



Department
for Work &
Pensions



Evaluating the In-Work Progression Advice Trial

December 2015

Research Report No 912

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Summary

In June 2014, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) ran a trial to test how people in lower paid work could be prompted to consider and move towards in-work progression and to gather insights into what package of support this group needs to progress in the labour market. As part of the trial, three versions of a letter were sent to 75,000 Tax Credits recipients, and a sub-set also received a follow-on text message. The communications offered advice from the National Careers Service helpline to help people 'get on in work'. The research assessed whether and how the trial had a perceived impact on recipients and insights into the future offer for in-work claimants. In-depth interviews were undertaken with recipients who took up and those who declined the offer of advice, and with National Careers Service staff. The interviews explored reasons for taking up or declining the advice, and experiences of delivering and receiving it where taken.

Those who took up the offer of advice were already considering progressing in work, or were interested in doing so. The letters and texts therefore fitted with or catalysed existing interest. Those who did not take up the offer either did not understand what was being offered, did not see the offer as relevant to them or were not interested in career progression at the time or at all, typically because they were content with their work situation or considered themselves 'too old' to progress. Overall, the two groups were similar in socio-demographic profile, their employment situation and history, and in their constraints to progressing in work. The differences were more prominent in terms of their attitudes to in-work progression and the extent to which they saw the difficulties as surmountable.

The MI indicated that response rates were higher with a follow-up text, but there were no statistical differences in response rates to different forms of the letter. Interpretation of the letters and texts influenced take up, with confusion about meaning or audience deterring uptake. The phrase 'get on in work' in particular was mistakenly read as 'get in to work' – and was compounded by assumptions that DWP is only for unemployed people, so recipients saw the communications as irrelevant. Letters and text messages were nonetheless seen as appropriate ways to inform people about careers advice. Participants recommended using simple language to clarify the offer of support and adding detail on exactly how it could help, whilst keeping the letter brief, perhaps in a separate leaflet.

The core provision of the National Careers Service is in line with future support needs described by participants. In particular, staff knowledge about training, funding and encouragement in making work-related changes were valued. Key additional components were interest in more directive advice, encouragement to keep on track with progression plans, perhaps more akin to the Jobcentre Plus Work Coach role. There was also interest in more specialist information to help assess how skills could best be deployed or give advanced insights into specific areas of work. Online engagement was considered a good idea, but participants were clear that any future service should provide multiple ways in which people can engage with it, and make it clear that several routes exist.

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List of abbreviations

BIT	Behavioral Insights Team
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
HMRC	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs
IS	Income Support
IWP	In-Work Progression
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LA	Local authority
MI	Management Information
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
UC	Universal Credit
WTC	Working Tax Credit

Glossary of terms

Behavioural Insights Team	The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) is an organisation set up to apply behavioural insights – understanding how individuals take decisions and how they are likely to respond – to design policies or interventions that can encourage, support and enable people to make better choices for them and society. The Department for Work and Pensions worked with BIT to design the communication materials for this trial.
BSS	BSS is a multi-channel service provider of integrated customer engagement solutions in the UK who were delivering the National Careers Service at the time the trial was administered.
Department for Work and Pensions	The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is responsible for welfare, pensions and child maintenance policy. It administers the State Pension and a range of working age, disability and ill-health benefits.
In-work progression trial	This in-work progression trial run by DWP with the aim of testing approaches to engaging Tax Credit claimants (many of whom would be eligible for future in-work support on Universal Credit) to consider progressing in work and earning more. In June 2014 letters were sent out to 75,000 Tax Credit claimants in England offering free specialist advice from the National Careers Service on progressing in work.
Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is a non-ministerial department of the UK Government responsible for the collection of taxes, the payment of some forms of state support, and the administration of other regulatory regimes.
National Careers Service	National Careers Service is the publicly funded careers service for adults and young people (aged 13 or over) in England. The National Careers Service is funded and managed by the Skills Funding Agency, a partner agency of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). It provides impartial information, advice and guidance on learning, training, career choice, career development, job search, and the labour market. The National Careers Service worked jointly with the DWP on this trial and delivered advice to trial respondents via a dedicated National Careers Service helpline number.

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Non-Takers	Non-Takers are Tax Credit claimants who did not take up advice from the National Careers Service as a result of the in-work progression trial. Non-Takers include people who did not respond to the communications about the trial at all and people who may have contacted the National Careers Service very briefly, for example to clarify the purpose of the letter, but chose not to take up the service.
Takers	Takers are Tax Credit claimants who did receive careers advice and guidance from the National Careers Service as a result of the in-work progression trial.
Tax Credit claimants	Tax Credit claimants are people who work and have a low income which is supplemented by Working Tax Credits. Tax Credits are payable to people aged 25 or over, with or without children and 16 to 24-year-olds who have a child or a qualifying disability. Tax Credits are administered by HMRC.
Tier 1 advisers	In National Careers Service's standard service delivery, Tier 1 advisers provided careers information to customers. This was simple information such as knowing where a certain subject could be studied or the qualifications required to enter a certain role. Tier 1 advisers fielded calls on the dedicated telephone lines during the trial.
Tier 2 advisers	Tier 2 advisers provide more in-depth careers advice, guidance and information to customers in the standard service delivery of National Careers Service. During the in-work progression trial they fielded calls on the dedicated telephone lines and provided specialist guidance to the takers.
Universal Credit	Universal Credit merges out-of-work and in-work support into a single unified benefit with the aims of simplifying the benefits system and making work pay. Around five million people are expected to make up the working Universal Credit claimant population with approximately one million being in-work claimants having migrated from Tax Credits.
Senior staff	Senior staff are BSS managers who managed the delivery of the National Careers Service aspects of the in-work progression trial.

Executive summary

Background to the trial

In June 2014, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) ran a trial¹ to inform Tax Credit claimants about the support available from the National Careers Service. The trial was undertaken to test ways in which Tax Credit claimants could be prompted to consider and take steps towards in-work progression. It was also intended to gather insights into what package of support this 'in-work' group will need to help them progress in the labour market, and to contribute more broadly to the evidence base on in-work progression.

The trial involved sending letters to 75,000 people in receipt of Tax Credits. A sub-set of these also received a follow-on text message. The letters and text messages explained that the National Careers Service provides advice and support to help people 'get on in work', and gave the telephone number for the National Careers Service helpline.

Five different communication formats were used in the trial. There were three different letter types: short; self-efficacy (which included a line noting that 'Everyone has the ability to develop and grow in their lives and careers but sometimes things can hold us back'); and case-study version citing three people who had used the service. In addition, short text messages were sent to sub-sets of those who received the self-efficacy and the case-studies letters.

The research

The aim of the research reported here was to assess whether and how the trial had a perceived impact on people who received the communications and to highlight lessons about how to design the future offer for in-work claimants.

The research was qualitative in nature, although the report also makes reference to the Management Information gathered on the trial by the National Careers Service and the DWP. The research involved in-depth interviews, predominantly conducted by telephone, with 35 people who had received the communications. Of these, 19 had taken up the offer of advice and support (these participants are referred to as Takers) and 16 declined it (Non-Takers).

Interviews covered participants' recall of the communications and how they responded to them. Participants also read the communications afresh and described their thoughts as they engaged with them. In addition, participants were asked about their personal and employment situations as well as their attitudes to and options for in-work progression. Takers were asked about their use of the National Careers Service and lastly all participants were asked about what support, if any, they felt would help them to progress in work in the future.

¹ The trial was structured using random allocation of recipients into five groups, but it was not delivered as a random controlled trial per se.

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Interviews were also held with 12 National Careers Service staff, 10 advisers who had taken calls as part of the trial and two strategic staff who had overseen the trial across the two staff sites. These interviews focused on whether and how trial participants differed from business as usual, and what the trial indicated about how careers advice could best be formulated for working people on low incomes.

Why did receiving the information prompt Takers to use the service?

Takers (those who took up the offer of advice) were already considering moving on in their work, or interested to do so in the future, the letters and texts were therefore seen as fitting with or catalysing existing interest. Takers identified themselves as positively oriented towards progressing in work, with an existing interest in earning more whether by increasing their hours, moving to a better-paid job or training for a better-paid job or career. They saw obstacles to in-work progression, such as childcare responsibilities or already working two jobs, but viewed these as constraints which would ease over time or which could be addressed. Receiving the letters and texts may have served to 'nudge' Takers to action, but it should be noted that these recipients were predisposed to moving on in work.

In some cases, participants had tried to use the service but had not been able to get beyond registering an interest in having a call-back. This highlights the importance of having multiple ways to connect to the service and ensuring that any engagement is picked up and sustained.

Why did receiving the information not prompt Non-Takers to use the service?

Non-Takers (those who did not take up the offer of advice) did not take it up for four main reasons. Firstly, not understanding what was being offered. Second, not seeing the offer as relevant to them. Thirdly, not being interested in careers advice or progressing in work at the time they were contacted. Fourthly, not being interested in progressing in work at all, typically because they were content with their work situation or considered themselves 'too old' to progress.

Non-Takers included participants who were positively oriented towards in-work progression, but some did not view the National Careers Service as appropriate for them (for example, perceiving it as providing only basic advice). Others did not see themselves as able to progress at this time, and so were not interested in the advice. In addition, there were Non-Takers who were not interested in progressing in work at all; they saw themselves as well-placed in their current role, or could not see a chance (or reason) to progress before they retired.

Overall, the research indicated that Takers and Non-Takers were broadly similar in their socio-demographic profile, their employment situation and history, and in the constraints they identified in relation to progressing in work. The differences were more prominent in terms of their attitudes to in-work progression and the extent to which they saw the difficulties as surmountable.

Did different communication forms have an influence on take-up of the offer?

The Management Information (MI) provided strong evidence that the response rates were higher when a follow-up text had been sent. A perception among staff was that text message recipients could be more likely to call, but also that these calls could be to clarify the meaning of the letter, rather than to use the service. Staff considered that these calls were more often from text message recipients because it was quick to call straight from a text, and it may also have appeared that the text was following up on a lack of response to the letter.

Overall, however, staff noted that many, perhaps the majority, of those calling on the trial helpline, had rung to clarify what the communication was about and concluded the call once they were told – specifically when reassured that it was not to do with Tax Credits or welfare benefits.

There were no statistical differences in the response rate to the different forms of the letter. This finding is in line with the qualitative research indicating no strong preference for any particular form of the letter, though the case studies version in some cases appeared to clarify the meaning of the letter.

There were clear indications that interpretation of the letters and texts influenced whether or not recipients took up the offer, with confusion about meaning or intended audience deterring uptake. The phrase ‘get on in work’ in particular was mistakenly read as ‘get in to work’. This interpretation was compounded by the assumption that communication from DWP must be for unemployed people, so again some recipients dismissed them as irrelevant.

Did using the service have an impact on Takers’ attitudes or actions?

Takers of the National Careers Service support commented positively about staff knowledge around navigating information systems for training and funding, and staff encouragement in relation to making work-related changes. There were indications of lower satisfaction with the service’s ability to provide for specialist information on specific areas of work and a sense that the service may be more useful to people who are earlier on in their career, or looking to change career, rather than for those who are well-established and looking to advance further.

Participants reported being encouraged to continue planning for in-work progression even if they had not yet acted on the advice provided by the National Careers Service. There were also those who had taken actions towards progression after using the service.

How should advice and support on in-work progression be communicated in future?

Letters and text messages were considered appropriate ways to inform people about careers advice and support. Concerns were raised about the potential for emails to be mistaken for ‘spam’, and participants commented that not everyone feels confident in using the internet and email. Email was felt to have a role once people had started to use the service, but less so in letting people know about it.

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Key findings on future letters and texts included using simple and clear language to make it more obvious what they are about and exactly what support is on offer. More detail was wanted on exactly how the service could help, whilst keeping the letter brief, perhaps through a separate leaflet. Participants suggested that both letters and text messages should be more clearly identifiable with the National Careers Service so the core purpose is clear to the reader.

What form should advice and support take in future?

The core provision of the National Careers Service is in line with the future support participants expressed interest in, though there were variations in the form, level, type and mode of advice people wanted. The main additional components were interest in more directive advice, in the form of encouragement to keep on track with progression plans, which is perhaps more akin to the Jobcentre Plus Work Coach role. There was also interest in more specialist information, to help people assess how their skills could best be deployed or to provide advanced insights into particular areas of work.

The idea of mentoring was raised by National Careers Service staff as a complement to mainstream provision, but participants were less interested in this as a general form of support. Online engagement with the service was considered a good idea, but participants were clear that any future service should provide multiple ways in which people can engage with it, and make it clear that several routes exist.

1 Introduction

The report details research into a trial conducted by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in collaboration with the National Careers Service. The trial informed Tax Credit claimants about the free advice available from the National Careers Service. The research looked at how people were informed about the trial, why they took up or declined the offer of advice, and what form and modes of advice are most suitable. The aim of the research was not to review the trial itself, but to gain insights into how advice can best be delivered to in-work claimants as part of a wider support package.

1.1 Policy context

The research engaged with Tax Credit recipients, but was conducted in the context of the early stages of the Universal Credit roll-out. Universal Credit merges out-of-work and in-work support into a single unified benefit with the aims of simplifying the benefits system and making work pay. It replaces Working and Child Tax Credits and a range of other benefits.

In 2014, Universal Credit began a staged roll-out. Once rolled out fully, around five million people are expected to make up the working Universal Credit claimant population (DWP, 2013), with approximately one million being in-work claimants migrated from Tax Credits who will be subject to some form of in-work conditionality (Garaud and Oakley, 2013).

Existing evidence on in-work progression is relatively limited. Previous research does, however, highlight the scale of the challenge faced by low-income groups in achieving in-work progression (Garaud and Oakley, 2013). It points to a complex interaction between:

- **Wider labour market factors** such as increasingly flexible, insecure jobs with poor progression routes.
- **Personal factors** such as low qualifications and skills, poor health, childcare responsibilities (Wilson *et al.* 2013) and limited motivation to progress (Tu and Ginnis, 2012).

In addition, research has found that relatively little support is specifically aimed at in-work progression, although more work is being done in this area (Wilson *et al.* 2013). The Department recognises that it cannot put in place an in-work, conditionality regime without building an evidence base of 'What Works' for those who are in-work but receiving financial support. From 2014, and in consultation with stakeholders, the Department has been developing a series of pilots to test new measures within legacy benefits.

1.2 The in-work progression advice trial

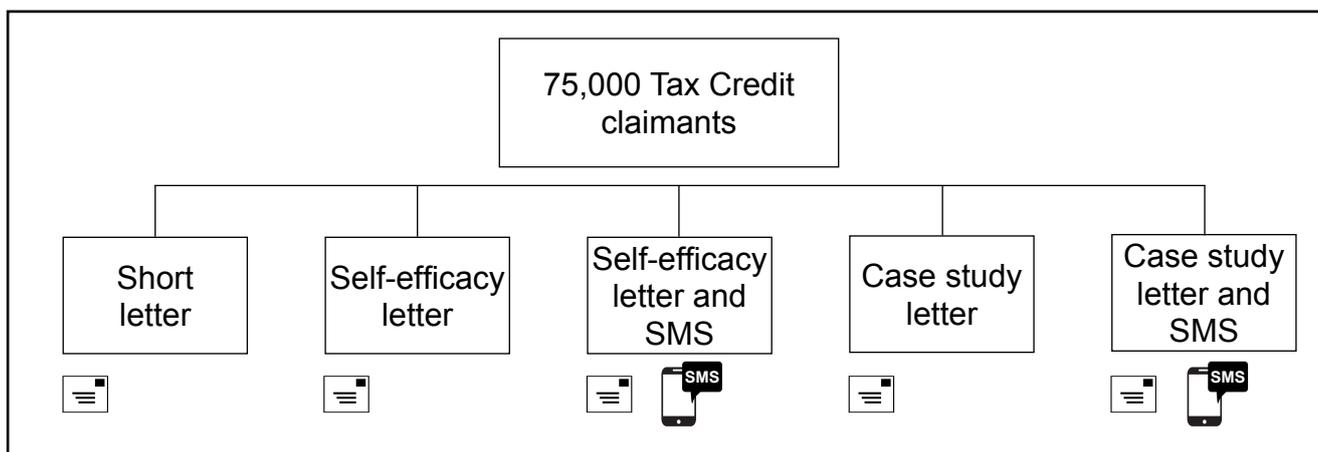
The DWP is gathering a comprehensive evidence base to inform the design of future provision to support in-work claimants. As part of this exercise, the DWP is running trial interventions to test approaches to engaging Tax Credit claimants (many of whom will be eligible for Universal Credit in-work support) in considering progression.

This report discusses the results of a trial carried out by the DWP and the National Careers Service in 2014 to test the effectiveness of different communications in engaging Tax Credits claimants in conversations about in work progression.

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In June 2014, letters were sent to 75,000 Tax Credit claimants in England offering free specialist advice from the National Careers Service on progressing in work. As in Figure 1.1, three letter styles were developed and two sub-sets of recipients received a follow-up text message (SMS) a week later. Recipients were split equally between the five messaging types. Copies of the letters and SMS are provided in Appendix B.

Figure 1.1 In-work progression advice trial messaging types



The three versions of the letters included a:

- **Short letter:** which said “We want to ensure you, and others who work, continue to have access to careers advice” and then described the support available from the National Careers Service.
- **Self-efficacy letter:** this similar to the short letter but contains an additional motivational sentence, “Everyone has the ability to develop and grow in their lives and careers but sometimes things can hold us back. Take the next step by getting some advice.”
- **Case-studies letter:** the short letter with examples of people who had used the service on the reverse, illustrating various forms of in-work progression.

The SMS said: “Dear [Name], DWP wrote to you about the National Careers Service. Please don’t miss out. Call 0800 now for free careers advice”.

The National Careers Service provides information, advice and guidance on careers to adults and young people in England. This includes advice on job search, learning and skills, career progression and development, and the labour market. The service offers specialist, confidential and impartial guidance from qualified careers advisers, and aims to help customers reach informed decisions and take action independently.

At the time of the trial, the National Careers Service could be accessed by telephone, online (via its website, webchat and email), and face-to-face. For the trial, it operated a dedicated telephone number. Initially, calls were handled by Tier 2 advisers who had more specialised training. As call volumes increased, a triage system was used with frontline Tier 1 advisers answering all calls and helping with basic enquiries and searches, then transferring callers to a Tier 2 adviser or arranging for an adviser to call back if the caller needed guidance or advice.

The National Careers Service was re-commissioned since the trial was conducted. The Skills Funding Agency has provided an updated description of it for this report. 'From 1 October 2014, new National Careers Service contracts were introduced. Area-based contractors now deliver the service through a range of integrated channels including face-to-face, telephone, online and via social media. National Careers Service contractors have assumed a local leadership role in implementing and co-ordinating local careers activities. The role of the National Careers Service contact centre is to provide a national helpline to provide detailed careers advice to young people and careers information for adults. Adults who require careers advice and guidance are referred to the locally-based area-based contractors. A payment by results approach has been introduced to funding the National Careers Service. Area-based contractors earn their funding for the achievement of outcomes.'

1.3 Research aims and design

1.3.1 Aims and objectives

The research is not an evaluation of the National Careers Service. Instead, it takes the example of the National Careers Service delivery during the trial to gain insights into how in-work progression advice should be provided as part of a wider package of support to people who are in work but receiving financial support.

The aim of this research is to further understanding of:

- How to tailor approaches and messaging to activate and engage Tax Credits claimants to consider progressing in work;
- Whether accessing the National Careers Service support helps to change claimants' attitudes and behaviours towards progression;
- How to design the future offer of advice for in-work claimants.

This research will also contribute more broadly to the Department's evidence base on in-work progression.

The research objectives are to:

- Explore what type of messaging is more effective at getting claimants to engage and why;
- Explore what motivated claimants to take up the initial offer and why they did/did not sustain activity;
- Understand whether contacts with National Careers Service were useful and productive and whether accessing the support helps to change claimants' attitudes and behaviours towards progression;
- Explore whether the National Careers Service 'offer' met claimants' needs and if not, why not;
- Explore the potential to include this type of specialist support into the proposed model for this group and what other type(s) of support might be effective.

1.3.2 Research design and methodology

The research entailed depth interviews with 35 recipients of the trial communications and 12 members of National Careers Service staff supervising or delivering the trial.

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Customers

Interviews with recipients of the trial communications were split into two groups:

- **'Takers'**: those who took up advice from the National Careers Service through the trial. Nineteen interviews were undertaken with this group.
- **'Non-Takers'**: those did not take up advice from the National Careers Service as a result of the trial. Twelve interviews were conducted with this group.

The samples of Takers and Non-Takers were drawn from two data sets. Non-Takers were drawn from the set of everyone who had been sent the trial communications, provided by the DWP. The Takers were drawn from the National Careers Service call records, excluding those who had not agreed to be contacted about the research.

Takers and Non-Takers were recruited by a letter and information leaflet explaining the research, inviting them to participate in an interview and providing a one week opt-out period. The research team then telephoned people who did not opt-out to confirm interest in participation and carry out a screening exercise to meet sample quotas. The achieved sample was monitored to attain diversity across age, gender, ethnicity and relevant characteristics such as caring status and employment status.

The majority of these interviews were undertaken on the telephone and a £20 high street voucher was offered as a thank you. Interviews were conducted using topic guides developed in discussion with the Department and the trial's Steering Group.

Takers' and Non-Takers' topic guides captured an overview of their circumstances (e.g. details of their employment and their wider lives) and explored their views of the trial communications, decision-making around taking up the offer (or not), attitudes towards progressing in work and views of the support needed or wanted to progress. Takers' were also questioned about their use of the National Careers Service, and the uptake and impact of any advice given.

Both topic guides included a 'think aloud' exercise. This involved participants opening a hard copy of the original letter (and SMS where relevant) during the interview and describing their views and impressions in detail to the researcher. This technique is well established within the cognitive-testing research domain and provided valuable insights into how the different forms of letter and the SMS were viewed and interpreted by recipients.

Staff

Interviews with staff at the National Careers Service were conducted with careers advisers and with senior staff who managed the delivery of the trial. Interviews with advisers included both Tier 1 and Tier 2 advisers, both of whom fielded calls via the dedicated telephone number during the trial. In the standard service delivery, Tier 1 staff provide simple information (such as where a certain subject can be studied) and Tier 2 advisers provide more in-depth advice and guidance.

Most staff interviews were conducted face-to-face at the two National Careers Service offices. The Advisers' topic guide focused on experiences of the trial and how the trial delivery and customer group differed from 'business as usual'. It also explored ways in which advice on progression could best be formulated and communicated to people who are in work but on low incomes. The Senior Staff topic guide explored similar themes but focused on gathering strategic reflections on the trial and comparison with standard delivery.

Staff were recruited through two routes. Specific senior staff were contacted directly by the research team. Advisers were recruited after a two-step selection process: first, the senior staff listed 15 advisers who had been involved with the trial; second, the research team contacted a sub-set of these advisers by email, inviting them to participate but making clear that their involvement was entirely voluntary.

All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The transcripts were summarised using the Framework approach which enables interview data to be organised ('charted') thematically and by individual case². All data was charted into a number of separate staff and claimant charts, using analytical frameworks devised with the study commissioners.

1.4 Interpreting qualitative findings

Qualitative findings are not reported in numerical terms. Purposive sampling as used in this research seeks to achieve range and diversity across the sample rather than to build a statistically representative sample. Likewise, the questioning methods are designed to explore issues in depth within individual contexts rather than to generate quantifiable data. Qualitative research gives depth insight into the range of views and experiences. Wider inference can be drawn on these bases rather than prevalence.

Verbatim quotations and case illustrations are used to illuminate findings. They are labelled to indicate respondent group, in terms of take up of National Careers Service support and messaging type, and for staff, the type of role performed. Further information is not given in order to protect the anonymity of research participants. Quotes and case illustrations are drawn from across the sample.

1.5 Report outline

The report presents the qualitative research plus the DWP's analysis of Management Information from National Career Service records of people who took up the offer. The findings are presented in the following chapters:

- **Chapter 2** describes socio-demographic characteristics and employment profile of the in-work group. Attitudes towards and constraints on progressing in work are discussed. The chapter shows how experiences and contextual factors combine with attitudinal variation to create substantial diversity and contrast.
- **Chapter 3** is the first of two chapters setting out the differing responses to the offer of in-work progression advice. It describes the Takers' motivations and rationale for taking up the offer of advice.
- **Chapter 4** describes the Non-Takers' reasons for declining the offer of advice. It highlights that Non-Takers included people who had a positive view of in-work progression, but their motivation did not translate into taking the advice.
- **Chapter 5** describes participants' views of the trial communications. It discusses what influence the communications had on the take-up of the service.

² The NVivo 10 software within which Framework is now embedded allows summarised data to be linked directly to the transcript, enabling movement between summarised and original data.

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- **Chapter 6** sets out what the research indicates about the optimal future form of advice on in-work progression, as part of a wider package of support to people who are in work but receiving financial support. It acknowledges that the 'in-work group' might best be seen as a number of quite distinct sub-groups.
- **Chapter 7** concludes the report by summarising key learning about the future offer and ways to communicate it. The research also provides an evidence base from which to make policy recommendations about engaging with and delivering to the range of people who are in work but on low incomes.

2 Description of the in-work group

This chapter describes the socio-demographic and employment profile of the study participants and the wider claimant group at whom the offer was aimed. It then looks at attitudes towards progressing in work and the factors which influence progression, including perceived constraints and the wider context.

The chapter highlights areas of difference between the Takers and Non-Takers of the offer of advice. The study indicated broad similarity between Takers and Non-Takers in socio-demographic profile, employment situation and history and the constraints on progressing in work. The two groups differed more in their attitudes to in-work progression and the extent to which they saw the difficulties as surmountable.

2.1 Socio-demographic profile

From its Evidence Strategy on the in-work group, the Department estimates that around one million people will form the in-work group claiming Universal Credit when it is fully rolled out. This population is expected to be mostly female (around two-thirds) and around a third are likely to be single. Approximately 60 per cent are estimated to have children, with two-thirds of these families headed by couples. It is expected that 30 per cent of these families will have a youngest child aged under five years. Average earnings will be £125 per week, a quarter of the national median and the group is likely to have a solid work history, compared to the average UC claimant. Existing research evidence indicates *'a large majority of the group do not seem to be motivated to increase their earnings'* (Garaud and Oakley, 2013:7).

The sample design for this research was qualitative. While it therefore did not attempt to statistically represent the wider population, the sample included the key groups present in the population in terms of their socio-demographic characteristics. The sample included women and men, aged 25 to 64, living in a range of locations in England (further details on the sample composition can be found in Appendix A).

The family compositions of participants can be grouped into the following categories.

- **Single people:** male and female participants aged 30–49 without any dependents and people aged over 50 with grown up, non-dependent children
- **Single parents:** female and some male single parents aged 25–49 with resident children aged 6–19, and people aged over 50 with older dependent children
- **Two-parent families:** people aged 30–49 with partners and 1–4 young children. Both parents shared childcare duties or the non-working parent took the lead.
- **Couples without children:** older participants, over 60 without dependents.

Participants were generally in good health but both the Taker and Non-Taker groups included people with health issues which affected their working lives, but which they managed while working (with one exception of a Non-Taker off-sick for nine months).

2.2 Employment profile

Participants in this research were in receipt of Tax Credits at the time of the trial and were therefore in work and on a low income. As research participants were not selected to be statistically representative, the profiles cannot be extrapolated to the wider population but the research does indicate that those who responded to the offer of advice had a similar employment profile to those who did not.

Participants were in low paid and low or semi-skilled jobs on permanent and flexible arrangements, such as zero-hour contracts. For the most part employment histories were stable, though some were new to their roles and one person was unemployed.

The type of work participants were engaged in included retail, cleaning/hospitality, catering, admin, social care, distribution and customer services. There were also self-employed people, some of whom supplemented their business incomes with low-skilled part-time and flexible work. Among Non-Takers there were also people working part-time professional roles and people volunteering on top of their jobs.

Family composition was a clear influence on working hours; single parents worked part-time, except those with free access to childcare. Single people, parents with non-resident children and parents in couple-led families worked full-time. Some Non-Takers were studying whilst working, even those who were working full time

Employment characteristics are given in Table 2.1, demonstrating the similarity of the two groups. A key difference was that Takers included graduates in jobs for which they were overqualified due to a lack of relevant work experience or because their qualifications were not recognised in the UK. Being a graduate in a non-graduate job was a key motivator for them to take up advice, this is discussed further in Chapter 3.

A further difference was that Non-Takers included people who were studying and volunteering in addition to working, which could suggest already full schedules.

Table 2.1 Employment characteristics of Takers and Non-Takers

Characteristic	Taker	Non-Taker
Employment contract		
Permanent contract	✓	✓
Self-employed	✓	✓
Skill level of job		
Low/semi-skilled	✓	✓
Professional		✓
Hours		
Full time	✓	✓
Part time	✓	✓
Zero hour	✓	✓
Work-plus		
Working two jobs	✓	✓
Working and studying		✓
Working and volunteering		✓
Qualifications		
Low/no qualifications	✓	✓
Graduate level qualifications	✓	

2.2.1 Pathways to the in-work group

Exploring Takers’ and Non-Takers’ work histories showed that there were different pathways by which people came to be part of the in-work group. The study suggests that the in-work group can be segmented by work history, not only by how long they have been in low-paid work, but also by their trajectory into it. These trajectories are informative in understanding what type of advice they would want about progression. The three key pathways identified in this research are set out in Table 2.2, along with reference to the specific routes or catalysts which were observed within each.

Table 2.2 Pathways to the in-work group

	Long-term low wage employment	Shift into low-wage employment	Passing through low-wage employment
Routes/ catalysts	Low-wage since early adulthood	Caring responsibilities	Newly self-employed/ establishing a business
	Low-wage since mid-adulthood	Moving country	Long-term career track with promotions
		Relationship changes	
	Investment in education or training showing returns		

Long-term low-wage employment

One pathway was defined by low-wage employment throughout the working history. People may have had periods of higher earnings but mostly their employment had comprised low-wage jobs. Within this sub-group were participants who had been in low-paid work from early adulthood, as well as participants who had entered low-paid work in mid-adulthood, having been economically inactive. Participants in this group included both university graduates and people with low-level or few qualifications.

Low-wage since early adulthood: The in-work group included participants who had entered low-paid work as young adults. Some had a few gaps in their work histories. These included both participants who had been in one role for over a decade, and those who had taken a number of different jobs; for example, a participant in her fifties had worked in a range of low-paid roles, including in cleaning, catering, retail and administration. Others had moved between low-paid work and unemployment over the course of their work history. One participant had been out of work for some time, explaining that he was a single parent with sole responsibility for his child and he could not find a job to fit around their school hours. By the time of the study, he was working in a restaurant kitchen and on a permanent contract.

This sub-group included participants with few qualifications and also those with degrees. One participant, for example, had been working in a café for almost a decade, a job she had taken initially as a student and then retained when she graduated from her degree. Another participant working part time in a fast-food shop for the last decade had taken the job soon after qualifying in business administration and computing. They had applied for part-time jobs related to their qualifications but had been unsuccessful – they assumed this was because they lacked experience.

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Low-wage since mid-adulthood: Participants who had entered low-wage work in mid-adulthood (around their forties) had been unemployed or economically inactive earlier in their adult life. This sub-group is distinct from those who moved into low-wage work after having been in better-paid work (see 5.1.2 below). This low-paid from mid-adulthood sub-group included participants who had taken on paid roles to support their families financially, after being stay-at-home parents. A participant said she ‘fell into’ low-wage cleaning work when she became a single parent. Another participant had worked briefly as a young adult, then stopped when she married and had children, but returned to paid work after becoming a single parent.

Shift into low-wage employment

Another pathway was marked by recent low-wage employment that had been preceded by higher earnings. Participants in this group had made or had experienced a significant change to their work path. Whether the change was led by the participant or a response to circumstances varied from case to case. Three sets of reasons emerged from the data: caring responsibilities; moving country; significant changes in relationships.

Caring responsibilities: For a group of participants, the onset or continuation of caring responsibilities (for adults or children) prompted a change of career, role or hours which resulted in a lower wage. A participant explained that she had left her full-time job in which she had higher earnings, because she ‘never got to see’ her children. Instead she had taken on a part-time, zero-hours contract, which brought in less money and posed difficulties in organising informal childcare around the shifting work timetable (her hours and days altered every week) but she deemed this to be the better option. This sub-group included Takers and Non-Takers, but this finding was borne out for the Takers by National Careers Service advisers’ case examples of trial customers moving from higher-paid into low-wage jobs after having children.

Moving country: Another way by which participants shifted from higher to lower wages was moving to the UK. A group of participants described having found their skills or qualifications were not recognised or readily accepted in the UK, or their English was insufficient. One participant, working as a carer in a nursing home, had a physiotherapy degree and had been working in that role in their home country; they felt they were not meeting their earnings potential. Another was working as a kitchen porter, despite having worked as a teacher abroad and being multi-lingual; they wanted a role using their skills. A third participant who had worked in construction explained that they were now working as a cleaner because they did not think their English was adequate to be in construction. A fourth participant had been a teacher but said his degree was not recognised, and he cannot afford to train and re-qualify.

Relationship changes: Significant changes in participants’ relationships – through breakdown, divorce and death – were identified as key turning points for the work histories and earnings of some participants. These changes could impact in part because they put additional caring responsibilities on the participant, but the research indicated that this sub-group was somewhat distinct in that participants had moved from higher-paid employment. One participant who had been widowed explained that their partner’s death had prompted them to leave their full-time professional career and take a part-time catering job to give their child additional attention. Another participant related how her divorce enabled her to return to paid work, as her ex-husband had prevented her from having a job; before her marriage she had trained and worked as a hairdresser but now had low-paid roles in catering and delivery.

Passing through low-wage employment

A third pathway was demarcated by participants who described themselves as being on track to higher earnings, so expected their lower wages or earnings to be time-limited. A participant who was establishing himself as a self-employed decorator was still earning the same hourly rate as in his previous delivery job, but explained that he was charging an introductory rate to clients and expected his earnings to rise as he built his business. Another participant had recently achieved the management role he had been working his way up to over a decade within a restaurant business. Having achieved this, he was now looking to move on as the role offered no scope for additional hours or higher earnings. A third participant, with a full-time job in retail, was also studying and volunteering in school to become a classroom assistant. A fourth participant, a single parent, had returned to an earlier career in finance after taking two years out when her child was an infant; she had gained an intermediate level accountancy qualification and credited this with increasing her earnings to date.

2.3 Attitudes to progression

Participants fell into one of three attitudinal groups in relation to in-work progression:

- Open and ready to progress.
- Open to progressing in the future.
- Not open to progression.

Both Takers and Non-Takers of the offer were in the groups open to progression. Those open to but not yet ready to progress were held back by caring responsibilities while those not open to progression at all included Non-Takers who felt they were too old for career advancement. These groups are discussed in more detail below.

2.3.1 Open and ready to progress

Participants with open attitudes towards in-work progression included both Takers and Non-Takers. This attitudinal group was very broad, including single people without dependents or caring responsibilities, participants in two-parent families (less limited by childcare responsibilities), single parents with older children who could now work full time, and single parents with younger children who were seeking better pay rather than more hours.

Caring responsibilities (childcare specifically) were a defining characteristic of participants' readiness to progress. Single parents with young children were not in this group unless they could increase their earnings without increasing their hours. This was possible for business owners with growth strategies and more qualified people who had the potential to enter better paid part-time work.

Takers in this attitudinal group included people who were degree educated or qualified for a better paid job or business owners looking to increase earnings by developing their business. Some had already taken steps towards progression by looking for work, starting college courses and requesting more hours and training.

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Non-Takers in this group included self-employed participants who saw Tax Credits as a temporary solution until their business generated enough to be their main source of income. This group were motivated by specific financial goals such as coming out of arrears and debt as well as by becoming financially independent one day,

“I think that would be a fantastic sort of milestone if we can say we are completely financially independent”

(Non-Taker, self-efficacy letter)

2.3.2 Open to progressing in the future

Both Takers and Non-Takers were in the group who aspired to progressing and being financially independent in the future but said they had to rely on Tax Credits for now. This attitudinal group included single parents who felt unable to increase their hours at present due to their children being too young and needing childcare. They did not consider progressing in other ways at this time, such as seeking promotion or better paid work with part-time hours.

Non-Takers in this group also included participants who wanted to dedicate their free time to caring for elderly and infirm parents, participants who wanted to prioritise learning English before looking to progress in work and people who wanted to work out their career ambitions before making any changes.

2.3.3 Not open to progressing

Only a sub-group of Non-Takers spoke in terms of not being open to progression; no Takers expressed these attitudes. Non-Takers overall were broadly more content with their jobs than Takers, but Non-Takers who were not open to progression at all felt that progression would mean too much work, responsibility and a change in role. Non-Takers aged over 50 contextualised these feelings in relation to their age explaining too they were too old to be considering progression. One participant said,

“There’s no way I wanna be a manager or run a restaurant... I’m nearly 52, I don’t even wanna think about that.”

(Non-Taker, self-efficacy letter)

Unlike the other groups these participants did not aspire to financial independence as they felt entitled to financial support having paid taxes throughout their working lives.

2.4 Influences on in-work progression

The research identified a number of factors which participants regarded as having a bearing on whether, when and how people may progress in work. These factors are described in turn below. Each could be a potential constraint or a potential catalyst for progression. Takers and Non-Takers varied in terms of how they saw the balance between a factor being a constraint and a catalyst. Non-Takers appeared to find the factors more limiting, whereas Takers responded positively by identifying solutions.

2.4.1 Personal factors

Perceived lack of qualifications, experience or confidence

Participants felt they needed higher qualifications to get a better job and those who were well-qualified said they were held back by a lack of relevant work experience. Some lacked confidence in job-seeking, such as revising CVs or using computers to search for jobs. Both participants who were ready for progression and for whom it was not a current priority experienced these barriers.

Lack of time to look for a better job or to study

Participants described lacking time and energy on top of their working hours to look for work or to study. This was particularly difficult for those working full time, in two jobs or on atypical hours such as night shifts as well as those who wanted to preserve their work-life balance. For example a participant was working full-time night shifts and studying two days a week and struggled to find time for job-seeking.

Health issues

Participants with health issues could be limited in the kinds of jobs they could accept. The research indicated that having to take health issues into consideration could be a constraint on participants' ability to progress in-work.

2.4.2 Household factors

Research participants were selected for diversity in terms of household composition so the study included people who were single parents and those who parented in a couple (with children of varying ages and including grandchildren), those who lived with a partner but without children, and those who lived alone.

Caring responsibilities

As anticipated from other research, the study found that having caring responsibilities had an influence on how people viewed their opportunities for in-work progression – but not in a uniform way. Childcare responsibilities could be a significant constraint to progressing in work for single parents with young children, especially in terms of their ability to get on in work by increasing hours or taking another job. There were also participants in the Non Takers group who were constrained by caring responsibilities for elderly parents as well as children.

However, participants who had sole responsibility for childcare could also cite this as having propelled them into work, albeit low-paid work. One additional finding was that participants with childcare responsibilities spoke of their opportunity for in-work progression increasing as their children grow older and need them less – not only on a daily basis but during school holidays. Participants who cared for adults could also make similar judgements about advancing in paid work if the adult received professional care in future:

“I think until next year until my daughter leaves school then I don't see any change, I don't foresee any change. But once that's happened I think that'll be a major sort of reality check. And also by then the way my mum's going I would imagine she would be in a home, that would be another thing taken off of me. So I think would just ... reassess my life completely next year.”

(Non-taker, self-efficacy letter)

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In-work partner

The presence of a partner who was also earning could likewise operate both as incentive and as a constraint on a participant's opportunity for progression. Participants included those who had moved into paid work when their relationship broke down, and described having not needed to or been able to take a paid job when they were in the relationship. Other participants explained that their paid work was intended to supplement a partner's earnings, and so their work was primarily organised around the partner's work. One Non-Taker described how her role as part-time administrator for her partner's own business constrained her opportunity to take on other work, because the partner's work pattern could change and she needed to ensure the administration was covered:

"I run an office for hubby. When he's out I'm in if you know what I mean 'cause he's a one man band and if we miss calls we miss work ... I'm just sort of stuck to do anything because if I, you know, if, if I plan something for say 'Oh I'm going out Tuesday' it's like 'Well actually I'm not working now, I've got to go and do this, so I need to be in the office'."

(Non-Taker, case studies letter plus SMS)

2.4.3 Financial factors

Lack of funding

Participants who identified a lack of qualifications as a barrier to progressing in work, this could be further compounded by lacking money to fund study. For example, one participant who wanted to be an art teacher could not afford the university fees and another participant who had qualified as a lawyer abroad could not afford the cost of converting his qualification for recognition in the UK. For these participants the most pressing need was to generate an income to support themselves and their families.

Among the Non-Takers were business owners who cited a lack of funding, in the arts for example, as impeding progression in terms of their business growth.

Concerns about being worse off

Takers were motivated to progress and achieve financial independence, but still the implications of losing Tax Credits and Housing Benefit as a result of increasing their earnings was a key concern. A participant had experienced this before and recalled:

"I had a pay rise at my old job, and by the time I'd had the pay rise, and the housing benefit and council tax took their bit, there was nothing left. And I thought what incentive does that give you to get a pay rise? It doesn't, does it?"

(Taker, self-efficacy letter plus SMS)

In addition, increasing hours posed the risk of sacrificing time with children, but not being substantially better off after rent and other expenses. Questions arose about what was gained from working more hours; some said that they would only accept a substantial pay rise to make the extra hours worthwhile.

2.4.4 Employment factors

Participants worked in a range of sectors, part time and full time, and at different levels of seniority. This sub-section reflects on what was found about the nature of work and the terms of work and how these have a bearing on in-work progression.

Lack of scope for progression in current role

Progression routes within participants' current roles were limited with little opportunity to increase hours, pay or progress into more senior roles. For example, a participant worked in a pub on a zero-hour contract and was unable to request more hours or a promotion. In some cases participants had started applying for new jobs with more hours or better pay.

Nature of work

Among participants who identified work-related limits on progressing in their current role were those who highlighted the nature of the work itself as a constraint. These limitations included the seasonality of the role, the physical labour expended in the role, the timings of the role (i.e. night-work) and the limited opportunity for extending hours or seniority. A participant considered, for example, that their ability to progress in the cleaning role they held was limited both by its seasonal nature – the hours required by the employer would fluctuate with the season – and by its physically demanding nature: 'it's too physically laborious' (Taker, self-efficacy letter). Another participant observed that he could not do more hours in his night-shift work in distribution because he already found standing for so many hours to be painful (Taker, short letter). He was incentivised by this to look for other work, and was considering changing jobs prior to receiving the letter – although working through the night also posed difficulties in finding time to look for another job.

Terms of work

One theme which emerged from some participants' accounts of their work was that the terms and conditions on which they were working could constrain progression. A participant described how their work for a major hotel and hospitality chain was paid by the minute, and only those minutes spent cleaning rooms were paid – with any time spent waiting for rooms to be vacated left unpaid. This appeared to undermine the participant's progression opportunity in this role as extra hours would not deliver a commensurate increase in pay. But it also compromised her ability to explore other options as she was working extra hours even for the low pay she was receiving, and so did not have the day-to-day resources of time and energy for a job search.

2.5 Summary

This chapter shows how the claimant group comprises a number of sub-groups, which can be segmented in various ways. It demonstrates however that Takers and Non-Takers of the advice offer were broadly similar in terms of their attitudes to progressing in work. Both groups included people who were open and ready to progress or open to progressing in the future mainly due to caring responsibilities. They also identified similar constraints to progression though the Non-Takers group were affected more strongly by these constraints while Takers looked for solutions and persisted with progression. Only a subgroup of Non-Takers was closed to progression and content in their current roles.

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It is evident in the research that in-work progression opportunities can be influenced by personal attributes such as health, skills or qualifications. The research has also highlighted how the in-work group can be better understood by considering the role played by contextual factors beyond personal factors. As it is qualitative research, this study does not show the prevalence of these factors, nor draw out patterns of influence they have on individuals, but rather it shows which factors participants had identified as influencing their opportunity for progression, positively or negatively.

Gathering the evidence on differing attitudes to progression and the segmentations, the most relevant forms of diversity for policy implementation are on the basis of:

- Attitudes.
- Pathways into claiming Tax Credits.
- Personal characteristics (which may be barriers or facilitators to progression).
- Wider contextual factors (which may be barriers or facilitators to progression).

Further work to understand how these different forms of diversity will intersect in the context of the transition to Universal Credit could make a substantial contribution.

3 Motivations to take up the trial offer

This chapter opens by presenting findings from the Department's analysis of the National Careers Service Management Information on take up of the trial offer. It then looks at what motivated those who took up the offer of advice on progressing in work.

The findings show that no one letter type was more successful in engaging recipients (1 per cent of whom took up the offer) but the methods involving an SMS prompted a stronger response rate than the letter-only methods. Participants were motivated to take up the advice to pursue better jobs or explore new education or training and childcare options. They were already highly motivated to progress in work and the communications therefore fit with or catalysed existing interest.

3.1 Take up of the offer of advice

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) contacted 75,000 in-work Tax Credit claimants, encouraging them to take advice offered by the National Careers Service. In total, 848 claimants contacted as part of the trial responded and engaged with the service. These comprised 1.1 per cent of all those who were contacted, and 37 per cent of a larger number who called the National Careers Service helpline but did not engage beyond a quick clarification call. Many of the calls were in the first few weeks after the mail shots.

3.1.1 Overall response to each letter type and SMS

There appears to be little difference between the effectiveness of different types of letter in engaging customers. Table 3.1 below shows the total volumes of 'positive' calls (i.e.: where full records for the call were created) to the National Careers Service for each of the different styles of letters. There were no statistically significant differences between the three different letter styles.

Table 3.1 Total calls to the National Careers Service (dedicated Freephone number) for each trial letter/communication type

Letter	Total number of respondents	% of respondents
Short letter only	107	13%
Self-Efficacy letter only	105	12%
Self-Efficacy letter plus follow-up SMS	174	21%
Case Study letter only	85	10%
Case Study letter plus follow-up SMS	119	14%
Text message, letter unknown'	258	30%
Total	848	100%

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However, letters which were accompanied by an SMS appear to provoke a stronger response rate than letters on their own; Tax Credit recipients, in our sample, were almost twice as likely (0.54:1) to respond to an SMS follow-up than a letter on its own. Contacts with the National Careers Service clearly increase when a SMS text message is used to follow up on the original letter.

Whilst the SMS responses are recorded in Table 3.1 as a separate category in practice they were not sent in isolation – they were sent out as a follow up to two of the letters. Unfortunately, due to an issue in the text message design (reference number removed) we are limited in our ability to undertake analysis of the SMS uptake of the National Careers Service support, by letter type. However, we can see, as shown in Table 3.2, that those people who did receive a SMS text message formed the largest group of individuals to contact the National Careers Service.

Table 3.2 Totals calls to the National Careers Service (dedicated Freephone number) for letter only and SMS Text follow-up (aggregated volumes)

Communication Type	Total number of respondents	% of respondents
Letter only (Short, Self-Efficacy and Case Study)	297	35%
SMS Text Message Follow-up DWP2	551	65%
Total	848	100%

The National Careers Service also received a number of ‘non-positive’ calls; respondents called the National Careers Service support number simply because they thought they had to do so, but didn’t actually want the support. These calls have not been included in the analysis.

3.2 Why was the offer taken up?

Motivations to take up the National Careers Service offer depended broadly on participants’ attitudes towards progression (see Chapter 2). Those who were open and ready to progress called the National Careers Service for careers advice that they intended to act on immediately. In contrast the ‘open to progressing in the future’ group engaged with the service to help position themselves for future progression by for example exploring childcare options and training.

3.2.1 Takers’ reasons for calling the National Careers Service

Takers’ decisions to call the service were underpinned by several motivating factors:

- The desire for career advancement, to move either into more enjoyable work or more senior and better paying positions.
- The opportunity to gain in-depth advice on education and training opportunities or childcare options.
- The description of the service in the letters, as expert, tailored, impartial and accessible, and lastly.
- Confusion about what was on offer and the desire to find out more.

These motivations are described in more detail below.

Desire for career progression

Takers were motivated to call the National Careers Service in order to help progress their careers, either by moving into more satisfying work or better paying roles. Dissatisfaction with work was a recurring theme among Takers, who as a result wanted to move into more rewarding work that offered better job satisfaction and more pay. Among this group there were people who had already started looking for alternatives:

“I was going through a bit of a rough patch at work, so I wanted to find somewhere to have a better job, so I thought I’d phone up to see if I could get any advice on how to go down different paths”

(Taker, case study letter)

Some participants felt they had outgrown their roles and wanted to obtain qualifications to embark on a ‘career’ or move into more senior positions. This group included single parents whose children were now older meaning they could pursue work that interested them and offered more hours. It also included graduates who wanted to move into jobs that reflected their qualifications. These participants were in low-skilled work either because they lacked relevant work experience or because their qualifications were gained overseas and were not recognised in the UK.

Takers were also motivated to call by the desire for better pay. Some participants were struggling to live on their low incomes while others wanted to meet financial goals such as paying off mortgages, moving to a bigger property and contributing more to child maintenance. The desire for better pay was also underpinned by the goal of becoming financially independent of Tax Credits, either to be self-sufficient or avoid dealing with administrative problems (such as overpayments).

Wanting to explore education/training opportunities

Some Takers were prompted to take up the National Careers Service offer to explore education and training opportunities with an expert adviser. One participant for example wanted advice on obtaining funding for an accountancy qualification (see case illustration below) and another participant wanted expert guidance on which of two courses would suit him best.

Case illustration, (Taker, self-efficacy letter plus SMS)

A single parent with an 11-year-old son was working part time as a finance clerk. She had an intermediate level qualification in accountancy but could not afford to pay for the next level. She was motivated to contact the National Careers Service to explore funding options for this qualification. She was not yet ready to work full-time hours because she felt her son, though becoming more independent, was too young to be left at home without supervision. However, she felt the qualification would help her meet her goal of working full-time hours in the future and to progress and earn more.

Wanting to explore childcare options

Amongst other things the letter offered support with exploring childcare options. This attracted Takers struggling to balance work and childcare to contacting the service (see case illustration below).

Case illustration (Taker, short letter)

A single parent of children aged 6 and 10, worked part time as a social care support worker. She was on a zero-hour contract and worked roughly 28 hours a week. She had been in this job for nearly three years. She liked her job but she wanted a fixed hour contract with more stable and secure work. This was because her hours changed every week causing her to rely on friends and family for childcare and she found this stressful. She contacted the National Careers Service for advice about finding childcare.

Liking the sound of the National Careers Service

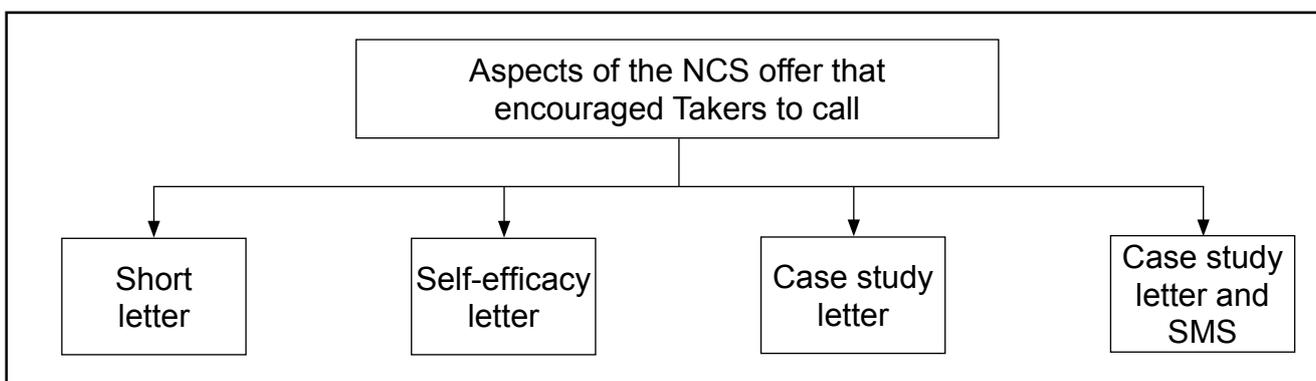
Some Takers said they were prompted to contact the service because they liked the sound of it. A feature that attracted people (see Figure 3.1) was that the one service could provide advice on a range of different issues, from careers to childcare. Those without clear career aspirations valued that the advice was expert and tailored and could therefore help steer them in the right direction. In addition, the impartial and unbiased nature of the advice provided reassurances that support would be suited to callers' needs and not an external agenda.

“No one’s specifically batting for one team, like they want you to go to college, or they want you to go and find a job in a factory or – do you know what I mean? It’s just an unbiased opinion, and they’ll just give you the information that would suit you best instead of rather to themselves, really, to get people, you know, into work.”

(Taker, case study letter plus SMS)

Finally the accessibility of the service was valued highly, firstly in that it was free to use and therefore accessible for people on low incomes, and secondly, in that the helpline opening hours (8am to 10pm, seven days a week), were accessible to working people.

Figure 3.1 Aspects of the National Careers Service offer that encouraged contact from Takers



Wanting to know more about the service

Some Takers called the National Careers Service without a particular query or progression goal in mind but simply out of gratitude for the offer and to see how the National Careers Service could help. Takers with a lesser understanding of the letter called up the service to find out more about it. For example, one participant called to find out if it could help with taking her employers to tribunal. Another participant wanted to test whether the National Careers Service was in fact interested in how work was going, which is how she had interpreted the term 'get on in work'. These participants went on to take up careers advice after hearing more about how the service could help.

3.2.2 Progression goals

The types of progression Takers aimed for, and which National Careers Service advisers also listed, included:

- increasing hours and therefore pay;
- moving to a better paid job;
- gaining qualifications for a better paid job or career; or
- growing businesses in order for them to become their primary income source.

Rather than progressing in their current roles, the most widespread progression goal for Takers was to get a better job; one that paid more, was more rewarding and enjoyable, that reflected their qualifications, skills and experience or that offered greater or more stable hours.

The inclination to progress within existing employment was less widespread, perhaps because Takers were generally less satisfied with their jobs or could not see any scope for progression. For those who did want to progress in their current jobs it appeared that clear progression routes were available to them, enabling them to seek more hours, training and promotion. They worked in large organisations which may suggest a greater likelihood of formal progression policies and availability of training and hours.

Advisers at the National Careers Service felt Takers differed from business as usual helpline customers by being less varied, in that they were in 'middling' age groups, on low incomes, in lower skilled jobs and with lower qualifications. In contrast, standard helpline customers tended to include people from the full working population age and included younger graduates, mothers returning to the labour market and professionals looking for a career change.

Most notably, however, advisers found trial callers required more support because:

- their progression goals were much less developed meaning they needed more guidance (however this may have been due to receiving a letter out of the blue); and
- they had lower levels of confidence and motivation.

They had specific and multiple barriers to progressing such as low qualifications, childcare responsibilities, health issues and financial concerns (as discussed in the previous chapter).

3.3 Summary

In total, 848 claimants took up the offer (1% of the total sample). While there was little difference between the effectiveness of different types of letter in engaging customers (the communication forms were evenly distributed), letters accompanied by an SMS appeared to provoke a stronger response rate than letters on their own. Motivations for taking up advice among participants of the qualitative research included wanting more enjoyable, better paid jobs or to seek promotions as well as wanting to explore education or training and childcare options. Some were also attracted by the description of the National Careers Service while others were initially prompted to call simply to understand the nature of advice on offer. Takers were highly motivated to progressing now or later and the latter group decided to take up the offer to help better position themselves for progression in the future.

4 Motivations to decline the trial offer

This chapter discusses why Non-Takers decided against taking up the National Careers Service offer after receiving communication from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The findings below demonstrate that while Non-Takers declined the advice this was not always because they did not want to progress in work. In fact the Non-Takers group included people who were open and ready to progress, but who were deterred from contacting the National Careers Service either because they misunderstood the letter and felt it was not relevant to them or did not think the National Careers Service could cater for their needs. The group also included people who wanted to progress in the future and refrained from contacting the National Careers Service because it was not yet the right time. Some, however, had no interest in progressing and therefore had no need for advice from the National Careers Service.

4.1 Why was the offer of advice not taken up?

Non-Takers opted not to contact the National Careers Service after receiving communication from DWP either because they did not think the letter was intended for them, because they did not think they needed careers advice or a mixture of the two. Some also decided against calling simply because it was not compulsory to do so. This section discusses each of these reasons in more detail.

4.1.1 Non-Takers' reasons for not calling the National Careers Service

Misinterpreting the letter

A key reason Non-Takers declined the National Careers Service offer was because they misinterpreted the meaning of the letter. Deciding it was not in fact intended for them, they discarded it. People in this group were, however, interested in careers advice about progressing in work and would have taken up the advice if they had understood the letter properly.

The most widespread reason why people dismissed the letter was that they thought it was aimed at the unemployed.

“I didn't really look into it, because like I said I'm already working and my first thoughts were like, well why have they sent me this, if I'm already in employment? It made me feel like they're trying to get me back into work.”

(Non-Taker, self-efficacy letter)

Although less widespread the letter was also mistakenly thought to be offering advice for carers rather than careers, and therefore also considered to be irrelevant.

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These interpretations appear to have stemmed from a combination of skim-reading the letter, associating the DWP with unemployment and mistaking the term 'get on in work' with 'get into work'. Some participants also spoke English as a second language or had learning disabilities such as dyslexia, which acted as additional barriers to the correct comprehension of the letter.

Not perceiving a need for advice

Another reason for declining the offer (even among those who understood what the letter was about) was the perception that they had no need for it. For one group this was because they felt content with their current circumstances and did not want to progress (see case illustration below).

"Well I know it said something about if you need any advice as regards your career, sort of give us a ring, but I'm happy in my job and didn't want to change my job so I just didn't really take much notice of it to be honest."

(Non-Taker, self-efficacy letter)

Case illustration (Non-Taker, self-efficacy letter)

A participant, age 51, worked as a waitress in a restaurant where she had been working for 18 years. She worked evening or day shifts, between 16 and 25 hours a week. She lived with her 19-year-old daughter, who was still at school and cared for her elderly mother who had dementia three mornings a week. She enjoyed her job and would not change anything about it because the hours suited her well and she got to meet a variety of different people. She threw the DWP letter in the bin after reading it because she felt happy with her job and did not feel the need for any further training or qualifications. The idea of progressing did not appeal to her because she did not want the extra responsibility and did not want to increase her hours. She did not aim for financial independence because of having worked and paid taxes all her life.

A group of single parents also expressed these feelings, particularly because their current working arrangements suited their childcare responsibilities. They were not averse to seeking careers advice in the future, however, but felt the timing of the letter was not suited to their present circumstances,

"I felt that the hours that I were doing were convenient for me."

(Non-Taker, self-efficacy letter)

A second group, though interested in progressing in work, declined the offer because they did not wish to pursue further qualifications or felt they already had all the skills and training they needed. This indicates an assumption that the advice is geared mainly around skills progression.

Finally a third group felt they knew how to go about increasing their earnings if they wished to and therefore did not need advice from the National Careers Service on doing so.

Feeling the National Careers Service could not meet their needs

The view that the National Careers Service could not cater for specialist or nuanced advice needs led some Non-Takers to reject the offer. Business owners, for example, assumed advice around business and enterprise fell outside the remit of the service. For example, the owner of a photography business wanted advice about exhibiting in more galleries but did not think the National Careers Service would have any expertise in this area.

It was not compulsory to call

Some participants saw that it was not compulsory to contact the National Careers Service for advice and therefore chose not to. These participants said they would, however, have called if it was a stipulation of getting Tax Credits.

4.2 Summary

Although some Non-Takers had no interest in progressing, not all declined the advice because they did not want to progress in work. In fact the Non-Takers group included people who were open and ready to progress, but who were deterred from contacting the service either because they misunderstood the letter and felt it was not relevant to them, because they felt no need for careers advice or because they thought the National Careers Service could not cater for their needs. Those who were open to progression in the future felt it was not the right time to be contacting the NCS because they would not be acting on the advice immediately. This is in contrast with their counterparts in the Takers group who though not ready to progress either, called to position themselves for progression in the future.

5 The role of the communications

An early aim of this trial was to test the effectiveness of different communications in catalysing the in-work group to consider in-work progression. This chapter explores the role of these communications in decisions as to whether or not to take up the offer and then discusses their suggestions for future engagement about such advice.

The feedback³ highlights the importance of clearly conveying the offer to prompt take up. While neither letter type generated a higher response rate, feedback suggests the examples in the case studies letter may facilitate take up due to their explanatory function. The evidence in this chapter suggests the use of follow-up text messages is a powerful way to prompt take up because it reinforces the importance of the original message and serves as a useful reminder to those already open to using the service. Participants generally favoured the communications used in the trial, preferring a letter followed by an SMS reminder but felt the trial letters needed refinement.

5.1 Communications' role in decision-making

This section explores the role of the communications in Takers and Non-Takers' decisions to take up or decline the National Careers Service offer, discussing the following factors in turn:

- Participants' interpretation of the communications.
- The timing of the communications.
- The different communication types (e.g. letter variants and SMS).
- The look and layout of the letters.

5.1.1 Interpretation of the letters

The findings suggest that understanding of the letters influenced people's motivation to call the service. Takers generally had a better understanding of the letters than Non-Takers, while Non-Takers who were otherwise open to advice declined the offer because they misunderstood the meaning of the letters.

A key reason Non-Takers concluded that the letter was not relevant to them was that they misinterpreted the term 'get on in work' (the title of the letters). For these participants, this term, coupled with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) logo (DWP being more commonly associated with out-of work rather than in-work claimants) created the impression that the letter was intended for unemployed people.

³ It is worth noting that interviews took place five to seven months following the DWP mail-shot. This meant recall was too low for some to explain exactly how the communications influenced their decisions or to give specific details about the different messaging types. In anticipation of this, fresh copies of the original letter (and SMS where relevant) were sent to research participants in advance of their interviews and in most cases this helped to jog their memories.

Even Takers could interpret the term 'get on in work' in different ways. Some took it to be about career advancement while others associated it with communication and teamwork or job retention rather than progression. The phrase and the letters overall were seen even by Takers as too open to interpretation and challenging for those with English as a second language or literacy problems to understand.

Participants in both groups suggested the use of more literal and specific wording as opposed to phrases such as 'get on in work'.

"It needs to be more specific. Something like 'how to further your career opportunities' would be better."

(Non-Taker, case studies letter plus SMS)

5.1.2 The timing of the communications

In terms of receiving the letter, Takers said that although the letter was unexpected it happened to 'come at the right time' and was as a result successful in prompting them to take up the offer. The letter coincided with a time when Takers were:

- already looking for another job, looking to increase their hours or considering further study or training;
- assessing their options while off sick or considering leaving because they were not enjoying work, and were therefore at a crossroads in their careers; or
- thinking about increasing their hours because their children were older and less dependent on them as single parents.

Non-Takers who were considering progression when the letter arrived did not find the timing fortuitous because they misunderstood what it was offering. Misinterpreting the letter as being aimed at the unemployed deterred them from taking up the offer. Other Non-Takers were not considering progression at the time nor interested in the idea of future progression.

5.1.3 The communication type

Letter type

The letter type had little influence over participants' decisions and this finding is supported by quantitative analysis showing that neither letter generated a higher proportion of calls to the service. Despite this the interviews generated some useful feedback about the different letter types. For example, recipients of the self-efficacy letter found the phrase 'Everyone has the ability to develop and grow in their lives'" empowering and said they identified with the words 'sometimes things can hold us back'.

In terms of the case studies letter, Non-Takers had little or no recollection of the examples, with some being completely unaware of them. While the case studies did not appear to be a deciding factor for Takers, they clarified the meaning of the letter and some participants may not have taken up the offer without them. This effect was also evident when participants re-read the letters in the interviews,

"I think the actual letter itself is very vague. But then the examples on the back emphasise what they actually do"

(Non-Taker, case studies letter)

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Takers and Non-Takers had mixed views about the use of case studies, ranging from positive comments about their explanatory power and improved aesthetic to scepticism about the stories and inability to relate to the examples. Business owners in particular found it difficult to identify with the case studies because their own circumstances were so different.

Individuals who were disbelieving of the case studies said they would have preferred statistics showing how many people the service had helped or testimonials such as online reviews that were unfiltered and written by users themselves.

Letters versus SMS

As mentioned earlier, the quantitative analysis found that the methods involving an SMS had higher response rates than the letter only methods. Among qualitative research participants those who were prompted by the letter alone said it was well-timed to their circumstances and were impressed by the tone and level of detail in the letter. Even for those who did not call the National Careers Service right away, the letter had created enough of an impression to prompt them to return to it when the timing was right.

Those who were prompted by the text message felt it acted as a reminder and verified the legitimacy of the letter, indicating that it was not a 'scam'. For some, receiving an SMS in addition to a letter suggested that the letter was important. Some participants, however, struggled to pinpoint exactly what it was about the SMS that prompted contact,

“Something about that text made me give it a go to ring. [...] There was something in the second thing [SMS] that gave me a bit more encouragement to ring up.”

(Taker, self-efficacy letter plus SMS)

Non-Takers either did not recall receiving the SMS or had a very vague memory of it and some ignored it thinking it was a random text. Of those who recalled it, there were two main attitudes. One group interpreted the text simply as a 'nudge' which might have been useful if the service was of interest to them. The second expressed more hostility because the text gave the impression that the offer was compulsory or was 'pushing a bit hard'. One participant interpreted the SMS as saying,

“We've sent you a letter, why haven't you phoned us?”

(Non-Taker, self-efficacy letter plus SMS)

5.1.4 The look and layout of the letters

While Takers held positive views about the look of the letters, Non-Takers did not. The use of black and white font was thought by Takers to give the letter an official appearance and some participants said that this made them take it more seriously. In contrast Non-Takers described the layout of the letters as 'standard', 'basic' and 'plain'. They felt they looked like circulars, making them easier to ignore.

Some Non-Takers said they were alarmed by the letters, associating government correspondence with something being wrong. After calling the helpline to clarify the purpose of the letter, they then declined the advice. The DWP logo also raised alarm bells for some Takers, as described by the quote below, but this did not put them off using the service,

“I just remember looking at the Department of Works and Pensions and thinking, oh God, what are, what are they doing to me now...”

(Taker, self-efficacy letter plus SMS)

Both groups agreed that the letters were clear and concise making them inviting and easy to read with good font style and size. They felt the use of bullet points and bold text were eye catching and worked well in emphasising key information. However, more detail was wanted about the advice, with terms such as 'childcare support' considered vague.

Recipients of the SMS were also positive about the messages. They liked that they were addressed directly to them, that they emphasised the availability of trained advisers and that the messages were short and clear. Despite holding positive views about the SMS, Non-Takers said they had already opted against using the service.

5.2 Future communication strategies

This section will now look at participants' suggestions for how best to communicate with them in relation to advice about progressing in work and their thoughts on how the trial letters could be improved. The findings show that participants generally favoured the communications used in the trial, preferring a letter followed by an SMS reminder but felt the letters used in the trial needed refinement.

5.2.1 Initial contact

While participants identified a range of ways in which they wanted to be told about advice, letters were preferred to e-mail, SMS or phone. One reason for this was that letters were considered more official and legitimate compared to email and SMS, which were associated with scams. Second, letters were seen as more inclusive than newer forms of communication; participants took more notice of letters compared to calls from unknown numbers or email which could be checked less frequently or which was not used by some. Third, letters were seen as a more reliable form of communication. They were described as easier to keep and less easy to delete whilst mobile numbers and e-mail addresses were more changeable than postal addresses.

This preference for letters was not completely widespread. Participants preferred telephone if they thought letters were easily discarded or thought more information could be given in a call. There was also a view that letters were 'old fashioned'.

Although letter was the preferred mode of initial contact there was consensus that the current letter was in need of improvement and the following suggestions were made:

- **Provide further detail about the advice:** participants liked that the letters were brief and inviting to read, but wanted more detail about what the National Careers Service could offer. Enclosing an information leaflet about the service may help to keep letters brief while providing information for those who need it.
- **Explain the reason for sending letter:** participants thought adding an explanation for why recipients had been selected may help avoid recipients disregarding the letters on the assumption that they are not intended for them.
- **Make the language literal and meaningful:** the phrase 'get on in work' was considered too open to interpretation and confused recipients. They therefore suggested that the language should be more accessible, literal and meaningful.

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- **Keep the overall formal appearance but add colour, statistics and reviews:** the formal appearance of the letters attracted people's attention, but participants highlighted the need to make the letters more eye-catching, attractive and contemporary with colour, statistics and reviews.
- **Make the National Careers Service logo more prominent:** some respondents felt that the National Careers Service logo should be more or as prominent as the DWP logo to clarify and bring attention to its role.

5.2.2 Follow-up contact

Participants were in support of follow-up contact after first receiving a letter. SMS was generally the preferred method, although there was support for follow-up phone calls among people who wanted more detail about the service.

SMS was preferred because it was considered a helpful way to jog memories and provide a nudge. In addition, SMS was viewed positively as a modern and increasingly commonplace mode of communication. Concern was raised, however, about SMS appearing 'pushy' and giving the impression that calling is compulsory. This suggests that SMS use should make clear whether contact is obligatory or not.

Participants stressed the importance of using SMS as a follow-up rather than initial mode of communication. Without being preceded by a letter, SMS could be seen as a scam and participants said that without the letter they would not take much notice.

5.3 Summary

Communications played an important role in shaping decisions to take up the offer. For Non-Takers, they deterred take up because participants mistook their meaning, thinking they were aimed at unemployed people. It seems that the language used in the letters coupled with the DWP logo gave this impression. Takers' understanding of the letters was better and they coincided with existing interest in progression, alerting them to a service that could help with the issue they were already considering.

The letter type had little influence over decision-making, as supported by the Management Information (MI) findings, though the case studies letter led to a better understanding of the offer. The SMS on the other hand roused higher response rates among Takers by reinforcing the importance of the letter. While the SMS did not change Non-Takers' minds about declining the offer both Takers and Non-Takers generally expressed positive views about receiving an SMS as a follow-up reminder and were accepting of text messaging as a widespread and contemporary form of communication. Such positive attitudes towards the use of SMS alongside the quantitative evidence on response rates demonstrate how worthwhile and effective SMS reminders are in prompting contact with this group.

Participants generally favoured the communications used in the trial, preferring a letter followed by an SMS reminder but felt the letters used in the trial needed refinement.

6 Future offer of progression advice

The research was conducted to contribute both to understanding the in-work group, as earlier chapters have detailed, and indicate which package(s) of support could be most suitable for them in the future. This chapter details the findings on what advice on in-work progression should be offered to meet the group's needs in the future.

The chapter begins by reviewing what the research found about progression attitudes and goals, and levels of interest in receiving advice on progression. The chapter then moves on to describe what forms of advice were highlighted as relevant to this group. It shows that the spectrum of future advice needs can be understood as varying by the issue on which advice is being sought and the form of advice required. The form of advice can itself vary by the level at which it is pitched. The chapter concludes by setting out how participants would like such advice delivered in the future. In detailing these findings, the chapter highlights variation across the in-work group. Differences between the interests of Takers and Non-Takers are noted, but the findings indicate significant similarities between the groups in terms of what they may want in future.

The chapter reflects on the National Careers Service trial but does not focus on this as a basis of future delivery. The aim is to provide insight into what is most relevant to engaging the in-work group with progression advice and opportunities.

6.1 Advice needs

6.1.1 Progression attitudes and goals

Interviews with Takers, Non-Takers and those delivering the trial indicated that there were three attitudinal groups in relation to in-work progression, detailed in Chapter 2:

- Open and ready to progress.
- Open to progressing in the future.
- Not open to progression.

Takers and Non-Takers alike could be open to progression, although they may have differing views of when and how they could address any constraints on progression. Only a sub-group of Non-Takers were identified as not being open to progressing at all. In considering how future advice on in-work progression should be delivered, it is important to acknowledge these differing levels of interest in progressing.

Those who were open to progressing, whether now or in the future, identified a range of progression goals. These goals were given by both Takers and Non-Takers in the two 'open to progression' attitudinal groups, and included:

- Extending hours – to increase overall pay.
- Moving to a better job – whether better paid, more rewarding or more suitable.

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- Gaining qualifications for a better-paid or more suitable job/career.
- Growing businesses in order for them to become their primary income source.

Underpinning these goals, for Takers and Non-Takers, could be financial motivations such as moving out of debt or off Tax Credits and into financial independence.

Interviews with advisers indicated that those who contacted the service as part of the trial required more support than 'business as usual' callers for three main reasons. One, their goals were less clear or considered, perhaps because they were making a reactive rather than proactive call. Two, as a group they had lower qualifications and demonstrated lower levels of confidence and more limited motivation. Three, as a group they faced a greater number of overlapping constraints on progressing in work.

6.1.2 Interest in taking advice

The research found that even those who were interested in progressing in work varied in whether or not they were interested in receiving advice on progression. In particular, the research indicated that resources for 'self-service' advice will form part of the future landscape of provision, whether they are delivered as part of a specific in-work advice service or by other providers.

Among those who were interested in progression, but not in taking formal advice on it, there was nevertheless some interest in gathering information about progressing. Those who wanted to advance in their current job said they could get information from their employer to do so. Others said they could get the information they needed online or from a library, rather than from an advice service.

For some, looking for their own information was a statement about drawing on their own resources – 'cause I'm the sort that would just go and do it myself' (Non-Taker). For others, it demonstrated doubts about the quality of what may be on offer – one Taker explained that he would find information himself as he knew what he wanted to do and 'did not want to be confused by anyone'.

Among those who were interested in taking advice there was a recognition that they would first need to identify what their own advice needs were and then to be sure that a service would be able to meet it. In both stages, they may be aided by self-service information searches as outlined above, but the research also indicated a diagnostic element would reassure users that the information is specifically relevant to them.

6.1.3 Issues on which advice is required

The issues on which people said they may want advice in the future clustered into four sets across both Takers and Non-Takers, and could overlap for a participant:

- What to do next (opportunities for and processes involved in progressing).
- Training, skills and qualifications required to progress.
- Financial implications of progressing.
- Voluntary work/gaining experience.

One set of advice needs related to advice on ‘what to do next’. This cluster of advice was broad, covering both progression opportunities and processes. Participants anticipated such advice to include discussions (e.g. where skills could best be used) and assistance (e.g. with CVs and job applications, or practising for an interview). One Taker, for example, said that she may welcome advice in future about what to do next if she got ‘stuck’ – she mentioned wanting to talk through choices around studying, funding, volunteering and completing application forms.

A second set of advice needs clustered around training, skills and qualifications. These were described as encompassing advice on which qualifications might be required for a new job or more senior role, as well as assistance in finding appropriate courses or the funding for these. For example, one participant said that the service would be useful if it were to advise her about what skills she possessed and how these could be utilised in the place of qualifications. Furthermore, the participant felt that it would be useful to know what types of training opportunities are available to fit around her working hours, or alternatively, receive advice tailored to people who are in work and wish to engage in training within their current role, with a view to progress in the future. She would want future advice to say:

“Right we could provide training for you while you’re working’, um, ‘and give you qualifications’, so that if you did move you can still take them qualifications with you”

(Taker, self-efficacy letter)

A third set of issues related to the financial implications of progressing, whether this was by changing job or by taking on extra hours or greater responsibility in their role. Specifically, a sub-set of participants said they would want advice on how additional income could affect benefits and Tax Credits (note: the way in which Universal Credit may impact on such ‘better-off calculations’ was not discussed with participants). One Non-Taker, for example, said that she would seek advice if she wanted to increase her working hours and would benefit from someone calculating the impact this would have on her benefits to see if she would be better or worse off financially, before she made the decision of whether or not to increase her hours.

A fourth set of advice flagged was on voluntary work, with people looking for advice on how to find opportunities to volunteer. National Careers Service staff reported discussing voluntary work with a number of trial customers, but one Taker specifically stated that she may contact the National Careers Service again in future to get help in choosing volunteer work.

6.1.4 Forms of advice required

The forms of advice which participants thought they may want to seek ranged across:

- broad discussions of options;
- practical facilitation; and
- specialist advice.

These are discussed in turn below, but across each category it should be noted that the research also indicated an interest in directional rather than facilitative advice. At the time of the trial, the National Careers Service was described by staff as predominantly facilitating rather than directive. Advisers described this as a defining characteristic of the National

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Careers Service, enabling people to identify the best route or options for themselves and encouraging them to act, but not telling them what to do. It was evident from both Takers and Non-Takers that these aspects of the offer could be reviewed in any future provision.

Participants described being interested in more directive provision, for example, highly tailored job-matching or skills assessment which could identify their optimal role. Takers included those who described frustration at not receiving such focused advice. Non-Takers included those who described their future advice needs in terms of specific guidance on what they should do, not just what they could do.

Broad discussions

A need for broad discussions of options was raised by participants. Such discussions may relate to particular options such as training, or be more general, assisting people in developing a sense of what may be possible or in identifying what is most relevant given their skills. It was clear that users may appreciate a diagnostic element to any advice, not simply providing advice, but assisting them in thinking through where they should be focusing. For example, a Taker said that it would be useful for advisers to:

“go through everything with you, why you want to move jobs, why you want more money and better prospects and all that”

(Taker, self-efficacy letter)

Using the example of the National Careers Service during the trial, the research has identified four ways in which broad discussions of options can provide the advice that people require to assist them in progressing in work. These are by helping with:

- navigating systems;
- identifying options;
- signposting; and
- motivating.

Navigating systems: One Taker wished to pursue a career in physiotherapy, drawing on her foreign qualifications; the National Careers Service adviser explained she would need to register as a healthcare professional with the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), gave her the contact details for the HCPC and talked her through the steps she would need to take beyond that, such as additional courses to reinforce the qualifications she had.

Identifying options: An adviser explained that a core part of their work on this trial, as well as in their wider work, was helping callers to identify courses and funding options. They could do this directly by looking through training and course databases, but could also direct callers to resources and databases for courses and funding. The callers who had this form of advice had broad ideas of the area in which they wanted to qualify, but wanted help to find a suitable course or knew what training they wanted to do but were looking for assistance to identify the funding to enable them to do that.

An adviser described having discussed options with someone who worked as a bar tender and cleaner but wanted to work in the care sector. The caller had considered a variety of roles in the care sector, but needed advice on what qualifications or training would help her move into a care role. The adviser looked at training options in the area and discussed suitable course providers in health and social care.

Signposting: One Taker who was establishing his own business contacted the National Careers Service to gather information on becoming self-employed; he reported that the National Careers Service directed him to a website about self-employment and told him where to call to register and get his 'self-employment number'. The Taker explained that this was what he had needed.

Motivating: The forms of motivational guidance outlined by Takers and staff were more diffuse but this aspect of the service – being facilitative rather than directional – was described by advisers as being core to the National Careers Service offer. The motivational guidance could be pitched at a basic level, such as encouraging a caller to consider opportunities for promotion, but it could also be pitched at a higher level, enabling callers to assess what they want from a job, and to consider roles beyond those in which they already have experience.

Forms of advice can combine for individuals, as a Taker described in recounting her use of the service. In the initial call, the adviser helped her identify options around her current job but also emphasised that she could move on, motivating her to consider other ideas, and then emailed her information to help her navigate the wider options.

Practical facilitation

Practical support was highlighted as a key expectation when taking advice on work. Advisers gave examples of assisting callers to draft or update a CV so they were in a stronger position to apply for more senior roles, or to revise a CV so it was better tailored to a new area, for customers who wanted to change career. Examples given by participants included assistance with completing an application form, help writing a CV, and support which would help her 'put pen to paper right' in completing forms.

"I don't know the right words to put down on the forms [...] I don't know where to put all the full stops sometimes, I forget to put a capital letter"

(Taker, self-efficacy letter)

Another Taker wanted to look for jobs alongside an adviser face-to-face, having been through job opportunities online with an adviser from another service and finding this:

"really practical and helpful" [reassuring him he] "will sooner or later find a job"

(Taker, case studies letter plus SMS)

Such practical support was seen as a way of gaining knowledge and confidence in one's own abilities, which participants stated would be useful when applying for jobs. Several participants specifically needed assistance on working on his/her CV, with one citing time constraints and lack of experience as barriers to this task:

"I've never got time to do it, and I don't know how to do it"

(Taker, self-efficacy letter plus SMS)

Specialist support

By contrast with some of the more generic practical support which was said to be of importance when taking advice, a sub-group of participants highlighted the need to access specialist advice. These participants considered that general advice would be insufficient for someone who had a specific field of employment in mind. Participants commented that advisers with specialist knowledge in certain areas would be particularly beneficial.

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“If they had like an expert on each subject – not on each subject, but the general gist, so someone who’s worked maybe in a school or whatever, or in the education sector, and then they could – it’s like if you wanted to be a builder you don’t want to be talking to the same person that’s giving advice on being an accountant, do you?”

(Taker, Self-efficacy letter plus SMS)

A Taker said he had been quite specific with the adviser about wanting to work as a classroom assistant, but the advice had related to a variety of work with children, rather than an educational role. The participant said advice should be provided by people who specialise in and have specific knowledge of particular areas of interest.

“they could have said, ‘Oh, right, okay, so you’re looking to go into education, let me, let me put you through to this adviser that knows something about education”

(Taker, short letter)

6.1.5 Differing levels of advice

The levels of advice which participants anticipated seeking ranged from basic (such as assistance with writing a CV), to higher level advice (for example, what to consider in researching a new area of work) and to a more strategic overview (such as guidance on how best to deploy the skills and experience a person has gained).

Table 6.1 summarises the facets of advice which the in-work group may look for in the future. It sets out the issues, forms and levels of advice for which requirements were described. In discussion with the Department for Work and Pensions, Table 6.1 also indicates possible delivery agents for the advice, with broad and practical forms of advice potentially within scope for JobCentre Plus Advisers, and specialist advice requiring a Careers adviser with sector knowledge. The suggestion of delivery agents is included for policy reference, as the research did not refer to the JobCentre Plus Adviser role and so the findings do not indicate how well the requirements for advice would fit with their work currently or as conducted in the future.

Table 6.1 Variation in what participants want from future advice

Issue	Level	Form	Delivery Agent
What to do next	Basic	Broad	Jobcentre Plus Work Coach
Training, skills and qualifications	Higher	Practical	Jobcentre Plus Work Coach/Careers Adviser
Financial implications	Strategic	Specialist	Jobcentre Plus Work Coach/Careers Adviser

The indication from the research, outlined in more detail in Section 7.2 below, was that the National Careers Service model of delivery met core requirements for advice but could be extended to cater for specialist advice and more abstract or higher-level discussions of people’s options given their skills, experience and interest.

6.2 Advice delivery

The research offered insights into which modes of delivery may be most suitable for providing advice in the future – drawing both on the example of the National Careers Service trial and on participants' views of what would be preferred.

6.2.1 Telephone

The telephone was perceived by Takers and Non-Takers as a suitable way to deliver advice, and especially to start the process of taking advice. It is important to note that there may have been a selection effect among research participants, if people who were unable or unwilling to use telephones (perhaps because of language barriers) were more likely to opt out of the research. Nevertheless, it was evident that advice on in-work progression can readily be delivered by telephone.

Advisers on the National Careers Service trial highlighted the importance of making telephone advice available with translation support, so that a wider range of callers can be supported to access advice. At the time of the research, the National Careers Service operated dedicated language lines and could access translation services in other languages – although it appeared that the trial number did not align with these.

There was a clear message that call costs can influence whether or not advice will be accessed by telephone. In the National Careers Service trial, the calls were free from landlines but may not have been free from mobiles. Several participants mentioned call costs when explaining why they had or had not chosen to call, especially as the option of arranging a call-back from the service was not clear to all participants. One Non-Taker said she would call for advice *“if it was a free phone number”*.

6.2.2 Online

The telephone was the only way for people to access advice during the trial, so the letters and SMS did not mention the range of access routes to the National Careers Service, including its website, email and webchat facilities. Some participants did mention looking at the National Careers Service website before phoning, but the greater body of evidence indicated that people were choosing whether or not to telephone the National Careers Service rather than exploring other options.

In this, those who engaged with advice during the trial appeared to mirror 'business as usual' customers who, an adviser explained, typically call even if they encounter the service online first. The adviser stated that people who contact National Careers Service often reported having 'Googled careers advice', whilst others go straight to the 'contact us' page on the website and call, rather than exploring the website or initiating their own job search. One Taker recalled having looked at the website before calling as a brief quality check rather than for information.

Nevertheless, the example of the National Careers Service indicated that there may be a significant and increasing demand for online engagement beyond initial contact, and as part of a wider search for information including self-service as set out above. Discussing the wider service with advisers and strategic staff showed that having an online presence was central to delivering advice, not only in directing people to it but also in maintaining longer engagement with them. The website forms a central part of delivery with staff directing

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customers to webpages such as 'job families' (explaining job types) to assist in identifying their career path and the steps required to progress. Email and web-chat are also popular routes for initial and sustained contact with National Careers Service; web-chat in particular has seen a rapid rise in uptake in the last two years. Staff did refer Takers to the website but there was no mention of web-chat or email contact as part of ongoing advice delivery.

Online advice was not at the forefront of the research, but reflecting on how advice may best be delivered to this group in the future does indicate that online provision may have a significant role to play. Participants made reference to online information as providing what they needed for advice on in-work progression – although for some there were obstacles to engaging with online advice, or limited interest in doing so. A Taker also said that email could play an important role in sustaining follow-on action; she stated that an e-mail from the National Careers Service a couple of weeks after the initial call would have reminded her of the conversation and may have catalyzed her to act on their advice.

There were participants who would make little use of online information or advice as they were not confident in using the internet, but there was a broad sense that online provision and engagement is appropriate for advice. It was also evident from staff interviews that innovative online forms of service promotion and advice delivery have shown relevance in engaging customers and sustaining their involvement.

6.2.3 Face-to-face

Face-to-face advice in the future was considered to be preferable by some Takers and Non-Takers. Reasons given for wanting face-to-face advice were for greater clarity, for direct assistance with completing online applications and for reassurance about the quality and the process of advice-giving. Other reasons given included that face-to-face engagement was seen as more 'relaxed' than a telephone call, and gives more a more personal dimension. A Taker said he would prefer a face-to-face discussion because:

"When you're actually meeting somebody it's so much better I think [...] they can see you, see what you look like, see how you come across"

(Taker, case studies letter plus SMS)

6.2.4 Mentoring

The possibility of providing advice through mentoring was explored with participants. Takers, Non-Takers and advisers expressed doubts as to whether mentoring would be relevant to all who may be seeking advice, but there was a view that providing a specialist mentor could be helpful to particular groups or at specific career stages. It was also considered to have application in maintaining users' momentum for change.

Maintaining momentum

National Careers Service staff members were positive about the idea of a mentoring service and felt that this would be helpful to the callers they deal with. There was a sense among advisers that mentoring could help keep up momentum and provide ongoing support. Such ongoing support was seen as part of their role:

"I'd say the careers advisers here are kind of, when we are kind of involved in ongoing support with people that's kind of mentor, I would say that's kind of a mentor role, arguably, to some extent, because you're checking in with people, you know, you're

trying to keep the motivation levels up, if they've hit any barriers you're trying to keep them, you know, keep their spirits up"

(Adviser)

"We don't actually use the term 'mentoring', but I suppose it is, in a sense, because you're keeping in touch with the customer and, you know, making sure that everything's okay"

(Adviser)

Some advisers felt they acted as mentors, providing encouragement, feedback and ongoing support: "I mean we pretty much act like mentors on this helpline anyway". Another saw a distinction but felt mentoring and careers advice were complementary:

"I think that'd be helpful for someone to – 'cause obviously I think that's what they need as well, isn't it, as well as careers advice"

(Adviser)

Whilst mentoring was not specifically indicated, Takers who reflected on their lack of progress since contacting the service asserted that some form of follow-up may have propelled them into action. A Taker said that perhaps due to childcare commitments, he had not followed up any of the advice he received or attended any of the open days that were suggested to him. He considered that it may have been better for the service to call him back at a later date to see how he had got on, as this may have,

"put the idea back into [his] head"

(Taker, case studies letter)

Support for particular groups or at specific stages

There was a focus on specific sub-groups of users, where participants felt that it was important that any mentor should be able to relate to the mentee, having been in the same situation and similar experience, as well as having specialist knowledge about a particular area of interest.

"I see a benefit of speaking to someone – like I say, a mentor – who's in that line of work who can be more, you know, specific because they are specialist in that sense"

(Adviser)

"I think to have that, that kind of one-to-one interaction and the personal interaction I think can be very motivating for people if they can relate to somebody that may have been in a similar position or gain reassurance from the per [person]-, you know, a real person that can guide, help guide them through. And perhaps give them, you know, specialist advice and knowledge of a particular sector then yeah, I think that could be very beneficial".

(Adviser)

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Participants also considered that mentoring may be most relevant to people who face particular challenges. For example, a Taker said that the idea of a mentor would not appeal to him as he is confident of his own abilities and experience but suggested that a mentor may be relevant to others, including young people and people who have experienced mental health difficulties and are trying to get back into work:

“certain people in certain circumstances would benefit from that more than others”

(Taker, case studies letter plus SMS)

One view was that having a specialist mentor may be helpful at particular stages of a career. There was a view that mentoring could be useful for young people, or others who are just starting out including people who are moving into paid work after being a stay-at-home parent. Likewise, participants observed that a specialist mentor could be useful for people who are moving into self-employment or trying to expand their own business.

6.3 How advice can help

The research was conducted within six months of the trial, and so was not intended to review the outcomes of the advice which was delivered. It does, however, provide insights into the ways in which taking advice on in-work progression may contribute.

6.3.1 Motivations

The research did not indicate that taking advice affected attitudes to progression. As detailed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, both participants who had taken the advice offer and those who had not could have similarly positive attitudes to in-work progression. The differentiating factors in terms of participants' attitudes to progression appeared to be how soon they anticipated retiring, how much they liked their current role and how strong they perceived the constraints on progression to be. Attitudes to progression were negative among those who expected to retire within the next few years, those who were happy in their role and those who saw their constraints as insurmountable, even over time. Attitudes were positive among other participants, Takers and Non-Takers, although they could vary in how soon they saw the progression as feasible.

The research did indicate that taking advice could affirm people's positive attitudes to progression and could also make their interest in progressing seem more achievable. As outlined earlier in the report, Takers' sense of motivation to progress in work was already strong before they contacted the National Careers Service – especially to change careers, rather than to advance in their current role. Using the service was described in terms of amplifying some Takers' sense of what was possible, playing a role in sustaining their interest in progression and catalyzing their ability to act on their motivation. A Taker described her use of the advice offer as giving her a sense that her options were now much broader: *“it opened my eyes to what is available”*.

6.3.2 Broad discussions

The research indicated that having the opportunity to discuss work experiences, skills and opportunities could prove valuable in enabling Takers to reflect on progression. A Taker described having found a new job since calling; although it had taken around six months, she traced the starting point back to contacting the service and said that the call had catalysed her to start finding new work. She was now in a role and sector that she wanted to be in.

Takers also included those who said it was good to discuss their options, even if they were unable to immediately act on the advice. There was an interest in taking advice in the future. One Taker spoke of contacting the service about further courses once she finished the NVQ for which she was studying. Others were more general, but were interested to discuss ways of progressing in the future, as one Taker said: “I don’t want to think too far ahead but I’m always open to ideas.”

6.3.3 Practical support

The importance of practical support was evidenced by Takers who recounted having been assisted in particular in identifying options, navigating systems and signposting.

Identifying options

One Taker explained how significant the advice had been in helping them to choose between options for a specific training course in accountancy. They were unsure of how to proceed throughout the process, from knowing where to start, to identifying the best course, and ensuring they submitted a strong application.

“[Without the National Careers Service] I don’t think I would have [applied for the course], because I didn’t really know where to go, because in accountancy there’s so many different things that you can do. I don’t know really where to start or what I needed for someone to take me seriously on an application form.”

(Taker, case study letter plus SMS)

Navigating systems and signposting

A Taker described having been signposted to the information he needed about being self-employed. Another was supported in navigating the registration process and qualifications required to re-establish herself in her physiotherapy career, which she had conducted outside the UK. She had found the advice to be very helpful in specifying what she needed to do, both to register and to refresh her qualifications.

“I think that, you know, having this National Careers Service is very, very helpful to those people who are, you know, who are just who came here in England, which they don’t know the, the system here, and everything, and it’s very helpful.”

(Taker, self-efficacy letter plus SMS)

6.3.4 Limitations

It was evident that there were significantly different levels and forms of impact, if any. Up to six months after the trial had begun, the Takers who engaged with the research included those who had already seen impact and others who thought that the advice would yield impact in due course, especially if the advice had given them a clearer sense that progression was possible. However, there were also Takers who did not indicate having had any impact from using the service. Although the research is not an evaluation of the service, it is worth reflecting on what their experiences indicate about how advice may have impact on progression in the future.

There were two sub-sets of Takers who described having seen no impact from their use of the National Careers Service. One sub-set explained that they had not – or had not been able to – put the advice into practice, which highlight the significance of ongoing constraints.

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This sub-group included Takers who had intended to 'bank' the advice for future reference, for example when their child was older and needed them less. There were also Takers who expected to use the advice but had so far lacked the resources – specifically the time or personal energy – to do so.

A second sub-set said that the advice had been insufficient in some way, which shows the importance of providing the right range of advice. In particular, participants highlighted where advice had been too general as having limited their ability to use it.

6.4 Summary

The research provided clear indications of the value of advice on in-work progression and the ways in which it can best be delivered as part of a wider package of support. It was evident that the in-work group has a wide range of advice needs, including the broader discussions of options and the more specific tailoring of opportunities. As the research was conducted within six months of the trial, it was not intended to assess outcomes but there were indications that advice can influence people's progression. Takers described that their sense of what is possible for them in their paid work had changed or been extended by using the service. These Takers included those who felt they now had a clearer understanding that there are different pathways open to them, and those who expressed a sense that they could better identify the steps required to make change, even if they are not yet able to act on them.

Overall, participants identified broad, practical and specialist forms of advice as core to promoting progression opportunity. It was clear that such advice can be delivered over the telephone, but there was interest in both face-to-face and online provision. Mentoring was perceived as having a role to play in maintaining people's momentum for progression, and also in supporting specific groups of people or people at specific stages of their career.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

This concluding chapter summarises the findings of this research and provides recommendations for future work in this area. It explores what we have learnt about the in-work group and lessons learned around engaging with in-work claimants in the future. Finally the chapter looks at how future support could be configured and the potential positioning of the National Careers Service in relation to this.

7.1 What have we learnt about the in-work group?

The Department estimates, in its Evidence Strategy on this group, that the in-work claimant group will consist of 1 million people when Universal Credit is rolled out. Existing evidence points to a highly diverse group in terms of socio-demographic characteristics, but with more solid work histories compared to the average Universal Credit UC claimant (DWP, 2013). Existing research evidence suggests limited motivations to increase earnings (Garaud and Oakley, 2013).

Findings from this research demonstrate that different progression goals exist in the in-work group, including increasing hours, moving to better paid and more rewarding jobs, progressing skills and for the self-employed; growing businesses. Different attitudes were also present; people were either open to progressing now, in the future or not at all.

The research indicated that those who responded to the advice offer and those who did not shared similar socio-demographic profiles, employment situations and history, and the constraints they identified in relation to progressing in work. The differences arose more in terms of their attitudes to in-work progression and the extent to which they saw the constraints as surmountable.

The study adds to the existing evidence base in terms of understanding this group and in terms of starting to understand the types of support they need. It indicates that such a diverse group with such a variety of progression goals will have wide-ranging support needs to progress in work. There is however a need for quantitative evidence to build up a more representative and comprehensive picture of this group and the type of support they will require to progress in work in the future.

In addition, current evidence explores attitudes, communications and support needs outside of the conditions of Universal Credit. It will therefore be important to understand how these factors are affected when the idea of compulsion is introduced. This knowledge will be essential to developing a policy approach which takes into account the complex interplay between motivation, in-work constraints and conditionality.

7.2 What does the trial tell us about engaging with this group?

The Management Information collected for this trial indicates that 1 per cent of the total group of 75,000 responded and engaged with the National Careers Service. People who declined the offer did so either because they assumed the letter informing them about the career progression advice available from the National Careers Service was not intended for them, because they did not perceive a need for careers advice or because they believed the National Careers Service could not cater for their advice needs.

7.2.1 The letters

Letters were the preferred method for initial contact about in-work careers advice. They were considered the more legitimate, reliable and inclusive method of communication, given that access to, use of and trust in email is still patchy. It may, however, be that the move to greater online use under Universal Credit may increase the reliability and use of online methods in the future.

The letters trialled as part of this intervention were misinterpreted, due to skim-reading and the language used. As a result a subset of people, who would otherwise have been interested, dismissed the offer of advice. This highlights the importance of letters being worded more literally to make them more 'skim-proof'. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) should consider reinforcing the message through work coaches under Universal Credit, as it is not guaranteed to be absorbed using written methods.

The evidence shows that the different letter variants had little influence on response, however, the case studies helped to clarify the meaning of the letter by illustrating the way in which the service had helped people. Reactions to the use of case studies were nonetheless mixed and it may be worth considering other forms of testimonial such as user reviews or statistics to help explain the support and garner buy-in.

The letters were generally applauded by recipients for being brief, clear and concise. Their official appearance (though not popular with all) drew attention to the letters among people who might have otherwise ignored them. The brevity of the letters did, however, cause uncertainty about the nature of the support. Future communications should keep letters brief to ensure they are inviting to read and enclose a more detailed leaflet for those wanting more information.

7.2.2 The SMS

MI analysis found that the methods involving an SMS provoked higher response rates than the letter only methods and this finding is supported by generally favourable comments about the use of SMS as follow-up reminders in qualitative interviews, both among Takers and Non-Takers. Such positive results demonstrate how worthwhile and effective SMS reminders are in prompting contact with this group and suggest that they should be considered in the future.

7.3 What does the research show about supporting this group?

The research has shown that the claimant group is highly diverse, although there are a number of common constraints to in-work progression. Future advice will need to provide personalised support which recognises the work pathway, personal characteristics and wider context of the individual as well as being calibrated to their outlook on progression. One of the strongest themes emerging about both the actual service delivered and future advice needs was that those who may use such advice are looking for a combination of both practical, possibly even directional, advice and more specialised guidance which responds to what is particular to their situation and their needs – so both generic and specialist advice are required. There is a role for self-directed or self-service advice, but the research indicated that users may find this most helpful when combined with initial or later advice

7.3.1 Where might the National Careers Service support fit into the design of the future offer?

The National Careers Service offer appears to be a good fit in terms of meeting the careers guidance needs of in-work claimants by identifying progression goals and pathways and providing ongoing support around sustaining activity. However it is less able to deliver more directional support as well as advice around benefits and income. This may be best delivered by Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches who can draw on National Careers Service advice as an option within their menu of support.

Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches may also be better placed to monitor participants' progress, using tools such as Universal Jobmatch and Jobseekers' Directions. The National Careers Service's inability to mandate activity means that while it may inspire and empower participants to progress it is less equipped to provide the extra push that participants of this research said they sometimes needed.

In addition, participants wanted more practical help with jobsearch, such as help with job applications and CVs and information about job vacancies, volunteering or work experience opportunities. This is, to an extent, an area of overlap between the remit of Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches and National Careers Service advisers and highlights the need to identify clear and distinct roles for the two.

7.3.2 Recognising challenges and tailoring support accordingly

The in-work group faces distinct constraints that either prevent them from taking steps towards progression or slow down their progress, even where motivation is strong. There is a need for future support to recognise these unique constraints. This may involve setting achievable objectives, supporting claimants to sustain progression-related activity and developing progression goals that match participants' career aspirations.

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Table 7.1 below summarises the constraints experienced by in-work claimants and provides potential suggestions for support.

Table 7.1 Suggested support for in-work claimants

Constraint	Suggestion for support
Lack of time, energy and motivation due to working and personal commitments	Ongoing practical support and mentoring to keep up momentum In-work conditionality – which sets achievable objectives
Lack of funds to study – income generation as priority	Help finding part-time, flexible courses (e.g. online course) Help finding funding streams
Concerns about how much better off they will be	Better off calculations (where possible)
Employment constraints e.g. lack of available hours, low promotion opportunities	Support with exploring progression with current employer e.g. policies for promotion, more hours, flexible working Support with applying for promotions and identifying training opportunities Support to explore other options Work with employers to improve progression routes

Future support will also need to consider the needs of claimants with multiple and complex barriers. Single parents for example, even those with children over 5, did not consider themselves ready to progress because they lacked access to affordable childcare and preferred to raise and spend time with their children rather than work more hours.

It is also important that future support can meet the needs of self-employed and more qualified people as these groups may have more complex or nuanced advice needs. They may need help with applying for promotions and exploring organisational policies for increasing hours and flexible working. If these needs cannot be met by Work Coaches and the National Careers Service the Department may want to consider signposting and referral to other agencies such as Acas.

7.4 Summary of recommendations

- More quantitative evidence is needed to build up a more representative and comprehensive picture of this group in terms of attitudes and barriers to progression and support needs, particularly under Universal Credit.
- Letters, as the preferred method of first contact, should be used to raise awareness of available support.
- SMS reminders are an effective way of prompting contact, following initial contact by letter, and should be considered in the future. If the support being offered is non-obligatory this should be clear in the SMS.
- Letters should remain brief to maximise engagement but explain why the recipient has been targeted, with a more detailed information leaflet enclosed. Language should more clear, literal and 'skim-proof'.

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- Any advice service will need to provide personalised support which recognises the work pathway, personal characteristics and wider context of the individual as well as being calibrated to their outlook on progression.
- The Department should consider a joint Jobcentre Plus/National Careers Service model of delivery that includes the National Careers Service as an option within the menu of options at the disposal of Jobcentre Plus work coaches.
- Future support should recognise the unique constraints experienced by the in-work group by setting progression goals that match participants' aspirations and help sustain activity.
- The Department should consider how well the future landscape of support can cater for people who are self-employed and who have higher than average qualifications as these groups may need more complex or nuanced advice.
- It should also consider how best to offer support around applying for promotions, exploring organisational policies for progression, increasing hours and flexible working as well as identifying training opportunities with employers.
- Claimants face external constraints to progression due to more flexible and insecure labour markets. The department should explore doing more work with employers to address external barriers.

8 References

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Appendix A

Technical Report

This technical report provides details about the way the study was designed and delivered. It gives information on the process for designing the samples, the selection and recruitment of participants, and the conduct of fieldwork and analysis.

A.1 Research design and methods

The study involved in-depth interviews with:

- **Claimants:** including those who took up advice from the National Careers Service as part of the trial (Takers) and those who did not (Non-Takers).
- **National Careers Service staff:** including advisers who delivered the advice to claimants and senior staff members who managed the delivery of the trial.

In June 2014 75,000 Tax Credit claimants in England were offered free specialist advice from the National Careers Service on in-work progression, via five randomly and evenly assigned written messaging styles. This study explored the views and experiences of National Careers Service staff and claimants involved in this trial.

A.2 Claimants

The names and contact details of the 75,000 Tax Credit claimants who received trial communications were sent to NatCen by The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The recipients were receiving Working Tax Credit (WTC) with a monthly equivalent earned income of £330–£960 and had claimed WTC for at least 12 months. Claimants with self-employed earnings, a youngest child aged under 5; or a disability were excluded⁴.

A sample file of 244 callers to the National Careers Service was sent to NatCen as the 'Takers' sample. Of the 244 callers, 28 did not consent to be re-contacted for research purposes and were removed from the sample along with incomplete records and a small number of letters returned to the DWP after the original mail shot.

Following the receipt of these sample files, 595 claimants (195 Takers and 400 Non-Takers of National Careers Service support) were selected across the five types of messaging. Three separate recruitment exercises, taking place in November 2014, December 2015 and January – February 2016, were made to meet an initial target of 40 people however a total of 35 interviews were achieved.

The recruitment exercises used an opt-out approach. Letters drafted by NatCen were sent to claimants providing information about the study, what the involvement would entail and provided claimants with the opportunity to opt out using an enclosed reply slip and pre-paid envelope, by calling the Freephone telephone number or by emailing and providing their details.

⁴ The qualitative sample did, however, include people who described themselves as self-employed and with disabilities.

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Claimants who had not opted out were then contacted by NatCen’s researchers and were invited to hear more about the study and to take part in a short screening questionnaire to ascertain their eligibility for the study. Those who could not recall the letter or did not receive it were excluded from the sample.

Diversity was sought against a range of characteristics including gender, age, ethnicity, employment, work history, income, household composition and health condition. Eligible claimants were invited to take part in an interview and, for those who agreed, interviews were arranged during the screening telephone call. Confirmation letters were sent to participating claimants and included a fresh copy of the original letter and SMS from DWP in order to remind them of the communications they received about the NCS offer.

A breakdown of the achieved claimant sample by take up and messaging type is shown in Table A.1.

Table A.1 Achieved claimant sample – Primary Criteria

Letter	Messaging type	Takers	Non-Takers	Total
Short	Letter only	4	2	6
Efficacy	Letter only	4	4	8
	Plus SMS	4	1	5
Case study	Letter only	3	5	8
	Plus SMS	4	4	8
Totals		19	16	35

A breakdown of personal and demographic characteristics is given in Table A.2.

Table A.2 Achieved claimant sample – Secondary Criteria

Sample criteria	Characteristics	Takers	Non-Takers
Offered face-to-face advice	Yes	2	n/a
	No	17	n/a
Gender	Male	9	9
	Female	10	7
Household composition	Single and live alone	1	2
	Single and live in a house share	0	1
	Live with a partner and resident children	2	5
	Live with a partner and non-resident children	0	1
	Lone parent with resident children	13	7
	Lone parent with non-resident children	3	0
	Carer	0	0
Age	25-29	3	1
	30-49	12	11
	50+	4	4
			Continued

Table A.2 Continued

Sample criteria	Characteristics	Takers	Non-Takers
Ethnicity	Asian	2	2
	Black	1	0
	Other	3	0
	White	13	14
Day time activity	In paid work and receiving Tax Credits	15	15
	In paid work and not receiving Tax Credits	3	0
	Not in paid work (looking for work)	1	1
	Not in paid work (not looking for work)	0	0
	Other	0	0
Health condition	Yes	4	3
	No	15	13
Weekly earnings ¹	Upper (> £125/week)	12	10
	Lower (< £125/week)	5	6
	I am out of benefits	1	0
	Prefer not to say	1	0
Work history/length of claim	Solid	14	12
	Fragmented	5	4
Region	South East	1	3
	London	3	4
	South West	2	1
	East Midlands	1	0
	East of England	3	0
	Yorkshire and the Humber	1	1
	North-West	3	3
	North East	0	1
	West Midlands	3	1
	Undisclosed	2	0

¹ This information was collected during the screening exercise and also during the interview. The figures presented here are taken from the interviews with claimants.

A.3 National Careers Service staff

The study spoke to National Careers Service managers and advisers to capture their perspectives of the support provided to Tax Credit claimants under this trial.

An operational lead at BSS provided NatCen with contact details for key personnel who delivered the trial. An initial email (including a link to information about the study on NatCen's website) was then sent by NatCen to nominated managers and advisers informing them of the research and rationale for it. The NatCen research team made direct contact with managers and advisers to arrange timings for the interviews.

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A total of 12 interviews were conducted with NCS staff from two different districts. 2 Managers, 2 tier 1 advisers and 8 tier 2 advisers were interviewed for this study. A breakdown of the achieved NCS staff sample is provided in Table A.4.

Table A.3 Achieved National Careers Service staff sample

Area	Tier	Achieved Interviews
District 1	T1 Adviser	1
	T2 Adviser	4
	Manager	1
District 2	T1 Adviser	1
	T2 Adviser	4
	Manager	1

A.4 Data collection

A.4.1 Claimants

In-depth interviews were conducted with claimants in order to explore individuals' circumstances, experiences and views in detail. 34 interviews were conducted by telephone and one was conducted face to face in Spanish. Interviews with Takers lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and interviews with Non-Takers lasted around 30-45 minutes. Each participant was given a £20 gift card as a token of thanks. Fieldwork with claimants took place between November 2014 and February 2015.

Topic guides were designed by NatCen, in conjunction with DWP. Interviews with Takers focused on their views of the DWP letter (and SMS where relevant), reasons why they took up the advice, experience of the advice, attitudes toward in-work progression and the types of support that would be helpful for them in the future. Interviews with Non-Takers focused on their views of the letters (and SMS where relevant) their decision making in declining the support, their views of progressing in work and the types of support that might be helpful for them in the future.

A.4.2 National Careers Service staff

In-depth interviews were conducted with National Careers Service advisers and managers in November and December 2014. Nine interviews were held at BSS premises, and three interviews were conducted on the telephone at a later date. These interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

Two different topic guides were developed for managers and advisers. The structure of the two guides was similar. The first section captured information about the role and responsibilities of the staff member. The second explored advice provision to trial callers. The third focused on the characteristics of the claimant group and their support needs. The final section turned to participants' thoughts about future provision.

While the two guides were structured similarly, interviews with advisers captured frontline experiences and specific examples of the trial callers. Managers offered more strategic

reflections on what was delivered during the trial and their thoughts about the trial communications and future advice provision for this group.

A.5 Analysis

All interviews were digitally recorded with participants' permission and later transcribed verbatim. Interview transcripts were analysed using the 'Framework' system for qualitative analysis in NVivo 10 software. This method was developed at NatGen and provides a comprehensive view of the themes and the details of individuals' accounts, used for the analysis.

The first stage of analysis involves familiarisation with the transcribed data and identification of emerging issues to inform the development of a thematic framework. This is a series of thematic matrices or charts, each chart representing one key theme. The column headings on each chart relate to key sub-topics, and the rows to individual participants. Data from each case is then summarised in the relevant cell. The context of the information is retained and the page of the transcript from which it comes is noted, so that it is possible to return to a transcript to explore a point in more detail or extract text for verbatim quotation. This approach ensures that the analysis is comprehensive and consistent and that links with the verbatim data are retained.

Organising the data in this way enables the views, circumstances and experiences of all respondents to be explored within an analytical framework that is both grounded in and driven by their own accounts. The thematic charts allow for the full range of views and experiences to be compared and contrasted both across and within cases, and for patterns and themes to be identified and explored.