

Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 386

Work Focused Interviews for Partners and enhanced New Deal for Partners

Qualitative Evaluation: Phase 2

Andrew Thomas and Rita Griffiths

A report of research carried out by Insite Research and Consulting on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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First Published 2006.

ISBN 1 84712 093 8

ISBN13 978 1 84712 093 9

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Printed by Corporate Document Services.

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all the members of staff in Jobcentre Plus offices who gave their valuable time to help with this research, and all the Jobcentre Plus customers (partners and main claimants) who also agreed to participate in research interviews.

They also gratefully acknowledge the contributions and support of Department for Work and Pensions colleagues in the Lone Parents and Partners Research and Evaluation Team, in particular Jenny Crook and Helen Wood who managed the research project.

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Andrew Thomas and **Rita Griffiths** are both partners at Insite Research and Consulting.

Abbreviations and acronyms

ADF	Adviser Discretion Fund
BOC	Better Off Calculation
CTC	Childcare Tax Credit
DEA	Disability Employment Adviser
DLA	Disability Living Allowance
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
FTA	Failure to attend
IB	Incapacity Benefit
IS	Income Support
IWBC	In Work Benefit Calculation
JOT	Job Outcome Target
JSA	Jobseekers' Allowance
LMS	Labour Market System
NDDP	New Deal for Disabled People
NDLP	New Deal for Lone Parents
NDP	New Deal for Partners
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
PG1	Priority Group One
SDA	Severe Disablement Allowance

WFI	Work Focused Interviews
WFIPs	Work Focused Interviews for Partners
WPLS	Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study
WTC	Working Tax Credit

Summary

Introduction

Work Focused Interviews for Partners (WFIPs) and enhanced New Deal for Partners (NDP) were introduced in April 2004. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) then commissioned Insite Research and Consulting to conduct a qualitative evaluation of these initiatives. The research was conducted in two phases for each of these two strands. This report presents the joint findings from the second phase of work looking at both WFIPs and NDP¹.

The aims of the second phase research were to add a longitudinal aspect to the evaluation and to explore changes in the delivery and management of the initiative, in the perceptions of Jobcentre Plus staff and in the experiences and perceptions of customers over the period of approximately 12 months since the first phase of work. A particular focus was put upon employment outcomes and sustainability, and the reasons behind customers' work related activity and inactivity.

Face-to-face interviews were undertaken with advisers, Business Managers, and Adviser Managers in fully integrated Jobcentre Plus offices, and with customer couples at their homes, in the same five districts as in phase one.

Work Focused Interviews for Partners/New Deal for Partners delivery

The following changes were noted in the twelve month period since phase one.

Interviews had become increasingly brief. Variations in the time allocated for WFIPs had all but disappeared and all districts were booking 30 minute slots (in accordance

¹ Phase 1 reported in: Thomas, A. and Griffiths, R. *Work Focused Interviews for Partners and Enhanced New Deal for Partners: Qualitative Evaluation, Phase One*, (2005), DWP Report 283.

with guidance). The shorter interviews were militating against carrying out 'persuasive' Better Off Calculations (BOCs) at that stage of the process.

Advisers perceived a particular problem with dealing with partners who were carers, for the great majority of whom the programme was felt to be inappropriate. A few advisers saw room for a more intense WFIP regime to be applied to non-carer partners. There was widespread agreement that where partners were spouse carers it was preferable to conduct WFIPs individually rather than jointly with the main claimant.

Advisers could see no real incentive for them to make the considerable extra effort that might be required to move a greater proportion of partners onto NDP. The longer-term needs and aspirations of some partners were being routinely missed or overlooked by advisers at WFIPs.

There was a trend away from 'specialism' among advisers, reinforced by a continued perception of a lack of training specifically related to partners' and couples' needs, and by the very small numbers of customers, especially on NDP case loads.

There was no indication of changes being made to NDP delivery to incorporate good practice or to focus more precisely on partners' needs and circumstances. Any changes that had been made (for example, increased outreach and access to mentoring services) had been the result of other, 'external' influences and programmes.

BOCs continued to be seen as a key tool for addressing, and in some cases overcoming, concerns of partners about work adversely affecting household income, and demonstrating the margin of net gain to be set against anticipated problems getting back into the benefits system should jobs fall through. Uncertainty, inconclusiveness or errors in BOCs were found to have a major deterrent effect on customers thinking about returning to work.

Work Focused Interviews for Partners/New Deal for Partners impacts

Advisers' expectations of job outcomes from partners remained low and the great majority were seen as uninterested or unable to work. Many partners who had gone on to take action towards employment felt their WFIP had not played any part in the process. Many couples expressed frustration and a sense of being trapped in a hopeless situation in spite of strong desires to get out and work. Where WFIPs were seen to have played a role this was primarily in raising awareness of opportunities, boosting self-confidence, 'kick starting' a thought process, and breaking down negative views of Jobcentre Plus services.

Key factors affecting partners' decision making were: the influence (negative or positive) of main claimant spouses; the priority given to caring responsibilities; and the financial constraints attached to benefits and to wages in the jobs market. Many

partners expressed the desire to work at some point in the future and even to prepare for this in the meantime through training, although they felt work to be impractical at the time of seeing an adviser. Generally, suggested ways of addressing longer-term change and possibilities included additional adviser training, better referrals and relations with other agencies, and further contact with partners.

Partners' views of NDP were evenly split between positive and negative perceptions with self-referrals generally being more critical than those entering via a WFIP. Main claimants views mirrored those of partners and in some cases the main claimants had been stimulated to seek work for themselves – some successfully.

Male partners appeared to be more likely to have undergone training and gone into full-time work or self-employment (part-time work predominated among female partners). The key factors affecting partners' chances for job outcomes were: long-term absence from the labour market; and the majority preference for part-time work. Advisers were often working under strict labour market constraints combined with very narrowly defined customer needs.

Partners took low paid jobs in sectors with opportunities for part-time hours, evening and night shifts (self-employed partners in a wider occupational range) and perceived needs for flexibility were often less in practice than anticipated. Jobs were well sustained, especially full-time jobs and self-employment, though successful job outcomes were often only as a result of extraordinary efforts, sacrifices and flexibility from partners.

Caring was the key barrier for many partners and was difficult for advisers to deal with as it was intimately tied into couples' personal relations, with many partners feeling great unease in expressing dissatisfaction with their caring role. There appeared to be little discussion of the details of caring responsibilities at WFIPs and their mention often led to the speedy ending of interviews. In spite of this, a small number of carers were being successfully case loaded onto NDP.

Most partners who were carers were caring for their main claimant partners/spouses. More male than female spouse-carers appeared to have entered NDP, though few carers of either gender had succeeded in entering work and these were mostly into part-time and poorly sustained jobs. The difficulties faced by 'third-party' carers often appeared to be even more acute than those faced by spouse-carers. Partners aged over 50 were seen as more likely to have limiting health conditions and caring responsibilities than other partners, and to be more set in their ways. Those on NDP, however, were faring comparably to partners of other ages; most had undergone some training to update skills and gain confidence, and some had entered and sustained jobs.

For partners of Incapacity Benefit (IB) customers generally (including carers), factors allowing consideration of work included their children getting older and improvements in the main claimants' health, whereas their main constraints included lengthy absence from the labour market and the management of their own health conditions. Indeed, advisers saw much in common between the needs of IB

customers and many in the partners' customer group. Particular mention was made of the training that some IB advisers had received in new questioning techniques that were felt would be appropriate to many partners. A high proportion of self-referrals were actually being identified as partners when jointly attending interviews for their main claimant spouses, and this was seen by advisers as a fruitful means of accessing potential NDP entrants.

Conclusions

Generally negative views and low expectations of partners by advisers continued and the low priority accorded the partners' customer group had been reinforced in several areas through new management practices, targets and work allocation procedures. Despite some employment outcomes successes with partners on NDP, the negative perceptions engendered by the WFIPs process had carried over also into NDP case load work.

The complexity of partners' circumstances was widely acknowledged, but there was little evidence of advisers being able to address it directly. Many felt more comfortable treating partners in general as individuals rather than taking on board couple and household related issues. Many NDP participants were reported either to have 'drifted off' with no apparent job outcome or to be 'sticking' within the programme – home circumstances and the influence of main claimants were suggested causes for this. Opposition and resistance to the aspirations and intentions of partners from the other person in the couple (the main claimant) was felt to be a major factor in the difficulties experienced by advisers in dealing with the partners' customer group at all stages of the process.

Overall there had been a drawing in and narrowing of approach to WFIPs. Interviews had become increasingly brief, often with the clear intent of doing only the minimum required. There was some evidence from customer interviews of rushed processes and possible missed opportunities. Advisers could see no real incentive for them to make the considerable extra effort that might be required to move a greater proportion of partners onto NDP. Contact with case loaded partners on NDP was also often minimal and limited to jobsearch and Tax Credits administration support.

The longer-term needs and aspirations of some partners were being routinely missed or ignored by advisers at WFIPs. This was sometimes the case even in the face of explicit intentions on the part of partners to return to work in the future and an expressed willingness to prepare for work in the meantime (perhaps through flexibly available training opportunities). Very few advisers were either willing or felt themselves to be able to take the required medium to long-term view of support that this would require. There was little evidence of long-term, active support being provided to partners on NDP (with the exception of those undertaking self-employment training and test trading options).

Given the extent of partners' difficulties and barriers, some advisers were of the opinion that NDP still did not have enough to offer its customers, and that in particular it held little in the way of help or provision for those who were not already 'job ready'. In spite of this, a considerable proportion of partners were failing to move off NDP case load and into work. Reasons for this ranged from disillusionment in the face of evidence of non-viability from BOCs (especially for much sought after part-time work), to the re-emergence of health or caring constraints, to an undermining of confidence (whether in the face of the demands of training courses or as a result of lack of support from main claimant spouses).

Gains in understanding, approach and practice from working with IB customers in the Pathways pilot areas were thought to be of direct relevance to dealing with those in the partners' customer group who were partnered with IB customers or who had health conditions of their own to manage. There was much evidence that all partners might profitably be approached via the main claimant rather than 'in isolation'.

1 Introduction

1.1 Research context

Work Focused Interviews for Partners (WFIPs) and an enhanced New Deal for Partners (NDP) were introduced in Jobcentre Plus offices in April 2004. From this date, the non-working, non-claiming partners of working age benefit customers were required to attend a one-off mandatory meeting with an adviser to discuss their work options. Those targeted are the dependent partners of customers in receipt of either income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Income Support (IS), Incapacity Benefit (IB), and Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA). JSA customer couples born since 1957 who have no dependent children living with them are not subject to WFIPs, but fall under the Joint Claims initiative.

NDP was enhanced and re-launched nationwide at the same time as WFIPs were introduced, with WFIPs designed as a new route onto NDP which was previously accessed solely through voluntary self-referral. WFIPs and NDP form part of the policy intent to extend Jobcentre Plus services on an equal basis to its different customer groups, and bring support and provision for dependent partners into line with other groups.

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned Insite Research and Consulting to conduct a qualitative evaluation of WFIPs and NDP. The aim of the research was to examine how the policies are being implemented, explore the characteristics of the partner' customer group, establish for whom the policies are most and least effective and why, and explore the outcomes and impacts of the initiatives on Jobcentre Plus staff and customers.

Two phases of fieldwork were carried out to investigate the WFIP process, and two to investigate the NDP process. At each phase the evaluation looked at both 'stock' and 'flow' partners. WFIPs are triggered at the 26 week point in a claim. 'Flow' cases comprise the partners of benefit customers for whom this trigger point was reached after April 2004. 'Stock' cases represent the partners of customers whose claim had already been in existence for more than 26 weeks at the start of the initiative.

Phase 1 reported separately². This report presents the joint findings from the second phase of WFIP and NDP qualitative research. WFIP fieldwork took place in Autumn 2005, approximately 12 months after the first phase and 18 months from the start of the initiative. NDP fieldwork took place in February and March 2006, also approximately 12 months after the first phase interviews.

1.2 Phase two methodology

Qualitative interviews were undertaken with advisers, Business Managers, Adviser Managers and customers in the same five Jobcentre Plus districts as in phase one. One of the districts was an IB Pathways pilot area and one was a Job Outcome Target (JOT) pilot area.

Staff interviews were conducted in integrated Jobcentre Plus offices. Where possible, follow up interviews were sought with the same respondents as in phase one. Where this was not possible, or advisers were no longer dealing with the partners' customer group, new respondents were interviewed. These respondents were asked to reflect back on the past year or, however long a period they had been involved with WFIPs and/or NDP. For both WFIP and NDP staff interviews approximately half the interviews were conducted with new respondents as a result of the widespread reorganization of advisers' duties in several areas and high staff turnover in others. New interviewees were also sought where there were specific practices identified in phase one involving different offices or different members of staff whose first-hand experience needed to be explored. Examples of such situations included the reported delivery of 'group' WFIPs in some districts and the separation of WFIP delivery from NDP caseload delivery in others.

Repeat interviews were also conducted with customers. As in phase one, paired in-depth interviews were conducted with couples. Simultaneous separate interviews were held at couples' homes with both main claimants and partners. All couples interviewed in the first phase of WFIP fieldwork who at that time had plans or expectations for future employment activity were re-contacted, as were all couples in which caring responsibilities had been an important element in previous decision-making about work. The particular issues affecting partners who were also carers formed part of the exploratory remit for phase two of the research, as did issues affecting partners (and couples) aged over 50 years.

Some respondent couples judged as unlikely to provide additional information relevant to the evaluation were not approached a second time. These included couples where previous recall of the WFIP process was poor or where their interest and engagement was minimal and they had expressed little likelihood of undertaking

² Thomas, A. and Griffiths, R. *Work Focused Interviews for Partners and Enhanced New Deal for Partners: Qualitative Evaluation, Phase One*, (2005), DWP Report 283.

any work-related activity in the next twelve months. Those couples where the partner had previously left NDP rapidly and without a known job or training outcome were also excluded from phase 2 interviews. With these exceptions, all couples interviewed in the first phase of NDP fieldwork were re-contacted.

For each of the WFIP and NDP elements, new customer respondents were sought to make up a complement of thirty couples to match phase one. New couples were selected to:

- maintain a spread of main claimant benefit types;
- include a proportion of male partners and partners from ethnic minority groups;
- include couples without dependent children;
- include both self-referred and WFIP-route NDP entrants;
- cover a variety of different recorded reasons for partners' exits from the WFIP process and from NDP.

1.3 Aims and objectives

The aim of the second phase of WFIP/NDP interviews was to add a longitudinal aspect to the evaluation. The primary objectives were thus:

- to explore any changes that had taken place in the twelve months since phase one interviews in the way WFIPs and NDP were being delivered, and the delivery process managed – including any effects of the JOT pilot observed in that area;
- to examine the perceptions of involved Jobcentre Plus staff of the impact and effectiveness of the initiative after eighteen months of implementation;
- to investigate the effects of WFIPs on entry to NDP and to examine customer experiences of the transition;
- to explore changes in the circumstances of customer couples and the ways these may have interacted with or been affected by the WFIP process or by participation in NDP;
- to identify the reasons for any changes in customers' views about working and/or their prospects for future employment;
- to explore medium-term outcomes from NDP participation, including work experiences and job sustainability, and with special reference to self-employed partners (a perceived 'success group' from phase one), to carers and to those aged over 50 years.

1.4 Research questions

There was a number of more specific research questions (some originally 'flagged up' by phase one fieldwork and findings) that it was hoped could be answered in phase two. These included:

- Had there been any further variation in the way WFIPs and NDP were being delivered?
- Had previously noted variations been sustained and if so why, and what was the assessment of their effectiveness from those involved?
- Had advisers (and their managers) changed their views, after a further twelve months of the initiative, of the customer group and its needs and characteristics?
- Had advisers changed their views of the ability of mandatory WFIPs to inform partners and encourage them to join NDP?
- Had perceptions of the impact and effectiveness of WFIPs and/or NDP participation changed at all over time and if so how?
- What more could advisers and customers tell us about the particular situation of **carer partners** and the difficulties they faced, and whether WFIPs were managing to address these or support on NDP able to tackle them?
- Had any partners managed to move closer to the labour market or into employment in the twelve months since they were previously interviewed, and if so what role had been played in this by their WFIP and any other contact they may have had with an adviser or with Jobcentre Plus including subsequent participation in NDP?
- What other changes in circumstances had customers seen that had affected their work options and expectations?

2 Programme delivery

2.1 Work Focused Interviews for Partners delivery

Summary of Findings: WFIPs

- Work with partners appeared to have been given an even lower priority than it had a year earlier.
- Variation and innovation in WFIP delivery had reduced over time with observed and reported changes in delivery practices indicating a process of retrenchment and marginalisation of work with partners in general.
- Variations in the time allocated for WFIPs had all but disappeared and all districts were booking 30 minute slots – though in practice many interviews were taking considerably less time than this.
- Shorter WFIPs were militating against carrying out ‘persuasive’ Better Off Calculations (BOCs) at that stage of the process.
- There was a trend away from ‘specialism’ among advisers, reinforced by a continued perception of a lack of training specifically related to partners’ and couples’ needs, and by the very small numbers of customers.
- Advisers perceived a particular problem with dealing with partners who were carers, for the great majority of whom the programme was felt to be inappropriate.
- There was widespread agreement that where partners were spouse carers it was preferable to conduct WFIPs individually rather than jointly with the main claimant.
- A few advisers saw room for greater persuasive efforts and a more intense WFIP regime to be applied to the remainder of the customer group (i.e. non-carers).

Continued

- Many advisers felt more comfortable treating partners in general as individuals rather than taking on board couple and household related issues.
- The complexity of partners' circumstances was widely acknowledged but there was little evidence of advisers being willing or able to address it directly, and no discernible 'Job Outcome Target (JOT) effect' in the JOT pilot area.
- Opposition and resistance to the aspirations and intentions of partners from the other person in the couple (the main claimant) was felt to be a major factor in the difficulties experienced by advisers in dealing with the partner customer group.

2.1.1 Variations in delivery

The first phase of WFIP research identified a number of areas of variation in delivery between the districts involved. These included:

- variations in the siting of the administration of appointments setting;
- the practice in two districts of making telephone contact with partners prior to their WFIP appointment date;
- the conducting of 'group' sessions for partners in one district;
- the formal separation of WFIP delivery from subsequent New Deal for Partners (NDP) case loading;
- variation in the length of time booked in for WFIP appointments;
- differing allocations of partners' work to advisers, with delivery ranging from 'specialist' dedicated partners' advisers, to New Deal advisers with a variety of backgrounds and main customer groups, through to some non-New Deal advisers.

These aspects of WFIP delivery were revisited in phase two to explore any further changes or variations and to ascertain whether variant practices had been sustained or not, and for what reasons.

Appointments administration and prior telephone contact

There was less variation evident in administrative arrangements for WFIP appointments than was reported twelve months earlier. Whereas district level, centralised administration was predominant at that time, local office-based arrangements were evident in two of the districts. These office-based arrangements had ceased in one of the areas and been replaced with a centralised process. The other area was continuing with an office-based system, with initial interviews arranged by administrative staff, but in some offices by an adviser. Local appointments administration was said to fit well with arrangements under the Incapacity Benefit (IB) Pathways pilot that was running there, and to facilitate the transfer of good practice from work under the pilot to partners. Particular mention was made in phase one to the practice in this area of advisers contacting partners by telephone prior to their WFIP. This was continuing and was felt to be helping reduce levels of failure to attend (FTA) appointments.

Since phase one, one of the districts had combined since with a neighbouring district to form a single Jobcentre Plus administrative unit. Here the process of appointments administration remained centralised but moved to the centre located in the 'new' half of the combined district. Advisers reported that under the new arrangements the practice of attempting to contact partners by telephone to agree convenient appointment times and dates had been dropped. Advisers perceived FTA rates to have increased, but thought this was more likely to be due to the greater perceived remoteness of the process rather than the lack of telephone contact. Despite the identification of prior telephone contact with partners as 'good practice' and as having beneficial effects on reducing FTA rates, the practice had contracted rather than spread to other districts.

Group sessions for partners and split adviser roles

The one district that had previously reported carrying out group WFI sessions for partners, had dropped the practice by the time of the phase two research. This appeared to have been the result of external pressure, because group sessions were not recognised as WFIPs by policy, but also to have been consequent upon the circumstances that had led to its introduction having changed. The administrative backlog of 'stock' cases in the district had been worked through in the intervening twelve months and there was no longer a perceived need to find ways of speeding up the process for partners.

A similar expediency appeared to have been behind the splitting of advisers' roles in this district, as this practice too had been dropped despite some claims for its effectiveness a year before. WFIPs were no longer being conducted by advisers other than those supporting partners on NDP caseloads. Practice had fallen in line with other districts in having the same adviser seeing case loaded partners as had conducted their WFIP.

Allocated time-slots for Work Focused Interviews for Partners

The variation in the amount of time allocated for WFIPs that was found in phase one had all but disappeared a year later. The initial booking of one hour 'slots' had already been modified to 45 minutes or to 30 minutes in all but one of the five districts by the end of 2004. By the end of 2005 all districts were working to a uniform booking-in time of half an hour (in accordance with guidance), though many advisers said that in practice WFIPs were rarely lasting even this long: 15 to 20 minutes was considered the average length for interviews. This was borne out in customer experience and in the quantitative survey strand of the evaluation research³. Several advisers reported spending even less time than this with many of their partner customers, stating that they were either fixedly uninterested in work or under such difficult circumstances as to make it unfeasible.

³ Coleman, N., Seeds, K. and Edwards, G., (2006) *Work Focused Interviews for Partners and Enhanced New Deal for Partners: Quantitative Survey Research*, DWP Research Report 335.

While advisers were generally of the opinion that the shorter, 30 minute interview slots were a better reflection of the reality of most WFIPs, there were a number of consequences to having less time available with customers that were interested in the possibility of working. In particular it appeared to strongly militate against conducting BOCs at that stage of the process.

'Specialist' advisers

In the early months of the WFIPs initiative, several districts had looked to concentrate partners' work among a limited number of advisers with particular backgrounds or familiarity with those customer groups assumed to have most in common with partners. Most often the work had fallen to lone parent advisers. In one office the decision had been made to give all partners work to one dedicated adviser in order for that adviser to develop a special expertise with the customer group. Even in this instance, however, there was not a sufficient volume of partner interviews to take up more than a minority of the adviser's time, and this responsibility was, therefore, in addition to the adviser's 'main' job function which was in finance.

By the second phase of fieldwork there was a clear trend away from anything that might be considered as creating 'specialist partner advisers'. There were no longer any large offices with only a single partner adviser. Not only was work with partners being 'spread around' among a greater number of advisers and assigned to advisers with a wider range of backgrounds and customer group responsibilities, but it was also being made the responsibility of 'non-New Deal' staff, with interviews being picked up, for example, by new claims advisers.

The increasingly small numbers of WFIPs coming through the system was one reason given for this marginalisation as it had become an ever smaller portion of offices' workloads. With no critical mass to justify lending partners' work any real sense of priority, there was an increasing tendency to fit it in around other priorities in what could be a rather ad hoc fashion. A lack of training specifically related to the needs of partners was seen as reinforcing this:

'I've never been told what is required of me – so I do them [WFIPs] like my lone parent interviews...'

(Adviser)

The assumption appeared to be widely made by managers that there was nothing unique about dealing with partners that meant WFIPs could not be carried out by more or less any adviser who had the required capacity. This was the exact opposite of the view of many advisers, however:

'It's such a difficult client group that you really need more experience before you do it.'

(Adviser)

'I think if we're going to do it we've got to do it properly...it's kind of like tagged onto things; it's kind of half-hearted.'

(Adviser)

2.1.2 Addressing early Work Focused Interviews for Partners delivery issues

Some of the delivery issues identified in phase one had diminished or effectively disappeared twelve months later, suggesting that they were either 'teething' problems generated before staff became fully familiar with the requirements of conducting WFIPs, or that they had been successfully addressed by minor policy changes and modified operational practices.

Eighteen months into the WFIP initiative, advisers reported noticeably less concern being expressed by customers about being called in for an interview, and relatively few complaints about the letters sent out to inform them. Some minor changes to the wording of letters had taken place and advisers felt that these changes were positive.

Also it appeared that most of the complaints in the early months were from stock customers and their partners. Large numbers were said to have interpreted the initial letter as a threat to their benefits income and a slight on the seriousness of their circumstances (such as health problems, caring and child rearing).

Early problems with diary filling were reported to have been largely overcome a year later. Shorter time slots had contributed to this, as had progress with the processing of 'stock' partners which was well underway in all districts. One area had completed its schedule of WFIPs for stock partners, other areas were approximately halfway through.

In most areas, the problems with high FTA rates at first WFIP appointments that were previously noted were seen as having reduced slightly over time. However, there appeared to have been little in the way of concerted efforts made to address FTA rates and no evidence of the transfer of good practice. Prior telephone contact by advisers, for example, had not been adopted in any other areas than that in which it was already taking place. There remained some evident gaps in advisers' knowledge and understanding of procedures relating to FTA. Several described having to check guidance on an individual case-by-case basis because they were seeing too few partners to be able to build any real expertise.

There were no major changes found in the implementation of formal waiver and deferral procedures either. Although partners receiving Carer's Allowance had been excluded from WFIP eligibility, there remained concern among many advisers that some partners with serious health problems and caring constraints were still being called in for a WFI inappropriately.

2.1.3 Adviser views of the partners' customer group

Most advisers perceived that the partners' customer group usually had strong reasons that explained why they were not working and that in most cases they were unable to make much impact upon these.

'There's always a reason why a partner isn't working...whether it's family reasons or partner reasons...'

(Adviser)

Nevertheless, one adviser felt that it was wrong to apply the same criteria to all partners, and that once allowance was made for carers then there was room for more persuasion and even a more intensive WFI regime with other partners.

'If they're the main carer then yes...it's never going to happen. But we've got people that are just used to sitting on benefits – the calculations come up £5 a week better off and they say 'oh forget it' – why aren't we saying to them 'we want you in the office and we want you to do a jobsearch' Why are we paying them to sit at home?'

(Adviser)

Consistent with phase one findings, advisers viewed partners as difficult and resource intensive customers to deal with. It was widely felt that a large proportion of the customer group did not wish to change their achieved *status quo*, whether for reasons of familiarity and security or for reasons more intimately tied up in their relationships:

'It's a strange sort of group these partners...quite often one of them [in the couple] is sick and there's a list of reasons why they just like it to be like it is, you know – They're just very difficult cases to deal with...they're in it as a family.'

(Adviser)

However, there was little evidence of advisers being willing or able to address the complex issues presented. In many cases they felt the specific problems associated with relationships, medical and mental health conditions and caring responsibilities to extend beyond their remit and their training. Issues relating to couple and household complexities were acknowledged as being '*deep and difficult problems*' but advisers had few, if any, strategies for dealing with them.

Many advisers admitted to feeling more comfortable treating partners as individuals, as they were familiar with dealing with other types of customers in this way. Even in jointly attended WFIP interviews, individual rather than household matters were being addressed. It was clear that partners were generally being addressed individually with the main claimants essentially 'sitting in' and for the most part not actively participating. This was confirmed from research interviews with customer couples.

The involvement of both members of a couple was seen as a fundamentally different situation from the one-to-one that advisers were familiar with:

'It's so different from working with the lone parents...where it's just one person you can really have a lot more influence on what their decision is – but when you're working with a couple and you find the partner [i.e. main claimant] is involved, then the battle is a lot harder.'

(Adviser)

Where main claimants, for whatever reason, were felt to be opposed to what their partners were wanting to do in relation to work, then many advisers saw their task as more or less impossible.

2.1.4 Joint Work Focused Interviews for Partners

Advisers perceived there to have been an increase over time in the proportion of partners attending their Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) jointly with their main claimant partner. Suggested reasons why this might be the case included:

- changes to the wording of letters to highlight and encourage joint attendance;
- the increased proportion of 'flow' WFIPs coming through in some areas, as 'stock' schedules were being successfully worked down.

Some advisers felt that 'flow' customers were more likely to attend WFIPs together as a couple because, in comparison to 'stock' customers, they were seen as more likely to be nervous and feeling vulnerable in the early months of their claim.

There were mixed views among advisers as to the benefits and drawbacks of conducting joint WFIPs, as there had been earlier in the initiative. Partners' circumstances were generally seen as being too varied for it to be possible to say whether, overall, joint WFIPs were preferable to singly attended WFIPs or whether one model was more effective than the other. Individual advisers, however, did hold strong personal views on this. One adviser even said that they refused to conduct joint meetings at all. It appears unlikely that the question of whether to encourage joint meetings is resolvable under current delivery conditions as there are too many other factors at work. These include:

- advisers' training and their perceptions of their ability to conduct joint meetings effectively;
- the highly variable influences brought to bear on WFIPs by the presence of the main claimant;
- other 'couple dynamics' affecting partners' ability and willingness to discuss their needs and aspirations.

None of the advisers interviewed were actively encouraging joint attendance at WFIPs. All preferred to leave this decision to customers. However, joint attendance was not a guarantee that issues affecting both partners in the couple, or their household as a whole, would be discussed. As one adviser rather tellingly put it:

'[Doing a joint interview] doesn't bother me unless they [main claimants] interrupt too much...'

[Adviser]

The one area where there appeared to be a broad consensus among advisers was in relation to partners caring for the main claimant. In such cases advisers felt it was most often preferable to see the partner on their own for their WFIP, as many carers found it difficult to talk about their feelings, frustrations and aspirations in front of the person for whom they cared, as they frequently experienced guilt where there were conflicts of interest.

2.1.5 Adviser motivation

Although many advisers were apprehensive or negative about the partners' customer group at the outset of the initiative, there was, nevertheless, a minority who viewed the difficulties partners faced as an interesting challenge. Some even relished the opportunity to engage with the complexities posed by a 'household' perspective. Such positive views were much harder to find a year further on into the initiative as a result of advisers having achieved so little in the way of success.

'[We are] downcast really at the lack of response.'

(Adviser)

The general context of delivery was felt to be more pressured, restricting the space and time available for serious engagement and advisers in some areas felt that their own jobs were under threat. Advisers in a number of districts were reported to be seriously demoralised by this.

Increased and extended targets relating to all customer groups were said to have removed any incentive that may have previously existed for advisers to engage with partners. Jobcentre Plus' devolved management arrangements were also said to have reduced the focus on particular customer groups and placed greater emphasis on delivering Jobcentre Plus business 'in the round'. Adviser Managers had typically been given responsibility for all New Deal advisers at the Jobcentre Plus office level, for example, compared to previous responsibilities by New Deal 'strands' across the district as a whole.

Work with partners, therefore, appeared to have been given an even lower priority than it had been given a year before. The small number of customers being dealt with continued to contribute to this low priority and was being accentuated by a general trend away from adviser 'specialisation'. Not only were the numbers of WFIPs being conducted falling (due to stock customers receiving WFIPs and thus the customer base naturally decreasing), but those that were coming through were being allocated to a greater number of advisers in most offices, further reducing the chances for any individual adviser to build specific expertise in relation to the customer group. Even in offices using specialist IB and Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) advisers to do WFIPs as appropriate, the partner WFIPs were said to be distributed

among all available advisers in these teams in order to '*spread the pain*', reflecting their low priority and a negative perception of their effectiveness.

The continued reductions in time slots for WFIPs – both as a result of policy change and operational practice – appeared to be further compounding the problem. The latter was also clearly a reflection of the perceived low priority accorded to the customer group. It had become accepted normal practice in many offices explicitly to seek to minimize the amount of time spent on WFIPs and to 'rush through' those partners not immediately expressing an interest in working. Several new customer interviews provided further evidence that this was happening and that there was on occasion a rather doubtful work focus to proceedings, particularly where customers mentioned caring responsibilities. In such cases, WFIPs were brought to a rapid close and interviewees suggested that some advisers were looking for 'get outs' in order not to extend the length of the interview.

One district had introduced a new target for its advisers which required them to complete a certain number of customer interviews (across all customer groups) each week. The perceived status of WFIPs as 'quick' and 'non-specialised' was reflected in the practice said to have developed of giving partner interviews to any advisers who were otherwise struggling to attain their target, as an easy way for them to make up numbers.

In other districts, work with partners was being allocated to advisers only after other, higher priority customers had been dealt with, reinforcing negative perceptions of the partners' customer group and dissipating any expertise that may otherwise have developed. Perhaps not surprisingly, this perception of WFIPs meant that there was no evidence of strategic thinking about partners or about how partners' specific needs might be addressed. Where efforts were being made they were directed rather towards finding ways of 'processing' the customer group quickly rather than towards seeking ways of making WFIPs more effective in terms of NDP entries or job outcomes.

2.1.6 Better off calculations

Better Off Calculations (BOCs), previously referred to as In Work Benefit Calculations (IWBCs), were found in phase one to be key aspects of the support available to partners, but to be taking place mostly at initial NDP meetings rather than during WFIPs. There were a number of reasons given for this, including the lack of sufficient time in a WFIP to conduct a calculation. The situation was not markedly different a year later, although even shorter allocations of time for WFIPs had reinforced this situation.

With the notable exception of one adviser who claimed to carry out a BOC at every WFIP he conducted, albeit mostly on a speculative basis, there was little evidence of calculations being used persuasively at WFIPs to attempt to get partners to change their attitude towards the possibility of working and thus perhaps to join NDP.

2.1.7 Effects of the Job Outcome Target pilot

One of the research districts was running an 'option 1' JOT pilot⁴ at the time the partners' fieldwork was being carried out. There was an expectation that arrangements under JOT might affect levels of successful job outcomes recorded, help prevent the unnecessary use of resources to 'capture' job outcomes that would otherwise occur anyway, and possibly thus help advisers and other staff to focus their efforts more effectively on the 'hardest to help' customers. It was not known what effect, if any, the JOT pilot would have on a particular customer group, such as partners, either in terms of job outcomes, or in terms of freeing staff time to deal with their more complex problems.

One office Business Manager made extensive comments about the JOT pilot in relation to partners and was very clear about the effect they felt it had had. The delivery of WFIPs was described as having been '*overtaken by JOT*,' and its effect seen to have been to end previous innovation in WFIP delivery. The office had previously conducted 'group WFIPs' and had been operating separate WFIP and NDP adviser roles. Neither of these initiatives had continued under JOT, though the causality may not have been clear-cut. It may have also been due to the removal of the administrative need for these innovations at that time with the successful working off of a backlog of stock partners that had built up previously.

Nonetheless, the partners' initiative was described as merely '*treading water*' as a result of JOT, and the pilot was said to have led to the prioritisation of certain groups – priority group one (PG1) customers – to the detriment of others including partners. Lone parents and IB customers, for whom a job entry was worth twelve points towards targets rather than the eight points awarded for a partner job entry, were reported to be the primary focus for staff efforts to an even greater degree than before.

The judgement of one Business Manager was, therefore, that while the JOT arrangements had perhaps freed up some staff time, this was being spent working with higher priority customer groups rather than with partners. Advisers saw no incentive to engage with partners unless they were already keen to work, and in the competition for advisers' scarce time and resources, partners were reportedly losing out to customer groups with perhaps less complex barriers and difficulties to address. Despite being perceived as a 'harder to help' group of customers, partners were not seen as having benefited in any way under the JOT pilot.

⁴ Under the option 1 JOT pilot, the previous individual and office targets for job entries were replaced with 'global', district targets for job outcomes measured independently of any particular interventions made by Jobcentre Plus on behalf of individual customers. This option required Jobcentre Plus to track all off-flows from benefits into work using the Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study (WPLS) which links individual activity records from Jobcentre Plus systems to employment records held by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

2.2 Delivery of New Deal for Partners

Summary of Findings: NDP

- There was no indication of changes being made to NDP delivery to incorporate good practice or to focus more precisely on partners' needs and circumstances.
- Any changes that had been made (for example, increased outreach and access to mentoring services) had been the result of other, 'external' influences and programmes.
- There was little sign that there had been any significant build up over time of expertise in understanding and supporting partners, and this was reinforced by the very small (in some cases non-existent) case loads that advisers were dealing with.
- BOCs continued to be seen as a key tool for addressing, and in some cases overcoming, partners' concerns about work adversely affecting household income, and demonstrating the margin of net gain to be set against anticipated problems getting back into the benefits system should jobs fall through.
- Uncertainty, inconclusiveness or errors in BOCs were found to have a major deterrent effect on customers thinking about returning to work.
- Given the extent of partners' difficulties and labour market constraints, some advisers were of the opinion that NDP still did not have enough to offer its customers, and that in particular it held little in the way of help or provision for those who were not already 'job ready'.
- The NDP support most frequently accessed by self-referring partners was jobsearch help and Adviser Discretion Fund (ADF).
- Partners entering NDP via a WFIP were more likely than self-referrals to access Programme Centres and various forms of training (though much training provision, including self-employment training, was seen as being under threat from budget and resourcing cuts).
- Contact between advisers and case loaded partners on NDP was minimal and confined to the provision of vacancies information. There was little evidence of long-term, active support being provided to partners on NDP (with the exception of those undertaking self-employment training and test trading options).
- Many NDP participants were reported either to have 'drifted off' with no apparent job outcome or to be 'sticking' within the programme – home circumstances and the influence of main claimants were suggested causes.

2.2.1 Limited scale of programme

Nearly two years into the initiative it was evident that there were still only very small numbers of partners coming onto the NDP programme. Current caseloads of one or two partners were typical and many of the advisers had no case loaded partners at all. This situation was not 'seasonal' or related to the particular timing of the fieldwork. Advisers reported a similar picture throughout the previous twelve months. Indeed, one adviser had had no new case loaded partners at all in the twelve months since the first phase of the evaluation.

One of the consequences of such low volumes was that many advisers found it difficult to generalise about the customer group as a whole, emphasising instead the particular situations of those few individuals they had dealt with on their NDP case loads. Thus, nearly two years into the initiative there was little indication of any significant build up of expertise in understanding and supporting partners:

'I think if you were continually seeing partners you would get success stories that you could sell to them...I think that would work...because we don't see that many [partners] the success stories are few and far between.'

(Adviser)

The problem was further exacerbated by the lack of feedback or follow-up information that advisers were getting on their partner customers.

2.2.2 Innovation

There were only a very limited number of new delivery initiatives reported since the first phase of the evaluation, and much of the 'non-standard' practice reported then had since been dropped. For example, the use of different advisers for dealing with case loaded partners on NDP from those conducting WFIPs, which had operated in one district, had since ceased. However, the widespread allocation of partners work had resulted in the emergence of a degree of *de facto* split in these roles in other areas.

The main changes reported were an increased level of outreach work and the availability of mentoring provision. In each of these, however, the reported provision and initiatives had been primarily directed at other customer groups (notably lone parents) and the impact on partners had been very slight. Advisers struggled to remember any partners who had been brought onto NDP via outreach work, although some contacts had been made in this way. Equally, although mentoring provision was open to partners, and was being made available regularly in Jobcentre Plus office premises, advisers reported barely any use of the service. One adviser felt that it was *'not the kind of thing partners want'* and cited a couple of instances where she had referred partners to the provision but they had declined to take it up.

One other area in which it was felt that partners were able to gain some 'spin-off' benefits was from the experience and practices developed in IB Pathways pilots. The specific training for advisers dealing with IB customers, and the additional resources

for helping with training and rehabilitation, were said to have created expertise in pilot areas that was directly transferable to many in the partners' customer group. However, outside these pilots the most evident change noted by advisers was one of diminishing available resources, retrenchment and cuts in both staffing and provision.

2.2.3 Content of New Deal for Partners

BOCs continued to be seen as the key tool available to advisers with which to demonstrate the net advantage from working and the total combined effect of transitional and in work benefits and tax credits. However, for many partners of customers on higher rate or means tested benefits, and those with several dependent children, the results of BOCs were said to frequently show either no benefit or very marginal benefit from working.

The importance of BOCs was in addressing, and in some cases overcoming, the worries and concerns of partners about adversely affecting household income through deductions or exits from benefits, and about the balance of net gain from working against the perceived problems of getting back into the benefits system should jobs fall through. One adviser summed up the situation as a fundamental underlying financial worry that many partners had:

'It is [financial] confidence...that is a real worry – whether they're going to be better off, whether they're going to be worse off. How long it's going to take to start the whole system up again if they find the job doesn't last? How long is it going to take...to get back onto the Benefits?'

(Adviser)

The downside of the importance of BOCs, however, was that there were a number of reported instances of partners being put off pursuing work options by what they saw as uncertainties in BOC results, inconclusiveness, or errors. While these to an extent merely reinforce and reflect the crucial importance of BOCs they also highlight the importance of getting them right and of following through and communicating the results effectively with customers.

Moreover, there were a number of advisers admitting to having difficulties carrying out BOCs for partners due to gaps in their understanding of benefits eligibility rules. This was especially the case amongst advisers relatively new to partners' work, and a lack of training was given by most of them as the reason for this. Corroborating evidence appeared to come from the small number of customers who complained about getting incorrect, conflicting or inconclusive results from the BOCs that had been carried out for them on NDP.

Customer Couple – Case (A)

A couple comprising a male IS customer and a female partner. Both had arthritis and were registered disabled. The main claimant also had other health conditions including 'dizzy spells', agoraphobia and depression. At the time of the interview, the partner was waiting for a hip replacement operation and did not feel able to contemplate work until she had had the operation and fully recovered. She ran a car on Mobility Allowance because of her condition. Neither had worked for more than six years and appeared to have given up working at the same time. The main claimant had been a driver and his partner last worked as a care assistant.

The partner was currently working on a voluntary basis. She clearly wanted to do more, both to get out of the house and to do something socially useful. She self-referred to Jobcentre Plus to get help with training (and possible work). She was interested in doing a computer course prior to undertaking jobsearch. She sat a basic skills assessment which showed she needed help with maths. Her adviser told her that she would only be allowed to do the training course if she first attended a maths course. This she found patronising and off-putting and so she declined.

She also had BOCs done which she said were inconclusive, with different advisers giving different results and advice. The BOCs appear to have shown she may have been marginally better off financially but, in her opinion, not enough for it to be '*worth the hassle and the grief*'. Eventually, the partner was told that she could not be helped through NDP. She had, however, since succeeded in pursuing computer training through a housing association.

The main claimant was not totally supportive of his partner's desire for work. He felt that this would upset the *status quo* and was concerned that it could affect their benefits and standard of living. He said he was happy for her to take up training or work as long as it did not affect their benefits, but had made the suggestion that she might lose her car if it turned out she was able to go out to work, and this had further deterred his partner.

She said that overall the experience of going to the Jobcentre Plus office had made her '*feel worse*' about her situation and prospects and that, ultimately, NDP was unable to help her.

Given the extent and difficulty of many of the factors affecting partners' ability to enter employment, some advisers were of the opinion that NDP still did not have enough to offer customers.

'There's a lack of anything really substantial to offer them – I feel as if I'm kind of trying to be enthusiastic and offer people help that I don't actually believe exists.'

(Adviser)

Comparisons were made in particular with what was on offer for IB customers (with whom many partners were felt to have much in common). In particular it was felt that there was little in the way of help or provision available that could help those who were not already job-ready.

'We haven't got [any] provision at all... apart from if they want to look for work I can call them in for jobsearch.'

(Adviser)

Case loading in the majority of instances appeared to involve minimal levels of customer contact. A frequent pattern was for customers to accept help with jobsearch and for advisers to agree to let them know of any suitable job vacancies that might arise. Often this would not entail any face-to-face contact after an initial meeting.

This appeared to be happening particularly with partners who had self-referred onto NDP, whom advisers generally perceived to be job ready and in many cases either to have found a job already or to have developed a clear idea of an area of self-employment that they wished to pursue. The NDP support most frequently accessed by self-referring partners was jobsearch help and ADF payments on starting work.

Partners entering NDP via a WFIP were more likely than self-referrals to receive support through referral to Programme Centres (for help with CVs and with interview technique) and more likely to have accessed training of some kind. For 'stock' partners in particular, it was the length of time they had been out of the labour market that was the main issue. Whereas motivational support and confidence building generally came via advisers themselves, partners had also undertaken a wide range of training, from English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Basic Skills through to childcare and other vocational courses, though much of this was now felt to be under threat.

Recent cuts in available training provision, and in the amounts of ADF allowable per customer, had reinforced advisers' negative feelings about the quality and extent of what they had to offer under NDP. However, overall it was the WFIP process that was viewed as problematic rather than NDP itself.

2.2.4 Length of time partners are on New Deal for Partners

It was difficult to gauge the length of time partners were spending case loaded on NDP. There was minimal contact between many partners and advisers for much of the time, with participants being sent vacancies information but advisers getting no feedback from them to judge whether they were being unsuccessful in job applications or were simply inactive and not acting upon the information being sent. One adviser suggested that part of the reason for this may have been the perceived lack of additional support available over and above jobsearch.

The ends of periods on NDP were frequently essentially unknown. Markers on Labour Market System (LMS) might show partners as long-term participants but

advisers did not always have precise information on exits and had to deduce that customers had left the programme when they had failed to respond to direct communications (letters or invitations to further meetings) and had not been seen for a number of months.

Many partners were reported to have '*drifted off*' the programme in this way without informing their adviser, and little was known as to the reasons for their exits. Partners who had left NDP without entering employment gave a range of reasons from inability to cope with training courses, through to deteriorations in their health and lack of support from the other members of the household (see Section 3.2).

The partners who actively remained on case loads the longest tended to be those undertaking training of one kind or another. In these cases it was often the training provider that was supporting them on a regular basis rather than the adviser. In the special circumstances of self-employment training and test trading, being on NDP case load was the transition to work, and contact with advisers took place at the beginning and end of extended periods of several months.

Apart from with partners working towards self-employment there was little evidence of long-term, active support being provided to customers on NDP. With many customers described as 'harder to help' the approach of advisers was to hold off to allow time for issues that they felt they could not themselves tackle to resolve themselves first, before intervening again:

'It probably needs a more long-term view than...we have with it. I would take the view that if I'm not going to get this person job ready in a certain amount of time, with a certain amount of input, then I would say 'right well I won't do much with them at the moment, I'll case load them and...put an alert on to see them in six months time...when some of these problems might have resolved themselves.'

(Adviser)

There were a few notable exceptions to the general picture of a lack of long-term support for partners on NDP.

Customer Couple - Case (B)

In this couple from the North West, the female main claimant was in receipt of IB on account of a long-term condition of depression. Although she felt unable to consider working herself she was able to cope with looking after her son who was at primary school. However, she seemed not to have discussed with her partner work options either for herself or for him, and was largely oblivious of the process he had been through, appearing not even to know of a recent job offer.

Her partner had not worked for several years since coming out of prison, and at his phase one interview he was very pessimistic about his chances of getting work on account of his prison record, his age and his health (some mobility difficulties). He was also aware that he needed to update his qualifications. Despite this he was very keen to re-enter employment.

Following a WFIP the partner had entered NDP and his adviser had sorted out a safety course and a skills update course both of which he had completed within the year. By the time of his second phase interview he was markedly more optimistic, had been offered full-time employment with a local contractor's firm and was due to start work. He was extremely positive regarding the support and assistance he had received from his NDP adviser and stated that this help, and financial assistance, was crucial in him completing his two courses.

The partner believed that being on NDP over the past year and his contact with an adviser had greatly positively influenced his outlook with regard to his chances of securing work. Because of the lack of any substantial issues over childcare and no perceived need to be at home caring for his wife on a day-to-day basis, the adviser was able to deal with him on a straightforward individual basis to considerable effect.

Advisers were generally disinclined to extend case load periods for partners, seeking rather to move them as rapidly as possible into employment. This reluctance in part reflected the experiences that some advisers reported partners having a tendency to 'stick' on caseloads and not to progress into work even after periods of training and several NDP meetings. Suggestions as to why this was the case, and why it appeared more common among partners than among other customer groups, included the possibility that circumstances in the home were interfering with work being done between advisers and partners, and that issues between partners and main claimants may have been playing a part. Advisers admitted that often they could not be sure, as these things were largely hidden from them (sometimes deliberately so).

2.2.5 Adviser motivation

Advisers continued to experience difficulty addressing the kinds of couple and household issues affecting partners, and this difficulty was arguably enhanced by a trend away from the use of 'specialist' partners' advisers. Although customer volumes on NDP had never justified the dedication of advisers wholly and exclusively to work with partners, earlier observed moves in some offices to concentrate partners work with a single adviser had been abandoned in favour of the greater flexibility that could be derived from distributing the work among a number of advisers.

The main effect of this trend appeared to be to extend the low priority accorded the WFIP programme to include NDP. Certainly NDP did not stand comparison with New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) in the minds of most advisers. One described her role as:

'I'm mostly a lone parent adviser – with add-ons!'

(Adviser)

The enhancement of case load practice with harder-to-help customers, which had been hoped for from JOT, did not seem to have materialised either. Advisers and managers in the JOT pilot district could discern little or no positive impact from the initiative. In other areas there was some uncertainty as to how JOT would run.

Lack of enthusiasm for dealing with partners was evident in most districts and there was little or no 'ownership' of the customer group. In addition to the effect of the small numbers of partners being case loaded, advisers also reported suffering from a lack of feedback information about the few customers they did see. This lack of feedback was primarily the result of partners themselves drifting off the programme, dropping out of training courses or finishing them but never returning to the Jobcentre Plus office thereafter. Several advisers also described a complete lack of information on customer progress or outcomes from training providers – a further factor in the demotivation of advisers. The lack of any scheduled review meetings with partners meant that once customers had left the system there was no way of easily regaining contact.

3 Perceived impact and effectiveness

3.1 Impact of Work Focused Interviews for Partners

Summary of Findings: WFIPs

- Characteristics of partners were not found to have changed; many had their own health conditions, and many said they wished to work in the future but could not consider it immediately.
- Partners had many and complex needs, but there was little evidence of any increased referral or signposting activity, and recognition of the importance of the 'couple dynamic' had not led to suggestions for engaging with it.
- Advisers' expectations of job outcomes from partners remained low and the great majority were seen as uninterested or unable to work.
- Many partners who had gone on to take action towards employment felt their WFIP had not played any part in the process.
- Where WFIPs were seen to have played a role this was primarily in raising awareness of opportunities, boosting self-confidence, 'kick starting' a thought process and breaking down negative views of Jobcentre Plus services.
- Key factors affecting decision making were: the influence (negative or positive) of main claimant spouses; the priority given to caring responsibilities; and the financial constraints attached to benefits and to wages in the jobs market.
- Caring was the key barrier for many partners and was difficult for advisers to deal with as it was intimately tied into couples' personal relations with many partners feeling great unease expressing dissatisfaction with their caring role.

Continued

- Many couples expressed frustration and a sense of being trapped in a hopeless situation in spite of strong desires to get out and work.
- There appeared to be little discussion of the details of caring responsibilities at WFIPs and their mention often led to the speedy ending of the interview.
- Caring situations were subject to change over time – the potential effectiveness of a WFIP was much reduced by being a one-off event.
- Generally, suggested ways of addressing longer-term change and possibilities included: additional adviser training; better referrals and relations with other agencies; and further contact with partners.
- Benefits and earnings traps especially for certain young couples concerned advisers, and was affecting confidence in dealing with the customer group.
- Problems affecting WFIPs had a knock on effect on transition to NDP.
- A high proportion of self-referrals were actually being identified as partners when jointly attending interviews for their main claimant spouses.

3.1.1 Partner characteristics and adviser perceptions

The characteristics of the partners' customer group were not found to have changed in any significant way since the start of the initiative, and many of the phase one findings were strongly reinforced in the new round of research interviews. Most partners were still seen as having relatively complex needs compared to other customers such as lone parents.

Many partners were found to have health problems of their own to deal with even though they were not the main claimant of sickness or incapacity benefits. Frequently, therefore, households were in a position of 'suspended activity' waiting upon health improvements either for the main claimant or the partner or for both individuals in the couple. Thus many partners said that they wished to work in the future but could not consider it in the short or medium-term.

Advisers saw these health problems as particularly important in making it difficult for WFIPs to have any impact or effectiveness with a lot of partners, and several expressed frustration at feeling restricted by a lack of specialist knowledge. It was suggested in one district that because of reorganisations it was harder than previously to access help from Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) for partners. In another district an adviser who had recently trained as a DEA was moving small numbers of partners onto her DEA case load as she felt this to be a more appropriate place for them than on her partners case load. Overall, however, there was little evidence of any increased referral or signposting activity on behalf of partners since phase one.

Phase two interviews confirmed the difficulty advisers were experiencing when trying to deal with partners in isolation from the circumstances and attitudes of their

main claimant partners. There was a greater awareness among advisers of the importance of the relationship between the individuals in a couple in determining the chances for successful outcomes of any kind. Recognition of the 'couple dynamic' as a key determinant of the WFIP process, however, had not led to any suggestions of ways of engaging with it or tackling it. Indeed the will to attempt to do so appeared to have weakened over time. Partners continued to be compared unfavourably with other customers, for example, lone parents. Expectations of job outcomes remained low.

3.1.2 Follow-on activity from Work Focused Interviews for Partners

Advisers who had been seeing partners throughout the eighteen months of the WFIPs initiative were pleased by cases where they had moved people onto New Deal for Partners (NDP) or into jobs, even though the numbers were very modest. However, most saw little scope for making in-roads into the great majority who were apparently not interested in working or saw themselves as unable to work.

Customers who were interviewed described a number of steps they had taken to move towards work following their WFIP. Their accounts may constitute evidence of some success for the initiative, though in some of the cases the link with their WFIP was rather tenuous. Successful outcomes during the twelve to eighteen months since participating in a WFIP included:

- instances where the partner had re-contacted their adviser some weeks or months after their WFIP and had at that point joined NDP;
- instances where a Better Off Calculation (BOC) had been requested following a WFIP;
- instances in which either the partner or other members of their household had made use of Jobcentre Plus services (for example job points) following a WFIP;
- partners who had found a job independently and not felt the need to revisit their adviser;
- partners who had started training or a college course;
- partners who had re-contacted their adviser seeking further advice about a specific job offer;
- a case in which a partner had subsequently accessed help in applying for an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) course.

The causes and explanations provided by individual partners for having taken these particular courses of action were various and mixed. Some partners attributed a significant role to the WFIP and their adviser, while others placed greatest emphasis on 'external' factors and perceived their actions to have been independent of the WFIP process and experience. Foremost among effects seen as having stemmed directly from a WFIP, and for which advisers were given credit, were:

- raised levels of awareness about work and other opportunities;
- boosted self-confidence and optimism about work possibilities;
- the 'kick-starting' of a thought process that had resulted in later decisions about work;
- the successful breaking down of previously held, negative views of Jobcentre Plus and the relevance of its services.

The main factors mentioned as being independent of WFIPs and as uninfluenced by them, were:

- improvements in the health of either the partner or the main claimant which permitted a reappraisal of employment options for one or both of them;
- changes in the circumstances relating to caring responsibilities (often linked to changes in health status);
- changes wrought essentially by the passage of time, such as children growing older and either requiring less child-care attention, or being able to adopt different roles and responsibilities within the household.

Cutting across almost all situations and underlying the decisions being made were three key factors: the crucial influence of main claimants in either supporting or undermining partners' efforts; the overriding priority generally given to demands of caring, and; the (financial) constraints resulting from the type of benefits being claimed, benefit eligibility rules, and available wage levels in the labour market.

3.1.3 Main claimant influence

Advisers widely recognised not only that main claimants' circumstances directly affected the work or non-work strategies of households, but also that their attitudes towards their partner working were, in the great majority of cases, the key to success or failure for WFIPs. Main claimants often set the limits to the scope advisers had to change partners' perceptions or to influence decision making. Experience over eighteen months of the initiative had highlighted and reinforced this recognition.

The influences main claimants were seen to have brought to bear on their partners were both positive and negative. Where positive and supportive, advisers had found it relatively easy, and generally very productive, to make contact with main claimants (whether face-to-face or by telephone) and to enlist their help in moving partners forward. Where negative and obstructive, main claimant influences were seen to undermine any work that advisers tried to do with the partner. Even where partners were themselves receptive to the idea of working they could not sustain the momentum imparted by a WFIP in the face of active resistance or passive non-cooperation from the main claimant. Advisers described instances of partners being prevented from attending training courses or discouraged from taking up job offers.

3.1.4 Caring demands

Caring was still the key barrier for many partners. The quantitative survey of partners found that just over half (51 per cent) of all partners had caring responsibilities over and above looking after their children⁵. Although people in receipt of Carers Allowance had been removed from WFIP eligibility there were many partners for whom caring constituted a significant demand on their time and for who caring was identified as the main constraint upon their work options. Advisers frequently expressed a sense of powerlessness in the face of customers' problems:

'I interviewed a partner the other day and her husband came with her and he had Hepatitis C and he was waiting for a liver transplant...she was quite interested in returning to work but she was his carer...they didn't want other people to know what was wrong with him. Lots and lots came out in the interview and it was very interesting, but I came out of it absolutely shaken really and thought 'what can I do for these people?' What is there to offer them? There's no support – I mean I could find a support group maybe for them or whatever, that kind of thing but as far as I'm concerned my priority in the Jobcentre was to get her to be thinking about going back to work. But they had like enormous issues that they wanted to talk about and I was the first person other than a medical person I think that they had talked to.'

(Adviser)

Almost all partners with caring responsibilities who were interviewed were 'spouse carers' rather than carers of other relatives such as elderly parents or children with disabilities or severe health or behavioural problems. This responsibility was seen as effectively removing both individuals in the couple from work in the majority of cases, and lay at the heart of the 'couple dynamics' underlying behaviour and attitudes. The need for caring and the demands this placed on partners were thus intimately tied into couples' personal and household situations and frequently had become a difficult issue within relationships.

'I've had [situations] where the partner has actually said 'I want to go to work, I need to go out to work', and [the other person in the couple] has sat and cried and said 'but who is going to look after me – what's going to happen?''

(Adviser)

Indications of resentment and guilt were apparent in some cases though many described more low-level tensions and conflict in their relationships. Sometimes these tensions were ascribed to the simple fact of having to spend a lot of time inactive together in the home. The frustrations clearly felt by many (partners and main claimants alike) often underlay a strong desire to return to work, coupled with a sense of being trapped within a situation over which they had little control and

⁵ See page 19 in Coleman, N., Seeds, K. and Edwards, G. *Work Focused Interviews for Partners and Enhanced New Deal for Partners: Quantitative Survey Research*. (2006) DWP Research Report 335.

which left them with few choices. Several partners displayed great unease at expressing their dissatisfaction with their caring role but admitted that a major component in their wish to work was a desire to 'escape' from their domestic situation.

The demands of caring on partners tended not to be constant or full-time (over twenty hours of essential care per week would qualify them for Carers Allowance). However, even the more varied in extent, less continuous and more intermittent care they were providing was perceived to effectively preclude work altogether or severely restrict the type of work or number of hours of work possible.

In particular many customers' health conditions were said to make unpredictable and intermittent demands for care input from partners. These irregular demands were hard to plan for, or to manage, and had an effect on partners' availability for work that might seem disproportionate to the actual time involved. Partners in this position could only anticipate being able to work if they could find an extremely understanding and flexible employer. Generally, if partners were also carers in any capacity they saw their availability for work as limited. As a consequence even partners who were interested in working were frequently only seeking part-time hours.

Almost all the partners interviewed saw themselves as prevented from working, or prevented from increasing their hours, by their caring responsibilities. Many had given up their previous jobs specifically in order to care for the main claimant when they had fallen ill or suffered an accident. In only a few instances was it the case that partners appeared to have become carers **because** they were not working (for other reasons). Most were prevented from working by their caring responsibilities. For a substantial proportion of carer partners the demands of caring had affected their own health, creating further barriers to employment. Resultant problems ranged from dented self-confidence and low self-esteem through to depression and mental health conditions.

Significant numbers of partners said they wanted to work (even if only part-time) but that they felt trapped by the circumstances of caring that they found themselves in. In spite of this there appeared to be little or no discussion or exploration of the details of caring responsibilities at WFIPs. Advisers felt they had little to suggest under such circumstances and no awareness of specialist agencies that they could refer carers on to. Indeed, the mention of caring responsibilities appeared to be being treated by some advisers as something of a 'let-out clause'. Some customers described their adviser's response to hearing that they were carers as being to bring the WFIP interview to a swift close. Several expressed frustration at not being given the opportunity to discuss fully their situation. Others said that they had found the implied confirmation that there was nothing they could do profoundly demotivating.

Certain caring responsibilities, therefore, did effectively present partners with an insurmountable barrier to employment at a given point in time. However, it was clear from phase two repeat interviews with customers that such situations were not

necessarily fixed, but were in flux and subject to change over time. A seemingly hopeless situation, closed to any possible intervention could, in the space of even a few months, change and offer new opportunities. The potential effectiveness of a WFIP was much reduced by being a one-off event cut off from possible future change. This was especially so if no attempt was made to explore with customers the possible parameters of future change either, in order to encourage returns to the Jobcentre Plus office should circumstances alter. Partners who were carers described three main types of positive change that had taken place in the twelve months since their first interview. These were situations in which:

- individuals had got used to coping with the difficulties of caring and the household had adjusted and set in place support arrangements that spread the burden of responsibilities;
- customers' health conditions had improved and the burden of care had reduced to a level that allowed reconsideration of employment or training options by the partner;
- other family members had taken over the caring role (for example, a son or daughter on reaching the age of sixteen, leaving school and even becoming eligible to claim Carers Allowance) thus freeing up the partner to seek work or to extend their working hours.

In a small number of cases these changes had prompted returns to the Jobcentre Plus office to seek further advice from advisers, through in most instances this had not taken place. It appeared that some opportunities were, therefore, being missed with caring partners through *de facto* waivers or short WFIPs; through the widespread unwillingness or inability of advisers to address the complex detail of caring situations; and through an immediate perspective on WFIPs which ignored longer-term change and possibilities. Possible ways of addressing this might include:

- additional adviser training;
- the development of better referrals and relations with other specialist agencies;
- longer-term contact with partners (perhaps through further mandatory meetings).

In the more immediate future of the initiative there would appear to be important scope for greater consideration in WFIPs of customers' longer-term prospects, possibilities and aspirations, to prevent some clear opportunities from being missed. For example, several partners who felt they could not work at the time of their WFIP expressed a desire to be preparing (for example, through training) for the time in the future when they anticipated changes in their circumstances that would allow them to do so. This was the case with some carers who could see gradual improvements in the main claimant's condition progressively freeing up more of their time. It also applied to some partners with their own health conditions to manage.

3.1.5 Partners with dependent children

Workless couple households are known to account for a large proportion of children living in poverty. WFIPs and the enhanced NDP programme were set up with the expectation that the impact they had on increasing the numbers of partners moving into paid employment would also benefit any dependent children in those households and thus contribute to meeting the national target for reducing child poverty.

The WFIP/NDP initiative was explicitly designed to provide similar support as was available to lone parents and had been successful with that customer group. An assumption was made that partners with children would in many cases share similar characteristics and face similar barriers to working as lone parents, and perhaps even be easier to move into employment as there would potentially be a second adult in the household who might be able to take on childcare and free the other partner for work.

The evaluation has shown that, contrary to this expectation, there are relatively few similarities between the partners of benefit customers and lone parents. Partners in many cases appear to share characteristics and circumstances more with IB customers than with lone parents, and to require a similar type of approach as these customers. Few instances were found in which the main claimant in a couple who was claiming IB or IS and IB was willing or able to take on childcare while their partner worked.

As the age of couples increased, so too did the frequency of other caring responsibilities and both the frequency and severity of health conditions among partners and main claimants alike. Despite children being settled in secondary school, or even having grown up and left home, partners still felt themselves highly constrained in their opportunities to consider paid work.

The presence of dependent children was, for this reason, not the defining characteristic of a distinct sub-group of partners in the sense of allowing prediction of responses and targeting of services and support. A stronger defining factor was the type of benefit for which the main claimant was eligible. JSA customers appeared to be more frequently able to take on childcare while their partner worked than were IS or IB customers (though some resistance to this arrangement was found among many male claimants who perceived this to be an unsuitable role for them). Likewise, in low wage economies where it was perceived only to be viable to come off benefits if both individuals in a couple entered employment, it was JSA partners who appeared to be entering NDP disproportionately more than the partners of other benefit customers.

Because of the many other, and more pressing, constraints affecting most partners in addition to issues of childcare, it was difficult to discern any major differences in motivation and behaviour between those with no children and those with one, or perhaps two, dependent children. The key distinguishing feature for these partners was how recently they had been in work, or conversely how long they had been absent from the labour market. Those with recent experience of employment were

more likely to make the decision to try to get back to work, whether or not this would involve sorting out an arrangement for childcare.

The decisive factor in work-related decision making by the great majority of partners was the financial 'bottom line'. While most were unable to test their assumptions against a BOC because calculations were not being carried out at WFIPs, in those instances where BOCs were carried out, many demonstrated the financial advantages of work to be quite marginal. Against these relatively modest gains partners were balancing the expected disruption to their current 'status quo' and the anticipated difficulties they might have with childcare. In this context the **number** of dependent children became an important factor for several reasons:

- with more than two children, arrangements for childcare were seen as objectively more complex and opportunities for enlisting family help with it more restricted;
- the costs of childcare increased with each additional child, creating further pressure either for partners to hold out for better paid work, or for both the partner and the main claimant to have to seek work together;
- the 'better off' margin over benefits was also perceived as showing diminishing returns with each additional dependent child.

These factors were reflected among case loaded partners. Among those from couples with more than two children there were a greatly disproportionate number of JSA main claimants. Male partners outnumbered female partners amongst those with two children or more. Whereas several couples with more than two children had decided that both the main claimant and the partner would seek work (and in most cases had successfully both entered employment within 6-12 months), none of the couples with only one or two children had successfully adopted this approach.

These findings need to be tested in quantitative data, but within the small qualitative sample of NDP2 respondents the apparent trends were more marked than was likely to be explained as a result of purposive sampling.

3.1.6 Benefits and earnings 'traps'

Another area of concern for advisers was their experience of the financial 'traps' which seemed to affect some couples. Certain combinations of circumstances, including the type and level of benefits being claimed, whether benefits were means tested or not, and the level of wages a partner could command in the local economy, were said to produce certain anomalous situations where a partner was unable to work without being financially worse off despite being keen to find employment.

Particular concern was expressed regarding young couples (under 25 years of age) who found themselves in this position. Cases described included such a couple where the female customer was receiving long-term rate IB due to a mental health condition but the partner was keen to find work for himself in order to support them both and not to live on benefits. Because of a gradual improvement in her condition her partner felt he was able to consider full-time hours. However, the BOCs carried

out for him by the adviser indicated that the couple would end up financially worse off if he did so, unless he could find a job that paid well above the minimum wage (at least £7.60 an hour). As he had left school with no qualifications and had no previous work experience, the chances for him to secure such work were seen as fairly remote. In this respect, his experience of his WFIP was demoralizing and demotivating. The adviser in this case was particularly concerned that a negative incentive should exist for someone just beginning their working life and who strongly wanted to work. She was reluctant to suggest working in a minimum wage job as a 'stepping stone' to experience and future better earnings potential, as she would otherwise do with a young person, because in the short-term the household would be worse off.

Although advisers were particularly concerned about cases in which young people with the whole of their working life ahead of them appeared to be in such a 'trap', there were other situations also in which benefits and tax credit rules were said to disincentivise work for partners.

Achieving positive results from BOCs for couples in receipt of higher rate benefits and premiums and for couples without children was often said to be difficult. Frequently it was the case that couples would only be better off if both of them worked or if the partner (or main claimant) worked full-time rather than part-time. With high levels of intermittent and 'low level' care responsibilities among partners, part-time work of less than 16 hours a week was what was being sought in a great many cases.

The existence, or not, of previous periods of working before claiming benefit also appeared to make an important difference to the viability of work for partners as it could determine whether benefits were means tested or not. Couples in apparently similar circumstances could thus face very different options and opportunities. For example, two partners of Incapacity Benefit (IB)/Income Support (IS) customers each looking to become self-employed reported that in the one instance this was not feasible because the main claimant would have to leave benefits altogether, whereas in the other case it was said to be a viable option because the main claimant could remain in receipt of non-means tested benefits. On other occasions, the possibility of continued receipt of additional non-means tested benefits such as Disability Living Allowance (DLA) were said to 'tip the balance' in favour of the partner working, even though other benefits might be lost.

Several partners who were seeking to go down the self-employed route mentioned the test trading period as providing a 'buffer' against the eventual need for their main claimant partner to leave benefits. The continued payment of benefits for the six month duration of test trading was said to have made a crucial difference to the transition into work⁶.

⁶ The option of test trading has since been withdrawn for households eligible for Working Tax Credits (WTC).

3.1.7 Transition to New Deal for Partners

The importance of 'selling' NDP to partners at their WFIPs was emphasised by several advisers, reflecting concerns that they only had one chance to influence decision making and persuade partners of the benefits of working. Problems affecting WFIPs were thus seen to have a knock-on effect on NDP. In particular, increasingly 'remote' administration processes were said to '*set the wrong tone*' for WFIP interviews by obliging advisers to spend much of the reduced time available reassuring customers and emphasising the voluntary nature of NDP. This meant that not only was less time available for persuasion, 'selling' and getting information across, but that the context of the interview was often working in the opposite direction to that required for a productive work focus.

Direct conversions from WFIPs onto NDP were said to be few and far between, and the perception was that most of those entering NDP were now self-referrals. The two main factors contributing to this were the winding down of stock processing and the phenomenon of 'returners' whereby partners who had previously attended a WFIP and then left the process, were returning to advisers several weeks or months later and being recorded as self-referrals even if their WFIP had been instrumental in their seeking work and NDP support.

Interestingly, a high proportion of 'self-referrals' recalled by advisers were actually identified as partners who could be supported on NDP when jointly attending interviews at Jobcentre Plus for their main claimant spouses. In particular, the partners of IB customers were being identified by IB advisers at main claimant WFIPs, and others at Restart interviews.

3.2 Impact of New Deal for Partners

Summary of Findings: NDP

- Customers' views of NDP were evenly split between positive and negative perceptions – self-referrals were more critical than those entering via a WFIP.
- Main claimants' views mirrored those of partners and in some cases main claimants had been stimulated to seek work for themselves – some successfully.
- Male partners appeared to be more successful than female partners at moving into work from NDP and to be more likely to have undergone training and gone into full-time work or self-employment (part-time work predominated among female partners).
- The key factors affecting partners' chances for job outcomes were: long-term absence from the labour market; and the majority preference for part-time work.

Continued

- Advisers were often working under strict labour market constraints combined with very narrowly defined customer needs.
- Many partners showed a tendency to play up difficulties faced in order to put off the moment of real decision about employment.
- Partners took low paid jobs in sectors with opportunities for part-time hours, evening and night shifts (self-employed partners in a wider occupational range) and perceived needs for flexibility were often less in practice than anticipated.
- Jobs were well sustained, especially full-time jobs and self-employment.
- Successful job outcomes were often only as a result of extraordinary efforts, sacrifices and flexibility on the part of the partner.
- Self-employment continued to be a successful route into sustained employment though perceived to be under threat from recent cuts in resource and provision.
- More male than female spouse-carers appeared to have entered NDP, though few carers of either gender had succeeded in entering work and these were mostly into part-time and poorly sustained jobs.
- The difficulties faced by 'third-party' carers often appeared to be even more acute than those faced by spouse-carers.
- For partners of IB customers generally, factors allowing consideration of work included their children getting older and improvements in main claimants' health, whereas their main constraints included lengthy absence from the labour market and the management of their own health conditions.
- Accessing partners via main claimant WFIs was seen as fruitful by advisers.
- Particular mention was made of the training that some IB advisers had received in new questioning techniques that were felt to be appropriate to many partners.
- Where couples with children had succeeded in entering employment it was through joint, flexible strategies involving both being willing to be involved in childcare.
- Partners over 50 were seen as more likely to have limiting health conditions and caring responsibilities than other partners and to be more set in their ways.
- Those on NDP were faring comparably to partners of other ages – most had undergone some training to upskill and gain confidence; some had entered and sustained jobs.

3.2.1 Customers views of New Deal for Partners

Views of NDP were fairly evenly split between positive and negative perceptions of the programme among partners who had participated. Positive views were strongly correlated with successful job outcomes, especially among those WFIP route entrants who had successfully moved into employment and among partners who had been supported into self-employment. Self-referred partners tended to be rather more critical of NDP overall than were those who had entered via a WFIP, perhaps reflecting their higher expectations of the programme.

Positive appreciation was expressed specifically for:

- advice, information and additional funding provided;
- self-employment training and supported test trading;
- help with motivation and building self-confidence;
- the opening out of viable work options;
- the effect of work (and training) on personal and wider household wellbeing.

Negative views focused around:

- inconsistent or inaccurate (or unwelcome) information – especially from the results of BOCs;
- perceived lack of adviser expertise;
- offers of what partners perceived to be the wrong ‘types’ of jobs (in terms of skill levels, pay and hours);
- lack of response or follow-up from an adviser.

Main claimant customers’ views of NDP broadly mirrored those of partners both in terms of positive aspects and negative ones. Frequently those who had seen the process help their partners expressed a desire for the same type of support for themselves. They tended to echo partners’ positive perceptions of the wellbeing (both financial and non-financial) of the household following successful NDP participation and entry into work for the partner. Many noted in particular gains in confidence and motivation for all members of the household especially in situations where all the potential gains had been realised from their partner successfully maintaining self-employment (of which there were several examples).

There were several instances where the opportunity to look at the whole household situation had meant that main claimants had responded to results of BOCs that showed work non-viable for the partner by starting to seek work for themselves. For some this had led to successful entry to employment for the main claimant.

3.2.2 Entry to employment

Advisers' views of the customer group were generally influenced by their negative perceptions of WFIPs and most had low expectations of job outcomes from partners, even from many of those participating in NDP and expressing a desire for work. Among customers interviewed, a higher proportion of male partners had moved into employment since participating in NDP than was the case for female partners. Male partners also appeared more likely to have undergone vocational training on NDP and to have gone into full-time jobs or self-employment. Part-time work predominated among female partners who had started working, with hours ranging from as little as four or five per week up to thirty.

In addition to unpredictable and unexplained exits, there were two factors in particular which were seen to affect chances for getting job outcomes for partners:

- the long-term absence of many of them from the labour market;
- the large proportion seeking only part-time work, often to fit around their children's school hours or the demands of caring for a spouse.

Partners who had not worked for many years, or perhaps never worked at all, were often highly apprehensive at the prospect and seen to require significant amounts of confidence building and constant motivation and reassurance. There was frequently a deliberate element of confidence boosting involved in referrals to training, and many partners saw the opportunity of doing short hours training courses as a manageable 'step' towards getting a job. The main problem facing advisers was judging when and if such partners would really be ready and willing to move into work.

A major effect of nervousness, uncertainty and lack of confidence regarding working was that in this frame of mind partners were seen by advisers as tending to 'play up' the difficulties they faced and to put off the real moment of decision about employment. Factors such as how to arrange childcare, which could be little more than an administrative task once the decision to take a job had been taken, could be seen and presented as a major barrier if the partner was still unsure and undecided. Conflicts also existed for some partners between a genuine desire to work and a sense of duty not to 'abandon' a long cared for spouse.

The demand for part-time work among partners also in part reflected the desire to move into employment gradually, though more commonly was a compromise between working and caring for others in the household.

'The problem I find, the majority of the time, is they're looking for jobs with certain limits. They want something that's part-time, school hours...and obviously when we do a search to see what jobs come up...invariably there's nothing really that we can offer them.'

(Adviser)

The lack of sufficient jobs of this type in local labour markets was perceived to be an important factor preventing more successful outcomes being achieved from the partners customer group on NDP. Several advisers perceived partners to be even more likely than lone parents to go for part-time work.

[Partners] are all looking for part-time work. But the problem is they don't want early mornings and they don't want nights...so like the cleaning jobs we get for instance...[partners] don't want those types, they want something that's going to be during the day and it's very hard to find those types of jobs.'

(Adviser)

Advisers were successfully achieving job outcomes with some partners, but the circumstances under which they were able to do so were frequently atypical of the customer group as a whole. For example, there were instances where female partners of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) customers were successfully moved into work because their male main claimant partners were willing to take over responsibility for looking after children. However, it appeared that in far more cases this was not an option people were willing to consider seriously.

It was noticeable that in many cases in which partners had successfully entered employment this had only been achieved by virtue of considerable and extraordinary efforts on their part to work around obstacles, to be highly flexible in what they were willing to consider, and to make sacrifices in other areas in order to achieve their work goals. In a number of such cases a willingness to work for low pay rates was combined with elaborate arrangements to fit hours around other commitments by working nights or particular early/late shifts in order to be available if needed at other times.

A similar commitment and awareness of the importance of such elaborate arrangements was not always equally evident from advisers, however. Several partners complained that in spite of emphasising to their NDP adviser the reasons for needing particular hours or patterns of work, they continued to be sent details of jobs that did not meet their requirements and were thus unsuitable. In some cases it would appear that advisers were attempting to work under very strict constraints from the local labour market combined with very narrowly defined needs from their customers.

Self-employment

Self-employment was identified in phase one of the evaluation as another way households could 'juggle' numerous demands on partners' time. This proved to have continued to be a successful route into employment from NDP, although more recent cut-backs in training provision and funding for test trading were reported to have put it under threat.

Customer couple – Case (C)

In this couple the main claimant suffered from degenerative arthritis and was in receipt of DLA though she did not perceive herself to be in need of day-to-day caring from her husband. There were no dependent children in the household and the couple owned their house outright and had some savings and investments that meant their income needs were modest. Her husband was called for a WFIP at a time that coincided with them planning to start a business based around his skills an entertainer.

He attended a WFIP and was referred to a business start-up firm. He had no more contact with Jobcentre Plus. The role of the business start-up firm was seen as reaffirming what his wife already knew about tax and business accounting (she had run her own business for several years before claiming DLA). The partner was fairly dismissive about the role played both by his adviser and the training provider. However, his wife (who was much more involved in running the business than he was) was appreciative of the extra support.

The business had been sustained and was gradually growing. The partner was aiming to increase his venue base and double his current workload over the next year, perhaps with the help of an agent. His wife looked after all book-keeping and tax affairs, but was not formally part of the business. He was rather vague about how the business was doing but stated that the income from his work plus his wife's DLA and tax credits gave them a 'comfortable' life. Much of what he had earned in the last year had been put back into the business.

This couple had been able to start their own business as they did not have any dependents and DLA is not affected by earnings. This also meant that there had been little pressure to build the business up. The business would have been started without NDP, but the support it provided did play a reassuring role for the wife in terms of the test period.

Not only was self-employment seen as fitting well with some partners' specific needs, it was also perceived to be particularly well suited to certain local labour markets. Self-employed partners were not seen as **necessarily** being among those who would have moved into employment on their own if they had not had the benefit of NDP. Not only were many said to lack the initial confidence, but most needed the reassurance that their activity would not be detrimental to the household income.

'They're perhaps people who wouldn't have known how to ask. They certainly wouldn't have wanted to just walk in here and say 'I want to start my own business,' because they're frightened again of affecting their partner's Benefit and it's not until you can do those BOCs and prove to them you know how much better off they will be, that's the reassurance that they need.'

(Adviser)

Partners who had successfully moved into self-employment were among those most positive about NDP, and the most eloquent in describing the beneficial effects that working had brought to themselves and their families.

Customer couple – Case (D)

This couple had both previously held well paid jobs. She had to give up her work on having a mental health breakdown and he left his job to look after her. She had been claiming IB for some time and her partner was actively thinking about self-employment when called to his WFIP. He had just finished a three year health related course and was looking to work self-employed in this field. The WFIP put him on to free self-employment training and the opportunity of test trading for six months while on benefits. The timing was good as he had resigned himself to having to do some lower paid, part-time work for a while to earn enough to pay for such a course.

The plan a year previously was to enter self-employment in order to have the flexibility to be on hand if his wife needed him or he was needed to help look after their daughter who had been diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, and also to try to involve his wife in helping with the business as a therapeutic activity. She was still not well enough to consider working and was very 'up and down'.

Things had gone very much as hoped – and they had a strong strategic plan for how to progress with the business. It was generating about four and a half days of work a week and an income of about £20,000 which was at the top end of expectations for the first year trading. The Jobcentre Plus office had provided some links to other sources of self-employment advice and finance which he had been able to take advantage of.

Some of the work involved the partner in a night away once a week. His wife had got used to this and was able to cope with it. She was also finding she could cope with the demands of caring for their daughter on a day-to-day basis. Her involvement in the business was still minimal because she still lacked the confidence to do more than take messages on the phone. She had started a training course but found it too demanding and had had to give it up.

The couple were very positive about the help they received from the self-employment training provider and for the Jobcentre Plus adviser's help. They perceived their situation to have noticeably improved and the partner's wife's health condition to be improving slowly, in part helped by his new employment situation.

3.2.3 Carers

Most of the partners on NDP who were carers were caring for the main claimant in the household. Proportionally more male than female spouse carers appeared to have joined NDP to look for work, suggesting that perceptions of caring responsibilities and 'breadwinning' responsibilities were strongly affected by gender role expectations. Male partners were more willing than female partners to put work requirements ahead of caring duties among their priorities. Female partners were more likely to see caring as their first priority. Regardless of these differences, however, very few partners of either gender who were caring for their spouse had actually succeeded in entering work from NDP, even though several had undergone some training. Many were disappointed in this regard.

Some advisers were unsure how to deal with partners who were carers. In many cases they saw caring responsibilities as constituting an insurmountable barrier to work for partners who did not wish to leave the one they cared for in the charge of anyone else.

Frequently the only realistic circumstance under which it was perceived that carers could work was if their caring responsibilities were to end – for example, if the cared for spouse was to die. Tackling questions of this nature was not felt to be possible or appropriate.

'A lot of [carers] say that if they didn't have the person to care for, they would like to go to work... They say they are going to come back [to us] when they are no longer caring, which is obviously a bit of a bad subject to bring up in an interview... sort of 'how long do you think you are going to be caring?', you can't.'

(Adviser)

Reasons cited by caring partners for failing to move into work from NDP included:

- being unable to find a financially viable way of working;
- being unable to see through the demands of training;
- encountering resistance from their main claimant partners.

Furthermore, those who had managed to enter work had gone mostly into part-time jobs that were not well sustained. The evidence suggests that the constraints these carers needed to overcome in order to work were real and considerable, and that despite a strong will to re-enter the labour market, carers often found constraints to be too great to negotiate successfully or sustainedly.

A similar situation was found to exist for partners who were caring for other members of the household such as disabled children or frail, elderly parents, though if anything the difficulties facing these 'third party' carers appeared to be even more acute than those facing 'spouse carers'. All those interviewed who were on NDP were male partners – again suggesting strong gender role determination and the

only sustained employment achieved among them was a self-employment arrangement allowing one partner to work flexibly from home, providing some care input when needed and being on hand for emergencies and key times of the day.

Couples caring for a child with special needs, disabilities and/or behavioural difficulties found it particularly hard to enter or sustain employment.

Customer couple – Case (E)

In this couple the wife was claiming IS and both she and her partner were looking after their daughter who was severely disabled. They felt trapped and frustrated by the situation they were in. *'It's like banging your head against the wall'* (partner). Both would have liked to work, and they considered the need to get out of the house a bit to be a question of keeping their sanity as much as earning money. They had tried to enter employment in the past, but they could no longer see a way of doing so due to the intensity of their daughter's caring needs and the benefits 'trap' they perceived themselves to be in. The main problem was not having anyone to do the childcare for their other children. The main claimant's mother used to do it but she was now working herself and unavailable:

The partner had a WFIP and told the adviser he wanted to work – as much to get out of the house as anything else – and he did start a part-time job doing 12 hours a week which was the most the BOC showed he could do and be marginally better off. As it was they were only £10 per week better off after deductions from his wife's IS, and he was spending more than this on petrol getting to and from work. *'it was just something to do, not to gain financially...It was more of a social thing really'* (main claimant) So when he had to take time off for his daughter to have an operation, and the employer was unhappy about extending the time needed he left the job and had not worked since.

The BOC showed that neither he nor his wife could work full-time and be better off unless earning £7-8 per hour. This, and the fact that his daughter was soon to go to college herself to do an Independence Course three days a week, had made him think about whether he could do a course while she was there (and take her in and bring her home) so as to get qualified and be able to earn the required amount. But he was not hopeful as every course he had enquired about had a very long waiting list of applicants.

3.2.4 Partners of Incapacity Benefit customers

Most of the partners of IB customers who had participated in NDP classed themselves as 'spouse carers' to some degree, providing varying amounts of care input for their partners, though feeling able to consider working. Several had, in the past, taken on all the household's childcare duties to relieve their spouse of this burden at the time of their health crisis or breakdown. It was above all the fact of

children getting older and more responsible, or improvements over time in main claimants' health conditions, that had allowed consideration of work.

Customer couple – Case (F)

This family owned their house and both had worked full-time until the husband's back problem started which severely limited his ability to move/carry things. This coincided with the start of maternity leave for his wife. He had been claiming IB for three years since then and was clearly frustrated at being out of work. His wife wanted to help their financial situation by returning to work.

The main barriers to the partner working initially were the care needed by her husband and arranging childcare as he could not care for their son on his own. Neither wanted to put their son in formal childcare and both sets of grandparents, who would otherwise be willing to help, suffered from ill-health. This meant that the partner's preferred option was for part-time work – but low pay and benefit deductions made this financially non-viable.

After two years the partner was called to a WFIP which she attended without her husband, though they had extensive discussions afterwards about what had been discussed. As she had only ever done shop work previously and would likely be on the minimum wage, it was understood that the family would not be better off if she worked part-time. Her husband, therefore, contacted Jobcentre Plus to arrange for an appointment for himself with an adviser to discuss him returning to work – something he had been increasingly considering. The WFIP acted as an impetus for him to find out more about his options:

He already had a job offer from a friend which was open to him when he felt he was fit for work, but he was concerned that the household would be worse off if he took this job, so he asked the adviser at the first interview to complete a BOC for him. The BOC showed that they would be better off, and confirmed that if the partner, his wife, was to return to work part-time they would be worse off as a result of lost tax credits. The BOC was seen as extremely useful and as having played a major part in their decision making. In particular it was seen to have overcome worries about the consequences of moving off benefits and helped prevent them becoming 'settled' in their workless situation.

The husband felt that the adviser built up his confidence to return to work, without which he possibly wouldn't have made the step. Jobcentre Plus was also able to pay for the uniform he required for work and a mobile phone which he needed for the job. The adviser saw him a second time to help complete tax credit forms.

Continued

Although the main claimant had left the first job after four months, the job proved to be a stepping stone into a full-time position as a care support worker. This job had little lifting (so limiting damage to his back) and also gave him time to work towards NVQ3 during work hours. He had remained in this job and both he and his partner appeared very happy with it. She still wanted to return to work, on a part-time basis, as soon as it became financially feasible, for example if her husband secured his NVQ3 qualification as he would then be on a higher pay scale. Also, their son was due to start school later in the year, which was seen as presenting a working opportunity. Working was perceived to have dramatically improved the household's financial situation.

Several had self-referred onto NDP on reaching the point at which childcare had become more manageable or their spouse's health improved to the point of needing less attention. Because many had been out of the labour market for a long time, some form of training had been taken up by most IB partners while they were being supported on NDP.

Many of the partners of IB customers had health problems of their own which complicated their situation and affected their view of work options. Although a much smaller proportion of these partners had managed to enter work than had partners with no perceived health issues, some of them had done so nevertheless. The fact that all those saying they had their own health problems had entered NDP from a WFIP may suggest that without the spur provided by a mandatory meeting such partners are likely to have a pessimistic view of their work options and be little inclined to explore the possibilities open to them on their own.

Many partners were identified at Jobcentre Plus interviews with the main claimant in the couple and were persuaded to self-refer to an NDP adviser. Accessing partners via main claimant interviews was seen as fruitful by advisers for several reasons, including the better perspective it provided on the couple and household, and the similarity of needs between many main claimants (especially IB customers) and partners. In some areas, partners' work was dealt with by IB advisers who had specialised expertise and training.

'We were seeing a good percentage of partners that had health issues. We started questioning wouldn't the partners sit better with the IB [team]... [which is what we did]... and partner's definitely sit better with that sort of customer group.'

(Adviser)

Particular mention was made of the value of the training that IB advisers had received in new questioning techniques. One adviser who was moving to the IB team had high hopes of the value of this specific training she was to receive, and that she was *'going to be able to deal with [partners'] issues better.'*

3.2.5 Couples with and without dependant children

Most partners **with** dependent children were still not working because they were undergoing longer-term work preparation including confidence building and mentoring support, or were postponing jobsearch while completing training courses (or in some cases on waiting lists to begin courses). Other reasons given included:

- feeling they had been 'forced' onto NDP before they were ready;
- sorting out more pressing issues prior to jobsearch, such as getting out of temporary housing or coping with mental health problems;
- being demoralised and thus essentially inactive because a BOC had demonstrated that the part-time work they wanted was not financially viable.

Partners in these types of situations may well be contributing to what advisers describe as partners 'sticking' on NDP and not moving forward or out into work. Where couples with children had succeeded in entering employment, it was through operating a joint strategy involving flexibility and willingness for both to be involved in childcare when necessary.

The key question regarding partners in couples with no dependent children living in the household was why, having agreed to being case loaded with an adviser on NDP, they should fail to move into employment. For many, the main reason appeared to be a relatively straightforward matter of having been out of the labour market a long time and feeling the need for lengthy preparation, including training and skills updating. A few admitted to not really being ready to look for work but joining NDP for specific help, for example with benefits or help with a particular kind of training they needed to realise longer-term plans.

Other reasons for not having entered work from NDP included:

- wanting part-time work but only being sent full-time vacancies;
- lack of skills;
- needing support and advocacy following time in prison;
- deteriorating health over the period while on NDP;
- lack of support from others in the household (especially the main claimant);
- losing confidence in Jobcentre Plus and stopping seeing an adviser;
- getting inaccurate or marginal results from a BOC and being put off making further efforts to find work.

Of these, perhaps only the last may have specific relevance to the situation of partners with no dependent children, in that the balance of benefit shown by BOCs will be affected by different Tax Credit allowances according to whether there are children in the household. However, (and taking this into account) there were still

clearly cases of couples without children where it proved financially viable for the partner to work:

Customer couple – Case (G)

This couple were in their mid-40s with dependent children living at home, the youngest of which was not yet of school age. She was previously claiming IS and he was the partner on the claim. He had suffered a serious accident when a child, which had caused brain damage and resulted in learning and some speech difficulties. He had left school aged 16 with no qualifications.

Though unable to read or write adequately, the partner had worked – mainly in manual jobs – virtually all his life. He had been made redundant and had experienced difficulties finding new work. During this time, when both were out of work, they decided that while he was experiencing difficulties she should try to find a job and her partner could look after the children. This was a joint decision both seemed happy to explore. She attended the Jobcentre Plus office for jobsearch and applied for and succeeded in getting a full-time job in a supermarket. This entitled the family to claim Tax Credits.

In the meantime, the partner was attending the Jobcentre and when he asked for help with jobsearch (as he could not use the Jobpoints) was referred to an NDP adviser. Both partner and main claimant attended the first meeting with an adviser but thereafter he went alone. Jobcentre Plus helped him to prepare a CV (his first) and he was sent on a basic skills course. He attended approximately ten-12 meetings, one every two weeks over a three-four month period, seeing three different advisers. He eventually succeeded in finding work through an agency (the job was advertised in the Jobcentre). The employer offered him a full-time permanent job which he still held at the time of the second phase interview. He liked the job and was hoping to remain there until he retired.

Once the partner was in this full-time work, the (former) main claimant was transferred to a different supermarket and reduced her hours to 16 at weekends. The family is now in receipt of Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit. She is currently looking for night shift work as the best way of earning the most money and managing the work-life balance, including childcare.

The couple thus acted jointly and responded flexibly to changing circumstances, and pulled off a successful strategy that moved them from a position of worklessness to work for both, while managing to juggle responsibility for childcare. NDP appeared to have speeded up and facilitated the partner's return to work.

3.2.6 Couples from ethnic minorities

Only four couples interviewed included partners from ethnic minorities, and they were all in London. These comprised two white/black British couples and two Black African couples who were asylum seekers living in the UK for several years. Neither of the British couples perceived there to be any ethnicity related issues attached to their participation on NDP. Both the African couples had been resident in the UK for long enough to have no more than minor difficulties with the English language (mainly the women) and no problems of understanding. The main problem was one of limited cultural and social exposure and, in the case of one couple, uncertainties surrounding their status as citizens and their eligibility to work.

Gender roles were no more, or less, of an issue for these couples than for other couples. One Black African woman was the mother of four children but was very keen to work and was undertaking training to learn how to teach others in her own situation to help their children to read, speak and write English. She was hopeful of relatively well paid work with a voluntary sector organisation.

The other asylum seeking couple had been workless for a number of years and had recently switched their main benefit claim from the husband to the wife following an accident in which she had hurt her back. He was training to qualify as an HGV driver and had passed the theory test, but was waiting to do the practical course and driving test later in the year. NDP appeared to have been able to move him closer to the labour market that he had been for some years previously.

Customer couple – Case (H)

This couple were asylum seekers who had come to the UK more than a decade previously. They had three young children. The children's mother, the main claimant, had a back problem, which had caused her claim for IS to be augmented with IB, and resulted in her requiring assistance at home from both her husband and, when her husband was training, from a friend of the family.

The partner completed his secondary education abroad, though he had been unable to complete university. He had not worked since arriving in the UK. It appeared that the partner had claimed JSA in his own right at some point during this time, though the details of this were unclear. The benefit claims in the household may have alternated between JSA and IS around the births of the children.

The partner had been a regular visitor to the Jobcentre Plus office to use the customer computers for jobsearch. He was interested in HGV training, had sought the help of an adviser and been referred to a local training provider. The training, which was to involve paid work experience, had not materialised after several months of waiting.

Continued

The partner was happy with the help he received as he felt that the adviser had been able to assist him with progression towards a goal, though he did seem perturbed about benefits advice. He had not received a BOC and remarked that he was unsure as to the way in which his future earnings would impact upon the household economy and income, and he referred to a £15 training 'top up' which he felt he was entitled to, but which had not been forthcoming.

3.2.7 Partners aged over 50 years

Older partners, in the over 50 age group, were felt by advisers to be even more likely than partners in other age groups to have limiting health conditions or onerous caring responsibilities. For this reason relatively few had been seen on case loads.

'I've seen plenty of people who are 50 plus on the WFIPs but none have actually come through to case load. Often health reasons or caring responsibilities tend to be more common in older clients.'

(Adviser)

Also some advisers perceived that this older group of partners was more difficult to persuade of the benefits of changing their situation and considering work.

'We tell them what's on offer...but they don't want to know...they're so set in their ways – I feel like a counsellor when I'm talking to [them].'

(Adviser)

There appeared to be a poor perception of this age group among some advisers, despite the fact that some partners over the age of fifty can access additional help via New Deal 50 Plus. Some opportunities relating to partners in the older age ranges were not being identified and picked up by current Jobcentre Plus practices.

A few of the NDP participants interviewed were aged over fifty years and they appeared to be faring comparably to others on the programme. All were the partners of IB customers and all were WFIP route entrants. The main reasons they gave for participating in NDP and seeking work were health improvements in their previously cared for spouses, and the persuasive evidence from BOCs.

Customer couple – Case (I)

This London couple were aged over 50 and had two teenagers living at home. The household had been coping with the effects of the mother's long-term illness for over 12 years. She had originally worked in a shop until her first child and had then given up work to raise a family, while her husband was working full-time. He became unemployed and was claiming JSA for them both when she had a heart attack and was hospitalised for a while. Jobcentre Plus advised them to switch claims and for her to claim IB with him as a dependent partner. He had to care for her and to look after the children who at that time were toddlers, as she was unable to lift or carry them.

For the past five years she had been able to claim DLA for herself at the higher rate and this had paid for a car that he could drive her around in when necessary. He had applied for Carers Allowance but was turned down. He was called to a WFIP.

He found the adviser helpful and friendly and the information he received about Tax Credits to be particularly useful saying that this started him thinking seriously about whether it would be a good idea to get back to work. He went on his own to the WFIP and the adviser gave him her card and told him to call her if he decided to start work and that she could help.

The couple were feeling financial pressure, her medical condition was under control with medication and the children were now old enough both to help out around the house and help if anything went wrong and to call an ambulance if she had a crisis. Therefore he felt he could perhaps think about work. They both also said that the strain was beginning to tell in their relationship.

The couple discussed the work option at considerable length and decided that the best solution would be for him to work nights so that he would be there for her during the day if necessary and could leave her at night as she was not likely to have any problems while sleeping. He therefore returned to the adviser as a self-referral to NDP to talk about finding employment.

They went to the Jobcentre Plus office together to get a BOC, which demonstrated that he needed to be thinking of full-time hours to be financially better off. The adviser helped with jobsearch and kept in touch with jobs on the phone for a week, before they went back in to tell her he had been given a job and that they wanted to sign off.

Continued

He had made the decision that he **wanted** to work – and that this was the key. He was very undemanding as to what kind of work that should be as long as it was at night. The bottom line was that they should not end up being **worse off**. He had a good rapport with the adviser who turned up a number of night jobs and helped him apply by making phone calls to employers and chasing up interviews. He was worried that his age might go against him in applying for work (and the fact that he had no formal qualifications or skill certificates) but was happily proved wrong, securing a night cleaning job of 40 hours per week.

The couple felt that everyone in the family was better off and happier now that he was working and he got great satisfaction from being '*a breadwinner*' again. After doing the job for seven months he saw it as both permanent and secure and as offering some future opportunities for promotion. His aspirations were to advance himself within the company into a supervisory job and then to be a manager. He bought mobile phones for himself and his wife so that they could keep in touch when he was working but, in spite of her fears, they had not had to use them much.

All but one of the NDP participants over 50 perceived their skills and workplace experience to be outdated and had therefore undertaken training while on NDP, and some had successfully entered employment. All of those who had started jobs since participating in NDP were still in work six to twelve months later. Thus although concerns were widely expressed about possible age discrimination in the jobs market, their confidence that once in employment they could prove their worth and their reliability were perhaps being borne out in practice.

3.2.8 Types of jobs attained by partners

The types of jobs that partners were moving off benefits into were by and large familiar, entry level jobs in low paid sectors. There was a strong concentration of jobs in retail occupations that appeared to correlate with the availability of part-time hours in this sector of the economy. Bar work and cleaning jobs were said to have been chosen primarily for the opportunities they afforded for working 'non-standard' hours, such as evening and night shifts. In some instances temporary or seasonal work had caused financial difficulties when they had ended.

Customer couple – Case (J)

This couple were in their early twenties. She was claiming IB as a result of post-natal depression. The couple were involved with their local Sure Start centre which they said gave them emotional and social support. They said that they were struggling financially – partly as a consequence of a previous period in which the partner had undertaken some part-time temporary (seasonal) work. This had resulted in an overpayment of Tax Credits that the household was now having difficulty repaying.

The partner had taken on the temporary work following a WFIP at which the adviser completed a BOC and helped with Tax Credits forms. He felt this information must have been inaccurate because once they had to pay rent and council tax again they had found they were struggling financially. Despite this he appreciated having a known contact in the adviser and expected that he would contact the adviser again for further help and advice. This said, the couple had not yet sought any further help in spite of having difficulties and being unable to understand why they were still having to make a contribution to rent and council tax when back claiming IB.

Both parents believed that they should be looking after their own children rather than using any formal childcare. The partner also preferred to find work which would allow him to help his wife with childcare, as at times she found this difficult due to ongoing depression.

The couple made work decisions together and had elaborate plans for juggling the future work of both parents with the demands of childcare and looking after the home. Their plan was for the partner to find full-time work in the near future – especially as the children would soon be going to school full-time. Once her partner had settled into some work the main claimant would like to work part-time to fit in with school hours.

Due to past experience neither wanted to work in a factory – the partner would prefer a delivery job or removals. Also, they were acutely aware of the problems that temporary/agency work could cause with finances and so wanted permanent jobs.

Although they had a clear idea of the type of work they wanted and the hours, the partner was relying on word-of-mouth for finding work rather than using Jobcentre Plus more frequently – the role of NDP was apparently not 'sold' to him as effectively as it may have been, nor the couple's apparent need for advice about money management picked up upon.

The remainder of jobs were other services and ancillary occupations, from a hairdresser to a groundsman, and only very few in more skilled areas such as an electrician. Indeed, some customers questioned the ability of Jobcentre Plus effectively to help those with higher levels of qualifications and extensive work experience who were looking to participate in the labour market beyond entry level.

Partners who had chosen to become self-employed had a more varied range of occupations and sole trader businesses, including a number of creative enterprises (musician, sculptor, web designer) and specialist skills and services (gardener, mechanic, podiatrist).

Those partners who were working as employees were equally split between full-time and part-time jobs, with the exact hours of work being determined by financial viability and by constraints on available time such as caring responsibilities and school hours. Several had chosen evening or night work as the best compromise with their other responsibilities and demands on their time.

Self-employed partners worked highly variable hours, though generally full-time. Several commented on the long hours that they needed to put in to their self-employment, though none had yet limited their activity seriously to accommodate other aspects of family and household affairs. Interestingly, the **possibility** of being flexible and able to make time for other responsibilities when needed, had generally been found to mean that in practice it was not required as often or as much as had been anticipated. Self-employed partners found they were able to work some weekends and even spend time away from home overnight without causing undue strain on household functioning.

Information on the levels of pay partners were receiving in work was somewhat patchy and not always easily compared between jobs or between employment and self-employment. By and large, earnings were relatively low with those working part-time hours earning little more than the minimum wage at an average of approximately £6 an hour and those working full-time being paid at a rate of just over £7 an hour. Earnings from self-employment were the most difficult to gauge, with substantial amounts often being put back into the businesses rather than taken as profits and partners themselves unsure as to levels of earnings after overheads, stock and running costs had been accounted for. One partner had deliberately restricted his drawings to a minimum wage level and adopted a very cautious approach to keeping the business afloat. Another was earning the equivalent of £20,000 per year in line with the target earnings he had set out in his business plan.

3.2.9 Sustainability

Amongst those partners who had moved into work from NDP, sustainability of employment was high. The great majority were still working six to twelve months after leaving the programme.

Customer couple – Case (K)

This couple's situation remained largely unchanged from the first phase of interviews. The partner became involved with the NDP programme through a WFIP and returned to see the adviser for benefits advice after securing a position with her local supermarket. The advice, including a BOC, was very accurate and the partner remained employed, reporting an increase in independence and confidence through the work. The main claimant remained unemployed, a situation he had been in for the past three years.

The couple had several dependent children living with them, the youngest having just started secondary school. Prior to her current partner moving in, she had claimed IS and had been involved with NDLP. When the main claimant moved in, he started a claim for JSA, part of which related to the partner, and it was during this claim that the partner was called in for a WFIP. As the partner was now in employment, the JSA claim had been discontinued and the couple were now receiving Tax Credits. The couple reported that they were significantly better off in financial terms than they had been on benefit.

The partner had two meetings with her adviser in total. The first of these was the WFIP, at which she received initial jobsearch help. She later returned, after having sourced a position herself at a supermarket, to speak to the adviser about the financial implications of taking this up. The adviser conducted a BOC and helped the customer with Tax Credit applications. The partner reported that the BOC had been very accurate. She had remained in employment for more than eighteen months.

Childcare was largely irrelevant in this case due to the ages of the partner's children and the fact that the main claimant was usually at home. The partner reported that she preferred to work part-time due to a health condition. The main claimant had been unemployed for the past three years since moving to the area and, though he reported that he had been seeking employment, he had not yet managed to secure a job.

Both partner and main claimant reported that they were much better off working and claiming tax credits than when he was claiming JSA for them both. The partner reported a marked increase in confidence through working, and was happy that she could now save. She would ultimately like to move from retail into care work.

Self-employment appeared to be the best sustained work, with all those interviewed still trading, although at least one of the businesses was clearly operating at the margins of viability and another at only around half of planned and hoped for profitability. Where self-employment plans had successfully produced a viable 'package' of sufficient flexibility to address the many and varied needs of households in full, work was stable and there was strong determination to sustain arrangements into the future and avoid ever returning to having to claim benefits.

Customer couple – Case (L)

This couple had been living on benefits for several years following her breakdown and continuing mental health condition involving panic attacks and agoraphobia. He stopped work to look after the eldest child who had behavioural problems (and who is now in care) and to care for his wife. She was claiming IB and getting DLA.

His WFIP allowed him to get launched onto the self-employment route and at phase one he was test trading under the guidance of the local self-employment provider. He had discussed this with his wife and they felt self-employment would give the flexibility for him to still be at home for her if she needed him, and for him to deal with the children at the beginning and at the end of the school day. She had had worries about going off benefits but had been reassured somewhat by the test trading arrangements. She said that she never liked being on benefit – but felt forced that way by circumstances.

He had finished test trading early. She had been signed off IB and continued to receive DLA. The business was still up and running, and growing, after a total of 15 months, on the basis of a very cautious approach, with only a basic wage being drawn and profits retained in the business. The couple were looking forward with high hopes for the long-term (even thinking about buying a house). The BOC that had been done for him on NDP proved more or less accurate and the extra income was described as completely transforming. He had already successfully paid off most of the money borrowed from relatives at start up.

He had not had any time off since starting, was working six days a week and putting in long hours. They had not found it an easy option but the problems it posed were preferable to the problems they had had when on benefits. As he put it *'things are harder but easier'*. All round improvements in family relations had made a key difference. Although new difficulties had arisen they were now viewed differently because his working had effectively re-focused their lives. They were now grappling with the fact that he actually had less time available at home than had been anticipated and that different arrangements had to be made, for example, for picking the children up from school when he wasn't able to be there. However, these were now seen not as insurmountable problems but *'at the end of the day it's just normal life isn't it?!'*

Continued

The help provided through NDP was seen as having been key. She didn't think she could have gone through with it without the support and the 'comfort zone' of test trading. She felt anxiety in anticipation of leaving the routine of claiming benefits, but in practice recognised her concerns as having been *'just one of those mind block worries that you have, that [in the end] wasn't anything to worry about at all'*.

There had been a big boost to her self-esteem from signing off and her health had improved somewhat. She was now able to leave the house and as hoped, she had been able to participate in the business in an administrative capacity.

The couple still had some problems to overcome regarding childcare, but had made arrangements with neighbours and friends. They talked through business related issues and problems together and provided mutual support to each other. Also they were clearly at one in their approach to money management, and the strategic view of what they were doing and where they were going. As she said: *'there's more to think about – but it's fun, it's not stressful, we haven't argued about money and things like that...'*

Overall this case appeared to provide strong vindication for the policy that work is the best way out of poverty. The impact of working on the household could be described as transforming – not only was there more money coming in, but major gains in self-esteem, motivation, direction, focus and purpose were described by both in the couple for themselves and their children, and the family was having to 'pull together' to make things work.

Part-time work had been less well sustained than full-time work, though some partners who had left a part-time job had subsequently moved rapidly into other employment. Customers gave a variety of reasons for why their employment had not been sustained. Reasons for leaving work included a mixture of labour market factors and personal factors – the former included jobs ending unexpectedly and employers making unrealistic demands for extended hours and overtime working, the latter included deteriorations in the partners' health and inability to cope with working alongside caring responsibilities.

3.2.10 Main claimant outcomes

In a few of the couples' interviews the main claimant had started work following their partner's participation in NDP, including two IB customers. Both the IB customers were stimulated into taking action in response to BOCs that showed it was not worthwhile for their partner to work part-time. One had found a job, the other was self-employed.

In some cases where main claimants had entered work, **both** the main claimant **and** the partner had done so. These involved self-referred partners to NDP and for the greater part were the result of main claimants getting involved in small ways with the

running of their partner's self-employed business. A similar number of main claimants had become involved in voluntary work of one kind or another, indicating moves closer to the labour market but falling short of paid work.

Main claimants had entered similar types of jobs as partners, ranging from retail and services through to labouring work, again mostly at minimum wage levels. All the main claimants who had started working had successfully sustained that work for six months or more.

4 Conclusions

4.1 Summary

The generally negative views and low expectations found to be held by advisers about the partner customer group in phase one continued and had even hardened somewhat a year later. Work Focused Interviews for Partners (WFIPs) were accorded an even lower priority by Jobcentre Plus staff and managers than previously and advisers showed no 'ownership' of the customer group. Despite some employment outcome successes with partners on New Deal for Partners (NDP), the negative perceptions engendered by the WFIPs process had to an extent carried over into NDP work. There was a tension evident between the desire of some advisers to build and develop their expertise to allow them to help partners better, and the tendency of most managers under operational pressures to pay little regard to NDP.

The already low numbers of partners coming in to Jobcentre Plus offices for WFIPs was spread even more thinly across advisers than was originally the case, undermining the apparent need for additional adviser training and preventing much accumulation of specialist expertise. Advisers described a reactive approach on a case by case basis but appeared to be most comfortable dealing with partners as single individuals within a model of Work Focused Interviews (WFI) delivery derived from familiarity with other customer groups, for example, lone parents. Numbers of partners on NDP case loads were even smaller. In extreme cases advisers had not case loaded a single partner in the previous 12 months.

There was widespread recognition of the additional complexities often facing partners compared to other customer groups, an acknowledgement of the importance of main claimants' influences on decision making, and consensus on the need to address 'couple' and 'household' issues. However, there was no evidence in phase two of any initiatives being undertaken to address the real and acknowledged complexity of partners' circumstances. Even with partners who had expressed interest in working and had been case loaded onto NDP, advisers continued to experience difficulties in addressing complexities whose roots often lay within a couple's relationship and were compounded by conflicting concerns and aspirations.

Advisers were most comfortable in the familiar one-to-one advice role, feeling that in any case there was nothing much that they could do to address the wider issues even where they were apparent. Often the root cause of problems remained hidden from advisers who were left guessing as to the precise reasons why, for example, they observed so many customers 'sticking' on their case loads and not moving into work. Although policy towards partners was set up to be similar to that directed at lone parents, partners were found to behave differently and many were seen to be more closely aligned to the Incapacity Benefit (IB) customers group than to most lone parents.

Overall there had been a drawing in and narrowing of approach to WFIPs. Interviews had become increasingly brief, often with the clear intent of doing only the minimum required. There was some evidence from customer interviews of rushed processes and possible missed opportunities. Contact with case loaded partners on NDP was also often minimal and limited to jobsearch and Tax Credits administration support.

Advisers could see no real incentive for them to make the considerable extra effort that might be required to move a greater proportion of partners onto NDP. Apparently even under Job Outcome Target (JOT) pilot conditions, partners had continued to lose out in competition for advisers' time and attention to other higher priority groups such as lone parents and IB customers. The low priority accorded the partners' customer group had continued and was being reinforced in several areas through new management practices, targets and work allocation procedures. Equally, there had been minimal effect from JOT on NDP case load practices in the JOT pilot area.

The longer-term needs and aspirations of some partners were being routinely missed or ignored by advisers at WFIPs. This was sometimes the case even in the face of explicit intentions on the part of partners to return to work in the future and an expressed willingness to prepare for work in the meantime (perhaps through flexibly available training opportunities). Very few advisers were either willing or felt themselves to be able to take the required medium to long-term view of support that this would require.

As a result there was little evidence of long-term or more intensive support for partners on NDP either, although there were a few notable exceptions. Most NDP participants were seen as job ready and requiring primarily jobsearch help and vacancies notification. In spite of this a considerable proportion of partners were failing to move off case load and into work. Reasons for this ranged from disillusionment in the face of evidence of non-viability from Better Off Calculations (BOCs) (especially for much sought after part-time work), to the re-emergence of health or caring constraints, to an undermining of confidence (whether in the face of the demands of training courses or as a result of lack of support from main claimant spouses).

When partners were successfully moved into work then jobs appeared to be well sustained. This was particularly true of those entering self-employment, although evident successes in this area of training and support were said to be under threat from recent cuts in provision and resourcing.

Gains in understanding, approach and practice from working with IB customers in the Pathways pilot areas were thought to be of direct relevance to dealing with those in the partners' customer group who were partnered with IB customers or who had health conditions of their own to manage. The transfer of this adviser expertise, however, was to date limited. There was much evidence that all partners might profitably be approached via the main claimant rather than 'in isolation' and many self-referrals onto NDP were already coming from contact made at main claimant Restart interviews and other WFIs.

4.2 Policy implications

The policy implications of the phase two findings can be presented in terms of a small number of rather stark headline choices. In the face of an initiative which is generally poorly regarded by staff, seen as irrelevant by a large proportion of the customer group, and as ineffective even by many of those who are actively seeking employment, there are three possible lines of approach:

The first might be simply to accept the status quo of a programme which appears to have relatively low levels of successful outcomes and a largely undetermined level of additionality among those outcomes. The problems affecting the successful delivery of both WFIPs and NDP appeared to be more 'structural' than 'operational'. That is to say the difficulties that have arisen could be interpreted as stemming from inherent flaws in conceptualising the customer group, from invalid expectations of comparability with other groups such as lone parents, and from a mismatch between adviser culture and customer needs. If this is indeed the case then any changes to operational and delivery practices are unlikely to have a significant effect.

Existing low levels of performance could be maintained alongside a restriction of costs through current resources management at Jobcentre Plus office level. Such an approach, however, would require a strategic decision about how important partners are to overall policy objectives, and whether they could ultimately be effectively supported through any other route.

Given the current implications of welfare to work policy in addressing workless households (especially those with children) the more active approach options are:

- to seek to take measures to tackle the low standing and low priority accorded to the initiative and the customer group by advisers and their managers;
- to seek to address the real complexity inherent in the needs of targeted customers, their main claimant partners and households.

4.2.1 Tackling low programme priority

The WFIP initiative was clearly being treated as a relatively low priority in most Jobcentre Plus offices, and if there had been any changes over the twelve month period it was to accentuate this rather than improve the situation. Low priority status appeared to extend also to NDP case load and not be confined just to WFIPs.

In terms of policy response it may be possible to address this low priority status independently of other factors, though it evidently interacts with, and is in part a product of, both the characteristics of the customer group and the experiences of advisers in dealing with them.

Advisers and their managers work within a target driven system which imposes a powerful economy of effort and reward on the way they work and the way they set priorities. Many advisers commented on the fact that partners were not only difficult to move into New Deal and into work, but that they were more difficult than, for example, lone parents. However a job outcome with a partner was only accorded eight points towards performance targets whereas a lone parent job outcome was worth twelve. Raising the points for a partner job outcome to the highest priority level of twelve points may go some way towards increasing motivation to deal effectively with partners and help raise the priority of the customer group.

Other 'levers' in the incentive and performance system that could be used to similar effect might include raising the job outcome targets for partners across the board, for each office and each adviser, and conveying the message that individual customer group targets were all equally as important to meet. Partners were found to 'compete' for adviser time with other customers, and to lose out because of the complexity of the labour market constraints and difficulties that needed to be addressed. A ring-fencing of time allocated to deal with partners could perhaps prevent efforts being routinely channelled elsewhere. However, this would begin to encroach upon the autonomy of Business Managers to determine for their own office how to deploy resources.

Even if the priority being given to WFIPs could be raised, there remains much evidence that this alone may not be enough to make a serious impact upon successful outcomes. Given partners' complex problems and their couple/household complications, any improvement in outcomes is likely to require additional resources to address these adequately both at WFIPs and within the support package provided by NDP.

4.2.2 Addressing partners' complexities

The other possible approach for policy would be to attempt to tackle 'head-on' the real complexities of partners' needs, and the important dynamics within couples and households. The types of measures suggested by the WFIP/NDP research include the following possibilities:

- linking partners' WFIs more closely with support for main claimants, whether this is by having the same adviser deal with both individuals, or approaching partners through main claimants, or by incorporating WFIPs within WFIs for longer-term customers, or by making joint WFIs mandatory;
- using 'specialist' IB and Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) advisers to deliver WFIPs to the partners of customers of these types of benefits;
- offering additional support, perhaps along the lines of the provision for customers in IB Pathways pilot areas, and transferring the gains in understanding and practice, learned through the IB pilots, to working with partners;
- building better referrals to specialist agencies and seeking to overcome the professional isolation affecting advisers;
- providing additional training and guidance to advisers to enable them to extend their competence in key areas affecting partners' ability or willingness to work;
- requiring partners to attend more than just the single one-off WFI in order to establish greater continuity of support – possibly calling partners to two mandatory meetings, one on their own and one jointly with their partner (the main claimant);
- addressing the benefit 'traps' that exist for some partners, especially young people at the start of their working lives, where certain combinations of circumstances appear to be encouraging benefit dependency;
- focusing more on longer-term prospects and options for partners and supporting preparation and development activities during the time partners are unable to work so that they are better prepared for employment when their circumstances change (and also so that any work they eventually enter will be well sustained).

Appendix A

Fieldwork documents

New opt out letter for WFIPs phase 2

Research into Jobcentre Plus help for couples

We are asking for your help.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) wants to improve the service provided to couples. They have asked us to carry out some research about Work Focused Interviews for Partners. The research will find out whether the interview meets your needs, and how it could be improved.

Your name has been selected from DWP records as someone who has recently been invited to one of those interviews. It would be very helpful if we could come and talk to you and your partner (the person who claims benefits). Even if either of you is now in a job, or doing something else, we are still interested in what you have to say. Your opinions are very important to us. We would like to speak to you and your partner separately, which will take about an hour. Interviews will be conducted by a researcher from Insite. All researchers will carry an identity card.

Insite is a research organisation completely independent of government and political parties. Everything you and your partner tell the interviewer will be treated in **complete confidence**. No personal views or information will be passed on to Jobcentre Plus or to anyone outside the research team. The report of the research will not identify any individual or family.

What happens now?

If you are interested in helping with this research, please complete the enclosed form, giving your contact details, and return it to us in the stamped addressed envelope provided. One of our researchers will get in touch with you to arrange an interview. Alternatively, you can contact Jo Porter at Insite on 0151 670 1080. Please

remember to fill in your telephone number, or to include your telephone number in any message that you leave.

- Appointments will be arranged at times which suit both of you.
- Interviewers from INSITE will come to your home and talk to each of you about what you think about New Deal for Partners and any help you received.
- We will thank each of you with a **£20 CASH GIFT** for your time.

If you definitely do not want to take part, please tick the relevant box on the form and return it within the next 10 days, so that we know not to contact you again.

Whatever you decide, any benefits you and your partner may receive will not be affected in any way either now or in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Research Director

Repeat opt out letter for WFIPs phase 2

Research into Jobcentre Plus help for couples

We are asking for your help once again.

A few months ago, you kindly participated in research that we are conducting on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) into Work Focused Interviews for Partners, in order to improve the services currently offered to couples.

During your interview, the researcher explained that we would like to follow you up with a second and final interview to see if anything has changed. This interview will follow a similar process to last time, involving both yourself and your partner in separate interviews and taking place in your own home.

Even if either of you is now in a job, or doing something else, we are still interested in what you have to say. Your opinions are very important to us. Interviews will be conducted by a researcher from Insite and will take about an hour. All researchers will carry an identity card.

Insite is a research organisation completely independent of government and political parties. Everything you and your partner tell the interviewer will be treated in **complete confidence**. No personal views or information will be passed on to Jobcentre Plus or to anyone outside the research team. The report of the research will not identify any individual or family.

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- We will thank each of you with a **£20 CASH GIFT** for your time.

If you definitely do not want to take part, please tick the relevant box on the form and return it within the next 10 days, so that we know not to contact you again.

Whatever you decide, any benefits you and your partner may receive will not be affected in any way either now or in the future.

You may also be interested to know that the findings from the previous interview round have contributed to a report on the first phase of the evaluation, which is due to be published by DWP in the autumn.

Yours sincerely,

Research Director

(Please note that these letters were also supplied in Welsh for participants in Wales)

Opt out form for WFIPs phase 2

REFERENCE NUMBER: WFIP2

NAME:

ADDRESS:

Please amend if any of these details are incorrect.

.....

JOBCENTRE HELP FOR COUPLES RESEARCH

I am interested in taking part in the research
and have filled in my contact details below

I do not want to take part in the research

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: _____

(please include area code, thank you):

(We will not pass your number on to any third party)

BEST TIME TO CONTACT YOU: _____

Thank you for your help. Please return this form as soon as possible in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

New opt out letter for NDP phase 2

Research into Jobcentre Plus help for couples

We are asking for your help.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) wants to improve the service provided to couples. They have asked us to carry out some research about New Deal for Partners. The research will find out whether the programme meets your needs, and how it could be improved.

Your name has been selected from DWP records as someone who has recently participated in New Deal for Partners. It would be very helpful if we could come and talk to you and your partner (the person who claims benefits). Even if either of you is now in a job, or doing something else, we are still interested in what you have to say. Your opinions are very important to us. We would like to speak to you and your partner separately, which will take about an hour. Interviews will be conducted by a researcher from Insite. All researchers will carry an identity card.

Insite is a research organisation completely independent of government and political parties. Everything you and your partner tell the interviewer will be treated in **complete confidence**. No personal views or information will be passed on to Jobcentre Plus or to anyone outside the research team. The report of the research will not identify any individual or family.

What happens now?

If you are interested in helping with this research, please complete the enclosed form, giving your contact details, and return it to us in the stamped addressed envelope provided. One of our researchers will get in touch with you to arrange an interview. Alternatively, you can contact Jo Porter at Insite on 0151 670 1080. Please remember to fill in your telephone number, or to include your telephone number in any message that you leave.

- Appointments will be arranged at times which suit both of you.
- Interviewers from INSITE will come to your home and talk to each of you about what you think about New Deal for Partners and any help you received.
- We will thank each of you with a **£20 CASH GIFT** for your time.

If you definitely do not want to take part, please tick the relevant box on the form and return it within the next 10 days, so that we know not to contact you again.

Whatever you decide, any benefits you and your partner may receive will not be affected in any way either now or in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Research Director

Repeat opt out letter for NDP phase 2

Research into Jobcentre Plus help for couples

We are asking for your help once again.

A few months ago, you kindly participated in research that we are conducting on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) into New Deal for Partners, in order to improve the services currently offered to couples.

During your interview, the researcher explained that we would like to follow you up with a second and final interview to see if anything has changed. This interview will follow a similar process to last time, involving both yourself and your partner in separate interviews and taking place in your own home.

Even if either of you is now in a job, or doing something else, we are still interested in what you have to say. Your opinions are very important to us. Interviews will be conducted by a researcher from Insite and will take about an hour. All researchers will carry an identity card.

Insite is a research organisation completely independent of government and political parties. Everything you and your partner tell the interviewer will be treated in **complete confidence**. No personal views or information will be passed on to Jobcentre Plus or to anyone outside the research team. The report of the research will not identify any individual or family.

What happens now?

- If you would still like to be involved in this research, please complete the enclosed form, giving your contact details, and return it to us in the stamped addressed envelope provided. One of our researchers will get in touch with you to arrange an interview. Alternatively, you can contact Jo Porter at Insite on 0151 670 1080. Please remember to fill in your telephone number, or to include your telephone number in any message that you leave.
- Appointments will be arranged at times which suit both of you.
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- We will thank each of you with a **£20 CASH GIFT** for your time.

If you definitely do not want to take part, please tick the relevant box on the form and return it within the next 10 days, so that we know not to contact you again.

Whatever you decide, any benefits you and your partner may receive will not be affected in any way either now or in the future.

You may also be interested to know that the findings from the previous interview round have contributed to a report on the first phase of the evaluation, which was published in September 2005. If you would like to receive a copy of this report, please contact Paul Noakes, Strategic Research and Modelling Division, Department of Work and Pensions, 4th Floor, Adelphi, 1-11 John Adam Street, London, WC2N 6HT, quoting research report 283.

Yours sincerely,

Research Director

Opt out form for NDP phase 2

REFERENCE NUMBER: NDP2**NAME:****ADDRESS:**

Please amend if any of these details are incorrect.

.....

NEW DEAL FOR PARTNERS RESEARCH

I am interested in taking part in the research
and have filled in my contact details below

I do not want to take part in the research

CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: _____

(please include area code, thank you):

(We will not pass your number on to any third party)

BEST TIME TO CONTACT YOU: _____

Thank you for your help. Please return this form as soon as possible in the stamped addressed envelope provided.

WFIP and NDP Topic Guides: phase 2

In depth topic guides were developed and piloted for use in all interviews, with staff, partners and main claimants, and for each element of the second phase of the research (WFIPs and NDP). The topic guides used in interviews with advisers and with partners and main claimants are set out here. Due to the cumulative length of all topic guides the others used are not included in these appendices. Copies are available on request from the Department of Work and Pensions.

**NEW DEAL FOR PARTNERS
TOPIC GUIDE
FACE TO FACE INTERVIEWS WITH PERSONAL ADVISERS
NDP EVALUATION PHASE 2**

Complete cover sheet. Record interview start and finish time in writing and on tape

Respondent name:

Telephone number:

Job title:

District & Jobcentre:

Interviewer name:

Venue of interview:

Start time:

Date of interview:

Finish time:

Explain aims and objectives of the evaluation and describe the methodology.

Secure permission for tape recording.

Emphasise confidentiality and impartiality, and the use of verbatim comments on a non attributed basis.

Objectives:

- 1 To explore any changes that have taken place during the past year in the type of help and support provided to partners through enhanced NDP, and in the way it is being delivered.
- 2 To establish advisers' current views of the impact and effectiveness of support under enhanced NDP, after 18 months of the initiative, in terms of helping either/both main claimants and partners to move closer to the labour market/ into work or to make labour market related decisions.
- 3 To examine the medium-term outcomes from the enhanced NDP programme, both for advisers and customers, to increase our understanding of what works for whom and under what circumstances.

N.B. If adviser was NOT interviewed in any other phase of interviews (i.e. WFIP1, NDP1, WFIP2) explore ALL of Section 1 in-depth. If interviewed previously, focus on exploring any changes and developments.

Section 1:

Background

Explore adviser's job history (e.g. length of involvement with partners); Jobcentre Plus offices based at and covered; size and structure of adviser team they are part of.

Explore whether adviser deals with any other customer groups (e.g. lone parents, New Deal 50+, etc) and what proportion of their time is spent with the different customer groups. Any recent changes here?

Explore whether adviser feels motivated about dealing with partners and whether they feel more or less motivated than they were when they first started dealing with the customer group; ask what reservations/concerns they may have; and whether their view of partners has changed at all over time.

Training

Check what training, guidance and briefing the adviser has received in relation to NDP, and if they have had any recent updates or additions. How useful or informative did the adviser find the training they have had. Any remaining gaps in their knowledge or understanding, and any particular aspects of partners work for which they would like more training.

Explore whether they think the training/guidance could be improved in any way and what additional training or preparation they would have found useful.

Management

Establish how the adviser is currently line managed and who has responsibility for issues concerning NDP in their office/district. Does the adviser think this arrangement works effectively (from their job point of view and from the customers' perspective)

Check whether the adviser has any means of airing any concerns they may have and whether an effective forum exists for exchanging ideas and good practice with other advisers dealing with partners – if not would they like such a forum

Explore whether the adviser has received any strong 'steer' about how to deal with, approach and handle partners, or what their main objectives should be. If so, who or what is the 'driver' behind the steer? If not how have they chosen to approach partners and why?

Section 2:

The Partner Customer Group

Ask advisers whether they have changed their view of the partner customer group at all in the past year and if so how their perceptions have changed. Ask whether they now feel they are familiar with partners' typical situations and whether they are now used to working with them and addressing their needs. Try to ascertain whether advisers have changed their attitudes at all regarding their ability to address domestic and relationship barriers affecting partners. Has there been any change in the level of confidence advisers feel about carrying out interviews/meetings with partners (or with partners and main claimants together).

Explore whether advisers still feel NDP to be unsuited to partners who are carers (whether or not they have young dependent children also) and whether they have any ideas as to how such people could be better supported, and what might be offered to them in the way of support and help that is not currently offered and which might help move them towards the labour market even if not into employment. Ask if they consider NDP to be unsuited to or unable to help any other 'types' of partners, such as older people (over 50) or those from ethnic minorities.

Ask whether advisers perceive any changes in the types of partners they are getting onto their NDP case loads. For example, does the self-employment option still appear to be popular and if so what type of partners and under what circumstances seem to be attracted to it?

NDP Workload

Ask how many partners advisers currently have on their NDP caseload; and approximately how many partners in total they have had on NDP since April 2004. Try to separate initial interviews that go no further from 'real' case loads.

Try to establish how many case loaded partners have been direct-entry partners (self-referrals), and how many came from mandatory WFIs. Also whether the two groups differ in any ways or get treated differently, and if so in what ways.

Explore the meaning of 'self-referral' (and if necessary mention phase 1 findings that many were either actively recruited or were really the result of WFIPs but removed in time from that intervention). Ask how self-referred partners say they have heard about NDP? (e.g. leaflet, friends etc.)

Better Off Calculations (BOCs)

Find out if advisers are doing any better off calculations (BOCs) at the first WFIP meetings or whether BOCs are always/generally done with partners once case loaded on NDP. Explore whether there are specific circumstances under which they vary the timing of carrying out BOCs or sub-groups of customers that they treat differently from others (e.g. doing BOCs speculatively for a minimum wage job, or based only on **assumed** benefits data etc.?)

Whenever a BOC is carried out, ask how the adviser deals with situations where it produces a negative result (i.e. Shows that the household will be worse off if the partner works). Establish what typical reactions of partners are to this and whether it always ends contact and support or whether there is still work that can be done with the partners to address their barriers to working.

NDP Case-loading

Explore how many partners advisers currently have on their case load and if this is significantly different from a year ago either in terms of numbers or in terms of the types of people joining. Also whether the numbers coming onto partners case loads have increased or decreased over time, and if so what advisers put this down to. Ask if they ever reach case load capacity with partners and what happens if they do.

How do advisers perceive the current situation regarding self-referrals – are they still as few as they were a year ago? Does the return of WFIP participants at a later date still make up most of those described as self-referred? And to what extent do advisers perceive other self-referrals as being truly **self**-referred as opposed to being pulled into the programme through other forms of 'targeting'?

Explore what kinds of strategies are being used to encourage partners onto NDP, and whether any marketing activity has been directed towards partners, and if so what types of marketing.

Ask whether the timing of (flow) WFIPs (six months into claims) affects their ability to encourage people onto NDP in any way; establish how deferrals are used in this regard to delay WFIPs for partners who may be unable to engage with a WFI because of the trauma that has led to the claim being made (e.g. serious illness or accident to their main claimant partner)

Ask if they perceive partners to be any more aware of the NDP programme, and what it can provide, than they typically were 18 months ago, and what reasons there might be for this. Also whether the programme is any more recognised by name than it apparently used to be.

Ask if the adviser's view of their case loaded partners has changed at all over the past 18 months, and if so in what ways and why that is. How do partners as a group compare with other customer groups? For example, even once they are on NDP are they more difficult to get into jobs than, say, lone parents who are on NDLP? Are there any issues specific to older partners (over 50) or those from ethnic minority groups – if so what and how are they dealt with?

In phase one a number of advisers said they maintained 'inactive case loads' to help keep in touch with possible future takers for NDP entry – explore whether this is still the case and if so how such inactive case loads are being used and to what effect.

Delivery of Interviews

Do advisers feel they have as much time to deal with partners on their case load as they would like. And if based in London Jobcentre Plus offices – has the JOT pilot made any difference either to how they deal with case-loaded partners, or to their approach to presenting training options or using job grants or ADF?

I would like now to look at the NDP process in more detail and at the longer-term outcomes from the programme with reference to actual customers that you have dealt with as an adviser since the new programme was introduced in April 2004.

You may recall that a year ago we discussed a small number of actual case loaded customers – could we start by returning to those and looking at what you know to have happened to them since then.

[Interviewers to use pre-prepared outline notes on previously discussed customers to assist their identification and advisers' recall.]

The longer-term perspective

Ask adviser to describe any developments since the last time we discussed each partner, and to provide an overview of the case history over the past 12 months.

Establish the main outcomes in each case, whether this was entry to work, movement towards the labour market or exit from the NDP process. Ask whether the adviser has any information about the effects of partners being on NDP case load on other members of households including the main benefit customer. In each case establish whether the outcomes expected a year ago have been realised, and if not what the adviser sees as the reasons for this.

If a partner is known to have entered employment, explore the process by which this came about (who found the vacancy, whether the partner was helped with applications and interviews etc.) and whether the job has been sustained as far as the adviser is aware. If the job is known not to have lasted explore the reasons why this was, whether the adviser was able to provide any help or support in-work, and whether the partner moved on into a further job (or jobs). Establish whether any contact was made with the partner after they first entered employment, and if so how it came about and what was done and achieved.

Ask specifically about partners who were case loaded on the self-employment option under NDP. How have they fared during test trading and at the end of the test trading period? If they have exited from self-employment have they done so to find other employment or returned to benefits?

In addition advisers to be asked about customers case loaded since the last research interviews. These new case load customers are ideally to be selected to cover both self-referrals and WFIP-route NDP customers, as many job entrants as possible and a mix of interesting 'successes' and 'failures'. Numbers of customers to discuss with each adviser are likely to remain small even after a further 12 months of delivering NDP.

Guide for each individual new case discussed:

What happened in this case?

Obtain an overview description of the

- *Circumstances of the partner (including whether 'job ready' vs. hard to help)*
- *Support measures undertaken*
- *Rationale*
- *Outcomes*

Case loading process

Discuss how the partner ended up on NDP – and if the adviser did the original WFI, how they persuaded them to go on their NDP case load.

Establish whether the partner went directly from their WFI into NDP or if there was a gap before they re-contacted the adviser. And if there was a gap, ask what was the reason for it. How long the partner was case loaded for, and how frequently the adviser saw them, for how long and for what purpose. Ask whether all contact was face to face or if other means (such as the telephone) were also used.

Joint meetings

Check whether the partner chose at any time to come in together with the benefit recipient (or anyone else) and if so, whether this was just to the first meeting (the WFIP), or to several or all meetings (i.e. when on NDP case load too). Discuss whether the adviser actively tried to encourage the partner to bring the main claimant with them, and whether that was to all meetings or only occasionally and for specific purposes such as to do a BOC.

Ask to what extent the main claimant's circumstances affected the way they dealt with the partner and in what way.

Partners' barriers/background

Establish what were the main barriers to working perceived to be by the partner, what the adviser perceived the main barriers to be and how they tried to deal with them. Discuss to what extent they were able to overcome them, or change the partner's perception of them.

Ask whether advisers have ever had any carers on their NDP caseload, and if they have then explore in detail how they dealt with these partners, what support was needed, how caring responsibilities were addressed in relation to possible work, how useful NDP was in addressing their needs, and what outcomes were achieved for them.

Ask whether the type of benefit being claimed by the main benefit customer appeared to have any bearing on the partner's perceptions or on how the adviser approached the case. Ask about any other important factors that came into play, such as age, confidence etc and how this was addressed, and with what degree of success.

Partner needs/aspirations

In relation to each customer's employment needs and aspirations, ask advisers if they perceived them to have a clear idea of the type of job they wanted, the number of hours, and level of wages, etc. Also whether the partner was fully aware of their job options, and how far these issues were discussed and explored.

Was there any particular help that this partner needed? If so, what was that and was the adviser able to provide it from within NDP?

Ask what kind of information and support the customer needed/wanted most, and what their main concerns were. Did the adviser need to involve any other colleagues in the course of dealing with the needs of this partner and if so, who, why, and to what end? Explore the recalled response/ reaction of the partner to entering and participating in NDP.

Content of NDP

Record precisely what the adviser did with the partner and both their reasons for this and the rationale for what they did not choose to do (e.g. explain Tax Credits, carry out a BOC, discuss job and training opportunities).

BOC

Discuss whether any better off calculation (BOC) carried out with the partner at any stage was able to take into account adequately the situations of both the people in the couple and the whole household context for considering work, and if not then why this was not the case.

Establish whether there was any discussion of part-time working/ the hours the partner needed to work to be better off. Record the outcome of the BOC and the partner's reaction to that.

Use of available support

Ask if there was anything within NDP (such as specific information or specific types of support) that the adviser found to be particularly helpful in working with this partner, and whether they can identify what contributed to a successful outcome in the case/or the reasons why there was not a successful outcome.

Outcomes and effectiveness

Establish how helpful the adviser thinks NDP was for the customer and ask for details of the ways they perceive they were able to help them move closer to the labour market/ or into a job. Ask whether there was any additional impact on the main claimant, in terms of their movement towards work.

Ask how effective NDP was perceived to be by the adviser in raising awareness of opportunities and services.

If the partner did any training on NDP, establish what the rationale was for this, how the decision was arrived at, and if there was a particular job goal in mind or if it was a more general move towards the labour market.

Household Issues

Ask to what extent (if any) the main benefit recipient influenced the way the adviser approached the partner, and if there were any household issues of relevance e.g. household income, joint decision-making that they recall being important in the case.

Check whether in the course of dealing with the partner, the adviser addressed the issues of **household** income and **joint** decision making about work (as opposed to the individual needs and aspirations of the partner).

Summary

Obtain the adviser's overall assessment of the new NDP thus far, and the extent to which they perceive it as being able to move households out of worklessness.

Ask how they compare NDP to other New Deal programmes, and what they perceive to be the impact it is having on households.

If in London: has the JOT pilot affected the delivery of NDP or the behaviour of advisers in any way – if so in what ways and do they perceive these to be positive changes?

Ask if there are any other key issues regarding NDP that have not been covered, and if there is anything they think might make NDP more effective or more productive than it is currently.

Thank respondent for their help and close the interview.

**NEW DEAL FOR PARTNERS
TOPIC GUIDE
FACE TO FACE REPEAT INTERVIEW WITH PARTNER
NDP EVALUATION PHASE 2**

Complete cover sheet. Record interview start and finish time in writing and on tape

Name of interviewee:

Address:

Telephone number:

Date of interview:

Researcher:

Start time:

Finish time:

Interview code:

Explain that we are looking at the New Deal for Partners programme in order to improve the service offered, and exploring how people feel about the assistance they have had from Jobcentre Plus under NDP to help them get work.

Secure permission for tape recording and emphasise confidentiality and impartiality, and the use of verbatim comments on an anonymous basis

Objectives:

- 1 To track the work-related history over the past 12 months of partners (and their households) known to have been case loaded on enhanced NDP in 2004, and to explore any changes in their circumstances that may have affected their experience of NDP.
- 2 To explore the type of help and support provided to partners case loaded on enhanced NDP, how it has been delivered and received, and what its impact has been in terms of movement into work and the making of labour market related decisions.
- 3 To examine the effectiveness of measures under enhanced NDP to increase our understanding of what works for whom and under what circumstances.

1. Introductory discussion

Explain that we are following up to find out what has happened to them (and their households) in relation to work in the past year. That we are interested in their views about the support they got from their adviser on New Deal for Partners (NDP), how useful they feel it was, and whether it could have been done any differently or improved at all.

Recap what we understood from the first interview: whether self-referred to NDP or via a WFI; date they started on NDP; nature of support being received then; their expressed work needs and job-type aspirations; the actions they were taking to achieve their desired outcome etc...

2. Current circumstances

Ascertain the broad outline of events over the past year that have impacted on work and work related decision making, and clarify current circumstances – specifically as regards any of the following that are relevant:

- Whether other members of their close family and/or friends and neighbours are also working at the moment (social norms and attachment to work).
- Whether they are working and if so how many hours a week.
- Whether the main claimant is now working.
- If both are working who found work first.
- If the main claimant is still claiming benefit and if so whether there have been any major changes to the claim in the past year.
- Whether there have been any significant changes (improvements or deteriorations) in their health or that of their (main claimant) partner.
- Any changes in caring responsibilities.
- Any changes regarding childcare and/or the needs of children now a year older.

3. Experience of NDP

Explore the partner's experience of being case loaded on NDP with reference to the following:

- The length of time they were on an adviser's case load.
- Whether they always saw the same adviser.
- The total number of meetings had with an NDP adviser (including any contact they may have had after entering employment).
- Any other contact they may have had apart from meetings (e.g. by telephone, or the adviser sending things through the post).
- Whether it was always the same person they saw/ spoke to (and how they felt about this).

- On average how long meetings lasted.
- If they attended any of their NDP Adviser meetings with their partner: which ones and why; at whose suggestion did they have joint meetings; how did any joint meetings go; were they different from other meetings and in what way; did they find them more or less useful than meetings on their own? If so in what respect and why?
- If NDP lived up to the hopes and expectations they had at the start, and if not, how it differed and what was it that they felt was lacking.
- The extent to which the adviser was able to help/offer solutions/options.
- What aspects of NDP they found particularly useful and what aspects they did not find helpful.
- The date (approx) of leaving NDP and the reasons for their exit.
- If the partner entered NDP on the self-employment route, ask specifically about how this went, whether it lived up to their expectations, how they experienced the test trading period and what happened when the test trading came to an end (further contact with their adviser? Financial difficulties? etc.).

4. Decision making & household issues

- Explore what the effect of the partner having been on NDP has been for the main claimant (how they felt about and reacted to the possibility of their partner working), and what other effects are perceived to have been caused to the household.
- Ask how discussions about work (with the main claimant) have changed – what sort of things have been discussed recently – for example, the main claimant's own employment options or possibilities.

5. Activities since leaving NDP case load

If partner **did not enter employment** after being on NDP ask about the circumstances of their leaving and any other labour market related activities that they may have undertaken, including:

- Reasons for not starting work at the time they left NDP.
- Whether they are still planning to work – and if so when.
- Whether NDP nevertheless helped move them closer to working; do they feel they are more likely to consider working in the future than they were before participating in NDP?
- Do they feel more able to/capable of work? If so, in what way/s and why?
- Jobsearch – where and how and how intensely.
- What types of jobs (and what hours) would they like to get, or are they currently looking for?

- Any further contact with Jobcentre Plus or their adviser (and if they would have liked any more contact than they had).
- Voluntary work sought or undertaken.
- Any other preparatory activities such as confidence building courses.
- Details of any training and/or work preparation undertaken on NDP or since.
- Reasons why training did not lead to employment at that time.
- Whether there have been any other outcomes from their participating in NDP.
- The ways this may have helped them.

6. Work since NDP and job sustainability

Explore with the partner their work 'history' since leaving NDP:

- Ask for details of the first job they went into from NDP, when it started, hours, if claiming Working Families' Tax Credit, whether they received help with the application etc. If the job was part-time or full-time and why they decided to work those hours.
- If they are happy to share the information, ascertain how much the job paid (eg. the hourly rate).
- Ask how the job affected their partner, whether he/she was happy about them starting work, and if not what the concerns were. Has he/she changed his/her mind at all since?
- Did their partner (the main claimant) also find work in this period? If so, what type of work and how many hours?
- Who found work first – and did this have an impact on the decision of the other to find work?
- How many different jobs has the partner had since leaving NDP – number and type of work; what the pay rate was for each (if happy to share this information); how long each lasted and the reasons why they left or the jobs ended.
- Ask what the impacts of them working were on other members of the household, and how it affected the household financial situation (Better off? Worse off? As predicted by better off calculation (BOC)? What did they see as the main benefits of working – the advantages, disadvantages and difficulties?
- Effects of jobs ending (if they have) on benefits, on household members and on the financial situation of the household.
- If the partner entered NDP on the self-employment route and is now self-employed, ask about the business and how well it has been sustained, also whether it fulfilled the expectations that the partner had of it at the outset in terms of flexibility and control over hours, work venues, fitting in with care responsibilities etc.

If the customer is still currently working:

- What has been the difference (e.g., social, financial, personal confidence etc.) that the job has made to them and to their household?
- How big a role do they think the support from the NDP adviser played in getting them into work?
- Any concerns or worries they had about starting work, and what was the main concern, and whether this was borne out in practice.
- If they feel better off now they are in work (either financially or in other ways).
- If their adviser carried out a BOC prior to getting the job they are in – was it accurate? i.e. did they end up the same amount better off as the BOC suggested? If not, views about this.
- Establish what are the customer's expectations of sustaining the job, and for how long.

If the customer has children:

- Ask what childcare arrangements they had to make when they started work.
- Whether the arrangements are still working effectively.
- If not, explore what problems have arisen in relation to childcare.

If the customer provides care for their partner or someone else:

- Ask what alternative care arrangements had to be made when they started work.
- Whether the arrangements are still working effectively.
- If not, explore what problems have arisen in relation to care arrangements.

If the customer is now working part-time:

- Would they consider increasing their hours in the future? Why/why not? Under what circumstances might they consider doing so?

If the customer has since left the job, or is now in a different job:

- Ask how long the job lasted and the reasons for leaving.
- Particular problems or pressures faced because of working, and how these have affected their view of working in the future.
- Also how these have affected their partner.
- Whether they will seek further help in the future from the jobcentre/NDP adviser.
- If the partner was self-employed enquire as to the reasons why their business did not sustain itself (especially whether it was primarily for business and commercial reasons or whether it was more to do with constraints and problems emanating from their household situation).

7. Constraints and barriers to working

For those partners who have left NDP but remain out of work, or who remain long-term on NDP but have yet to get a job, ask about current constraints and barriers to working – whether these are the same as they perceived at the time they entered NDP or if they have changed, and whether NDP has helped to remove any barriers (or indeed to create new ones):

- Problems and barriers that their NDP adviser was able to provide help with or to overcome.
- Remaining barriers and problems preventing them finding or taking up work.
- New constraints and barriers arising since they entered NDP.
- Problems that have got progressively better or worse over time.
- Barriers that they see as particularly resistant to any help from Jobcentre Plus and their adviser.
- Whether their **main** barrier is different now to what they perceived it to be when they entered NDP.
- Whether they see their age as in any way a barrier to finding work.
- Whether in some cases a 'negative' BOC result created a barrier to further jobsearch or consideration of work as an option.

8. Current intentions and expectations regarding work

Whether partners are currently in work or are still not working, explore their future intentions and expectations about employment, and the degree to which participation on NDP may have affected these:

- What expectations and aspirations do they have for the future.
- Whether they are still actively looking for work (or more hours or a better job).
- And if they are then what sort of work; how many hours per week they are seeking to work; how they are jobsearching; whether they have applied for any vacancies or had interviews; what happened at interviews; any particular problems or difficulties they are encountering.
- Explore the partner's perceived timescale for attaining work/increasing hours to full-time etc., and whether these timescales have changed at all over the past year.
- Was the partner looking to go into work as soon as possible when they entered NDP or did they always have a longer-term view than this?
- Ask partners who are not currently working whether their intention is to find work immediately or to wait for a while.

9. NDP/Adviser impact

- Customer's perceptions as to what was the most useful thing to come out of NDP Any other gains from it.
- The impact of NDP – describe what it meant to them personally (prompt if appropriate - confidence, optimism, jobsearch, clear future plans, decision making, work etc.).
- Did being on NDP in any way change the way they thought about working, or about the options they might have in terms of employment? details.
- Did talking to an adviser on NDP leave them with a different view in any way about the difficulties they felt they faced if they were to consider working? details.
- Do they think any of the information or help received will help them in making decisions about working in the future? In what ways?
- Explore with all partners what were the main financial incentives for them in joining NDP (seeking work) and whether these met their expectations (e.g. had they fully understood the short-term nature of job grants) – especially if BOCs were carried out that the partner now perceives as having been incorrect or misleading.
- Do they think they would be doing what they are now doing anyway – whether or not they had gone on NDP? Why/why not?
- If the partner was on the self-employment route on NDP ask whether they would recommend this option to others and whether it has changed their attitude to work in any way, or the way they view jobcentre Plus.

10. Summary

- Ask if there is anything else they can think of in terms of support from their NDP Adviser that they would have found helpful.
- Ask if with hindsight there is any particular support or provision they would have liked to see that would have been helpful but that is not currently available.
- Anything else they would like to say about participation in NDP that has not been covered.

Thank customer for their help.

Get them to sign for receipt of their £20 gift on the separate sheet.

**NEW DEAL FOR PARTNERS
TOPIC GUIDE
FACE TO FACE REPEAT INTERVIEW WITH THE BENEFIT RECIPIENT
NDP EVALUATION PHASE 2**

Complete cover sheet. Record interview start and finish time in writing and on tape

Name of interviewee:

Address:

Telephone number:

Date of interview:

Researcher:

Start time:

Finish time:

Interview code:

Explain that we are looking at the New Deal for Partners programme in order to improve the service offered, and exploring how people feel about the assistance their partners have had from Jobcentre Plus under NDP to help them get work.

Secure permission for tape recording and emphasise confidentiality and impartiality, and the use of verbatim comments on an anonymous basis.

Objectives:

- 1 To track the work-related history over the past 12 months of partners (and their households) known to have been case loaded on enhanced NDP in 2004, and to explore any changes in their circumstances that may have affected their experience of NDP.
- 2 To explore the type of help and support provided to partners case loaded on enhanced NDP, how it has been delivered and received, and what its impact has been in terms of movement into work and the making of labour market related decisions.
- 3 To examine the effectiveness of measures under enhanced NDP to increase our understanding of what works for whom and under what circumstances.

Explain that we are interested in their views about the support their partner got from an adviser on New Deal for Partners, how useful they feel it was, and whether it could have been done any differently or improved at all from the point of view of the household as a whole.

1. Introductory discussion

Explain that we are following up to find out what has happened to their partner (and the household) in relation to work in the past year. That we are interested in their views about the support their partner got from their adviser on New Deal for Partners (NDP), how useful they feel it was, and whether it could have been done any differently or improved at all.

Recap what we understood from the first interview: the date their partner started on NDP; nature of support they received then; their expressed work needs and job-type aspirations etc...

2. Current circumstances

Ascertain the broad outline of events over the past year that have impacted on work and work related decision making in the household, and clarify current circumstances – specifically as regards any of the following that are relevant:

- Whether other members of their family, their friends or neighbours are in similar circumstances as they themselves.
- Whether they are working and if so how many hours a week and how they arrived at that decision.
- Whether their partner is now working.
- If both are working who found work first.
- If they are still claiming benefit and if so whether there have been any major changes to the claim in the past year.
- Whether they are undertaking any voluntary work or training or any other activities that might be described as movement towards the labour market.
- Whether there have been any significant changes (improvements or deteriorations) in their health or that of their partner and what the consequences of that have been.
- Any changes in caring responsibilities.
- Any changes regarding childcare and/or the needs of children now a year older.

3. Contact with Jobcentre Plus (via partner's NDP)

Explore the degree of contact, if any, that the main claimant has had with Jobcentre Plus in the past year, what it has entailed and what the purpose of it was, also whether it was stimulated by contact that the partner was having via NDP. In particular ask:

- if they attended any of the NDP adviser meetings with their partner: which ones and why; at whose suggestion did they have joint meetings; how did any joint meetings go; was any useful help, advice or referral made to themselves at these meetings? If a BOC was carried out did they feel it adequately took into account the circumstances, needs and aspirations of both them and their partner?

4. Effects of partner being on NDP

- Explore any ways in which the partner's participation on NDP may have affected the main claimant, how they feel about the process and what they think their partner got from participation.
- Have the main claimants views of their and their partner's work options changed?

If either the benefit recipient or their partner has started work since the partner went on NDP:

- Explore whether their partner's decision to participate in NDP played any part in either them or their partner deciding to work.
- Get details of who started work, when, in what jobs, for how many hours per week, and whether they are still in the same job(s).
- How much of a joint decision with their partner was starting work for either of them? What were their main concerns and were they borne out at all?
- The effect on the household as a whole, including wider social and family effects.

If the customer has children:

- What childcare arrangements did they have to make when one or other of the partners started work?
- Are arrangements still working effectively, and if not, what problems have arisen in relation to childcare?

If the customer has any caring responsibilities:

- What care arrangements did they have to make when one or other of the partners started work?
- Are these arrangements still working effectively, and if not, what problems have arisen in relation to caring?

If either has since left a job, or is now in a different job:

- Ask how long previous jobs lasted, the reasons for leaving, particular problems or pressures faced, and how this has affected their view of working in the future.

5. Decision making and household issues

- Explore what the effect of the partner having been on NDP has been for the main claimant (how they felt about and reacted to the possibility of their partner working), and what other effects are perceived to have been caused to the household.
- Ask how discussions about work (with the partner) have changed – what sort of things have been discussed recently – for example, the main claimant’s own employment options or possibilities.
- Check whether the main claimant’s views on their future options and work prospects (and those of their partner) have changed at all over the past year. If they have, explore the reasons why (positive and negative factors) and whether the meetings their partner had under NDP had any influence.
- Has any of the information their partner gained on NDP influenced their own thinking or their own training or work related activities in the past year; was there anything they recall being particularly helpful or influential?
- Is the main claimant aware of their partner having had a BOC while case loaded on NDP – if so check details, outcome and accuracy of the calculation and how important it was in helping to make household decisions about work.
- Was the main claimant happy for the details of their claim to be discussed and used in carrying out a BOC?
- If they are not aware of a BOC having been carried out, do they think it would have been useful?

6. Activities since their partner left NDP case load

- Explore the reasons why their partner left NDP (whether for work or other reasons) and whether this has affected the way they think about their own work options and possibilities in any way.
- If the main claimant is now working themselves ask why they decided to work, how they arrived at the decision, and what factors influenced the decision.
- If both are working – who found work first – and did this have an impact on the decision of the other to find work?
- How closely have decisions about themselves and decisions about their partner’s working been tied together? Explore in detail how the situations of the two people in the couple interact and affect each other (e.g. from encouragement or demonstration through to household financial viability).
- Ask whether the main claimant thinks any differently from a year ago about work options and possibilities.

7. Job sustainability and constraints

- If the main claimant's partner has entered work since being on NDP, explore what the effects of this have been, for the partner personally, for the household (financially and socially) and for the main claimant. Ask what arrangements have had to be made for childcare, for caring or any other relevant needs that required meeting. Did NDP help to address any of these – if so how? Explore whether any constraints and difficulties still exist and whether they threaten the sustainability of the job in any way. Ask in general how the main claimant feels about their partner working and whether this raises any issues or problems for them.
- If the main claimant's partner is not currently working, explore what the remaining barriers are perceived to be by the main claimant, and whether they see these as getting worse, improving, or insurmountable, and why. Ask specifically about any health and disability, childcare and caring barriers that the main claimant perceives to be important.

8. Summary

- Check if there is there anything else that they would like to say about the process their partner went through on NDP that perhaps has not been covered

Thank the customer for their help.

Get them to sign for receipt of their £20 gift on the separate sheet.

If they ask – the gift is counted as a contribution to capital not earnings, so won't affect their benefits.

**NEW DEAL FOR PARTNERS
TOPIC GUIDE
FACE TO FACE INTERVIEW WITH NEW PARTNER
NDP EVALUATION PHASE 2**

Complete cover sheet. Record interview start and finish time in writing and on tape

Name of interviewee:

Address:

Telephone number:

Date of interview:

Researcher:

Start time:

Finish time:

Interview code:

Explain that we are looking at the New Deal for Partners programme in order to improve the service offered, and exploring how people feel about the assistance they have had from Jobcentre Plus under NDP to help them get work.

Secure permission for tape recording and emphasise confidentiality and impartiality, and the use of verbatim comments on an anonymous basis.

Objectives:

- 1 To track the work-related history of partners (and their households) known to have been case loaded on enhanced NDP in 2004-5, and to explore any changes in their circumstances that may have affected their experience of NDP.
- 2 To explore the type of help and support provided to partners case loaded on enhanced NDP, how it has been delivered and received, and what its impact has been in terms of movement into work and the making of labour market related decisions.
- 3 To examine the effectiveness of measures under enhanced NDP to increase our understanding of what works for whom and under what circumstances.

1. Introductory discussion

Explain that we are interested in their views about the support they got from an adviser on New Deal for Partners, how useful they feel it was, and whether it could have been done any differently or improved at all.

Establish whether they self-referred onto NDP or entered from a WFIP: For example, whether they took the initiative and asked to talk to an adviser about NDP (self-referred) or whether they entered the programme following a compulsory work focused interview (WFIP route).

Check the timing of their period on NDP and that they can remember the period when they were seeing an adviser, and the degree to which they were aware that they were participating in the New Deal for Partners programme.

2. Personal details

Start by asking them to describe themselves and their circumstances, including:

- Their age, and that of their partner.
- Whether they are home owners or tenants.
- The number and ages of any dependent children living with them.
- The length of time they have been with their partner.
- Whether they are married or living together.
- Their current situation regarding benefit claims, and whether anyone in the household is working.

3. Work history and experience

For background, ask them about their own work history, including:

- When they finished continuous full-time education.
- What educational qualifications they have.
- Any work-related, vocational qualifications they have; when they attained them, and at what level.
- If they have done any training in the past other than that which led to qualifications, and if so, what sort of training it was, how long they did it for, if they completed the course and why it did not result in qualifications or a job.
- If they have worked in the past (before going on NDP).
- If so, what types of jobs they have done and whether full or part-time.
- If they have any experience of voluntary work of any kind.
- Would they say they had spent more time in work or out of work in the past.

- How long ago was the most recent job they had before going onto NDP.
- What that job was and how many hours a week they were working in it.
- Whether they were already actively looking for work (or more hours) at the time they first spoke to an Adviser.
- And if they were then:
 - what sort of work they were looking for;
 - how many hours per week were they seeking to work;
 - how they were jobsearching;
 - how their jobsearching went;
 - whether they applied for vacancies or had interviews, and what happened;
 - any particular problems or difficulties they encountered.

4. Benefits/Jobcentre history

- Check whether the partner has ever claimed benefits in their own right.
- If so, which benefits and under what circumstances?
- What previous contact they have had with the Benefits Agency, the Employment Service or Jobcentre Plus?
- When the last time was that they visited a Jobcentre before joining NDP, what the purpose of that visit was and what they thought of the environment, staff and atmosphere?
- Do they now think of the Jobcentre as somewhere to go for help with getting work?

5. Barriers to Work (at the time of entering NDP)

Explore whether work was something that the partner wanted to do straight away, what their main reasons were, and if not looking to work immediately whether they had an expectation about when they might work

- What was their perception of the difficulties that they needed to overcome before starting a job? ***Seek spontaneous un-prompted responses.***
- What did they perceive to be the main difficulty they faced?
- And did they expect the NDP Adviser to be able to help them overcome these difficulties?

Ask specifically about the following areas of potential difficulty/barriers to work

Health issues and disability

- Ask if they have any disability or health problem that restricts either the type of work they might be able to do or the hours they could work.
- If the partner says they do have such a problem, establish the degree to which they feel it restricts them, in terms of the type of jobs or amount of hours they feel they could do given their condition.
- How long have they experienced this problem?
- Do they still face this difficulty?
- Do they think their health is likely to improve in the future, stay much the same, or get worse?

Caring responsibilities

- Ask if they have any caring responsibilities that restrict their ability to work.
- If the partner says they do, then establish who they care for, what it entails, roughly for how many hours a day they are providing care and the degree to which they feel it restricts the amount of work they could do.
- Do they get any support or help with caring from anyone else, and would they want this if it was available.
- Could anyone else carry out their caring responsibilities for them? If not, why not?
- What does the person they care for think about being cared for by someone else for all or some of the time they need it?

Childcare (if have children)

- What sort of childcare is preferred (***prompt if necessary: friend/family, childminder, nursery***) and do they know if suitable childcare is available locally – would they know how to find out?
- If they are in work, find out what arrangements are in place for looking after their children, and whether these have changed for any reason recently.
- Is childcare shared with their partner? If so how is it shared, and how well does this work in practice. If not would it be possible to share it?
- Ask whether they could get help with childcare from anyone else if it was needed, and whether they would want to do so.
- Get details of any particular difficulties that may have arisen with childcare since they've been in work.

- If they are not currently working, find out if they think they would be able to make acceptable childcare arrangements if they were to start work, and what these would be. How do they see childcare being affected by either one of the couple or both working, and do they think the need to look after children would limit or affect the work they could do.

6. Decision making and household issues

- Ideally, who does the customer think should work from the household, and why do they think that.
- Equally, (if there are any children in the household) who do they think should look after the children ideally, and why.
- Explore what the effect of the partner going on NDP has been for the main claimant (how they felt about and reacted to the possibility of their partner working), and what other effects are perceived to have been caused to the household.
- Discussions with the other partner in the couple - to what extent were the implications of working discussed? Including options for arrangements between the two partners, and options for aspects of work such as the number of hours and which hours in the day (shifts, part-time, night work etc.).
- Are respondents satisfied that they were (and are) clear about how working might affect the overall joint household income and arrangements?

7. Situation on entry to NDP

Ask respondents to describe their situation regarding work at the time they decided to go onto NDP, including:

- The length of time since they were last in paid employment.
- The main reasons for them not being in work at the time they joined NDP.
- Anything that made/makes it particularly difficult for them to work (*probe if necessary – age, lack of jobs in the area, skills/qualifications, lack of work experience, lack of confidence, transport difficulties etc.*).
- Reasons for deciding to go (back) to work (or move closer towards working in the future) at that particular time (*prompt for changes in circumstances, or new information about benefits/being better off in work, or a change of mind for some other reason*).
- The way in which the decision to get back into work/ move closer to the labour market was arrived at.
- How much it was an individual decision and how much a joint decision with their partner.

- If the partner had a WFIP – explore how instrumental/useful it was felt to be in making them decide to go onto NDP; For example, had they previously thought about going onto NDP and/or discussed it with their partner?
- Their main reasons for deciding to go onto NDP.
- Whether discussing with the Adviser what help/support was available contributed towards their decision.
- The extent to which the Adviser was able to help/offer solutions/options.
- If there were any aspects of the help/support available as part of NDP that the customer found particularly attractive or thought would be particularly helpful to them in their situation.
- Whether there were any particular problems or difficulties that they hoped NDP might be able to help them with. And if so, exactly what they were.

8. Entry to NDP

- How the customer first heard about New Deal for Partners.
- What they thought NDP was about, and if they saw the NDP leaflet , what they thought about it.

If respondent heard about NDP at a WFIP:

- Do they think they would have found out about NDP without having had to go to a WFIP?
- What was said about NDP at the WFIP? Was it enough or not enough? Was it clear?
- Had they heard of the help available to partners/ the New Deal for Partners programme before the WFIP?
- Had they at any time prior to joining NDP considered getting help from the Jobcentre regarding the possibility of working – if so: when and under what circumstances?

If partner contacted the jobcentre themselves (i.e. self-referred to NDP):

- How their first contact with the jobcentre come about exactly.
- Why they decided to go.
- Who they first spoke to.
- How long it took before they saw an NDP Adviser.

9. Visiting the Jobcentre Plus office

- Expectations as to what the Jobcentre would be like when they went there.
- What they based these expectations on (*prompt: previous contact, word of mouth from friends, images on TV...*).
- If they had experience of Jobcentres in the past, how did it compare this time?
- How they found visiting the Jobcentre in practice.
- Whether they felt comfortable being there.
- How staff there treated them and how helpful they were.
- Would they be happy going back in the future if they needed to?
- How they got to the Jobcentre and how difficult it was for them.
- If they took child(ren) with them, and whether the Jobcentre made them welcome.
- Did they find it an acceptable environment for children to be in?
- If it was difficult to do the interview with the children there.
- If they didn't take children, what arrangements did they have to make for the children to be looked after while they were at the Jobcentre?
- If the respondent is someone's carer, did they have to make arrangements for replacement care while they were at the Jobcentre? If so, what arrangements did they have to make?

10. Expectations of NDP

- What they expected the NDP programme to be like.
- How it might have differed from their expectations.
- Whether there were any particular things that they expected/ hoped NDP would help them with.

11. Support on NDP

- The total number of meetings had with an NDP Adviser.
- Any other contact they may have had apart from meetings (e.g. by telephone, or the Adviser sending things through the post).
- Whether it was always the same person they saw/spoke to.
- On average how long meetings lasted.
- If they attended any of their NDP Adviser meetings with their partner.
 - which ones and why?
 - at whose suggestion did they have joint meetings?

- how did any joint meetings go?
- were they different from other meetings? In what way?
- did they find them more or less useful than meetings on their own? In what respect and why?

Get details of any changes in relation to benefits claims and work that may have taken place since participation in NDP.

- Details of what was discussed at different meetings and what was the Adviser able to do for them when they were on NDP.
- Whether Tax Credits and/or in-work support was discussed with the NDP adviser, and whether the Adviser offered to do an in work benefit calculation at any meeting, to work out how much better off they might be if working (if so, at which meeting, was it for a particular vacancy or more speculative, did it take their partner/husband/wife into account, what was the outcome, was it accurate/helpful).
- Whether respondents felt they understood everything that was available to them on the programme.
- If there was there anything the Adviser could not help them with.

12. Perceptions of NDP Adviser

- What did customers think of their NDP Adviser?
- Was he/she as they expected?
- If not, were they better or worse? In what ways?
- Was it the same or a different adviser to their WFIP adviser (if they had a WFIP)? Did they find this a problem at all? Was the transition from a WFIP to NDP a smooth one?
- Were they able to talk through with him/her the things that mattered to them personally, and was he/she able to answer all their questions?
- Did they feel he/she listened to what they had to say?
- Did the meetings help with what they believed were their needs at the time?
- Was there anything that they would have liked more discussion about? If so, what?
- Why do they think this was not covered adequately?
- Do they remember anything that the Adviser said which surprised them?
- Was there anything they were particularly pleased (or unhappy) about?

13. Outcomes from NDP participation

Establish if they have now left NDP or are still case-loaded. Explore reasons for leaving NDP (such as getting a job, giving up trying, changing their mind, circumstances changing to prevent work etc...).

13a. Job outcomes

Details of what job they went into from NDP, when it started, hours, rate of pay and if claiming Tax Credit, whether they received help with the application etc. If the job was part-time: why they decided to work part-time hours.

- Did they consider the decision about working to be essentially an individual choice, or a matter for joint decision making with their partner?
- Did they discuss with their partner/husband/wife what it would mean if they started work? Did they discuss what the options might be?
- Did they discuss how it would affect the household income, or other household arrangements? If so, what?
- Ask how their job affected their partner, whether he/she was happy about them starting work, and if not what the concerns were. Has he/she changed his/her mind at all since?
- Did their partner also find work in this period? If so, what type of work and how many hours? Did the circumstances of their partner change in any other way at this time?
- Overall what does the customer feel has been the impact of them working? Income/time/social/family effects.

If the customer is still currently working:

- What has been the difference (e.g., social, financial, personal confidence etc.) that the job has made to them and to their household?
- How big a role do they think support from the NDP Adviser played getting into work?
- Perceptions of the most significant help they received.
- Anything that had to be sorted out before they could start work, and if so, what the single biggest factor was.
- Any concerns or worries they had about starting work, and what was the main concern.
- Whether this was borne out in practice.
- If they feel better off now they are in work (either financially or in other ways).

- If their adviser carried out a better off calculation (BOC) prior to getting the job they are in – was it accurate? i.e. did they end up the same amount better off as the BOC suggested? If not, views about this.
- Customer expectations of sustaining the job.
- Whether other members of their close family and/or friends and neighbours are also working at the moment.

If the customer has children:

- Ask what childcare arrangements they had to make when they started work.
- Whether the arrangements are still working effectively.
- If not, explore what problems have arisen in relation to childcare.

If the customer provides care for their partner or someone else:

- Ask what alternative care arrangements had to be made when they started work.
- Whether the arrangements are still working effectively.
- If not, explore what problems have arisen in relation to care arrangements.

If the customer is now working part-time:

- Would they consider increasing their hours in the future? Why/why not? Under what circumstances might they consider doing so?

If the customer has since left the job, or is now in a different job

- Ask how long the job lasted and the reasons for leaving.
- Particular problems or pressures faced because of working, and how this has affected their view of working in the future.
- Also how it has affected their partner.
- Whether they will seek further help in the future from the jobcentre/NDP Adviser.

13b. Outcomes other than jobs

If respondent left NDP without going into a job:

- Reasons for not starting work at that time.
- Whether still planning to work – and if so when.
- What types of jobs (and hours) would they like to get, or are they currently looking for?
- Whether NDP nevertheless helped move them closer to working; do they feel they are more likely to consider working in the future than they were before participating in NDP?

- Do they feel more able to/capable of work? If so, in what way/s and why?
- Details of any training and/or work preparation undertaken on NDP.
- Reasons why training did not lead to employment at that time.
- Whether there have been any other outcomes from their participating in NDP.
- The ways this may have helped them.
- Whether other members of their close family and/or friends and neighbours are also working at the moment, or are in similar situations to them (social norms and attachment to working).

14. NDP/Adviser impact

- Ask for the customer's perceptions as to what was the most useful thing to come out of NDP and if there were any other gains from it.
- The impact of NDP – describe what it meant to them personally (prompt if appropriate – confidence, optimism, jobsearch, clear future plans, decision making, work etc.).
- Did being on NDP in any way change the way they thought about working, or about the options they might have in terms of employment? details.
- Did talking to an Adviser on NDP leave them with a different view in any way about the difficulties they felt they faced if they were to consider working? details.
- Do they think any of the information or help received will help them in making decisions about working in the future? In what ways?
- Do they think they would be doing what they are now doing anyway – whether or not they had gone on NDP? Why/why not?

15. Summary

- Ask if there anything else they can think of in terms of support from their NDP Adviser that they would have found helpful.
- Ask if there is any particular support or provision they would like to see and would be helpful that is not available at the moment.
- Anything else they would like to say about participating on NDP that has not been covered.

Thank customer for their help.

Get them to sign for receipt of their £20 gift on the separate sheet.

**NEW DEAL FOR PARTNERS
TOPIC GUIDE
FACE TO FACE INTERVIEW WITH NEW BENEFIT RECIPIENT
NDP EVALUATION PHASE 2**

Complete cover sheet. Record interview start and finish time in writing and on tape

Name of interviewee:

Address:

Telephone number:

Date of interview:

Researcher:

Start time:

Finish time:

Interview code:

Explain that we are looking at the effectiveness of the work focused interviews being given to the partners of benefit customers, in order to improve the service offered, and exploring how couples feel about the adviser interviews and whether they have found support from Jobcentre Plus helpful.

Secure permission for tape recording.

Emphasise confidentiality and impartiality, and the use of verbatim comments on an anonymous basis.

Objectives:

- 1 To investigate the type of help and support provided to the partners of benefit customers under enhanced NDP and how it is being delivered and received by them and by their main claimant partners.
- 2 To explore the impact of the enhanced help and support available under the enhanced NDP programme in terms of helping either/both main claimants and partners to move into work, towards the labour market, or to make labour market related decisions.
- 3 To examine the effectiveness of measures under enhanced NDP to increase our understanding of what works for whom and under what circumstances.

Explain that we are interested in their views about the support their partner got from an Adviser on New Deal for Partners, how useful they feel it was, and whether it could have been done any differently or improved at all from the point of view of the household as a whole.

1. Personal details

Start by asking them to describe their own circumstances, including:

- Their age, and that of their partner.
- The number and ages of any dependent children living with them.
- The length of time they have been with their partner.
- Whether they are married or living together.
- Their current situation regarding benefit claims, and whether anyone in the household is working.

Your partner [name] took part in the New Deal for Partners programme. We are interested in your views about their involvement – and we would like to find out how you see things from your position.

Can you remember when your partner **[name]** was on NDP?

Did you go with them to any interviews?

I understand that you were claiming **[JSA/IS/IB]** at that time, is that right?

And is that still the case or has the situation changed at all?

2. Work history and experience

For background, ask them about their own work history, including:

- What educational qualifications they have.
- Any work-related, vocational qualifications they have; when they attained them, and at what level.
- If they have worked in the past.
- If so, what types of jobs they have done and whether full or part-time.
- How long ago the most recent job was that they had.
- What that job was and how many hours a week they were working in it
- Whether they were already actively looking for work (or more hours) at the time their partner first spoke to an Adviser.

- And if they were then:
 - what sort of work they were looking for;
 - how many hours per week they were seeking to work;
 - how they were jobsearching;
 - how their jobsearching went;
 - any particular problems or difficulties they encountered;
 - if they have worked at all since that time.

3. Barriers to Work

Obtain a bit more detail about their current circumstances and anything that might have affected/be affecting whether they and/or their partner can get into work.

- Would they like to work?
- What is their perception of the difficulties that they **and their partner** need to overcome before either or both of them could start a job (*seek spontaneous unprompted responses*).
- What do they perceive to be the main difficulty they face?

Ask specifically about the following areas of potential difficulty/barriers to work

Health issues and disability

- Ask if they **or their partner** have any disability or health problem that restricts either the type of work they might be able to do or the hours they could work.
- If they say that either of them does have such a problem, establish the degree to which they feel it restricts the type of jobs or amount of hours they or their partner could do given their condition.
- How long have they experienced this problem?
- Do they still face this difficulty?
- Do they think their health is likely to improve in the future, stay much the same, or get worse?

Caring responsibilities

- Ask if they **or their partner** have any caring responsibilities that restrict their ability to work.
- Establish who cares for who and what it entails, roughly for how many hours a day and the degree to which they feel it restricts the possibility of working.
- Do they get any support or help with caring from anyone else, and would they want this if it was available.

- Could anyone else carry out their caring responsibilities for them? If not, why not?
- What does the person they care for think about being cared for by someone else for all or some of the time they need it?

Childcare (if have children)

- What sort of childcare is preferred (***prompt if necessary: friend/family, childminder, nursery***) and do they know if suitable childcare is available locally – would they know how to find out?
- Any arrangements that are in place for looking after their children, and whether these have changed for any reason recently.
- Is childcare shared with their partner? If so how is it shared, and how well does this work in practice. If not would it be possible to share it?
- Ask whether they could get help with childcare from anyone else if it was needed, and whether they would want to do so.
- Get details of any particular difficulties that may have arisen with childcare (*especially if their partner has started working*).
- If they are not currently working, find out if they think they would be able to make acceptable childcare arrangements if they and/or their partner was to start work, and what these would be. How do they see childcare being affected by either one of the couple or both working, and do they think the need to look after children would limit or affect the work they could do.
- If neither partner is working - what sort of arrangements do they think they would you have to make if one or both of them was to start?

4. Attitudes to working

- If not working – would they like to work?
- Find out how they feel about the possibility of their partner working, and what they think their partners attitude would be to them working themselves; also whether other members of their close family and/or friends are working or in a similar situation to themselves.
- Whether they are currently looking for a job, or might in the future (if so when).
- Or the reasons why they feel they and/or their partner do not want to/cannot work.
- Ideally, who if anyone does the main claimant think should work from the household, and why do they think that.
- Equally, (if there are any children in the household) who do they think should look after the children ideally, and why.

5. Decision making & household issues

- Explore what the effect of the partner going on NDP has been for the main claimant (how they felt about and reacted to the possibility of their partner working), and what other effects are perceived to have been caused to the household.
- Do they think that NDP has been beneficial to their partner – if so how – and have they gained themselves in any way?
- Discussions with the other partner in the couple – to what extent were the implications of working discussed? Including options for arrangements between the two partners, and options for aspects of work such as the number of hours and which hours in the day (shifts, part-time, night work etc.).
- How do they perceive that they have arrived at decisions about working or not working with their partner – and to what extent were these individual or joint decisions.
- Are respondents satisfied that they were (and are) clear about how working might affect the overall joint household income and arrangements?

6. Awareness of the NDP process

- Main claimant's understanding of what prompted their partner to join NDP.
- Whether they had heard of the New Deal for Partners programme before and, if so, what they thought it was about.
- Their feelings about their partner taking part in NDP.
- Whether they thought it an appropriate time for their partner to be thinking about work possibilities.
- The extent to which they discussed it with their partner at the time, and what they can remember of those discussions.
- Whether they were aware that they could go with their partner to see the Adviser and if they would have liked this option, and why.
- If they did attend any joint meetings, at who's suggestion was it and why did they decide to go along?

7. Joint interviews

- If the main claimant attended one or more meetings with the NDP Adviser jointly with their partner, find out how many joint meetings were attended, whether they had particular hopes or expectations from these meetings, and if these were satisfied.
- How useful they found joint meetings, what they discussed with the Adviser and how involved they felt they were able to be; to what extent did they feel the adviser understood their household circumstances?

- The degree to which they felt they understood the help and support that was available to themselves and their partner under NDP.
- If a better off calculation (BOC) was carried out did they feel it adequately took into account the circumstances, needs and aspirations of both them and their partner?

8. Perceptions of NDP Adviser

- If the main claimant attended one or more NDP meetings jointly with their partner, what did they think of the Adviser?
- What did they feel he/she was trying to get across – and was this relevant to their own particular situation?
- Did they feel he/she listened to what **they and their partner** had to say?
- Did he/she tell them anything they didn't already know?
- Was there anything that they would have liked more discussion about? If so, what, and why do they think this was not covered adequately at the time?
- Was there anything they remember that the Adviser said which surprised them; anything they felt particularly unhappy about or particularly pleased about?

9. Effects of partner being on NDP

- Explore any ways in which the partner's participation on NDP may have affected the main claimant, how they feel about the process and what they think their partner got from participation.
- Have the main claimants views of their and their partner's work options changed?

If either the benefit recipient or their partner has started work since the partner went on NDP:

- Explore whether their partner's decision to participate in NDP played any part in either them or their partner deciding to work.
- Get details of who started work, when, in what jobs, for how many hours per week, and whether they are still in the same job(s).
- How much of a joint decision with their partner was starting work for either of them? What were their main concerns and were they borne out at all?
- The effect on the household as a whole, including wider social and family effects.

If the customer has children:

- What childcare arrangements did they have to make when one or other of the partners started work?
- Are arrangements still working effectively, and if not, what problems have arisen in relation to childcare?
- Similarly as regards any caring responsibilities either partner may have.

If either has since left a job, or is now in a different job:

- Ask how long previous jobs lasted, the reasons for leaving, particular problems or pressures faced, and how this has affected their view of working in the future.

10. Summary

- Check if there is anything else that they would like to say about the interview process for their partner that perhaps has not been covered.

Thank the customer for their help.

Get them to sign for receipt of their £20 gift on the separate sheet.

If they ask – the gift is counted as a contribution to capital not earnings, so won't affect their benefits.

Appendix B

Methodological information

Phase 2 qualitative fieldwork took place in the five delivery districts that were selected in the first phase for being areas in which the Jobcentre Plus roll out was relatively well advanced. All elements of the qualitative research were carried out in the same selected fieldwork areas and interviews were with a relatively small number of key, informed individuals.

Tables B.1 and B.2 show the number and spread of staff interviews in each district for each part of the phase 2 fieldwork.

Table B.1 WFIP2

Job category	Number interviews per district
Business Manager or other senior manager	1
Senior adviser	1
Personal advisers	5
Total	7

Table B.2 NDP2

Job category	Number interviews per area
Business Manager other senior manager	1
Senior adviser	1
Personal advisers	5
Total	7

B.1 Customer samples

Repeat interviews were also conducted with customers. As in phase one, paired in-depth interviews were conducted with couples. Simultaneous separate interviews were held at couples' homes with both main claimants and partners. All couples interviewed in the first phase of WFIP fieldwork who at that time had plans or expectations for future employment activity were re-contacted, as were all couples in which caring responsibilities had been an important element in previous decision-making about work. The particular issues affecting partners who were also carers formed part of the exploratory remit for phase two of the research, as did issues affecting partners (and couples) aged over 50 years.

Some respondent couples judged as unlikely to provide additional information relevant to the evaluation were not approached a second time. These included couples where previous recall of the WFIP process was poor or where their interest and engagement was minimal and they had expressed little likelihood of undertaking any work-related activity in the next twelve months. Those couples where the partner had previously left NDP rapidly and without a known job or training outcome were also excluded from phase 2 interviews. With these exceptions, all couples interviewed in the first phase of NDP fieldwork were re-contacted.

For each of the WFIP and NDP elements, new customer respondents were sought to make up a complement of thirty couples to match phase one. New couples were selected to:

- maintain a spread of main claimant benefit types;
- include a proportion of male partners and partners from ethnic minority groups;
- include couples without dependent children;
- include both self-referred and WFIP-route NDP entrants;
- cover a variety of different recorded reasons for partners' exits from the WFIP process and from NDP.

The achieved samples of WFIP2/NDP2 'couple' interviews are shown in Tables B.3 and B.4:

Table B.3 Achieved sample of WFIP2 client interviews

Sample outcome (30 pairs of interviews)	Total achieved	Initial target	Variance from target
Repeat	15	15	0
New	15	15	0
Claimant JSA	11	12	-1
Claimant IS	13	12	+1
Claimant IB	6	6	0
No dependent children	11	10	+1
From a minority ethnic group	5	5	0
Male partner	12	10	+2
Total	30	30	0

Table B.4 Achieved sample of NDP2 client interviews

Sample outcome (30 pairs of interviews)	Total achieved	Initial target	Variance from target
Repeat	14	15	-1
New	16	15	+1
Self-referrals	10	11	-1
WFIP route	20	19	+1
Claimant JSA	13	12	+1
Claimant IS	8	12	-4
Claimant IB	9	6	+3
No dependent children	5	5	0
Ethnic minority background	4	5	-1
Male partners	13	10	+3
Over 50 years of age	6	5	+1
Job entry	13	15	-2
Total	30	30	0

B.2 Opt out

New respondent partners and claimants were given the opportunity of opting out of participating in the research. Those not wishing to be interviewed were able to contact Insite by telephone or by letter using a pre-paid reply envelope. To meet the requirements of the Welsh Language commitment of DWP, Customers resident in Wales received a Welsh as well as an English version of the letter, and were informed that they could request the interview to be conducted in Welsh if they preferred. Repeat respondents had all been asked for their permission at phase 1 to be re-contacted.

B.3 Recruitment

Interviews were arranged and scheduled centrally by in-house recruiters.

B.4 Transcription

All interviews were tape recorded, with the respondent's permission, to allow verbatim quotes to be recorded and later transcribed and analysed. Once completed, transcriptions were made available to the relevant researcher for interpretation, analysis and write-up.

B.5 Analysis

Qualitative analysis was conducted thematically, combining issues raised in the research interviews and providing an explanatory structure based on the strength and frequency of types of responses and reported perceptions and understandings. Because qualitative analysis cannot and should not make claims to representing the population beyond its sample of respondents, the emphasis at all stages was on ensuring that analysis and interpretation was **true to the data** that had been collected. Hypotheses were tested and new hypotheses put forward in order to provide input to the processes of policy development that were of concern to the research client. It was intended that some of these hypotheses would provide a guide to future quantitative research which would be of value.

The analysis of the qualitative data was an iterative process extending throughout the research from initial instrument design to final reporting. Topic guides were drawn up around initial hypotheses as to what might be identifiable as significant characteristics of partners and claimants, what might be the factors affecting their responses to the WFIP/NDP intervention, and what might be particularly interesting areas for exploration such as the household dynamic and decision making about work. Phase 2 topic guides (see Appendix B) explored in particular the work related histories of customer couples since their WFIP/NDP interventions, and issues of job sustainability with those who had entered work.

The purposive sampling of partners further aimed to ensure the inclusion of sub-groups of respondents judged a priori to be of potential significance and of policy interest, for example couples including carer partners and couples in which one or both partners were aged over 50 years. Interviews tested initial hypotheses and preliminary analysis identified those which were strongly borne out and those which were to be rejected.

B.6 Preliminary analysis

Using transcripts of the interviews that they had conducted, researchers carried out preliminary analyses, using analysis proformas structured around the research questions. The completed proformas identified responses, trends and issues of prominence. Copies of the proformas used in preliminary analyses are attached in Appendix C. In addition, in the second phase of the evaluation each pair of couple interviews was written up as a short case study.

B.7 Secondary analysis

Completed proformas formed the basis for a process of secondary analysis, which took place initially through team workshops following the completion of the fieldwork for each element and phase of the research. The workshop format provided two important checks and balances that contributed to the rigour required of the qualitative analysis. First, it brought together a variety of viewpoints and acted as a control over the domination of one perspective. Second, it provided the first opportunity for 'testing' interpretations and judgements about issues and themes of importance by continually inviting consideration of counter-evidence from the experience of other interviews and other interviewers.

At secondary analysis stage the interaction of the research team members allowed the identification of new 'emergent' issues that were not determined by the initial subject areas and hypotheses embodied in the topic guides. Emergent issues, and the themes that they contributed to, were also subject to the same process of testing and verification through argument and counter argument as was other evidence.

Following the workshop, analysis proformas provided an efficient method of cross-checking the prominence of issues through their repetition. The effective 'grid' of salient known and discovered characteristics and responses that the proformas presented (such as main benefit type, gender, lack of dependent children, attendance at a joint meeting etc) was also used as a system for pointing further analysis back to individual or groups of transcripts for more in-depth investigation and for the identification of verbatim quotes for use in reporting.

B.8 Composite analysis

The final stage in analysis was conducted alongside presentation preparation and report writing, and involved a re-reading of all transcripts and the coding up of passages and quotes according to the major agreed themes. It consisted in unifying and structuring the findings, elaborating on emergent issues and themes, and seeking an explanatory context for observations. At each step of the process opportunity was made of returning to transcripts in search of potentially contradictory evidence; these 'negative feedback loops' providing the necessary rigour to ensure truth to the data.

Appendix C

Analysis proformas

Primary analysis of transcripts from interviews was carried out by the researchers who had conducted the interviews, using a selection of pro formas, the following one is an example. For all proformas, please contact the Department of Work and Pensions.

WFIP2 NEW STAFF ANALYSIS SHEETS					Staff interview code WFIP2
Completed by:	Area/office	Job title	Previous job	Length of time in post	Rating of this interview for content/interest/ importance (0-5)
		Analysis: Include any key illustrative quotes in the main boxes below, along with analysis. Reference both quotes and the main sites of supporting material for the issue under discussion in right hand column (transcript page numbers)			Transcript page references:
Key bullet point summary of the most important issues to emerge from this interview		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • 			
Summary: in what ways has this interview increased our understanding of: how well the WFIP process is working? what problems have been encountered? what improvements might be made? what aspects of delivery are working well?					

1	<p>Describe the key elements of current role:</p> <p>Has the introduction of WFIPs resulted in any changes in role or staffing arrangements?</p> <p>How have staff reacted to WFIPs?</p> <p>How and to what extent do they work with other colleagues and external organisations in relation to Partners?</p>		
2	<p>Any training/staff development undertaken for the extension of WFIPs to Partners:</p> <p>How useful/comprehensive have they found it?</p> <p>Any gaps in training/knowledge that need to be addressed?</p> <p>What means do they have for sharing ideas, experiences and good practice etc. (and do they use them)?</p>		
3	<p>How well is the delivery process for WFIPs working:</p> <p>What have been identified as key areas or stages?</p> <p>How well do leaflets/letters work? What reactions had to letters?</p> <p>Is the deferral/waiver procedure working effectively (should there be more/less)?</p> <p>Any process gaps need filling or improvements that could be made?</p>		

4	<p>Reactions of customers (partners and main claimants):</p> <p>Extent of failure to attend WFIPs? Reasons?</p> <p>What complaints/feedback from customers?</p> <p>Any typical misunderstandings or misapprehensions about WFIPs?</p> <p>Are current approach letters and information leaflets clear and understood by customers?</p> <p>What do customers say they find most useful about WFIPs?</p>		
5	<p>For which 'types' of partners do advisers find that WFIPs are most/least useful/successful:</p> <p>What customer characteristics seen as most important in determining how WFIPs go (age, customer benefits, children, work experience, benefits history?</p> <p>What factors make people more/less likely to move into work?</p> <p>WFIPs able to address barriers?</p>		
6	<p>Joint attendance at WFIPs:</p> <p>How prevalent? With whom? For what reasons given?</p> <p>Preference/views of advisers? Pros and cons of joint/single interviews?</p> <p>Approach of advisers to joint interviews?</p>		

7	<p>Content of WFIPs:</p> <p>How long WFIPs booked for in adviser diaries? How long taking in practice? What covered in WFIPs (always/typically/sometimes)? Any key elements? How useful is Guidance on delivering WFIPs? Is it used/followed?</p>		
8	<p>Outcomes from WFIPs:</p> <p>Jobs to date? Who for (partner or main claimant, and under what circumstances)? Outcomes other than work (partner/main claimant)? What signs of movement closer to the labour market for those that remain inactive? Any changes in barriers or attitudes as result of WFIP (partner/main claimant)? After WFIP are customers more aware of opportunities and support available to them? Is there a need for follow-up, more frequent, or further mandatory meetings for partners? When should these be timed for? How useful WFIPs for those furthest from labour market?</p>		

9	<p>How are harder to help customers dealt with:</p> <p>Which types of customers are harder to help?</p> <p>Why are they harder to help? What is done?</p> <p>Which types of customers are unlikely to achieve a job outcome in the time available and why?</p> <p>How are customers for whom a job is not a realistic outcome dealt with?</p>		
10	<p>Overall:</p> <p>What is their experience to date of dealing with the Partners customer group?</p> <p>What important issues have emerged?</p> <p>What are the key issues around 'couple dynamic' and dealing with the whole household rather than just one individual?</p> <p>What is working best for whom and why?</p> <p>Has there been any feed-back from customers? If so what?</p> <p>What are the main perceived challenges and difficulties ahead?</p>		