

Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 579

Older people's attitudes to automatic awards of Pension Credit

Mehul Kotecha, Meg Callanan, Sue Arthur and Chris Creegan

A report of research carried out by the National Centre for Social Research on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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Summary

Overview

This research looks at older people's attitudes to the principle of automating parts of the Pension Credit awards process. Three key advantages to automation are highlighted: its capacity to raise awareness of entitlement, its ability to reduce perceptions of stigma, and its convenience. Although the study also reveals concerns about automation, such as privacy, these were rarely felt to be insurmountable and the advantages were generally thought to outweigh them.

Lower levels of automation (particularly notifying customers of their potential eligibility) were largely met with approval, while higher levels, which entailed less customer input and more autonomous government involvement, tended to raise more concerns.

A number of good practice points for maximising the acceptability of a more automated system emerged. These ranged from the rapid processing and delivery of claims to providing an opportunity for customers to opt out of receiving Pension Credit.

Background and research objectives

At present, older people have to actively claim Pension Credit, resulting in less than complete take up. Using data to automate elements of the process of awarding Pension Credit is a possibility that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is considering in order to address this issue. The term automation, as used in this study, refers to the ways in which the instigation of Pension Credit claims could be switched away from the individual to the Government, making use of data available to the Department to estimate people's entitlement. Higher levels of automation would demand very little input from the customer, giving the Government the lion's share of input into the process of targeting, assessing, awarding and paying customers.

DWP commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) to undertake a study exploring older people's attitudes to the principle of automatic awards with a view to providing the customer context to feed into the Department's wider consideration of the viability of automation.

Research design

This study comprised 24 in-depth interviews with people aged 60 and over, who were either in receipt of Pension Credit or not in receipt, but potentially eligible. Individuals were purposively selected from the Family Resource Survey (FRS) based on four key criteria: age, gender, whether they claim Pension Credit or did not claim it but are eligible to do so, and geographical region. The use of purposive sampling in this way enabled the study to achieve diversity among sample members, as opposed to building a statistically representative sample. This furthered the goal of this qualitative study, which was to understand, in depth, the range of views around automation.

The interview topic guide was developed in partnership with DWP. In addition to the key areas to be covered, it included the use of four reflective vignettes which enabled respondents to comment on different possible automation scenarios located at higher and lower levels of the automation spectrum.

Perceived strengths of an automated Pension Credit system

Respondents identified three particular strengths of a more automated system.

Greater awareness of eligibility

Informing customers of their potential eligibility was seen as a positive step that could:

- encourage take-up by increasing awareness of Pension Credit;
- encourage take-up among those who may wrongly perceive themselves to be ineligible; and
- promote early take-up, avoiding periods of unnecessary hardship before a claim is made.

Overcoming stigma in applying

Respondents across the sample raised the issue of stigma and described feeling like they were 'begging' when making a claim for Pension Credit. For these respondents, an automated system in which individuals, rather than having to ask for Pension Credit, were made aware of their eligibility and encouraged to apply would help to reduce stigma.

Convenience

Automation was perceived to make the process of claiming Pension Credit more convenient in two ways: by providing support with the application process and speeding it up:

- **Making an application:** Some recipients and non-recipients of Pension Credit found application forms in general to be complex and confusing. Specific fears were raised about filling them out incorrectly and, consequently, being accused of fraud and/or having to pay money back. Physical barriers to completing forms, such as health conditions, were also identified. An automated system that offered some support with making an application was welcomed, although the desired level of support depended on the individual.
- **A quicker process:** Automation was thought to potentially speed up the process of applying for Pension Credit by alerting people to their eligibility and informing them how to apply.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the respondents who were not currently in receipt of Pension Credit, but potentially eligible, might be more likely to take up Pension Credit if an automated system was in place because the barriers to take up, outlined above, would be reduced.

Concerns around automation and possible ways of addressing these

Respondents identified a number of concerns around automation relating to both the individual and the wider benefits system. It is important to emphasise that these concerns were not seen to be insurmountable.

The nature of the information held by the Government and its use

This set of concerns focused on the issue of privacy, data security and the accuracy of the administrative data that could be used in the process of automation.

Privacy

Questions around privacy centred on what kind of personal information the Government has access to about an individual and the types of information that would be used. Some respondents were acutely concerned about government use of personal information, while others, though wary, had little objection to the Government using this data if it was to the benefit of the individual. In some cases respondents had no objection to the Government holding and using personal data.

While government transparency about the use of personal information was identified as a solution to these concerns, there was some opposition in principle to the use of personal information for the purpose of automation.

Data security

Concerns around this issue focused on the possibility of the Government losing personal information needed to make the process of automation work. When prompted, some respondents also expressed concern around who the Government would share personal information with in any given process of automation and how this would occur. Possible ways to address these issues included: ensuring personal information is held securely; not disclosing sensitive information (such as bank account details) in letters; and being transparent about what information is shared and why.

Accuracy of the information used

Respondents expressed concerns that inaccuracies in the administrative data held by government could result in individuals not being informed of their right to Pension Credit or customers being under or overpaid. Ways of addressing these issues included requiring customers to have some input into the information used during the application stage. At the stage where errors are detected, some respondents felt that where the Government has made an assessment without any input from the customer, it should make good any underpayments made and, in the case of overpayments, not ask the customer to pay back any extra money paid to them in error.

The nature of the information given to claimants

Respondents expressed concern about how well informed they would be kept of their Pension Credit entitlement within any given automated system. It was important to some respondents to have information on the level of their entitlement, how this assessment was calculated and what effect it may have on any other benefits that they may receive to enable them to reach an informed decision around whether to accept Pension Credit and to enable them to challenge the assessment if they wish.

Choice and control over the claims process

Concerns were also raised around the detrimental effect that some forms of automation may have on the right of an individual to determine their own financial circumstances and how these could undermine the independence and dignity of a person in their senior years. More specifically, automation was thought to have a potential impact on the following:

- the opportunity for the individual to provide information about their own lives to the Government;
- the ability of the individual to contest the decisions made by the Government (e.g. payment levels); and
- the right of the individual to opt out of being paid Pension Credit.

Respondents felt that the Government should be transparent in its communication around automated awards; that it should provide both informal and formal channels through which individuals could contest claims and, finally, that an option to refuse Pension Credit should be built into any automated award system.

Fraud

Fraud being perpetrated against individuals and the benefits system as a whole was raised as a concern relating to automation, particularly in relation to higher levels of automation that require limited input from the customer. Many of the solutions related to tackling fraud against the individual were raised when respondents discussed the issue of data security. Where fraud to the benefits system was concerned, the solutions posited included the Government asking for verification from customers that the data was correct. Some respondents felt that the Government should make it clear that any overpayments made would have to be paid back by claimants to deter fraudulent behaviour and to encourage claimants to discuss changes in circumstances.

Resource issues for the Government

Concerns were raised that automation would increase the administrative burden on government and these costs would be translated into higher levels of tax. There were also concerns around the cost implications of tackling fraud and the anticipated increase in take up of Pension Credit. Respondents felt that costs could be minimised if the administrative data was solely used to award payments (as opposed to sending out pre-populated forms or letters) or if the letters sent out are targeted to only those that are thought to be eligible. Respondents also felt that money could be saved if the Government only pre-completed forms for customers that required special help (e.g. disabled customers or those that are very old).

Feasibility and mistrust of automation

A degree of scepticism emerged about whether automation could take place, particularly at higher levels of automation. The interviews also threw up some mistrust and a concern that automation was a way for the Government to elicit personal and private information from individuals. This was based on the argument that if the Government already had sufficient information on individuals to award entitlements, why, in certain forms of automation, would they be approaching potential customers for more information.

Promoting automation of Pension Credit

Three key ingredients were identified by respondents as central to effectively promoting an automated Pension Credit application process:

- giving a clear message to ensure that any new system is easy to understand;
- ensuring that the tone of the publicity material promotes Pension Credit as an **entitlement**;
- placing emphasis on the right of the individual to make a choice about taking up Pension Credit or not.

Respondents felt that a range of delivery methods should be used to give maximum coverage to this message, including advertising in a range of media, promotion via third-party agencies and targeted mail-outs.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and context

NatCen was commissioned by the DWP to explore older people's attitudes to the principle of automatic awards of Pension Credit. At present, older people have to actively claim Pension Credit in order to receive it, resulting in less than complete take up. DWP is looking at potential ways of using data to automate elements of the process of awarding Pension Credit as a way of improving take-up. This study explores older people's views on the pros and cons of automation, as well as how they feel about the general principle of automation and the possible processes that could facilitate it. A secondary aim of the study was to shed light, where possible, on the implications for the automation of other income-related benefits such as Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB). It is important to reiterate here that this study focuses exclusively on people's attitudes to automation. It does not consider the wide range of other factors which could determine the fundamental viability of the approach.

1.2 The concept of automation

The term automation is employed in this report to indicate the switching of the instigation of the Pension Credit claims process away from the individual to the Government. It should be emphasised that there is no single way in which automation could occur. Rather, it may be helpful to envisage ways of automating the claims process as a spectrum that embodies different combinations of government and individual input. At the lowest end of the spectrum, automation may simply involve the Government targeting information and marketing around Pension Credit more efficiently so that individuals who may be eligible for the benefit could be automatically notified of their entitlement, giving them the choice to apply for the benefit or not. At the highest end of the spectrum, automation could entail the Government having the lion's share of input into the claims process so that an individual is targeted, assessed, awarded and paid without having very much input into the process itself. In between both extremes, of course, there could be different degrees of automation. For example, the Government could

complete a claims form on behalf of an individual, using routine administrative data and allow the individual to have some input into the process in terms of deciding whether to press ahead with the claim and/or checking the accuracy of the information used to complete a form (please see the discussion on the reflective vignettes in Section 1.4). Regardless of which end of the spectrum is being discussed, automation currently represents a hypothetical scenario.

1.3 Research aims and objectives

This study explored the views of older people (aged 60 and over) on the principle of automatic awards of Pension Credit. In doing so, the study sought to understand the attitudes and reactions of older people to the idea of automatic awards, as well as identifying the facilitators and potential barriers to introducing automation. This aim was framed by the following study objectives:

- to explore older people's understanding of automated awards;
- to explore older people's attitudes to the idea of shifting the onus of initiating a claim to the Government, and the principle of using personal information to deliver automated awards; and
- to identify older people's perspectives on the implementation of automated awards.

1.4 Overview of the study design

The study comprised 24 in-depth interviews with people aged 60 and over, who were either in receipt of Pension Credit, or not in receipt but potentially eligible. The sample was derived from the 2006/07 FRS. The FRS is a survey that is funded by the Department and conducted by NatCen. Individuals were selected based on four key criteria; these are presented in the table below along with the final sample profile. As Table 1.1 indicates, the study managed to capture a diversity of respondents within each of the key criteria.¹

¹ The only possible exception to this would be the geographical area, where those from East Anglia were marginally under-represented in the sample. This may reflect the challenges in engaging respondents in this region as well as the tight timeframe for the study, which restricted further efforts to engage respondents from this area.

Table 1.1 Sample profile

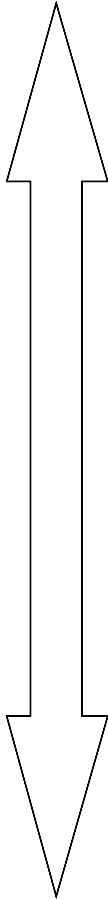
Key criteria	Groups	Number of respondents
Age	60-69	14
	70+	10
Gender	Male	10
	Female	14
Whether respondent claims Pension Credit or not ¹	Claims Pensions Credit	11
	Does not claim Pension Credit but is potentially eligible	13
Geographical region	London	11
	Midlands	8
	East Anglia	5

¹ The FRS identified respondents who were receiving Pension Credit. A screener question was used to ascertain which individuals in the FRS sample were potentially eligible for, but not receiving, Pension Credit. The screener did not draw on the actual FRS definition of eligibility, nor did it take into account levels of personal savings as this was felt to be too complex a screening process. It is therefore likely that those who were not in receipt of Pension Credit, included respondents who were eligible but not claiming, and those that were not eligible because of savings. As such, the screener provided an estimate of the people who were in the vicinity of eligibility but not claiming. Please consult Appendix A for a copy of the screener question.

Interviews lasted approximately an hour and took place in the respondent's own home. All of the interviews were digitally recorded with the respondents' consent and the respondents were given £25 to thank them for their time. The interviews were carried out in a sensitive and careful manner, with an emphasis being placed on informed consent throughout the encounter. The interviews were usually conducted on a one-to-one basis, although, on occasion, an interviewee's partner was also present.

The interviews were carried out using a topic guide developed in consultation with DWP (see Appendix B). The topic guide set out key areas for the interviews to cover and ensured consistency across the interviews, while also enabling the researcher to flexibly explore the range of issues raised in different interviews and to respond and follow up on new subject areas raised by respondents. The topic guide ensured that respondents were able to comment both on the process of automation in general and on the appropriateness of different possible levels of automation (please see the discussion in Section 1.2 around the spectrum of ways in which automation could occur). Four reflective vignettes offered to respondents during the course of the interviews were used as hypothetical examples to aid understanding and discussion of the different levels of automation, with each vignette presenting a scenario located at a different point in the automation continuum. The vignettes, along with their position in the automation continuum, are summarised in Table 1.2 (please consult Appendix C for a fuller description of the vignettes).

Table 1.2 A summary of the vignettes used

Hypothetical level of automation	Vignette name	Summary of vignette
 <p>Lower levels of automation</p>	1. Estimate of entitlement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer is informed automatically by the Government of eligibility and estimate of entitlement Customer sent an application form and invited to apply
	2. Pre-populated forms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer is informed automatically by the Government of eligibility and estimate of entitlement Customer also informed how this entitlement is calculated The Government completes a Pension Credit form on behalf of the customer based on the administrative data available Customer is sent the pre-populated form and asked to check details and give consent
	3. Payment trial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer is informed automatically by the Government of eligibility and estimate of entitlement Customer asked to give consent to receive benefits and provide bank details Payments are provided for a trial period of three months, after which customer is asked whether they want to continue to receive Pension Credit and to confirm whether the information used by the Government to make the initial award is correct Payments continue or stop based on consent and eligibility
	4. Full automatic payment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer informed of eligibility and estimate of entitlement Entitlement paid directly to the customer without the need to complete an application form at all
Higher levels of automation		

It is worth noting here that this study was not about measuring and quantifying attitudes towards automation. Rather, as a qualitative piece of work, it sought to explore and understand views around this issue in depth. This focus is reflected in the decisions around the sample size, the use of purposive sampling (which sought to achieve diversity among sample members rather than to build a statistically representative sample) and the method of questioning used – all of which are designed to explore issues in depth and within an individual context, rather than to generate data that can be analysed numerically.

1.5 Structure of the report

Chapter 2 discusses respondents' views on the strengths of automation. **Chapter 3** moves on to discuss some of the concerns that respondents had with regards to automation and some of the ways in which they felt these concerns could be addressed. **Chapter 4** discusses ways in which respondents felt that automation could be promoted among people in their age group. The report concludes with **Chapter 5** which identifies the key findings, cross-cutting issues and potential implications of the research.

Verbatim quotations and case studies are used to illustrate the findings. They are labelled to show the respondent's gender, whether they are in receipt of Pension Credit and their age group. Quotes are drawn from across the sample. The report deliberately avoids giving numerical findings, since, as mentioned earlier, qualitative research cannot support numerical analysis.

2 Perceived strengths of an automated Pension Credit system

2.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, the aim of this study was to explore respondents' perceptions of what automation of the Pension Credit system would mean and to investigate the perceived advantages and disadvantages of different levels of automation. To this end, respondents were introduced to the concept of automation in terms of the Government taking a lead in initiating the Pension Credit application process by informing customers of their potential eligibility and encouraging them to apply. In addition, as mentioned in Chapter 1, a series of four reflective vignettes that represented different levels of automation were used to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the respondents' views in relation to the specific ways in which automation could work. This chapter explores the strengths of an automated system identified by respondents. Three areas in particular were identified as potential strengths of a more automated system. These were:

- greater awareness of eligibility;
- reduced stigma in applying; and
- convenience.

Each of these areas is discussed in turn here, followed by a discussion of the possible impact on the take up of Pension Credit. The issues of greater awareness of eligibility and reduced stigma in applying were largely raised spontaneously by respondents. The issue of convenience was raised in response to the possible forms of automation presented to respondents in the vignettes, discussed further in Section 2.4.

2.2 Awareness of eligibility

Respondents who were in receipt of Pension Credit at the time of interview described how they first became aware of their eligibility for Pension Credit from a wide range of information sources. These sources included advertisements in newspapers and on television, word-of-mouth from family and friends, advice from charities, hospital staff and sheltered accommodation staff. In some cases, respondents had been invited to claim when they reached 60 or 65 because they had previously been on working-age benefits such as Income Support (IS) or Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). For those not in receipt of Pension Credit, levels of awareness of Pension Credit varied. In some cases, respondents had applied and been turned down because they were not eligible. In other cases, respondents perceived themselves to be ineligible so had not applied or were unaware of Pension Credit². These findings are supported by previous research that has identified perceived ineligibility as a primary barrier to take up of Pension Credit (DWP, 2006).

In this context, respondents were asked in broad terms how they would feel if the Government took the lead in initiating a claim for Pension Credit by identifying potentially eligible customers and then notifying them of their eligibility and encouraging them to apply. This notification of eligibility was seen to be a particular strength of an automated system which was almost unanimously agreed on by respondents. The positive impact of notification is illustrated in the following quote:

'The fact that you feel you're not entitled, you just don't even try. So if somebody said, 'well you might be entitled, here's the phone number... might encourage a lot more people to do it.'

(Female, receives Pension Credit, 60-69 age group)

It was felt that notification would encourage take-up among those people who were unaware of Pension Credit, as well as among those who perceived themselves to be ineligible. Notification would also ensure that older people received Pension Credit as soon as they were eligible, making the process more timely and avoiding periods of unnecessary hardship before a claim for Pension Credit was made. The following case-study illustrates this issue:

² As referred to in Chapter 1, respondents who were not in receipt of Pension Credit were screened on income in order to ensure the study included people who were potentially eligible for Pension Credit but not receiving it. The screener did not draw on the actual FRS definition of eligibility, nor did it take into account levels of personal savings as this was felt to be too complex a screening process. It is therefore likely that those who were not in receipt of Pension Credit included respondents who were eligible but not claiming, and those that were not eligible because of savings. As such, the screener provided an estimate of the people who were in the vicinity of eligibility but not claiming. Please consult Appendix A for a copy of the screener question.

Alan is 62 years old and was made redundant in 2001 after working for the same employer for 32 years. While looking for work he lived on money he received from his redundancy, but by the time he turned 60 this money had run out and he was living on a small work pension of £260 a month. Two months after his 60th birthday his daughter saw an advert in the paper for Pension Credit and made an enquiry on his behalf. With the help of his daughter he made an application over the phone, and has received Pension Credit ever since. Alan would welcome a system that would have made him aware of his eligibility for Pension Credit from his 60th birthday. He described the two months living on his work pension after he turned 60 as a period that put him under a lot of strain, and if he had been told about his eligibility for Pension Credit earlier, this strain could have been avoided.

(Male, receives Pension Credit, 60-69 age group)

Views varied about whether notification should also provide an estimate of how much Pension Credit an individual may be entitled to. In general, simply being notified about possible eligibility was felt to be sufficient and one respondent expressed the view that it would be better not to include an estimate of the amount in case this raised hopes for a certain level of Pension Credit which were later not met. However, other respondents felt that providing an estimate of the amount of entitlement (including how this amount was calculated) would be valuable, enabling them to verify whether they thought the amount was correct and helping them make an informed decision about whether to apply. For those respondents who were also receiving other benefits, including HB and CTB, it was important that any notification made it clear how other benefits may be affected by a Pension Credit claim.

While the predominant view was that being informed of eligibility was a key strength of an automated system of Pension Credit, an alternative view was that this was unnecessary. This was associated with a perception that levels of awareness of Pension Credit were already high and that the current system was working adequately. The main concern here was cost; there was a perception that automatically informing people of their eligibility would be prohibitively costly, because of the administrative costs involved in notifying potentially eligible customers.

All four vignettes presented to respondents as possible scenarios for automation included this element of notification of eligibility. Vignette one (at the lower end of the automation spectrum) described a scenario in which customers were notified of their potential eligibility and encouraged to apply. However, this scenario stopped short of pre-populating an application form or paying Pension Credit automatically. For some respondents this was as far as they wanted an automated system of Pension Credit to go, because they felt it was sufficient to remove the barriers presented by a lack of awareness and perceived ineligibility.

For others however, a higher level of automation was felt to be preferable to provide help with making the application itself. These preferences will be discussed in later sections.

2.3 Overcoming the stigma of applying

Previous research has documented a range of factors that prevent people from claiming the benefits they are entitled to. The concept of 'perceived ineligibility' discussed in Section 2.2 was found to be a key barrier, but other barriers have also been identified, including perceived stigma attached to claiming benefits (Costigan, 1999), (DWP, 2006), (DWP, 2007). This issue of stigma was raised by respondents in this study and formulated in terms of feeling 'embarrassed' and feeling that in making an application for Pension Credit they were 'scrounging' or 'begging'. While feelings like these were not shared by all respondents, those who did express these views were found across all sub groups within the sample.

Where such concerns were raised, it was felt that an automated system in which people were made aware of their eligibility and encouraged to apply would help to reduce this stigma. In particular, it was felt that being offered, rather than having to ask for, Pension Credit would make a difference to how people felt about taking it up. Respondents felt that being offered Pension Credit emphasised that it was an entitlement, and this was an important factor in encouraging take-up. Furthermore, respondents might feel less reluctant about claiming Pension Credit if they knew they were not going to be turned down, thereby helping them feel less embarrassed and more confident about applying. In particular, automation could potentially engender a feeling of being respected because it would allow individuals to avoid feeling like they were 'begging' for help. Automation was therefore seen to represent the Government's attempt to reach out to help individuals by making their entitlement to Pension Credit known to them. A case study illustrates these views:

Ann is in her 70s and living alone. Although she has had leaflets through her door about Pension Credit she hasn't considered applying because she thinks she's probably not eligible. She prefers to steer clear of bureaucracy and describes how she would find it difficult asking for more money because it would be like admitting that she didn't have enough to live on. However, Ann says that she would feel differently if she received a letter informing her of her entitlement: *'If they wrote on the day I got my pension and said "Well, you're going to be below the line, so...you will get a supplementary... credit, sort of automatically really, [that would be] much better, because you wouldn't feel you're begging, you'd feel it's a right..."'*

(Female, not in receipt of Pension Credit, 70+ age group)

Interestingly, respondents who raised the stigma of applying for benefits as an issue did not have a consistent preference for how an automated system of Pension Credit should operate. It was unanimously felt that being directly informed of eligibility was important in reducing stigma. Beyond this point, views varied on the extent of automation felt to be desirable. While some felt that a fully automated system requiring very little involvement from the individual would be preferable, because it took the responsibility to apply completely away from the individual, others felt simply being informed of their eligibility was sufficient and enough to encourage take-up by themselves and other people. It is important to note here that while some level of automation was felt to be a positive step forward, it was also argued that it would be preferable to have a basic State Pension at a sufficient level to avoid the need for Pension Credit completely.

2.4 Convenience

2.4.1 Making an application

A key issue raised by all respondents was the nature of the application process itself. Respondents currently in receipt of Pension Credit had applied in a variety of ways. Methods included applying over the phone, being invited to transfer from working age benefits at 60 or 65, filling out application forms themselves, and receiving help from face-to-face home visits or office appointments. Previous research has found that filling out application forms in general can deter people from claiming benefits they are entitled to (DWP, 2007), and this issue was also raised in this study. Respondents described finding application forms complex and confusing and, in particular, fears were raised about filling them out incorrectly and being accused of benefit fraud and/or having to pay money back as a result. These concerns were raised with regards to all forms of benefits, and not specifically in relation to the Pension Credit application process. Where these concerns were raised, respondents' actual experiences of claiming Pension Credit did not necessarily confirm their fears and indeed, in some cases, the experience of claiming Pension Credit was much more positive than they had anticipated. However, respondents also cited negative experiences of overpayment and delays in receiving Pension Credit because of completing forms incorrectly.

Alongside these concerns, respondents also raised the issue of physical barriers to completing application forms, including the challenges posed by disabilities and health conditions. Views of this kind were expressed by both those currently in receipt and those currently not receiving Pension Credit, and by both younger and older pensioners.

In this context, an automated system that offered some degree of assistance with filling out application forms was generally welcomed. Views on the nature and level of this support differed. To illustrate the complexity of these views, outlined below are responses to the four vignettes which offered varying levels of support with making an application for Pension Credit:

Estimate of entitlement

This vignette involved potentially eligible individuals being sent an estimate of their entitlement and an application form in the post, and being invited to apply. Of the four vignettes, this offered the least support with completing an application. Respondents who preferred this vignette were generally those who felt comfortable completing the application form themselves, but valued being made aware of their potential eligibility as discussed in Section 2.2. In general, these were respondents who preferred to provide information about their circumstances themselves, rather than have central government administrative records used for this purpose. This preference was related to concerns around fraud, accuracy of information used, and privacy, all of which are discussed further in Chapter 3.

For others, however, the possible form of automation contained in this vignette did not provide enough support with making an application and concerns were raised that some individuals would not apply if they had to complete the form themselves. One suggested way to improve this possible model of automation was through providing information in the letter on how to access help with the application process if needed. Suggestions for how this could be done included providing a phone number to call for help (mirroring the current telephone-based application process) or signposting to organisations like Citizens' Advice Bureau. For those who preferred this vignette, it was felt to be cost effective because extra support and resources would only be targeted at those who needed them.

Pre-populated application forms

This vignette involved eligible individuals being sent a pre-populated application form, completed on their behalf using information drawn from government administrative records. This possible form of automation was welcomed by those who found filling in application forms particularly difficult because the forms would already be completed.

However, this vignette also triggered a number of concerns which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. These included questions about where the data used to pre-populate the forms came from and the extent to which this data was accurate (related to the potential for over or under payment based on inaccurate data). Questions were also raised over data security and potential identity theft if pre-populated forms went to the wrong address or went missing. It was also felt by some that the form of automation outlined in this vignette would be more open to fraud because there would be less responsibility on the individual to provide accurate information on their circumstances. To address some of these concerns, it was felt that an important feature of this possible form of automation would be the facility to modify any incorrect details, either by post or by phone, to ensure that

information was accurate and up-to-date. Forms would need to be clear and easy to understand for this purpose. Information on where information was drawn from was also felt to be important to allay concerns about privacy:

'I would just worry about where the actual information had originated from...Then if it was explained and it was very transparent that would probably ease the fears and you would probably be more ready to accept it, but it would have to be in simple language.'

(Male, in receipt of Pension Credit, 60-69 age group)

Payment trial

This vignette offered individuals a trial payment period of three months based on an estimate of their entitlement drawn from administrative records. After three months, customers would be invited to complete an application for Pension Credit itself. If there had been an overpayment as a result of inaccurate information in the three month trial period, customers would not be required to pay this back. The benefits of this possible form of automation were felt to be that potential recipients would be paid immediately, avoiding delays while a claim was being processed. The three month trial period would also give the individual time to double check the accuracy of the information the claim was based on without fear that any overpayment would have to be paid back.

Concerns were raised that the form of automation contained in this vignette was confusing and that people would struggle if they received Pension Credit for three months and then had it taken away because they were found to be ineligible after all:

'I'd like to know I was going to get Pension Credit, not worry in three months time that I'm going to have less in my pocket than what I've got already. No, I wouldn't like that.'

(Female, in receipt of Pension Credit, 60-69 age group)

There was a strong feeling among some respondents that they were either eligible or they were not, and they disliked the uncertainty that a three month trial period introduced. An additional concern was the extra cost involved for the Government if they were paying Pension Credit for three months to people who were not eligible.

Full automatic payment

This final vignette involved the individual being informed of their eligibility for Pension Credit, and being paid this entitlement automatically without the need to complete an application form. The strength of this possible form of automation was felt to be in its simplicity, particularly because the need to complete an application form was completely removed and minimal input

from the customer was required. Where concerns about this vignette were voiced, these tended to focus on the potential for fraud and the possibility that inaccurate data would be used to award Pension Credit, potentially resulting in the individual being held responsible for overpayment even though they did not have any input into the application process. Similarly, respondents were concerned that an individual could be incorrectly assessed as not eligible for Pension Credit and would find it difficult to challenge this because they would not be aware of how the assessment had been made. Respondents voiced a certain amount of scepticism that a full automatic process could be put in place, and that the individual would still need to be involved to inform the Government of changes in circumstances and to ensure that the information that the claims were based on was correct.

In addition to the discussion of the possible forms of automation described above, there was some preference for a Pension Credit process that involved a home visit. This was felt to be an effective way of reaching people who could not complete application forms without help and/or would be reluctant to divulge private information over the phone. It was also felt to be preferable to an office appointment for those who were less mobile. Although this was the preferred option for some, there was also an acknowledgement that this could be costly. It is important to note here that a home visit service is already offered to customers who find it difficult to complete an application for Pension Credit, but there was limited awareness of this among respondents.

2.4.2 A quicker process

Respondents felt that automation would speed up the process of applying for and being awarded Pension Credit by alerting people to their eligibility and informing them how to apply. It was also felt that it would ensure there were fewer delays caused by incorrectly completed applications, particularly if forms were pre-populated, or if individuals had accessed support to complete their application.

The view that automation would lead to a quicker application process was perceived to be a particular advantage by respondents who had experienced delays when applying for Pension Credit themselves. In one case, for example, a couple's application went missing resulting in delays of four months. In another case, a couple delayed applying for Pension Credit for two years because they did not have a record of the National Insurance number they needed for the application (an issue that was quickly resolved when they finally did make their application). In addition to this perception that automation would resolve these issues, another benefit identified by respondents was that an automated system would ensure that people who were not eligible for Pension Credit did not waste their time making an application.

2.5 Take-up

An important consideration to explore when assessing the potential implications of an automatic Pension Credit system is the possible impact on take-up. The evidence suggests that the respondents who were not currently in receipt of Pension Credit, but potentially eligible, may be more likely to take-up Pension Credit if an automated system was in place because the barriers to take-up outlined above would be reduced. This was the case, for example, where respondents had not applied because they were unaware of Pension Credit, or perceived themselves to be ineligible, and respondents expressed a willingness to apply if they were informed in this way. Similarly, although not presented as the primary barrier to take-up, issues of stigma attached to claiming Pension Credit were felt to be reduced by a system that offered Pension Credit as opposed to a system that required the individual to seek it out and this again was felt to encourage take-up. Indeed, none of the respondents who were potentially eligible, but not in receipt of Pension Credit, expressed a conviction that they would not apply for Pension Credit in any circumstances, suggesting a system that is able to remove some of these barriers could have a positive impact on take-up. It should be noted however, that there may be customers who would not claim Pension Credit regardless of the system in place whose views were not captured in this study because they may be less likely to engage in research on this subject.

2.6 Summary

In summary, an automated Pension Credit application process was perceived by respondents to have three main strengths:

- raising greater awareness of eligibility and, therefore, potentially improving the take-up of Pension Credit;
- reduction in the stigma of applying by accentuating the right of the individual to claim Pension Credit and reducing the perceived stigma associated with looking for financial help themselves; and
- greater convenience in terms of speeding up the application process and making the application process easier.

3 Concerns around automation and possible ways of addressing these

3.1 Introduction

Concerns around automation revolved around six key issues, some of which have already been touched upon in the last chapter. These were:

- the information held and used by the Government;
- the nature of the information given to customers;
- choice and control over the claims process;
- the potential for fraud to occur within the process of automation;
- the resource implications for the Government (and taxpayer) of implementing automation; and
- the feasibility of operationalising automation.

All of the issues listed above were raised spontaneously by respondents during the course of the interviews, except one particular aspect of the discussion around how the information is held and used by the Government. This aspect related to the possible sharing of information between central government and other bodies (e.g. local government) within any given form of automation; this was an issue that was often prompted for during the discussions (please see Section 3.2.2 for a further discussion of this point).

Each of the above issues will be examined in detail in the sections to follow.

3.2 The nature of the information held by the Government and its use

Discussions around automation, particularly in relation to the possible forms of automation outlined in vignettes two through to four (i.e. the pre-populated forms, the payment trial scenario and the full automated payment scenario), generated anxiety among respondents around the nature of the information held by the Government and how it is used. These concerns related to privacy, data security and the accuracy of the information used by the Government to assess an individual's claim. Each of these concerns, as well as the possible solutions posited by respondents, will be dealt with in the following sections.

3.2.1 Privacy

Concerns around privacy centred on issues relating to the type of information the Government would use to initiate the process of automatic awards and how it could have access to this information. Privacy was not a concern specific to any particular sub-group in the sample.

In this study, it is possible to identify three different types of respondents in terms of their attitudes towards privacy. In the first instance, there were respondents who were acutely concerned about how the Government acquired and used personal information, and how this process potentially infringed on the privacy of an individual. There were other respondents who, though wary of the information held and used by the Government, saw the Government handling of personal data as a 'necessary evil' in contemporary society and who had very little objection to the Government using this data if it was for the benefit of the individual – for example, in the automation of the Pension Credit awards system. Finally, there were respondents who had no objection to the Government holding and using information on them. Generally, such respondents expressed the view that they had 'nothing to hide' and, therefore, no objection to the Government having access to their private data. The two latter groups were much happier with something resembling full automation, such as the payment trial scenario (vignette three) and the full automatic payment scenario (vignette four).

During the course of the interviews, the thought of the Government automating the award system based on the administrative data at its disposal also raised the spectre of what other information the Government holds on individuals. The view was often formulated in terms of the Government acting like 'Big Brother' in accessing, holding and using a wide variety of information pertaining to an individual, to the detriment of an individual's privacy. For example, concern was expressed at the thought that the Government could have access to customers' bank account details, such as savings levels and general account details. The excerpt below illustrates one such instance where a respondent raised these concerns around the Government use of administrative records to make an assessment.

'It all depends what they've got in the records doesn't it?...Is there a big satellite in the sky telling them I'm only living on me own and I've only got a pension from my work like, you know. Where would they get the other information from? I'm not opposed to the, the Big Brother idea but there's some things you have to keep personal, you know...Too much information... But if they're gonna go that far and know your personal circumstances without you telling them, what else do they know? You know, that's my only concern, you know what I mean?'

(Male, receives Pension Credit, 60-69 age group)

The issue of privacy was raised during the discussion of all four vignettes. However, privacy was particularly mentioned in relation to vignettes two through to four – i.e. the pre-populated forms, the payment trial and the full automatic payment scenarios. In relation to each of these vignettes, concerns were couched largely in terms of how the Government could have access to information that could enable it to assess and award Pension Credit to customers automatically. With regards to the provision of an estimate of entitlement (vignette one), respondents seemed to be less concerned about privacy largely because of the lower level of automation that this involved.

One way of addressing concerns around privacy was thought to be government transparency regarding the type and origin of the information used to automatically assess a claim. Conversely, it was also felt that the Government should not use routine administrative records to complete application forms on behalf of customers. This view was based on the argument that individuals should be allowed to volunteer information about themselves that could affect their claim and that the Government should not use routine administrative data in this way. However, as mentioned earlier, respondents were more comfortable with administrative data being used to identify potentially eligible recipients for Pension Credit.

To summarise, some participants did not perceive privacy to be an issue in relation to the possible use of administrative data. Among those who did feel privacy was at stake, some felt that transparency on the part of government could alleviate their concerns, while others were opposed in principle to such use of administrative data.

3.2.2 Data security

The idea of automation raised more practical concerns about data security. These stemmed from an acknowledgement that the process of automation would necessitate government access to personal information. These concerns were not specific to any one group within the sample or particular to any one of the vignettes discussed.

The concerns around data security were twofold: on one level, respondents were wary of the Government losing personal and sensitive information about customers and, on another level, respondents were concerned about how personal data was shared. Where the former is concerned, respondents did not generally specify at

what stage in the process of automation they feared that data would be lost – although, as mentioned in Section 2.4.1, there was some anxiety that, in attempting to inform individuals of their claim, the Government could send letters and forms containing personal information to the wrong address. With regards to the latter, respondents expressed concern around who the Government shared information with and how the information was shared between government departments and between central and local government. The excerpt below highlights one respondent's ambivalence about how information is shared between central and local government and fear that the information could fall into the wrong hands.

'Again if the local council were doing it, it would depend how it was being done, and how many people are involved in it, which you wouldn't know because of bureaucracy, it's behind the wall, bureaucracy if you like... Which becomes them and us to a degree, but it would depend what information and why it was being used, for what reason. If it was being used, as it is in some cases where they sell your name on and you get a load of crap through the door, sorry no, but if it was going to be for your benefit i.e. you are going to be able to get better state pensions or better information about obtaining benefits yes fine.'

(Male, receives Pension Credit, 60-69 age group)

As mentioned in Section 3.1, the concerns around how the Government shares information were often not raised spontaneously by respondents, but in response to prompts during the course of the interviews. This indicates that this issue was not something that was initially uppermost in the minds of respondents during the discussions around automation, but this does not necessarily mean that it was not important to the respondents. The need for prompting could simply indicate that the concept is one which may not be obvious to the lay person at the outset of the discussion.

In response to the concerns around data security, the view emerged that the Government should ensure that personal information about customers is held securely and that personal details, such as bank account details, should not be disclosed in letters sent to customers, lest these fall into wrong hands. Some respondents also felt that the Government should restrict the sharing of personal information. Implicit in this concern was a feeling that personal information should not be shared with the private sector and, more explicitly, that the sharing of information between government departments should be restricted. (This suggests that respondents were not aware of the nature and extent of current data sharing arrangements between departments.) Where information is shared, some respondents felt that customers should also be made aware of what information is shared and why.

However, it must be noted that data sharing was not an issue for all of the respondents. There were respondents who did not object to the Government sharing data, particularly among different departments, if this meant that an individual received what they were entitled to. Such respondents tended to favour

something resembling full automation, as represented in vignettes three (the payment trial scenario) and four (the full automatic payment scenario).

It is difficult to arrive at a definitive conclusion from the above discussion about whether respondents for whom data security was of particular concern felt that the possible benefits of automation would offset any risks associated with its possible introduction. What can be said is that, firstly, concerns around data security grew as participants discussed higher levels of automation – particularly the possible forms of automation presented in vignettes two, three and four. Secondly, the fact that respondents endeavoured to posit solutions to this issue indicates that it was not seen to be insurmountable by many respondents.

3.2.3 Accuracy of the information used by the Government to assess claims

As briefly mentioned in Section 2.4.1, the question of the accuracy of information was raised as an issue throughout the discussion of the different vignettes. This is because any form of automaticity, by its very nature, entails the Government drawing on its administrative records to, at the very least, inform customers of their entitlement. Possible inaccuracies that respondents were concerned about included, for example, the administrative data being out of date and, therefore, unable to take into account the dynamic changes in an individual's life and circumstances (e.g. coming into inheritance money).

Although the issue of accuracy was common to the discussion of all the different levels of automation, this issue became of particular concern in relation to possible forms of automation that did not give customers the opportunity to redress any inaccuracies in the information that was used to assess their claim. As such, accuracy cropped up as an issue particularly, though not exclusively, where vignette four was concerned (the full automatic payment scenario). In this scenario, the Government simply informs the customer of their entitlement and awards them accordingly without informing them how this assessment was calculated and without giving them any opportunity to query, contest and generally have an input into the information used to make this assessment.

The accuracy of the data was seen by respondents to have a potentially deleterious effect on the claims process in one of two ways:

- firstly, respondents felt that the Government could fail to inform some individuals of their right to Pension Credit due to possible inaccuracies in the administrative data that they may have on the individual; and
- secondly, that, even where an individual has been earmarked to receive Pension Credit, they may not receive the correct payments that they were entitled to.

On one level, concerns around not receiving the correct payments revolved around an individual being underpaid because of the inaccuracies in the Government's administrative data. For the respondents who felt this, it was clear that, although

automation had the potential to ensure that those who were eligible for Pension Credit would receive it, receiving some form of payment from the Government was not an adequate substitute for receiving the full payment that an individual was entitled to. On another level, this concern related to an individual being overpaid and the attendant fear that an individual may have to pay back the Government for a mistake that they had not made. The anxiety around this is captured in one respondent's account below.

'I think if you've made a mistake receiving £5, £10 or £100 or whatever, I think the government should let them keep it because it was the government's fault... That would be the disadvantage if they haven't calculated it properly and that pensioner gets extra money and all of a sudden they get this letter through the post saying Dear Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms whatever, we have given you too much and we are asking for it back.'

(Female, non-receipt of Pension Credit, 60-69 age group)

It is worth noting here that respondents who had in the past been asked to pay back their Pension Credit due to an overpayment being made sometimes experienced this as a withdrawal of their entitlement and, accompanying this, there was a feeling that they were perceived to be trying to defraud the benefits system.

Additional concerns around overpayment were raised when respondents discussed the payment trial scenario (vignette three). Within this scenario, potential customers would have their payments reduced or ceased altogether if the information they provided after the three month trial period indicated that they were actually eligible for less or nothing at all. As mentioned in Section 2.4.1, the view emerged from the interviews that it was unfair for the Government to pursue either of these options because it would destabilise the financial situation of the customer, who would have grown accustomed to these payments and whose budget may, subsequently, be dependent on them.

Anxiety around the level of payment received was shared by all of the groups of individuals in the interviews. However, this issue was of particular concern for individuals belonging to the 60-69 age group and to those who did not receive Pension Credit. It is difficult from the data to posit a definitive explanation for this. Factors may include the different levels of trust invested in the Government by the two age groups; the different levels of peer and family support received by the different age groups which could affect the confidence to question government decisions; and differences in mental and physical health that could also have an impact on the drive and confidence needed to question government decisions. Similarly, those who have been exposed to the Pension Credit system and have experienced receiving payments may be more trusting of the Government's ability to get decisions correct and, therefore, more likely to accept that an individual would receive what they are entitled to in an automated award system.

In terms of addressing the accuracy of the data held by the Government, respondents offered a number of solutions that could be incorporated into an automated award system. At the application stage, the view emerged that an

individual should have some say in the accuracy of the information held by the Government. The responses given during the course of the interview can be clustered into the following three broad positions (these have been discussed in detail in Chapter 2):

- preference for the Government to send out a pre-populated form (vignette two) which enables customers to check the accuracy of the information used to assess their claim;
- at the lowest level of automation, where the customer is simply informed of their entitlement to Pension Credit (vignette one), preference for the customer to complete a form themselves so that they can be confident that the information the Government has is reflective of an individual's situation; and
- again, at the lowest level of automation (vignette one), preference for the Government to offer help over the telephone or even face-to-face to assist individuals to complete forms accurately.

However, it must be noted that there were also respondents who felt uncomfortable about completing or correcting forms for a number of reasons, including personal confidence, visual impairment problems and the effort needed to complete forms (see Section 2.4).

At the stage where errors in the levels of payments are detected, the view emerged that, where the Government has solely used its administrative data to assess a claim without any customer input, it should be held accountable for any mistakes made – regardless of whether these relate to overpayments or underpayments. In practical terms, this meant that a customer should not be asked to pay back any overpayments that have been made and, where underpayments are concerned, the Government should pay back any outstanding payments to the customer. It was felt that failure on the Government's behalf to redress any mistakes made would be tantamount to penalising an individual for the error made by the Government.

3.3 The nature of the information given to customers

Another concern around automation focused on how well informed the Government would keep customers of their entitlement. There were two main aspects to this concern:

- whether a customer would be informed of the payment that they would be entitled to; and
- how well informed the Government would keep them about how their assessment was worked out.

Concerns around these issues were raised, to varying degree, in relation to all of the vignettes. With regards to vignette one (the estimate of entitlement scenario), some participants, though appreciating the fact that they would be

informed of their entitlement, felt that this form of automation did not go far enough in informing them how their entitlement was calculated. In this respect, the pre-populated forms were seen more positively as customers would receive information around their entitlement and the way in which it was worked out. Vignette four (the full automatic payment scenario), by its very nature, entailed very little information being given to customers about their entitlement and how it was worked out. As such, this vignette was particularly criticised on these grounds by those respondents who were concerned about receiving information about their claims.

The provision of information about their claims was seen to be important by respondents for a number of reasons. These included:

- enabling customers to make an informed decision about whether or not to take-up Pension Credit;
- reassuring customers about the automation process they were entering into and how their financial situation may or may not change as a result of receiving Pension Credit;
- providing them with some control over the claim in terms of challenging the entitlement given; and
- enabling them to have some control over their own data.

Mirroring these reasons for needing information, respondents requested different types of information from the Government about their Pension Credit entitlement. At the very least, respondents generally felt that any possible form of automation should still entail the Government continuing to provide information about the customer's right to receive Pension Credit and the amount that they were entitled to. Respondents also expressed a need for the Government to be transparent about how the amount of the entitlement was calculated and the information used to perform this calculation – including where this information was derived from. This latter point was seen to go some way towards allaying concerns around how information is shared and used by the Government. Finally, the view emerged that the Government should also clearly inform customers about how receipt of Pension Credit could affect any other benefits that they are entitled to.

It is worth noting at this juncture that, as mentioned in Chapter 2, there were also some respondents who were anxious about receiving an excessive amount of information about their entitlement. Such respondents felt that, in the past, they had received too much information about their entitlement and found the pages of explanations both confusing and overwhelming. These respondents preferred either not to receive an overly detailed explanation of their entitlement or, if the information needed to be detailed, they expressed the need to have some form of assistance in helping to comprehend the information that is provided (e.g. over the phone).

3.4 Choice and control over the claims process

Several other sections of this report have already touched on the issue of choice and control over the claims process, which was a core theme of the research study. Central to this issue was a concern that automation could by-pass the right of an individual to determine their own financial circumstances and may run the risk of undermining the independence and dignity of a person in their senior years.

These broad concerns informed other more practical concerns around the possibility of automation marginalising the input of the individual in the claims process. Automation was thought to have a potential impact on the following issues:

- the opportunity for the individual to provide information about their own lives to the Government;
- the ability of the individual to contest the decisions made by the Government (e.g. payment levels); and
- the right of the individual to opt out of being paid Pension Credit.

The ability to opt out was seen as important by some respondents because it enabled those whose other benefits may be affected by Pension Credit to opt out. The option to opt out was also felt to safeguard personal independence and dignity. The importance of having a choice to opt out is highlighted in the excerpt below.

'Well, it is [important to have an opt-out option]. Because some people are very independent and they wouldn't...claim it anyway even though they are entitled to it.'

(Male, receives Pension Credit, 70+ age group)

The issue of choice and control permeated discussions of all of the vignettes. Vignettes one to three – the estimate of entitlement, the pre-populated form and the payment trial scenarios, respectively – fared well in the estimation of those respondents for whom control and choice was an important consideration. This was because they were seen to offer the customer the opportunity to volunteer information about their own lives that could affect a claim and because they enabled customers to opt out of applying for and receiving Pension Credit. Conversely, these respondents were particularly critical of vignette four (the full automatic payment scenario). This is precisely because this scenario was seen to deny customers a chance to have an input into the information used to assess their claim (including failing to provide any mechanisms to contest the decisions made), as well as not offering customers the opportunity to opt out.

Although choice and control over the claims process was raised by individuals from all of the groups, this issue was of particular concern for those that belonged to the 60-69 age group. Those in the older age group were more likely to want to take a less active role in the process. The data does not support a definitive answer as to why this is the case. However, similar sets of factors as discussed in Section

3.2.3 could inform the subtle differences between the age groups with regards to this issue. These include different levels of trust invested in the Government and the various factors that could affect the willingness and drive to get involved in the claims process, such as the levels of support available from peers, family and friends to both groups and differences in mental and physical health.

In response to these challenges, respondents felt that the Government should be transparent in their communication around automated awards (see the above discussion on how entitlements are worked out); that it should provide both informal and formal channels through which individuals could contest claims (e.g. through a telephone contact as well as a formal tribunal) and, finally, that an option to refuse Pension Credit should be built into any automated award system.

3.5 Fraud

Respondents' concerns around fraud were raised briefly in Chapter 2. A closer examination of the accounts reveals that respondents expressed concerns around fraud being perpetrated not only against themselves as individuals but, interestingly, against the benefits system itself. With regards to the former, there was the view that automation may carry with it the danger of information being sent, and payments being made, to the wrong person. Automation, particularly – though not exclusively – at higher levels, was seen to provide fertile ground for fraud to take place because of the limited customer input required to assess and make payments. For example, concern was expressed during the course of interviews that the bank details of customers may be sent erroneously to the wrong address without their knowing or that their payments would be paid to the wrong person. Some of these concerns echo the discussion about data security in Section 3.2.2.

In terms of fraud against the benefits system, respondents felt that automation carried with it the danger of customers being tempted not to correct any inaccuracies in the information used to assess claims, where, of course, this information is made known to customers. This was a concern that was raised particularly in relation to vignette two (the pre-populated forms scenario) and vignette three (the payment trial scenario). Both of these possible automation scenarios relied on the customers correcting any inaccuracies in the information that the Government used to assess their claims. This concern is expressed by one respondent in the excerpt below.

'Yeah, it is [automated awards system being open to fraud and abuse]...I wouldn't voluntarily necessarily say "this information is wrong and I'm not entitled" I'd want them to find that out.'

(Female, non-receipt of PC, 70+ age group)

There was a view that once payments are underway, automation may discourage customers from notifying the Government of any change in personal circumstances that could affect their payment levels. Respondents attributed this to the convenience of assessing and receiving benefits inherent within the different possible forms of automation.

Finally, there was also the fear that automation could lead to individuals unknowingly receiving payments at a higher level than they are entitled to. This prompted concerns about being perceived to be a 'benefit cheat' and the attendant fear of having to pay back any overpayments made. This fear materialised particularly in relation to possible forms of automation that did not inform customers of how their claim was assessed (e.g. as is the case in vignette four).

Fraud was an issue that concerned individuals belonging to all of the groups. However, fraud relating to the benefits system was of particular concern to respondents belonging to the 60-69 age group. Again, it is difficult to ascertain from the data why this may be the case. It may be that, as mentioned earlier, this group is less trusting and more questioning of the Government and its initiatives.

The earlier discussion on information security outlined some of the ways in which respondents felt that fraud against the individual could be addressed. Respondents felt that the Government needs to be vigilant about attempts to defraud the benefits system. Some respondents were more specific and argued that, within an automated system, the Government needs to follow-up on customers to ensure that all details are correct at the stage at which their claims are assessed and prior to any money being deposited into accounts. Other respondents felt that the Government should make it clear that any overpayments made would have to be paid back by customers in order to deter fraudulent behaviour and to encourage customers to discuss changes in circumstances.

3.6 Resource issues for the Government

As mentioned briefly in Chapter 2, respondents were also concerned with the costs to the Government of automation and whether these costs would be translated into higher levels of tax. This view was predicated on the assumption that automation would entail the Government doing far more of the work than they currently do in terms of extracting information about customers at the assessment level, notifying customers of their entitlement and, if applicable, completing forms on behalf of customers. (Where the latter is concerned, there was the implicit assumption that, rather than pre-populated forms being generated automatically by computer systems, there would be teams of individuals at the Government who would complete Pension Credit forms on behalf of individuals.) Some respondents were concerned with whether or not the Government had the finances in place to be able to deal with the increase in uptake of Pension Credit if automation were to take place.

Accordingly, this concern permeated the discussion of all of the vignettes. With regards to vignettes one and two, the estimate of entitlement and the pre-populated forms scenario, some concern was expressed at how much it would cost the Government to actually identify eligible customers from their records and notify these customers of their entitlement. In the case of the pre-populated forms scenario, respondents considered the additional possible cost implications of the

Government completing forms on behalf of customers. In terms of the payment trial scenario (vignette three), there was concern not only at the additional work entailed in the Government chasing up customers after the three month trial period, but also the potential cost implication of the Government overpaying the customer for the first three months due to inaccuracies in the information used to assess the initial claim. For some respondents, the concern around overpayment and its cost implication was amplified in the full automatic payment scenario (vignette four), simply because this scenario did not allow the Government to systematically consult customers regarding the accuracy of the information that was held on them.

Another concern for respondents was, as mentioned in Section 3.5, the potential for a higher level of fraud to occur within an automated award system, particularly in relation to benefit fraud. Respondents felt that the Government would need to dedicate some of its financial resources to tackle benefit fraud and, this in turn, could prove to be costly in the long run. This position is illustrated in the quote below, where, during a discussion of one of the reflective vignettes, a respondent voiced their concerns around benefit fraud in relation to automation.

Oh they [fraudsters] would do it – I mean they can always devise some method – if people are criminally intent enough and criminally minded enough, they'll always devise some way of falsifying records and so on, to make absolutely certain that what they were getting continued, whether they were entitled to it or not. And to be honest I think that this [automation] would cost the Government a lot of money, a lot of taxpayer's money.

(Male, in receipt of Pension Credit, 60-69 age group)

Respondents offered a number of possible ways of limiting the costs of implementing automation. Many of the proposed cost saving measures focused on the point at which customers are notified of their entitlement. Respondents felt that costs could be minimised here if the administrative data was solely used to award payments (as opposed to sending out completed forms or letters) or if letters were sent out only to those that are thought to be eligible (i.e. a targeted mail out which could help minimise the costs of delivering letters). Both of these options must be seen within the wider discussion of the right of respondents to know about how assessments are worked out and the right to opt out of Pension Credit (see earlier sections). Respondents also felt that the Government could save money by only pre-completing forms for customers that needed special help (e.g. disabled customers or those that are very old).

3.7 Feasibility and mistrust of automation

As Chapter 2 indicated, the interviews revealed a degree of scepticism around whether automation could take place. Even when the lowest level of possible automation was discussed, the estimate of entitlement scenario in vignette one, it was thought that the Government would require some input and information from potential customers in order to assess eligibility. This scepticism became amplified when higher levels of automation were discussed. For example, some respondents, in discussing the full automated payment scenario (vignette four), queried how the Government could pay Pension Credit directly into the accounts of customers without first having acquired their bank details from them. This scepticism led to some respondents labelling higher levels of automation (e.g. ones which potentially bypassed the need for an application process) as 'pie in the sky'.

Allied to the issue of feasibility, the interviews also threw up some mistrust of what the Government was trying to achieve in automating the award system. The view was expressed during the course of the interviews that automation was simply another way for the Government to elicit personal and private information from individuals. This was based on the argument that if the Government already had sufficient information on individuals to award entitlements, why, in certain possible forms of automation, would they be approaching potential customers for more information? These issues were raised particularly when the estimate of entitlement (vignette one), the pre-populated forms (vignette two) and the payment trial (vignette three) were discussed.

Again, although individuals belonging to all of the groups raised the issues of feasibility and mistrust, interviewees belonging to the 60-69 age group seemed to be particularly concerned with these issues. As mentioned above, it is not clear from the responses given why this should be the case.

3.8 Summary

In summary, respondents expressed concerns around various issues in relation to automation. These issues revolved around the following areas:

- how information was held and used by the Government, and in particular, how this affected the privacy of the individuals, the accuracy of the administrative data used to assess claims and issues relating to data security;
- the nature and level of information given to customers about their entitlement;
- the degree of choice and control a customer had in the process of automation, in particular, the right of the individual to provide information about their own lives, the right of the individual to contest any entitlement decisions made and the right of the individual to opt out of receiving Pension Credit;

- the potential for fraud to occur within an automated system, both at the level of the individual and in relation to the benefits system as a whole;
- the resource implications for the Government (and taxpayer) of implementing automation in terms of shouldering the administrative burden of awarding Pension Credit and combating fraud; and
- the feasibility of automation occurring, particularly at higher levels.

It is important to emphasize here that these concerns were not deemed to be insurmountable by the respondents; indeed, respondents were keen to explore how these concerns could be addressed during the interviews.

The next chapter will explore the respondents' views on how the automation of Pension Credit could be promoted to potential customers.

4 Promoting automation of Pension Credit

4.1 Introduction

Respondents were asked their views on how a more automatic Pension Credit system might be implemented. This chapter explores these views, looking firstly at respondents' views on the message to be conveyed and then at the modes of delivery.

4.2 The message to convey

Three key ingredients were identified by respondents as central to effectively promoting an automated Pension Credit application process. These ingredients were clarity of message, tone and consent.

4.2.1 Clarity of message

A clear explanation of any new system that was straightforward and easy to understand was felt to be key to effective promotion. Respondents wanted clarity over the timing of implementation and what they should expect. Promoting the system as convenient, particularly in terms of making the application process easier was felt to be an important element of the promotional material.

4.2.2 Tone

The tone of promotional material was raised as an important issue. For those who highlighted the stigma of applying for benefits as a barrier to take-up, promoting Pension Credit as an **entitlement** and encouraging take-up in that way was felt to be very important. Descriptions of Pension Credit as a 'top-up' and as a 'bit extra' were felt to be good ways of encouraging take-up among pensioners.

4.2.3 Consent

As discussed in Section 3.4, having a choice over whether to take up Pension Credit was important for a number of respondents. Where this was the case, respondents felt it was important to emphasise in any promotional material that it was up to the individual whether they chose to take-up Pension Credit or not.

4.3 Ways of delivering the message

Respondents felt any new system of Pension Credit should be promoted in a variety of ways to ensure that the maximum number of people heard about it. Suggested methods included advertising on television, on radio, in national and local newspapers and on-line. It was also felt that it would be effective to promote the new system via other organisations that would be used by pensioners. Suggestions included Doctors' Surgeries, Day Centres, Pensioner Associations, Hospitals, Post Offices, Libraries, Town Halls and Council Offices. Promotion via third parties, including charities like Help the Aged, Age Concern and Citizens Advice Bureau, was also felt to be useful and a particularly effective way of reaching hard-to-reach pensioners, including those with no fixed address.

Targeted letters sent to older people informing them of changes to the application process were also felt to be a particularly effective method of communication. Respondents described a preference for having things in writing so that they could refer back to a letter and if necessary show it to someone else if they wanted help. This was particularly important for those who were hard of hearing and found telephone conversations difficult.

4.4 Summary

In summary, respondents felt that information should be clear and easy to understand, the tone should encourage take up by emphasising Pension Credit as an entitlement, and it should make clear the right to choose whether or not to take it up. To ensure that this message reached the maximum number of people, a range of delivery methods should be used. These included advertising in a range of media, promotion via third-party agencies and targeted mail-outs.

5 Conclusions and implications

This chapter summarises the evidence from the main body of the report, and explores the possible implications of these findings. Respondents perceived both strengths and weaknesses to an automated awards process for Pension Credit, both for themselves personally and more generally for society as a whole. These impacts are summarised in Sections 5.1 and 5.2 respectively. The third section touches on the extent to which the findings from this study can be applied to automation of other income-related benefits. Section 5.4 summarises the key conclusions that can be drawn from this study, and the final section draws out some of the possible best practice implications for an automated Pension Credit process.

5.1 Impact of automating Pension Credit on the individual

Overall, respondents felt that an automated application process for Pension Credit that notified them of their eligibility could be a positive step forward. As discussed in Chapter 2, this was felt to be helpful because it would raise awareness of Pension Credit among those who were unaware, and because it would ensure that people received it as soon as they were eligible, avoiding unnecessary hardship.

In addition to raising awareness of eligibility for Pension Credit, Chapter 2 highlighted how respondents felt that a more automated system would encourage take-up by making people feel that they were being offered something they were entitled to. In this way, feelings of stigma around receiving Pension Credit would be reduced.

A quicker and easier process was also felt to be a positive impact of automation, although views varied over the best way to provide help with the application process, and the level of automation that would be preferable. For some, simply being notified of their eligibility was sufficient. Others preferred a greater degree of automation, including pre-populated forms and minimal input from the applicant. Interestingly, respondents often presented their own preferences,

while acknowledging that their preference would not necessarily suit everyone. A flexible approach to automation which accommodates this range of preferences and needs may perhaps be the most desirable option.

The evidence in Chapter 2 suggests that, taken together, the advantages of an automated system outlined above could have a positive impact on take-up by reducing some of the perceived barriers to take-up in the current system.

Alongside these perceived benefits of a more automated system of Pension Credit, a number of concerns were also raised about how such a system may impact on the individual. As discussed in Chapter 3, the use of administrative records held by the Government to automate the application process raised questions for some individuals over their privacy and how data may be used. Another concern was that a more automated system may increase the likelihood of fraud against the individual because of the use of personal data during the process and because of the possible limited input customers may have in the process. Closely related to this were concerns about the data-security of personal information and respondents sought reassurance that data would be kept securely. The accuracy of information used by the Government and what impact this would have on individuals was also raised as a concern, particularly if inaccurate data led to over or underpayments of Pension Credit.

5.2 Impacts of automating Pension Credit on the benefits system

Alongside respondents' views on how a more automated system would affect them personally, a number of issues were raised around the impact of an automated process on the Pension Credit system more generally. These are issues that would need to be addressed in the way that any automated payments scheme is portrayed and promoted to the general public.

First, there was a degree of scepticism over how an automated process could be implemented and the sufficiency of administrative records held by the Government to accurately target those eligible for Pension Credit. At the same time, there was a general anxiety raised by the idea of automated awards about data privacy and security in relation to government administrative records.

Another area of concern was the possible cost of an automated system, and the level of government resources needed to administer it. Consideration of the cost implications of any changes to the system was therefore felt to be important. Related to this issue was the concern that an automated system may be more susceptible to benefit fraud than the current system of Pension Credit, particularly if it required individuals to provide less verification of their circumstances than they currently do. Respondents felt that safeguards were needed to reduce this risk.

5.3 Automating other income-related benefits

This study focused primarily on respondents' views of automating the Pension Credit application process. However, some of the findings presented here may be transferable to the automation of other income-related benefits, e.g. HB and CTB. In particular, increased awareness of eligibility, reduced stigma attached to applying and a more convenient application process are all strengths of an automated system that could be transferred to the automation of other benefits.

It is also likely, however, that some of the concerns raised around the automation of Pension Credit, may also affect the automation of other benefits, and in some cases these concerns may be heightened, depending on the nature of the benefit being automated. For example, if the automation of benefits like HB required data-sharing between local and central government, the concerns around privacy and data security raised in relation to Pension Credit may be felt more strongly. Similarly, queries concerning the accuracy of administrative data used to assess claims may be a more important issue when this data is being collected at the local rather than national level. Further research would be of value to explore whether this is the case, and the extent to which the findings from this study would hold true or differ in the case of other income-related benefits.

5.4 Conclusion

In summary, respondents perceived both strengths and weaknesses of an automated system. **On balance, the evidence suggests that although respondents felt that the concerns they raised should be addressed in the design and implementation of any possible automated Pension Credit process, these concerns were rarely felt to be insurmountable, and the strengths of an automated process in terms of raising awareness, reducing stigma, and making the process more convenient were felt to largely outweigh these concerns.** In particular, possible forms of automation at the lower end of the spectrum of automation (particularly notification of potential eligibility) were largely met with approval, while those at the higher end of the spectrum, though welcomed by some, tended to raise more concerns. In exploring the feasibility of an automated Pension Credit system, the challenge will be to find a way to maximise the benefits identified by respondents in this study while minimising the concerns also raised. The next section presents some suggestions for good practice based on the views and opinions of those who took part in this study.

5.5 Good practice points based on the views of respondents

A number of good practice points for maximising the acceptability of automation emerged from the data.

5.5.1 Rapid processing and delivery of claims

In the first instance, the data suggests that it may be important for the processing of claims and the delivery of Pension Credit to be as quick and as simple as possible within any given automated system. This means claims being dealt with quickly, money arriving into accounts swiftly and the process of automation being as transparent and as intelligible as possible to the lay person.

5.5.2 Advanced notification of entitlement

There was a perception among some respondents that the Government would be able to forecast eligibility for some customers, particularly if they were on working-age income-related benefits prior to becoming eligible for Pension Credit. While this type of advance notice would not be feasible in all cases, it was felt that it would serve the dual purpose of alerting individuals of their entitlement and enabling them to plan their finances in advance.

5.5.3 Transparency of information around assessments

The data suggests that individuals would like some basic information about their claim under any given system of automation. This information should be sufficient enough to enable individuals to make an informed decision about whether to take up Pension Credit and could cover the following key areas: it could state whether an individual will receive Pension Credit, whether any other benefits that they are claiming could be affected by receipt of Pension Credit, the level of Pension Credit they are entitled to, how this figure was calculated, and ways in which the given assessment can be challenged if individuals feel the need to do so.

5.5.4 Accuracy of information

With regards to assessing the claims, the data suggests that it is important to ensure that the personal information used to assess the eligibility and level of Pension Credit for an individual is as accurate as possible. Such information should, ideally, be responsive of the changes in circumstance of individuals.

5.5.5 Customer input into the information used to make assessments

Giving individuals an opportunity to correct the information that the Government has about them and that is used to calculate a claim may be one important way in which to ensure the accuracy of the information used. This could be done, for example, by providing individuals with an opportunity to correct forms that have been completed on their behalf, with access to assistance (e.g. via the telephone) where required.

5.5.6 Protecting privacy

In terms of protecting privacy, guaranteed data protection practices which govern the type of information used, how this information is held, how it is used and how it is shared between government departments and between local and central government may well go some way to allaying concerns around this issue. These practices should be made known to the customer.

5.5.7 Providing an opportunity to opt out

Finally, providing an option to opt out of receiving Pension Credit may be important for those individuals who feel they will be less well off under Pension Credit, or who feel that their independence or dignity is affected by receipt of the benefit.

Appendix A

The screening question used to ascertain whether a person not claiming Pension Credit in the sample was eligible



Serial number of respondent _____

Q1. Are you living with a partner?

No Go to Q.2

Yes Go to Q.3

Q2. In this research we are interested in speaking to people in particular income groups. Can I ask, is your weekly household income:

- A) up to £174 per week
- B) £175 and over per week

Answer A Go to Q.4

Answer B Go to Q.5

Q3. In this research we are interested in speaking to people in particular income groups. Can I ask, is your weekly household income:

- A) Up to £254 per week
- B) £255 and over per week

Answer A Go to Q.4

Answer B Go to Q.5

Q4. Eligible to take part. Proceed to recruit (if in quota).

Q5. Not eligible to take part. Thank respondent for their interest in the study and close.

Appendix B

The topic guide



As this is an investigative and exploratory study, we wish to encourage respondents to discuss their views, perceptions, attitudes and experiences in an open way without excluding issues which may be of importance to the study. Therefore, unlike a survey questionnaire or semi-structured interview, the questioning will be responsive to the issues raised in group discussion.

The following guide does not contain pre-set questions but rather lists the key themes and sub-themes to be explored within each group. The topics will be introduced and explored in turn with each respondent.

In addition, it must be noted that we have deliberately structured the topic guide so that it furnishes us with an understanding of the facilitators for automated awards and how these awards can be implemented, as well as the barriers to these awards. We have designed the topic guide so that it explores these issues in a non leading manner.

Italicised words and sentences refer to specific instructions to the researcher.

Aims and objectives [*for the researcher*]:

The aim of this strand of the study is to explore older people's attitudes to the introduction of automatic awards of income related benefits. This is when individuals do not have to actively make a claim in order to receive the payments which they are entitled too. These awards place the onus on the government to instigate the claims/award process, as opposed to the customer.

The key objectives are to explore respondents':

- Views on how the process could work (in broad terms);
- Views and reactions to a range of possible implementation options;
- Views on how far they would like to go down the route of the government instigating the claims process
- Views on what elements of the process of the government instigating awards they are comfortable with and which they are not comfortable with.



Introduction

Aim: to introduce the research and set the context for the interview.

- Introduce **self and NatCen**.
- **Introduce the study:** At present, people have to actively make a claim if they think they are entitled to Pension Credit, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. This study has been commissioned by DWP to explore people's views on the improvements that can be made to ways in which these payments can be claimed. In particular, how people might feel about the government, as opposed to the individual, taking the lead in initiating the claim/award process for these payments.
- **Important to stress:**
 - This study is not about state pensions, but Pension Credit. One key difference is that Pension Credit eligibility depends on both Income and Saving Levels.
 - This study is not about altering the eligibility criteria for the payments or about changing the level of payments people receive. It is about exploring a range of options which the government could pursue in order to take a lead in initiating the claim/award process.
 - That the DWP does not have one idea in mind with regards to how it can take the lead in initiating the claim/award process. It is currently in the early stages of exploring the different options that it could pursue.
- Details about their participation:
 - **voluntary** nature of participation - both overall and in relation to any specific questions and discussions
 - **recording** of interview – why it is necessary
 - **confidentiality**, and how findings will be reported
 - **Length of interview** - 1 to 1.5 hours.
 - **How they have been identified:** Through the FRS survey (a different type of study)
- How data will be used:
 - **Produce a report for DWP** to inform their thinking on the issue
- Any **questions** they have.



1. Background/Ice breaker

Aim: to allow the respondent to introduce themselves and get them thinking about the payments they are claiming and the process they went through to claim them

Respondents should cover the following detail in their introduction.

- Invite them to say **something about themselves and their circumstances**

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who they live with - Previous employment - Their current main activity - Whether they have claimed any payments in the past 	-

- What payments they are **receiving**– if any

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pension Credit - Council Tax Benefit - Housing Benefit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If claiming PC, what made them apply for this?

- **Details of applying** for the payments

Prompt	Probe
-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How they heard about the payments? - How long it took them to apply for them? - Did they complete the forms themselves or did they have help? (Who helped them – including any third party organisation?)

- Their **experience of applying** for these payments

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experience of applying for different benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their views on the pros and cons of applying for payments. - Any negative experiences they had when they applied for payments.



- If they have not received payments before, explore reasons **why they have not**.
(This question relates only to respondents who are not in receipt of Pension Credit)

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Not knowing what they are entitled to – The process of claiming being a disincentive (e.g. hassle) – Stigma attached to claiming payments 	

2. Initial impressions/views about the principle of the government taking a lead in the claims process and their initial visions of what this process could look like

Aim: to explore respondents' initial impressions of the idea of the government instigating claims/awards process and their views on what this process might look like.

Outline the current Pension Credit process:

- *If someone thinks they are eligible for PC, they would call the Pension Service*
- *The Pension Service will take them through the process and complete a form on their behalf*
- *(Claimants can also fill in the form themselves rather than telephoning the Pension Service; or they can complete it on the internet and print it out to sign and post back. In some cases, the form might be filled in with customers in a home visit)*
- *They will also tell the individual how much they are entitled to*
- *The form will then be sent to the claimant to sign and verify that the details are correct (sometimes certain documents as proof of eligibility would be required)*
- *The form is then posted back to the Pension Service, who will process it*
- Explain that the government is interested in exploring ways in which it could take the lead in initiating the claims/awards process for them



- Explore **how they feel about this idea** that the instigation of the claim/award process switches from them, as the customer, to the government

Prompt	Probe
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What advantages do they see? - What disadvantages they see? - How does the idea of the government initiating this process compare with the respondent's experience of applying for payments?

- If the government was to take the lead, explore how the respondents **would like to this to be done**

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The degree of control they want over the claims process (e.g. from just wanting information about awards to having no input into the awards process) - The nature and type of information the government can use to make claims - How the process should be promoted - How the govt. should communicate with individuals (e.g. notification of claim entitlements) - Process of dealing with overpayments/underpayments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What would this process look like? - What reassurances they want about the process (e.g. information usage etc)?



- Explore whether respondents would **have any concerns** if the government was to take the lead in initiating the claims/awards process for them

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How they feel about using admin records – What kind of information they consider confidential – Data security – Consultation procedures – Information use and sharing (between departments and levels of govt.) – Consent and confidentiality in relation to information use – Accuracy of the information used to make awards – Receiving the appropriate level of payments – Impact on other payments – Impact on personal choice (e.g. ability to opt out) – How payments will be paid to individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Why these are concerns?

- Explore ways in which these **concerns could be addressed**

4. Views on each of the implementation vignette available

Aim: having explored the respondents' initial visions regarding how the government could possibly take a lead in the claims/awards process, we will now present them with specific implementation vignettes. Each vignette will be presented on a cue card and respondents will be invited to reflect and comment on these vignette.

INTRODUCE THE OPTIONS IN THE ORDER BELOW.

- Vignette 1: Estimate of entitlement
- Vignette 2: Pre-populated forms
- Vignette 3: Payment trial
- Vignette 4: The government taking a full lead in initiating the awards/claims process without any customer input.

FOR EACH VIGNETTE, INVITE RESPONDENTS TO REFLECT ON THE ISSUES OUTLINED BELOW.

- Explore respondents' **overall views** on the given vignette



- Explore respondents' views on the potential **advantages** of the given vignette

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Convenience - Time - Less stressful - Less hassle - Comment on the level of control - Getting money they are entitled too - Removal of stigma attached to claiming payments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why these are considered to be advantages

- Explore whether this particular implementation vignette raises any **questions/queries** for the respondent

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which agency/department/govt. body is responsible for making such awards - The type of information that will be used to make such awards - Who will the information be shared with (central govt. & local govt.; between different govt. departments) - How awards will be paid to respondents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -



- Explore **what issues**, if any, these questions present the respondents with and how these issues **could be addressed to make the implementation option workable**

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What happens if information on them is incorrect? – Data security – Consultation procedures – Information use and sharing (between departments and levels of govt.) – Consent and confidentiality in relation to information use – Accuracy of the information used to make awards – Receiving the appropriate level of payments – Impact on other payments – Impact on personal choice (e.g. ability to opt out) – How payments will be paid to individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are there particular elements of this option that pose a particular issue? – What measures/processes would help to address each issue.

6. Exploration of which option they prefer and/or elements of the different options that they prefer

Aim: to explore which of the options or elements in each option the respondent is comfortable with and why

- Explore **which of the options appeals** most to the respondent and why

Prompt	Probe
–	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Why this option appeals to them? – Which elements of this option appeals to them



- Explore how respondent **compares** the option they have chosen to having to make a payment claim themselves

Prompt	Probe
-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which is better and why? - (For non claimants, would the preferred option have made a difference to their attitude to claiming PC? In what way would it have made a difference?)

- Explore **why respondent found the other options less attractive**

Prompt	Probe
-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which options were the least attractive and why? - Which elements of these options were particularly unattractive and why?

- Explore whether there are **elements of the other options** that the respondent finds attractive

Prompt	Probe
-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are these elements? - Why are they attractive?

- Explore whether the respondent feels that the option they most preferred needs to be **modified or changed** in any way to make it more attractive

Prompt	Probe
-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which options were the least attractive and why? - Which elements of these options were particularly unattractive and why?



7. Views on how to promote the government taking a lead in initiating the claims/awards process

Aim: to investigate views about how the government taking the lead in initiating the claims/awards process can be promoted

- Their views on how the government taking a lead in initiating the claims/awards process can be **promoted**

Prompt	Probe
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information content - Information delivery - Would the endorsement of third party organisations/agencies help? - If so, why would third party endorsement be desirable? - If so, who these organisations would be? - Why they would trust these organisations 	-

- Explore whether they have anything else to add that has not already been covered

- Thank respondents for their time & thoughts.
- Check if they have further questions.
- Reassure re confidentiality & (if appropriate) give more information about reporting.
- Ask if would like to be told when the research findings become available OR a respondent summary of findings. If so, ask respondents to write their contact details down. Ensure you update findings database when returning to office.

Appendix C

The reflective vignettes around automation offered to respondents



Vignette 1 Estimate of Entitlement

- The government would send you a letter letting you know how much Pension Credit they think you are entitled to.
- They would also send you a claim form and would ask you to complete it if you wish to claim Pension Credit.
- It is up to you whether you choose to fill out the claim form or not.



Vignette 2 Pre-populated Forms

- The government would send you a letter letting you know how much Pension Credit they think you are entitled to.
- They would also provide information explaining what information they used to work this out.
- They would send you a Pension Credit form that they have completed on your behalf.
- You would then be asked to confirm or correct the details on the form and send it back to the government if you were interested in claiming Pension Credit.



Vignette 3 Payment Trial

- The government would send you a letter stating the following:
 - How much Pension Credit they think you are entitled to
 - That the government wants to pay you Pension Credit for three months, based on the amount they think you are entitled to
 - That the government would guarantee that your other benefits would not be affected
- You would be asked to consent to this by signing a form and providing your bank details so that they can pay your entitlement.
- After three months, the government would ask you to confirm that the details they hold are correct.
- If they are correct and you still want to receive Pension Credit they would help you make a claim and you would continue to receive Pension Credit.
- If they are not correct and you are not entitled to Pension Credit the payments would stop. You would not have to pay back the money you received during those three months.



Vignette 4 Full Automatic Payment

- The government would send you a letter letting you know how much Pension Credit they think you are entitled to.
- They would pay you this entitlement without you having to complete any forms.

References

Bunt, K. *et al.* (2006), *Understanding the relationship between barriers and triggers to claiming Pension Credit*. Department for Work and Pensions Research Report No. 336, Corporate Document Services, Leeds.

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Tennant, R. *et al.* (2007), *Helping older people engage with benefits and services: an evaluation of the Partnership Fund*. Department for Work and Pensions Research Report No. 441, Corporate Document Services, Leeds.

