

Research report

Qualitative evaluation of the Pension Credit payment study

by Natalie Maplethorpe, Mehul Kotecha and Sue Arthur

Department for Work and Pensions

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Any enquiries regarding this document/publication should be sent to us at:
Central Analysis Division, Department for Work and Pensions, Upper Ground Floor, Steel City House,
West Street, Sheffield, S1 2GQ

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The Authors

Natalie Maplethorpe, Researcher, Income and Work Group.

Sue Arthur, Research Director, Income and Work Group.

Mehul Kotecha, Senior Researcher, Income and Work Group.

Summary

Aims and methods

In order to explore ways of using data more effectively to ensure that older people receive the help available through Pension Credit, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) ran a small study in which an initial sample of just under 2,000 people were paid their estimated Pension Credit entitlement without them first having made a claim. Payments were made directly into their bank accounts, and stopped after 12 weeks.

NatCen were commissioned to carry out a qualitative evaluation of this study to see how well the payments had been understood and received, and to understand the influence the study had on subsequent claiming behaviour. The research involved in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of 40 individuals who had received payments of Pension Credit under the study.

Awareness of the study

Opt out of the study appeared to have been minimised by the simplified process of engaging respondents in the study, where no additional input was required, and its timing over the winter and Christmas period, where the additional income was appreciated.

Respondents responded well to receiving information by letter, which they found reassuring and credible, with the additional option of having information available via a helpline or on the website. The letter was felt to be clear, concisely worded and covered the key points, in particular the question of not having to pay back any money. It was also thought to be credible because of the use of official logos and contact details, and because people were not required to provide any personal information.

However, because some respondents had limited understanding, the letter could have been improved by bringing some of the information found in the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section into the main body of the letter. This includes information around: the purpose of the study; why respondents had been selected; and how precisely respondents' entitlements were calculated. Some respondents would also have found a follow-up phone call helpful to consolidate understanding.

Experience of the study

The principle of the government taking the lead in assessing and awarding Pension Credit payments was on the whole acceptable to respondents, who appreciated being told about an entitlement they may not have known about or thought they were eligible for before; not having to ask for payments; and not having to complete forms.

It was least acceptable to those who felt they were more than capable of sourcing and applying for benefits and/or those who made claims for Pension Credit as a result of the study which proved unsuccessful, and so questioned the government's ability to undertake assessments without any input from customers

There were some concerns around the government's use of personal data but these were relatively limited. Respondents were accepting of the government using their personal information as long as it was not shared outside of government departments. At worst, this acceptance was due to

individuals feeling that they had nothing to hide and/or being resigned to the wider culture of sharing personal information. At best, respondents saw the use and sharing of information as necessary in enabling the government to make assessments as accurately as possible and with the minimum level of inconvenience to respondents.

Some respondents also wanted the chance to volunteer further information about themselves in order to correct any potential inaccuracies in the information that had been used.

Respondents on the whole also commented favourably on the length of the study, feeling that 12 weeks was just enough time for individuals to factor the additional income into their financial plans, and hence, appreciate the difference it made, without getting too accustomed to it.

Why they did not claim

There were a range of barriers to claiming Pension Credit after the study including: misunderstanding the rationale for the study; feeling that they did not need or were not entitled to Pension Credit; negative experiences of claiming Pension Credit or other benefits in the past; concerns about the claims process and personal circumstances at the time. Overcoming these barriers may encourage respondents to claim Pension Credit and increase uptake.

Respondents reported feeling uncertain about their eligibility for Pension Credit when they (or their partners) worked. This view was particularly prominent amongst those who were self-employed or had difficulty predicting their annual income. These respondents would have benefited from receiving further information about how employment impacts on their eligibility for Pension Credit.

Respondents were also deterred from claiming if they were uncertain about income or savings thresholds. They felt it would have been useful for this information to be provided before they made a decision about claiming.

In some cases respondents did not realise that an assessment had been made and thought that all study participants had received the same amount of Pension Credit. These people would have been encouraged to claim if they were told that a calculation had been made and there was greater transparency about how their entitlement had been assessed.

Inertia and forgetfulness were a barrier in some cases, as well as people not understanding the study or feeling they did not know how or where to claim. These respondents would have benefited from more prompting and reminders to claim.

However, there were some respondents who appeared resistant to claiming because of their underlying attitudes towards claiming benefits. These were underpinned by past negative experiences of claiming benefits, as well as feeling that they did not need the money and/or did not want to ask for it. Concerns about feeling they were ineligible were amplified by anxieties about the upheaval of the claims process itself, and a worry that they might have to give the money back if they were wrongly paid, leaving them feeling that it was not worth applying.

Why they did claim

Respondents were influenced to claim by a range of factors, which included both aspects of the study and external supporting factors. Where the study raised their awareness of Pension Credit or their potential entitlement this made a difference, as well as the financial impact of actually receiving a payment. Receiving the extra money had made a significant difference to some, in terms of their ability to pay for things and their sense of financial security. General attitudes towards claiming benefits tended to underpin decisions to claim, including the extent to which they felt anxious about the process or were prepared to give it a go.

The letter at the end of the study served as an important prompt for respondents to apply for Pension Credit; for some a phone call or home visit at the end of the study would also have been useful. Increased understanding of the study as a result of the research interview suggested that this kind of one-to-one advice can be very helpful. Respondents were encouraged to apply if they had felt the claims process would be straightforward and the support helpline would be useful.

Organisations such as Age UK were a trusted source of advice for respondents, and are, therefore, a potentially valuable resource for helping explain government initiatives. Respondents reported that they also often received support and encouragement to apply for Pension Credit from partners and close family members.

Some respondents said they would apply for Pension Credit if they only received a letter and not a payment: there were two main reasons for this: firstly, receiving a letter would signal a change in their eligibility or show that the government thinks they are entitled to Pension Credit; secondly, the letter would act as a prompt and remind them about claiming Pension Credit. The interviews indicate others would not find a letter by itself a sufficient motivation to overcome concerns about the claims process and worries about being unsuccessful.

1 Introduction and background

1.1 Background and rationale

It is currently estimated that between 32 and 38 per cent of pensioners who are entitled to Pension Credit¹ are not claiming it². Non-take-up of benefit is a significant reason that pensioners remain in poverty and DWP has been looking at ways of increasing take-up through various campaigns and initiatives for a number of years but take-up remains less than complete.

DWP has been investigating whether the data it already holds about people – from its own administrative records and those of HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) – might be effectively and appropriately used in the administration of Pension Credit, both to identify and pay those people who appear eligible. It is not yet possible to simply pay Pension Credit automatically with sufficient accuracy, but in order to explore the concept further, DWP ran a small study where an initial sample of just under 2,000 people were paid their estimated Pension Credit entitlement without them first having made a claim. Payments were made directly into their bank accounts, and stopped after 12 weeks.

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) were commissioned to carry out a qualitative evaluation of the study.

1.2 Research aims and objectives

The overall aim of the research was to provide information about how the Pension Credit payment study was received by customers. Findings from this qualitative evaluation will have implications both for any further development of policy relating to the Pension Credit payments specifically, and for any other interventions which utilise similar concepts around data sharing, automatic benefit payment, and administration of means-tested benefits.

The specific objectives of the research were to:

- explore **understanding** of how the award of Pension Credit works under the study and the information used to calculate and award a claim;
- explore views on the **acceptability** of the government taking a lead in assessing and awarding Pension Credit. This included exploring attitudes towards the government having access to personal information and views on how this data was used to estimate entitlement and to pay an income-related benefit not claimed for;
- explore **experiences** of taking part in the study;
- explore the **impact** of the study on the post-study take-up of Pension Credit;
- explore views on whether the approach used in the study should be **continued**.

¹ Pension Credit is a means-tested benefit for older people which tops up weekly income to a guaranteed minimum level of £137.35 for a single person or £209.70 for a couple (figures correct as of March 2012).

² http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/income_analysis/feb2012/tkup_full_report_0910.pdf

1.3 Overview of the research design

Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with 40 respondents who had participated in the Pension Credit payment study. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling method, whereby key criteria were identified and quotas set for these to ensure a representation of a range of characteristics and circumstances. The primary criteria used were:

- **current Pension Credit status:** it was important to talk to customers who both claimed and did not claim Pension Credit after the study in order to explore motivations for their claims behaviour. In addition, it was also important to capture the views of customers who subsequently claimed and were successful and those who were unsuccessful, as this may have an impact on their views on the study;
- **age:** this research focused on two broad age groups: 60-74 and 75+. This enabled this research to capture the views of both younger and older customers, as reactions to the study may differ between groups;
- **estimated entitlement amount:** customers who had a range of Pension Credit amounts awarded to them under the study were included in the research, as reactions to higher or smaller amounts may determine views of the study as well as having an impact on subsequent claims behaviour.

The following secondary criteria were also monitored:

- **Gender:** equal numbers of men and women.
- **Household type:** the sample was monitored to ensure a good representation of both couple and single households.
- **Geographical area:** the sample was split between urban and rural areas.

Table 1.1 Achieved response in relation to primary sampling criteria

Characteristic	Number of respondents
Claimed Pension Credit after study	
Successfully claimed	11
Unsuccessfully claimed	7
Did not claim	22
Age	
60-74	23
75+	17
Pension Credit weekly entitlement amount	
Low (£15 per week or less)	13
Medium (£16-£80 per week)	15
High (£81 per week or more)	12
Gender	
Male	19
Female	21
Household status	
Single	16
Couple	24
Geographical area	
Urban	17
Rural	24
Total number of respondents	40

Table 1.1 indicates that this research managed to capture a range of respondents around the primary sampling criteria. There were some challenges recruiting respondents in the 75+ age group. A large proportion of these people opted out of the research with some citing health problems as the reason for doing so.

It is worth noting here that, as a qualitative piece of work, this research sought to explore and understand respondents' views about the Pension Credit study and their participation in it, rather than to quantify these. 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 views and experiences in depth and within an individual context, rather than to generate data that can be analysed numerically.

1.4 Conduct of interviews

The interviews were carried out using a topic guide developed in consultation with DWP (see the Appendix). The topic guide set out key areas to be covered and ensured consistency across the interviews, whilst 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 interviews covered background information (current living arrangements and main activity) and their previous experience of claiming Pension Credit and other benefits. Respondents were then asked about their experiences of claiming after the study and what influenced them to make a claim. Respondents were also asked about their understanding of the study, including how they first heard about it and their view of the assessment and payments process.

Interviews were generally carried out with individuals. However, where an individual specifically requested that their partner be present, this was accommodated. Interviewers were mindful of the concerns associated with interviewing elderly respondents and the potentially sensitive nature of the topics being discussed.

Interviews lasted approximately one hour and were conducted on a face-to-face basis at locations that were convenient for respondents, usually their homes. Assurances of confidentiality were given at the start and end of each interview. Respondents were given a thank you payment of £20 at the end of the interview. All of the interviews were digitally recorded with the respondent's consent.

1.5 An overview of the structure of the report

The remainder of this report presents findings from the interviews with respondents. Chapter 2 explores respondents' awareness and understanding of the study, including their views on information provided during the study and any additional support accessed. Chapter 3 provides an overview of respondents' experience of participating in the study, including their views on the assessment and payment process, as well as their entitlement. Chapter 4 moves on to discuss the reasons why respondents did not claim after the study. Chapter 5 provides an overview of how and why the study worked to influence respondents to claim Pension Credit. The chapter includes a discussion of the overarching factors that influenced claiming behaviour, the specific aspects of the study that encouraged respondents to claim and an overview of the groups that the study appeared to have the most impact on.

Where case studies are used in the report to provide an illustration of views, we have taken care to preserve anonymity and the names used are all pseudonyms.

2 Awareness and understanding of the study

This chapter explores respondents' preliminary exposure to the study. This includes how they heard about the study and their views on the information received (Section 2.1), any support they initially accessed around the study (Section 2.2), their decision not to opt out (Section 2.3) and their overall understanding of the study (Section 2.4). In so doing, this chapter will explore the effectiveness of the information delivery strategy used for the study.

2.1 Information about the study

This section will explore how respondents initially heard about the study and their views on the information that they received.

2.1.1 Hearing about the study

Respondents generally heard about the study through the introductory letter sent by DWP. Respondents tended to appreciate receiving the information by letter. There were three reasons for this:

- **trust:** Respondents tended to be wary of receiving information by telephone or email because they could not be sure of the identity of the caller and/or feared being targeted by commercial 'cold callers' who may be out to sell them products;
- **need for written confirmation:** Respondents generally valued having written confirmation about matters relating to their benefits and finances. In the context of the study, respondents appreciated having information in 'black and white' to refer to in the event of any queries from DWP;
- **access to/knowledge of information technology:** Not all respondents had access to or felt comfortable using electronic information technology, such as emails and the internet, and so preferred receiving information in paper form.

Different levels of engagement with the letter were apparent from the interviews. Respondents who engaged fully with the letter read it thoroughly and sometimes also followed this up with a visit to the study website and/or customer helpline (see 2.2). Those who did not engage with the letter tended not to recall receiving it, either because of memory issues or because their spouse dealt with their correspondence and financial issues, and/or they did not pay much attention to it even if they recalled receiving it.

For the above reasons, there was a view that the information delivery strategy could perhaps be made more effective if the letter was accompanied by a telephone call (either before or after the letter was received). This was seen to ensure that those who did not engage with the letter and/or needed further information would have an additional source of information about the study.

2.1.2 Views on the letter

Respondents across the sample found the letter to be informative because of the way it was written, which was seen to be short, concise and in ‘plain English’, and because its content was seen to clearly summarise information that was felt to be important. This included information around:

- payments being for a fixed period with a start and end date;
- the name of the benefit they would receive under the study (i.e. Pension Credit);
- how much benefit they would receive and how often; and
- how the payments would be made (i.e. through their bank).

‘It’s very straightforward [the letter] ’cos it says you will get three payments, four weeks money at x per week, paid the week starting, then they put in the date and then they put in week starting so and so, then week starting so and so. And I assumed they knew what they were doing and I just left it to them and I felt this was, you know, it was a very good letter. It’s [the letter] very straightforward. And then of course, as it says on the back can I still claim Pension Credit and that was the number that I phoned up there, the one in the middle there.’

(Male, 60-74, successfully claimed)

Despite the above, there were respondents who still had misunderstandings about the study and would have liked more information. In some instances, this information could be found in the ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ (FAQ) sections at the back of the letter, which respondents did not seem to have read. Misunderstandings and/or perceived gaps in information revolved around two key themes:

- **the rationale of the study:** not being clear about the purpose of the study (see Section 2.4) and why they had been selected, as well as failing to distinguish the study from the State Pensions they received. For example, some saw the Pension Credit they received under the study as part of their State Pension;
- **their participation in the study:** not being clear about the voluntary nature of their participation, whether their payments would be paid in with their pension and how they had been assessed – this included not being aware of the information used to make assessments (see Chapter 3) and, more fundamentally, respondents thinking that everyone received the same level of entitlement.

There were also respondents who found the letter difficult to understand, especially those who left their financial affairs to their spouse, and/or because the FAQ section was too densely laid out at the back of the letter to be user friendly for those with visual impairments. Some respondents also took exception to the language used in the letter. In particular, there were respondents who disliked the term ‘taster’ and felt this to be a ‘childish’ term and/or a product of ‘trendy’ policy thinking for reasons they could not fully articulate.

‘It’s a taster, we’re going to send you money, see if you like it. That’s kind of; almost childish ... To talk to me like that ... You know it seems silly; it’s a taster, come on. We are unfortunately possessed these days by people who want to be cute. Or want to be with it or cool or whatever expression goes. And, so we’re going to call it a taster. It’s rather silly, but it’s just me.’

(Male, 60-75, unsuccessfully claimed)

Respondents’ initial reaction to being notified about the study tended to be one of pleasant surprise, usually tempered by a degree of suspicion revolving around not quite believing they would receive a payment without making a claim. The importance of being pleasantly surprised by receiving unexpected money, particularly over the costly festive and winter season, tended to have a ‘halo

effect' on respondents. That is, it tended to make them more positive about their entitlement during the study, the decision over the Pension Credit post- study and their general experience of the study (see Chapter 3 onwards for the implications of this).

Where there were initial suspicions about the study, respondents tended to either put these aside or they were offset by the perceived credibility of the letter. A key reason that made the letter credible was that it did not ask respondents to act in any way, unless of course they wanted to opt out of the study. That is to say, respondents were not asked to opt in to the study and provide personal information (e.g. bank details) by calling a number or visiting a website, which would have heightened suspicions. This enabled respondents to adopt a 'wait and see' approach, which they tended to do and were further assured when the money materialised into their account.

'Well nobody asked us for our particulars for a start. We are sort of very wary, on the computer as well, of giving out names and addresses and passwords and what have you. So nobody asked us anything like that so it [the credibility of the letter and study] just never entered our head ... If they'd have started asking personal questions then we probably would have thought [about the credibility].'

(Male, 75+, did not claim)

There were also three other reasons which made the letter, and thus, the study, credible:

- **awareness of Pension Credit:** Some respondents had already heard of Pension Credit before and so felt reassured that the letter referred to a benefit that they were aware of;
- **language and official contact details:** Respondents felt that the language sounded authoritative and official, which was a positive feature of the letter insofar as it reassured them of its credibility. They were reassured further by the letter arriving in an official looking envelope with the Pension Service logo, and the official telephone and website details on the letter;
- **mode of payment:** Having the study payment being paid into the same account as their State Pension also reassured respondents, as it further highlighted that those delivering their pension payments were also running the study.

Conversely, those respondents for whom credibility still remained an issue after reading the letter questioned the study because they: a) had not heard of the Pension Service before; b) did not think the format of the letter looked official; and/or c) were unable to put aside their initial disbelief around being offered a benefit that they had not applied for. This disbelief was further amplified by the absence of a media promotion of the study and respondents not knowing anyone else who was selected for it.

2.2 Sources of initial support accessed

Respondents tended not to access much formal or informal support and assistance after hearing about the study for three reasons:

- **they did not have an opportunity to at the time.** For example, they had other matters to attend to, such as health issues concerning themselves or their spouse;
- **they felt wary about accessing support.** For example, they did not want to discuss their personal financial issues with friends and/or were wary about being asked for personal information if they accessed the official phone support;
- **they felt that they did not need to.** This was because the letter was seen to be credible and provided all the information they required and/or the study made it convenient for them to adopt a 'wait and see' approach. This enabled them to wait until their benefit was paid and use this as a 'litmus test' for the authenticity of the study.

Where respondents did access support, they did so to either confirm the authenticity of the letter and to confirm that they had understood it and the study – particularly around such key issues as not having to pay back the money they received in the study and reassurances around whether the study would affect any additional benefits they may be receiving. Table 2.1 summarises the three key types of support respondents accessed.

Table 2.1 Types of support accessed

Type of support	Details and views
Formal support linked to the study	This tended to be the website and/or the official telephone support line. Respondents tended to be positive about both forms of support. Website information was seen to be useful and telephone staff were seen to be polite, friendly and helpful. Negative experiences included having to chase-up support helpline staff for more information (i.e. multiple calls) or not being able to readily get through. There was also a view that the website was sometimes difficult to navigate, with too many options and often redirected them to other websites.
Formal support not linked to the study	This involved approaching organisations outside the DWP or The Pension Service which respondents already had contact with, such as advisers at Age UK or personal accountants.
Informal support	This tended to be family members such as a spouse or children, who encouraged respondents to persist with the study. Respondents did not generally approach friends, because they wanted to avoid discussing personal financial issues. Friends who were approached tended to be those already in receipt of Pension Credit, as they were felt to be more knowledgeable.

2.3 The decision not to opt out

A key reason for respondents not wanting to opt out of the study was the value placed on having the additional income for the study period, particularly during the costly winter and festive season.

‘Well, you’re not going to turn, I mean I don’t remember how much now, but quite a bit of money. I wasn’t going to turn that down was I? I mean I’m not that daft. I am daft but not that daft.’

(Male, 60-74, did not claim)

There were four other factors that worked in tandem with this key reason in shaping respondents’ decision not to opt out:

- **not having to pay back money received under the study.** This was particularly important for respondents who did not feel entitled to Pension Credit or had been asked to pay benefits back in the past;
- **money not affecting other benefits/taxes.** For example, not affecting housing benefits they received or not affecting tax paid as the study did not need to be declared for tax purposes;
- **prospect of being eligible for Pension Credit after study.** This was a particular motivating factor for those who had unsuccessfully claimed it in the past and who felt the purpose of the study was to assess whether they needed additional income;
- **the study did not require any action.** The study did not require any effort on the respondent’s part (e.g. the completion of forms) and so made it easy for them to ‘go along’ with it.

2.4 Understanding and valuing the study

Respondents could be segmented into four groups depending on their understanding of the study (see Table 2.2). This understanding was partly linked to how helpful respondents found the information about the study and how they engaged with this information.

Table 2.2 Respondents’ understanding of the study

 <p>Most understanding</p> <p>Least understanding</p>	<p>Group A: Fully understood the study Respondents understood that the study was a taster payment designed to encourage individuals to claim Pension Credit who may not otherwise have done so.</p>
	<p>Group B: Some misunderstanding of the study Respondents knew they were in a study but misunderstood some aspects, seeing the study as a way for the government to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allocate surplus money to pensioners who may not be entitled to Pension Credit but would benefit from having temporary additional income; • see how much income pensioners need to survive.
	<p>Group C: Not understanding the purpose of the study Respondents understood they were in a study but did not know its purpose</p>
	<p>Group D: Not understanding they were part of the study at all Respondents had not engaged with the study information at all and thought that study payments were related to short-term additional pension payments or a one-off windfall payment.</p>

Respondents expressed their views on the value of the study on two levels: as an individual and as a citizen. As an individual, respondents valued the extra income they received as a result of the study regardless of whether they needed Pension Credit or not. There was little guilt expressed by respondents who did not feel they needed Pension Credit for two reasons: it was acknowledged that the study was for a limited time period and it was felt that their participation would be useful to government in trialling this approach. As a citizen, views on the study were more complex and mixed. Those who valued the study did so because it was seen to be innovative. There were two reasons for this: it was seen to embody the government proactively reaching out to citizens in order to help them claim what they were entitled to and, related to this, it replaced the perceived culture of benefit refusal within government with a more helpful culture of support and assistance.

Those who questioned the value of the study did so on the basis of perceived need and entitlement. On the one hand, those who felt in least need of the income questioned why they had been selected, how well the study targeted individuals, and the costs to taxpayers. They also questioned the value of the study in relation to the administrative and other costs of running it. On the other hand, there were respondents who felt that they needed the additional Pension Credit income but were unsuccessful when they had applied for it after the study. These respondents questioned the value of a time-limited study and, indeed, Pension Credit as a benefit, preferring rather that the State Pension be raised for all.

2.5 Summary

The interviews indicate that there were a number of good practice points around encouraging participation and information delivery that could be learned from the study.

12 Awareness and understanding of the study

In terms of minimising opt-out of the study, two key facilitators were **the timing of the study** and the **simplified process of engaging respondents in the study**. The study began over the Christmas period and the need for additional income over this time may have contributed to respondents choosing not to opt out. This timing of the study worked well in tandem with the unobtrusive and simple process of engaging respondents in the study which required little input from them, particularly around volunteering any additional personal information. This process served to reassure respondents about the credibility of the study, particularly those who may have been nervous about giving out personal information, and also enabled those who were sceptical to adopt a ‘wait and see’ approach.

In terms of information delivery, the **use of letters** to inform respondents of the study – with the additional option of having information available on a website and through a helpline – worked particularly well with this age group, who seemed to distrust receiving information over the phone and who may have lacked the technological knowledge to access the information electronically. The clear, concise, authoritative and accessible way in which the letter was written could also provide a good model for the delivery of information. The use of official logos and the inclusion of contact details where respondents could access additional information were also helpful to establish the credibility of the letter. However, because some respondents had limited understanding, the letter could be improved by bringing some of the information found in the FAQ section into the main body of the letter. This includes information around:

- the purpose of the study;
- why respondents had been selected;
- how precisely respondents’ entitlements were calculated.

However, the inclusion of this additional information must be balanced against the need for the letter to be short, clear and concise in order to be accessible to customers.

The next chapter will explore respondents’ experiences of the study, particularly in relation to the assessment and payment process.

3 Experience of the study

This chapter provides an insight into how respondents felt about Pension Credit entitlements being assessed and awarded to them without their prior input. It will do so by exploring three key issues:

- understanding and views of being assessed as eligible;
- views about the payment process (including feelings about level of entitlement awarded under the study); and
- views about the length of the study.

3.1 Views on the assessment process

Respondents across the sample tended to welcome the government undertaking some form of assessment before awarding Pension Credit under the study, regardless of how limited and/or dated the information was seen to be. Assessments reassured respondents that the government had taken some measures to ensure that they did not inappropriately award benefits to those who may not financially require them.

At the start of the interview, respondents were asked about how the assessment process worked under the study. There were varying degrees of knowledge about this process based on levels of engagement with the information they received and previous experience of claiming benefits, including Pension Credit. Respondents could be categorised into three groups according to their understanding of the type of information used to make assessments, **how information was shared** and whether **entitlements varied** between individuals.

- **Those who knew the types of information the government drew on.** These were respondents who were aware that entitlements varied between individuals and felt that the government drew on moderate and appropriate levels of personal information. They knew that information relating to pensions, benefits and other capital would have been used to assess their level of entitlement and that there would have been some sharing of information between departments.
- **Those who felt that the government drew on extensive personal information.** These were individuals who were also aware that entitlements varied between individuals but felt that the government used extensive personal information, including personal banking information (e.g. details of savings and expenditure) to make these assessments. Accordingly, these respondents also felt that information was extensively shared between the government and non-government organisations, such as banks.
- **Those who had not given the subject any thought prior to the interview.** These were respondents who generally had little or no views about how the process worked – including which government body was responsible for this and the types of information used. This group also included respondents who thought that all individuals on the study were given the same level of entitlement.

Once informed about the assessment process by interviewers, there were respondents who felt that they would have liked more opportunity to provide information and general input into how their assessments were made. This view was shared particularly, though not exclusively, by two groups of respondents: a) those who questioned the accuracy of the information used to assess entitlement (see Section 3.3) and so wanted to volunteer more information about their financial circumstances (e.g. their expenditure); and b) those who considered themselves proactive in applying for benefits/ financial assistance and felt that the study took this initiative away from older people.

However, respondents, on the whole, appreciated the government taking the lead in informing them about their entitlement and assessing this entitlement for three reasons:

- it helped to raise awareness about Pension Credit;
- not having to ask for financial assistance. This age group tended not to want to ask for benefits out of personal integrity and out of fear of experiencing rejection; and
- convenience. This included not having to complete forms, locate proof of income and experience the trouble of sending these to the government.

Underlying this general acceptance of the government taking a lead in assessing and awarding Pension Credit was an acceptance of how the government used and shared personal information, particularly amongst different departments. There were three reasons behind this based on degrees of acceptance, as summarised in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Acceptance of the government using and sharing personal information

Level of acceptance	Views
Resignation	Resignation to a perceived wider culture of information sharing. Respondents referred to a ‘big brother’ society in which information was perceived to be shared widely within the public sector and between the public and private sector. Respondents were resigned to this taking place and were in fact surprised that the government had not accessed more private forms of information (e.g. information on savings as they pay tax on them or medical records).
Acceptance	Respondents feeling they had nothing to hide. Respondents felt that privacy was only an issue if an individual had any financial irregularities. These respondents felt they had nothing to hide and so were happy for the government to have access to, and use, their personal information. This group also trusted the government to handle their information responsibly.
Endorsement	Respondents did not mind the government using and sharing information it already had at its disposal if it was put to good use, such as raising awareness about entitlement. In fact, these respondents felt that it was necessary to share information between departments for two reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to avoid duplication of information requests to customers and better joined-up working between departments; and • to ensure that individuals did not ‘scam’/defraud the benefit system.

However, respondents caveated this general acceptance of the government’s use of personal information with two key concerns around privacy and data security: a) a general disapproval and wariness about the government either accessing personal information from the private sector (e.g. their savings history from banks) or sharing this with the private sector, with particular concerns around firms using this to make ‘cold calls’; and b) respondents being wary of governments losing personal information, as had occurred in the past. This included concerns around information being ‘hacked’ from government computer systems. Both of these concerns seemed to be amplified as the fieldwork progressed due to the emerging issue in summer 2011 of newspapers breaching the privacy of individuals and other instances of inappropriate sharing of information. It is worth noting that these issues were raised as general concerns and did not colour respondents’ views of the study.

‘Well as long as it’s [the sharing of information between government departments] kept in, I don’t mind ... Kept in privacy sort of, I mean I wouldn’t want it leaked out.’

(Female, 75+, unsuccessfully claimed)

Respondents suggested two ways in which the assessment process could be improved: firstly, there was a request for more **information** around the assessment process. Respondents wanted to know more about the types of personal information and data used to assess entitlement and clearer information on the threshold for savings and income beyond which they could not apply for Pension Credit. Respondents also requested some form of **follow-up input from customers** after the assessments of entitlement had been made in order to help the government target customers more effectively. A follow-up call to customers was seen to enable individuals to correct any inaccuracies in the information the government used to make assessments, give them an opportunity to provide additional information and to even give individuals an opportunity to make their case for why they feel they need or do not need Pension Credit.

3.2 Views on awarded entitlement and mode of payment

Respondents tended to be satisfied by the level of entitlement awarded to them under the study, even where it was not seen as a significant amount. Although there were respondents who had satisfied themselves of the accuracy of the government's estimates of entitlement with their own calculations, the chief reason for the satisfaction was the 'halo' effect that was discussed in Chapter 2. That is to say, respondents expressed a gratitude for receiving a payment that they had not applied for nor expected and so were less likely to question the actual amount they received.

Respondents also tended to be trusting of the government to accurately estimate their entitlement. This is because their financial situation was seen to be markedly less complicated than when they worked, and thus, easy to use in calculations, and/or the view that the government would have access to more accurate and complete information than the respondents themselves.

Where respondents did question the ability of the government to accurately estimate awards, they did so to query their entitlement to Pension Credit, rather than the amount they were awarded. The information held and used by the government was queried in two ways:

- **whether the government had the breadth of information it needed.** This included information on the income of a partner, other material circumstances apart from an individual's income (e.g. the value of their property or the financial assistance they receive from family) and the level of household expenditure. The issue of expenditure was particularly raised by those who had unsuccessfully claimed Pension Credit in the past or on the back of the study and felt aggrieved that only income was taken into account to arrive at decisions on eligibility; and
- **the ability of the government to process complex financial situations.** For example, individuals having pensions from abroad (which may be difficult to pick up in government records and to understand) or having intermittent part-time work which erratically altered an individual's income from week to week or month to month.

In terms of the mode of payment, respondents across the sample appreciated receiving their Pension Credit directly into the same bank or post office account where their pension was deposited. There were three reasons for this:

- **convenience.** Respondents were accustomed to using their accounts to deal with their financial affairs, such as paying in bills, checking balances and drawing out money. They also appreciated not having to cash in cheques and chase up missing cheques, which mobility issues and/or a lack of nearby amenities (e.g. a post office) would have made difficult to do;
- **reassurance and reliability.** Respondents felt reassured that it was the government who were responsible for the study because their Pension Credit payments were placed in the same account as their pension and at the same time; and

- **cost-effectiveness.** Respondents felt that payments made directly to their accounts reduced the administrative burden to the government of posting cheques and chasing up and reissuing missing cheques.

3.3 Views on the length of the study and use of additional income

Respondents on the whole appreciated the length of the study for two reasons: firstly, there was the ‘halo effect’ already mentioned, which resulted in respondents appreciating this perceived ‘windfall’ without questioning how long it lasted; secondly, those who understood the purpose of the study felt that the 12 weeks was just enough time for individuals to be able to appreciate the difference the additional income could make to their financial planning without getting too reliant or accustomed to it.

‘I think [receiving study payments for] one month, you wouldn’t feel as if it was worth it. I think three months gives you a sort of healthier respect for everything to know what’s going on. It’s a much better controlled system ’cos you can plan things over three months that you can’t do in a month. You’ve got more logistical way of working and reasoning if you’ve got three months. Six months is too long because you lose sight of it. Three months is enough because you can sort of control it so to speak.’

(Male, 60-74, successfully claimed)

How this additional income was spent depended on the perceived need for it. For those respondents who felt they needed the additional income, the extra money they received from the study was spent on personal use in meeting basic living requirements such as paying utility bills and on grocery shopping and in contributing to replacing more expensive essential items (e.g. carpets and refrigerators). Those who felt they could manage without it tended to save their entitlement or spend it on family and/or leisure interests, such as gardening. There were also some female respondents who felt that, although as a household they did not need the additional income, the additional income they received nonetheless enabled them as individuals to have a little more financial freedom from their partners. This tended to be women whose income was much smaller than their partner’s and who valued having an extra income of their own which they could use without necessarily consulting their partners.

3.4 Summary

The principle of the government taking the lead in assessing and awarding Pension Credit payments was, on the whole, acceptable to respondents, who appreciated being told about an entitlement they may not have known about or thought they were eligible for before, not having to ask for payments that they were entitled to and not having to complete forms. It was least acceptable to those who felt they were more than capable of sourcing and applying for benefits and/or those who unsuccessfully claimed for Pension Credit as a result of the study and so questioned the government’s ability to undertake assessments without input from customers.

The acceptability of the government taking a lead on assessments also reflected the limited concerns that respondents had around the government’s use of their personal data and issues around privacy and data security that accompany this. Respondents were accepting of the government using their personal information as long as it was not shared outside government departments. At worst, this acceptance was due to individuals feeling that they had nothing to hide

and/or being resigned to the wider culture of sharing information that was perceived to exist in the public and private sector. At best, respondents saw the use and sharing of information as necessary in enabling the government to make assessments as accurately as possible and with the minimum level of inconvenience to respondents.

Respondents suggested the government should be more transparent about how assessments were worked out for individuals. Some respondents also wanted the chance to volunteer further information about themselves in order to correct any potential inaccuracies in the information that was/had been used.

Respondents appreciated payments coming through into the same account as their State Pension. This method of payment was seen to be convenient, reliable, reassuring and cost-effective for the government.

Respondents on the whole also commented favourably on the length of the study, feeling that 12 weeks was just enough time for individuals to factor in the additional income into their financial plans, and hence, appreciate the difference it made, without getting too accustomed to it.

The next two chapters will move on to consider the effects that the study had on claiming behaviour.

4 Reasons for not claiming Pension Credit as a result of the study

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this research talked to customers who both claimed (successfully and unsuccessfully) and did not claim Pension Credit during or after the study. This chapter focuses on those who did not claim Pension Credit and presents the key reasons why they did not apply. After a discussion of these reasons, the chapter ends with a summary of good practice points.

4.1 Reasons why respondents did not claim Pension Credit after the study

There were six broad reasons why respondents did not claim after the study. As these are important for understanding claiming behaviour, they are described in detail in the sections that follow:

- poor understanding of the study or letters explaining how to claim;
- feeling they did not need Pension Credit payments;
- feeling they were not entitled to Pension Credit;
- attitudes towards claiming benefits;
- views and expectations of the claims process;
- personal circumstances at the time.

These factors worked together to influence respondents' claim behaviour. Chapter 5 explains how these factors also fed into a set of wider factors to either encourage or deter respondents from claiming.

4.1.1 Low understanding of the study

Respondents who lacked sufficient knowledge of how to apply for Pension Credit were less likely to make a claim during or after the study. A distinction can be made between those who did not fully understand the rationale and aims of the study and those who lacked knowledge about how to apply.

As discussed in Chapter 2, respondents had different levels of understanding about the purpose of the study. Where there were misunderstandings about the study, this acted as a barrier to claiming Pension Credit. At the most basic level there was a lack of awareness amongst respondents that they were participating in a study (see Chapter 2). The payments received were viewed as a one-off payment or 'gift' and were sometimes likened to the Winter Fuel Payment. These respondents did not understand that Pension Credit could be claimed as a long-term benefit.

'They had selected the name randomly, given this extra amount and as they stated in the letter that it was up to us to use it as we wished and there would be no tax required on it or whatever, you know, there would be no future claims. It was a gift from the government.'

(Male, 75+, did not claim after study)

Part of this lack of understanding was not realising that a calculation had been made and believing a flat rate payment had been given to all study participants. If they had been provided with more information about the assessment they would have given more consideration to claiming after the study.

'I find it interesting that they actually calculated it. If I'd thought that they'd calculated it I might have suggested that you, you claimed sooner after, after it finished.'

(Male, 75+, did not claim after study)

There was also a misunderstanding about the time frame in which Pension Credit could be claimed. Respondents incorrectly believed there was a limited time period in which they could apply for Pension Credit and if they had missed this 'window of opportunity' they would be unable to claim again in the future.

'You see I thought you only got up to a certain time on it, and with what was going on in our lives at that time, he was unwell and it made me unwell doing the extra running backwards and forwards.'

(Female, 75+, did not claim after study)

Respondents who understood the rationale for the study but felt that they did not have sufficient knowledge about how and where to claim Pension Credit were also deterred from claiming. Respondents were sent a letter with their final study payment explaining how they could continue to receive Pension Credit payments. However, not all respondents recalled receiving this information or did not fully understand it and were unsure about the 'next steps' they should take to claim after the study ended in terms of how to apply and/or where to seek help with their application.

These respondents would have been encouraged to claim Pension Credit if additional information and support, such as reminders to apply and application guidelines, were provided at the end of the study. It was suggested that it would have been useful for DWP to provide more application prompts once the study was over. This could have been in the form of a letter (if respondents did not recall receiving one at the end of the study), phone call or personal visit from a benefits adviser. Personal visits were of particular importance to respondents with health or mobility problems. It was also reported that it would have been useful for an application form to be sent with the letter at the end of the study as completing the form was seen to be preferable, particularly amongst respondents who disliked using the phone and/or were reluctant to give information over the phone or anticipated calling an automated phone line.

4.1.2 Feeling they did not need Pension Credit

The amount of Pension Credit paid to respondents during the study was an estimate calculated using information held by DWP. This meant that not all of those who took part were eligible for Pension Credit or felt that they had a 'need' for the money. These perceptions around the 'financial need' for Pension Credit were an additional barrier to claiming for respondents. These perceptions related to their own financial situation and comparisons drawn with the financial situation of others. Respondents did not think they needed Pension Credit if they felt they were 'managing okay' without it because they received an adequate state or occupational pension or sufficient income from another source such as work or other benefits.

'I just really felt I wasn't – I know, or they said I obviously was entitled to it, but I didn't feel I was ... I suppose I'm satisfied with my life, and that was it, really.'

(Female, 75+, did not claim after study)

How financially well off respondents felt compared to other members of their age group was another important factor influencing claim behaviour. Feeling comparatively wealthy or that other people were more deserving of the money acted as a deterrent for claiming. Those who perceived Pension Credit to be a benefit for people who were living on the 'breadline' or who had limited pensions or savings were also put off claiming.

'... to be honest with you a bit unhappy that there might be people that were far more deserving than me, not getting it and I was getting it ... and I could do whatever I wanted with it. Whereas you know if I'd been in reduced circumstances it would have been a Godsend, you know. But as it was it was just a gift and something I could buy something extra for the wife or the son or the house you know.'

(Male, 75+, did not claim after study)

A final influence was whether or not receiving payments during the study made an appreciable difference to respondents' finances. Those who did not notice much of a difference when study payments stopped did not think it would be worthwhile to claim Pension Credit longer term.

4.1.3 Feeling they are not entitled to Pension Credit

Perceived ineligibility was an important factor influencing whether respondents claimed Pension Credit after the study. If respondents felt they were not eligible for Pension Credit they were also less likely to make a claim. There were four groups of respondents who questioned their eligibility:

- those who had been told in the past they were not eligible;
- those who perceived themselves to be ineligible, for example because they felt that their savings were over a certain threshold;
- those who were uncertain about their eligibility;
- those who were aware of the eligibility rules and had not applied on these grounds.

Also related to eligibility was respondents' perceived financial need for Pension Credit. Respondents may have felt that they needed the money but did not think they were eligible for it and as such did not apply.

If respondents had previously applied for Pension Credit and were told that they were not eligible they generally continued to believe this was the case, even after they had been selected for the study. The study did little to convince them of their eligibility, particularly if their personal and financial circumstances had not changed since they last applied for Pension Credit. In such instances, respondents persisted with the assumption that they would still not be eligible for it and as such did not make a claim after the study.

'I didn't think it was necessary. I just said to myself well, it's the same situation as before. Like my income hadn't changed, my, basically my income was the same like you know?'

(Male, 75+, did not claim after study)

Perceptions of ineligibility which had not stemmed from a previously rejected claim also stopped respondents from claiming. These perceptions were informed by respondents feeling that they did not meet the required threshold because their savings were too high, or they received an income from savings and/or investments, from an occupational pension or from employment. Indeed, some of these respondents may not have been eligible on these grounds. Those who perceived themselves to be ineligible for Pension Credit expressed surprise at having been selected for the study and thought that the government should have worked out that they were not entitled using

the records at their disposal, such as tax records. As such, the perceived certainty that they were not eligible for Pension Credit persisted despite being selected for the study and being told by the government that they may be able to claim.

'I haven't applied for it. I've looked online but I'm sure that I'm not eligible because of the income.'

(Female, 60-74, did not claim after study)

Feeling **uncertain** about Pension Credit eligibility also discouraged respondents from making a claim. Those who were unaware of the income threshold for Pension Credit were put off claiming and would have preferred to have been provided with this information before making an application. These respondents were reluctant to complete the application process without knowing whether their income was below the income threshold and that they were definitely eligible for Pension Credit.

Uncertainty about eligibility was a particular concern amongst respondents who were employed in full or part-time work. These individuals were unsure whether employees could apply for Pension Credit and felt that clearer information about this should be available. Those who were self-employed were particularly concerned about their eligibility and thought that it would be complicated to apply for Pension Credit as their fluctuating financial situation made it difficult to accurately predict their annual income. There were two main concerns about applying, stemming from this uncertainty: firstly, that they would receive money they were not entitled to and that they may have to pay money back; secondly, they were reluctant to go through the application process if they were unsure they were going to receive Pension Credit at the end of it.

'I didn't get in touch with them ... For that, for the reason we didn't think we'd be eligible because we're self-employed ... No, that's why I didn't bother getting all the, you know, it's that rigmarole.'

(Female, 60-74, did not claim after study)

4.1.4 Attitudes towards claiming benefits³

Attitudes towards claiming benefits were an important factor in determining claiming behaviour. Not wanting to claim Pension Credit was influenced by previous negative experiences and also feelings of stigma associated with claiming benefits.

A strong barrier to applying was the experience of being turned down for other benefits, such as housing benefit, in the past. Those who felt rejected when they were previously refused were reluctant to go through the experience again and were deterred from claiming after the study. This is because they assumed they would also be refused Pension Credit if they applied for it. Reference was also made to a 'saying no culture' within the government and the belief that most people are not entitled to any financial support or benefits.

'We get fed up with people saying, "No, you're not entitled to it, you're not entitled to it", so we don't. We don't bother now.'

(Female, 60-74, unsuccessful claim)

³ In one case a respondent had made a successful claim shortly before the study so it was unnecessary for them to apply afterwards.

A further barrier to claiming Pension Credit was a negative experience of dealing with government ‘bureaucracy’ in the past. When respondents had difficulties in dealing with government departments, such as Social Services, they were often concerned that applying for Pension Credit would be similarly burdensome. Respondents who had particularly challenging dealings with government departments in the past reported that they lacked the time and energy to enter into an interaction with another department.

‘But I have such a lot going on with Social Services just with my mother to get involved in anything else, if it was going to be complicated I don’t think I could cope with it at the moment.’

(Female, 60-74, did not claim after study)

There was also concern about applying for Pension Credit if government departments had made errors, such as in calculating tax or VAT, in the past. When errors had occurred respondents did not trust the government’s ability to get things right.

Respondents were also influenced by the experiences friends and families had of benefit systems. They assumed that if people they knew, with comparable personal and financial circumstances, were refused benefits then they would be too and it would not be worthwhile to apply.

‘Yeah, when my mum needed something she got nothing, so what point is applying because you’ll only be turned down anyway?’

(Female, 75+, did not claim after study)

However, it is important to note that not all of those who had previous negative experiences of claiming benefits in the past were deterred from applying for Pension Credit, and this factor worked in conjunction with the other factors discussed in this chapter.

There was also unease about the effect of claiming Pension Credit on other benefits and on respondents’ tax situation. This was informed by previous experience of claiming but was also true of respondents who had not claimed Pension Credit before. Previous claimants who had found that Pension Credit conflicted with their other benefits, leaving them financially worse off, felt that even if their circumstances changed they would be better off not claiming Pension Credit. Other respondents had not claimed Pension Credit in the past but were still concerned about the possible effect it may have on their benefits. These people received reassurance from the Pension Credit helpline, their local council or a benefits adviser that claiming Pension Credit would not affect the other benefits they received. There was also some concern expressed that receiving Pension Credit would change which tax bracket they were in, meaning they would lose money if they claimed.

The receipt of other benefits also influenced claiming behaviour in another way. Respondents who felt satisfied with the money received from other benefits were less concerned about applying for Pension Credit as they felt they already received enough financial support from the government.

An additional barrier to claiming was experiencing feelings of stigma about claiming Pension Credit or other benefits. It was found in some cases that respondents did not like to ask for financial help and felt that it would be demeaning or embarrassing to ask for financial assistance. When probed about these feelings respondents suggested that it was a common view amongst members of their generation that *‘you don’t get something for nothing’*. These people felt they were used to working and were hesitant to receive money they did not think they had earned.

‘There’s so many people that, you are too proud to do it and you, I know it’s silly, I know it’s really silly, but you are, you can’t help it. It’s you, isn’t it?’

(Female, 75+, did not claim after study)

Despite these concerns, respondents reported that feelings of stigma could be overcome. Those who felt embarrassed about applying for Pension Credit often received encouragement to claim from family and friends. Respondents who were deterred from claiming because of feelings of stigma also suggested that it would be preferable to receive a payment in the way they had done during the study, rather than making an application as it would save them from having to ask for it.

4.1.5 Views and experiences of the claims process

Feeling concerned about the Pension Credit claim process itself also acted as a barrier to claiming. There were two such concerns: concerns about the application process when applying for Pension Credit and concerns about providing personal financial information.

Concerns around the application process focused on the effort needed to complete Pension Credit application forms and the time it would take to find and provide the requested financial information. This was the case even where respondents were aware that the application process does largely take place over the phone.

'I think it's a hassle ... you get on the phone and they go "oh well you need to go to so and so and you need to go there and you need to go back and you'd have to go to the tax man and tell them what you're earning". And people just don't want to do that.'

(Male, 60-74, did not claim after study)

There was also some concern about applying over the phone, particularly amongst respondents who either generally did not like using the phone or were reluctant to provide personal information over the phone. Related to this, was a reluctance to claim because of worries about being asked intrusive questions or to disclose a great deal of financial information. Personal finances were perceived to be a private matter and respondents felt that it was unnecessary to share this information with the government over the phone but they were not necessarily averse to the government using information they already held on individuals to make assessments. It was reported that this view was commonly held amongst members of this generation and that older people would not want to be 'subjected' to means testing.

'I found out that it was not a, it was a means tested benefit which I don't want to, having built up some savings I don't want to divulge what they are.'

(Male, 60-74, did not claim after study)

4.1.6 Personal circumstances and issues at the time

Claiming behaviour was also influenced by personal circumstances and issues at the time of the study and immediately after it. For some, the study coincided with caring responsibilities or events such as illness or the death of a family member, which made it difficult to think about applying. These respondents felt as if they had other more pressing matters to deal with and did not have the energy required to engage in an activity such as claiming Pension Credit.

'He was going into hospital and I had enough to do, to worry about having, getting here and there and different appointments that I was too tired to think about answering letters or forms.'

(Female, 75+, did not claim after study)

There was also a range of other personal issues which influenced claiming behaviour, including cognitive difficulties, apathy and nervousness about claiming:

- respondents who experienced memory problems did not recall receiving a letter encouraging them to claim at the end of the study or simply forgot to claim;
- inertia was also a problem, with some respondents feeling like they ‘couldn’t be bothered to claim’;
- respondents felt nervous about claiming as they did not want to receive money that they were not entitled to and that they may have to pay back.

Those who were influenced by cognitive factors would have benefited from reminders and other prompting from DWP.

4.2 Summary

Respondents reported that there was a range of barriers to claiming Pension Credit after the study including misunderstanding the rationale for the study, feeling that they did not need or were not entitled to Pension Credit, negative experiences of claiming Pension Credit or other benefits in the past, concerns about the claims process and personal circumstances at the time. Overcoming these barriers may encourage respondents to claim Pension Credit and increase uptake.

Respondents reported feeling uncertain about their eligibility for Pension Credit when they worked or their partners worked. This view was particularly prominent amongst those who were self-employed or had difficulty predicting their annual income. These respondents would have benefited from receiving further information about how employment impacts on their eligibility for Pension Credit.

Respondents were also deterred from claiming if they were uncertain about income thresholds. They felt it would have been useful for this information to be provided before they made a decision about claiming.

In some cases respondents did not realise that an assessment had been made and thought that all study participants had received the same amount of Pension Credit. These people would have been encouraged to claim if they were told more clearly that a calculation had been made.

Inertia and memory problems were a barrier in some cases, as well as people feeling they did not know how or where to claim. These respondents would have benefited from more prompting and reminders to claim but obviously the benefits of doing this need to be weighed up against the costs.

However, there were some respondents who appeared resistant to claiming through strong underlying attitudes towards claiming benefits. These were underpinned by past experiences, as well as feeling that they did not need the money, and did not want to ask for it. Concerns about feeling they were ineligible were amplified by anxieties about the upheaval of the claims process itself, and a worry that they might have to give the money back if they were wrongly paid, leaving them feeling that it may not be worth applying.

The next chapter will move on to explore the ways in which respondents were influenced by the study to make a subsequent claim.

5 How and why does the study work to influence people to claim Pension Credit?

This chapter will explore the factors that encouraged respondents to claim Pension Credit. It begins with a discussion of the overarching factors that influenced claiming behaviour and then moves on to explore the specific aspects of the study that encouraged respondents to claim. This chapter also looks at the other possible impacts of the study and how respondents reacted to successful and unsuccessful claims. The chapter then moves on to a discussion of which groups the study had the most impact on, using a model of claimant types and case studies. The chapter concludes with a summary of the factors that influenced respondents to claim and offers suggestions for improvements to future studies.

5.1 Overarching factors influencing claiming behaviour

As already described in Chapter 4 in relation to not claiming, respondents' decision to claim Pension Credit was influenced by a range of different factors. These can be grouped into the following overarching set of factors:

- understanding of the study and knowledge of Pension Credit;
- perceived need for Pension Credit;
- perceived entitlement or eligibility;
- attitudes towards claiming benefits; and
- previous benefits experience.

These factors worked together to either encourage or discourage respondents to claim. There was variation amongst respondents in terms of the factors that were applicable and the extent to which they influenced their claiming behaviour. For example, a respondent may have had a negative experience of claiming benefits in the past but their perceived need for Pension Credit was a stronger influence on their decision to claim. This section summarises the influence of these five factors.

5.1.1 Understanding of the study

How well respondents understood the rationale and purpose of the study had a strong influence on whether they decided to claim. In order to make an application for Pension Credit respondents needed to have fully understood what Pension Credit was and how they would go about applying for it. A misunderstanding of the aims of the study or a lack of awareness about how and where to claim acted as barriers.

5.1.2 Perceived need for Pension Credit

Respondents were more likely to apply for Pension Credit after the study if they felt they needed it because they were struggling to meet day-to-day living costs or were concerned about how they would manage financially in the future.

5.1.3 Perceived entitlement or eligibility

In some cases respondents felt entitled to some kind of financial support from the government because they had worked all of their lives and ‘paid in’ through taxes. This feeling of entitlement encouraged them to apply for Pension Credit after the study.

5.1.4 Attitudes towards claiming

Attitudes towards claiming benefits also had a strong influence on claiming behaviour. Respondents were encouraged to claim if they did not feel embarrassed about receiving benefits or had the attitude that they would have ‘nothing to lose’ by claiming. These respondents thought it was worthwhile to ‘give it a go’ and make a claim as there was a possibility that they might receive something.

‘I thought well, I’ve got nothing to lose ... let’s go down this road again and try one more time.’

(Male, 60-74, unsuccessful claim)

5.1.5 Previous experience

Respondents’ attitudes were influenced by their previous experience of claiming benefits. Previous successful benefit claims encouraged further Pension Credit claims, possibly because they were associated with a greater understanding of the benefits system in general and a more positive attitude about the outcome of the application. The benefits experiences of family and friends were also important in influencing claim behaviour as were previous experiences of dealing with government departments.

5.2 Aspects of study which encouraged people to claim

In addition to the overarching set of factors, respondents were also influenced to claim by the following aspects of the study:

- raised awareness of Pension Credit and entitlement;
- actually receiving the payments;
- reminder at the end of the study; and
- gave the message that applying for Pension Credit is convenient.

These study specific factors worked in conjunction with the overarching set of factors, and varied in the strength of their influence on respondents’ claiming behaviour.

5.2.1 Raising awareness of Pension Credit and entitlement

There was a great deal of variation amongst respondents in terms of their knowledge and understanding of Pension Credit and the benefits system in general. In some cases people had no experience of claiming benefits and a complete lack of knowledge about the benefits they might be entitled to. This contrasted with other cases where respondents were well versed in their benefits entitlements and kept up to date using the internet or benefits advisers. For example, a respondent made it explicit that their reason for claiming Pension Credit was not the study itself but, rather, that they had heard through the internet that it had increased and this offset the perceived effort needed to apply for it.

Participating in the study generally helped to raise respondents' awareness of Pension Credit. Those who had not previously heard of Pension Credit were given more information by taking part in the study. These respondents would not have previously considered applying if they had not been selected for the study.

'... It gave me a kick start in other words basically.'

(Female, 75+, successful claim)

The study also raised awareness of entitlement for respondents who had either previously been unsuccessful in applying for Pension Credit or had been told they would not be eligible for it after making enquires. Those who had previously claimed unsuccessfully thought that the study signified a change in the threshold.

'It, it was a different kettle of fish, and that, and that we were entitled to this as we'd paid in, as I've paid in for 50 years. I worked for 50 years and I was entitled to do it. So, they encouraged me to do it in that respect.'

(Male, 60-74, successful claim)

5.2.2 Actually receiving the payment

Receiving payments during the study had a strong impact on claiming behaviour. This was for three main reasons:

- it made a difference to respondents' purchasing power. The extra income was found to be useful and respondents wanted to receive it regularly, with respondents reporting items and services that they could afford during the study that they could not afford previously (see Chapter 3);
- it made respondents feel more financially secure or independent. They felt more confident that they would be able to pay bills and meet fuel costs which had a positive effect on their well-being; and
- it eased respondents' concerns about their future financial needs. These people were concerned about the rising cost of living and how long savings would last.

'The Pension Credit which helps me a lot, is like a protection, is about your future, you'll feel secure like ... you are on the Pension Credit you're going to get some help from the government isn't it?'

(Female, 60-74, did not claim after study)

The extent to which receiving the payment during the study encouraged respondents to claim was explored by asking respondents whether they would have considered claiming Pension Credit if they were sent a letter informing them that they may be eligible but were not given a payment. A range of responses to this hypothetical scenario was recorded.

Respondents who felt they would apply for Pension Credit if they only received a letter did so for two main reasons: firstly, receiving a letter would signal a change in their eligibility or show that the government thinks they are entitled to Pension Credit. This would lead them to assume that there would be a chance of receiving something; secondly, the letter would act as a prompt and remind them about claiming Pension Credit. Respondents suggested that it was important for DWP to send a letter or to make some other kind of contact such as a phone call. This is particularly important where individuals are unfamiliar with Pension Credit and the benefits system in general.

This approach was reinforced among people who had an attitude of being willing to see what happened if they applied, and feeling that it would be 'foolish' to turn down any money being offered.

Although respondents commented that they would claim Pension Credit if they received a letter alone it is important to note that they were asked how they would act in a hypothetical scenario and it is possible they may actually respond differently.

There were also respondents who said they would only apply if they received a letter worded to indicate that they 'were' entitled not 'may be' entitled. These respondents cautioned that if people were just told they 'may' be eligible it could raise expectations and leave them feeling disappointed if they did not receive anything.

A final group of respondents said that they would not apply if they just received a letter. And, indeed, there were respondents who had received letters from DWP in the past informing them that they might be eligible for Pension Credit but had ignored them. Key reasons for this included having unsuccessfully applied in the past after being encouraged to do so or feeling that the application process would be difficult or time consuming as they would have to provide a great deal of financial information.

Related to the points above some respondents suggested that it was preferable to receive a payment as well as a letter (as they had done during the study). The main reason for this was that respondents frequently receive letters saying that they have won money or that they are eligible for some kind of payment. Receiving the payment as well as a letter would reassure them that the letter was genuine and make them feel less suspicious.

5.2.3 Reminder at the end of the study

Receiving a letter or phone call at the end of the study reminding respondents that they could claim Pension Credit had a positive impact on claiming behaviour. The reminder letter at the end of the study served three main purposes: firstly, the letter acted as a prompt and reminded respondents to claim after the study; secondly, where respondents had misunderstood the purpose of the study (see Chapter 2) the letter explained that they could apply at the end of the study. Finally, the letter further enhanced respondents' view that they may be entitled to Pension Credit after the study and that it would be worthwhile to apply for it.

'... they then wrote to me at the end of the ... this three month time and said would you like to apply for it? And so I phoned them up and had a chat with the person on the other end who was very, very helpful, gave him all the details of all my pensions ...'

(Male, 60-74, successful claim)

5.2.4 Gave message that claiming would be convenient

Taking part in the study sent the message to respondents that it would be convenient for them to claim Pension Credit after the study. It suggested that claiming would be a simple process and that respondents would not have to fill in too many forms. It was also reported that DWP members of staff were helpful when respondents phoned to make queries about Pension Credit offering advice and assistance completing application forms. This support and guidance was particularly important for those who would have had difficulty claiming on their own.

'It seemed that it wasn't going to be a massive form filling exercise ...'

(Male, 60-74, successful claim)

5.3 Support and encouragement from others

An additional influence on claiming behaviour was support received from other sources such as benefits advisers or family and friends. The type of help and encouragement received can be divided into practical support and moral support.

Practical support was offered by benefits advisers and advisers from independent organisations such as Age UK. These people also provided information about other benefits they may be eligible for e.g. Attendance Allowance, Carer's Allowance. Such organisations were a particularly important source of advice for people who were unfamiliar with the benefits system in general.

'The bloke from Age Concern helps us a lot, don't he ...? Otherwise we wouldn't have bothered 'cos we know we never get any. But he was insistent; "Do this, do that".'

(Female, 60-74, unsuccessful claim)

Moral support was provided by partners or other family members. Where respondents felt embarrassed or 'too proud' to claim Pension Credit, a 'push' to claim from their partner had sometimes encouraged them. When respondents had health or mobility problems their children were able to claim on their behalf.

The research team suspected that the act of taking part in the research interviews could itself have had a potential impact on claiming behaviour. Participating in the research interviews appeared to influence views in two ways:

- when respondents had fully understood the purpose of the study taking part in the interview served as a reminder to claim; and
- if respondents had not understood the rationale for the study the research team provided more information which appeared to encourage them to claim, for example learning more about the assessment process.

'... the only thing that it has done is made me realise that I think I ought to apply for it, having spoken to you and heard what you've had to say.'

(Female, 60-74, did not claim after study)

5.4 Other impacts of the study

5.4.1 Positive impacts

When claims were successful respondents were, rather unsurprisingly, positive about the experience. The main reason for this view was feeling grateful about receiving an additional income (even if it was not always considered to be a large sum of money). As discussed in previous chapters this can be seen as a 'halo effect' of participating in the study. Respondents also were appreciative of the additional benefits of receiving Pension Credit such as help towards dental costs and free prescriptions.

In some cases respondents perceived these extra benefits to be more financially useful than the Pension Credit payment itself. Respondents also felt satisfied with their claim if they received backdated Pension Credit payments.

'Having a Pension Credit is more useful in other things as well because we are eligible for some more. Like you don't, I heard you don't have to pay any Council Tax, you don't have to pay for your, some of the treatments and some things are free for you which are very, very useful for our age group.'

(Female, 60-74, did not claim after study)

Taking part in the study also improved respondents' awareness of the willingness of the government to support them and the types of government support they could receive. This was particularly important amongst those who had never received support, for whom the study demonstrated they could get financial assistance if they ever experienced financial difficulties. Related to this, respondents who made an application for Pension Credit were also informed of other benefits that they could apply for and in some cases applied for these too.

5.4.2 Negative impacts – unsuccessful claim decisions

There were also respondents in the sample whose Pension Credit claim either during or after the study proved to be unsuccessful. In such instances, respondents differed in the extent to which they felt disappointed about the claim decision. Feelings ranged from mild disappointment to very strong feelings of frustration and anger.

There were respondents who experienced a mild feeling of 'missing out' but nonetheless felt grateful for the payments they received during the study. Respondents had a milder reaction to an unsuccessful claim if they had not previously claimed or did not think that they were eligible for Pension Credit. It is possible that these people were less concerned about receiving Pension Credit payments and had 'invested' less in their claim. Having an unsuccessful claim did not deter these respondents from the prospect of claiming in the future if their circumstances changed.

In contrast, another group of respondents felt bitterly disappointed and frustrated that their claim was unsuccessful. There were practical and emotional dimensions to their reaction. On a practical level they missed the money they received during the study and were often struggling to pay bills and meet other costs without it. They also missed the feeling of financial security that receiving payments during the study offered and expressed concern about how they would manage financially in the future. On an emotional level, respondents thought that the study had built up their expectations about receiving Pension Credit. Consequently, they felt rejected when their claim was unsuccessful. Respondents experienced strong feelings of disappointment if they had made an unsuccessful Pension Credit claim in the past. This seemed to be particularly true if they had been encouraged by someone else to apply or if their claim was unsuccessful on the basis of their income being slightly over the threshold. Respondents also reported feeling very disappointed if their estimated entitlement during the study was towards the higher end of the spectrum or felt that receiving the payments during the study really made a difference to them.

'I wanted to cry. I wanted to cry. I was so angry ... Why are they offering me money on a study, and then going to kick me in the teeth, more or less, at the end of it?'

(Female, 60-74, unsuccessful claim)

An additional response to an unsuccessful claim was confusion as to why the claim had not been successful. Respondents wanted to know why they were eligible during the study but not after it.⁴ There was also some surprise that the government did not have access to all of their financial (and other) information during the study assessment and were only able to give an estimate.

⁴ In one case a respondent reported feelings of frustration about their claim because they did not think the person dealing with their claim was sufficiently knowledgeable about their particular circumstances.

5.5 Who did the study have an impact on?

Respondents could be divided into four broad groups based on their claiming behaviour after the study and the way this interacted with their perceived need for Pension Credit, which was a key influence on their behaviour. These groups are illustrated in this section, and summarised in Table 5.1.

Those in **group A** perceived themselves as having a need for Pension Credit and made a claim after the study. Members of this group did not always have a high entitlement to Pension Credit but felt that the money received during the study made a difference. Participating in the study signalled that they could be entitled to Pension Credit and prompted them to make a claim.

Case study A: Arthur

Arthur lives with his wife and has been retired for 20 years. He receives Attendance Allowance but had not heard of Pension Credit prior to the study. He thought that the money received during the study ‘made life a little easier’ and helped him to pay for electricity, gas and car insurance bills. He has put a lot of his savings into his property and felt that the payments received during the study made a difference to him. He thought that three months was a good length of time for the study as it allowed him to plan what he was going to spend the money on. Taking part in the study raised his awareness of Pension Credit and encouraged him to claim. He believes that he would not have applied if he had not participated in the study as he did not think he would be eligible. His claim after the study was successful and although it was less than he received during the study he felt satisfied with the amount as it helps him to pay bills.

(Male, has a partner, low Pension Credit entitlement, aged 75+)

Members of **group B** also perceived themselves as having a need for Pension Credit but did not make a claim at the end of the study. These respondents had either misunderstood the aims of the study or lacked sufficient knowledge to make a claim. Feelings of uncertainty about eligibility were also associated with this group, particularly if they were still in employment. Members of this group indicated that they may make a claim in the future if they were provided with the relevant information.

Case study B: Anne

Anne lives with her partner and together they run the catering contract for a nearby factory. They receive small private and state pensions and feel that they cannot afford to retire. She has not applied for any benefits in the past and feels that it is often a struggle to make ends meet. She felt that the money received during the study made a big difference to her and allowed her to pay their rates and bills. She was disappointed when the study stopped as she had got used to receiving the money. She did not apply after the study as she was unsure of her eligibility due to her employment status. She was also concerned that it would be difficult to apply over the phone and she would need to consult her accountant before making a claim. However, as a consequence of what she learned in the research interviews she may consider applying in the future.

(Female, has a partner, high Pension Credit entitlement, aged 60-74)

Those in **group C** did not previously think that they were eligible for Pension Credit; these respondents were influenced to claim after participating in the study. They did so either because the money received during the study made a difference or were encouraged by a family member and/or a benefits adviser (e.g. from Age UK) to apply. It could be that the study had the most influence on this group as they did not previously think they were eligible for Pension Credit and did not think they needed it but were encouraged to claim as a result of participating in the study.

Case study C: June

June was widowed 13 years ago and lives alone. She retired 33 years ago and previously worked as a ledger clerk for a large department store. She had heard about Pension Credit prior to taking part in the study but did not think she would be eligible as her income was over the required limit. She initially did not think that she needed the money but was very happy to be selected for the study. She decided to claim after the study after receiving a letter encouraging her to do so. She thinks that she would not have claimed if she had not received this letter and would have viewed the payment as a 'nice bonus' and not pursued it further. June made a successful claim and felt that the money she received made a big difference to her. It allowed her to purchase household items and made her feel more secure about meeting winter fuel costs.

(Female, widowed, medium-high Pension Credit entitlement, aged 75+)

Members of **group D** did not think they needed Pension Credit and did not apply for it. These people strongly believed that they were not eligible for Pension Credit either because they had made an unsuccessful claim in the past or had made their own assumptions about their eligibility based on their income or employment status. They did not feel that receiving payments made much of a financial difference and they felt they were unlikely to apply for Pension Credit in the future.

Case study D: Matthew

Matthew retired from the Civil Service 12 years ago and lives with his wife. He experiences problems with his health and currently claims the mobility and care components of Disability Living Allowance. He had not previously heard about Pension Credit and initially thought the payments received during the study were the Winter Fuel Payment. He did not feel that he deserved the money and thought that the payments were a mistake. Receiving the money did not make a great deal of difference to him and he felt that it was just 'absorbed' into his bank account. He made an initial enquiry at the end of the study but was deterred from claiming when he was asked to provide detailed financial information. He was reluctant to divulge this information as he felt it should be kept private. He also felt that the income received from his pension and other benefits was sufficient and that he did not really need the money.

(Male, has a partner, medium Pension Credit entitlement, aged 60-74)

Table 5.1 Respondents’ claiming behaviour

	Felt the need for Pension Credit	Did not feel the need for Pension Credit
Applied for Pension Credit	<p>Group A</p> <p>Understood rationale and purpose of study Study signalled entitlement Knowledge they could apply Receiving payments made a financial difference</p>	<p>Group C</p> <p>Understood rationale and purpose of study Study signalled entitlement contrary to their belief/experience of applying Receiving payments made a financial difference External advice influenced claim behaviour (particularly if entitlement low)</p>
Did not apply for Pension Credit	<p>Group B</p> <p>Misunderstood rationale and purpose of study (e.g. payment considered to be a one-off payment) Insufficient knowledge to claim Possibility will claim in future if provided with necessary information</p>	<p>Group D</p> <p>Understood rationale and purpose of study Study did not signal entitlement due to strength of previous experience or persistent belief about eligibility Very little financial difference felt Unlikely to claim in future</p>

5.6 Summary

Respondents were influenced to claim by a range of factors including those related to the study. Where the study raised their awareness of Pension Credit or their potential entitlement this made a difference, as well as the financial impact of actually receiving a payment. Underlying their decision to apply was their attitude towards claiming benefits more generally, and the extent to which they felt anxious about the process or were prepared to give it a go.

The letter at the end of the study served as a prompt for respondents to apply for Pension Credit. It was important for respondents to be reminded to apply and some suggested a phone call or home visit at the end of the study would also be useful. Increased awareness and understanding as a result of the research interview suggested that this kind of one-to-one support can be very helpful. It was also important that respondents received a letter at the start of the study which made the purpose of the study clear as misunderstanding the rationale of the study served as a barrier to claiming.

Organisations such as Age UK were a trusted source of advice for respondents. It is important that such organisations are informed of any future research so they are best placed to support their clients. Respondents reported that they often received support and encouragement to apply for Pension Credit from partners and close family members. In these cases it may have been useful to have informed these people about the evaluation, although the ethical implications of doing so would have had to have been carefully considered.

6 Conclusions

This conclusion will reflect on the findings of this research with a view to bringing together learning points from the study. These learning points will focus on three key areas: raising awareness of and participation in the study; customers' experience of the study; and the impact of the study on claiming behaviour.

6.1 Raising awareness and participation

The study is a useful demonstration of using information to raise awareness and participation. In terms of **minimising** opt-outs, timing is important and the experience of the study suggests that running it during a period of time where customers have a 'need' for additional income – e.g. over the expensive winter and Christmas period – is effective and means that customers are less likely to opt out. The experience of the study also suggests that the effect of getting the timing right is amplified by a simple and unobtrusive process of engaging respondents in the study which requires little input from respondents, particularly around volunteering personal information. This is especially important as the study targeted older customers, who may be nervous about volunteering personal information and may need additional convincing around the credibility of the study.

The use of letters to inform customers, coupled with the option of accessing other forms of formal support – such as the helpline and the official website – worked as an effective information delivery strategy for this age group. Older people had a distrust of receiving information over the telephone and sometimes lacked the technological know-how to access it electronically. As such, they valued the clear, concise, authoritative and accessible way in which the letter was written. The study also indicates that the use of official logos and the inclusion of official contact details are important ways in which the credibility of the information can be established.

The research suggests that although having a FAQ section at the back of letters is helpful, the information delivery strategy would have been strengthened by bringing some of the key information into the main body of a letter. This includes information around the purpose of the study, why a customer is selected, how any entitlements are calculated and reassurances that the money will not need to be repaid. However, this must be balanced against the need to have a concise letter which is accessible to customers.

6.2 Experience of the study

Respondents were, on the whole, accepting of the government taking the lead in assessing and awarding payments. This was for a number of reasons, including an appreciation of not having to ask for benefits and not having to complete forms. Respondents had limited concerns around how their personal information is used by the government, providing that it was not shared with the private sector. There were a number of different positions on the issue of data sharing, ranging from a begrudging resignation to a wider culture of sharing information that was seen to exist in the private and public sector, to a more positive view which appreciated the necessity for government departments to share information in order to enable them to make assessments accurately and to minimise the inconvenience experienced by customers.

The length of the study and how payments were made were received well by respondents. In the case of the former, respondents felt that 12 weeks was an appropriate time period for the study as it enabled them to factor in the additional income into their financial budgets without getting too accustomed to it. In the case of the latter, respondents appreciated payments coming into their post office or bank accounts. This method of payment was seen to be convenient, reliable, reassuring and cost-effective for the government.

Respondents suggested two key changes to the assessment process which may provide helpful learning points. These were: a greater transparency in the information given around how assessments are calculated (so that people understand that it is an individual-level calculation) and an opportunity for customers to volunteer further information about themselves should they wish to correct any potential inaccuracies in the information that may have been used.

6.3 The study and claiming behaviour

As the above discussion indicates, respondents, on the whole, were accepting of the study and valued participating in it. However, participation in the study did not seem to shift entrenched claiming behaviours in certain respondents. There were three groups of respondents most resistant to claiming: those who had a negative attitude towards claiming, sometimes because they did not want to risk disturbing their current financial arrangements; those who persisted with the view that they were not entitled to Pension Credit despite being on the study; and those who felt they did not need the additional income. It is difficult to suggest how these entrenched views could be changed but it is important to note that some of these views, particularly around negative views towards claiming, may be less widespread among younger age groups.

There were also other respondents whose claiming behaviour was less entrenched and may have benefited from additional information and reminders during and after the study, over and above the reminder letter that was sent. These included respondents who:

- had misunderstood aspects of the study;
- felt uncertain about whether their work or their partner's work could exclude them from applying;
- were uncertain about the income and savings thresholds for applying; and
- had memory issues.

Accordingly, this follow-up work might take the form of letters, telephone calls and/or personal visits which would:

- clarify rules around benefit entitlement – including income thresholds;
- signpost support that individuals could access to complete any paperwork;
- correct any misunderstandings around the given benefit; and
- provide the necessary reassurances around claiming.

In order to keep claiming at the forefront of customers' minds, particularly older customers, this follow-up work might have taken place systematically over a period of time (e.g. immediately after the study, three and six months after, etc.) rather than as the one-off reminder letter employed during the study.

Appendix

Topic guide

P3103 – Pension Credit taster payment study evaluation – topic guide for customers that took part in the study

Interview aims: The key aim is to explore customers' perceptions of the study, their understanding and experiences of it and any impact it may have had on their subsequent decision to claim or not to claim Pension Credit. Accordingly, this topic guide will explore:

- background information about the participant– including information about their living arrangements and their thoughts on claiming Pension Credit before the study;
- understanding of the study – including their views on the information given to them about the study and their understanding of the principles underpinning the study and the processes involved in it;
- views on the level of entitlement awarded to them under the study and how this was assessed;
- experiences of being paid Pension Credit under the study;
- impact of study on decisions to apply for Pension Credit; and
- overall views on the approach to paying Pension Credit used in the study.

Guidance for interpretation and use of the topic guide: The following guide does not contain pre-set questions but rather lists the key themes and sub-themes to be explored with each participant. It does not include follow-up questions like 'why', 'when', 'how', etc. as participants' contributions will be fully explored throughout in order to understand how and why views and experiences have arisen. The order in which issues are addressed and the amount of time spent on different themes will vary between interviews.

Introducing the research to participants

- **Introduce self and NatCen** (emphasising the independence of NatCen)
- **Introduce the research**
 - A research which explores people's views and experiences of the Pension Credit taster payment study that they participated in
 - *NB: Prepare to give further information on the study to nudge customer's memory – a 12 week programme where their Pension Credit entitlement was estimated by the DWP [or The Pension Service] and paid by the DWP [or The Pension Service] into the same bank/post office account they get their State Pension*
- **Details about their participation**
 - **Why they have been selected** – they participated in the study

- **Voluntary nature of participation** – both overall and in relation to any specific questions. Participant should feel free to let us know if they are uncomfortable sharing any information that we request
- **Recording of the interview** – to have an accurate record of what was said; held securely by the research team
- **Confidentiality** – and how findings will be reported
- **Length of interview** – no longer than 1.5 hours

1. Background information

[Aim: to explore participants' current living arrangements, main activity and whether they had thought about claiming Pension Credit prior to the study]

Estimated coverage time: 5 mins

Explore participant's current living arrangements and main activity

- Current living arrangements
 - Live alone
 - Live with partner [is partner retired?]
 - Live with family
 - Their housing situation (rent, own – with mortgage? – live with family?)
- Explore whether they work and, if so, what they do. Are they:
 - Retired
 - Voluntary work
 - Part-time work

Explore whether participant had heard about/thought about claiming Pension Credit before the study

- If not, why not?
- If so, what had stopped them making a claim?
 - Not knowing whether they were entitled
 - 'Knowing' that they were not entitled *[NB: remember that A) people sometimes will be adamant that they are ineligible, even though they are; and B) DWP may have got the estimate wrong so they might be right]*
 - Completing forms
 - Having to tell the government personal financial information in order to claim
 - A perceived 'benefit scrounger' stigma associated with applying

2. Post-study – impact on take up of Pension Credit

[Aim: to explore views on the study ending and how the study impacted on their decision to claim/not claim Pension Credit]

Estimated coverage time: 20 mins

Explore their decision to claim/not claim Pension Credit after/during the study

- If they had claimed
 - What motivated them to claim?
 - How soon during/after the study did they claim?
 - What support did they receive during/after the study to claim?
 - Did the study influence their decision to claim? If so, how and why? e.g.
 - ~ Study made them clear about their entitlement
 - ~ They got used to the money coming in
 - ~ Thought they might as well give it a go

Explore whether they would they still have claimed if they had not received the actual payment of Pension Credit under the study – just been told their estimate by letter?

- If not, why not?
 - ‘Knowing’ they were not entitled
 - Thought it was a scam
- What would have made the difference in encouraging a claim? e.g. a follow-up phone call to receiving the entitlement letter? A visit?

If they claimed Pension Credit during/after the study, how did their post-study entitlement compare to their entitlement during the study?

- Was there a difference in the awards during and after the study? [Specifically, did they claim and then find they weren’t entitled?]
- If so, how do they feel about this?
- Related to above – what did it make them think about the DWP/Pension Service’s ability to estimate entitlement/government competency/quality of government data?

Reflecting back on their experience of the study, explore views on whether the government should continue to take the lead in assessing and awarding Pension Credit

- If not, why not?
- If so, why? What was it about the study that worked well?
- Should anything be changed about the way in which they do this?

3. Understanding of the study and reasons for not opting out

[Aim: to explore participants’ understanding of the Pension Credit taster payment study and their reasons for taking part in it]

Estimated coverage time: 10 mins

Explore how they first heard about the study

NB: They all should have received a letter around April or March from the DWP informing them about the study. However, some of them may not have read the letter and may only have become aware of it once Pension Credit payments had been paid to their bank accounts. Some may still be unaware of it now, having not noticed the additional payments made.

- Their views on the letter sent by the DWP

NB: Have copy of letter at hand to show participant after they have given their initial recall of their reactions to it

- How easy to understand was it?
- Was it informative? Was there any information missing?
- Was it credible? i.e.
 - ~ Did they believe that they were entitled to Pension Credit having read it?
 - ~ Did they think it was a scam?
 - ~ Did they believe that it would be ‘free’ money and they wouldn’t ever be asked to repay anything?
- What made them think it was real? Probe around whether the following helped:
 - ~ The 0800 number
 - ~ Directgov site
 - ~ The Pension Service branding helped
- If they did not read the letter, why not? How did they first become aware of the study?

Explore whether there was anything that could be done to improve their understanding of the study

- The content of the information
 - Would they have liked to know more about any aspect of the study? [e.g. how the payment amount was calculated and/or what information was used?]
- How the information was delivered
 - Timing of delivery
 - Format of information (e.g. larger font, different format)

Explore how they see the study as differing from other ways of claiming payments

- What do they understand the ‘study’ payment to be? (i.e. what is involved in the government taking a lead in the assessment and awarding of payment?)
- Why do they think the government is doing it? e.g.
 - Government taking the lead in initiating claims/awards
 - Government trying to increase take-up of benefits customers are entitled to
 - Government trying to reduce the costs of administration/make better use of data and technology
- Their views on the government taking the lead in encouraging customers to claim Pension Credit.

Explore their reasons for not opting out in the study

- Did they discuss the study with anyone? (If so, why and what advice was given to them). E.g.
 - Partner
 - Neighbours
 - Family
 - Advisory organisation (e.g. Citizen Advice Bureau, Age UK, etc.)
 - DWP/Pension Service
- What were their reasons for not opting out?

Explore fully their spontaneous answers before prompting

- Personal financial circumstances
- Did not know it was happening until payments started and decided to continue with it (if so, why?)
- Did they understand that the study was voluntary?

Explore respondents' feelings about being selected for the study

- What were the overall feelings about being selected?
- Did they have any concerns about being selected? e.g.
 - Why they were selected and not their partner
 - Whether assessment relates to them individually or as a couple
 - Having financial information addressed to them when their partner usually handles their finances.

Explore views on the study ending after 12 weeks

- Whether it was a good idea to have run the study on a time-limited basis
 - If so, why?
 - If not, what reservations did participants have (e.g. getting used to the money)?

4. Views on the level of entitlement awarded to them and the assessment process

[Aim: to explore participants' views on the level of entitlement awarded to them, how this was assessed and on the government taking a lead on this]

Estimated coverage time: 20 mins

Feelings about the level of Pension Credit entitlement awarded to them under the study

- Do they agree/disagree with this? Why?
- What impact this has had on their decision not to opt out of the study and continue with it.
- Did they 'know' they were not entitled and if so, what impact did this have on their remaining on the study? e.g.

- They understood the government was testing something and they were fortunate as a consequence of this
- Any concerns and reservations continuing with the study
- The size of the amount?

WHAT ARE THEIR OVERALL VIEWS ON THEIR ENTITLEMENT BEING ASSESSED FOR THEM BY THE GOVERNMENT WITHOUT THEIR INPUT

NB: Allow participant to spontaneously offer their views before probing about their concerns and what they appreciated (see below).

Explore participants' views on how their entitlement was assessed

- Their knowledge of how assessments were made:
 - who/what departments made the assessment
 - views on the information thought to be used, including:
- Thoughts on what information used to estimate entitlements – both for 'normal' assessment of Pension Credit and that used in the study.
- How information was shared, what information shared and who it was shared between (e.g. government departments and different levels of government)
- How does this sharing of data sit with their existing expectations of the extent to which the government shares data:
 - Is it acceptable?
 - If not, why not?
 - If so, for what purpose? Only certain purposes?
- *Followed by researcher informing them of how assessments were actually made using the information that the DWP provided on the single side of A4.* Their views on how information was actually used to make their assessments, including:
 - How does this sharing of data sit with their existing expectations of the extent to which the government shares data:
 - Is it acceptable?
 - If not, why not?
 - If so, for what purpose? Only certain purposes?

Explore whether they have appreciated anything about their entitlement being assessed for them by the government without their input

NB: Shaded areas represent issues that will be explored with all participants, regardless of whether they have raised these spontaneously or not.

- Not having to complete forms
- Not having the stigma associated with applying
- Being made aware of the benefit when they had not heard of it or thought they were ineligible

Explore any concerns they have about how their entitlement was assessed

NB: Some of this may already have been picked up during the discussion on feelings about the Pension Credit awarded. Shaded areas represent issues that will be explored with all participants, regardless of whether they have raised these spontaneously or not.

- The **accuracy of information** used
- Issues around **privacy**
 - Lack of customer consent
 - The information used to make assessments
- Issues around **data security** – how information used and shared and the impact of this on participant confidentiality
- Not feeling consulted
- Impact on sense of independence – especially, having a benefit ‘forced’ upon them

Views on any support/guidance they accessed from the DWP around their assessment

- Whether they felt any support was needed
- Who they spoke to? [Specifically, did they use the number on the letter, to contact the study delivery team?]
- How useful they found the support

Views on whether anything can be done to improve the assessment process

- Transparency around the information used to assess claims
- The type of information used to assess claims
- How customers are informed about the assessments
- Additional assurances around data security, privacy and confidentiality that need to be given
- Someone to talk to, to discuss the assessment?
- Specifically, would they have preferred to be told the estimated amount, and then given a choice about whether or not to receive it?

5. Experience of the payment process

[Aim: to explore participants’ experiences of being paid Pension Credit into their bank accounts under the study]

Estimated coverage time: 10 mins

WHAT ARE THEIR OVERALL VIEWS ON THEIR PAYMENT BEING PAID DIRECTLY TO THE BANK ACCOUNT

NB: Allow participant to spontaneously offer their views before probing about their concerns and what they appreciated (see below).

Explore their knowledge of how payment of Pension Credit actually worked under the study

- Were they clear about how their Pension Credit was going to be paid?
- Knowledge of when payments were going to start
- Knowledge of when their last payment was to be made and what would happen after this

Explore whether they appreciated anything about their payment being paid directly to their bank account

NB: Shaded areas represent issues that will be explored with all participants, regardless of whether they have raised these spontaneously or not.

- **Knowing they wouldn't be asked to repay** anything back and that any errors were the DWP's fault, not their own
- Not having payments being lost in the post
- Payments arriving in a timely fashion

Explore any concerns they had about being paid directly into their banks

NB: Shaded areas represent issues that will be explored with all participants, regardless of whether they have raised these spontaneously or not.

- Concerns around the acceptability of this payment method
 - Issues around **privacy**
 - ~ Lack of customer consent
 - ~ Concerns around how the government could access their bank accounts
 - Issues around **data security** – how information used and shared and the impact of this on participant confidentiality
 - Not feeling consulted
 - Impact on sense of independence
- Concerns around the practical experiences of receiving their payment
 - **Payments conflicting with other benefit payments** being made, etc.
 - Not knowing money was being paid directly into their accounts
 - Money going to the wrong account
 - Money not being deposited into account on time

Views on any support/guidance they accessed from the DWP around their payments

- Whether they felt any support was needed
- Who they spoke to
- How useful they found the support. Did they consult any of the following and if so what did they think of these:
 - The webpage of Directgov (or did some do this on their behalf?)
 - The special 0800 study enquiry number

Views on whether anything can be done to improve the payment process

- Transparency around how payments are made
- Payments made by means other than through banks (e.g. via a cheque)
- Additional assurances around data security, privacy and confidentiality that need to be given

End

- Ask if there is anything we have not covered about their experience of the study
- Thank them for taking part
- Reassure about confidentiality and field questions
- Ask if they would be interested in receiving a summary of the research

References

Take-up of Pension Credit figures found at: http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/income_analysis/feb2012/tkup_full_report_0910.pdf

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) recently ran a study which used data held by the Department to pay a random sample of individuals their estimated Pension Credit entitlement, for a short period, without them having first claimed. Final evaluation findings are published in two reports. This publication contains findings from qualitative research with participants which explored attitudes to this approach and reasons for subsequent Pension Credit take-up. The quantitative report, published alongside this one, provides the net impact of the estimated payments on subsequent Pension Credit take-up.

If you would like to know more about DWP research, please contact:
Carol Beattie, Central Analysis Division, Department for Work and Pensions,
Upper Ground Floor, Steel City House, West Street, Sheffield, S1 2GQ.
<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

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