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Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

	Executive Summary	i
1.0	Introduction	1
1.1	Joint Claims for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)	1
1.2	The research objectives	1
1.3	The structure of the report	2
1.4	Methodological summary	3
1.5	Note on terminology	3
2.0	Policy impact and potential – overall conclusions	5
2.1	Introduction	5
2.2	Policy objectives	5
3.0	Operational processes and impacts	9
3.1	Introduction	9
3.2	Prior information and staff training	9
3.3	First contact and the role of reception staff	10
3.4	The difficulties with IT	11
3.5	Attitudes of staff towards joint claimants	12
4.0	The role of the Personal Adviser	15
4.1	Introduction	15
4.2	Quality of interaction with PAs and the NJI	15
4.3	Follow on – the Fortnightly Jobsearch Review (FJR) and beyond	17
4.4	Interagency working and other models of delivery	18
5.0	Social and cultural factors	21
5.1	Introduction	21
5.2	Dialogue within a claim	21
5.3	Gender relations and their impact upon Joint Claims	22
5.4	Cultural identities and their impact upon Joint Claims	23
6.0	Summary of research objectives, and recommendations	25
6.1	Introduction	25
6.2	The research objectives	25
6.3	Recommendations: Policy issues	30
6.4	Recommendations: Organisational issues	31
	References	35
Appendices		
	Appendix A: Methodology for Stage One	37
	Appendix B: Methodology for Stage Two	41
	Appendix C: Methodology for Stage Three	45
	Appendix D: The 'types' of joint claimant	48

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Glossary of Abbreviations

BA	Benefits Agency
BM	Business Manager
CBT	Computer-Based Training
DIM	District Implementation Manager
DM	District Manager
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ES	Employment Service
ESCOM	Employment Service Communication (System)
FJR	Fortnightly Jobsearch Review
IB	Incapacity Benefit
IT	Information Technology
Joint Claims	Joint Claims for JSA
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
JSAg	Jobseeker's Agreement
JSAPS	Jobseeker's Allowance Payment System
JMT	Joint Management Team
LMS	Labour Market System
NDP	New Deal for Partners
NDPA	New Deal Personal Adviser
NDPU	New Deal for Partners of Unemployed People
NDYP	New Deal for Young People
NJI	New Jobseeker Interview
PA	Personal Adviser

Executive summary

Introduction

Joint Claims is a mandatory enhancement of JSA and applies to workless couples without dependent children, where at least one partner is aged 18 or over and born after 19 March 1976 (i.e. under age 25 when the enhancement was implemented on 19 March 2001). An extension of the enhancement to include couples born after 28 October 1957 (i.e. up to age 45 at the time of introduction) will be implemented in October 2002.

The qualitative evaluation was part of a wider research programme focused on Joint Claims, which included a quantitative survey of claimants before and after implementation, and an analysis of administrative data.

This report summarises findings from three stages of qualitative research, as follows: research with potential joint claimants (pre-implementation); case studies of delivery; and, research with joint claimants (post-implementation). All these stages were based upon face-to-face interviews across different parts of Great Britain. Around 40 couples (80 individuals) were interviewed at each stage of client interviews, whilst case studies took place in six varied locations.

Policy impact and potential – overall conclusions

At the time of the evaluation, Joint Claims was **accelerating** the employment prospects of the **more** motivated of couples, conversely was **decelerating** the prospects of the **least** motivated couples, but had yet to have a significant impact upon the more ambivalent couples.

Joint Claims has the potential to increase claimants' likelihood of moving into work from benefits. Examples of this occurring are concentrated in couples where both partners are oriented towards the labour market but lacking in confidence and job seeking skills. Strongly motivated people do not believe they have benefited from the enhancement, since their barriers to labour market entry are external. Strongly de-motivated couples are resistant to the idea and practice of Joint Claims, which has done little to address the root causes of their alienation and cynicism. If anything it has deepened their disenchantment with the system.

The strongest positive impacts are observed in previously dependent partners where actual or latent motivation to work has been liberated. In a minority of such cases this can be associated with a concomitant de-motivation of the other partner, particularly those depressed by previous employment seeking failures, and those with 'traditional' attitudes towards gender roles in employment.

The potential and actual impacts of Joint Claims come from three different factors which impact differentially: increased scrutiny of claimant couples; the availability of Jobcentre employment support services to previously dependent partners; and encouragement of increased dialogue and mutual support within the couple.

Observed outcomes by the time of the research were influenced by the following: firstly, the evaluation was close to introduction, so some problematic issues were the result of lack of familiarity and initial operational problems. Secondly, lack of awareness amongst staff was felt to affect the quality of service received. Some joint claimants felt that service was poor, insufficiently focused on the 'non-payee' and lacking continued support.

The policy was found not to take sufficient account of circumstances particular to couples, as opposed to individuals, for example the enhanced effect of the benefits disincentive; and failed to consider the dynamics and interests of the couple. Joint Claims policy appears ambiguous in its treatment of claimants sometimes as individuals and sometimes as a couple.

Operational processes and impact

At launch, implementation staff were partially but not fully familiar with Joint Claims and its requirements. This caused a degree of uncertainty and inconsistency in delivery, which undermined the impression gained by early claimants. Staff training was delivered too far ahead of the date of implementation, and in many cases was lacking in adequate detail and realism. Staff turnover meant many involved in delivering Joint Claims had not received any training. Combined with smaller than expected numbers of claimants, this means experience has been slow to build up. This is particularly an issue for reception processes.

Initial IT problems were serious and caused considerable extra work for staff as well as failed benefit processing. IT based information was difficult to use, hindering the conduct of fully joint interviewing. These issues can be expected to decline as the enhancement 'beds down', IT is improved, and experience and expertise develop. The assignment of specialists to Joint Claims work is an important means to accelerate improvements.

The role of the Personal Adviser

The role of the Personal Adviser (PA) is central to the delivery of Joint Claims. Some joint claimants were happy with their interaction with their PA, but others were dissatisfied and did not feel the NJI had been of value. Both staff and clients found joint interviews to be the most effective approach for most couples. Truly joint interviews, where the couple were dealt with at the same time and dialogue was encouraged, were viewed most positively, followed by 'joint but separate' interviews where one person was dealt with, followed by the other. Least well regarded were those conducted separately, which did little to encourage dialogue or address joint needs. The exception to this was the small number of previously dependent partners who preferred a separate interview.

The key background factors identified as affecting the service offered by PAs include:

- the numbers of joint claimants that PAs had already seen
- the amount of training they had received regarding Joint Claims
- their degree of confidence with support systems and structures (especially IT)
- any prior knowledge they had of the couple
- their underlying attitudes and expectations of household roles

Social and cultural factors

The outcomes to be expected from Joint Claims are strongly affected by some underlying social and cultural factors. The nature and 'quality' of dialogue within the couple has an important bearing on their actions, and there is a need for PAs to understand the differences in addressing couple, as opposed to individual, issues.

Specific resistance to Joint Claims can be found in couples influenced by particular views of gender roles and employment. Some 'traditional' white male respondents are hostile to a perceived undermining of their role a 'breadwinner'; whilst some minority ethnic couples have cultural norms which do not ascribe employment to be an appropriate role for women. Joint Claims needs at the very least to expect these issues to occur, and should consider culturally sensitive responses.

Recommendations

Policy

- the policy goals of New Deal and its structure with regard to eligibility and timing should be reviewed in relation to the particular issues arising from Joint Claims, to encourage synergy and a joined up approach.
- policy and practice needs to take better account of the particular issues which apply to couples as opposed to individuals, in particular the benefits disincentive should be recognised as a serious problem for couples and tackled more directly
- the extension of the age range may be expected to bring some additional or exacerbated problems which should be anticipated

Practice

- Joint Claims needs to be better communicated to claimants
- staff training should be better organised and more appropriate, in terms of content and timing
- further training for PAs on how to conduct 'truly joint' interviews
- more staff with special responsibility for Joint Claims should be deployed
- reception processes should be improved to enhance efficiency and effectiveness, for example improved identification of joint claimants and providing couples with real and meaningful choices
- the NJI's importance should be emphasised more, and PAs encouraged to take a more flexible and sensitive approach to its organisation and delivery
- alternative models of delivery should be considered where they offer improvements (for example Joint Management Team initiative); and reformed where they undermine the enhancement (e.g. call centre model)
- continuing support should be enhanced, and more use made of training and intermediate steps towards employability and employment, particular for those clients at a distance from the labour market

Chapter one – Introduction

1.1 Joint Claims for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)

Joint Claims became part of the legislative framework on 19 March 2001. Its main aim is to help people in workless households to achieve a successful transition into employment and to help those in part-time work to progress into full-time work.

Currently, Joint Claims applies to both partners in a couple without dependent children, where at least one partner is aged 18 or over and born after 19 March 1976 (i.e. under 25 when the enhancement was implemented on 19 March 2001).¹ Both partners are required to make a joint claim for JSA, and both have to satisfy JSA conditions.

If a couple are on a joint claim for six months or more, those aged 18-24 will gain access to the New Deal for Young People. Older partners within a joint claim (those over 25) can join the New Deal or employment and support programmes available to them according to their age and duration of unemployment from the start of, or conversion to, a joint claim. In most cases this will be New Deal 25+, which is available after 18 months unemployment.

The requirement to make a joint claim is set with reference to the dates of birth of the couple. Thereafter, they remain under Joint Claims provision as long as they have a claim to JSA as a couple, unless they become responsible for a dependent child. An upwards extension of the age range to be covered by Joint Claims to 45 years will be implemented in October 2002.

1.2 The research objectives

The Employment Service (now Jobcentre Plus) commissioned the Labour Market Research Partnership to carry out quantitative and qualitative surveys of clients and Employment Service (ES) and Benefit's Agency (BA) staff. The qualitative research into Joint Claims has two major elements:

1. in-depth interviews with potential and actual joint claimants
2. case-study research.

These were part of a three-stage approach:

- Stage One: pre-implementation qualitative research with potential joint claimants (see Fielding and Bell, 2001a)
- Stage Two: case-study research on delivery (split into two phases) (see Fielding, Judge and Bell, 2001b)

¹ A number of jobseekers that are required to make a joint claim will be unable to meet certain JSA conditions (for example, those unable to work because of health problems or pregnancy). These jobseekers are still required to be part of a joint claim but can apply for an exemption from certain JSA conditions.

- Stage Three: post-implementation qualitative research with joint claimants (see Fielding and Bell, 2002).

In addition, the qualitative research into Joint Claims is complementary to:

- quantitative research into Joint Claims (with potential joint claimants and actual joint claimants – see Bonjour et al 2001 and 2002)
- the New Deal for Partners (NDP) evaluation programme (see Griffiths and Thomas, 2001).

This report brings together the findings of all three stages of the qualitative research. It seeks to draw overall conclusions as to the actual and potential impact of the enhancement, and assess the implications for future delivery and for the policy as a whole. The overall evaluation strategy identified the following objectives for the qualitative research:

- to identify whether Joint Claims assists young and long-term unemployed people and their partners into work and improves their prospects of staying in and progressing in employment
- to assess whether Joint Claims contributes to the long-term employability of young and long-term unemployed people, and their partners
- to identify whether Joint Claims helps couples in workless households to enter employment (and those already in part-time employment to access full-time work)
- to explore attitudes to work among young and long-term unemployed people
- to consider the perceived and actual barriers to work, and explore solutions
- to ascertain the attitudes of jobseekers and their partners to finding work, in light of the implementation of Joint Claims
- to assess the effect of Joint Claims upon the ES, related labour-market programmes and initiatives, and upon those involved in delivering the programme
- to assess the effect that delivery factors have on the success of Joint Claims
- to assess whether Joint Claims is helping to create the appropriate conditions to allow couples in workless households to secure the skills, confidence and social stability to compete effectively in the labour market.

1.3 The structure of the report

The report is split into six chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 summarises the main conclusions of the qualitative evaluation across all its three stages, and discusses the impacts which have been, or may be, achieved with regard to the intentions of the policy. Chapter 3 moves on to look at issues emerging from the operational processes involved in setting up and running Joint Claims, particularly with regard to training, organisation, and the interaction of claimants with the Jobcentre. Chapter 4 considers the role of the Personal Adviser (PA), with a primary focus on the conduct and outcomes of the New Jobseeker Interview. The next chapter discusses the influence of various social and cultural factors on couples and their experience of Joint Claims. Finally, Chapter 6 draws together a series of recommendations for further development of policy and implementation of Joint Claims.

1.4 Methodological Summary

Annexes A-C provide methodological details of the study and Annex D provides a typology of joint claimant couples identified during the research. A brief summary of each stage is provided below.

Stage One was based on face-to-face depth interviews with 86 potential joint claimants (43 couples) in eight areas across Great Britain. Respondents were all interviewed separately. Depth interviews explored in detail couples' attitudes to work and identified the perceived barriers encountered during job search, as well as views on the Joint Claims enhancement in advance of its implementation.

Stage Two case study research was based upon face-to-face in-depth interviews with 87 respondents across six areas of Great Britain. A variety of staff were interviewed in the Employment Service (ES), Benefits Agency (BA) and also training providers. Interviews explored the introduction, implementation, delivery and impact of Joint Claims, together with training and barriers to work faced by joint claimants.

Stage Three involved face-to-face interviews with 41 couples (82 interviews) in eight areas across Great Britain. Couples were all interviewed separately but simultaneously in order to explore their attitudes to work and their experiences of Joint Claims. Nine couples from the Stage One qualitative research were re-interviewed to provide a longitudinal element, as well as three couples without telephone numbers to include 'harder to reach' joint claimants. The typologies of potential joint claimants identified at Stage One were revisited and provided a baseline against which to explore developments since 'go-live' day.

1.5 Note on terminology

The first round of interviews were carried out with couples who would, barring changes in their circumstances, become joint claimants once the enhancement was introduced. At this time, one person would be the 'claimant', the other a 'dependent partner', and both can be considered as 'potential joint claimants'.

Once part of Joint Claims, both people become joint claimants, but only one is designated to receive payment on behalf of both of them – one is the 'payee'; the other becomes the 'non-payee'. All these terms are used at various points in the report. In the main however the report uses the term 'joint claimants' as shorthand for both potential and actual joint claimants, 'claimants', 'partners', 'payees' and 'non-payees', when there is no useful purpose in distinguishing between these different categories. On other occasions, where for example attitudes or behaviour were different before and after implementation, or where the treatment of 'payees' and 'non-payees' differed, the more precise terms are used.

Chapter two – Policy impact and potential: overall conclusions

2.1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the key conclusions from the evaluation, particularly in relation to overall policy impacts. The focus is on the extent to which the policy enhancement demonstrates potential to meet its objectives.

2.2 Policy objectives

2.2.1 The potential for impact

Joint Claims has demonstrated **potential** to achieve its primary objectives, specifically to address the issue of workless households and to assist more people into work. The potential is achievable through bringing some individuals closer to the labour market, particularly those partners who were not previously required to engage with the Jobcentre; and in increasing joint discussion and activity by the couple as a unit. These outcomes were reported by at least some of the couples interviewed, as well as by PAs and other Jobcentre staff. They are corroborated by the quantitative study of labour market effects², which concludes *‘Joint Claims has developed over time to be effective in encouraging exits from JSA and...this has operated primarily through the influence on the female partner’*.

The potential impact of Joint Claims comes from three factors. Firstly, the ‘scrutiny’ effect – the dependent partner becomes visible to the ‘system’ for the first time, is required to present themselves at the Jobcentre, and give some account of their job seeking activities – in effect, the same conditions which apply to all other JSA claimants. Secondly, the services of the Jobcentre (and any onwards referral agency) are made available to provide advice and support for practical job searching and enhancement of employability. Thirdly, the very fact of the couple being required to interact with the Jobcentre together can lead to changes in their behaviour and attitudes towards employment opportunities, mutual support and activity. These factors act in different combinations and intensities on individuals and couples, leading to the different outcomes observed.³

This report provides more detail as to on whom the reported employment effects can be expected, as well as how the operation of the different factors might have an effect. At the time of the evaluation, Joint Claims was **accelerating** the prospects of the **more** motivated couples, conversely was **decelerating** the prospects of the **least** motivated couples, but had yet to have a significant impact upon the more ambivalent couples.

² Bonjour et al 2002 p xxi

³ Always allowing of course for contextual factors such as the state of the local labour market.

The evaluation identified a number of different 'types' of couple with regard to their orientation towards the labour market, that is, the extent to which the acquisition of employment was desirable and felt to be achievable and realistic⁴. Joint Claims had relatively little impact on the **most** motivated, since they were already focused on job seeking, optimistic as to their prospects, and little concerned with the 'threat' others might perceive from increased scrutiny of their activities. For these couples the primary barriers to employment were external, for example a simple lack of opportunities in the local labour market. Their primary reaction to Joint Claims is some irritation at having to spend time on additional interaction with the Jobcentre; combined with little faith in the likelihood of additional support being of any real use to securing work. The quantitative survey showed that, of respondents who had found work since being sampled, only a quarter of men and a fifth women attributed this to support from the Jobcentre – conversely, more than sixty per cent of both sexes had heard about their job from a personal contact, a local paper, private employment agency, or direct contact with the employer⁵.

2.2.2 Positive impacts

The most positive impact of Joint Claims is found amongst those with positive labour market orientation, but combined with insecurity and uncertainty. This was a particular feature of many of the female partners, particularly where they had been out of the labour market for some time (if they had ever been in it), but also occurred with some men with patchy employment histories, basic skills issues, or generally a lack of confidence. For both sexes, and particularly where both were of the same general mind set towards employment, Joint Claims was effective in increasing motivation and confidence. This arose from both receptiveness to the 'system' taking what was seen (at least to start with) as a sympathetic attitude towards them, as well as providing some positive and practical actions for them to take. Encouragement of dialogue within the couple also played a role here.

The actual experience of Joint Claims for this group did somewhat undermine these positives through problems of implementation, but in the main, once motivated, these couples have stayed so, and overall had the most positive things to say about the enhancement and its components. Given the small numbers used for qualitative study it is not possible to give numbers likely to have been positively benefited in this way, and the proportion of these couples was only around 15-20 per cent of the sample. Nevertheless, the quantitative survey suggests that what positive impact is identifiable from Joint Claims is to be found in the female 'flow' population, which matches the 'positively oriented but uncertain' profile of this couple type.

2.2.3 Negative impacts

The 'perverse' effect of decreased motivation through introduction of Joint Claims needs to be separated into two main groups. The most straightforward were couples where

⁴ A description of the couples typology is given in Annex D, and a full discussion of the differential impact of Joint Claims upon them found in Fielding et al 2001a

⁵ Bonjour et al 2002 p18

both partners were thoroughly alienated from the labour market, typically with highly disrupted and unhelpful employment history (if any), often combined with factors well known to be unhelpful in job search such as substance dependency or an offending record. There is little that an enhancement such as Joint Claims could do to tackle the deep rooted causes and vicious circles experienced by such couples, and its increased demands upon them only served to increase the opportunities for antagonistic interaction with the system. In these cases, the scrutiny effect is paramount. Alienation from the system renders impotent the support services available from the Jobcentre.

The second group is in policy implementation terms rather more interesting. In these cases the increased motivation of one partner (in almost all cases the female, previously dependent partner), led to a decrease in motivation on the part of the other partner. This effect was seen primarily in couples where the male partner reported quite 'traditional' attitudes towards gender roles, both men as 'breadwinner' and 'head of the household', and women as having their 'place in the home' and needing to be 'housewife' to look after the 'family' (even though children were not present in these households). A sub set were less stereotypical in their attitudes, but rather one partner was plunged into gloom from a sense of failure to have gained employment, and irritated by the new found enthusiasm of their partner – a typical comment being along the lines of *'she'll soon find out how hard it is'*. Again it is not possible to quantify this effect from the evaluation, but the quantitative survey lends at least suggestive corroboration in that it identified a general *negative* impact of the introduction of Joint Claims on the stock, and particularly on men.

2.2.4 Systemic influences on impact

At this stage therefore the positive impact is seen more in potential than reality, and is concentrated in couples with particular characteristics. There are additional limits to impact over and above the demographic and attitudinal characteristics, as follows:

(1) the evaluation was conducted relatively soon after the enhancement had been introduced. There had been insufficient time elapsed for systems to have settled down fully and for staff to have become familiar with ways to implement it to achieve most impact. Initial evidence also suggests that stock claimants are more resistant to the change implied in the enhancement, and inevitably these have constituted the majority of cases so far dealt with (and interviewed as part of the study). New claimants, particularly those without a previous claiming history, are less resistant, and do not have the same history and expectations. As the number of stock claimants reduces and new cases come into the system it can be anticipated that less resistance will be encountered.

(2) the quality of service delivery offered has an impact and there is some mismatch of expectations between staff and joint claimants. Whilst some of these issues are do to with unfamiliarity with the system, others are to do with the way the couple are treated, and a degree of stereotyping of attitudes amongst staff. The evidence of the study is that previous dependent partners and 'non payee' new claims, who tend to be the female partners, are more likely to be stimulated into new job search and employability activity as a result of novel interaction with the Jobcentre. In some cases it could be said that Joint Claims releases a latent potential for employment, and can even bring a

degree of liberation. However, the conduct of key parts of the process – deciding on the type of interview to be held; the concentration by PAs on the male partner during NJIs; automatic assumption that the male partner will be the payee – can act to alienate female partners and prevent the development of a more positive attitude and activity.

2.2.5 Particular ‘couple’ issues

A number of issues arise from the different circumstances and interests of couples as opposed to individuals. In couple situations, interaction with the labour market is more complex. The explanation of this is risk assessment. Joint claimants cannot afford to take the same risks as a single client because they feel they have additional responsibilities, meaning they become more conservative and more strategic in their job searches. In this respect, the importance of a joint claimant’s responsibilities to each other as a couple over the importance of responsibilities to themselves has been underestimated.

The key practical disincentive for couples concerns the **benefits disincentive** to working, whereby the loss of some benefits, particularly housing benefits, on take up of employment by one partner, can seriously threaten the household economy as a whole. Taking up employment can be seen as a significant risk. Unless both partners are able to access employment at the same time, there may be strong, rational disincentives to one taking an available job. The influence of Joint Claims could work in different directions here. On the one hand it might increase problems since by seeking to encourage both partners into work it will lead to situations where one has an employment opportunity and the other does not, bringing the disincentive dilemma to the fore. On the other hand, Joint Claims might ameliorate this issue by giving support to both parties and helping facilitate both into work.

There are also more subtle issues in play concerning the relationship between the two individuals, such as the increased motivation by some partners acting to reduced the other’s motivation. Whilst the enhancement goes some way towards treating the couple as two individuals, it does not go all the way – only one receives the benefit payment, on the other hand communications may be directed at both and joint interviews held. A degree of ambiguity is inevitable, however the evaluation would conclude that the issues arising from dealing with couples are in many cases different from those concerning individuals, and are as yet not well recognised or understood. There is a strong need for the advantages of joint interviews to be exploited, for example the positive effect of joint discussion of job search and mutual support in taking actions; and for the problem areas to be recognised, respected and help and advice offered in overcoming them.

Overall, Joint Claims has a body of support from joint claimants themselves and ES and BA staff alike. This serves as an excellent platform from which to facilitate improvements, in order to allow this potential to be realised.

Chapter three – Operational processes and impacts

3.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the operational processes around delivery of Joint Claims, and the impact of these upon its effectiveness. These include the training and informing of staff in advance of its introduction; interaction between claimants and the Jobcentre in advance of the NJI; and the IT system used to process claims. The role of the PA with regard to the NJI and afterwards is taken up in the next chapter.

3.2 Prior information and staff training

Staff concerned with the delivery of Joint Claims were prepared in various ways for the enhancement. Starting some months before implementation, information and advice activities included:

- provision of written information, newsletters and so on
- training for key staff, particularly PAs, reception staff and BA processing staff
- information on the Employment Service's Communication System (ESCOM)
- discussion in local meetings

The training provided was, in a few instances, felt to be very positive, especially where innovative practical activities were combined with the theory to enable PAs to try out scenarios that they might encounter in reality. This was further enhanced when the trainers had a good working knowledge of the enhancement and supporting materials that presented models of good practice were used in conjunction with this.

However, the majority of PAs interviewed were unhappy with their training. It was said to be either too long and boring, or too short with insufficient detail (these comments did not concern the same training event). Training staff were said to know little about the enhancement, and the supporting documentation was weak. Didactic or 'chalk and talk' methods of delivery were particularly criticised. In addition, the time lag between awareness raising and training and then between training and 'go-live' day was often long, PAs could not always recall the key points, and had to rely on ESCOM. There were few opportunities for mop up training for those that missed it, which caused problems in smaller Jobcentres, or in Jobcentres with a high turnover of staff. The constant updating of guidance post-training meant that staff still had to keep referring back to ESCOM despite its known problems.

Other key staff, particularly administrators and receptionists, were in the main more positive about the training they had received. For these groups training was less detailed than for PAs and concentrated more on the implications for their functions, however in the main it was seen as useful and confidence enhancing, and as an unusual example of training needs being taken seriously in advance of a major change.

Unfortunately this positive aspect was rather undermined by the length of the gap between training being delivered and actual implementation, and by the fact that staff members in many Jobcentres, had changed by 'go live' day, thereby wasting much of the training given.

District Implementation Managers (DIMs) were charged with raising awareness of Joint Claims in Jobcentres. In the main, the enhancement was presented as a significant and important change which needed to be taken seriously, but could be dealt with adequately within normal procedures and organisation. A few less experienced DIMs were reported as interpreting Joint Claims as 'the most important enhancement to JSA since it came into being' and relayed this to PAs and other staff. As a result, some PAs were immediately 'on the back foot' and apprehensive about the enhancement and what it would mean, particularly in terms of complexity and workload. Following training, PAs were kept up to date with information relating to Joint Claims via communication meetings in Jobcentres and on ESCOM. Many details had not been available during the training given, and the reported poor navigability and usability of ESCOM curtailed many of the PAs' efforts to find information, which even when they did find it, was often insufficient, even a few days before 'go-live' day.

In the short-term, this concerned PAs because they could not be confident in front of clients and thereby could not gain their trust if they had to keep referring to guidance or checking up on ESCOM. PAs accepted that it was always going to take time for them to get used to Joint Claims and that they had to see a certain number of couples before they were comfortable with the protocols and procedures.⁶

3.3 First contact and the role of reception staff

Stock claimants were identified from their claiming record and written to with information about the enhancement and what it would mean for them. Jobcentres noticed an immediate effect in that a high proportion of contacts did not convert into a joint claim. Staff reported that up to 40 per cent had dropped out, for a variety of reasons including change in circumstances, but also, in the view of staff, as a result of the dependent partner in fact being in work. New claims after 'go live' day were simply dealt with as a joint claim when they first came to claim.

The first point at which Joint Claims would impact was when they arrived, and were seen by the receptionist. For many joint claimants initial contact, claim registration and arranging the New Jobseeker Interview (NJI) were often all blurred into one event. Any recollection of initial contact was based upon either a very positive or a very negative event. On the positive side, a number of joint claimants were happy with their interaction with the receptionist, and contrasted this with the PA. They praised the way that they were talked to and the fact that receptionists seemed to listen to them – those expressing such sentiments were largely female 'non-payees'.

On the negative side, joint claimants were often frustrated by the receptionist's lack of knowledge about the enhancement. This made for a very disjointed experience of initial

⁶ It should be noted that enhancements to staff training in Joint Claims are planned to coincide with introduction of the extension to age 45 in October 2002, and as an on-going priority thereafter.

contact, and did not fill joint claimants with confidence for the NJI. In a few cases, reception staff missed the fact that a fresh claim was in fact a joint claim. When such couples came in for their NJI they were told that they had to re-register and fill in a new claim, a frustrating and time consuming experience for them.

Many Jobcentres had a shortage of reception staff, particularly those with good experience, with many also lacking in the necessary training. The time lag between training and 'go live' noted above, combined with staff turn over, and the need to use what staff resources were available, meant in many cases that the receptionists dealing with Joint Claimants were inexperienced, rushed, and inadequately trained. A number of unsurprising consequences flowed – inefficiency and inaccuracy in registering claims; failure to identify Joint Claims at all; the conveyance of an impression of confusion and uncertainty to claimants.

In the absence of standardised processes and protocols, reception staff applied Joint Claims as requested by DIMS and PAs, and there was considerable variability between Jobcentres. Whilst the basic process and eligibility was consistent, details such as the length of time to book for interviews; the booking of joint or single interviews (even though a choice over this was intended); and the explanation of Joint Claims to give to joint claimants depended on local decisions. There was some lack of knowledge of who the enhancement was intended to work for and issues such as exemptions were poorly understood. In a few Jobcentres, staff members constructed their own eligibility checklists or process flowcharts to help them understand and manage the system, good practice which could be applied elsewhere.

The role of the front end should not be underestimated. For the rest of the service to function effectively and for couples to be fully engaged with the enhancement, the front end has a very important role to play. Some joint claimants related more to receptionists than PAs and the opportunity to build upon that should not be missed. For example, with increased training reception staff would be more able to 'sell' Joint Claims to clients. Many of the difficulties encountered at the NJI resulted because of a couple's lack of knowledge and apprehension about what would be entailed. Reception is a good example of where more attention, such as adequate resourcing, improved supporting information and flow charts and better training, could make a highly positive difference to the experience.

3.4 The difficulties with IT

The quality of service delivery, especially in the period immediately after 'go live' day, was hampered by technical difficulties with IT systems, most notably Jobseekers Allowance Payment System (JSAPS). Most problems centred on the processing of joint claims and payment to joint claimants, with up to 90 per cent of all claims having to be processed clerically, which could take as long as two hours rather than the expected ten minutes. No BA staff reported receiving any training in how to process a clerical joint claim. ES and BA staff being based in different locations exacerbated the consequences, especially when the lack of compatibility between ES systems (LMS) and BA systems (JSAPS) remained problematic. Often, information would have to be faxed from the ES to the BA, with a tendency to get lost in transit between the two, resulting in a delay in payment and frustration for clients.

The other main IT issue concerned locating information relating to Joint Claims on ESCOM, which was time consuming. Information was laid out unhelpfully and was difficult to find, reducing the extent to which it was used for client benefit in NJIs.

Over the lifetime of the enhancement, a number of 'fixes' to the IT system have been implemented to reduce many problems. As a result, the numbers of rejected claims have been greatly reduced and so has the workload for processing staff, making the service more efficient in the longer-term. These fixes are likely to enhance service delivery, but there is a residue of disenchantment to be overcome which may impact on the likelihood of positive outcomes for the claimants who experienced these problems.

3.5 Attitudes of staff towards joint claimants

The attitudes of staff towards joint claimants were an important influence on service delivery and its impact upon joint claimants. Generally staff enjoyed taking a joint claim and dealing with the issues facing couples. They became more exasperated by those joint claimants that were continually demotivated, particularly the 'non-payee' in a stock claim that had been claiming for some time.

Staff also detected a cultural resistance to Joint Claims from a small number of couples who objected to the enhancement because it was at odds with their cultural and religious beliefs about women working. Some staff empathised with this position but appreciated that these were the conditions under which benefit would be granted and so couples had to abide by those conditions.

A few staff were concerned about the impact of the enhancement upon the 'non-payee' in a stock claim, especially their likely attendance at fortnightly jobsearch review and the potential repercussions within the couple if benefit payment was delayed.

The attitudes of staff to joint claimants are largely determined by their level of comfort with and their knowledge and understanding of the service. Improvements to all of these would generate more confidence for staff and joint claimants and increase the likelihood of sustained contact between the Jobcentre and joint claimants. Central to this is an understanding that Joint Claims is designed as a system of support, advice and guidance to couples, and not just as a monitoring exercise.

The point of view of staff is based at least in part on direct experience. Many reported suspicions that fraudulent claims had disappeared as a result of the introduction of Joint Claims, and it is clear that most staff are highly intolerant of fraud. If it achieves nothing else, staff welcome Joint Claims as contribution to this end. They also tend to feel that requiring all parties to claim addresses an unfair anomaly. At the same time, most staff, and particularly PAs with direct client contact, are enthusiastic as to the possibility of improving the service they deliver, and see Joint Claims as embodying both these aspects. Their frustration comes from problems of implementation and resources.

There is however little recognition by staff of the particular issues that come with Joint Claims, particularly the 'couple dynamics' and sensitivity over issues such as joint treatment during interviews. This is due in part to this being a new set of circumstances,

and in part to relatively few cases having been dealt with so far, and therefore lack of experience as to the issues which will emerge.

Chapter four – the role of the Personal Adviser

4.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the role of Personal Advisers (PAs) and their interaction with joint claimants. This is primarily in relation to the NJI, since all the respondents had had one of these by the time they were interviewed, but also considers other subsequent interactions with PAs (or other Jobcentre staff) for example at the FJR.

4.2 Quality of interaction with PAs and the NJI

The role of the PA is central to the delivery of Joint Claims. PAs check the claim; they give advice, guidance and support to couples; they enable couples to make decisions; and they provide a human face to the enhancement. In the main, claimants do not see a PA until arriving for their NJI – one or two may have contact at the time of their initial call at the Jobcentre when, for example, an aspect of Joint Claims needed explaining to them, but it is unusual.

There was praise among a few couples for their dealings with PAs. Positive aspects included PAs sign-posting potential areas of support, and their dealing with all aspects of a couple's claim before beginning the work focused part of the NJI. This enabled rapport to be built up and gave couples the reassurance of having their benefit confirmed. PAs were also praised for ensuring that a couple's fortnightly jobsearch review took place on the same day at the same time, and for their patience in dealing with exemption cases, particularly those with significant paperwork. However, these positive views were the exception rather than the norm.

A significant amount of criticism was levelled at PAs by the majority of couples expressing an opinion. PAs were criticised for appearing uninterested; for appearing to listen to couples but not to hear what they said; talking at couples rather than talking to them; and giving little attention to their previous work experience and skills – only around half of respondents in the quantitative survey reported discussing their experience and skills at the NJI, with women reporting less than men⁷. There was rarely any serious attention given to assessing the financial benefits (or not) of taking work. The 'better off calculation' is a mechanism available to give substance to the view that being in employment is preferable to remaining on benefit. In practice this might be difficult to do at the time of the NJI, before benefit entitlement has been confirmed, and in any case might show the financial incentive to working to be slight. Nevertheless, it could be argued that claimants should be as fully informed as possible of the consequences of their actions, and given an idea of the level of pay which would make a significant difference to their circumstances. The quantitative survey reported that just 10 per cent of men and 5 per cent of women discussed a better off calculation at their NJI.⁸

⁷ Bonjour et al 2002 p39

⁸ Bonjour et al 2002 p39

There was also little evidence of promotion by PAs of the non-financial benefits of working, nor of recognition by them of the considerable risk often implied by the decision to take work. As discussed above, such risks have a different nature when applied to couples, given the benefits disincentive and internal dynamics of the couple. The failure of PAs to communicate recognition of such issues undermined their credibility in the eyes of some claimants.

The most important aspect of the NJI from joint claimants' point of view was ensuring that they got their benefit resolved. From the claimants' perspective there is little choice perceived in the 'system', and few had clear expectations as to the likelihood of positive results from the employment focused part. Some claimants felt dis-empowered by the fact that payment would be made to one party only, although nearly 90 per cent did report in the quantitative survey that effective choice was presented as to who this should be, with 70 per cent happy with the choice they had made⁹.

A striking feature of the research relating to the NJI was the significant difference between the guidance itself, and the accounts of PAs and joint claimants, over the length and content of the NJI. Receptionists recalled that they were booking NJIs to last up to 120 minutes, much longer the 60 minutes indicated in the guidance. PAs indicated that most NJIs took between 80-90 minutes and that some lasted as long as 120 minutes. This contrasts quite sharply with the recalled experiences of joint claimants, where the longest interview was around 120 minutes, but the shortest was 15 minutes, with **most** reported as taking between 20 and 25 minutes. However, this discrepancy may be due to problems of recall.

For the work-focused part of the NJI, the following **joint interview** formats were identified:

1. **The 'joint but separate' interview** – Here, the couple sat together, but the PAs talked to them separately, first one, usually the 'nominated payee', then the 'non payee'
2. **The separate interview** – One of the couple, usually the 'non-payee' was asked to sit away from the desk while the PA talked to the other person. They then swapped over after a period of time.
3. **The 'truly joint' interview** – Here both joint claimants were involved in all the aspects of the others interview and JSAG.

The other type of interview was that conducted **separately** for each partner, sometimes on different days. The quantitative survey¹⁰ reported around four fifths of NJIs as being joint, one fifth as separate. Information from both the qualitative and quantitative research leads to the following conclusions about the relative merits of joint and separate interviews:

- when given a free choice over the type, most couples will opt for joint interviews. Most joint interviews conducted were decided on by the couple, although around one third reported this being chosen for them by the Jobcentre

⁹ Bonjour et al 2002 p40

¹⁰ Bonjour et al 2002 p36-37

- a small proportion will choose separate interviews if given the option, and amongst this group satisfaction with the interview tends to be high. Women were much more likely to seek a separate interview, and be happy with it
- more than half of the separate interviews held were not however as a result of choice by the couple, but imposition by the Jobcentre, and in this case satisfaction with the interview was much lower

There are some important lessons here. The issue of choice over type of interview to be held is not perceived by a significant number of couples as being available to them. This matters if it is the case that different people have different preferences. For most it would appear to be the case that joint interviews are better, and that the 'truly joint' is the best. For some others, particularly some women, separate interviews may offer more. At present, in some Jobcentres, choice is clearly not being made available, nor across the board is it the case the PAs and interview booking staff are taking more subtle issues and preferences into account. This again is a 'couple' issue – couples may well not share a view as to the preferred type, and there is a need for more thought as to how to make the choice available.

A further issue about the interviews was the tendency in joint interviews reported by couples for the PA to talk primarily to the 'nominated payee' (most often the male partner), even though the other partner would in almost all cases have less labour market experience and probably be most in need of additional support, particularly stock claims. This is confirmed in the quantitative survey, which showed PAs discussing a greater number and wider range of topics with men than women¹¹. PAs did not report much awareness of these issues around joint and separate interviews being of importance to couples.

In conclusion, a number of key background factors can be identified as affecting the service offered by Pas. These include:

- the numbers of joint claimants that PAs had already seen
- the amount of training they had received regarding Joint Claims
- their degree of comfort with support systems and structures (especially IT)
- any prior knowledge they had of the couple
- their underlying attitudes and expectations as to roles within the couple.

Such issues are likely to last unless tackled. Of shorter term significance was the impression gained by some couples that PAs were not confident in dealing with them, and that they did not appear to know what they were doing. This is likely to have arisen from PAs unfamiliarity with the enhancement, and can be expected to reduce as a problem over time, particularly where some PAs are given particular responsibility for Joint Claims.

4.3 Follow on - the Fortnightly Jobsearch Review (FJR) and beyond

Joint Claims does not add to the nature and timing of employment support services available, rather it extends those already in place to previously dependent partners. For

¹¹ Bonjour et al 2002 p35

a significant minority of joint claimants, particularly women coming into the labour market with little if any prior experience, there has been a problem of raised then disappointed expectations – an issue further confused by other claimants' experiences of New Deal. Some newly motivated 'non payees' saw the NJI as the start of a process of help and support, only to receive no follow up, and an experience at the FJR which amounted to little more than signing on. Joint claimants were appreciative of efforts made to co-ordinate FJRs on the same day, bringing greater convenience and reducing the likelihood of sanctions if one partner failed to attend, but in the main saw little positive in the apparent '*cursor*' treatment of employment issues. The reality for joint claimants was that the FJR was almost solely used as a vehicle for signing on – they sign on, they leave. FJRs were criticised for being understaffed, resulting in queues, leading joint claimants to feel uncomfortable spending time talking to staff when other people were waiting. Another issue was the lack of continuity. Mainstream joint claimants never saw the same person each time they came in, preventing the build up of rapport or follow-up activity. FJR staff knew less than the PAs and were far less confident about the detail.

All this contrasted quite sharply with the experiences of those joint claimants on a New Deal (usually New Deal for Young People). Their New Deal Personal Adviser (NDPA) carried out the FJR. They saw the same person every time. Specific time was allocated to talk to the client about looking for work and other activities through an appointments system that negated the need for queuing. All of this made for a very positive experience for those clients. The problem here was this positive experience was almost the polar opposite of that of their partners. Many mainstream joint claimants with partners on a New Deal thought that they should get to see the same NDPA as this would help them both to address issues of worklessness at the same time. It is apparent that at least some partners were not clear as to the distinction between New Deal and the mainstream JSA position, and that there would be merit in ensuring PAs communicate effectively to joint claimants that Joint Claims itself is not a New Deal initiative. Seeking ways to make the same PA available to both partners even when one is on New Deal and the other not would also help overcome some of these issues of contrasting experience.

It was clear that many mainstream joint claimants, especially 'non-payees' were disappointed by their treatment at FJR. They had not been provided with accurate or adequate information and there had been a failure to manage their expectations about FJR, both from FJR staff and from PAs in the NJI. This remains a concern because FJR could be the part of the process that sustains the longer-term interest and attitudes of joint claimants towards the Jobcentre as a mechanism to help them into work.

4.4 Interagency working and other models of delivery

In areas piloting the Joint Management Team initiative, BA staff register and process a joint claim and this proved to be a success. PAs got to spend more time on the work-focused part of the interview and couples got to know the status of their benefit more quickly. Such a formula could be adopted for all joint claims, especially with the introduction of Jobcentre Plus. Moreover, the steps that are being taken in the Jobcentre Plus pathfinders by having financial assessors working side-by-side with PAs could be a better solution.

However, the evaluation does highlight some concerns over the call centre model adopted by Jobcentre Plus. Joint Claims research was carried in a ONE pilot area that used the call centre model of delivery. The evidence of this study from both staff and claimants suggests that service delivery and staff training was less good; that inter-agency working was being held back; and that call centre staff were lacking in training, were uncertain exactly what to do and provided poor quality information. Of particular importance was that having call centre staff fill in claim forms removed the opportunity for a PA to assess a client's basic skills.

Development of practical experience and the sharing of experiences with colleagues was reported as more effective when carried out at an inter-agency level. ES and BA staff worked well together in some circumstances, particularly when co-located. This enabled inter-agency working to be much more efficient and enabled problems with claims to be sorted out very quickly, helping to ease joint claimants' fears. These actions enabled joint claimants to be more open once they came to talk about work because they knew their benefit was sorted out. In other offices however, inter agency divisions continued and were unhelpful. This was particularly the case when they were on different floors or even in different buildings. In these situations there appeared to be lack of clarity over each others roles in relation to Joint Claims.

Chapter five – Social and cultural factors

5.1 Introduction

This chapter considers some of the underlying factors which have a bearing on the implementation of Joint Claims and its reception by claimants. In particular it looks at aspects of the relationship between the couple, and also considers attitudes towards gender in different population groups.

5.2 Dialogue within a claim

One of the underlying mechanisms affecting change in attitudes and activities among joint claimants is the degree of dialogue within the couple. In theory the more a couple talk to each about looking for work and the steps that they might take, the more likely they are to take effective action.

The study shows the role of women to be important here. Examples were encountered where a distinct increase in motivation and orientation to the labour market of the female partner, especially 'non-payees', promoted an increase in dialogue within the couple. Moreover, where couples already discussed jobseeking (for 'the claimant') with each other on a regular basis, the need to consider both partner's employment helped to improve the quality of dialogue, and in some cases helped to bring about more focused and strategic job search activities. Change could be seen not just from the other partner's involvement, but from them both adopting a fresh perspective to the couple's situation. This was also enhanced by their increased knowledge and understanding of a couple's entitlements and options within Joint Claims. In a number of circumstances, these factors led to couples feeling more 'together' as a couple. Indeed, a few mentioned that this helped to strengthen their relationship, with both now being in the same position and willing to help each other get out of it. The effect of the benefit disincentive upon the length to which couples were prepared to go to address their situation was however important, and couples with good dialogue between them tended to have a clear view of their own circumstances and what would be in their joint interests.

Other outcomes were also observed. In a limited number of cases the 'payee' lost motivation following the increased motivation of the 'non-payee'. In these cases, there was little joint discussion about looking for work, the 'non-payee' following their own course, at times against the wishes of their partner. This could lead to a degree of tension within the couple.

There were also cases where the lack of dialogue between couples pre-Joint Claims was a contributing factor to them not wanting to engage with the enhancement, despite what it might be able to do to help them. In seeing employment as not an issue for them jointly, there was little enthusiasm for a new approach, which sought explicitly to deal with them as a couple. There were other couples, especially from stock claims, where the lack of enthusiasm of the 'payee' prevented dialogue, and had a depressing effect

upon the potential labour market participation of their partner. In these and other cases dialogue was not the only contributing factor, the role of traditional gender relations also played a significant part.

5.3 Gender relations and their impact upon Joint Claims

Stereotyped views of traditional gender relations in the communities where joint claimants were surveyed were not generally borne out. There were many couples with 'liberal' attitudes to gender relations, completely comfortable with the idea of women working. In many respects, women within the joint claim were better placed to find work, and many of the men recognised this. Softer skills around inter-personal relationships and fitting in to situations were seen as higher amongst women, whilst employment opportunities in the area were in fields traditionally associated with female work such as retail and personal care.

These attitudes were not necessarily reflected in outcomes however. Few women were actually moving into work, or taking other actions such as training as a stepping stone to work¹². In part, this can be explained by the time it takes to change attitudes into activity and also by the impact of the benefit disincentive. However, the decision-making was often based on unequal status within the relationship. For example, it was clear that the decision not to work because of the benefits disincentive was more often based upon the man's decisions. More women wanted to work but were persuaded not to for good of the couple because of the likely financial loss they would suffer. Women were making more individual sacrifices for the collective good of the couple, despite the fact that they tended to be the ones in most need of the experience of working.

Short-term financial decisions overrode longer-term career aspirations in these cases, but it was the male in the couple 'pulling the strings' (or thinking that they were 'pulling the strings'), despite their apparent weakness in terms of labour power. A few women were prepared to admit to this situation, and indicated that they would wait for their partner to make the first move into work and then follow suit, ensuring that their partner felt they were in control. In other words, unequal gender and power relations within a couple were affecting the extent to which women felt that they could participate in the labour market, despite their willingness to do so.

Another issue was that although women had acquired more knowledge and understanding about their benefit entitlements and the benefits system per se, few of them were prepared to challenge the Jobcentre about any of the aspects of the registration process and the JSAg. Indeed, many women admitted hardly saying anything during the NJI, letting their male partner take control. This may have been because the male of the couple was often the 'nominated payee', but it was also because a number of women felt it important that the man was in control of the situation - not to be could have been damaging. Often women took these decisions at the expense of their personal development, and often their partners were oblivious of what they were doing. Something beyond personal choice was influencing decisions around these women working. In the absence of other empirically grounded evidence, the

¹² Bonjour et al 2002 were unable to identify statistically significant evidence of increased job entry for males or females as a result of their participation in Joint Claims

replication of traditional gender relations based on the maintenance of unequal power and an engendered culture is the most likely cause.

For all the efforts of Joint Claims to treat couples equally, unless these gender relations and their effect upon the dynamics of decision making in the couple are addressed, the impact of the enhancement will not be as substantial as it could be. More significantly, this research has shown that the current organisation and conduct of Joint Claims can cause such dynamics to be replicated and sustained in some couples, undermining its own objectives

The continued impact of gender and power relations is also connected to the maintenance of a 'traditional' cultural identity. These wider cultural identities do have a role to play in the impact of Joint Claims.

5.4 Cultural identities and their impact upon Joint Claims

The continued presence of a 'traditional' cultural identity of the man working and the woman staying at home was found in a number of interviews, especially in white working class areas. This resulted in fewer women than anticipated moving off benefit and into work in the short-term. Although very few minority ethnic couples were interviewed, there was a discernible amount of reticence and resistance towards the enhancement within most of the couples interviewed. This resistance was based upon the fact that Joint Claims was at odds with some cultural beliefs and practices about women's roles, particularly in relation to work. Concerns were expressed about the impact of a woman having to work upon her husband's family, especially their standing within the community. The evidence to date though is not substantial, because of the small numbers.

There is very little that Joint Claims can do to address wider societal issues such as these directly. The issues addressed in this chapter do however need to be monitored over time so that they can act as a barometer to the potential in changes in attitudes to work and the possibility of moving workless households off benefit and into work. They are also important indicators of the future problems that the extension to the enhancement may encounter because they are based upon beliefs and practices that are more entrenched among the older population. As a result, it is highly likely that these issues will act as bigger barriers to work in a future extended Joint Claims. Many Jobcentre staff have recognised this and have already called for more and not less resources to be devoted to such a development in order to give staff the help and support they would need to help these older joint claimants.

Chapter six – Summary of research questions, and recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This chapter returns to the original research questions, and summarises the answers to these which have been provided by the research. It then puts forward a number of recommendations for further consideration. These are made in the light of the discussion above, and the conclusions drawn about the current effectiveness of Joint Claims, set against its intentions. They also take into account new developments such as the extension of the enhancement to older age groups.

6.2 The research objectives

The evaluation addressed the specific research objectives as follows:

Objective 1 - Whether Joint Claims assists young and long-term unemployed people and their partners into work and improves their prospects of staying in and progressing in employment

Joint Claims does assist those joint claimants who are already motivated, have an idea of what they want to do in work, and are willing to try different ways to progress. The effect is primarily noticed amongst those orientated towards the labour market but lacking in a degree of confidence or experience, and is most striking amongst a number of non-payees, who experience a degree of liberation through being brought into the system. The most motivated and already active claimants receive little which makes a significant difference to their behaviour, although even for this group the opportunity to discuss work issues as a couple with a third party can be useful.

Unfortunately, the conduct of NJIs can be counter productive in this context, in that the stereotype based and potentially divisive approach to interviewing by some PAs is off-putting. In not addressing the benefits disincentive however Joint Claims may in many cases act against most claimants taking work even when they might previously have done so, in that it could heighten concern about the consequences of one party working.

On the basis of the survey interviews conducted, it is not possible to conclude that Joint Claims has had, or is likely to have, a significant impact on the prospects of individuals *staying in or progressing* in employment once gained. Respondents saw little connection between the claiming regime and their likely behaviour or treatment once working – from their point of view the role of the Employment Service effectively ends once a job has been found, and only returns if unemployment occurs again. Employability is more about getting than keeping a job.

The potential of Joint Claims to assist the less motivated joint claimants has yet to be demonstrated. If anything, the evidence shows that for at least a proportion of such claimants the effect is to reinforce alienation and further enhance claimant's

disillusionment with 'the system'. This is particularly evident amongst stock joint claimants. Implementation problems have done little to help with these issues, and have acted to reinforce cynical views of what the enhancement is really intended to achieve.

Objective 2 - Whether Joint Claims contributes to the long-term employability of young and long-term unemployed people, and their partners

There is little evidence to suggest that longer-term employability is uppermost in the minds of joint claimants, because short-term concerns still dominate. Claimants lacking in confidence, with poor work histories, or in areas with few quality job opportunities have little faith in the sustainability of work. For these groups income is the primary concern, and most have their own views as to what is in their financial interest at any particular point. Their expectation is that work of one form or another is likely to be available to them from time to time, and may provide more income than remaining on benefits. However, most expect work to be relatively short-lived, and their position to be precarious, with the posts available to them being highly vulnerable to employer's needs.

There are some signs that longer-term planning is beginning to be recognised as an important job seeking strategy among a few couples, and that this is in part attributable to Joint Claims. The key influence here is the encouragement of dialogue within the couple. In a few circumstances, the non-payee's enthusiasm affects the payee, in others the need to discuss and co-ordinate jobsearch is new. There is evidence of growing awareness of the importance of generic skills and a more strategic, stepping stone approach to securing more stable employment. However, the way NJIs, and most importantly follow-up, are handled does not assist with this process. More change would be likely to come from more concerted efforts to deal with the couple as a couple, or at least fully acknowledging that it is a couple which is being dealt with, requiring different considerations. It would also come from more use of training options, and from sympathetic and engaged follow-up to review progress and make appropriate suggestions.

In summary, longer term employability is of relatively little immediate concern to joint claimants, and at present the enhancement is not doing very much to raise its importance. The lack of referral to training or intermediate options is a particular gap in the development of employability.

Objective 3 - Whether Joint Claims helps couples in workless households to enter employment (and those already in part-time employment to access full-time work)

Couples are beginning to look for and find work at the same time, especially when they are both committed to finding work and have a clear idea of what they want to do. Joint Claims has meant that more of these activities take place within the formal channels available at the Jobcentre. The enhancement has also stimulated dialogue within a number of couples, which has impacted upon job search strategies. In turn, further evidence suggests that Joint Claims *could* act as the catalyst for more ambivalent or unsure clients and for less motivated or self-confident clients in the longer-term. However, this is dependent upon the service being delivered to the expectations of joint claimants and that any barriers to work (crucially the 'benefits disincentive') are addressed adequately - this has yet to happen.

Few of the couples in the study were working part-time, and there is little if any evidence to suggest that Joint Claims makes the transition from part- to full-time work more likely. Decisions about such moves are likely to be affected by domestic dynamics – how well part-time work fits with the couple’s time budgeting for example, by the nature of work available in the locality and by the potential impact of the benefits disincentive - all of which are risk assessed by the couple. Claimants with part-time work are largely dependent on whether the employer has extra hours available, and there is resistance amongst most claimants to having more than one job.

Objective 4 – To explore attitudes to work among young and long-term unemployed people

The vast majority of joint claimants would rather work than not work. Motivations of course vary, however across the board there is wide recognition that employment should bring higher income, more stability and respect, and opportunities to progress. Joint Claims has the potential to build upon these attitudes, but is hampered in doing so for a number of reasons:

- there may be little faith that employment is really available in the locality
- the benefits disincentive undermines the willingness to work
- current administration of Joint Claims fails to connect willingness with effective activities, undermining its credibility
- the enhancement does not fully comprehend the differences of dealing with a couple rather than individuals, and can act to reinforce internal divisions, and/or does not exploit opportunities for joint actions.

A small group of claimants are thoroughly alienated from the labour market, and are unlikely ever to seek employment enthusiastically. For this group the ‘system’ is there to be manipulated to provide the maximum income possible, and most are relatively sophisticated in knowing how to interact with the system for their own purposes. Joint Claims can be seen to have had an impact here, in that many stock joint claims ended once the enhancement was enforced. For those who stay within the system however, there is little evidence to suggest that the ‘new service’ is capable of addressing the underlying motivational and practical issues of these couples.

Objective 5 - To address the perceived and actual barriers to work, and explore solutions to ascertain the attitudes of jobseekers and their partners to finding work, in light of the implementation of Joint Claims

Above all others, the benefits disincentive continues to have a significant impact upon joint claimants as a couple. However, there were also a series of specific but interconnected barriers for joint claimants, which focused upon lack of confidence in themselves and the system and a distinct fear of change. At the moment, joint claimants are not convinced that Joint Claims is going to have any significant impact upon addressing their barriers to work. The exception is those joint claimants that are now on a New Deal (usually NDYP), who are very positive about this and their prospects when they come out of it.

A host of other barriers to work exist, such as lack of local jobs, lack of transport, lack of information, which are similar to those experienced by other types of claimants. The

study does not indicate that joint claimants experience or react to such barriers differently from other groups. The one issue where a (positive) difference might be seen is where an increase in dialogue and planning within the couple brings up more possible solutions and ways to overcome individual barriers. In this context, the situations where the enhancement has acted to involve both parties equally and together are demonstrably more effective, although at present relatively rare.

Objective 6 - to ascertain the attitudes of jobseekers and their partners to finding work, in light of the implementation of Joint Claims

It is clear that Joint Claims has had a positive impact upon the attitudes to work of some 'non-payees', especially women and those that are motivated, and know what sort of work they want to do. It is less clear whether there has been any impact upon 'payees', but improved attitudes are more likely among those where their partner is equally if not more motivated, or they are a part of a fresh claim. However, there is a concern about the attitudes of 'non-payees' in stock joint claims. These are likely to become more negative, especially where their partner has failed to become more motivated. Joint Claims has increased the polarisation of attitudes to work because of what it has done for the more motivated and what it has not yet achieved with the less motivated and ambivalent.

Objective 7 - to assess the effect of Joint Claims upon the ES, related labour-market programmes and initiatives, and upon those involved in delivering the programme

In the short-term, there was a significant increase in the work load and stress levels of all staff charged with delivering Joint Claims, caused largely by problems with information delivery and faults with JSAPS. Many of the problems with JSAPS have been fixed and longer-term delivery looks more promising. However, staff have not yet built up sufficient experience in dealing with joint claims because the numbers have been much smaller than anticipated. Combined with the lack of easily useable information, this meant the enhancement 'got off on the wrong foot' for many staff. The role of reception staff has not yet been given sufficient recognition to enable a more effective service to be delivered. Inappropriate and poorly delivered training complicated matters during the early stages of implementation.

Such practical issues were recognised early on, and a number of solutions implemented, which are reported to have improved the situation greatly. Time problems and frustration therefore should have declined, and it would be wrong to condemn the enhancement on the basis of such issues. It should be borne in mind however that the difficult early implementation is likely to have left a residue of negative attitude and scepticism in the minds of both claimants and staff, which may take some time to dissipate.

Of more concern is the lack of understanding amongst many staff of the particular dynamics and concerns of couples as opposed to individuals, and the sensitivity needed in dealing with 'non-payees' who have little or no experience of the benefits system, let alone work itself. The IT and other fixes implemented so far do not deal with such issues, although it is possible that more positive approaches will evolve as PAs and other staff build up more experience.

The study indicated relatively little interaction with other labour market programmes. Most relates simply to the amount of staff time needed. On the one hand, the lower than expected numbers meant that fewer individuals (particularly PAs) have had exposure to Joint Claims, and in some cases this has freed up more time for other activities. On the other hand, the processing problems ate up very much more time than expected, which, combined with the frustration of wasted and unnecessary work, impacted upon the time available for different work. In the main, experience gained with other programmes has been carried across to Joint Claims, with little attention to the possibility of anything other than practical differences.

The clearest relationship is with the various New Deals, where positive experience by one partner has an influence on how the couple regards ES intervention in their lives. Whilst to start with this might mean there is optimism about the possible help on offer, the different experiences of mainstream joint claimants compared to their partners on a New Deal has often resulted in disappointment and disaffection for the former.

Objective 8 - to assess the effect that delivery factors have on the success of Joint Claims

Generally, joint claimants feel they have received a poor service and delivery staff have been frustrated by short-term systemic difficulties. Good practice is occurring in the organisation of FJRs for the same day; the allocation of dedicated staff to deal with a joint claim; and, where a truly joint interview occurs. The longer-term prospects look better as staff build up a bank of experience in dealing with a joint claim. Progress has been hampered by the lower than anticipated numbers. For the longer-term however, it is the psychological and attitudinal issues which will have a greater impact on Joint Claims than immediate practical delivery issues.

Objective 9 - to assess whether Joint Claims is helping to create the appropriate conditions to allow couples in workless households to secure the skills, confidence and social stability to compete effectively in the labour market

At the moment, Joint Claims is meeting these conditions for the more motivated of couples who know what work they want and where to get it, although the extent of value it really adds is limited. Amongst the less motivated and active groups there is evidence that key drivers for improved stability such as social dialogue and a greater knowledge and understanding of benefit entitlements and the benefits system per se may be achieved in the longer-term. At the moment, it is too early to tell, but there is certainly the potential for this to be achieved. However, the unintended effects of Joint Claims, such as the possible exacerbation of the benefits disincentive (although it might also ameliorate it), and causing tension between partners, act in the opposite direction. Overall a joint approach is popular in principle, and closes an obvious anomaly. Its ability to achieve the impact which is sought upon workless households, however will depend upon greater understanding of, and effective work with, the household as a complex unit. The enhancement seeks to individualise people in a situation where they themselves do not operate as individuals; whilst it also continues to treat people in stereotyped ways as 'traditional' couples. Workless households are neither clusters of purely self-interested individuals, nor are they traditional male breadwinner and stay at

home housewife. Joint Claims does not at present transcend these views, and will only realise its potential when it does so.

6.3 Recommendations: Policy issues

6.3.1 Overall policy

Joint Claims is intended to bring both partners in a couple into contact with JSA, thereby equalising treatment, ending an anomaly, and directly tackling the issue of workless households. However, both the structure of delivery and aspects of the way key elements are being conducted means true equalisation is not being provided. Only one partner receives the payment for both; job focused discussions take the couple's relationship into account; PAs tend to talk to the male partner more, and about a wider range of subjects. Consideration could therefore be given to whether joint claimants should be treated as a separate category of claim from mainstream JSA, with more thought being given to the underlying policy goals for individuals and couples and how these may be achieved, and the principles of equality of opportunity.

Ways to achieve better synergy between the New Deals and Joint Claims should also be considered, including how this could be achieved within the different policy frameworks. Differential treatment of partners within the couple undermines the attempt to deal with the household as a unit, and for some is demotivating, particularly where access to positively viewed services from New Deal appears to be being denied. The policy goals of New Deal and its structure with regard to eligibility and timing should be reviewed in relation to the particular issues arising from Joint Claims.

The benefits disincentive is real, and well understood by many couples. It not only impacts on motivation to work, but also compounds the risk inherent in taking up employment, which is not just financial. The consequences of taking a job which is then lost (for whatever reason) are serious, not least with regard to the barriers to signing back on. The interaction of different parts of the benefits system, and the impact this has on incentives to work, needs further improvement with regard to couples and better understanding by staff.

6.3.2 Presentation of the policy

The impression gained by many joint claimants, particularly in the stock, is of a change primarily intended to increase 'interference' in their lives, and a means of reducing benefits by 'forcing' partners off the register. Regardless of the truth or otherwise of this, there would be merit in emphasising the helping and supporting intentions of Joint Claims, particularly at the point of first contact for those with least prior experience. It goes without saying that the credibility of such messages is dependent on the service on offer living up to expectations.

One piece of good practice could be directed at individuals coming to the Jobcentre in the first instance on their own. When identified as a Joint Claim, they could be given an explanatory session about Joint Claims to explain the procedures involved, to start the

process of developing their understanding and give a clear set of expectations about what to expect when returning as a couple.

6.3.3 Future of the policy

The extension of the enhancement to older age groups is due to take place in October 2002. It is forecast from the evaluation's conclusions that this will mean:

- a higher proportion of partners coming into the system with little or no labour market experience throughout their adult lives – hence a need for more sensitivity to their uncertainty and fears, and a greater appreciation of the need for employability and a step by step approach to job readiness. PAs will need to be much more willing to consider training or other transitional steps as valid intermediate outcomes for the client.
- a higher proportion of 'traditional' views of gender roles in employment, meaning a need for more sensitivity to the possible impact of a heavy focus on both partners seeking and taking work on the internal dynamics of the couple
- this is particularly likely with some minority ethnic groups, where at the very least culturally sensitive explanation of the purpose and intentions of the enhancement is needed
- greater numbers of couples for the system to deal with, meaning more experience can be gained by staff more quickly, and strengthening the case for more specialist PAs
- a higher proportion of Joint Claims exemptions being sought

Overall however, the basic rationale of the policy gains support in principle from both staff and claimants, and is felt to end an anomalous situation.

6.4 Recommendations: Organisational issues

6.4.1 Overall organisation

Joint Claims will become a permanent and larger scale part of the overall benefits and employment support system. Business Managers and the Jobcentres they run should be encouraged to develop specialist knowledge and expertise amongst the staff working with joint claimants. Much of the good practice identified in the study came from understanding of the claimant's point of view.

A substantial number of problems were identified with background training and information provision about the enhancement. Recommendations for training and information include, inter alia:

- timing of training more closely to when it will be put to use
- overall training improvements, particularly more interaction and use of 'life like' situations
- Computer Based Training should be encouraged as being most effective. When used it should relate to JSAPS as well as LMS

- regular mop-up training should be available to those who have not worked on Joint Claims before or for some time
- information relating to Joint Claims on ESCOM should be reviewed and made easier to access
- improvements to the IT benefit processing system should be monitored, and where necessary new problems dealt with swiftly and effectively
- ES and BA staff should be encouraged to work more closely together, and wherever possible should be co-located in joint teams.

6.4.2 Reception issues

As the first point of contact, reception is important in 'setting the tone' for how Joint Claims will be seen by claimants, as well as in ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of the system by, for example, ensuring Joint Claims are correctly identified. The issues identified in the study concerning this stage of the process suggest that reception staff need to be better trained in the requirements of Joint Claims; and should be encouraged to 'sell' the enhancement to claimants more effectively. Performance would be improved by providing reception staff with better supporting documentation and tools such as a simplified exemption check list. They should be encouraged to support couples in self diagnosis.

Overall information provision on exemptions should be improved. Good preparation, after initial contact with the Jobcentre, by a couple who know they are likely to be an exempt case, such as the collection of evidence, would ease the process of the NJI and make it less irksome and time consuming. Equally, the information provided to couples to enable them to undertake this preparation needs to be more accessible in its content and format. NJIs that involve an exemption case can be very lengthy, often to the detriment of the other person's needs. Here, the opportunity to re-arrange the work focused part of the NJI for the non-exempt partner would be a significant step forward.

In addition, real and meaningful choices need to be given to couples in relation to key parts of the process, such as whether to have individual or joint interviews. Their 'rights' as well as responsibilities in the process should be spelled out clearly. The possibility of disagreement within the couple should be recognised, and strategies recommended for defusing tensions and ensuring due account is taken of both party's views.

The pilot Joint Management Team initiative where BA staff registered the claim and processed benefits was generally successful and give the PA more time to deal with work based issues. Replication elsewhere should be considered and feedback from the Jobcentre Plus pathfinders should be sought to ascertain other emerging good practice.

The call centre model in the ONE area was problematic with regard to Joint Claims. The reasons for this, particularly to do with poor information and inflexible systems, should be more thoroughly investigated, and solutions found, given that more call centres are to be used in future, for example in Jobcentre Plus.

6.4.3 Issues for the NJI

A wide range of issues were encountered with regard to organisation and conduct of the NJI. Recommendations flowing from this hinge around the need to:

- deal with the benefits issue quickly and efficiently, recognising that this will be the claimants' understandable top priority in the first instance. Separation of this element for processing by specialist staff, allowing the PA to concentrate on the job focused element, may be a more effective approach. In any case, benefits issues may need time to complete properly, and if necessary the work focused element should be reorganised or actively followed up rather than rushed
- be clear with joint claimants as to what they can expect of the system. A balance needs to be struck between raising expectations as a factor in developing strong labour market orientation, whilst giving a realistic impression of what the claimant should expect from their participation within it
- understand the different circumstances which apply to joint claimants as a couple; and to recognise the unconscious stereotyping which some PAs manifest. PAs should be encouraged to give truly equal attention and time to both parties

'Truly joint interviews' should be encouraged wherever possible, and PAs provided with help and support to carry these out effectively. There should be a focus on encouraging joint discussion and activity, and mutual support, between the couple. Alongside this is a need for recognition that some cases may be better dealt with individually, however this should not be imposed, but emerge in dialogue between the couple themselves, and with the PA (or reception staff).

Another idea is to encourage PAs to ensure that the 'non-payee' is always the first person they speak to at a work-focussed interview. As they are the clients most likely to require extra help and support and confidence building, the NJI would address this straight away.

PAs should also make more use of the means available to them to overcome the benefits disincentive. These include 'better-off calculations'; incentives such as tax credits, the Adviser Discretion Fund, and benefit run on. Joint claimants could be provided with independent information about such measures before the NJI to encourage them to request and use them. More information and training for PAs in the use of these, particularly how they can work with couples, should be provided.

An IT fix on LMS to enable PAs to have both partner's information on screen at the same time should be developed. This would help with the conduct of 'truly joint' interviews.

6.4.4 Follow up and the FJR

A clear issue for those interviewed in the evaluation was the paucity of follow up and on going support. This is particularly unfortunate when it acts to de-motivate those whose energies have been engaged by the novel experience of the 'system' taking an interest and offering help to find work. More systematic follow-up should therefore be used with couples. Joint claimants should be given clear information about what sort of follow up

they can expect and/or request. PAs (and FJR staff) should regard joint claimants as part of a case load, and should make sure continuing support is provided.

Training and development should also be used more often as a stepping stone into the labour market, rather than focusing on simply acquiring employment. To this end, PAs need better information about what is available locally, better referral links, and a monitoring system which enables positive incremental outputs to be identified and valued.

The staff responsible for the FJR should be adequately trained in Joint Claims, and specific information and advice to them on how to deal with joint claimants should be made available. Overall however, a clearer view needs to be arrived at as to what role the FJR should play, and whether more support should be available for those who want to access it at this time. In purely practical terms both claimants should have their FJR on the same day as a matter of course to avoid tension between them, if for example one fails to attend and benefit is stopped.

Mainstream clients with a partner in New Deal should be allowed to see the NDPA rather than FJR staff in order that continuity can be provided and so that issues pertaining to the couple and decisions that will effect the couple can be taken. Once more, this coheres with the view that joint claimants have different aspirations and responsibilities from their individual counterparts.

6.4.5 Targeting

Clearly the enhancement needs to cover all couples in the eligible age groups. This evaluation has however identified a range of different couple and individual types, with differing degrees of labour market orientation and experience. Consideration should be given to the targeting of particular support on those joint claimants most likely to respond, as well as those more likely to be adversely affected. Both outcomes are likely to impact upon female 'non-payees', whilst less motivated male 'payees' are more likely to be put off by increased motivation by their partners.

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Appendix A – Methodology for Stage One

Introducing the Interview Techniques

This stage is based on qualitative research with potential joint claimants, and the main method of inquiry was in-depth interviews. These took a ‘traditional’ format in that they involved an exploration of topics through a series of questions with probing and follow-up of responses by the interviewer, designed to elicit, elucidate and establish the rational responses and attitudes of interviewees. A total of 80 interviews with 40 couples were planned across eight areas (ideally, five couples per area).¹³ These interviews were carried out separately but simultaneously in the couples’ homes, by a team of two researchers per area; one researcher interviewed the claimant in one room, and the other interviewed the partner in another room. All participants were thanked with a £20 cash gift.

Area Selection

Eight areas were selected for the research. Selection was based on two main criteria:

- geographic region (urban versus rural, plus a spread of different regions)
- labour-market conditions (with high/low unemployment and a tight labour market being key determinants, a tight labour market defined as experiencing below-average unemployment).

A third criterion, the method of delivery for potential joint claimants (in particular the centralised vs. the dispersed) was also considered, but to a much lesser extent.

Sampling

The Employment Service provided a recent sample of potential joint claimants for each of the eight areas.

The numbers in the sample varied significantly among the areas. The main aim was to interview five couples in each area. In addition, it was hoped that there would be some of the following types of couple in each of the areas:

- where the claimant was female and the partner male
- where the claimant was significantly older (more than ten years) than the partner (and vice versa)
- where one or both of the couple belonged to an ethnic minority group
- where the claim for the couple was over one year old
- where one of the couple worked part-time.

¹³ Four of these areas will also be common to the case-study research on delivery in Stage 2.

Recruitment

BMRB Qualitative carried out recruitment of interviewees over the telephone. Unfortunately, a small but not insignificant number (approximately 30 per cent) of couples had to be excluded because they did not possess a telephone.

A total of 41 couples (82 interviews) were recruited. Table AA.1 details the areas covered, the justification for the areas, the organisation conducting the research, the numbers of letters sent out, and the numbers of people interviewed.

Table AA.1 Sampling and Recruitment Information

Area	Justification	Organisation responsible for interviews	No. of opt-out letters sent	No. of couples interviewed
A	Rural/urban high unemployment	ECOTEC	65	5
B	Rural, high unemployment	ECOTEC	78	5
C Pilot	Inner city, high unemployment	ECOTEC and BMRB	150	8
D	Rural/urban, tight labour market	ECOTEC	100	5
E	Urban, high unemployment	ECOTEC	100	6
F	Urban, tight labour market	ECOTEC	100	6
G	Rural, tight labour market	BMRB	56	5
H	Rural/urban, tight labour market	BMRB	49	3

Interviewing

Interviews were carried out in the couple's home simultaneously, but separately. All the interviews were taped and later transcribed by a team from BMRB. Issues covered included:

- perceptions of the labour market
- barriers to work
- motivations to work – current and future
- motivations concerning improved employability
- household decision making
- awareness of the voluntary programme (why no response to NDPU)
- perceptions of the mandatory nature of Joint Claims and issues concerning exemption
- perceptions of and current behaviour towards the current benefit system
- perceived benefits/disbenefits of Joint Claims

- understanding of the proposals concerning sanctioning and disentanglement
- attitudes towards joint/individual interviews
- understanding of benefit responsibilities for reporting a change in circumstances.

Analysis

The same teams that conducted the field interviews also conducted the analysis. The analytical framework was based on the topic guides, and centred around the themes of motivation, barriers, decisions and solutions.

Each team used their field notes and the interview transcripts in conjunction with the analytical framework, in order to derive essential findings based around the four themes. All of the findings were circulated among the teams, and then brought together by the report-writing team to be edited into a final report.

Appendix B – Methodology for Stage Two

Introduction

The research was split into two phases, separated by a period of six to eight weeks. Phase one of the study was designed to investigate immediate issues, such as how the stock of claimants was dealt with and any problems identified within the system. These themes were revisited in phase two of the study in order to gain a longer-term view, and also to identify which problems were more likely to be teething problems and which were more structural.

Interview techniques

The main method of inquiry was the in-depth interview. These interviews involved an exploration of topics through a series of questions with probing and follow-up responses by the interviewer, in order to elicit the responses and attitudes of the interviewees. One or two researchers in each location carried out the interviews. A total of 87 interviews were carried out. Interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed.

Interviewee selection

The interviews were planned over six areas (with 15 interviews per area). The following staff were interviewed in each area; the target numbers are given in parentheses:



- regional implementation manager (RIM)/regional co-ordinator (1)
- district manager (DM) (1)¹⁴
- business manager (BM) (1)
- personal advisers (PAs) (4)
- reception staff (2)
- training providers (3)
- Benefits Agency staff (3).

Area selection

A total of six case study areas were selected. Four of these areas had been covered in Stage One of the research, thus providing continuity. The areas were selected according to the following criteria:

- geographic location – urban versus rural, plus a regional spread

¹⁴ A number of district implementation managers (DIMs) were also interviewed, as they reported directly to the District Manager on Joint Claims. The DM felt that the DIMs would have a clearer picture of implementation and process issues.

- labour-market conditions – high unemployment, low unemployment, and a tight labour market (defined as experiencing below-average unemployment)
- areas with unusual polarisation in male and female unemployment rates
- method of delivery – centralised versus dispersed. In addition, a ONE pilot area was selected, to highlight the differences from ‘traditional’ Jobcentres.¹⁵

The selection of the specific Jobcentres to be visited was decided on the following basis:

- size – a mix of large, medium-sized and small Jobcentres
- location – a number in the main towns, others in outlying areas
- specific labour-market conditions – Jobcentres in areas with large redundancies, new opportunities, or specialist requirements
- inter-agency issues – Jobcentres with BA staff on site, or on separate floors of the same site, and those where BA staff were in separate locations
- staffing issues – avoidance of Jobcentres with recognised staff shortages, or with absences because of holidays.

Below, Table AB.1 presents more detailed information on the selected areas.

Table AB.1: Description of Areas Selected for Case Study Research

Area	Phase	Criteria	Organisation conducting research	No. of interviews conducted
A	1	Rural/urban, high unemployment	ECOTEC	14
B	2	Rural, high unemployment	ECOTEC	15
C	1 (pilot)	Inner city, high unemployment	ECOTEC + BMRB	14
D	2	Urban, high unemployment	ECOTEC	15
E	1	Rural/urban, tight labour market	BMRB	14
F	2	Rural, tight labour market, ONE pilot area	BMRB	15

Recruitment

Each research team was responsible for recruitment in their own areas (see Table AB.1). ES recruitment was conducted in partnership with regional representatives

Usually, ES representatives first organised an interview with the DM and then contacted business managers in each Jobcentre, asking them to nominate appropriate members

¹⁵ ONE is a new, fully integrated service for claiming benefit and looking for work. It is currently being piloted in nine areas across Great Britain, through three different models of delivery.

of staff who would be willing to be interviewed. Similar patterns were followed for BA and ONE staff.

Training providers were recruited via PAs, who provided a list of potential providers once their own interview had been organised. A shortlist of potential contacts was then drawn up, and providers were contacted and interviews arranged to coincide with the rest of the fieldwork.¹⁶

Interviewing

Where possible, interviews were organised with district and regional staff first, so that the information could be mapped from district and region to individual staff in Jobcentres

Generally, interviews were straightforward, but in a few instances obtaining the relevant data was problematic. Generally, this was when:

- the interviewee was not really the right person to speak to. For example, interviews were arranged with New Deal Personal Advisers (NDPAs) who had not seen any joint claimants¹⁷
- interviewees did not really know enough about Joint Claims – these interviewees had not been sufficiently involved, or had started work after ‘go live day’
- interviewees had not seen enough clients.

Analysis

A generic analytical framework was drawn up, based upon the construction of and responses to the topic guide. Teams used field notes and interview transcripts in conjunction with this framework in order to derive the main findings. These were then circulated among the research team and brought together by the authors to be edited into the final report.

¹⁶ This shortlist was based on ensuring a variety of provision, style, qualifications, location, types of client and so forth.

¹⁷ The team suspects that this confusion arose because Jobcentres tend to use the term PA to refer to New Deal Personal Advisers (NDPAs) and not as a generic term for all advisory staff in the Jobcentre.

Appendix C - Methodology for Stage Three

Introducing the techniques

This stage is based on qualitative research with joint claimants. The research was carried out over a four-week period during August and September 2001. The method of inquiry was the in-depth interview. The interviews were carried out separately but simultaneously in the joint claimants' homes. A total of 82 interviews with 41 couples were carried out. All participants were thanked for their time with a £20 cash gift.

The interviews involved an exploration of topics through a series of questions with probing and follow-up of responses by the interviewer, to elicit attitudes of joint claimants.

Area selection

The research was undertaken in eight ES districts. Seven of the eight areas selected at Stage One were re-selected for Stage Three. Selection was based on three criteria:

- geographic region (urban versus rural, plus a regional spread)
- labour-market conditions (with high/low unemployment and a tight labour market being key determinants)
- the method of delivery in each district (centralised vs. dispersed), although this was less significant than the other criteria.

In one Stage One area, the sample was too small and so an additional area with the same characteristics (Rural/Urban, tight labour market), replaced this. With selection complete, a sample of joint claimants was drawn up.

Sampling

The sample of joint claimants was split into two groups:

1. Couples who were interviewed during Stage One and who were a joint claim the day the sample was drawn
2. Couples who were a new joint claim on the day the sample was drawn.

Recruitment at Stage One did not include couples without a telephone. In order to address this possible gap (on the assumption there may be differences between these claimants and others), the sample for group two was disproportionately split into those with and those without telephones - those without telephones becoming group three. A separate face-to-face recruitment strategy was adopted for the latter and it was agreed that at least three of the total sample would be recruited in this way (recruitment being much more time consuming in these circumstances).

The aim was to recruit five couples per area from either group, but there were variations in the numbers within each of the eight areas. There was some flexibility to re-adjust this should recruitment prove more difficult in some areas and more productive in others.

Within the sample of couples, there was particular interest in purposively recruiting any displaying the following characteristics:

- the nominated payee was female¹⁸
- the nominated payee was significantly older than the 'non-payee' (and vice versa)
- one or both of the couple belonged to a minority ethnic group
- the claim for the couple was over one year old
- one of the couple worked part-time.

Recruitment

- BMRB Qualitative carried out the recruitment of couples.

A total of 41 couples were interviewed.

Piloting

The interviews and the topic guide were piloted in Area B one week before the start of fieldwork in the other areas. One topic guide was developed for all joint claimants. The main issues covered were:

- Background information
- The process of moving to two people claiming
- Experiences of the New Jobseeker Interview (NJI)
- Exemption issues (where applicable)
- Payment of benefit
- Fortnightly reviews
- Sanctions (where applicable)
- Household impacts of being a joint claimant
- Barriers to work
- Outcomes
- Motivation and attitudes to work
- Perception and experience of Joint Claims
- Prospects for the future

Interviewing

- A team of two people per area carried out interviews in the couple's home. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

¹⁸ The 'nominated payee' is the person within the couple to whom the giro is made out to, or, to whose bank account the money is paid into. Unless otherwise stated, the report refers to them as the 'payee' and the other person in the couple as the 'non-payee'

Analysis

An 'interview synopsis schedule' was constructed, based upon the main themes in the topic guide. This was filled in after each interview (or on the same day), so that key issues would be recorded quickly, and in addition to the transcript.. A more detailed analytical framework was drawn up later. The team used fieldnotes and interview transcripts in conjunction with this framework in order to derive the main findings. These were circulated among the research team and brought together by the authors to be edited into the final report.

The analysis had to unravel the varying opinions of joint claimants with three different types of exposure to the process - Stage One re-interviewees whether claiming or not, stock claims from Stage Three and fresh claims from Stage Three.¹⁹ Given the sample size it was not practical to investigate the experiences of these three groups separately. Instead, analysis treats the group as a whole, and seeks to illustrate differences between these three groups as and when they are relevant.

¹⁹ A stock claim is when one person in a couple had been claiming for the couple prior to 19 March 2001 and then they were converted to a joint claim. A fresh claim refers to a couple who started a joint claim after 19 March 2001.

Appendix D – The ‘types’ of joint claimant

‘Types’ identified from Stage One and Stage Three

Type 1 – Where both ‘payee’ and ‘non-payee’ are clearly orientated towards the labour market

Type 2 – Where both ‘payee’ and ‘non-payee’ are not as clearly orientated towards the labour market

Type 3 – Where the ‘payee’ is orientated towards the labour market and the ‘non-payee’ is not/less so

Type 4 – Where the ‘payee’ is orientated towards the labour market but the ‘non-payee’ is more so

Type 5 – Where the ‘payee’ is orientated towards the labour market and the ‘non-payee’ cannot be/does not want to be at this stage

Type 6 – Where neither ‘payee’ nor ‘non-payee’ is orientated towards the labour market

‘Type’ identified from Stage Three only

Type 7 – Where the ‘non-payee’ is orientated towards the labour market but the ‘payee’ is no longer so inclined.