

Research report

Work-Focused Services in Children's Centres Pilot: Final Report

by Rachel Marangozov and Helen Stevens

Department for Work and Pensions

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Rachel Marangozov and Helen Stevens

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Abbreviations

AAT	Adviser Achievement Tool
ADAPT	Adviser Development, Achievement and Performance Tool
ADF	Adviser Discretionary Fund
CA	Carers Allowance
CAB	Citizens Advice Bureau
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
CAPI	Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing
CRB	Criminal Records Bureau
CTB	Council Tax Benefit
CTC	Child Tax Credit
DLA	Disability Living Allowance
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESA	Employment Support Allowance
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
HB	Housing Benefit
HMRC	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
IB	Incapacity Benefit
IS	Income Support
IT	Information Technology
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LAMRA	Labour Market Recruitment Adviser
LMS	Labour Market System
MI	Management Information
NDLP	New Deal for Lone Parents
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification

SROI	Social Return on Investment
TfC	Together for Children
WFIs	Work Focused Interviews
WPLS	Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study
WTC	Working Tax Credit

Glossary of terms

Traditional Jobcentre Plus customers

Customers who are the main claimant of a benefit or are the partner in a couple benefit claim.

Non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers

Customers who are neither the main claimant of a benefit nor the partner in a couple benefit claim.

Summary

Introduction

This report presents final findings from the evaluation of the ‘work-focused services in children’s centres’ pilot. The main components of the evaluation have been:

- two waves of case study interviews with pilot staff and some children’s centre users (autumn/winter 2009 and 2010);
- two waves of in-depth qualitative interviews with children’s centre users, both those who had and had not used the pilot (summer 2009 and 2010);
- two waves of a survey of children’s centre users conducted in all the pilot children’s centres (a ‘baseline’ survey in January 2009 and a wave two survey in 2011);
- a comparison study that involved nine children’s centres in three non-pilot local authorities so that any trends in take-up or attitudes could be linked to the pilot. The comparison study involved both case study research (autumn/winter 2010) and a survey of children’s centre users (January 2010).

A baseline and interim evaluation report have already been published.¹ This final report builds on all the findings from these previous evaluation reports and research components, as well as Management Information (MI).

The work-focused services in children’s centre pilot

At the end of 2007, the Government set up the Child Poverty Unit to bring together key officials in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the then Department for Children, Schools and Families and HM Treasury. The Work-Focused Services in Children’s Centres Pilot was one of a suite of Child Poverty Pilots that were announced in 2008, which aimed to build up the evidence base of what works in tackling child poverty.

The aim of the pilot was to test whether children’s centres can offer an effective means of engaging parents in labour market activity, moving them closer to work and ultimately into employment. While the pilot was not linked to the achievement of specific employment outcomes or targets, the aim was to increase engagement with a variety of services and activities which had that as their eventual goal.

The ten local authorities chosen to participate in the pilot were:

- Blackpool;
- Ealing;
- Kingston-upon-Hull;
- Lambeth;

¹ Marangozov, R. (2009). *Work-focused services in children’s centres pilot: evaluation baseline report*. Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Research Report No. 602; Marangozov, R. and Stevens, H. (2010). *Work-focused services in children’s centres pilot: Interim report*. DWP Research Report No. 677.

- Nottingham City;
- Redcar and Cleveland;
- Sandwell;
- Somerset;
- Southampton;
- Westminster.

Pilot activities and delivery

All pilot sites delivered the five core elements of pilot provision: Jobcentre Plus provision, packages of support and bespoke services, partnership working, integrating the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser into the children's centres, and identifying and engaging customers. Some activities were prioritised over others depending on local demographics and customer demand, the children's centre's footfall, the availability of other local provision and the need profile of the local community.

Across almost all sites, there was an early focus on engagement and outreach activities at the start of the pilot to raise awareness of the service among children's centre staff, partner organisations and parents. However, as the pilot progressed, and this awareness increased, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers tended to dedicate more time to delivering work-focused activities and bespoke support to customers.

Demand for the pilot has been high, with the vast majority of children's centre users in the pilot and comparison sites stating in our survey that they would prefer to access Jobcentre Plus services in the children's centre, as opposed to the Jobcentre Plus office. Over the life of the pilot there were over 6,300 starts to the pilot by more than 5,800 individuals², with 50 per cent of pilot participants undertaking specific work-related activities or training.³ When considering both Jobcentre Plus and bespoke packages of work-focused support, the most popular provision was for skills/needs assessments and employment-related training. Employment-related training was most popular among traditional Jobcentre Plus customers while skills/need assessments were most popular among non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers. In terms of Jobcentre Plus provision, the pilot led to an increased take-up of New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP); over 40 per cent of eligible⁴ pilot participants who had taken up some form of activity had joined NDLP.

That only half of pilot participants had undertaken training while on the pilot reflects the pilot's emphasis on engagement and outreach activities (particularly among those who would not normally access Jobcentre Plus services), the high levels of hand-holding required by some customers (much of which could not formally be recorded as a pilot activity), and, to a lesser extent the physical capacity of some children's centres to host on-site training. Data on activities held by the children's centres demonstrated that across the pilot areas there were often 1,500 to 2,000 attendees at events each quarter, both outreach and work focused. From these there were often referrals for further support to the Personal Adviser, as well as from the advisers to the children's centre for registration.

² Some individuals may have started the pilot more than once if they exited and then rejoined during the lifetime of the pilot.

³ Data from the pilot MI. Due to a data collection issue data on pilot funded work-focused provision is missing from one pilot area and so data on this will be an undercount.

⁴ Of lone parents who were not on NDLP prior to joining the pilot.

The use of discretionary funds provided through the pilot was a key facilitator of pilot delivery and enabled areas to tailor support and plug gaps in provision to meet specific needs that were not being met by mainstream services. Another key facilitator to pilot delivery was effective engagement and outreach by the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, which enabled advisers to build trusting relationships with parents and guarantee sufficient take-up of the service.

The role of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser

Overall, the pilot areas successfully integrated Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers into the children's centres. Customers reported that advisers were accessible, empathetic and understanding, friendly and approachable, trustworthy, knowledgeable and helpful, and had more time to dedicate to them in comparison to their experiences at the Jobcentre Plus office. The flexibility of this role was key to its success with customers and pilot staff alike.

Continuing challenges for the role of Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers were twofold. Firstly, some advisers found it difficult to manage the tension within the role itself: that of balancing work-focused activities with less structured, ad-hoc engagement and outreach activities. Secondly, a very small number of advisers found themselves having to work to targets set by Jobcentre Plus line managers, even though the pilot was not linked to targets. Neither of these issues proved detrimental to the role, but they did highlight the importance of having management structures in place that would facilitate integrated service delivery and support the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser in achieving this.

Partnership working

Partnership working was strong between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres, while partnership working with other local providers tended to be more limited in some areas. This was partly because of the delays in pilot start-up and the time it took to establish effective working relationships. Partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres grew much stronger over time, as the pilot developed and this was evident in four key ways:

- a greater understanding of each other's organisation and working practices;
- a greater number of referrals between the two organisations;
- the joining-up of partner organisation networks and expertise;
- the full integration of Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers into the children's centres.

There were also greater linkages between Jobcentre Plus and key Sure Start partner organisations working on-site, as well as greater partnership working with the local authority in some areas. With the exception of training and education providers, partnership working with a wider range of local partner organisations and providers remained limited, and the pilot drew on these networks on an ad-hoc basis, depending on customer needs. This did not present a problem for most of the pilot areas, mainly because the children's centres were already serving as hubs for multiple support services (of most relevance to families with young children), and so the need to seek out wider provision or establish formal partnerships was not necessary.

Engagement

Outreach was one of the most successful elements of the pilot. Through a variety of outreach methods the pilot successfully engaged a mix of traditional and non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers. Pilot MI shows that around 60 per cent of pilot starts were known to be lone parents

in receipt of benefit and around 30 per cent were non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers. The latter figure is particularly encouraging as many of this group would be parents from low income households and generally not in contact with Jobcentre Plus.

Of those traditional Jobcentre Plus customers who were in receipt of benefits as the main claimant, 85 per cent were in receipt of Income Support (IS), 11 per cent were in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and two per cent were in receipt of Incapacity Benefit (IB) or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) – again indicating good reach into the target groups. Partners of benefit claimants comprised four per cent of all pilot participants.⁵

Most of those engaged in the pilot were also from low-income households. Income information was collected for non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers at the household level. The pilot MI shows that, for those for whom we have the data, around 70 per cent of non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers earned under £20,000 gross annual household income, with one in five earning under £10,000.⁶

As the baseline report highlighted, successful engagement of these target groups reflects both the demography of the children's centres and their reach into some of the most deprived communities. However, since then, evidence from the qualitative research and survey findings have shown that much of this engagement can also be confidently attributed to the success of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers in proactively making themselves approachable, accessible and trustworthy to parents.

Key learning and critical success factors

This report draws out several key learning points for the successful delivery of work-focused services in children's centres:

- Children's centres can be ideal venues for hosting work-focused services targeted at poor households.
- Flexibility is critical to the success of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role in allowing for a more personalised and tailored service which meets the needs of the target group.
- Recruiting the 'right' Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, with the right mix of relevant skills, is key to facilitating engagement and partnership working.
- It takes time to embed work-focused services in a multi-agency setting. The experience of the pilot demonstrates that it takes at least nine months for an initiative like this to bed-in, and at least one year to establish effective working relationships with key partner organisations.
- 'Hands-on' commitment by key partner organisations facilitates integrated service delivery.
- Management and performance structures need to facilitate integrated working. Jobcentre Plus and children's centre managers have to support integrated working, both in practical terms but also in terms of sharing the pilot's aims. Performance structures need to be flexible enough to account for the fact that integrated working takes time to establish, job outcomes are likely to be a longer-term prospect for many of the hardest-to-reach, and that important areas of work such as partnership working do not lend themselves easily to quantitative measurement.

⁵ Data from the pilot MI

⁶ Data from the pilot MI. We only have this information for 34 per cent of non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers.

Many of these critical success factors are not just limited to outreach work in children's centres, but could be applied in wider settings.

Pilot perceived outcomes and impacts

The pilot had a number of outcomes and observable impacts:

- **Effective engagement of the target groups:** Around 60 per cent of pilot participants were lone parents in receipt of benefit and around 30 per cent were non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers. Many parents in this latter group were not working due to childcare commitments and were more likely to be potential second earners where only one member of the household was in paid employment. The pilot MI shows that, for those where we have the data, around 70 per cent of non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers were from low-income households.
- **Increased take-up of Jobcentre Plus services in children's centres:** At the baseline survey of children's centre users, only three per cent of parents reported that they were using Jobcentre Plus services at the children's centre. Two years later, in the wave two survey, this figure had jumped to 14 per cent.
- **Stronger partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres:** This was evidenced by positive feedback from pilot staff in most areas, a number of referrals between the two organisations, and attitudinal changes towards Jobcentre Plus among children's centres staff.
- **Parents are closer to work:** Perceived, attitudinal outcomes achieved include increased levels of confidence, aspirations, better awareness of work-focused opportunities and options, and attitudinal changes towards Jobcentre Plus and work. In this way, the pilot made significant progress in preparing parents for work, in getting parents to think about work and in linking them into wider support and provision which they might need in the interim period. There is also indicative evidence from both qualitative and MI that the pilot moved participants closer to the labour market and moved some into paid employment.
- **The profile of the children's centres and their users is more work-focused:** Over the course of the pilot, there was a decrease in the number of centre users who reported that they were not working because they were looking after the home and/or family (from 51 to 46 per cent). Overall, more pilot centre users at W2 reported that they were looking for work, than centre users in the comparison sites, particularly among parents out of work and claiming benefit entitlements (38 per cent, compared to 25 per cent). Engagement with Jobcentre Plus services also became more work-focused over the course of the pilot, with 51 per cent of children's centre users reporting that they used Jobcentre Plus to receive help with jobsearch at W2, compared to 36 per cent at the baseline survey, and 32 per cent at the comparison survey.
- **Integrated service delivery and better outcomes for parents:** More joined up services meant that parents had better access to services on one site, and this meant that they were often dealt with more quickly. Referrals between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres services also meant that parents' issues were not addressed in isolation from each other, but were tackled more holistically.
- **Additional skills, knowledge and customers for Jobcentre Plus:** Jobcentre Plus gained new skills and knowledge via its Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers. These included not just professional and personal skills, but also important local knowledge about support and provision in the wider community which they might not have known about from their work in the Jobcentre Plus office. Being embedded in children's centre settings also gave Jobcentre Plus access to customer groups that were not in touch with its services, those who had little prior contact with Jobcentre Plus, and those who had little awareness as to the Jobcentre Plus services available.

Conclusions and recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions set out in this research report, this section makes the following conclusions and recommendations to DWP, to Jobcentre Plus, to local authorities and to children's centres.

1. Children's centres are potentially ideal venues for an enhanced Jobcentre Plus offer to reach families through joined-up services

Children's centres have been a substantial investment over the past two decades and the Government's ongoing commitment to the Sure Start programme is based on solid evidence that the early years are when the greatest difference can be made to a child's life chances.⁷ In many areas, they have successfully cut through silos in public services delivery to become hubs where several services can be accessed on site through more joined-up service delivery.

For these reasons alone, children's centres are good venues for hosting an enhanced Jobcentre Plus offer (beyond the core offer currently offered by children's centres). However, they also offer good reach into the target communities of lone parents, potential second earners and low-income households. They are also established and trusted environments in which to engage parents, many of whom are not in touch with Jobcentre Plus services. Finally, there is more than sufficient demand for the service and this is demonstrated in a four-fold increase in the take-up of the pilot's services in children's centres over time.

The pilot children's centres were chosen primarily on the basis of those based in the most deprived wards, or those with reach into the most deprived communities. While this should remain a key factor in determining which children's centres could be suitable sites for work-focused services, local areas should also consider a wider range of factors, such as the children's centre's capacity to host the service and whether it has sufficient footfall. This will ensure that any future provision is targeted effectively and efficiently, at a time when both Jobcentre Plus and children's centres are under pressure from public spending cuts.

While children's centres emerge as potentially ideal venues for the co-location of Jobcentre Plus provision, recent evidence from the results of a similar pilot suggest that Jobcentre Plus outreach targeted at disadvantaged families need not necessarily be restricted to children's centres.⁸ There is potential for local areas to consider co-locating Jobcentre Plus provision in similar outreach settings, such as primary schools and other early years settings.

2. Jobcentre Plus are well positioned to deliver work-focused services in children's centres

The evidence from this pilot indicates that Jobcentre Plus is ideally placed to deliver work-focused support in children's centres. This is not just because many areas already have strong partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and local authorities. The 'added value' of having Jobcentre Plus as one of the lead delivery agencies is its advisers' specialist knowledge of benefits, better-off calculations and tax credits. In some areas, they have also brought with them contacts and links with Jobcentre plus provision, as well as knowledge of local job vacancies.

⁷ Allen, G. (2011). *Early Intervention: The next steps*. Cabinet Office.

⁸ Marangozov, R. and Dewson, S. (2011). *Study of School Gates Employment Support Initiative*. DWP Research Report No. 747.

3. There is a clear case for strengthening the Jobcentre Plus offer in children's centres to encompass dedicated outreach provision

In the space of two years, integrated service delivery has had a number of key achievements:

- successfully recruited and integrated Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers in almost all of the children's centres;
- engaged a significant proportion of non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers (30 per cent of pilot starts are neither benefit claimants nor the partner of a benefit claimant);
- increased the take-up of Jobcentre Plus services in the pilot children's centres by four-fold, and actively referred parents onto other relevant services where necessary;
- engaged many parents who have faced complex and multiple barriers to work;
- delivered work-focused activity in an integrated way, alongside children's centre services and services from other key children's centre partner organisations;
- delivered intensive, personalised and tailored support – much of which cannot be captured in formal pilot data – to remove some of the toughest barriers to employment. This includes attitudinal barriers to work (and to Jobcentre Plus in some cases), low levels of confidence and motivation, and getting parents to think about and prepare for employment in the medium to long term if work is not an option in the short term alongside their primary childcare responsibilities.

In deciding whether to continue such provision, Jobcentre Plus district managers do not just need to take into account the significant outcomes listed above, but also their wider organisational obligations under the Child Poverty Act (2010) and the core messages in the Child Poverty Strategy, published in April 2011. As part of the latter, the Government is committed to strengthening links between services by encouraging the co-location of services, such as employment support with children's centres and other services.⁹ This is part of a clear emphasis on early years' intervention and whole-family approach to tackling child poverty which runs throughout the Child Poverty Strategy. As part of the Child Poverty Act, Jobcentre Plus, alongside local authorities and other key partner organisations, have a duty to work together to tackle child poverty, which includes supporting parents into employment, and learning and skills opportunities to maximise their income.

4. Children's centre staff and managers need to have child poverty at the forefront of their thinking and understand that employment can provide a route out of it

Evidence from the pilot shows that it is simply not enough to co-locate Jobcentre Plus services in children's centres. A major factor in determining pilot success is also whether children's centre managers understand the role that employment can play in providing a route out of poverty, and more generally, their 'frontline' role in helping to address it. Most of the managers in this pilot were aware of this, but where they were not, pilot implementation and delivery was slower, more difficult, and at times, strained.

Where children's centre managers have demonstrated their understanding of employment as a route out of child poverty, it is important that this is communicated to all staff so that the message filters down the organisational chain to ensure that service delivery on the ground reflects this understanding.

⁹ DWP and Department for Education (2011). *A new approach to child poverty: Tackling the causes of disadvantage and transforming families' lives*.

5. Lessons from the pilot evaluation should be used to inform future local delivery and approaches to tackling child poverty

At the time of conducting the final stage research, most pilot areas were already aware of the pilot's positive impact and its outcomes. As a result, many areas reported that they had plans to continue Jobcentre Plus outreach in their children's centres, albeit on a reduced basis. This is encouraging, and the lessons drawn out in this evaluation are intended to help shape and inform future plans to continue this kind of provision at a local level.

Lessons and outcomes drawn out in this evaluation report are also intended to help shape and inform future local approaches to child poverty. The experiences from this pilot demonstrate a clear potential to reduce child poverty through:

- positive employment-related outcomes;
- effective engagement of the target groups;
- increased take-up of Jobcentre Plus services in children's centres;
- effective co-location of Jobcentre Plus services in children's centres and more integrated service delivery as a result;
- positive attitudinal and aspirational changes among pilot participants;
- positive attitudinal changes among children's centre staff towards Jobcentre Plus services and a better understanding among many Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers of the culture and priorities of children's centres.

1 Introduction

This chapter starts by outlining the policy and research background to the pilot and is followed by a discussion about the pilot itself – the pilot aims, rationale and provision. The chapter then goes on to provide an overview of the evaluation methodology, before providing a brief summary of the key findings from the baseline and interim evaluation reports. The chapter concludes by outlining the structure and content of this final report.

1.1 Background to the pilot

The importance of Jobcentre Plus involvement in children’s centres has been highlighted in the past through the Harker (2006) and Freud (2007) reports, the review of the child poverty strategy, and recent Welfare Reform Green Papers.¹⁰ The core offer of children’s centres includes the requirement for links with Jobcentre Plus. However, previous research by Dench *et al.* (2008) has shown that, although a considerable amount of Jobcentre Plus activity takes place within children’s centres, it tended to be relatively limited in scope and patchy, ranging from simply providing leaflets and information, to vacancy boards and telephone or computer contact points, and one-off events, such as job fairs.¹¹ This sits in contrast to more recent evidence showing a high level of interest among children’s centre users for advice and support around adult training and education.¹² The greatest impact on customers’ engagement and take-up of employment-related services has been observed in the minority of centres where there has been a Jobcentre Plus Adviser available, whether through outreach activities or through funded sources such as the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. Providing such a resource is costly, however, and Dench *et al.* (2008) argued that there was scope for a ‘minimum offer’ consisting of leaflets and vacancy boards, and an ‘enhanced offer’ in those areas which appear to offer most potential for beneficial impact on parental employment rates and reductions in child poverty, which might include a linked Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser.

As part of the Child Poverty Strategy, which was published in April 2011, the coalition Government has committed to strengthening links between services by encouraging the co-location of services, such as employment support with children’s centres and other services.¹³ This is part of a clear emphasis on early years’ intervention and whole-family approaches to tackling child poverty which runs throughout the Child Poverty Strategy.

¹⁰ Harker, L. (2006), *Delivering on Child Poverty: what would it take?* Department for Work and Pensions (DWP); Freud, D. (2007). *Reducing Dependency, increasing opportunity: options for the future of welfare to work*. DWP.

¹¹ Dench, S., Aston, J., James, L. and Foster, R. (2008). *Jobcentre Plus and Children’s Centres*. DWP Research Report No. 485.

¹² Marangozov, R. (2009). *Work-focused services in children’s centres pilot: evaluation baseline report*. DWP Research Report No. 602; Thornton, A. and Dalziel, D. (2009). *Sure Start Children’s Centres Survey of Parents*. Department for Children, Schools and Families Research Report No. 083.

¹³ DWP and Department for Education (2011). *A new approach to child poverty: Tackling the causes of disadvantage and transforming families’ lives*.

1.2 About the work-focused services in children's centres pilot

At the end of 2007, the Government set up the Child Poverty Unit to bring together key officials in the DWP, the Department for Children, Schools and Families and HM Treasury. The work-focused services in children's centres pilot was one of a suite of Child Poverty Pilots that were announced in 2008, which aimed to build up the evidence base of what works in tackling child poverty.

1.2.1 Pilot aims, provision and target groups

The aim of the pilot was to test whether children's centres could offer an effective means of engaging parents in labour market activity, moving them closer to work and ultimately into employment. Previous research has highlighted the potential for a more comprehensive model of work-focused support to be provided in children's centres (above and beyond children's centres core offer to have links with Jobcentre Plus). While the pilot was not linked to the achievement of specific employment outcomes or targets, the aim was to increase engagement with a variety of services and activities which have this as their eventual goal.

This pilot provided for a dedicated Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser in each of three children's centres in ten local authority areas. The long-term vision was for the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser to be seen as part of the children's centre staff. Each pilot area offered a common core set of services, consistent across the ten local authority areas. This would be supplemented by services or delivery mechanisms designed to support local parents into the labour market, as well as by pilot-specific discretionary funding to enhance existing Jobcentre Plus provision that was already in place. Core services included: outreach to those not using the centre and to those using the centre but not using Jobcentre Plus services; providing lone parent adviser services such as New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP); and offering services to those outside the traditional Jobcentre Plus contact group, such as potential second earners. An important part of the role was awareness raising, via seminars, events and training for children's centre users and centre staff, and the development of partnership working arrangements.

The ten local authority areas selected to participate in the pilot were:

- Blackpool;
- Ealing;
- Kingston-upon-Hull;
- Lambeth;
- Nottingham City;
- Redcar and Cleveland;
- Sandwell;
- Somerset;
- Southampton;
- Westminster.

1.3 Aims and objectives of the evaluation

The evaluation ran from December 2008 to March 2011. Key aims of the evaluation were to assess:

- Impact¹⁴ on take-up of work-focused services within children's centres, both by those already accessing centre services and those who accessed them for the first time as a result of the pilot.
- Engagement with groups of children's centre users not normally accessing such services, such as partners of people who were on benefits or in low-paid work.
- Any observed impact on customers' attitudes to Jobcentre Plus services, and to work and training, which might affect future take-up of opportunities.
- Any observed impact on the understanding and communication of key messages about employment and child poverty by children's centre staff – to what extent were these now 'owned' by all stakeholders?
- Development of partnership working between Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers and children's centre staff, and the extent to which the Personal Adviser role and services became integrated into the children's centre core service offer.

There were three key outputs as part of the pilot evaluation. The first was a baseline report, which contained findings from the baseline survey and from the initial (familiarisation) phase of the evaluation.¹⁵ The second was the interim report, which detailed interim progress of the pilot from in-depth qualitative work and case study research.¹⁶ The third is this final report, which pulls together the findings from the different strands of the evaluation, including the Management Information data, to draw its conclusions and policy recommendations.

1.4 Our evaluation methodology

This evaluation was a mixed methods impacts study, designed to capture both qualitative and quantitative aspects of the pilot's progress over the course of the pilot (just over two years). This section details our methodology, the main components of which are summarised below:

- 'Familiarisation' visits to all of the pilot children's centres along with interviews with key pilot staff at the start of the pilot. This was accompanied by a review of the pilot bids and of labour market and demographic statistics to provide baseline information about the pilot areas.
- Two waves of in-depth, qualitative research with children's centre users. The first wave was conducted in June/July 2009 and the second wave (follow-up interviews) was conducted with the same children's centre users in June/July 2010.

¹⁴ This evaluation does not comprise a formal impact assessment. The assessment of impact relies on comparison areas rather than control areas. It will not be possible to provide a quantitative measure of impact, but instead an assessment of added value in terms of types of customers seen and support provided.

¹⁵ Marangozov, R. (2009). *Work-focused services in children's centres pilot: evaluation baseline report*. DWP Research Report No. 602.

¹⁶ Marangozov, R. and Stevens, H. (2010). *Work-focused services in children's centres pilot: Interim report*. DWP Research Report No. 677, p. 53.

- Two waves of in-depth, case study interviews with pilot staff and partner organisations in ten case study locations. The first wave was conducted in October – December 2009 and the second wave was conducted in October – December 2010. In the second wave of case study interviews, staff from three non-pilot local authority sites were interviewed (the comparison sites), to gain some comparative insights against which to assess the overall impact of the pilot. Interviewees included staff from children’s centres, Jobcentre Plus and the local authority in each of the three comparison sites.
- Discussion groups with children’s centre users in the ten case study locations (October – December 2009).
- Two waves of a survey of children’s centre users conducted in all the pilot children’s centres. The first wave (baseline) was conducted at the start of the pilot, in January 2009, and the second wave was conducted towards the end of the pilot in January 2011. In January 2011, an additional nine children’s centres across three comparison sites were also included in the survey, in order to provide comparative data against which to assess the overall impact of the pilot on levels of take-up and attitudinal change.

The qualitative research with children’s centre users involved both pilot customers and those not accessing the pilot. The case study research involved interviews with a range of pilot staff in each of the pilot areas, including children’s centre managers and deputies, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers, Jobcentre Plus line managers and District Managers, Jobcentre Plus Childcare Partnership Managers, local authority leads for the pilot, and in some cases other children’s centre staff who were closely involved in pilot delivery.

1.4.1 Selection of case studies

The selection of the ten case studies was intended to give the evaluation team a sufficiently diverse spread of case study sites from which to conduct the longitudinal depth interviews with centre staff, centre users and key partner organisations in years one and two. A list of the most important criteria for selection was drawn up, based on the familiarisation visits in year one, the background information on the children’s centres and local authorities, and the original pilot bids. These criteria included:

- centres with varying levels of (pre-pilot) Jobcentre Plus resource;
- more established children’s centres and newer builds;
- consolidated children’s centre sites and those spread across more than one location;
- urban and rural contexts, as well as pockets of deprivation;
- centres that appeared to have different approaches in how they planned to use their Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser in year one (integrated approaches versus other less integrated approaches).

1.4.2 Waves 1 and 2 of qualitative research with children’s centre users (summer 2009 and 2010)

The qualitative research with children’s centre users was carried out in June and July 2009. The first wave of longitudinal depth interviews were with 61 children’s centre users across the ten case study sites.

Interviews explored a number of issues, including:

- current and previous labour market attachment;
- family characteristics;
- awareness of the pilot.

The second wave of the qualitative research with children's centre users was carried out in June and July 2010. Thirty-six of the original 61 parents participated in this second wave, the aim of which was to explore, in-depth, the longer-term impact of the pilot on these participants. Interviews explored a number of issues, including:

- use of the pilot since wave one, and reasons for any change;
- change in personal circumstances;
- current attitudes towards training and work, and reasons for any change.

Participants received £20 as a thank you for taking part in the interviews and were advised that this was a gift which did not affect any benefits they might be receiving.

1.4.3 Waves 1 and 2 of case study research with pilot staff (autumn/winter 2009 and 2010)

The first wave of case study research was carried out between October and December 2009, with the aim of exploring the experiences and perceptions of the pilot from both within and outside the children's centres and sharing good practice to guide future delivery of the pilot. The case studies explored the following issues:

- to what extent services were being delivered in accordance with the core model, and how the flexible elements of funding were being deployed;
- staff experiences and perceptions of working together on delivering work-focused services;
- the response of other organisations, such as Primary Care Trusts and local authorities, to the pilot;
- how key messages about poverty and employment were being communicated to staff and to pilot customers;
- customers' perceptions of how the pilot had impacted on their attitudes and employment-seeking behaviours;
- stakeholder perceptions of changes in customers' attitudes and outcomes to date, and factors underpinning this.

Sixty-four stakeholders across the ten case study sites were interviewed, including pilot staff, pilot partner organisations, Together for Children (TfC) staff¹⁷, local authorities, and other childcare and employment support service providers. A discussion group with children's centre users in each of the case study sites was also undertaken (avoiding those who had already been engaged in the longitudinal depth interviews), and each participant was paid £20 as a thank you for their participation.

Forty-two of the original 64 interviewees in wave one were then re-interviewed in the second wave of case study research carried out between October and December 2010. Interviewees in this second wave were asked to reflect on their experiences and views of working on the pilot and any key changes in pilot delivery.

¹⁷ TfC supported the delivery of the pilot in the ten local authority areas. Their role was to develop project plans and costs, and to provide specialist programme management support. TfC also provided ongoing advice and support to the pilot areas.

1.4.4 Waves 1 and 2 of the survey of children's centre users (January 2009 and 2011)

The survey of children's centre users in the pilot areas was intended to gauge any changes in the levels of take-up or attitudinal changes to work and training as a result of the pilot. Wave 1 (baseline survey) was carried out in January 2009 and involved face-to-face interviews at all the pilot children's centres using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI). Exactly the same process and questions were used for wave two of the survey, conducted two years later in January 2011.

In total, 1,177 and 1,123 interviews were carried out in the baseline survey and the wave two survey respectively.

Most of the data from these surveys are included in the main body of the report, where they relate to key findings. However, a fuller set of the survey results are presented in the Appendix, and there are references to this more comprehensive set of data in parts of this report.

1.4.5 The comparison study

The purpose of the comparison study was to see whether the increased Jobcentre Plus provision in pilot areas could be linked to definable trends in take-up and attitudinal change. The comparison study was intended to contextualise the findings from the pilot areas to gauge whether some of the pilot outcomes were attributable to the pilot, or would have occurred in its absence.

Three non-pilot local authorities were chosen as appropriate comparison sites based on the fact that they offered the best possible match to the pilot local areas, in terms of:

- levels of deprivation;
- demography;
- levels of economic activity.

The comparison study research was undertaken in nine children's centres across these three comparison sites, and in the most deprived wards. The research consisted of both a survey and qualitative interviews. Between October and December 2010, a total of 13 in-depth interviews were held with children's centre managers, Jobcentre Plus district managers and Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers in the comparison sites. In January 2011, a survey of children's centre users was also undertaken in the nine children's centres. This involved the same processes and questions as the survey of children's centre users in the pilot sites (see Section 1.4.4).

Taken together, the findings from both the survey and qualitative interviews in the comparison sites provided the research team with sufficient context in which to assess the outcomes and impact of the pilot.

1.5 Management Information

Throughout the report we draw upon pilot Management Information (MI) to supplement the evaluation findings. Unlike the survey of children's centre users, the MI only covers pilot participants. The MI is comprised of a number of elements, outlined below.

1.5.1 DWP administrative data

DWP administrative data was taken from the Labour Market System (LMS) and the Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study (WPLS) which enables monitoring of the number of parents accessing work-focused services. It also allows tracking of individuals and reporting their activity.

This data covers all parents that have participated in the work-focused services pilot (6,345 starts for over 5,800 individuals)¹⁸.

To consider work-related outcomes following participation in the pilot, DWP need to draw upon Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) employment data. However, this data is not stable or complete for at least six months. Furthermore, time delays in the collation of DWP benefits data mean that pilot outcome information is not of publishable quality at the time this report was produced. Consequently, DWP are unable to present employment entry and benefit off-flows information within this report, but a one-off DWP publication on the pilot outcomes may follow in late 2011.

1.5.2 Work-Focused Services in Children's Centres clerical data (pilot funded work-focused provision)

Within the report we also draw upon a clerical data collection completed by each Personal Adviser which recorded all work-focused pilot support participants had received outside that conventionally available through Jobcentre Plus support (the work-focused elements of the packages of support and bespoke services provided within the pilot).

For traditional Jobcentre Plus customers, information was collected on the support they received directly as a result of the adviser being in the children's centre rather than the Jobcentre Plus office and on work-focused activities they could only take part in as a result of pilot funding. For non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers, tax credits/household income information was collected with information regarding any pilot funded provision they participated in.

While the administrative data holds a record for each pilot participant, it is important to note that we only have clerical information for participants who received additional support outside of that conventionally available through Jobcentre Plus. Core Jobcentre Plus provision is captured within the LMS administrative data. The clerical data therefore represents only 27 per cent of all pilot participants.

In addition, due to a data collection issue, clerical data for one pilot area is missing. Therefore, all information sourced from this data will be an undercount based on only nine areas.

1.5.3 Children's centre activity data

Quarterly activity templates were completed by each children's centre, detailing the activities that were undertaken as part of the pilot. This extends beyond the pilot funded work-focused provision detailed in the clerical data, to include more general engagement events for parents as part of the children's centre. The data also covers the number of parents engaging in the events, and referrals in both directions between the Personal Adviser and children's centre following participation from parents. Children's centre activity data covers all ten pilot areas.

1.5.4 Use of the MI and clerical data

Elements of the MI are referenced throughout the report, both individually and in conjunction, to provide figures on the pilot (alongside the qualitative and survey elements of the evaluation referred to previously). How each MI/clerical data source is used in the report is summarised in Table 1.1.

¹⁸ Some individuals may have started the pilot more than once if they exited and then rejoined during the lifetime of the pilot.

Table 1.1 Sources of the MI and clerical data

Data on pilot participants	Data source
Pilot starts	LMS administrative data
Benefit status	LMS administrative data
Demographic characteristics	LMS administrative data
Income data for non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers	Clerical data
Work-focused activities and training	LMS administrative data and clerical data combined
Employment-related outcomes	Clerical data

As outlined previously, as HMRC employment data is not stable or complete at the current time, and due to time delays in the collation of DWP benefit data, DWP are unable to provide pilot outcome information on employment starts and benefit off-flows. The report does, however, present outcomes recorded within the clerical data to provide an illustration of pilot outcomes. However, there is no clerical data for one pilot area, and of the remainder, 11 per cent of outcomes are missing. Therefore, the outcomes presented in this report will not be representative of the pilot as a whole and should be considered as indicative only.

1.6 Summary of key findings from the baseline and interim reports

The evaluation of this pilot has already produced two reports, prior to this one. This section summarises the key findings from these two reports to contextualise the content of this report.

1.6.1 Summary of findings from the baseline evaluation report

The baseline report set the scene for the pilot and evaluation, drawing on the first round of a survey of children's centre users (a baseline survey), familiarisation visits to each of the pilot children's centres and a review of each of the local authority bids.

The pilot local authorities and children's centres

It was evident from the baseline findings that the pilot local authorities and children's centres were well positioned to deliver to their target communities. This was borne out by the demographic and labour market profiles of the pilot local authorities and children's centres. For example, all of the pilot local authorities were ranked within the top 75 most deprived local authority districts in England, and in most of the reach areas of the children's centres a high proportion of children aged under five were in workless households – as high as 30 to 40 per cent in many wards.

Pilot approaches and early implementation experiences

The baseline findings, from the survey of children's centre users, indicated that some children's centre users with children under five might present greater challenges for the pilot, as they did not necessarily see work as a priority in the short to medium term alongside their primary childcare responsibilities. This suggested the importance of the pilot in getting these children's centre users to think about, or prepare for their longer-term employment options, along with promoting the benefits and availability of good quality childcare, so that they could consider work as an option once their children started school, or earlier.

The baseline findings also indicated that a great deal of the success of the pilot hinged upon the role and the skills of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser and the support they received from children's centre staff. This was particularly the case in the task of engaging children's centre users, promoting work-focused services and facilitating multi-agency working.

Other key findings

The baseline user survey showed that there was more than sufficient demand for both work-focused services and for having this service located on site, at the children's centre. Importantly, this demand was particularly strong among those children's centre users who were out of work and claiming benefit entitlements.

1.6.2 Summary of findings from the interim evaluation report

The interim report provided more detailed findings on the progress of the pilots since the baseline evaluation report. It was based on qualitative research with children's centre users (wave 1); in-depth interviews with pilot staff and partner organisations (wave 1 case study research); and discussion groups with children's centre users – all of which took place across ten case study sites 11 to 12 months after the pilot went 'live'.

Pilot delivery

Overall, the interim report found that pilot delivery had been largely successful over the first year and that the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers had settled into their new roles well. Challenges had centred around implementation issues, which delayed pilot start-up. These were delays in Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks being completed for the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers, technical problems with implementing Jobcentre Plus IT in the children's centres and a lack of capacity among some Jobcentre Plus line managers to devote time to the pilot and support the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers. In addition to these issues, the interim report found that Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers continued to grapple with the unstructured and ad-hoc demands of their job role and how to manage the target-orientated expectations of their role among their line managers.

Partnership working

The interim report identified that effective partnership working between children's centres and Jobcentre Plus was characterised by the following features:

- flexibility on both sides to make the pilot work;
- regular communications between the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser and the children's centre manager;
- referrals between children's centre staff and partner organisations, and the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser;
- joining up partner networks and contacts;
- prior understanding of each other's organisational cultures;
- shared expectations of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role and pilot outcomes;
- physical space to accommodate the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser.

The interim report found that the range of partner organisations involved in the pilots had been quite limited in some areas. Many pilot staff felt that this was because it took time to build up effective working relationships with partner organisations and staff, and that this kind of work had been hindered by the delays in pilot start-up and implementation.

Engagement and outreach

Findings from the interim report showed that engagement and outreach had been largely successful. Most areas had actively engaged parents through a variety of methods, and word-of-mouth and referrals from partner organisations were proving particularly successful methods. Factors which facilitated engagement were found to be:

- the informal nature of engagement;
- easier physical access to the children's centre (as opposed to the Jobcentre Plus office);
- a more comfortable environment offered by the children's centre;
- the continuity of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role;
- the privacy offered by many children's centre sites.

Factors which were found to constrain engagement and outreach were low levels of children's centre users in some areas, a lack of physical space within children's centres for the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser to engage with parents, cases of potential fraud, transient local communities and language barriers for non-English speaking parents.

Pilot outcomes

Two key outcomes were identified by the interim report. Firstly, most case study areas had delivered personalised, flexible and often intensive support for customers to meet their needs and respond to their circumstances. Secondly, many pilot areas had improved access to, and awareness of, work-focused services among children's centre users by successfully engaging them (both traditional and non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers). Pilot participants had benefited from both these achievements, with many reporting increased levels of confidence; increased awareness of opportunities and options around employment, training and childcare; and access to job preparation skills and support.

1.7 Overview of this report

This report draws primarily on the findings from the final stage research, which consists of new findings from:

- the second wave of in-depth qualitative interviews with children's centre users who were interviewed in the first round of interviews in 2009;
- the second wave of case study research with pilot staff;
- the second wave of the survey of children's centre users in all the pilot children's centres;
- the comparison study.

There are references throughout this report to findings from the baseline and interim report, for comparative purposes.

Data and findings from the baseline survey of children's centres users (January 2009) is referred to as 'baseline' survey data in this report. Data and findings from the second wave of the survey of children's centre users (January 2011) is referred to as 'W2' in this report. Data and findings from the survey carried out in the non-pilot, comparison children's centres is referred to as 'comparison' survey data/results in this report.

2 Pilot activities and delivery

This chapter outlines the core activities provided in the pilot sites and discusses what factors determined which activities were prioritised over others. The chapter then details the demand and uptake of activities, drawing on qualitative evidence, findings from the surveys of children's centre users and the pilot Management Information (MI). Finally, this chapter concludes by detailing some of the practical issues with regards to pilot delivery, as well as the key facilitators.

2.1 Pilot activities

This pilot provided for a dedicated Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser in each of the three children's centres in ten local authority areas, as well as pilot-specific discretionary funding to enhance Jobcentre Plus provision. The long-term vision was for the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser to be co-located and fully integrated into the children's centre. It was intended that each pilot area would offer a set of core services, consistent across the ten local authority areas. These would then be supplemented by services or delivery mechanisms designed to support local parents into the labour market.

2.1.1 Core activities

The interim report detailed the five core elements of delivery common to the approaches of the pilot local authorities. The following section provides a brief recap of these core activities and details any changes in the activities since the interim research.

As discussed in the introduction, where details of work-focused activities have been referred to using the MI, they concern both Jobcentre Plus provision and the bespoke packages of work-focused support.

Jobcentre-Plus provision

Jobcentre Plus provision continued to be delivered in all of the pilot children's centres and included a range of activities to support parents towards employment. These activities included delivering:

- New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP);
- information, advice and guidance (IAG);
- job search;
- job preparation;
- better-off calculations and queries regarding tax credits or benefits.

As the pilot progressed, most areas tended to spend less time conducting mandatory work-focused interviews for lone parents and partners, and more time engaging a caseload of customers on a voluntary basis. It would seem that the emphasis on advisers engaging parents and integrating into the children's centre environment in the pilot guidance was a key driver to this decision in many areas, as it was felt that a focus on Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) would mean less time for outreach and engagement activities.

Another important activity across most pilot areas was that of disseminating job vacancies and training opportunities, and hosting group information sessions (often with partner organisations).

Alongside these activities, many Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers also spent a proportion of their time identifying and signposting to local support for parents with specific needs, such as high levels of debt or a lack of basic skills (see following section on *Partnership working*). They also spent a significant proportion of their time on bespoke support for parents, which could not always be easily categorised as a work-focused activity, but which proved critical for ensuring that parents achieved the ‘smaller steps’ towards work, such as greater confidence or self-esteem. This support is described in more detail below.

Packages of support and bespoke services

Packages of support and bespoke services were intended to offer pilot areas a degree of flexibility needed to work with customers who might have multiple and complex barriers to employment. Throughout the course of the pilot, discretionary funds were valuable in financing some of this, particularly with regards to specialist help and training. Training courses included English language courses; team building; National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) in first aid, food hygiene, health and safety; IT courses and motivational and confidence-building courses. Workshops and regular sessions on CV writing and interview techniques were also common across the pilot areas. In addition to this, wider support was often drawn into the pilot by careers advisers, counsellors, and other partner agencies. Much of the work-focused bespoke services provision has been captured in the clerical data.

The second wave of the case study research has shown that Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers spent more time on bespoke support as the pilot progressed past the first operational year. This tended to include fairly intensive and quite time-consuming support, usually on a one-to-one basis. This support cannot easily be identified as ‘work-focused’ in nature, but has proven important in moving parents closer to work, or considering work. Examples most often cited by Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers include discussing childcare support with parents (or getting parents to start thinking about childcare options), removing attitudinal barriers to work and raising aspirations, adjusting parents’ expectations to fit their skill set and experience, encouraging parents to think about the future and their next steps regarding employment, training or education, and following up with parents who had already been engaged in the pilot to ensure they continued to make progress in their journey towards employment.

The clerical data was designed to capture the specific work-focused support that parents received from these bespoke services. However, the bespoke services equally covered a great deal of softer, less tangible support which has not been captured in the MI due to the difficulties in capturing them in a meaningful quantitative way. They were consistently reported within the qualitative research by parents and pilot staff as being key to progressing those further from the labour market towards employment.

‘People aren’t always at the end of the continuum in terms of their work readiness. For many, they can feel quite daunted just walking into a children’s centre.’

(Local authority lead, second wave case study research)

The increase in these activities over time is consistent with the time it took for the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers to fully embed into the children’s centre settings, and reflects the growing levels of trust which built up over time between advisers and parents, as advisers became more familiar and visible.

Partnership working

Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers were working in partnership with the children’s centre, the local authority, third sector organisations, training and education providers and other specialist agencies in the children’s centre network.

Over time, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers were drawing on partner organisations slightly more as their engagement with parents increased and as parents presented more complex barriers to work which required multi-agency intervention. The research found that while Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers were often able to source these partner contacts through the Jobcentre Plus office, the children's centre or their own contacts, on a number of occasions they had to proactively seek out local provision that would be able to provide support to a parent. Most of this was reactive and in response to parents' barriers to work, as and when they emerged, but some Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers had proactively sought out and initiated contact with partner organisations who were able to plug gaps in local provision to help meet the needs of the parent. Examples include Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers drawing on the support of specialist debt advice agencies, social services, housing associations and local support for newly-arrived immigrants.

Evidence of greater partnership working in the final stage of research also came about because many Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers were simply more embedded within the children's centre team of staff by this time. This meant that the children's centre staff would often refer people onto the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser or grant the Personal Adviser access to their own partner networks for onward referral. This gave Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers much greater access to local partner and support organisations than they would have otherwise had at a Jobcentre Plus office, but it did very much depend on how successfully they had been integrated into the children's centre.

'We've looked at case studies and the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers have talked to me about some of the customers that they've helped. It might be that they've just nipped next door to get a health visitor about speech therapy and by solving that little problem we've moved that person on. That just wouldn't normally happen, would it?'

(Jobcentre Plus pilot lead, 2nd wave case study research)

As greater links were made between some of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers and local partner organisations, this would often be accompanied by more joint efforts on hosting outreach events or information sessions. Often, partner organisations would be invited into the children's centre to provide information to parents on their support services, or the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser would be invited to be present at a partner organisation event in the community to raise awareness of the work-focused services at the children's centre.

While this type of partnership working had increased in many centres since the pilot began, in some areas partnership working had at the same time been strained somewhat by the impact that Government spending cuts (announced in October 2010) were having on all partner organisations' budgets and staffing capacity. This is described in more detail in Chapter 5.

Integrating the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser into the children's centres

At the beginning of the pilot, it was envisaged that the integration of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers into the children's centres would help engage parents, children's centre staff and partner organisations, while also increasing awareness of the pilot. The extent to which this integration was achieved varied in a few children's centres, but, overall, the pilot areas achieved successful integration of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers into the children's centres. In areas where greater integration had been achieved, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers had demonstrated a natural ability to engage with children's centre staff and parents informally, and in unstructured situations not typical of their traditional Jobcentre Plus roles. Children's centre staff and Jobcentre Plus line managers also had an important role to play in facilitating the integration of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers into their new working environment.

Findings indicate that where Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers had been integrated into the children's centres at an early stage of the pilot, this facilitated effective partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres, particularly with regard to buy-in and involvement.

Identifying and engaging customers

The emphasis on identifying and engaging with customers was intended to give Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers the opportunity to balance the more traditional work-focused aspects of the role with other key aspects of the role, such as building trust with parents, increasing awareness of the pilot and embedding work-focused services in a multi-agency setting.

This aspect of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers' role has been one of the most successful outcomes of the pilot, with many Personal Advisers embracing this new approach by engaging in a number of different outreach activities – whether in the children's centre itself or out in the community. This most commonly took the form of Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers making themselves visible, approachable and known among parents through floor-walking, attendance at children's centre sessions and informally engaging parents at drop-off and pick-up times for nursery. One Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser neatly referred to this approach as 'just being available and hovering'.

Much of this activity was confined to the children's centres, particularly in the early stages of the pilot. However, as time went on, some Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers had extended their outreach to other community venues such as libraries, nurseries and primary schools.

Less outreach and engagement was necessary towards the last 12 months of the pilot, mostly because many Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers had by that stage built up a visible presence within the children's centre and had a caseload of customers with whom they were dealing. More details on engagement are provided in Chapter 4.

2.1.2 Core activities across the case study sites and over time

All core activities were present in the ten pilot sites, but there were a number of factors which determined which activities were prioritised over others. The first was local demographics and customer demand – for example, the demand and provision of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes in multilingual communities. The second was the centre's footfall which, if particularly low, would place an additional onus on Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers to extend their outreach beyond the children's centre premises. The third was the availability of local provision – whether it was employability support or childcare provision – and whether there were gaps which the pilot could usefully fill through its activities. Lastly, there was the needs profile of the local communities. This often determined the level of 'hand-holding' required for parents and the level of support they needed to move them forward. For example, in one pilot area, there was an acute lack of basic skills among the local community and so the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser sourced and ran a series of basic skills courses around mathematics and English.

One of the key changes in the provision of pilot activities across the case studies was the shift from undertaking more engagement activities in the early and interim stages of the pilot to undertaking more work-focused activities as the pilot progressed. As with any pilot focused on partnership working, much of the early focus on engagement was necessary to raise awareness of the pilot among parents, staff and partner organisations and build effective relationships. However, as time went on and awareness and uptake of the service increased, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers tended to dedicate more time to delivering work-focused activities and bespoke support to customers. This trend continued and Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers had more time dedicated to work-focused activities as they built up a caseload of customers and as awareness of the

pilot increased over time. Engagement activities were still considered to be important, but not as critical as at the beginning of the pilot as repeat contact with customers became more of a regular occurrence. Similarly, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers reported that parents would still show up on an ad-hoc basis with a range of requests and enquiries, but that this was happening less now that they were familiar with what times they could see the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, and more comfortable with accessing support from them.

2.1.3 Demand and uptake of activities

Demand for work-focused services in the pilot children’s centres was high, as indicated by the results of the surveys of children’s centre users, as well as by the results from the survey of comparison sites. Figure 2.1 shows the preferred site for accessing Jobcentre Plus services among children’s centre users in the pilot and comparison sites. The figures marked ‘comparison’ represent the results from the three comparison local authorities and strongly indicate that even without the experience of having the work-focused services pilot, many children’s centre users are likely to have a strong preference for accessing work-focused services in a children’s centre as opposed to in a Jobcentre Plus office.

Figure 2.1 Preferred site for Jobcentre Plus services (%)

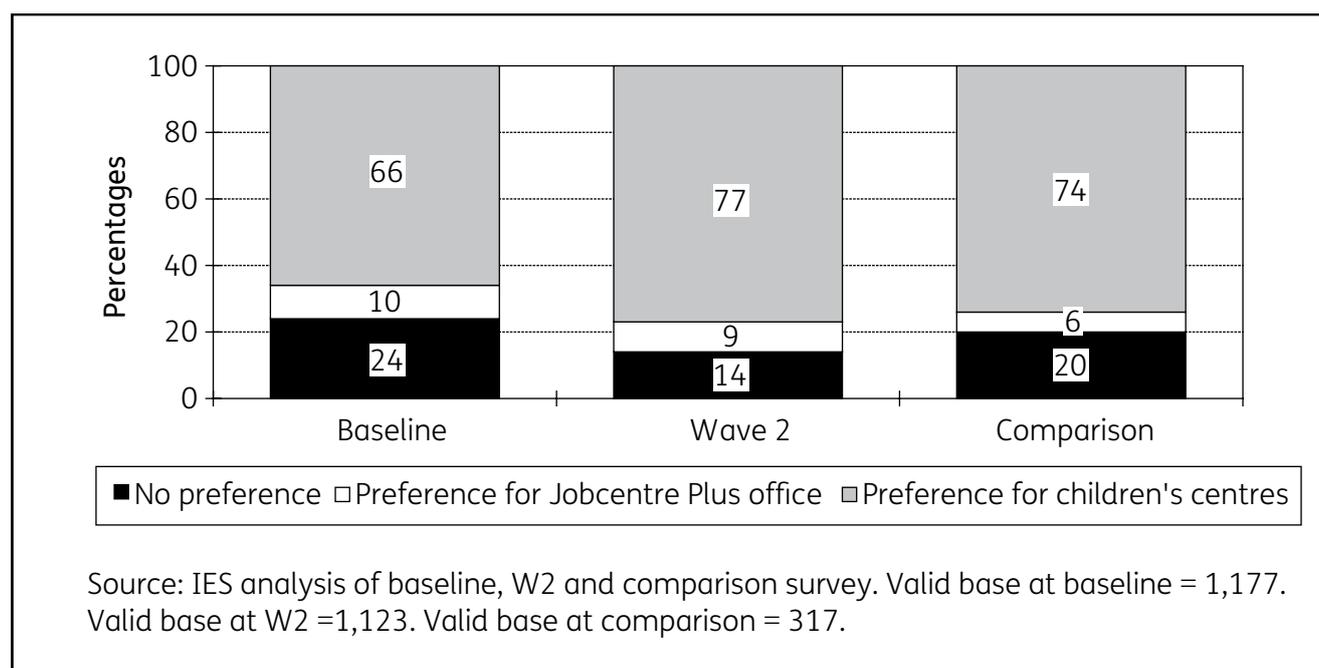


Figure 2.2 shows why children’s centre users favoured accessing Jobcentre Plus services at the children’s centre, rather than at the Jobcentre Plus office. The most commonly mentioned reason parents gave for preferring to access Jobcentre Plus services in their local children’s centre was because the children’s centre was nearer to their home, and so more convenient and accessible.

Interestingly, by the time of the W2 survey centre users were also more likely to mention as a reason for their preference that the environment was friendly at the children’s centre, and that staff were helpful and polite, and they felt safer, compared with the baseline and comparison surveys. Parents were also more likely to prefer the children’s centre because it allowed them to ‘do two things at once’ at W2.

Figure 2.2 Reasons for favouring Jobcentre Plus services at children’s centre sites (%)

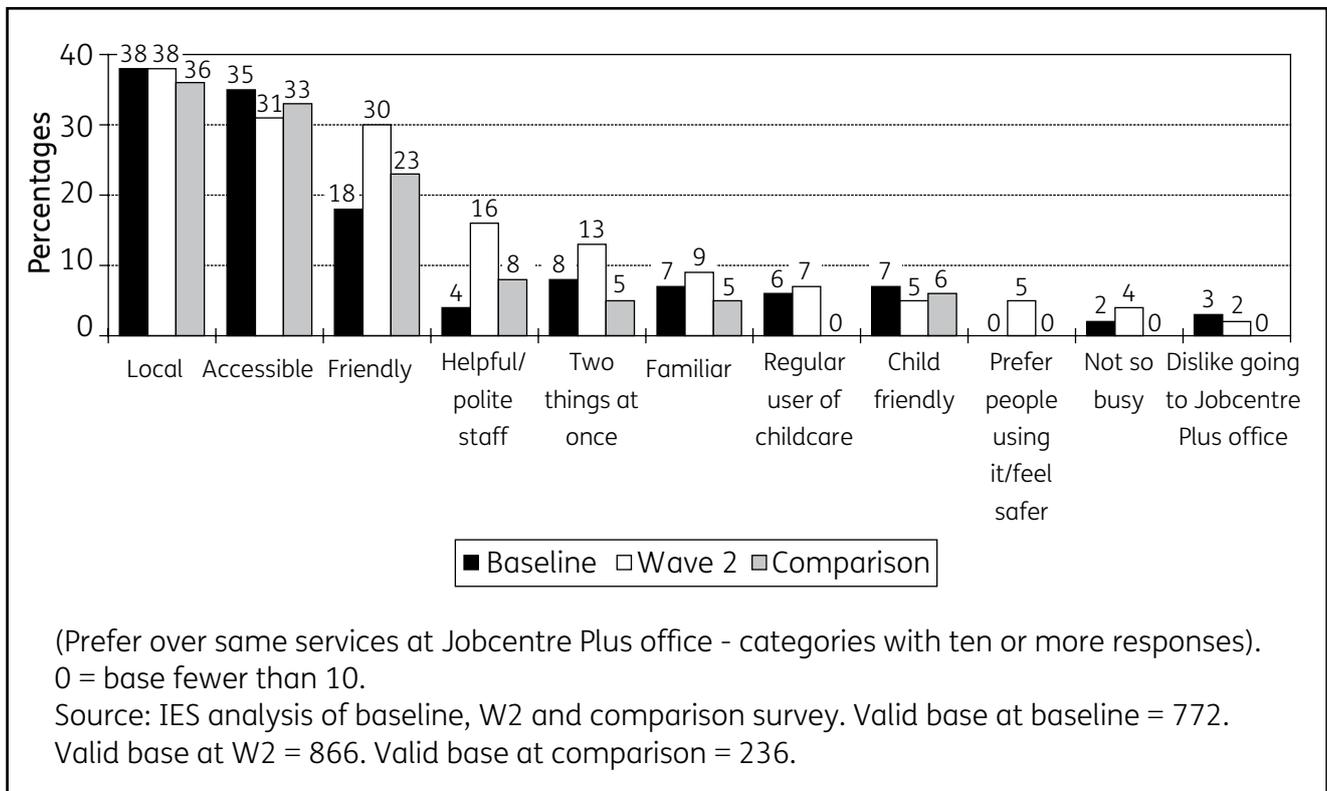
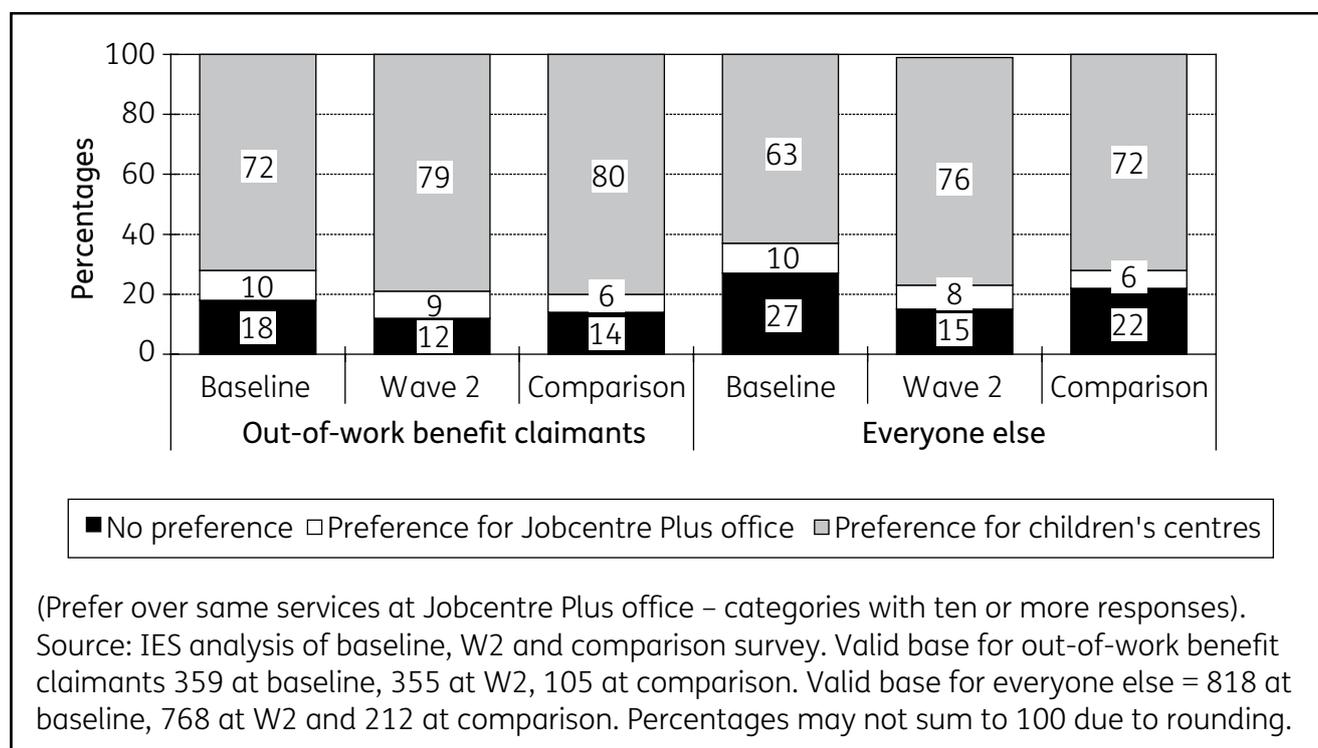


Figure 2.3 shows that amongst centre users who were not claiming benefits, a higher proportion reported no preference for either the children’s centre or Jobcentre Plus office site to access Jobcentre Plus services at the baseline survey (27 per cent) and the comparison survey (22 per cent), when compared with the W2 survey (15 per cent). This difference is not significant amongst parents claiming out of work benefits. This may be because at the baseline and comparison surveys non-benefit claimants had no experience of Jobcentre Plus and so no basis on which to compare, whereas at W2 they may have come into contact with pilot services. This is further evidence to suggest the pilot reached non-benefit claimants, many of whom would have been potential second earners.

Figure 2.3 Preferred site for Jobcentre Plus services, by work and benefit status (%)



There is evidence from the latest MI and case study research that particular activities were more in demand than others. Combined evidence from the administrative and clerical data show that the work-focused activities and support most in demand were:

- employment-related training;
- skills/needs assessments.

The most frequent work-focused activity for traditional Jobcentre Plus customers was employment related training, whereas for non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers it was skills/needs assessment. Many traditional Jobcentre Plus customers also participated in NDLP. More than 40 per cent of eligible¹⁹ pilot participants who had taken up some form of activity had joined NDLP.

Table 2.1 shows the work-focused support undertaken by pilot participants (covering both pilot funded work-focused support and Jobcentre Plus provision).

The case study research reveals a similar pattern, with most Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers reporting that parents saw them most to discuss training needs, to have their skills assessed/recognised and to gain assistance with CVs and jobsearch.

¹⁹ Of lone parents who were not on NDLP prior to joining the pilot.

Table 2.1 Training and activity by customer type

	Traditional Jobcentre Plus customer	Non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customer	Total
Total number of Work-Focused Services in Children's Centre spells where some activity or training is recorded	2,175	1,020	3,195
Of which:			
NDLP	1,250	90	1,345
Employment-related training	745	375	1,120
Skills/needs assessment	390	610	1,000
Other	390	120	510
Personal development training	200	110	310
Support to remain/progress in work	65	100	165
Referral to specialist agency	115	40	155
New Deal for Partners	50	70	120
Financial support	80	40	120
Debt advice	50	65	115
Group session	65	25	90
Childcare support	40	20	65
Tax Credits advice	10	20	30
Transport support	15	0	15
Mentoring scheme	5	0	10

Source: Pilot MI, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), June 2011. Volumes do not sum to the total number of spells where training activity has taken place as some individuals may have participated in more than one type of training and are therefore counted more than once.

As Table 2.1 demonstrates, approximately 3,195 pilot spells had some training or activity start recorded. Table 2.2 shows how all of the training and activity starts have been split according to pilot participant. It shows that around 50 per cent of pilot spells have an activity or training start recorded.

While Table 2.2 might appear to show a low take-up of activity among the pilot areas, there are two further points which need to be noted. The first is that the pilot took at least the first nine months to bed in, from January 2009 to August 2009. During this time, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers were mostly preoccupied with engaging customers, making themselves known to parents and raising awareness of the pilot among staff and partner organisations. This took priority over work-focused activity, particularly in the first quarter of the pilot's introduction where the children's centre activity data shows that few work-focused activities were being undertaken at that stage.²⁰ Also the pilot took longer to bed in than anticipated due to some delays with getting Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks done in time and problems with the installation of the IT. This is clear in Figure 2.4, which charts the number of training starts over the life span of the pilot. Figure 2.4 shows that activity was slow at the start of the pilot, but then rose significantly after the first eight months. Thereafter, the number of training starts remains consistently over 100, with the exception of those months that follow straight on from the Christmas and summer holiday breaks (where one would expect to see a sharp fall in activity). The peaks in activity in October 2009 and 2010 correlate with the end of the summer break and the fact that many courses would have started around this time.

²⁰ Information taken from the quarterly activity forms which were submitted by the pilot areas.

Table 2.2 Total number of training or activity starts

Number of training/activity starts	Total (individuals)
0	3,150
1	1,720
2	780
3	360
4	165
5+	165
Total	6,340

Source: Pilot MI, DWP, June 2011.

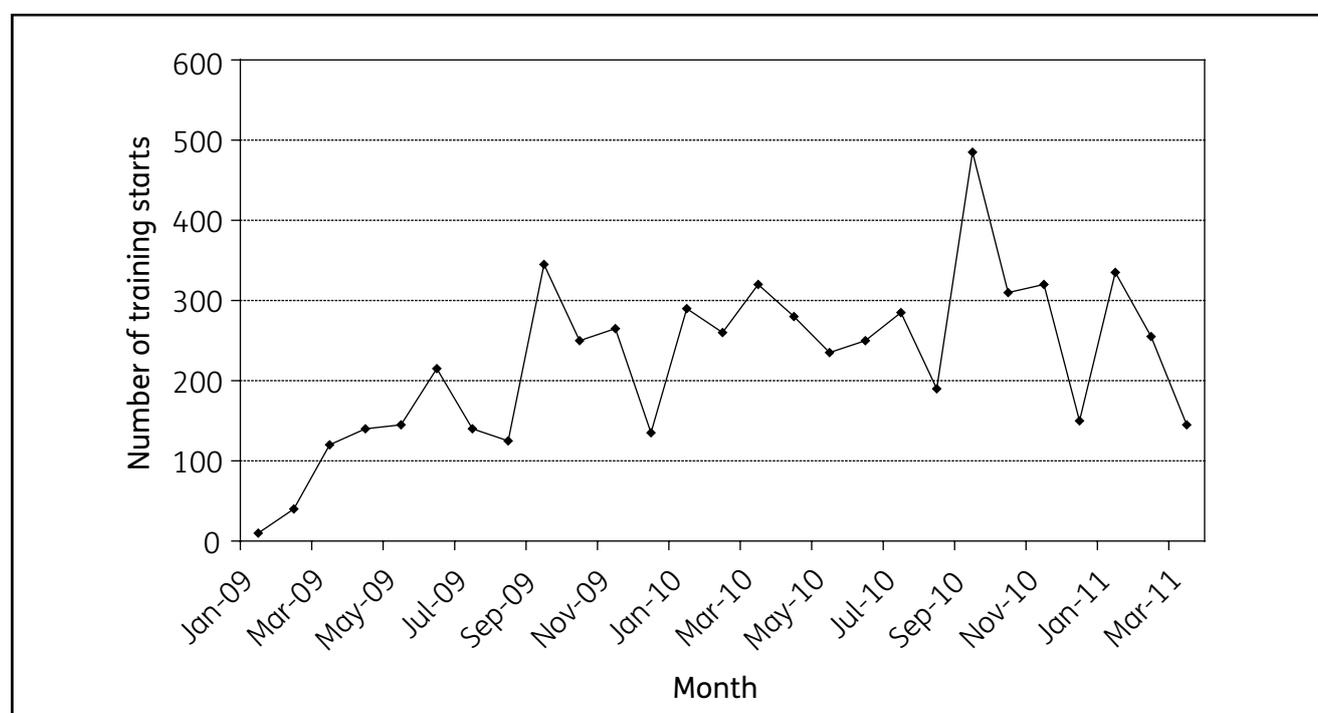
Figure 2.4 Number of training starts over the life span of the pilot

Figure 2.4 correlates with information provided by the pilot areas which also shows a notable increase in the number of work-focused activities from the second quarter of the pilot (April to June 2009). The children's centre activity data shows that work-focused activities increased to around 100 work-focused activities and just over 250 subsequent referrals to the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser during this period. The number of work-focused activities then remains fairly stable (at around 100), but the number of referrals steadily increases, from around 300 in the third quarter of the pilot (October to December 2009) to around 350 referrals in the period between March to May 2010.

The second point which needs to be emphasised is that Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers spent a significant amount of time with parents over the course of the pilot offering them the kind of individual support which would not be covered by any of the other activities listed in Table 2.1.

Although this kind of ‘hand-holding’ support often helped remove some of the most difficult barriers for parents, such as low levels of aspiration or confidence, this inevitably proved time-consuming on most occasions and took time away from organising/hosting other activities and training.

Another difficulty for a few children’s centres was the physical space in which to deliver any training and staff capacity for childcare provision. In one children’s centre, for example, the only viable room for training to take place was in the same space as they ran the crèche. In another children’s centre, the number of children who could use the children’s centre childcare provision was limited according to the number of children’s centre staff available at the time the training was taking place.

However, perhaps the most important reason why there appears to be a low take up in the number of training activities across the pilot areas is that some of the parents with children under the age of five simply did not see work as a priority in the short to medium term, alongside their primary childcare responsibilities. As a result, their demand for work-focused services was mostly with a view to starting work, education or training once their youngest child had started school.

2.2 Governance and Jobcentre Plus line management

Pilot governance remained stable over time in most areas. The steering groups and operational groups which had been set up from the start of the pilot were still functioning and largely proving useful mechanisms for communication between key partner organisations and for resolving problems. As the pilot progressed, many of these governance meetings became useful opportunities to recap on pilot progress, successful outcomes and lessons learned.

There was a limited capacity among Jobcentre Plus line managers to support Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers working on the pilot. In some cases, this had left Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers feeling isolated and lacking in support when difficulties presented themselves. Many areas were aware that these line management arrangements were not working as well as they could be and had taken steps address this over the course of the pilot. As a result, many Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers reported that the situation had improved and that there were regular communications with their line manager and more involvement by their line manager too. A small number of Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers had experienced more than one or two line managers over the course of the pilot, but the negative impact of this had seemed less and less significant as the pilot progressed and as many Personal Advisers became accustomed to working more independently in their role.

From the experience of the pilot, there does not emerge one clear model of how Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers should be managed in an outreach setting. Most pilot staff acknowledged that formally, this role should remain with Jobcentre Plus and that this worked well in most areas, where the line manager was able to maintain some regular communication with the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser and fully understood that flexibility was a core requirement of the role. However, practically some staff (including those from Jobcentre Plus) also acknowledged that line management from a distance could be difficult and that the capacity of line managers was often stretched, particularly if they had other senior responsibilities in Jobcentre Plus. Where this arose, the success of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role depended more heavily on the ability of the Personal Adviser to work independently and on there being an effective working relationship between the Personal Adviser and children’s centre staff.

2.3 Pilot location and room for the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser

Most of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers in the pilot areas had rooms which they could use as some sort of office and/or interviewing space in which to work. However, for those that did not have this space, engaging parents could be more challenging, particularly for confidential conversations. Some of these challenges remained throughout the life of the pilot, although many Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers and children's centre staff had found ways around this problem, either by doing more outreach off site in another community venue or by sharing space with other staff members. Again, however, this depended heavily on a good working relationship between the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser and the children's centre staff (see Chapter 4). In one exceptional example where this relationship was strong, the centre manager gave up her office space to accommodate the work of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser.

In a few pilot areas, the geographical location of the children's centres continued to exert an influence on delivery, particularly in rural areas, where the availability of transport links and local childcare provision was often a barrier to engaging parents. Even in urban areas, if a children's centre was not centrally located, near shops, transport links or a town centre, footfall was often low and Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers might find themselves with spare capacity.

2.3.1 Key facilitators of pilot delivery

Discretionary funds

A key facilitator in enabling the pilot areas to provide tailored and bespoke support were the discretionary pilot funds. These funds provided the flexibility the pilot areas needed to plug gaps in provision and meet specific needs that were not being met by mainstream services or by existing Jobcentre Plus provision. The support on offer varied considerably, often according to individuals' needs, but the most common forms of support across the pilot areas were childcare expenses, clothing for job interviews, training courses and travel expenses.

Confusion in several areas surrounding the availability of discretionary funds and their use at the beginning of the pilot gave way to greater clarity around the use of discretionary funds as the pilot progressed. Approximately a year and a half into the pilot, and nearly all areas had drawn upon these funds, to varying degrees, to support individuals on the pilot to take up training, employment or volunteering opportunities.

There is evidence that much of this discretionary spend was used efficiently and effectively. Most pilot areas reported that they would first seek to fund an activity or expense through the Jobcentre Plus Adviser Discretionary Fund (ADF), and would only draw on the pilot's discretionary funding should the individual not qualify for support through ADF or through other local provision. Some areas also reported that they would only fund an activity or cover an expense if it was clear that it would lead to an outcome for the parent, or if the parent could demonstrate that they had seriously thought about their next steps towards work or training.

The evidence from the pilot areas indicated that the value of discretionary funds was twofold. First, they enabled the provision of tailored support and/or the one-off purchase of items, particularly at a time when other sources of mainstream support and provision were often under pressure. Second, discretionary funds often gave the pilot an important degree of flexibility to remove the barriers to work or training that many parents faced. Often these barriers were around childcare or travel expenses, but in many instances, these barriers were unique to the individuals or local community concerned – for example, funding an ESOL class for a group of women whose first languages were not English, or paying for a course exam fee for an individual who was on an exceptionally low income.

Effective engagement and word-of-mouth

Engagement of the target groups was an important element of pilot delivery, and effective engagement was a key facilitator. The details of engagement are detailed in the chapters that follow, but suffice to say that successful engagement rested largely upon the skills and abilities of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers, and how well they could establish and build trusting relationships with parents (see Chapter 3). It also depended upon the extent of partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres because many referrals to the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser came through children's centre staff (see Chapter 5). To a lesser extent, effective engagement also depended upon some of the logistics and practicalities of pilot delivery, such as a room for the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser and sufficient footfall in the children's centre, or the reliability of IT facilities to enable the Personal Adviser to work effectively out in the community (see Section 4.3).

An important driver of effective engagement was word-of-mouth, which tended to increase as the pilot bedded-in and awareness of the service grew. It emerged as a strong driver of effective (and ongoing) engagement because the pilot's 'success stories' (quite literally) tended to speak for themselves and spread the news of the service among trusted family and friendship circles (see Section 4.1).

3 The role of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser

This chapter details the role of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser by drawing on customers' and pilot staff experiences of the Personal Adviser role. It details the strengths and successes of the role drawing on the many examples of good practice from across the pilot sites as well as the feedback from parents themselves. The chapter then concludes by detailing the continuing constraints and challenges to the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role.

3.1 A new approach to the 'traditional' Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role

The work-focused services pilot aimed to place outreach and partnership working at the core of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role. This new approach was intended to embed work-focused services in a multi-agency setting and to help establish trusted relationships with parents who might not otherwise access Jobcentre Plus services. In this way, the pilot marked a departure from the traditional Personal Adviser role in the Jobcentre, which is subject to more rigid targets and a more structured way of working.

The pilot guidance stated a new modified objective for Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers to work to. Their aim was:

'To embed Jobcentre Plus work-focused services within the children's centre, working in partnership with children's centre staff, establishing and building rapport and trust with parents, providers, employers, and the local community. [To] provide core Jobcentre Plus services, encouraging people who would not otherwise do so to access them, and act as a role model in leading, managing relationships with Jobcentre Plus and children's centre colleagues and developing self.'

3.2 Successes and strengths of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role

Overall, the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers recruited onto the pilot had a large degree of success in fulfilling the aim stated above. Some of these details were briefly covered in the interim report. This section details their key successes in this regard.

3.2.1 Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers are more accessible

The opportunity to access work-focused services and support in children's centre settings has been overwhelmingly welcomed by children's centre users. This is not only evident through the survey results (for example, see Figure 2.1 in previous chapter), but is also evident through the qualitative evidence from parents, who found Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers to be easily accessible for several reasons. Firstly, many parents were already regular users of the children's centre and so accessing the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers on site was convenient for them, as it fitted in with their daily or weekly routine. Secondly, many parents found this access easier in comparison to their experience of using the Jobcentre Plus office, which was often reported to be further away and not as child-friendly. ('Child-friendly' to parents meant a range of things, from the ease with

which they could access the building with a pushchair or pram, to the extent to which they felt comfortable taking their child into an environment where there were security guards and very little to keep their child occupied). Thirdly, the children's centre site made parents feel more comfortable with accessing the service because they regarded it as being an informal, welcoming and trusted environment and one in which they were already familiar with the service, set-up and staff.

'It's more convenient as I come to the nursery anyway. I can just pop into the office and speak to [named Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser]. You get a horrible feeling sometimes when you go to the Jobcentre and you don't get that here because you're in a safe environment. You can pop in and it's child-friendly.'

(Children's centre user, second wave qualitative interviews with children's centre users)

Finally, parents and staff acknowledged that access to the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers was easier because of the flexibility of the service. This enabled parents to access Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers outside of formal appointments or a strict diary-booking system. Removing these improved access, and outcomes for the parent, as a couple of Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers highlighted:

'One of the parents applying for a job needed some help with the application form. She contacted Jobcentre Plus and they said "yes, come in two weeks' time" and so she came to me because she had to do it the next day, and two weeks time is no good, is it?'

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave case study research)

'In [the] Jobcentre, you'd say "see you in a few weeks' time". Well, in a few weeks, that person's motivation or whatever they're interested in has gone off the boil. Here, we can see them quicker, sooner, to make sure that whatever their problem is or whatever their interests or what they need can happen sooner rather than later.'

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave case study research)

3.2.2 Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers are empathetic and understanding

Many parents noted that Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers had been very empathetic, sensitive and understanding to their personal circumstances, much of which had not been employment or skills related. This was key to engaging many customers who were not accessing Jobcentre Plus support, or those with complex and multiple barriers to work.

'[Named Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser] listens and she understands the position that you're in. She is totally understanding that I'm on my own with my daughter and I don't get any help and she'll go out of her way to help.'

(Children's centre user, second wave qualitative interviews with children's centre users)

A few parents expressed their views in contrast to less positive experiences they had had at the Jobcentre Plus office, where they felt that their interaction with Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers was more process-driven and more removed from their personal circumstances.

3.2.3 Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers are friendly and approachable

Much of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers' engagement with parents hinged upon how approachable and friendly they were able to make themselves to parents. In this regard, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers had considerable success in using this to engage parents in work-focused services. Much of this stemmed from the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers' interpersonal skills and how comfortable they felt with this level of informality (see Section 6.5 for more on this). However,

a great deal of this also depended on the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers' ability to strike up informal conversation with parents so that they could start to build up a relationship with them and make themselves known as a 'friendly face'. As one Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser put it, when describing how she successfully engages parents:

'I use my own initiative and the informality of the contact with the parents. I've found that is the way you have to do it. It's more enjoyable doing that anyway, if you can welcome somebody in by "how are you?", "how are the kids?" In the Jobcentre you don't have the time to do that, irrespective of how pleasant your customer might be.'

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave case study research)

3.2.4 Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers are trustworthy

Parents mentioned that they felt able to develop trusting relationships with the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers. This was not only evident in the fact that many had repeat contact with the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, but also the fact that they were on first name terms with them and felt able to discuss a range of personal issues with them outside their employability and skills needs.

'I see [named Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser] many times. It's a good contact; this relationship with her has become like friends. I've got no friends with whom I can express my feelings, so I tell her everything. She's helped get the crèche place for me and she helped me do a lot of research on volunteering.'

(Children's centre user, second wave qualitative interviews with children's centre users)

A key facilitator of this process was not just the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers' interpersonal skills, but also the continuity of the Personal Adviser role in the children's centres, which gave parents the security that they could access this support from an individual who was already familiar with their circumstances, rather than 'starting over' with someone who was not. Another facilitator was the fact that the children's centres and their staff were already trusted by parents accessing their services, and this lent wider credibility to the role of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser in trying to build relationships with parents.

3.2.5 Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers are knowledgeable and helpful

Many customers and children's centre staff reported how knowledgeable and helpful the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers had been. Customers valued the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers' help with benefit and tax credit queries, jobsearch, CV writing, job application forms and knowledge about training courses and job vacancies. Customers particularly valued Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers' help when they felt they had 'gone the extra mile' with a particular request for help, for example help with sourcing childcare, or in finding out about eligible financial assistance for training.

'If she couldn't go down one avenue for me, she would try another one, so she was very informative.'

(Children's centre user, second wave qualitative interviews with children's centre users)

The specific knowledge and expertise of Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers was also equally valued by children's centre staff, who found out more about the specific support available through the Personal Adviser as the pilot progressed and as parents started to give feedback on the help they had received. Of particular value were the better-off calculations and the knowledge of benefits and tax credits which parents often had queries about.

'I think that specific expertise is really significant. It's the benefit advice and in-work calculations. It's a font of knowledge in terms of where to signpost people to and where they can access funding. That comes as part of their Jobcentre Plus role.'

(Local authority pilot lead, second wave case study research)

There was also some evidence that Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers were helping parents to source childcare, or to source financial support for childcare or with general childcare queries. Often, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers might refer onto children's centre staff who would also provide information on these queries. This was encouraging evidence of how the pilot was providing joined-up support for parents.

3.2.6 Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers have more time to help customers

Perhaps one of the most significant strengths of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role on the pilot was the flexibility to spend more time with customers. This was repeatedly mentioned by both parents and pilot staff as being a significant strength to the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role because it improved the overall quality of the work-focused services on offer in three important respects. First, it allowed Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers more time to build up a meaningful and trusted relationship with parents. As one parent put it:

'Giving them [Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers] a bit more freedom by putting them in one of these [Children's] centres, rather than in the office where they don't have much time for appointments, means they can help a lot more. I just feel more interactive with [named Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser]. There's a few workers, but I know her very well now and so with anything, I just go to her and talk to her about it.'

(Children's centre user, second wave qualitative interviews with children's centre users)

Second, it allowed Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers to familiarise themselves more with the parents' wider circumstances that would be preventing them from working. As one Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser summarised:

'If I was sat as an adviser in the Jobcentre, I would be doing eight to nine interviewees a day – bang, bang, bang, one after the other and that would be my day. If somebody drops in and says "can I have a word?", unless somebody failed to attend, I would be "no I'm sorry I haven't got time for that. I haven't got time to look at your childcare or to help sort your childcare". Also it's looking deeper into the family circumstances, which as a Jobcentre Plus adviser, I can't do.'

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave case study research)

Finally, more time with customers meant that Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers could often spend more time encouraging and motivating parents to think about work and start preparing for work, which was important given that some parents only saw work as a medium to long-term option alongside their primary childcare responsibilities. As one parent put it, when describing the impact of her contact with the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, 'she pushed me, which is really what I needed'.

Many Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers themselves found this aspect of the job to be the most rewarding, often stating that having more time to help people was a particularly rewarding experience.

3.3 Constraints and challenges to the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role

The final stage research identifies three challenges to the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role which emerged during the course of the pilot. The first, which is the lack of physical space, and the way in which this constrained the work of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, has already been detailed in Section 2.3.1. Two further challenges are detailed below.

3.3.1 Balancing work-focused services with engagement and outreach activities

The role of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser in this pilot has a fundamental tension at its core: that of balancing work-focused activities with less structured, ad-hoc engagement and outreach activities. The way in which this affected the day-to-day running of the Personal Adviser's activities was detailed to some extent in the interim report, but it is clear from the final stage research that this tension presented a much more sustained challenge for a few Personal Advisers, as the pilot progressed.

This challenge had two aspects to it. The first was that a few Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers had 'gone native', in the words of one Jobcentre Plus line manager. In other words, they were struggling to strike a balance between carrying out work-focused activities alongside the requirement to integrate into the children's centre and the centre's activities, with the latter was taking priority over the former. This extended beyond the initial start-up phase of the pilot (where most areas were prioritising engagement over work-focused activities) and continued on for a few months beyond this. In these cases, a few Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers (and their line managers) felt that they were being asked to participate in too many children's centre meetings and activities, and that not enough time was being spent on more structured work-focused activity. However, once this was flagged up by line managers, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers took more of a concerted effort to redress this balance and dedicate more time to work-focused activities.

The second aspect of this challenge was that some customers were approaching Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers to seek help with a range of issues, some of which were clearly beyond the scope of their role. Examples of this include asking advisers for help with home insurance, medical matters or help with their personal relationships. Again, it is possible to identify a real tension here between Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers making themselves accessible and helpful, but at the same time remembering that they are there to provide work-focused services. One Jobcentre Plus pilot lead summarised this dilemma when she said:

'[Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers] need to be open and honest with that customer and be able to bond with customers, but there's a fine line, isn't there? There are some advisers where maybe they get too personally involved. So it's having that ability to gel with somebody and help them to the best of your ability without going too far.'

(Jobcentre Plus District Manager, second wave case study research)

In these cases, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers got better with this 'balancing act' over time, and with experience, gradually learning how to tactfully and gently tell customers that they were not able to help them with all their personal difficulties without compromising their relationship with them.

3.3.2 The role of targets

The pilot itself was not explicitly linked to the achievement of employment outcomes or targets. Indeed the pilot guidance clearly stated that Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers working on the pilot were to be exempt from the then Adviser Achievement Tool (AAT), which ensures that all Jobcentre Plus advisers contribute to Jobcentre Plus aims.²¹ However, in a few areas, Jobcentre Plus line managers and district managers had taken the decision to introduce their own targets for the pilot. These not only included targets on job outcomes, but also on the number of people engaged in any one day.

The decision to introduce targets was motivated by a number of reasons. Some Jobcentre Plus managers thought that it would be a good way of ‘reining in’ those Personal Advisers who were spending too much time on outreach and not enough time on work-focused activities. Others thought that targets would be a useful motivational goal for Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers, and particularly those few who were struggling to adjust to a much less structured environment and way of working. Lastly, some managers thought that targets would offer a useful way of demonstrating pilot progress to their senior colleagues, particularly as the end of the pilot neared and some Jobcentre Plus managers were concerned that pressure on Jobcentre Plus capacity would be used as an argument for withdrawing all post-pilot outreach activities.

The effect of these targets on the pilot was mixed and difficult to judge given the small number of areas involved. In one case, the targets did act as a useful motivational tool for a Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser who was struggling to adjust to working outside of targets and without regular feedback regarding performance. In another case, however, it was clear that gathering data for these targets was in itself consuming a great deal of pilot time, and constraining the role of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser. Overall, the evidence seems to indicate that the imposition of targets do not appear to have been detrimental to the role of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, or pilot delivery more generally. Over time, any tensions among pilot staff, about where the pilot’s emphasis should lie in terms of work-focused activities versus outreach and engagement, were resolved and staff had agreed a way forward (or at least agreed to disagree). More importantly, the findings of this chapter have shown that the skills and qualities of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser are far more important in determining the success of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role than targets.

While the imposition of targets was confined to only a very small number of pilot areas, and appears to have had very little detrimental impact to the role of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, it does perhaps highlight the potential danger of imposing rigid performance frameworks to areas of work – for example partnership working or building relationships with hard-to-reach customer groups – that simply do not lend themselves easily to quantitative measurement. In this sense, targets tend to defeat the purpose of Jobcentre Plus outreach in the first place. If Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers were simply going to continue to work to targets, then there was little point in trying to embed their services within a multi-agency setting (arguably a significant task in itself), let alone trying to meaningfully engage with target groups. Two Jobcentre Plus staff put it like this:

‘One of the complaints I’ve heard about this pilot is that you’re essentially delivering something that is not that different from what is being delivered in the Jobcentre, and therefore it could be pulled back into the Jobcentre. But I think making the distinction between what is being delivered and how it’s being delivered is quite important.’

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave case study research)

²¹ AAT has now been superseded by ADAPT (Adviser Development, Achievement and Performance Tool).

'I think [targets] drive perverse behaviours. I'd much rather somebody spend an hour and a half with a customer, if that's what they need to get the outcome, than spend no time at all just to get a tick in the box. That's not what [the pilot] is about.'

(Jobcentre Plus District Manager, second wave case study research)

Perhaps more obviously, targets were not appropriate for the target groups of this pilot, many of whom were some distance from the labour market. As one Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, who was subject to targets, put it:

'The target that I was given was to convert 90 per cent of WFIs into caseload. That means I have to make 90 per cent ready for work, but I can't do a 90 per cent conversion because many aren't looking for work. Some have just had a baby!'

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave case study research)

4 Engagement

This chapter provides an account of how the pilot engaged with children's centre users and other target groups. It outlines the main methods of engagement used in the pilot areas before then detailing the key facilitators and challenges to engagement. The chapter concludes by drawing on both qualitative evidence and evidence from the pilot Management Information (MI) to report on who was engaging with the pilot.

4.1 Methods of engagement

This section draws on the final stage research to detail the different methods of engagement used in the pilot areas. These methods varied between some of the pilot areas and according to the experiential lessons gained as the pilot progressed, but the most prevalent methods are detailed below.

4.1.1 Outreach in children's centres

Pilot guidance made it clear that the pilot was not simply about placing Jobcentre Plus resource in children's centres, but that there must be a shift in the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role to proactively make themselves visible, accessible and approachable to customers and staff within this setting. The interim report detailed how outreach in children's centres was evident in three key ways:

- Informal engagement with children's centre users to make themselves known and increase their visibility. Often this engagement had little to do with work-focused activity, but simply provided an opportunity for Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers to get to know the parents better. Examples include coffee mornings, informal chats at drop-off and pick-up and playing with the children.
- Attending children's centre activities and sessions to engage with parents on a one-to-one basis and to raise awareness of the pilot services. This included attendance at drop-ins, nursery, crèche, mother and toddler groups and baby clinics.
- Organising and participating in introductory sessions, pilot launch days, open days and other events aimed at explicitly promoting the pilot.

All of these methods continued to be utilised throughout the lifetime of the pilot, but all to a lesser extent as the pilot bedded in and awareness of the pilot increased. Informal engagement was the most consistent element of engagement and one which Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers reported as an ongoing necessity, even though awareness of the pilot had improved since the interim stage of the evaluation. Although many Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers had already built up a caseload by this stage, there were potentially new customers to the pilot every time the term started again. Also this kind of informal contact with parents was necessary to keep them engaged with the pilot, and also to maintain the relationship built up with them.

Attendance at children's centre activities and sessions also continued, but some Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers with a particularly large caseload of clients did report that they had been doing less of this as the pilot had progressed and as demand for their services had grown. It was a similar story for organising and participating in introductory sessions, pilot launch days and other promotional events aimed at increasing awareness of the pilot. This was mostly because the pilot was no longer in its 'launch' phase but also because awareness of the pilot was beginning to grow, through word-of-mouth within the local community or through referrals from partner organisations.

One activity which had increased over time was Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers tagging onto the back of other children's centre events and sessions. Half way through the pilot Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers had grown to know which sessions were most attended/popular, which would be more likely to yield new customers to the pilot, and which sessions provided them with a suitable opportunity to engage parents without them being too distracted by their children.

Another activity which was also more evident in the final stage research was what might be called 'follow-up' engagement with parents. It would be informal opportunities within children's centre sessions, or drop-off times, that would allow a Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser to engage with parents and follow-up on earlier support and advice they had given them. For example, informally engaging with parents at a coffee morning to find out how they had got on with their CV, or the job vacancy which had been passed onto them the previous week. This kind of engagement would give Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers an opportunity to casually ask parents how their job interview went, or whether they needed any help filling in their online job application. Texting parents to remind them of appointments or their course attendance was another way in which a few Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers kept parents engaged with pilot activity. This kind of 'follow-up' engagement grew along with the increasing caseload of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers and as relationships strengthened between Personal Advisers and parents.

One other activity which was more prominent over time was the use of notice boards within the children's centre to inform parents of job vacancies, training courses and other work-focused activities which might be of interest. In a few children's centres, updating these notice boards was a regular task for Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers and both parents and Personal Advisers alike reported how useful they were as information sources for parents. Of particular use was the posting of job vacancies on these notice boards in letting parents know about the kind of work that was available, the job requirements, and the levels of pay. One Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser described the strength of this approach as being a 'mini Jobcentre set-up, but in a more comfortable environment'. These notice boards were also useful in keeping parents occupied if they had to wait to see the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, or if the Personal Adviser was busy talking to someone else.

4.1.2 Outreach in the community

Outreach in the community formed an important part of some Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers' engagement activities. For most of the time, this included shadowing outreach and community workers and using this time to make themselves known to parents in the community. Alongside this, some Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers also dedicated a few hours a week to visiting other community venues, such as libraries, other children's centres, primary schools and community centres, to engage with potential customers and raise awareness of their services.

Over time, much of this initial shadowing of outreach workers had resulted in regular visits into the community with outreach workers. In a couple of cases, the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers had become embedded into the children's centre team of outreach advisers and regularly worked alongside them to engage parents. Outreach visits to other community venues continued throughout the pilot and where these were occurring, they also became a regular feature of some Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers' diaries. In a few cases, these outreach venues had changed as Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers learned over time which settings best lent themselves to successful engagement with the target groups, but overall the visits themselves became a regular (albeit relatively small) feature of Personal Advisers' diaries.

One activity which had increased over time was Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers' attendance at community events. These were either events run by Sure Start, or by other local partner organisations, out in the community. Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers' attendance at these events

grew as their relationships with these partner organisations also strengthened and as partner organisations became increasingly aware of what services the advisers could offer their customers. Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers increasingly found it useful to ‘piggy-back’ off these events in order to raise their profile within the wider community (beyond just those using the children’s centre). Examples include attendance at community fairs, celebration events, and open days at local primary schools.

4.1.3 Advertising and marketing

Much of the advertising and marketing materials used by many of the pilot areas were less utilised as time went on. Perhaps one of the methods which continued in some areas was the use of posters and leaflet drops in the local community. While many pilot staff and parents reported that they had found out about the pilot through such means, the overall impact of these methods is less clear. For example, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers working in communities characterised by entrenched worklessness and severe deprivation found that marketing was far less effective as an engagement tool than personal contact because many people had a deep distrust of public agencies. The same applied for those advisers working in areas where some parents could not read the posters or leaflets because English was not their first language. Perhaps for these reasons, as well as the fact that other outreach methods were proving more successful, many Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers came to rely less and less on marketing as a key tool for engaging customers.

4.1.4 Word-of-mouth

Word-of-mouth was an important means of engaging customers into the pilot. Some of this had come from marketing in the community or through referrals from partner organisations, but most of it had come through positive personal experiences that beneficiaries of the pilot were passing onto other parents, friends, partners and family. This trend continued to grow, with word-of-mouth becoming one of the most effective methods of engaging parents in most of the pilot areas.

Word-of-mouth was not just effective in increasing the numbers engaged onto the pilot, but also in increasing trust between Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers and the local community. This was because most word-of-mouth took place within trusted family and friendship circles, and so people were more likely to engage with the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser if they had heard positive things about them from a reliable and trusted source. One Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser described how word-of-mouth had helped raise her own profile and services within the local community:

‘I think word-of-mouth has done a lot of good. You get stopped in the street as you walk around. It’s lovely that people do say hello and chat.’

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave case study research)

Word-of-mouth was also mentioned as being particularly helpful in multicultural communities, where many languages were spoken and which Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers would find it difficult to target.

Word-of-mouth increased as the pilot bedded in and awareness started to increase. However, word-of-mouth also increased as the pilot started to progress people into and towards work. As these ‘success stories’ started to spread, engagement with the pilot increased.

4.1.5 Referrals from partner organisations

Referrals from partner organisations were a key way in which some Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers were engaging with parents. These referrals were important because partner organisations had already established a trusting relationship with their client, and so these people were often more willing and comfortable being referred onto the pilot.

The development of partnership working is detailed in Chapter 5, but it is worth noting here that referrals increased over time and that the bulk of referrals were coming from the children's centre staff and other support services based in the children's centre. Referrals from children's centre staff tended to come from outreach workers, community workers and the family support teams and increased over time as these staff came to know the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser better and understand their role/services in more detail. Most of the referrals from partner organisations came from those operating out of the children's centre on a regular basis, such as health and midwifery services. Again, given that many of the staff already had a trusting and familiar relationship with parents, they were a valued method of engaging parents into the pilot.

'Our referrals to the adviser have been a big source of their workload, especially those from the staff in the nursery school and staff in the day care nursery.'

(Children's centre manager, second wave case study research)

'We've been pretty much accepted by all of Sure Start as a good thing. I think that has rippled out to the customers because we're accepted by the staff and the customers trust the staff, we're included by reputation almost, or association. I think that's worked very well.'

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave case study research)

4.2 Key facilitators

Key facilitators of engagement with parents are summarised briefly below.

- **Easier physical access to the children's centres.** Children's centres were reported to be more accessible for parents with buggies and pushchairs. For those customers whose local Jobcentre Plus office was located in a town centre, there was also an issue around the distance and cost of travelling there.
- **A better environment for parents and children.** Children's centres were widely reported to offer nicer and more comfortable environments to engage with work-focused services, for both parents and children. Children's centres were more child-friendly with more activities to keep children occupied and were familiar and trusted environments for many parents.
- **Continuity of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser.** This facilitated initial and ongoing engagement with the pilot as it helped customers build up a personal and trusting relationship with Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers. This meant they were often more willing to disclose personal details about their circumstances and any barriers they might be facing to work, education or training. Continuity of Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser also meant that many customers did not feel as if they had to 'start over' with a new Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser every time they accessed work-focused services in the children's centre.
- **The privacy afforded by children's centres.** Many parents, who had previously accessed their local Jobcentre Plus office reported that they felt children's centres offered them more privacy.
- **The informality of engagement.** Parents appreciated the informality of engagement with the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser and the informal setting in which it took place.

Two facilitators from the above list continued to exert a strong positive influence on engagement right up until the final few months of the pilot. The first was the continuity of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser. The importance of this became increasingly apparent in the final stage of research as many parents expressed concern at the pilot coming to an end and the prospect of no longer

being able to access the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser at the children's centre. More often than not, this concern manifested itself in fear of losing contact with and support from the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, with whom they had built up a good relationship.

The second facilitator which continued to exert a particularly strong influence was the informality of engagement which the pilot allowed for. Parents and pilot staff noted a number of strengths to an informal approach. First, parents did not have to book appointments, which made the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers more accessible and flexible to help people at short notice. This was particularly important for the repeat and follow-up contact which nearly all parents required after initially engaging with the pilot. As one Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser and one parent put it:

'Just being accessible and people not having to book an appointment has made it easier for people to come and see us, rather than having to go somewhere formal and book an appointment.'

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave case study research)

'I don't know what I would have done without him – I really don't. I just walk up the road and he's there. If he's got someone with him, you just sit there and wait. He is brilliant, absolutely fantastic.'

(Children's centre user, second wave of qualitative interviews with children's centre user)

The informality of engagement allowed Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers to deliver a more personalised and tailored service. Parents often noted how friendly, approachable and helpful Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers were, and this was largely down to the informality and flexibility which the Personal Adviser role allowed for. As Chapter 3 highlighted, this informality and flexibility were key to the success of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role.

Some of this positive engagement was reported by parents and staff to be in contrast to the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role in the Jobcentre Plus office, which could often be too time-constrained or process-driven to allow for more personalised engagement. As two pilot staff from Jobcentre Plus put it:

'I think because they see us as not having a Jobcentre agenda, they see us concerned with them as people and not just as a number. I think that's one of the major strengths of this pilot.'

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave case study research)

'Personally what I like is that I'm approachable and people quite easily come and ask anything in the role that I'm in here.'

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave case study research)

Over time, an additional facilitator to engagement which emerged from the research, was the lack of explicit Jobcentre Plus 'branding' in a number of pilot areas. A number of pilot staff reported that in promoting and marketing the pilot, it helped to leave the Jobcentre Plus logo, name badges and signage off any marketing materials or not to immediately mention it to parents showing an interest in the service. Of course, if parents were to ask, then pilot staff would mention that the Personal Advisers were employed by Jobcentre Plus, but insofar as parents' perception was concerned, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers were to be seen and to behave as very much part of the children's centre teams of staff.

'We took the decision very early on that advisers should be seen as part of the children's centre team and I do think that enabled families to embrace them in a different way. They were aware that they worked for the Jobcentre, but they didn't look like they were from the Jobcentre and they didn't act like they were from the Jobcentre. They acted like they came with the family support worker or the outreach worker and I think people found it easier to talk to them.'

(Local authority lead, second wave case study research)

This approach appeared to be particularly helpful in communities characterised by entrenched worklessness and severe deprivation, which tended to hold a deep mistrust of public authorities and attach a particular negative stigma to Jobcentre Plus.

'The people are quite hardcore. They've very much been on that estate a long time and you've got your long-term benefits there. I would say they're quite anti us because they've probably been through all our projects so it works quite well for [named Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser] to not say it's Jobcentre Plus.'

(Jobcentre Plus line manager, second wave case study research)

4.3 Challenges to engagement and outreach

Previous evaluation findings identified four main challenges to engagement and outreach. These were low levels of children's centre users in those sites which had a lower footfall than others; a lack of physical space for the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser to work in sites where there was a general lack of meeting rooms and offices; a few instances of benefit fraud which were being disclosed and which some Personal Advisers felt could negatively affect their ongoing engagement and trust with customers; and the issue of transient and mobile communities which made ongoing engagement with them difficult.

Encouragingly, few of these issues were reported as being particularly problematic over time, highlighting the way in which most areas had overcome these difficulties. For example, room sharing in a couple of pilot areas had solved the issue of Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers not having a working space in the children's centre and in another area, the Personal Adviser had sought to work more in outreach venues to overcome the problem of not having a room. The issues of low levels of children's centre users and transient communities were less easy to overcome, being demographic and geographic features of the local community. However, the issue of low footfall in a few children's centres has highlighted the need to ensure that future outreach work in children's centres takes into consideration the potential reach of that venue into the local community before the outreach work begins (see Section 6.2 for more on this).

4.4 Who engaged in the pilot?

Between January 2009 and March 2011 there were over 6,300 starts on the pilot by over 5,800 individuals. Evidence shows that the pilot areas were engaging a mix of both traditional Jobcentre Plus customers (ie benefit claimants or the partner in a benefit claim) and non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers. Pilot MI shows that around 60 per cent of pilot starts were known to be lone parents in receipt of benefits, and around 30 per cent were non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers. These are encouraging findings as the pilot always intended to engage both traditional and non-traditional Jobcentre Plus clients. The 30 per cent figure is particularly encouraging as many of this group would have been parents from low income households and generally not in contact with Jobcentre Plus.

Of those traditional Jobcentre Plus customers who were in receipt of benefits as the main claimant, 85 per cent were in receipt of Income Support (IS), 11 per cent were in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and two per cent were in receipt of Incapacity Benefit (IB) or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) – again indicating good reach into the target groups. Partners of benefit claimants comprised four per cent of all pilot participants.²²

Income information was collected for non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers at the household level. The pilot MI shows that, for those where we have the data, around 70 per cent of non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers earned under £20,000, with one in five earning under £10,000²³, and this is broadly in line with the results of the surveys, which show that 64 per cent of pilot centre users reported a weekly household income of less than £385 (or £20,000 a year) and between 35 and 37 per cent reported a weekly household income of less than £192 (£10,000 a year). See Figure A.12.

In line with the profile of children's centre users, as indicated by the surveys (see Figure A.3), most of the pilot participants had children under the age of five. Seventy-five per cent of those pilot participants for whom we know the age of their youngest child had a child under the age of five at the time they agreed to participate.²⁴ This had increased from over 60 per cent of pilot participants at the early stages of the pilot and from around 70 per cent at March 2010. This is an encouraging development as the interim report found that some of those with primary childcare responsibilities had yet to access pilot provision.²⁵

Most of the pilot starts were female (90 per cent), although in some pilot areas there was a higher proportion of men participating. In Kingston upon Hull, 21 per cent of participants were male, and in Redcar and Cleveland the proportion was 15 per cent.²⁶ This is very much in line with the broader profile of children's centre users (see Figure A.1). Thirty per cent of all participants for whom we know their ethnicity were from an ethnic minority group, although this varies significantly from area to area, with the more diverse London local authorities having just over 70 per cent of their participants from an ethnic minority group.²⁷ Again, this is similar to the broader ethnic profile of children's centre users (see Figure A.2).

Qualitative evidence from the research indicates that many of the ethnic minority groups accessing the pilot were those who had limited levels of English language skills and were not accessing any Jobcentre Plus support prior to the pilot. More generally, the qualitative evidence from the research confirms the quantitative data from the pilot MI showing that the pilot was engaging the target groups and some of the hardest-to-reach groups. For example, there is evidence from some pilot areas that the pilot engaged some pilot participants who had never accessed a children's centre before. In a few areas, pilot staff also reported growing awareness and engagement of the target groups in the wider community.

²² Data from the pilot MI.

²³ Data from the pilot MI.

²⁴ Data from the pilot MI.

²⁵ Marangozov, R. and Stevens, H. (2010). *Work-focused services in children's centres pilot: Interim report*. DWP Research Report No. 677, p. 53.

²⁶ Data from the pilot MI.

²⁷ Data from the pilot MI.

5 Partnership working

This chapter details the extent of partnership working within the pilot. It focuses mainly on the partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres before detailing the extent of wider partnership working.

Partnership working has been most evident between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres, with wider partnership working with other local providers tending to be more limited in some areas. In the early days of the pilot, this was partly because of the delays in pilot start-up and the time it took to establish effective partnership relationships. Over time, however, this situation has not changed substantially with the strongest partnership working developing between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres. However, the research found greater linkages between Jobcentre Plus and key Sure Start partner organisations working on-site, as well as greater partnership working with the local authority in some areas. Partnership working with a wider range of local partner organisations and providers has remained limited, and the pilot has drawn on these networks on an ad-hoc basis, depending on customer needs.

5.1 Partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres

Partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres has emerged as particularly critical to the delivery of work-focused services in a multi-agency setting. Previous evaluation findings showed that effective partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres was characterised by the following features:

- flexibility on both sides (among children's centre and Jobcentre Plus staff) to make the pilot work;
- regular communications between the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser and the children's centre manager;
- referrals between children's centre staff and partner organisations, and the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser;
- joining up partner organisation networks and contacts;
- prior understanding of each other's organisational cultures;
- physical space to accommodate the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser;
- shared expectations of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role and pilot outcomes.

As these features were covered in some detail in the interim report, they will not be re-visited here. Suffice to say that the final stage research further validated these findings and that partnership working continued to be characterised by these features.

Overall, the experience of the pilot shows that joint working had strengthened in many areas, as the partnerships had more time to embed and learn from experiential insights. The strengthened relationship between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres was particularly evident in four ways, which are detailed below.

5.1.1 A better understanding of each other's organisation

In many pilot areas, there was evidence that Jobcentre Plus and children's centres had developed a better understanding of each other's organisation, in terms of working culture, priorities, pressures and ways of working. This had evolved over time, as both organisations worked together to deliver the pilot and had more contact with each other and more insights into how the other organisation worked. Understanding each other's pressures and ways of working was widely reported to be beneficial to partnership working because it meant that staff understood the constraints on their colleagues and were more willing to work flexibly to overcome them.

'There's a much deeper understanding of each other's core business and role and responsibilities. I suppose we understand more how Jobcentre Plus culture works and their expectations and targets. And they probably understand a lot more about how the children's centres operate and what our priorities and what restraints we work within. When you're working in partnership, sometimes you just think "well, why can't they just do that for us?", whereas once you understand the constraints of their organisation, you know why they just can't do that.'

(Local authority lead, second wave case study research)

Certainly at the beginning of the pilot, a few children's centre staff were cautious about having Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers on-site because they thought they were there to force parents into work or to check up on their benefit claims (see baseline report). However, by the time of the final stage research, most pilot staff reported a notable change of attitude among staff towards the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers, with most regarding them as now part of the children's centre team of staff. This is described in more detail in Chapter 7, Section 7.3.

Perhaps the greatest understanding gained on both sides was in respect to the services on offer by their respective counterparts. For example, many children's centre staff reported a better awareness of what the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers could offer in terms of better-off calculations and benefits advice. Likewise, some Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers reported that they had a much better awareness of the full range of children's centre services.

5.1.2 A greater number of cross referrals

A greater number of referrals between the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser and the children's centre staff emerged as evidence of stronger partnership working in the final stage research. In most pilot areas referrals had increased over time as both the Jobcentre Plus and children's centres staff became more familiar with each other's services – for example, children's centre staff learning how the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers could conduct better-off-calculations for parents considering a return to work. Another driver of cross referrals between the two organisations was greater trust between them, which also tended to increase over time, as relationships solidified. As the interim report detailed, it was important for many pilot staff to feel as if they could trust the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser before they referred onto them, particularly where an individual had particularly complex needs and needed sensitive support. Possibly one of the strongest drivers of cross referrals between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres was the pilot 'success stories' which came from parents themselves, who often provided feedback about the ways in which the pilot had helped them. This acted as one of the greatest incentives for children's centres staff to continue to refer onto the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser and for the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser to continue to work closely alongside children's centre colleagues. Indeed, many pilot staff described this as being the most satisfying part of their work on the pilot.

Cross referrals between children's centre staff and Jobcentre staff not only resulted in a more joined-up support service (see Section 7.3 for more on this), but also resulted in new client groups for both organisations. As the pilot MI shows, around 30 per cent of pilot starts were not in receipt of benefits and many of these individuals would not have been in contact with Jobcentre Plus. Similarly, qualitative evidence from the research, as well as the survey results showing increased use of work-focused services in children's centres, strongly indicate that children's centres were also seeing new faces as a result of the pilot.

'I'll say "does anybody know such as such a person?" They [children's centre staff] will reply "no, we don't know her" and I'll say "well, she's coming to see me tomorrow and she's got a little girl". I will then introduce her to them, so that they can then offer them the facilities that the children's centre has to offer. That's happened frequently, which I think is great.'

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave case study research)

The children's centre activity information equally demonstrated that a considerable level of referrals took place following engagement events – not including more informally undertaken referrals directly between partner organisations and Jobcentre Plus. In addition, Advisers were often making referrals to the children's centre for registration.

5.1.3 Joining up of partner networks and expertise

The final stage research also found evidence of more joined up networks, contacts and expertise between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres. For example, once children's centre staff learned of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers' expertise regarding tax credits and benefits, more parents were referred on to the Personal Adviser with tax and benefit queries. Children's centre staff also reported a greater awareness of local provision, particularly with regards to training and employment support as the Personal Advisers and their Jobcentre Plus line managers introduced the children's centre to much broader networks of provision.

'We worked with the managers in each of the children's centres, and we sat on a city-wide forum as well so we were able to find out what's out there, how we could manage it, and how we could continue to support parents.'

(Jobcentre Plus line manager, second wave case study research)

Similarly, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers also reported much better links to other partner organisations working out of the children's centre, and a greater awareness of other areas of expertise. For example, one Jobcentre Plus District Manager had worked with the children's centre manager to provide the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers with safeguarding training as well as family support training. As a result, there was evidence that Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers were taking on a more family-centred approach to moving people towards work. At times, this was out of necessity, because some barriers to work were inextricably family related. At other times, however, this was because they were picking up on wider issues that had to be dealt with first before the parent could even begin to think about employment.

'They know what they're looking for. So, if they see a child and they think "that's not quite right", they'll get a family support worker in and together they'll talk to mum and dad.'

(Jobcentre Plus District Manager, second wave case study research)

Most of the pilot children's centres were already hubs of integrated service delivery and this facilitated the partnership working between Jobcentre Plus. In very few children's centres where there were some continuing difficulties in integrating existing services, partnership working with Jobcentre Plus seems to have been more strained.

5.1.4 Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers fully integrated into the children's centre

Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers being fully integrated into the children's centres was perhaps the most clear evidence of effective partnership working between the two organisations. This varied somewhat across pilot areas, but most commonly included activities such as organising joint events for parents, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers attending children's centre staff meetings, Personal Advisers helping out at children's centre sessions and day trips and children's centre staff helping the Personal Adviser to engage parents. In a few cases, full integration was also evident in Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers wearing the Sure Start uniforms or name badges and/or being embedded within the children's centre family support teams. All of these activities helped create the perception among parents that the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers were part of the children's centre team of staff and belonged to the same organisation. It also highlighted that fully integrated service delivery requires more than just delivering services in community venues and alongside other services, but requires the ability to work in partnership with these services on a day-to-day basis, and effectively build links between the services to ensure they do not operate in isolation.

Successful integration of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser depended on a number of factors, but perhaps most important were the skills and qualities of the Personal Advisers themselves (particularly interpersonal skills and the ability to work flexibly and use initiative). Also important was how well the children's centre staff understood the aims of the pilot and the role of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser because this, in turn, impacted upon how well they received and integrated the Personal Adviser into their working environment and practice. These key facilitators of integrated service delivery are detailed more in Chapter 6 (Sections 6.3, 6.5 and 6.7).

Some Jobcentre staff had welcomed opportunities to work shadow or visit the children's centre prior to pilot start-up, as a way of giving them a better understanding of the different ways of working in children's centres and a better idea of what their role would involve. Some staff even suggested that it would also work well operating in the other direction too (children's centre staff having the opportunity to work shadow or visit a Jobcentre Plus office). A few Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers had found a 'buddying' system particularly helpful in the early days of the pilot, when they were settling into the role and felt more comfortable asking for help from 'on-the-ground' staff, rather than children's centre managers and deputies.

5.2 Wider partnership working

The pilot was most successful at engaging the wider partner organisations that were based within the children's centres, or those in regular contact with the children's centre sites, such as health visitors, social care workers or staff running training courses. The pilot successfully connected with wider partner organisations in the local community, but these tended to be on an ad-hoc basis, and as customer needs arose. As one Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser put it:

'There's no-one that we really work closely with. It's just dipping in and out of whoever we need for that particular moment.'

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave case study research)

In some places, children's centres and Jobcentre Plus identified that there was a particular need in the community and then used pilot funding to bring in a partner who could meet these needs. For example, in one area, debt was a significant issue, as the local authority lead describes:

'We were able to use some of our funding to work with the Citizen's Advice Bureau and they provided us with an adviser in each of the three children's centres for one day a week. So they were able to work together, particularly around debt, housing issues and supporting families to apply for benefits and there have been some great successes around that. I think, at our last tot-up of the figures in January, the Citizen's Advice Bureau were helping families manage over £80,000 worth of debt, which is extraordinary.'

(Local authority lead, second wave case study research)

While this level of partnership working was not as extensive as some of the original pilot bids had envisaged, this has not been overly problematic for the pilot, or for pilot performance for several reasons. First, many of the pilot children's centres were already serving as hubs for multiple services and so the need to seek out other wider local provision was often not necessary since much of that provision was already on-site (health, social, midwifery and family support services). Second, pilot staff reported that some partnerships were less beneficial to the pilot than they had originally hoped and so it was felt that these should not be pursued at the expense of other areas of pilot work or at the cost of new partnerships which could be formed instead. In a few cases, the reasons for these less successful partnerships were unclear and pilot staff speculated that it might have been because partner organisations did not fully understand the aims of the pilot. More often than not, however, other financial pressures on partner organisations (particularly those in the third sector) meant that partner organisations lacked the capacity to play a more active role in pilot delivery. This was more pronounced in the final stage research, when the impact of the Government's public spending cuts had resulted in a great deal of uncertainty about the future of many public and third sector organisations. Lastly, it was evident that some pilot children's centres had no spare capacity to host additional services, even on a drop-in basis, and this restricted how much partner provision could be delivered on-site.

In some cases, services had been bought in using pilot resources from the Jobcentre Plus network of training providers, or from organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), but these tended to be the extent of wider partnership working. Other organisations, offering more specialist support tended to have been drawn into the pilot, on an ad-hoc basis, depending on customer needs. These were not so much formal partners of the pilot but they were useful for taking onward referrals from the pilot. These partners included organisations which offered housing support, counselling, debt advice, or support around substance abuse and alcoholism.

In some pilot areas, partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and the local authority strengthened as a result of the pilot. As many of the children's centres themselves were run by the local authority, this was in some ways a by-product of Jobcentre Plus working so closely together with children's centre staff. However, local authority leads and Jobcentre Plus managers both reported greater levels of contact with each other in several pilot areas and in a few areas, a better quality relationship as a result of enhanced Jobcentre Plus provision in children's centres. Again, a better understanding of each other's organisation and working practices emerged as key to closer relationships between local authority and Jobcentre Plus leads.

6 Key learning and critical success factors

This chapter draws on the evidence presented in this report to pull out key learning and critical success factors for the successful delivery of a pilot of this nature.

6.1 Many children's centres can be ideal venues for hosting work-focused services targeted at poor households

The overarching aim of this pilot was to test whether children's centres could offer an effective means of engaging parents in labour market activity and moving them closer to work by intensifying the Jobcentre Plus provision beyond the existing links that children's centres already have with Jobcentre Plus as part of their core offer. The findings strongly indicate that they can, validating earlier research which has shown that the greatest take-up of employment-related services has been in children's centres where there has been a Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser available.²⁸

Most of the pilot children's centres were **visible services hubs** for their local communities. As such they were, in many ways, ideal venues for hosting work-focused services, engaging the target group of parents on low incomes and for providing on-site childcare. In a few cases, they were also ideal sites for conducting training courses.

As pre-existing service hubs, many of the pilot children's centres **offered unique multi-agency settings in which to embed work-focused services in a cost-effective way and offer parents a more holistic package of support**. This strengthens the case for embedding work-focused services in children's centres as an effective means to address some of the causes and drivers of child poverty. Children's centres are also where most parents feel comfortable because they are familiar with the setting and staff, and in the knowledge that their children are in the same building while they access work-focused support. This is particularly important for those parents who are some distance from the labour market. This was borne out by survey results from the comparison sites which showed a strong preference for accessing Jobcentre Plus services at children's centres as opposed to Jobcentre Plus offices (see Figure A.21).

From a child poverty perspective, the pilot has demonstrated that children's centres can provide **access to the most disadvantaged families and the poorest households**. Survey data from the pilot and comparison sites show that most of the children's centre users were on low incomes (see Figure A.12), and Management Information (MI) shows that around one-third of pilot starts were not in receipt of benefit and, as such, were unlikely to be in touch with Jobcentre Plus services. Qualitative data from the evaluation research highlights that many of those accessing pilot support were further away from 'job readiness' and benefited from the types of training and one-to-one support which centred on building confidence and realising potential and aspirations.

²⁸ Dench, S., Aston, J., James, L. and Foster, R. (2008). *Jobcentre Plus and Children's Centres*. Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Research Report No. 485. Leeds: Corporate Document Services.

6.2 Some children's centre settings offer more suitable venues than others

While the location of the pilot children's centres offered a good reach into the target communities, the layout and capacity of some sites facilitated pilot delivery better than others.

As Section 2.4 highlighted, a few pilot children's centres were short of physical space in which to accommodate the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser and/or any on-site provision of training courses. While this did not make delivering work-focused services impossible, it did make it more challenging, particularly when it came to offering customers a private space in which they could talk freely and confidentially to the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser.

The specific location of the children's centre also impacted upon pilot delivery, particularly where it meant lower footfalls for the children's centre. In a few cases a lower footfall was down to the rural nature of the children's centre locations, but in other cases, it was simply down to the children's centre not being close to a town centre, or easy transport connections. These experiences highlight the need to take into account levels of footfall within a children's centre when considering the viability of Jobcentre Plus outreach on a full-time basis, although this is likely to be less of an issue if outreach were to be conducted on a part-time basis (ie one or two days a week).

These experiences also highlight the need to take into account local circumstances when considering the Jobcentre Plus offer in children's centres. The pilot model of Jobcentre Plus provision can be successful in the right settings, but this is not to say that other models of delivery cannot be equally successful if they are tailored to the needs of different local circumstances.

6.3 Flexibility is critical to the success of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role

There is evidence elsewhere which has called for the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role within Jobcentre Plus to be more flexible, to enhance the quality of the service and improve the help on offer. For similar reasons, flexibility of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role within these pilots has allowed for a more personalised and tailored service which better met the needs of the target group. However, this flexibility is arguably more important in outreach work than in Jobcentre Plus offices because Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers have greater contact with harder-to-help groups which requires more time and more intensive one-to-one support. As Section 2.1.3 highlighted, this kind of 'hand-holding' emerges as a vital part of Jobcentre Plus outreach in helping people move forward in their journey towards employment, even though this kind of activity cannot be formally captured as part of the pilot MI. It results in a more holistic, whole-family approach to moving parents towards work.

Flexibility of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role in outreach work is also important for facilitating greater accessibility of the service to the target groups and local community.

6.4 Continuity of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role facilitates engagement

As Section 6.4 details, the evidence from the pilot areas demonstrates that continuity of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role facilitated effective engagement (and particularly ongoing engagement) with the target groups. This positively impacted the extent to which customers felt

able to build up a personal relationship and trust with Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers. This, in turn, also positively impacted on how much detail customers felt able to disclose to Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers about their circumstances, and any barriers they might be facing in progressing towards employment, education or training. Continuity of Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser was also seen as immensely practical for some customers who did not feel as if they had to ‘start over again’ with a new adviser every time they needed advice or support – both in terms of explaining their circumstances again, but also in terms of familiarising themselves with someone new. Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers also reported the benefits of better knowing customers and their circumstances because it allowed them to tailor their services accordingly or refer onto more specialist providers.

6.5 Recruiting the ‘right’ Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser is key

From the research findings, it is possible to identify a clear set of skills and competencies which are necessary for the role of Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers working in children’s centres.

First, and perhaps most importantly, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers need to be flexible to be able to work effectively in an outreach setting and without the structured environment and targets of Jobcentre Plus. Advisers need to be comfortable with outreach work in a very different environment from that of Jobcentre Plus. If they are not, the risk is that they could ‘feel very lost’, as one Jobcentre Plus line manager put it. Flexibility is also important to balance work-focused activities with outreach and engagement. This may sound easy in theory, but proved much harder in practice because an outreach activity could easily overlap or turn into a work-focused activity. For example, a friendly chat at a drop-in session could immediately lead onto a one-to-one session about training courses. The ad-hoc nature in which parents would often call upon the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser also made this task more difficult in reality.

Second, flexibility needed to be coupled with an openness to trying new ways of working. This emerged as important in facilitating the relationship between Jobcentre Plus and children’s centres, much of which was determined on a day-to-day basis and at the frontline of service delivery. As one local authority lead put it:

‘They need to be open-minded and flexible in the ways that they work and not scared to try different things, particularly for people who have worked for Jobcentre Plus for a long time.’

(Local authority lead, second wave case study research)

Third, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers need to be ‘people persons’ to successfully engage parents. This includes having excellent interpersonal skills and having the capacity to be empathetic and a good listener. As one Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser put it, the role requires ‘someone that’s willing to get on their knees with the Play-Doh, bonding with the child and mother’. Related to this, some pilot staff thought it was helpful for the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser to possess (or have the potential to develop) facilitation skills. This skill was seen as key to their role in linking the pilot to relevant local partner organisations and developing effective working relationships through these contacts. So important was this activity in one area that the Jobcentre Plus Childcare Partnership Manager described one of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers as similar to ‘mini partnership managers’.

Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers also need to be proactive and able to use their initiative. Unlike the Jobcentre Plus office, Personal Advisers on the pilot had to adjust to sole working for most of the time on the pilot, working without their usual colleagues/team. Line management functions and support from other Jobcentre Plus colleagues was all at a distance (off-site) and this placed greater

importance on the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser's ability to 'think on their feet, use their initiative and hit the ground running', as one children's centre manager put it. Being proactive also emerged as important in being able to seek out and identify local provision and support which could help their customers. It was also mentioned as important in helping the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser integrate effectively into the children's centre, by attending staff meetings, getting to know staff and familiarising themselves with the children's centre partner networks.

Finally, some pilot staff thought that resilience was an important quality to have as a Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser because of the intensive work that was often required in dealing with hard-to-help groups and the considerable length of time it could take to see progress. As one children's centre manager put it:

'It's not an easy job when you're working with hard-to-reach families. There is often no immediate outcome and you can feel like you're hitting a brick wall.'

(Children's centre manager, second wave case study research)

6.6 It takes time to embed work-focused services in a multi-agency setting

The experience of this pilot demonstrates that it takes at least a year to establish effective working relationships with key partner organisations. For work-focused services to fully embed in a multi-agency setting, the experience of the pilot suggests that this takes at least 18 months in total. By this time, most areas had successfully integrated the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser and their services into the children's centre setting and had established effective links with partner organisations. By this time, pilot activities had also peaked (see Figure 2.4) and the pilot was starting to see some outcomes in terms of parents moving closer to work.

Even in those children's centres which had had strong links with Jobcentre Plus prior to the start of the pilot, pilot staff reported that it still took time to embed the enhanced Jobcentre Plus services into the children's centre setting. It is evident that this was because there was a significant difference in hosting visits by Jobcentre Plus and in having a Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser based on site on a full-time basis.

Many pilot staff also noted that it took time to establish trusting relationships with the local community and children's centre users, and that the two-year duration of the pilot had facilitated that. As one Jobcentre Plus line manager put it, 'it's not something that happens overnight. It's about having the time to build that trust element within the community'.

However, this lesson around needing time to establish trusting and working relationships with partner organisations and parents/service users is not confined to this particular pilot. Instead, this lesson is likely to hold true of most initiatives which is dependent on effective partnership working as a way to achieve integrated service delivery and the successful co-location of services. For example, the evaluation of the Local Authority Child Poverty Innovation Pilot also highlights the time and resources necessary to secure partnership working, and also the time necessary to establish and develop trust with particular communities.²⁹

In the case of this pilot, time was also necessary to sort out the practicalities of start-up as the experience of this pilot demonstrated that it takes at least nine months to bed-in.

²⁹ GHK (2010). *Local authority child poverty innovation pilot: First national evaluation report*. DCSF: Research report no. 208. London: DCSF.

6.7 'Hands-on' commitment by key partners facilitates integrated service delivery

A commitment by key partner organisations to the pilot emerged in the final stage research as a critical success factor to effective pilot delivery and outcomes. This went beyond mere sign-up to the pilot, in a formal sense, to encompass a 'hands-on' commitment which filtered down from management to all staff at the operational level. In some areas, this kind of commitment had been established at the stage of putting together the initial bid for the pilot, but in others, this early cooperation was missing. In these latter areas, this meant that some children's centre heads and Jobcentre Plus line managers were not fully committed to delivering an integrated work-focused service, largely because they felt they lacked any ownership and input over the proposed service. Even in those areas that did have the initial commitment of all key partner organisations, there was often a lack of 'hands-on' involvement and commitment when it came to the day-to-day running of the pilot and the somewhat inevitable issues that would crop up around the practicalities of integrating the two services.

This kind of commitment from the outset of the pilot was found to be crucial in determining the way the rest of the pilot was to proceed. For example, where children's centre managers had expressed a commitment to the pilot early on, and had ensured this commitment had been communicated to all their staff, good working relationships tended to be established more quickly. This also facilitated the integration of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser into their new role and ensured that the children's centre was willing to work flexibly to establish joint working. It also helped establish, at the pre-pilot stage, whether key logistics were in place by partner organisations to facilitate pilot delivery, such as a room at the children's centre to host the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser and the availability of 3G cards and laptops to ensure Personal Advisers could work in an outreach setting.

So important was this kind of early commitment to delivering an integrated service that many pilot staff considered this to be a key lesson for future service delivery. As one Jobcentre Plus line manager said, in reference to lessons for the future:

'If [a children's centre] is not on board with us, I won't waste my time thinking "right, well, I really have to work with this children's centre". I won't. I'll think "let's move on then".'

(Jobcentre Plus line manager, second wave case study research)

Commitment from all key partner organisations also tended to ensure that clear roles of responsibility were established early on in the pilot and communication arrangements/meetings were regular and purposeful. It also tended to ensure that when tensions and problems arose (as they did in some areas), there were staff who were willing to address them – or 'thrash them out' as one Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser described it when detailing how her line manager had stepped in to improve working relationships with the children's centre.

Commitment from key partner organisations, therefore, goes beyond a formal sign-up in a bid or proposal. It also goes beyond an agreement to follow pilot guidance. It is a commitment which is established early on, provides key partnerships with ownership for the delivery of an integrated service, and which filters down all levels of the organisation so that all staff understand why the proposed service is important and beneficial for their area of work and their 'client' groups.

6.8 Management and performance structures need to facilitate integrated working

It is important that management and performance structures support integrated working, if services are to be effectively joined up. In terms of management support, the evaluation research shows that Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers need the management support of Jobcentre Plus. In practical terms, this means consistent line management support from Jobcentre Plus to ensure Personal Advisers are not left feeling isolated in their role and can continue to be effectively managed, motivated and encouraged in their new role. Practically, this regular contact with Jobcentre Plus line managers also benefits the pilot by allowing advisers to keep in touch with, and link into the Jobcentre Plus network of provision and support, such as work trials, pre-employment support and their Labour Market Recruitment Advisers (LAMRAs).

Management support from children's centres is also necessary insofar as they are able to maintain a regular level of communication with the Jobcentre Plus lead for the pilot (whether that be the line manager of the Personal Adviser or a district lead). This guarantees that delivery is agreed by both key partner organisations and that the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser is delivering services according to a shared set of aims and objectives.

Management support from both Jobcentre Plus and children's centres is also important in ensuring that the aims and intentions of the pilot are effectively cascaded down the organisation, so that operational staff on the ground can offer practical support for the pilot and Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser on a day-to-day basis. A few Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers reported that many of their colleagues back at the Jobcentre tended to view their work as 'a bit of a jolly', as one adviser put it, and this was often discouraging and frustrating, particularly when many advisers considered their job to be much harder than working in a Jobcentre Plus office because of the more intense help they had to offer people accessing the pilot. In a very few number areas, some Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers even reported a lack of support from senior Jobcentre Plus line managers which meant that the pilot and its staff lacked key strategic support from Jobcentre Plus.

'What they don't seem to appreciate is the harder-to-engage angle and what the advisers have had to go through to reach those people and move them close to employment. They still look at the productivity and outcomes. My line manager fed that back to me and it's a bit disheartening because I can tell they're not on board.'

(Jobcentre Plus line manager, second wave case study research)

Similarly, the research found that in those children's centres where the managers had not communicated the pilot to their staff very well, integration of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser and work-focused services took longer because staff were not able to grasp the relevance or importance of the pilot.

The prospect of management support from both organisations was under considerable pressure at the time of conducting the research, largely because of economic climate which was exerting additional pressure on Jobcentre Plus but also because of public spending cuts which left some children's centres unsure about their future. These challenges notwithstanding, however, future attempts to integrate work-focused services in early years settings will require some management support from both key partner organisations for the simple fact that they have to guarantee the effective delivery of both their services in one setting. Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers will also need to achieve a careful balancing act between providing work-focused services and conducting outreach/engagement. This has not always been an easy task to achieve and cooperation from both Jobcentre Plus and children's centre management has been needed to resolve any emerging tensions and difficulties.

'It's finding the balance between giving them [Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers] the flexibility to meet the parents' needs, but also remaining very focused on what needs to be delivered. It's finding that balance and I believe with the right management in place, they can deliver that anywhere.'

(Jobcentre Plus line manager, second wave case study research)

Performance structures also need to support integrated service delivery. Applying rigid performance frameworks to areas of work which do not easily lend themselves to quantitative measurement is time consuming and often counter-productive and demotivating for staff. Any performance structures need to realistically account for the time taken to fully integrate a service, to build effective working relationships with key partner organisations, and to engage and assist harder-to-help groups or those who are likely to be some distance from work (in this case, mostly mothers with at least one child under the age of five). The value of substantive and qualitative achievements such as these, in delivering a more holistic service to parents, will yield considerable economic gains in the future (both for parents and the state) and should not get lost amidst the current pressures on public spending and any associated drive to demonstrate value-for-money. As one local authority lead put it. 'without targets, we're able to approach things in a much more holistic way'.

This is a message reiterated in the Government's Child Poverty Strategy, which argues that Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis should be used to identify the most cost-effective interventions by understanding the longer-term impacts and all the wider social and economic benefits that can be derived from more integrated service delivery.³⁰

6.9 Key learning and its relevance to other, similar outreach settings and delivery models

Many of the critical success factors detailed in this chapter highlight the potential to host Jobcentre Plus services in similar outreach settings, such as primary schools. While much of the success of this pilot has hinged upon co-locating Jobcentre Plus provision in children's centres, the rest of the pilot's success has depended on other local factors, such as:

- the quality and strength of partnership working;
- the importance of picking the right outreach location in which to deliver the provision, in terms of capacity to deliver provision, having staff on site who are on board and having sufficient reach into the target communities;
- the quality of engagement and the importance of recruiting the right Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser.

The above factors have been shown to be important in a similar pilot that tested Jobcentre Plus outreach pilot in primary schools.³¹ Given the overlap in some of the key learning arising from both pilots, it is evident that Jobcentre Plus outreach targeted at the most disadvantaged need not necessarily be restricted to children's centres; there is potential for local areas to consider co-locating Jobcentre Plus services in similar outreach settings such as primary schools or other early years settings.

³⁰ DWP and Department for Education (2011). *A New Approach to Child Poverty: Tackling the causes of disadvantage and transforming families' lives* (p.60).

³¹ Marangozov, R. and Dewson, S. (2011). *Study of School Gates Employment Support Initiative*. DWP Research Report No. 747.

Similarly, it is important to note here that the critical factors detailed in this chapter suggest that Jobcentre Plus outreach in children's centres does not necessarily have to involve full-time co-location. Towards the end of the evaluation research, some areas were planning to continue the pilot provision albeit on a reduced basis (co-location of services on just a few days per week). Our evidence would suggest that for this to work effectively, maintaining regular days and hours for the Jobcentre Plus service each week is key for many parents, who find this kind of regularity helpful, convenient and conducive to maintaining a trusting relationship with the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser. Our evidence would also suggest that continuity of the same Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser is conducive to building a trusting and effective relationship with parents.

7 Perceived outcomes and impacts

This evaluation does not comprise a formal impact assessment. The assessment of impact relies on comparison areas rather than control areas. It has not been possible to provide a quantitative measure of impact, but instead an assessment of added value, in terms of types of customers seen and support provided, is provided in here.

7.1 Effective engagement of the target groups

There is strong and clear evidence to show that the pilot has effectively engaged the target groups. Pilot Management Information (MI) shows that around 60 per cent of pilot starts were known to be lone parents in receipt of benefits, and around 30 per cent were non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers.³² Many parents in this latter group were not working due to childcare commitments, as the survey results indicate, and are most likely to be potential second earners.

Of those traditional Jobcentre Plus customers who were in receipt of benefit as the main claimant, 85 per cent were in receipt of Income Support (IS), 11 per cent were in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and two per cent were in receipt of Incapacity Benefit (IB) or Employment Support Allowance (ESA).³³ Just over 50 per cent of all those in receipt of benefit had been on that benefit for over two years, although there was considerable variation by benefit type. Partners of benefit claimants comprised four per cent of all pilot participants.

Income information was collected for non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers at the household level. The pilot MI shows that, for those for whom we have the data, around 70 per cent of non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers earned under £20,000, with one in five earning under £10,000.³⁴

Some of this engagement reflects the broader demographic profile of the children's centre locations and users. For example, the survey of children's centre users (both baseline and wave two) showed that most children's centre users were not in employment (with most citing 'looking after home/family' as their reason why), many were from low-income households and were in receipt of benefits. However, much of this engagement of target groups was down to the availability and the quality of the pilot services. As the qualitative evidence has consistently shown throughout the reporting, the accessibility, flexibility and continuity of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role has been a key strength for engaging the target groups, as has been the additional time which Personal Advisers have had to give to more needy customers. Two pilot staff from Jobcentre Plus described this impact on engagement as follows:

'The biggest difference is that parents now have access to somebody who could signpost or support them with regards to work and benefit queries. That was never done before; they would have just been given an 0800 or 0845 number.'

(Jobcentre Plus District Manager, second wave case study research)

³² Data from the pilot MI.

³³ Data from the pilot MI.

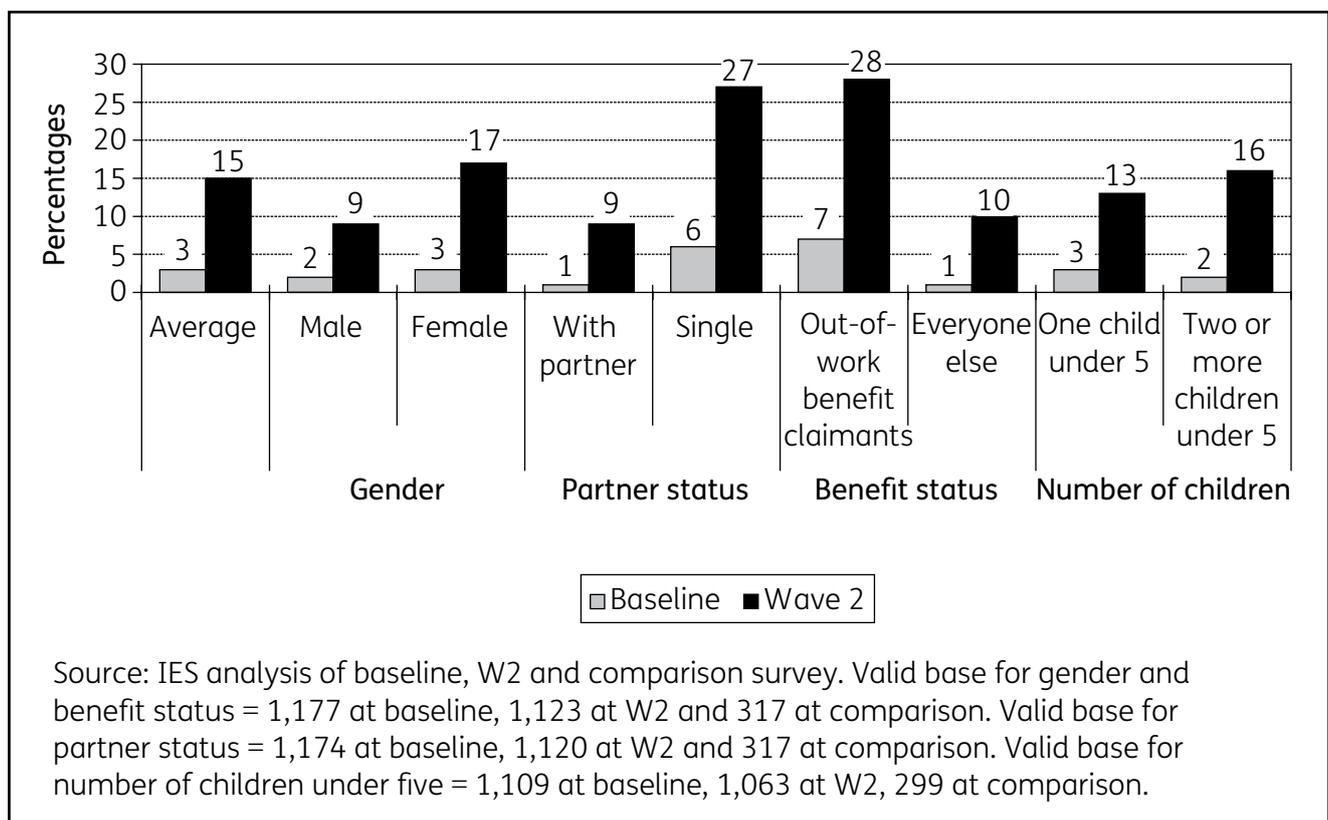
³⁴ Data from the pilot MI.

‘I think, apart from helping over a dozen customers off benefits and into work, for me it’s having been able to devote special time, at length with a handful of my customers. That’s been best of all, to be honest – the individual support that I’m able to give a selection of very needy customers.’

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave case study research)

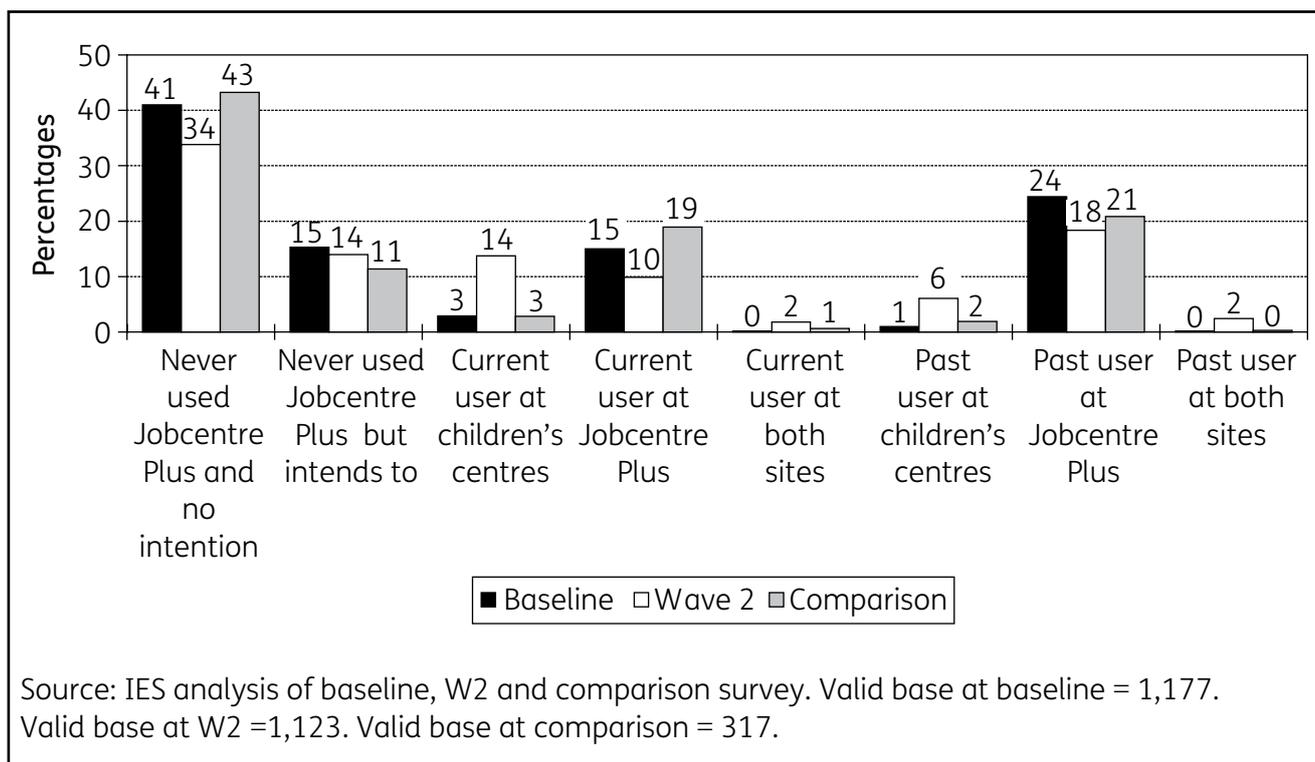
Evidence from the children’s centre surveys also indicates effective pilot engagement of the target groups. Figure 7.1 shows variations in take-up of Jobcentre Plus services at the children’s centres by different characteristics of centre users. Not surprisingly, those out of work and claiming benefit entitlements and lone parents had the highest level of take-up, with more than one-quarter of children’s centre users in those groups (28 and 27 per cent respectively) using Jobcentre Plus in the pilot areas at W2.

Figure 7.1 Current users of Jobcentre Plus Services at Children’s Centre, gender, partner status, benefit status, number of children (%)



7.2 Increased take-up of Jobcentre Plus services in children’s centres

The pilot has had a marked and positive impact on the take-up of Jobcentre Plus services in children’s centres. Figure 7.2 clearly shows an increased take-up of Jobcentre Plus services among pilot children’s centre users. At the baseline survey (when only a minority of pilot children’s centres had what could be termed a ‘high’ level of pre-pilot Jobcentre Plus resource), just three per cent of parents reported using Jobcentre Plus at the children’s centre, and only one per cent reported using Jobcentre Plus services in the past. However, by the time of the W2 survey, 14 per cent of parents reported currently using Jobcentre Plus services at pilot children’s centres and six per cent reported using Jobcentre Plus services at the children’s centre in the past.

Figure 7.2 Past, present and future take up of Jobcentre Plus services(%)

Correspondingly, there was a drop between the baseline and W2 survey, in the number of parents reporting that they had never used Jobcentre Plus and had no intention to do so, from 41 to 34 per cent. This reflects higher take-up of the service, but also, quite possibly, some attitudinal changes towards the prospect of work and/or Jobcentre Plus services. The level of take up of Jobcentre Plus services among comparison site centre users was mostly very similar or lower than that of the baseline survey, providing clear evidence that the pilot has added value and increased take-up of Jobcentre Plus services in the pilot children's centres.

7.3 Stronger partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres

Stronger partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres has been one of the most significant outcomes of the pilot. This has been detailed in Chapter 4 and has been evidenced by the increased number of referrals between the two organisations and the reports of closer working between the staff on the ground to help parents progress towards work. Both organisations have been able to promote each other's services (as well as other local provision) to ensure that parents receive wrap-around support to suit their circumstances. For those parents who have been farthest from the labour market in terms of having multiple barriers to work, this integrated form of service delivery has been most beneficial. One Jobcentre Plus line manager described work-focused services in children's centres as being a 'one-stop-shop' for family support services and one children's centre manager described the benefits in the following terms:

'She [the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser] sells our services, and we sell her services. And having [named partner organisations] as part of that package has meant that families going into employment have been dealt with on that basis, step-by-step.'

(Children's centre manager, second wave case study research)

All Jobcentre Plus and children's centre staff working on the pilot noted a positive change in the strength of their relationship. Even those children's centres which had a linked/named contact with a Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser prior to the pilot noted that the pilot had added a much more 'work-focused' element to provision, not just in terms of having a full-time Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser on-site, but also in terms of providing more work-focused training activities, better assisting parents in a more tailored and personalised way, and linking in with other children's centre services to offer more of a 'whole family' approach to moving parents towards sustainable work.

The stronger relationship between the two organisations was also evidenced in many areas through clear attitudinal changes among children's centre staff towards Jobcentre Plus. As the baseline report highlighted, many children's centre staff were initially quite cautious about Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers being on site to provide work-focused services. Many thought they were there to force parents back into work, or to check-up on their benefit claims. In a few areas, they were sceptical about the services because in the past, when they had had Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers in the children's centres (doing drop-ins or information sessions), the service had been pulled as soon as the local Jobcentre Plus office needed additional capacity. However, towards the end of the pilot, all of these attitudes had completely changed in that Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers were now welcomed, accepted and treated as a member of the children's centre team. By this time, children's centre staff had come to know the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers better on both a personal and professional level and had come to learn more about their job role and the types of support they could offer parents. Some children's centre staff also gained a better understanding about how employment could raise a family's income and improve the outcomes for the family as a whole. Two pilot staff summarised the impact as follows:

'I genuinely believe it was an opportunity for us to actually turn the children's centre managers around a little bit. I've worked in partnerships for years, and children's centre managers, quite rightly, focus on children so they are looking at the child and their wellbeing. But behind that child is a parent who's possibly not working. So we were able to kind of educate the children's centre managers, in a way, to demonstrate that to improve on a child's development, we do need to support the parents. That has actually helped raise the profile of Jobcentre Plus and work being the route out of poverty.'

(Childcare Partnership Manager, second wave case study research)

'At the beginning, staff were quite cautious. There was quite a bit of uncertainty from staff about having Jobcentre Plus closely involved. Somebody said, at one point "this is a DWP spy". That was a barrier and we worked quite hard on it. We did the induction and recruited the two [named Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers] and they've been lovely. And very quickly, it was almost like they'd always been there.'

(Children's centre manager, second wave case study research)

Perhaps the most powerful catalyst for the change in attitudes among some children's centre staff was the feedback they received from parents themselves about how the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser had helped them access training, advice, job vacancies and opportunities to improve their skills, employability and confidence. This helped the staff understand better the Jobcentre Plus services on offer and how they could help parents in more ways than they initially thought. For example, many children's centre staff would not just receive feedback about how good a training course was, but they could also witness how this might be improving a parent's confidence at the same time. Another example, which was quoted on several occasions by children's centre staff, was an increased take-up of children's centre services as a result of the pilot and the personal relationship that had built up between the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser and the parents.

In a similar way, many Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers noted that they had gained a better understanding of the working culture of children's centres, and particularly their priorities around safeguarding children and the well-being of the family as a whole. This also facilitated greater partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres.

7.4 Parents are closer to work

The outcomes for parents, in terms of moving them closer to work are evident in three ways: through aspiration-related outcomes, through attitudinal changes to Jobcentre Plus, and through employment outcomes. Each are addressed, in turn, below.

7.4.1 Aspiration-related outcomes

The pilot has supported parents in moving closer to the labour market, and with this has achieved both aspiration-related and attitudinal outcomes as well as more tangible training and employment-related outcomes.

One of the key ways in which the pilot has progressed parents closer to work has been through the achievement of softer, attitudinal outcomes, which have been widely reported by parents and staff from across the pilot areas. Soft outcomes have most commonly included raising levels of confidence, aspirations and awareness of work-focused opportunities and options. Parents who have benefited most have been those farthest away from the labour market. However, many pilot staff have reported that even those parents who do not consider work to be a short-term option have accessed the pilot to enquire about their future work or training options, with many taking down the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers' contact details for future reference.

'They might not have thought about it before because they didn't have anyone to talk about it with, or someone on their doorstep to say "you can actually do this and this, and did you know you can do this part-time and yes you can get help with that?" We've also seen lots of parents that aren't ready now but I know certainly they'll come back. We are seeing parents already that I've seen ages ago and now they're saying "I think I might be ready for work".'

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave case study research)

As part of thinking about work and future employment, many sought advice and guidance from the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers as to how their future plans might affect their current income level and their tax status, and where they might be able to gain financial support along the way. Both Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers and customers noted that this kind of engagement had made a major impact in terms of raising awareness of the possible routes and avenues that were available to customers – either in the short term or longer term – and of the financial support that could be available in some cases.

The clear strength of this pilot, therefore, has been in preparing parents for the world of employment so that they are work-ready when their children reach school age. Many pilot staff who had talked to parents about their future work options noted that many had not had this kind of support before, and needed hand-holding throughout their journey towards work.

'The pilot makes a huge difference. We're able to work with them while their children are so young and offer the right courses to them. So confidence-building – that will pick your confidence up. Then we look at their education. Then we can look at any other skills they might need. Then, by the time the child is five, they're ready for work.'

(Jobcentre Plus line manager, second wave case study research)

'If it wasn't for the support the advisers have given parents, hand-holding them throughout the process of going back to work, sorting out their housing benefits and sorting out their tax credits, they may have given up.'

(Jobcentre Plus Childcare Partnership Manager, second wave case study research)

In this respect, these 'small steps', as one Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser put it, were actually rather large steps in two respects. First, they put the prospect of work on many parents' horizons at an early stage and better prepared them for the labour market once their child reached school age. Second, these small steps actually addressed some of the toughest of barriers to work, including low confidence, low levels of aspiration and attitudinal barriers to the prospect of work and the use of formal childcare.

'It was helping her every step of the way. It has taken a few months but you don't realise that till the end. She's in work and happy and then you look back and think "oh yes, we did all these steps and this is where they were leading - to work".'

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave case study research)

An important part of increasing awareness around employment opportunities or options was raising awareness of the availability of local childcare, sources of financial support for childcare costs, or directly funded childcare through the pilot so that the customer could attend a training course. This was particularly beneficial for those customers who had engaged with the pilot but who were not registered at the children's centre at the time. The research identified a number of pilot areas where Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers were carrying out this kind of important work with parents. In a number of cases, the use of childcare through the pilot was the first time a parent had used formal childcare and this in itself had broken down many barriers for the parents.

'I think it was in her other card to me that she was saying how it gave her the confidence to leave her daughter in a crèche and how good and healthy it was for them to have that time apart.'

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave case study research)

7.4.2 Attitudinal changes towards Jobcentre Plus and work

The second way in which parents were brought closer to work through the pilot was through attitudinal changes to work and Jobcentre Plus. Again, some pilot Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers reported that while some may see this kind of work as 'wishy-washy', these changes were having significant impacts on parents' lives. Figure 7.2 has already indicated this change in attitudes by showing a drop between the baseline and W2 survey in the number of parents who reported that they had never used Jobcentre Plus and had no intention of doing so (from 41 to 34 per cent). The increased take-up of Jobcentre Plus services also indicates a positive change in attitudes to both Jobcentre Plus services and work more generally.

However, equally strong evidence has emerged from the qualitative research, which indicates that the pilot has been a key enabler in breaking down attitudinal barriers to work and to Jobcentre Plus. The main enabler in this regard has been the additional time the pilot has allowed for Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers to build trusting relationships with parents and within the wider community. Building such trust, as one Jobcentre Plus line manager stressed, takes time and the pilot has allowed this. The second key enabler has been integrating work-focused services within a wider network of service delivery which is already used and trusted by parents.

‘When we went into [named children’s centre], the dads were quite adamant that they didn’t want to work with us. Now, not only do we work with them in their monthly group, but we have dads volunteering to work with us when we’re running group information sessions and things like that. That’s a real turnaround. Advisers in [named children’s centres] will go into town and people will speak to them and say “hello, you helped me with this”. Whereas before, the head would have gone down and it would have been “God, it’s that woman from the Jobcentre”.’

(Jobcentre Plus line manager, second wave case study research)

7.4.3 Employment-related outcomes

The aim of the pilot was to help move parents closer towards the labour market, recognising that, for many, employment was a longer term goal. The MI data, however, does provide positive indications that a number of pilot participants have made considerable steps towards – and into – employment. It is positive to see that a relatively high percentage (40 per cent) of those with a clerical record³⁵ have a work-related outcome recorded, indicating some progress towards work. This is particularly encouraging given the profile of most of these customers: mostly lone parents and potential second earners, on low incomes, out of work, with at least one child under the age of five, and some with multiple barriers to work.

Table 7.1 Pilot outcomes from the MI

Outcome	Volume	Percentage of total
Work-related outcome		
Is actively looking for work	315	19
Has applied for a job	70	4
Has been offered a job interview	5	0
Has attended job interview	15	1
Has been offered work	275	16
Has been offered promotion	5	0
Non-work-related outcome		
Moving to another employment-related/training opportunity	395	23
Moving to another personal development/training opportunity	180	11
Referred to specialist agency	135	8
Other	100	6
Will be joining mentoring scheme	5	0
Unknown	175	11
Total	1,675	100

Source: Pilot clerical data, DWP, June 2011. Clerical information from one pilot site is not available.

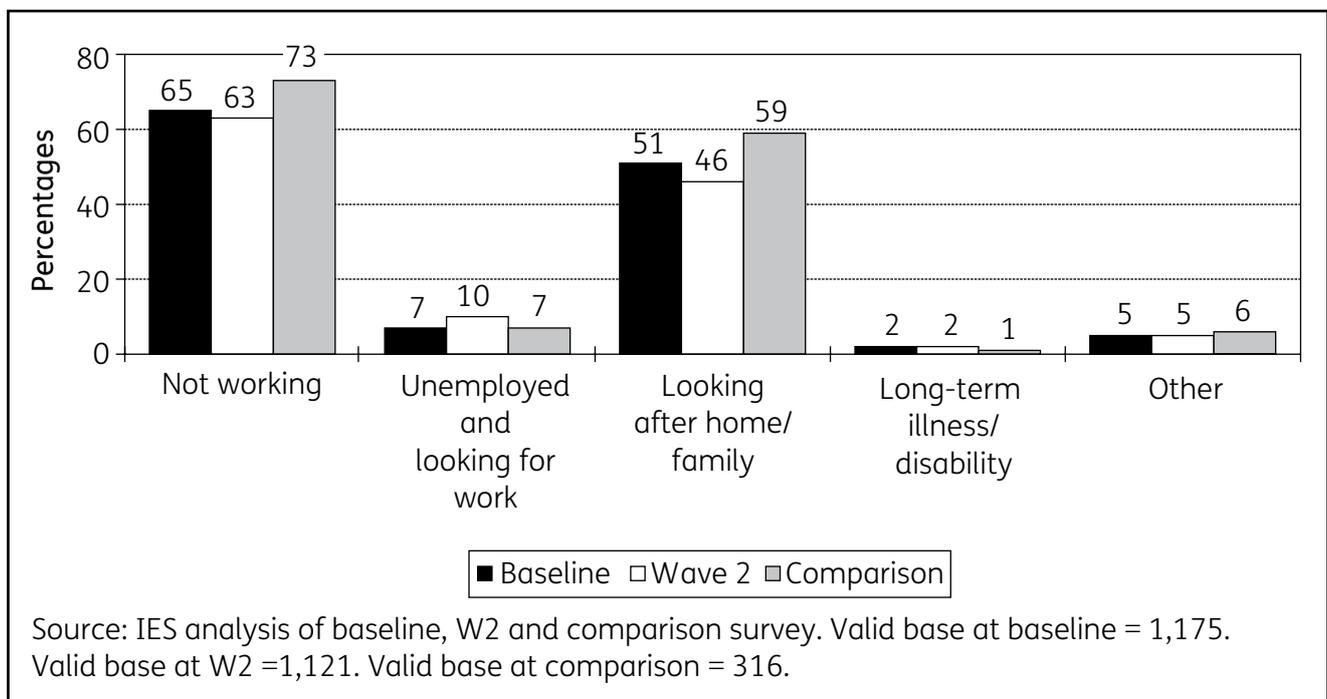
³⁵ We only have clerical information for participants from nine pilot areas who received additional support outside that conventionally available via Jobcentre Plus support – 27 per cent of all pilot participants. Therefore, the outcomes presented in Table 7.1 are not representative of the pilot as a whole.

7.5 The profile of pilot children's centres and their users is more work-focused

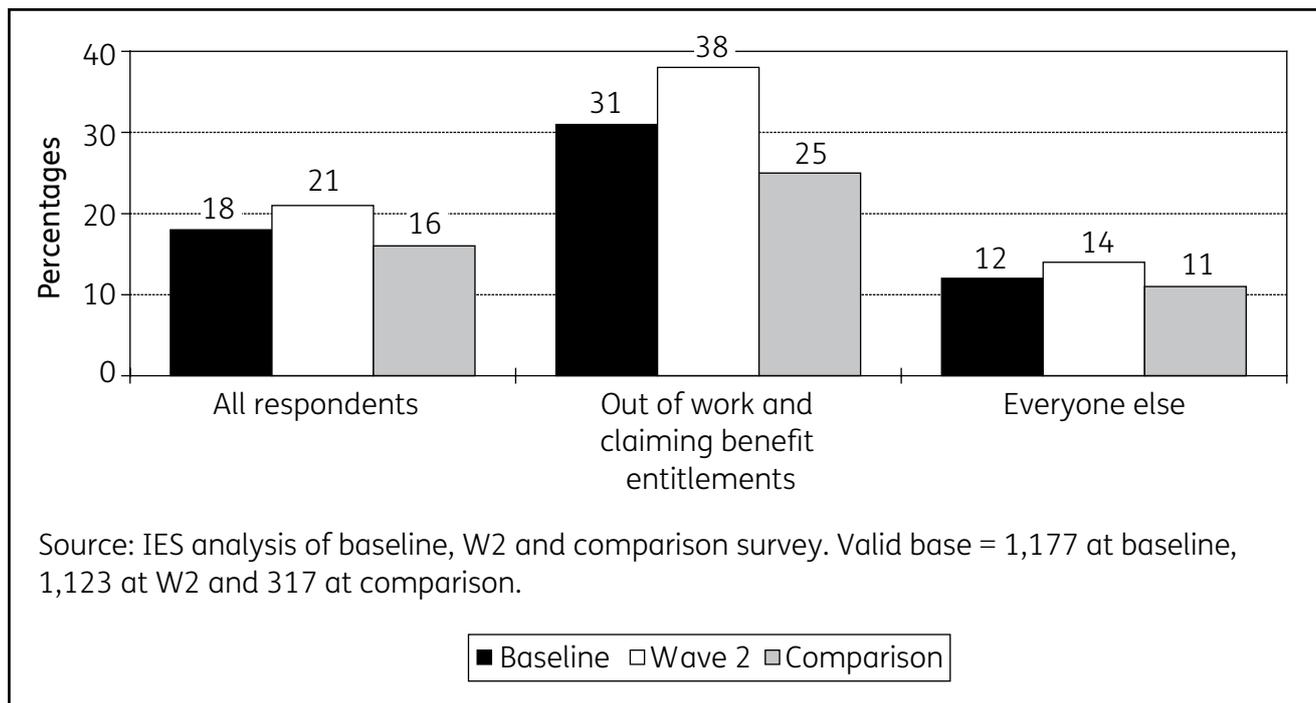
Evidence from the pilot shows that the profile of pilot children's centres and of their users is more work-focused than at the start of the pilot.

Figures from the survey of pilot children's centre users show a decrease at W2 in the number of centre users who reported that they were not working because they were looking after the home and/or family, when compared to the baseline survey (from 51 to 46 per cent), see Figure 7.3. In contrast, the proportion of centre users at the comparison sites who reported that they were not working because they were looking after the home and/or family was much higher (59 per cent). This suggests the pilot had a positive impact in changing attitudes towards work.

Figure 7.3 Respondent's employment status, not working (%)

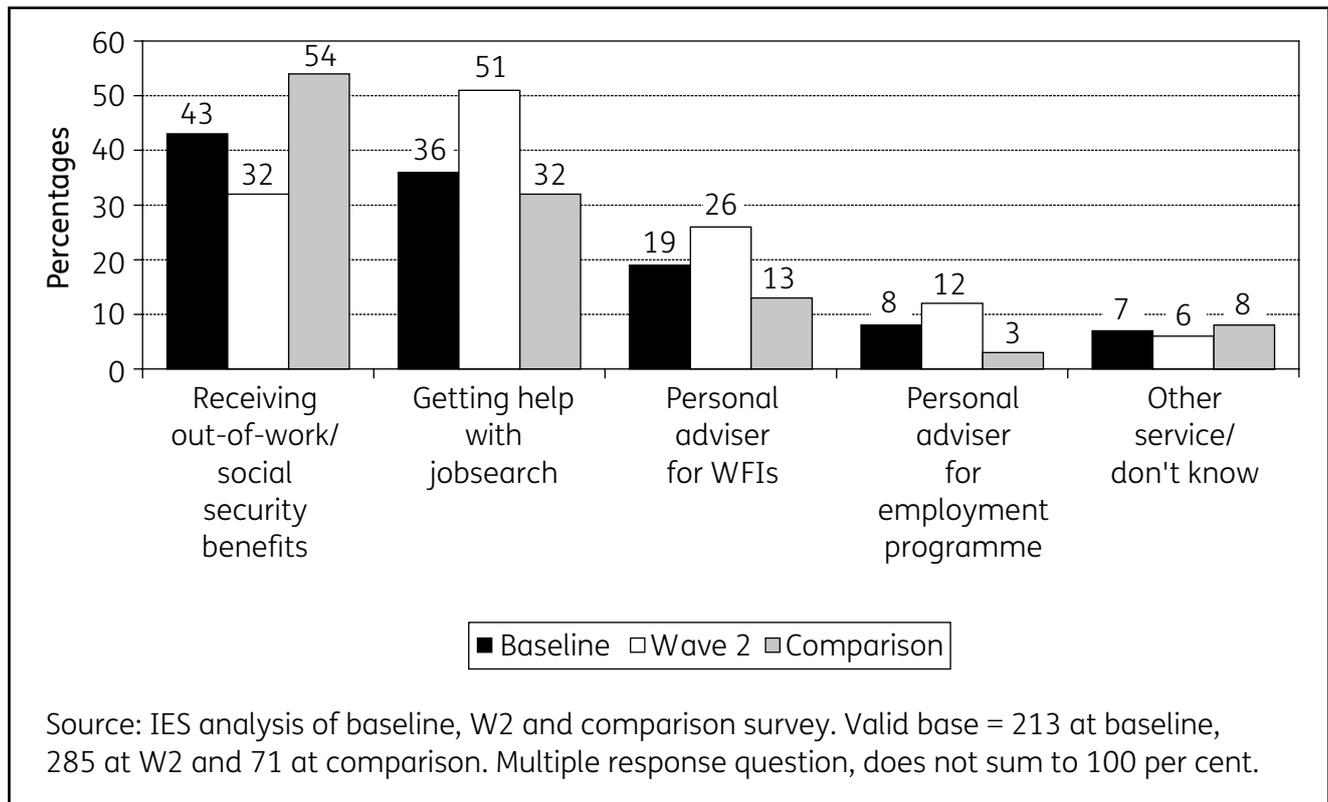


The survey data also shows that at W2 more pilot sites respondents reported that they were looking for work, than comparison site respondents (21 per cent compared to 16 per cent), and this difference is exaggerated among parents out of work and claiming benefit entitlements (38 per cent, compared to 25 per cent), see Figure 7.4. The differences in the number of respondents who reported looking for work at the time of the survey were not significant between the baseline survey (when only a minority of pilot children's centres had what could be termed a 'high' level of pre-pilot Jobcentre Plus resource), and the comparison survey. This suggests that the pilot may be having a positive influence on parents' attitudes towards work and their access to Jobcentre Plus services.

Figure 7.4 Looking for work at time of survey (%)

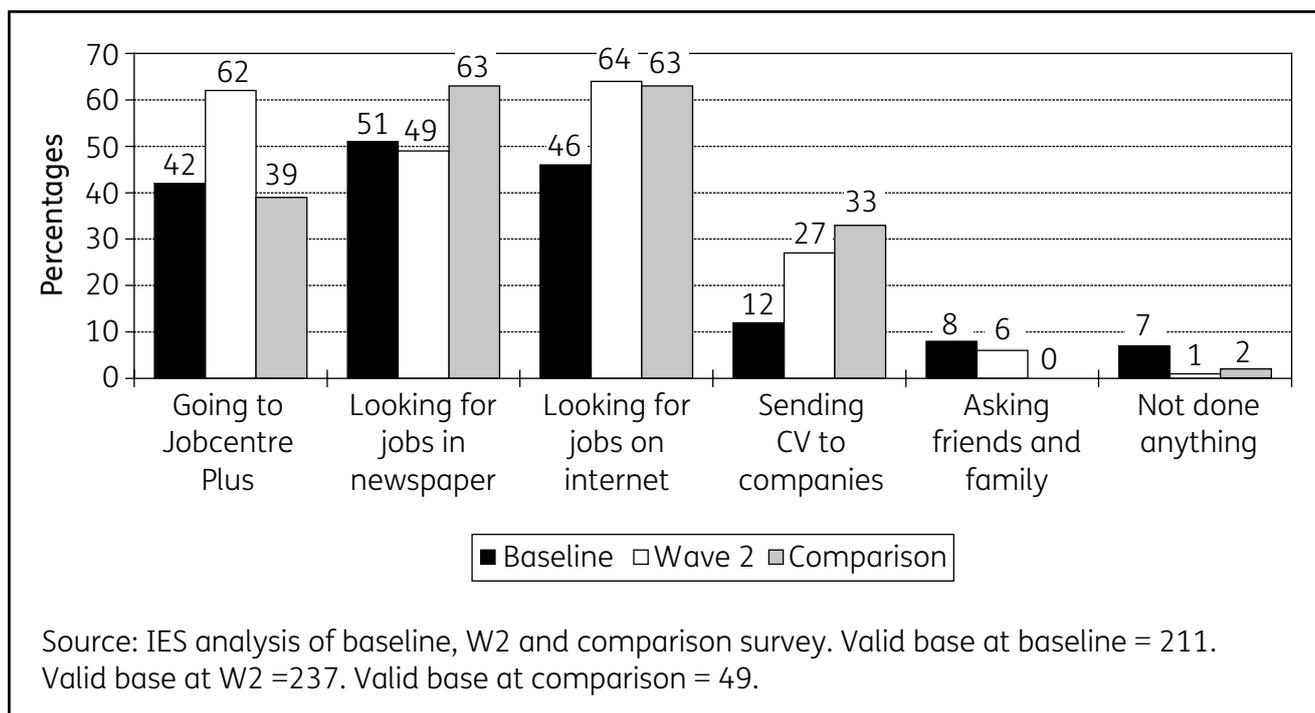
When looking at the use of specific Jobcentre Plus services, it is possible to see that engagement with Jobcentre Plus services became more work focused over the course of the pilot – ie between the baseline and W2 survey (see Figure 7.5). Engagement with Jobcentre Plus services at W2 was also more work-focused than in comparison sites.

The most notable difference between the three surveys relates to the use of Jobcentre Plus for jobsearch, and jobsearch was in fact the most commonly reported reason for using Jobcentre Plus services at W2. Fifty-one per cent of children’s centre users at W2 reported that they used Jobcentre Plus to receive help with jobsearch, compared to 36 per cent at the baseline survey, and 32 per cent at the comparison survey. There was also a greater number of parents seeing a Personal Adviser for work-focused interviews or as part of an employment programme at the W2 survey, compared with the baseline and comparison surveys. The most commonly reported reason for using Jobcentre Plus services in the baseline and comparison surveys was to receive out-of-work/social security benefits. This reinforces evidence of the positive impact of the pilot in engaging parents in more work-focused activity to move them closer to work.

Figure 7.5 Types of Jobcentre Plus services currently used (%)

Among those who said that they were looking for work, there was considerably greater use of Jobcentre Plus as a means of job searching at W2 (62 per cent of respondents), than at either the baseline or comparison surveys (42 per cent and 39 per cent of respondents respectively), suggesting that the pilot had helped to make Jobcentre Plus services more accessible to parents. There was also a large increase between the baseline and W2 in the number of respondents who reported sending their CV to companies (from 12 to 27 per cent) and looking for jobs on the internet (from 46 to 64 per cent), and a decrease in the number who said that they had not done anything to look for work (from seven to one per cent).

Unsurprisingly, there was a greater level of job search activity among those out of work and claiming benefit entitlements for all strategies of jobsearch, with the exception of using the internet, at the baseline and comparison survey.

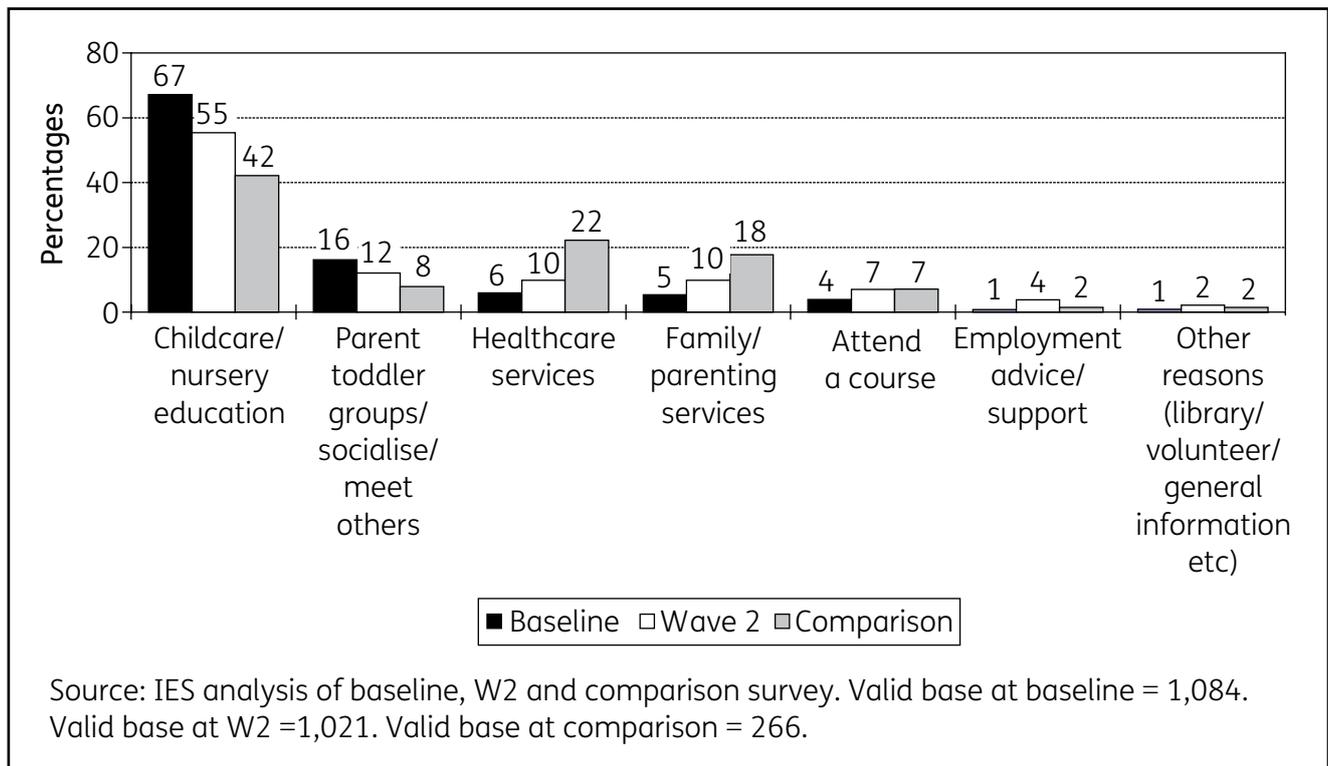
Figure 7.6 Job searching strategies among those looking for work (%)

7.6 Integrated service delivery and better outcomes for parents

There is evidence from the pilot of successful integrated service delivery, and that this was leading to better outcomes for parents. More joined up services meant that parents had better access to services on one site, and this meant that they were often dealt with more quickly. From the qualitative research, there were examples in some pilot sites of children's centre and Jobcentre Plus staff booking appointments for each other.

Referrals between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres services also meant that parents' issues were not addressed in isolation from each other, but were tackled more holistically. There is further evidence of such referrals from Figure 7.7, taken from the survey of children's centre users. While childcare/nursery education and parents toddler groups were the most commonly used children's centre services in all the surveys, these services were mentioned less frequently by parents as their usual reasons for visiting the centre at W2 than at the baseline survey (67 per cent compared to 83 per cent). Instead, other core children's centre services had increased in popularity by W2, with approximately double the number of parents visiting the centre to use healthcare services (from six to ten per cent) and family/parenting services in W2 (from five to ten per cent), and an increase in the number of parents visiting to attend a course (from four to seven per cent). In the comparison sites, the split between the use of childcare services and other core services was also more evenly distributed. This is evidence of a change in the way that parents were using the children's centres, and it is likely to be a result of increased cross-referrals and partnership working between different agencies based on-site. The pilot children's centres appeared to be being used as venues which offered more all encompassing services and wrap-around support.

Figure 7.7 Usual reason for visiting the children’s centre (%)



In a few areas, the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers were even using the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) to facilitate this joined up working.

From qualitative evidence, it is clear this kind of integrated service delivery resulted in better outcomes for parents. Parents’ barriers to work could often be addressed holistically and services could properly sequence their interventions according to parents’ needs. As one Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser and one parent put it:

‘I’ve had mandatory interviews where they’ve had so many other problems that I’ve said “look, let’s forget about looking for work or training and concentrate on what’s wrong. We’ll sort that first and then we’ll look at the work and training”. I just don’t think you can move somebody forward if you don’t do that. It’s a package, not just a blinkered vision of “I’m getting you into work and I don’t care what job it is”.’

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave qualitative research)

‘It’s great that there’s everything under one umbrella. You’ve got the Jobcentre Plus, you’ve got your childcare people that you can ask for advice, you’ve got the Citizens Advice Bureau, you’ve got your outreach workers. Everybody’s here and you can just go to them and get anything and if they don’t know, they’ll pass you onto somebody that does.’

(Children’s centre user, second wave qualitative interviews with children’s centre users)

7.7 Additional skills, knowledge and customers for Jobcentre Plus

There is little doubt from the evidence that Jobcentre Plus has gained new skills and knowledge via its Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers. As previous sections in this report have detailed, most Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers (and their line managers) reported that they had gained important and valuable skills through their work in delivering the pilot. These included not just important professional and personal skills (Section 6.5), but also important local knowledge about support and provision in the wider community which they might not have known about from their work in the Jobcentre Plus office. One Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser put it like this:

‘I would say working here I have got to know more service providers in the areas and not only that, we’ve got a lot of courses. For instance in the Jobcentre, you can kind of gauge when a parent has a confidence issue. Now I’ll be honest with you, in a Jobcentre I wouldn’t know where to refer them. I would have thought the college, but then I don’t know if they do courses like that. But being in the children’s centre, it’s opened me up to seeing that there are all these courses that the children’s centre run, so that’s been really useful. Otherwise I wouldn’t have known.’

(Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, second wave case study research)

In some pilot areas, Jobcentre Plus staff also reported being able to see poverty in a much more ‘real’ way, by being given the opportunity to work much more closely with families than they would otherwise have had the chance to. This has also increased their knowledge of local provision and also the complex nature of some barriers to employment.

Across most of the pilot areas, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers were successfully embedded within the children’s centre team. As such, they were seen as a member of the children’s centre team and worked hard to engage parents on that basis. This has meant they had access to customer groups that were either not in touch with Jobcentre Plus services, or who had little awareness of the Jobcentre Plus services available. As the MI shows, around 30 per cent of pilot starts were non-claimants, and from the overall profile of this group (Figure 7.1), it is possible to see that their take-up of Jobcentre Plus services in children’s centres increased almost tenfold over the course of the pilot, as indicated by the baseline and W2 surveys.

7.8 The potential to reduce child poverty

The evidence in this chapter highlights the potential to reduce child poverty through an enhanced Jobcentre Plus offer in children’s centres. The pilot has demonstrated the potential to reduce child poverty through the following outcomes, summarised here:

- **Employment-related outcomes.** Raising skills and employability is part of the Government’s strategy to tackle child poverty and worklessness. *Ending Child Poverty* described work ‘as the surest and most sustainable route out of poverty’. Similarly, welfare reform is premised on work ‘as the best route out of poverty.’ The pilot has helped move parents closer to work, either through training courses, careers advice, pre-employment training or jobsearch. Forty per cent of those with a clerical record have had a work-related outcome recorded as a result of accessing the pilot.

- **Effective engagement of the target groups.** Given that around half of children living in poverty have a parent in work³⁶, there is a clear need to reach non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers (likely to be potential second earners) and address in-work poverty. This pilot has successfully engaged potential second earners (approximately 30 per cent of all pilot starts) and those on low incomes (for those for whom we have the data, around 70 per cent of non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers earned under £20,000, with one in five earning under £10,000).³⁷ From the qualitative evidence, it is also clear that the pilot has successfully engaged many parents who have had complex or multiple barriers to employment or training.
- **Increased take-up of Jobcentre Plus services in children's centres.** Among many of the target groups (lone parents, non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers, those from low incomes), the pilot has had a marked and positive impact on the take-up of Jobcentre Plus services in the pilot children's centres (from just three per cent of children's centre users who reported that they were currently using Jobcentre Plus services at the children's centre at the start of the pilot to 14 per cent of parents towards the end of the pilot).
- **Successful co-location of Jobcentre Plus services and integrated service delivery in children's centres.** More integrated service delivery has been welcomed by children's centre users as enabling a more holistic, accessible, flexible and family-focused approach to supporting parents towards employment. Children's centre users have also valued more time that the pilot has enabled them to have with the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, the convenience of accessing Jobcentre Plus provision in a more comfortable and trusted environment, and the continuity of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser role which has enabled them to build up a trusting relationship with the Adviser.
- **Attitudinal and aspirational changes among pilot participants.** The pilot has progressed pilot participants closer to work through achieving both aspiration-related and attitudinal changes to work and training. Qualitative evidence indicates that these outcomes have largely come about through raised levels of confidence, greater awareness of work-focused opportunities and options, and intense one-to-one support provided by the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser to raise participants' aspirations and attitudes to work and training.
- **Attitudinal changes among children's centre and Jobcentre Plus staff.** In many of the pilot areas, there was evidence of clear attitudinal changes among children's centre staff towards Jobcentre Plus staff, with many staff gaining a clearer understanding of how employment could raise a family's income and improve the outcomes of the family as a whole. Given the demographic profile of many children's centre users, and the Government's recent decision to re-focus children's centres to help the most disadvantaged, it is all the more important that children's centre staff and managers have child poverty at the forefront of their thinking and understand the way in which employment can provide a route out of it. Alongside these changes among children's centre staff, many Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers also gained a better understanding of the working culture of children's centres, and particularly their priorities around safeguarding children and the well-being of the family as a whole. These changes bode well for future partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres.

³⁶ Harker, L. (2006). *Delivering on child poverty: What would it take?* London: DWP.

³⁷ Data from the pilot MI.

8 Conclusion

The overarching aim of this pilot was to test whether children's centres could offer an effective means of engaging parents in labour market activity and moving them closer to work. The findings of this evaluation strongly indicate that they can, and that there is a clear case for providing work-focused services in children's centres as an effective way to tackle (and prevent) worklessness and in-work poverty.

In light of the findings and conclusions set out in previous chapters, we make the following conclusions and recommendations to Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), to Jobcentre Plus, to local authorities and to children's centres.

1. Children's centres are potentially ideal venues for an enhanced Jobcentre Plus offer to reach families through joined-up services

Sure Start Children's Centres have been a substantial investment over the past two decades and the Government's ongoing commitment to the Sure Start programme is based on solid evidence that the early years are when the greatest difference can be made to a child's life chances.³⁸ In many areas, they have successfully cut through silos in public services delivery to become hubs where several services can be accessed on-site through more joined up service delivery.

For these reasons alone, children's centres are good venues for an enhanced Jobcentre Plus offer (beyond the core offer currently offered by children's centres, which requires them to have links with Jobcentre Plus). However, the pilot evaluation has shown that they are ideal for three further reasons. Firstly, most children's centres offer good reach into the target communities of lone parents, potential second earners and low-income households. Secondly, they are established and trusted environments in which to engage parents, many of whom are not in touch with Jobcentre Plus services. Thirdly, there is more than sufficient demand for a more enhanced Jobcentre Plus offer and this is demonstrated in a four-fold increase in the take-up of the pilot's services in the pilot children's centres, over the course of the pilot.

The pilot children's centres were chosen primarily on the basis of those based in the most deprived wards, or those with reach into the most deprived communities. While this should remain a key factor in determining which children's centres could be suitable sites for work-focused services, local areas should also consider a wider range of factors, such as the children's centre's capacity to host the service and whether it has sufficient footfall. These additional considerations have been detailed in Section 6.2 and should be considered alongside key deprivation statistics when deciding which children's centres should host work-focused services. This will ensure that any future provision is targeted effectively and efficiently, at a time when both Jobcentre Plus and children's centres are under pressure from public spending cuts.

While children's centres emerge as potentially ideal venues for the co-location of Jobcentre Plus provision, recent evidence from the results of a similar pilot suggest that Jobcentre Plus outreach targeted at disadvantaged families need not necessarily be restricted to children's centres.³⁹ There is potential for local areas to consider co-locating Jobcentre Plus provision in similar outreach settings, such as primary schools and other early years settings.

³⁸ Allen, G. (2011). *Early Intervention: The next steps*. Cabinet Office.

³⁹ Marangozov, R. and Dewson, S. (2011). *Study of School Gates Employment Support Initiative*. Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Research Report No. 747.

2. Jobcentre Plus is well positioned to deliver work-focused services in children's centres

The evidence from this pilot indicates that Jobcentre Plus, as an organisation, is ideally placed to deliver work-focused support in children's centres. This is not just because many areas already have strong partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and local authorities. The 'added value' of having Jobcentre Plus as one of the lead delivery agencies is their advisers' specialist knowledge of benefits, better-off calculations and tax credits to the services. In some areas, they also brought with them contacts and links with Jobcentre Plus provision, as well as knowledge of local job vacancies. Evidence from the pilots shows these services were much in demand among pilot participants and that Jobcentre Plus were the best places to meet this demand.

3. There is a clear case for strengthening the Jobcentre Plus offer in children's centres to encompass dedicated outreach provision

In the space of two years (or 18 months if accounting for start-up delays), integrated service delivery has had a number of key achievements:

- successfully recruited and integrated Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers in almost all of the children's centres;
- has engaged a significant proportion of non-traditional Jobcentre Plus customers (30 per cent of pilot starts are neither benefit claimants nor the partner in a benefit claim);
- increased the take-up of Jobcentre Plus services in the pilot children's centres by four-fold, and actively referred parents onto other relevant services where necessary;
- engaged many parents who have faced complex and multiple barriers to work;
- delivered work-focused activity in an integrated way, alongside children's centre services and services from other key children's centre partner organisations;
- delivered intensive, personalised and tailored support – much of which cannot be captured in formal pilot data – to remove some of the toughest barriers to employment. This includes attitudinal barriers to work (and to Jobcentre Plus in some cases), low levels of confidence and motivation, and getting parents to think about and prepare for employment in the medium to long term if work is not an option in the short term alongside their primary childcare responsibilities.

Many pilot areas had already noted these kind of achievements, which had attracted strategic support from Jobcentre Plus District Managers in some cases. However, other pilot areas noted that Jobcentre Plus was getting to grips with a number of changes and were operating at stretched capacity. In April 2011, the Government granted Jobcentre Plus managers and Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers greater flexibility and decision-making to drive local approaches to tackling parental worklessness and skills. As such, any decisions about whether Jobcentre Plus outreach will continue post pilot will be largely shaped by Jobcentre Plus district areas.

From the experience of the pilot, there did not emerge one clear model of how Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers should be managed in an outreach setting, and so these kind of management decisions around co-location are also likely to be shaped by Jobcentre Plus district areas.

Whatever decisions are taken at the district level, Jobcentre Plus District Managers do not just need to take into account the significant outcomes listed above, but also wider obligations under the Child Poverty Act (2010) and core messages in the Child Poverty Strategy, published in April 2011. As part of the latter, the Government is committed to strengthening links between services by encouraging

the co-location of employment support with children's centres and other services.⁴⁰ This is part of a clear emphasis on early years intervention and whole-family approach to tackling child poverty which runs throughout the Child Poverty Strategy. As part of the Child Poverty Act, Jobcentre Plus, alongside local authorities and other key partner organisations, has a duty to work together to tackle child poverty, which includes supporting parents into employment or learning and skills opportunities to maximise their income.

4. Children's centre staff and managers need to have child poverty at the forefront of their thinking and understand that employment can provide a route out of it

Evidence from the pilot shows that it is simply not enough to co-locate Jobcentre Plus services in children's centres. A major factor in determining pilot success is also whether children's centre managers understand the role that employment can play in providing a route out of poverty, and more generally, of their 'frontline' role in helping to address it. Most of the managers in this pilot were aware of this, but where they were not, pilot implementation and delivery was slower, more difficult and at times, strained.

Where children's centre managers had demonstrated their understanding of employment as a route out of child poverty, it was important that this is communicated to all staff so that the message filtered down the organisational chain to ensure that service delivery on the ground reflected this understanding.

5. Lessons from the pilot evaluation should be used to inform future local delivery

At the time of conducting the final stage research, most pilot areas were already aware of the pilot's positive impact and its outcomes. Other children's centres had also heard of the pilot and were also keen to have the services on their premises too. As a result, many areas reported that they had plans to continue Jobcentre Plus outreach in their children's centres, albeit on a reduced basis. This is encouraging, and the lessons drawn out in Chapter 6 are intended to help shape and inform future plans to continue this kind of provision at a local level.

Lessons and outcomes drawn out in this evaluation report are also intended to help shape and inform future local approaches to child poverty. The experiences from this pilot demonstrate a clear potential to reduce child poverty through:

- positive employment-related outcomes;
- effective engagement of the target groups;
- increased take-up of Jobcentre Plus services in children's centres;
- effective co-location of Jobcentre Plus services in children's centres and more integrated service delivery as a result;
- positive attitudinal and aspirational changes among pilot participants;
- positive attitudinal changes among children's centre staff towards Jobcentre Plus services and a better understanding among many Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers of the culture and priorities of children's centres.

⁴⁰ DWP and Department for Education (2011). *A new approach to child poverty: Tackling the causes of disadvantage and transforming families' lives.*

Appendix

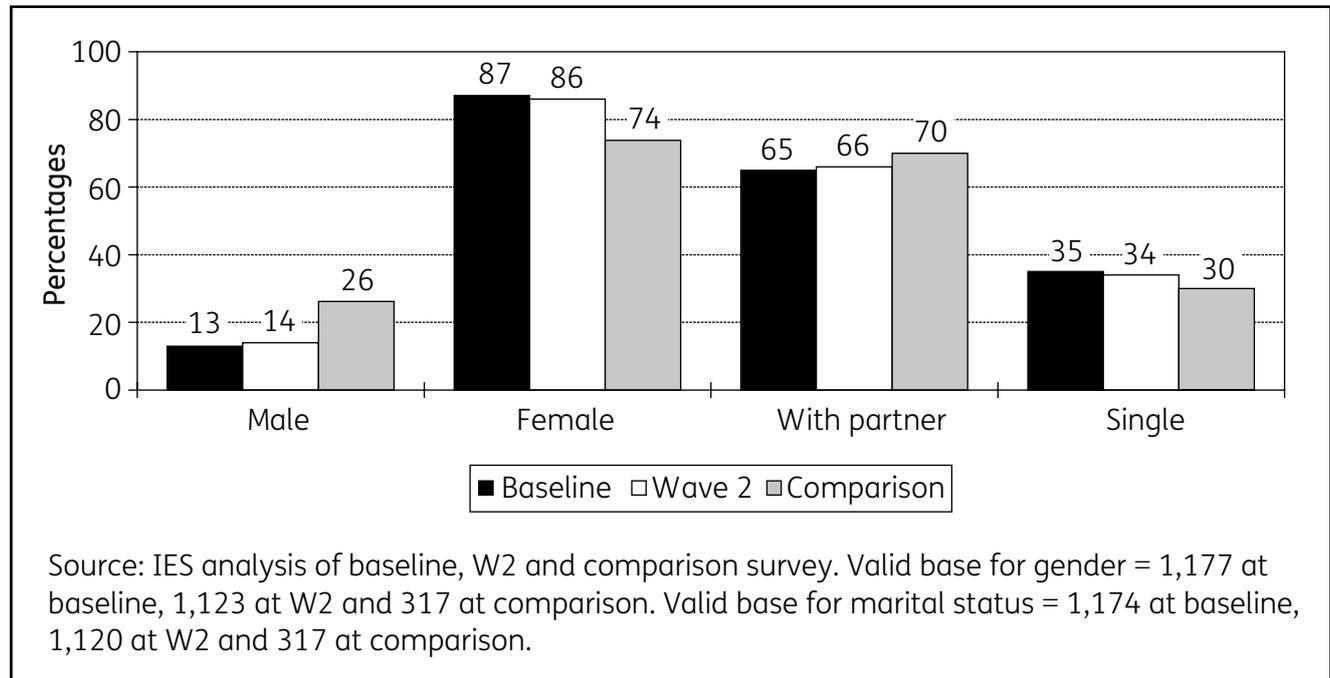
A fuller set of results and analysis from the survey of children’s centre users

Demographic profiles

Gender and partner status

There was little noticeable difference in the demographic characteristics of the pilot children’s centre users at the baseline and wave two survey (W2). In both surveys, all the centre users were parents (as opposed to other family members, carers or guardians), and more than 85 per cent were mothers. Just over one in three centre users were single parents.

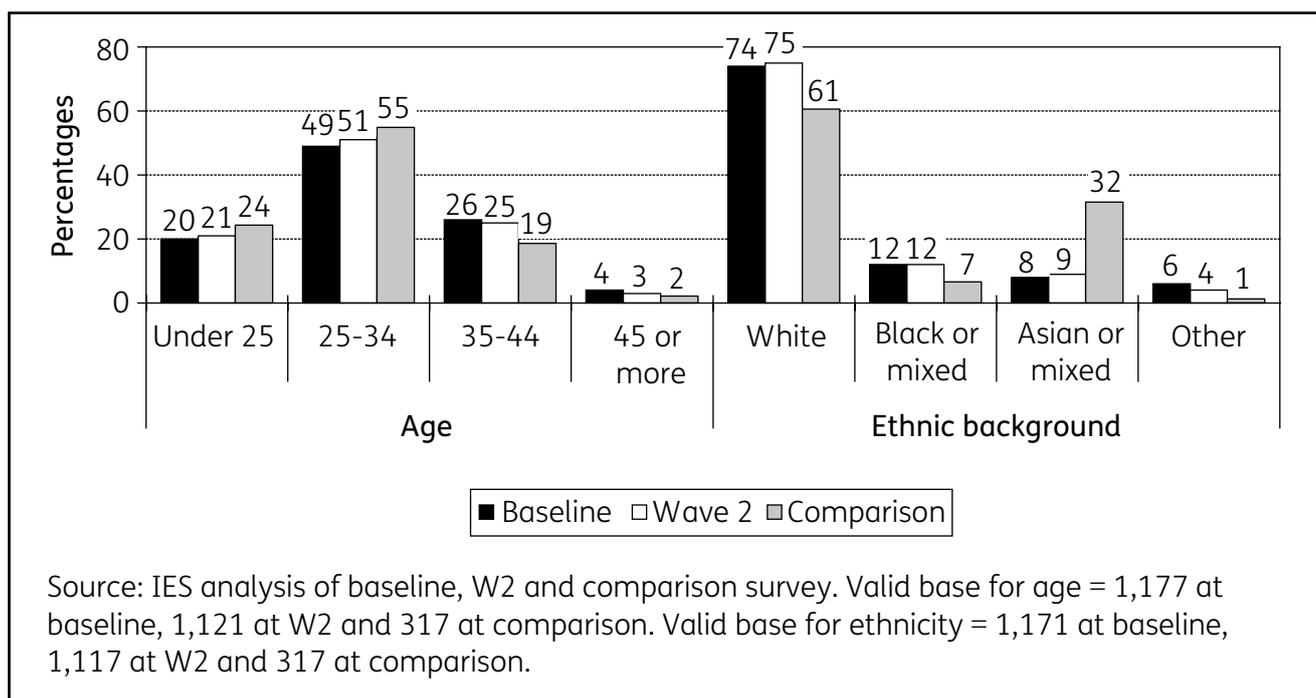
Figure A.1 Demographic distribution of respondents, gender and partner status (%)



Age and ethnicity

Approximately 20 per cent of pilot children’s centre users were aged under 25⁴¹, approximately half were aged 25 to 34, and approximately one-quarter were aged 35 to 44. Less than five per cent were aged 45 or older. Most centre users were white (74 per cent at the baseline, and 75 per cent at W2), followed by 12 per cent who were black or mixed ethnicity, and under ten per cent who were Asian or mixed ethnicity.

Figure A.2 Demographic distribution of respondents, age and ethnic background (%)



The children’s centre users in the comparison survey had a very similar profile to the pilot sites. Just like in the pilot sites, all comparison respondents were parents, and there were no significant differences regarding age⁴² and marital status. However, in the comparison survey there were more fathers (26 per cent) and almost one-third of respondents (32 per cent) were of Asian or mixed ethnicity.

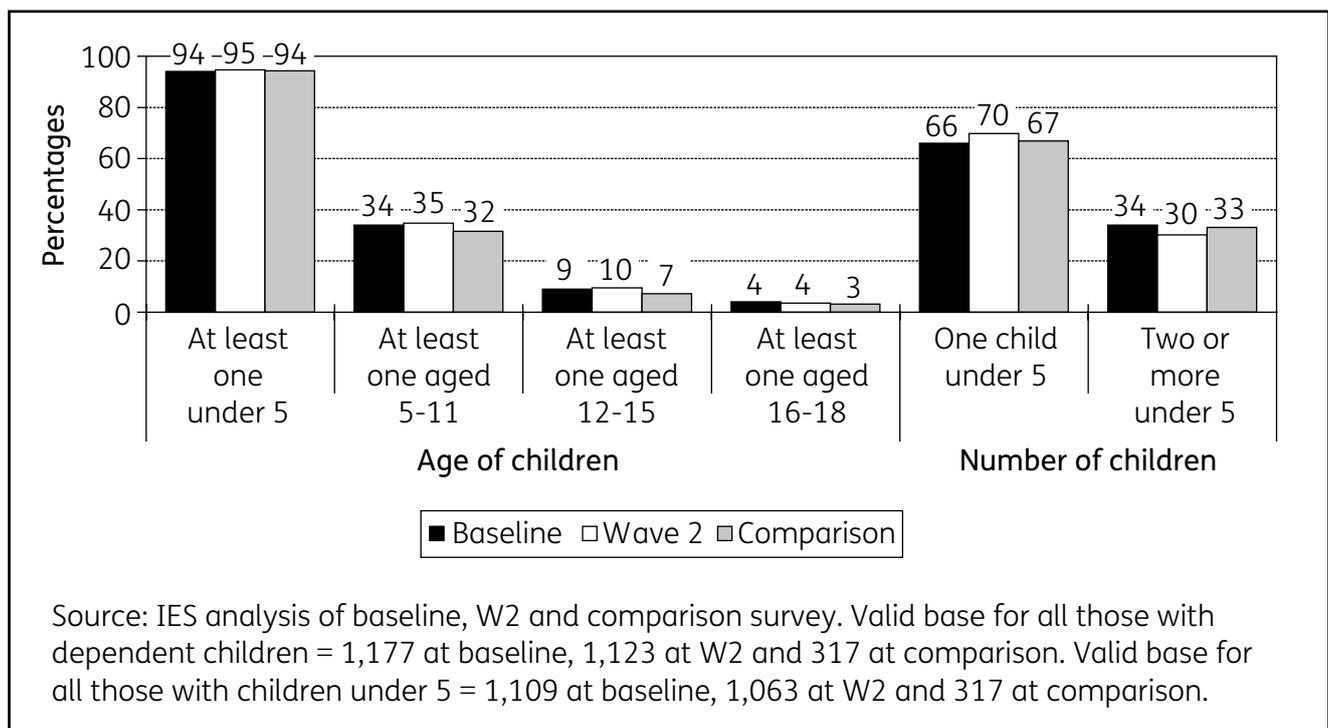
⁴¹ Less than one per cent were aged under 18, and none were aged under 15.

⁴² Less than two per cent were aged under 18, and none were aged under 15.

Number and age of dependent children

In all three surveys, nearly all centre users had at least one child under five years old (between 94 and 95 per cent). Among these, 30 to 34 per cent had two or more children aged under five. Just less than half of centre users had children aged over five. There were no significant differences between the number and age of dependent children between the three surveys.

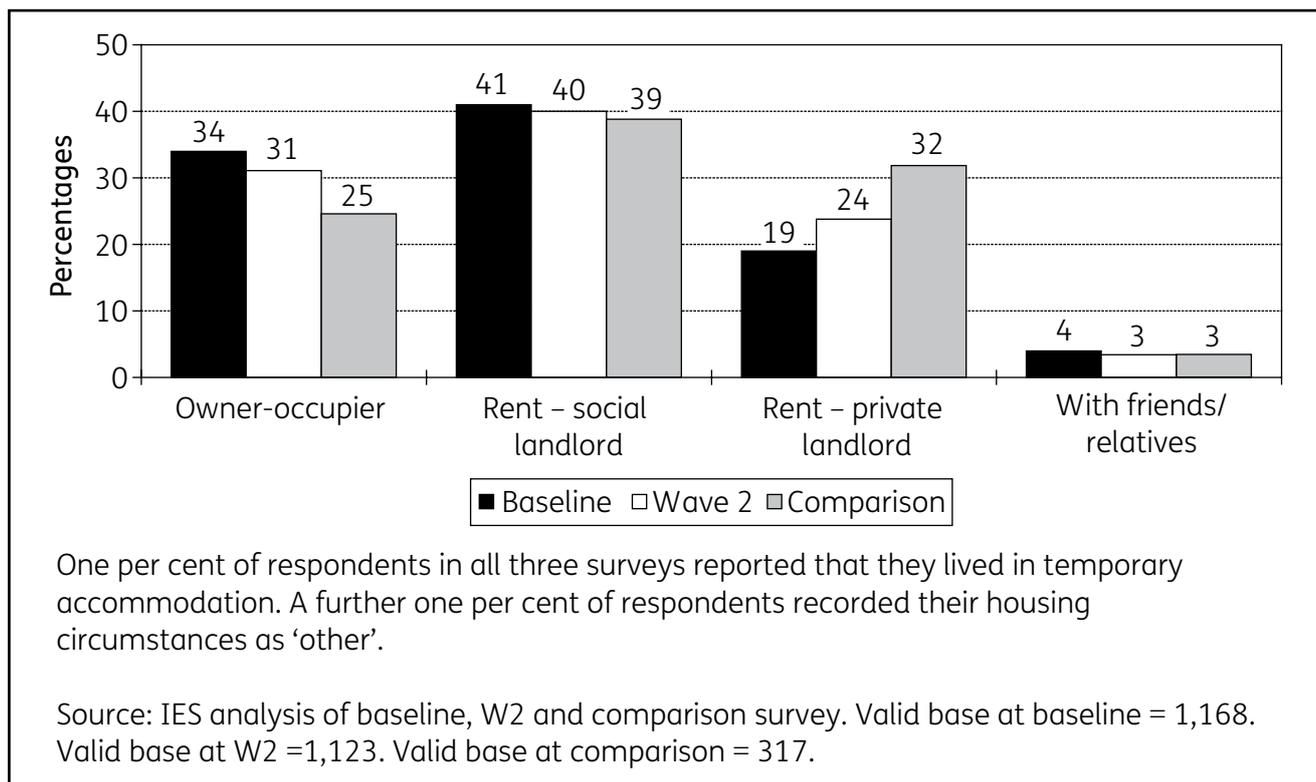
Figure A.3 Number of dependent children among respondents (%)



Housing circumstances

The largest proportion of centre users across all three surveys lived in socially rented accommodation (39 to 41 per cent). Roughly one-third of pilot centre users lived in owner-occupier accommodation (34 per cent at the baseline and 31 per cent at W2). Comparison centre users had a slightly different housing profile, with fewer owner-occupiers (25 per cent) and a higher proportion of private renters (32 per cent).

Figure A.4 Respondent’s housing circumstances (%)



Partner’s employment status

Across all three surveys, nearly four out of five centre users with a partner said that their partner was working (between 77 and 78 per cent), of whom most had partners in full-time employment (see Figure A.5). Approximately one in ten respondents with a partner said their partner was unemployed and looking for work (between seven and 11 per cent). See Figure A.6.

Figure A.5 Partner’s current employment status, working (%)

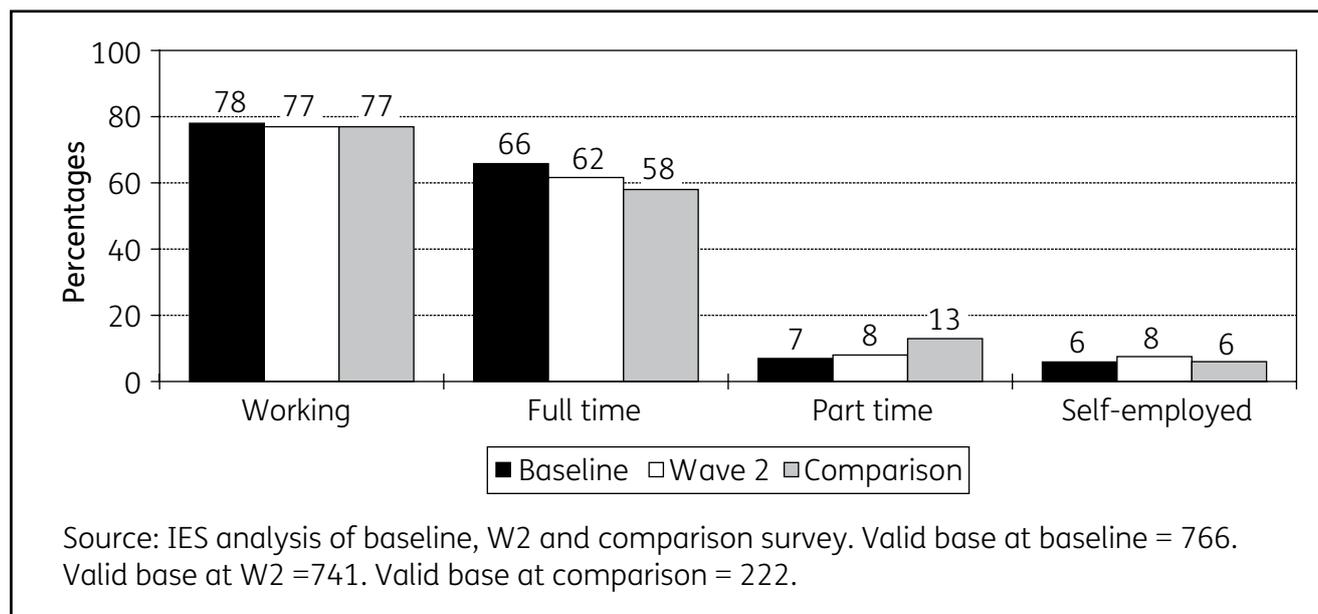
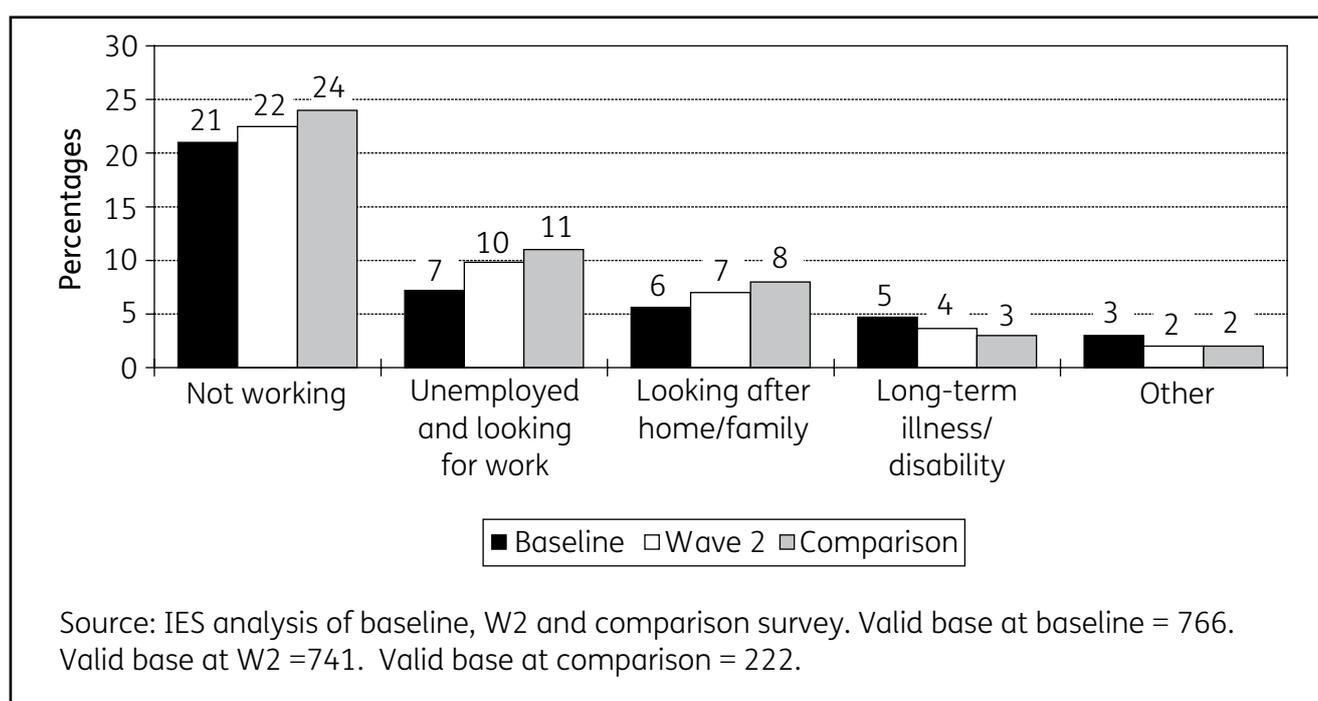


Figure A.6 Partner’s current employment status, not working (%)



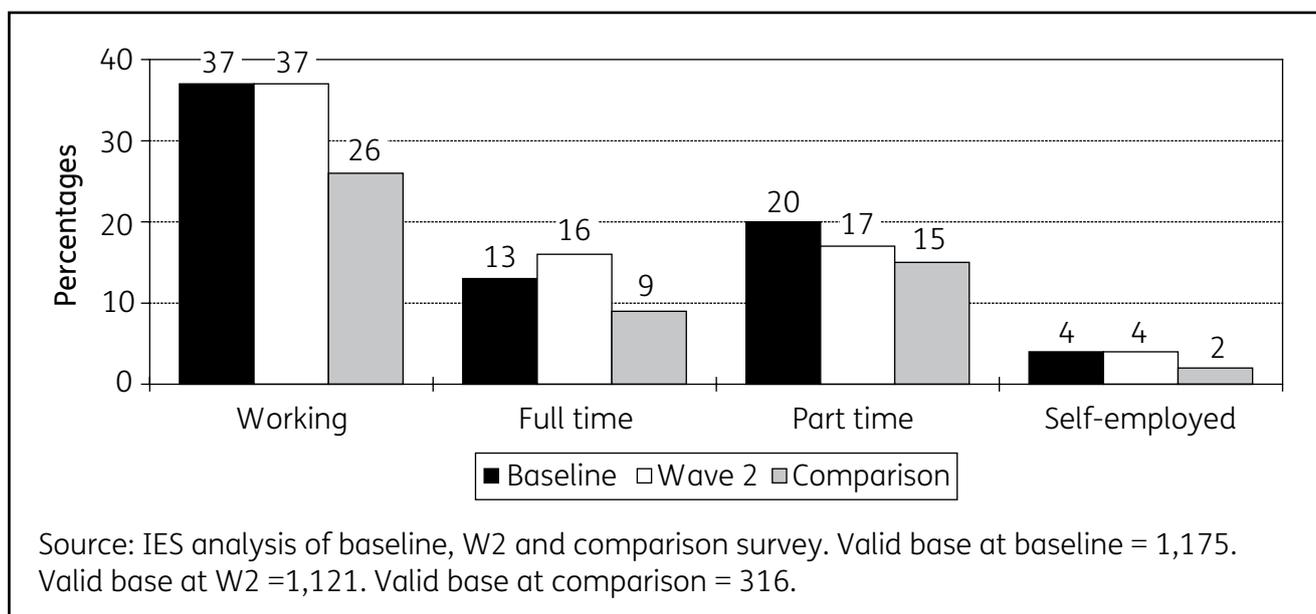
Employment

Respondent’s employment status – working

Thirty-seven per cent of pilot centre users were in some form of work at the time of the baseline and W2 surveys. This was much higher than the rate among comparison site centre users (26 per cent), and this sustained level of employment should be regarded positively, considering the external economic climate.

If this is broken down by employment type, it is possible to see that at W2 the proportion of pilot centre users in full-time employment had increased from 13 per cent to 16 per cent, and the proportion of centre users in full-time employment at the comparison sites was lower than at the W2 survey (nine per cent). The difference between the proportion of centre users in full-time employment at the baseline and comparison surveys is not significant.

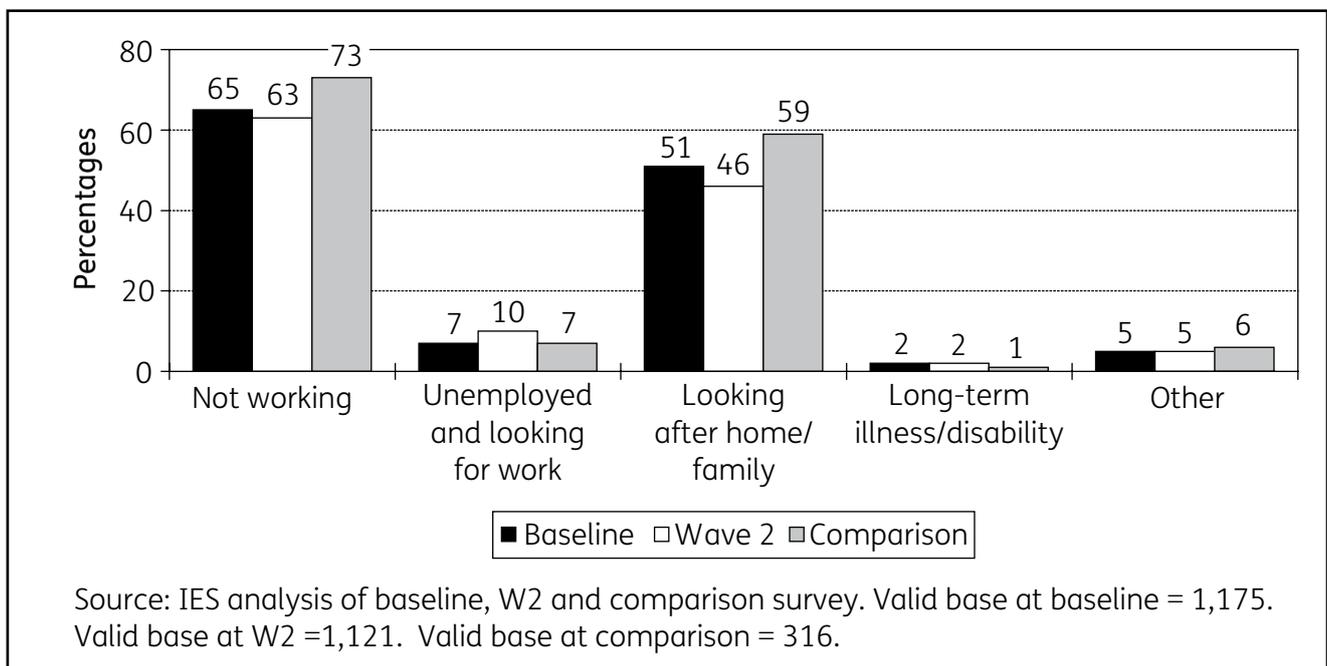
Figure A.7 Respondent’s employment status, working (%)



Respondent’s employment status – not working

Just under two-thirds of pilot children’s centre users reported that they were not working (between 63 and 65 per cent), however, the rate of comparison centre users who reported not working was higher (73 per cent). If we look at the reasons parents gave for not working we can see that there was a decrease at W2 in the number of pilot centre users who reported that they were not working because they were looking after the home and/or family, when compared to the baseline survey (from 51 to 46 per cent). In contrast, the proportion of centre users at the comparison sites who reported that they were not working because they were looking after the home and/or family was much higher (59 per cent). This suggests the pilot may have had a positive impact of changing attitudes towards availability for work.

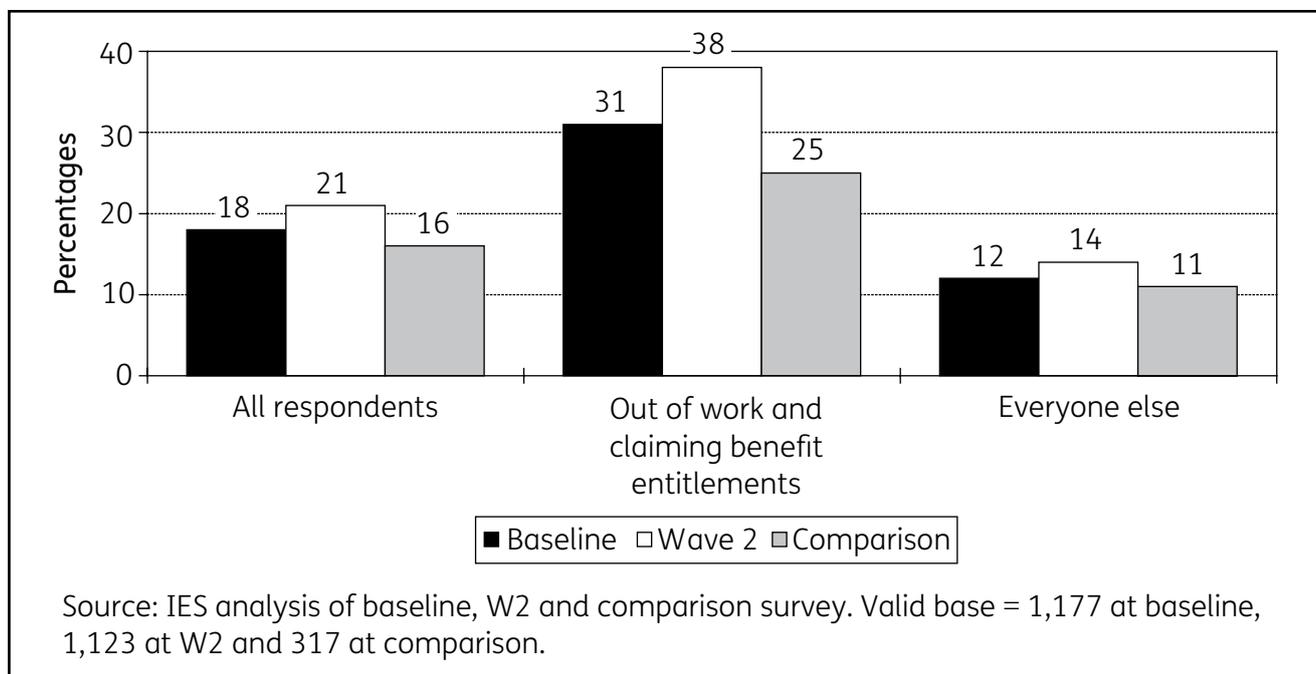
Figure A.8 Respondent’s employment status, not working (%)



Looking for work

The survey data also shows that at W2 more pilot site respondents reported that they were looking for work, than comparison site respondents (21 per cent compared to 16 per cent). This difference is exaggerated among parents out of work and claiming benefit entitlements (38 per cent, compared to 25 per cent). These differences between the number of respondents at the pilot and comparison sites who reported looking for work at the time of the survey were not significant for the baseline survey (when only a minority of pilot children’s centres had what could be termed a ‘high’ level of pre-pilot Jobcentre Plus resource). These findings suggest that the profile of pilot centre users is more work-focused than that of comparison centre users, suggesting that the pilot has had a positive impact on parents’ attitudes towards work and encouraging them to take positive steps towards employment.

Figure A.9 Looking for work at time of survey (%)

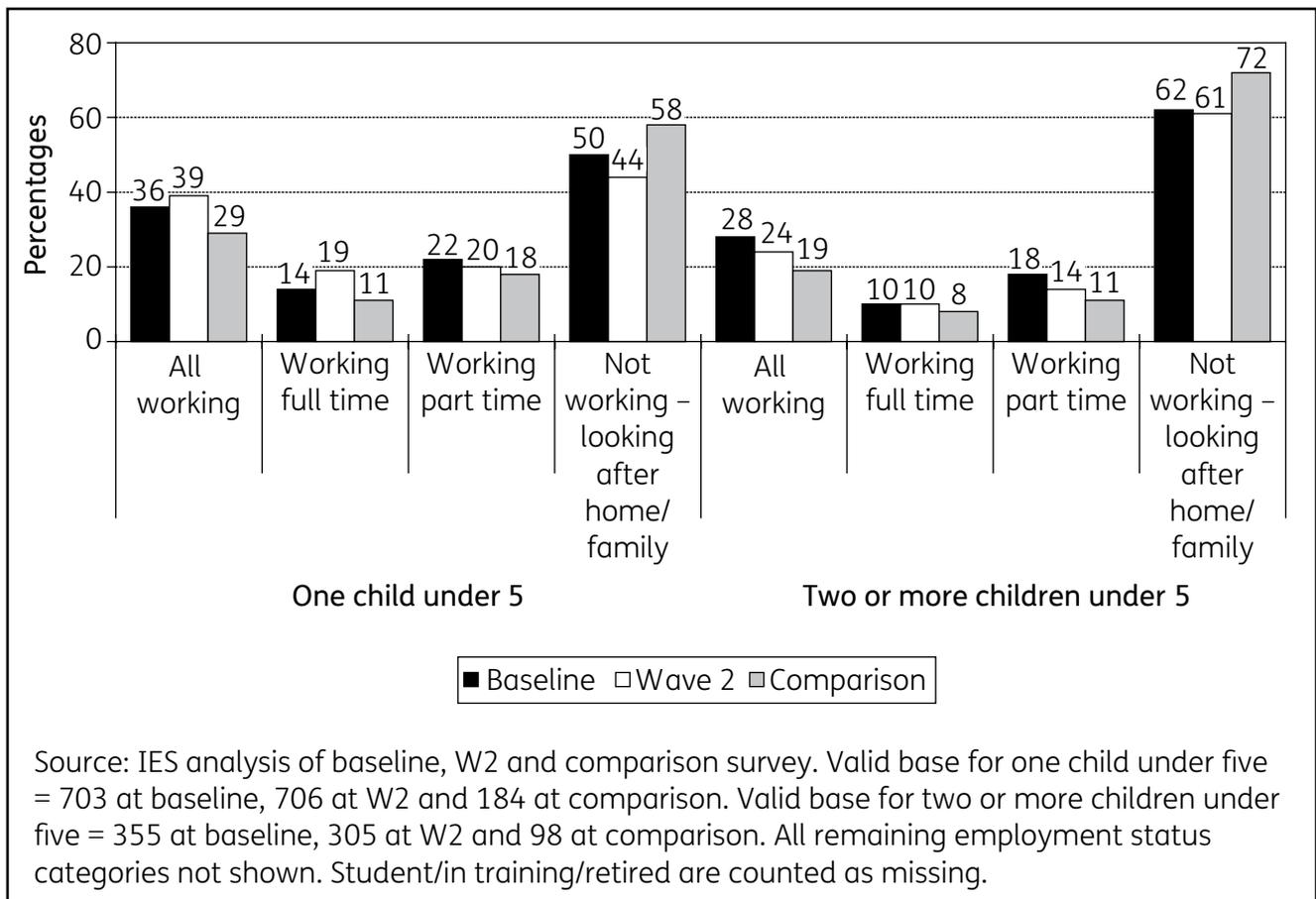


Employment status and caring responsibilities

There is a statistically significant relationship between a parent’s employment status and the number of their children under five years old. Across all three surveys, parents with only one child under five were more likely to be in full-time or part-time paid work, and less likely to be out of work because of family and home care commitments (‘homemaker’), than parents with two or more children under five.

This breakdown also reveals that the increase in pilot centre users in full-time employment at W2 (shown in Figure A.10), and the decrease in centre users reporting they were out of work because they were looking after the home and/or family, was restricted to those with only one child under the age of five. There was no noticeable change among those with two or more children under five. This supports the fact that levels of parenting responsibility affect decisions about returning to work.

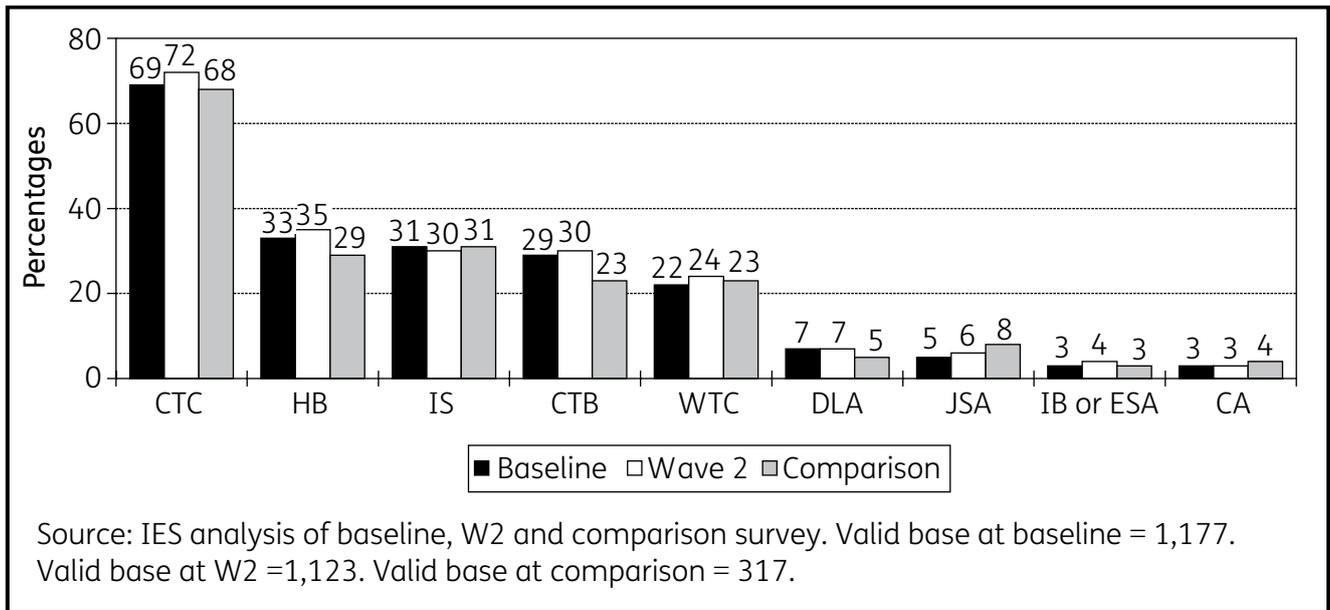
Figure A.10 Employment status by caring responsibilities (%)



Benefit entitlements

The majority of centre users across all three surveys claimed child tax credits (between 68 and 72 per cent). A slightly higher percentage of respondents reported claiming some benefits, such as Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, in the pilot sites than in the comparison sites.

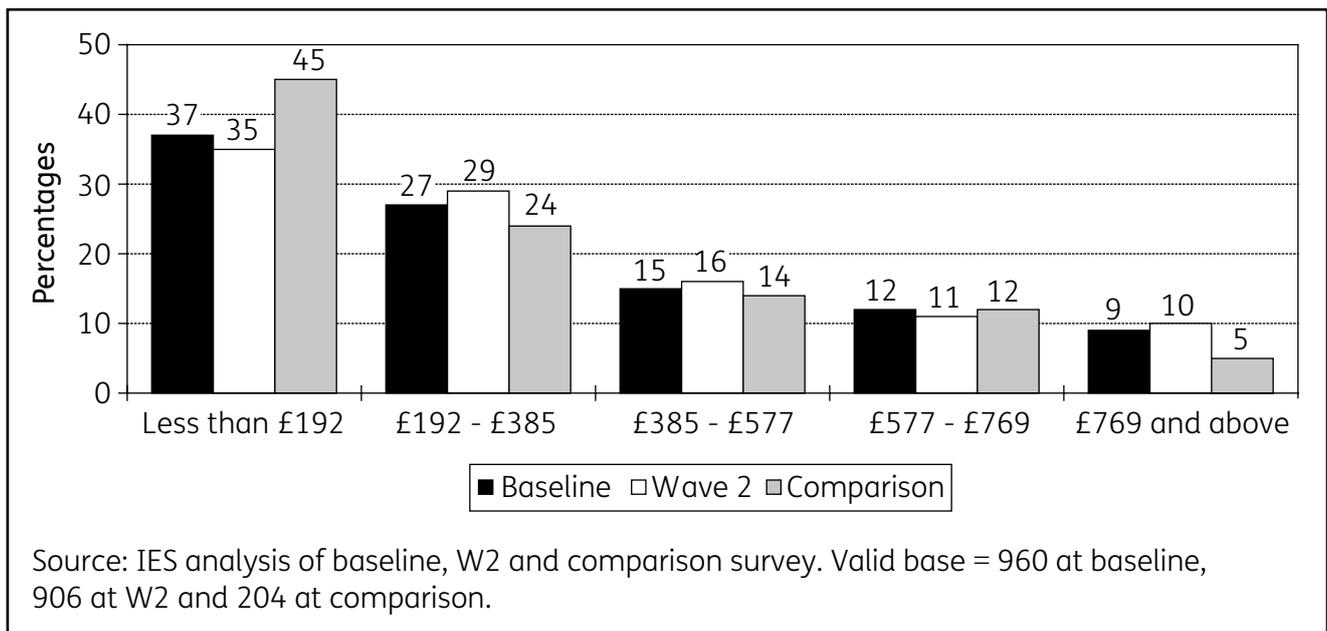
Figure A.11 In receipt of benefits or tax credits – respondents or their partners (%)



Household income

The majority of children’s centre users surveyed had low household incomes. Approximately two-thirds of respondents across all three surveys (between 64 and 69 per cent) reported a weekly household income of less than £385 (or £20,000 a year) and between 35 and 37 per cent of pilot centre users reported a weekly household income of less than £192 (£10,000 a year). The comparison sites showed a more disadvantaged profile regarding household income, with a greater number of respondents reporting weekly household incomes of less than £192 (45 per cent).

Figure A.12 Weekly household income of survey respondents (%)



Use of children’s centre services

Frequency of visits

Most parents were frequent users of the pilot children’s centres, with approximately 40 per cent visiting once or twice a week (41 per cent at baseline, 39 per cent at W2), and a further 40 per cent visiting more often than this (44 per cent at baseline and 38 per cent at W2). Just under ten per cent of respondents at both pilot site surveys were visiting the children’s centre for the first time (eight per cent at baseline and nine per cent at W2). The frequency of visits was slightly lower at comparison site children’s centres, nevertheless 63 per cent of parents still visited at least once a week.

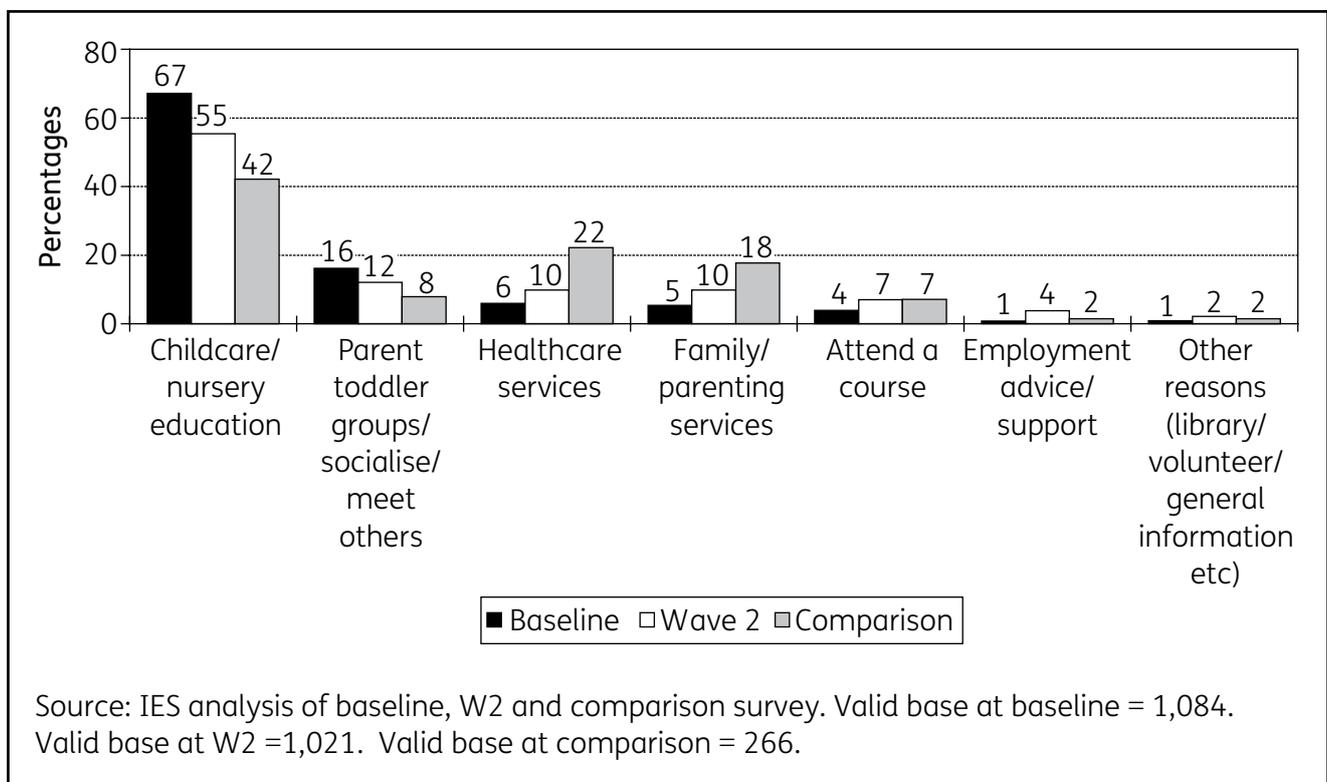
Use of particular services

While childcare/nursery education and parents toddler groups were the most commonly used children’s centre services in all three surveys, these services were mentioned less frequently by parents as their usual reasons for visiting the centre at W2 than at the baseline survey (67 per cent compared to 83 per cent). Instead, other core children’s centre services had increased in popularity by W2, with approximately double the number of parents visiting the centre to use healthcare services (from six to ten per cent) and family/parenting services (from five to ten per cent), and an increase in the number of parents visiting to attend a course (from four to seven per cent). In the comparison sites, the split between the use of childcare services and other core services was also

more evenly distributed. This is evidence that parents were using the children’s centres more as venues which offered all encompassing services and wrap-around support, a structure within which work-focused services fitted very well.

Encouragingly, there was also an increase among pilot children’s centre users at W2 reporting that their main reason for visiting was to receive employment advice and support (from one to four per cent). Among those who did not mention employment advice and support as their main reason for visiting, a further 12 per cent said that they used this service, compared to three per cent at the baseline survey. In contrast, comparison sites had a similar level of take up to the baseline survey regarding the use of employment advice and support; two per cent reported this as their main reason for visiting, and only a further four per cent said they ever used the service.

Figure A.13 Usual reason for visiting the children’s centre (%)



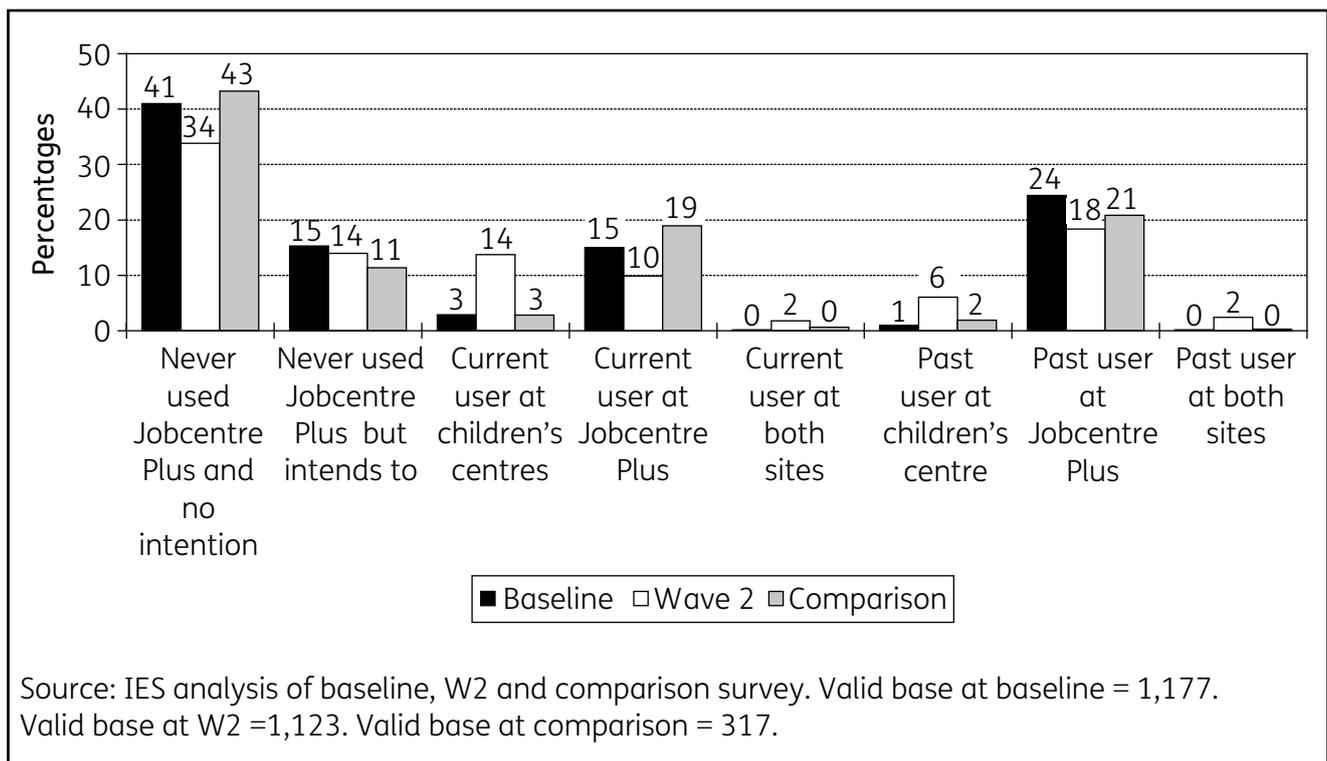
Use of Jobcentre Plus Services

Levels of take-up

Figure A.14 clearly shows an increased take-up of Jobcentre Plus services among pilot children’s centre users. At the baseline survey (when only a minority of pilot children’s centres had what could be termed a ‘high’ level of pre-pilot Jobcentre Plus resource), just three per cent of parents reported using Jobcentre Plus at the children’s centre, and only one per cent reported using Jobcentre Plus services in the past. However, by the time of the W2 survey, 14 per cent of parents reported using Jobcentre Plus services at pilot children’s centres, and six per cent reported using Jobcentre Plus services at the children’s centre in the past.

Correspondingly, there was a drop between the baseline and W2 survey, in the number of parents reporting that they had never used Jobcentre Plus and had no intention of doing so, from 41 to 34 per cent. The level of take up of Jobcentre Plus services among comparison site centre users was mostly very similar or lower than that of the baseline survey, providing clear evidence that the pilot added value and increased take-up of Jobcentre Plus services in the pilot children’s centres.

Figure A.14 Past, present and future take up of Jobcentre Plus services (%)



Levels of take-up by individual characteristics

Figure A.15 shows variations in take-up of Jobcentre Plus services at the children’s centre by different characteristics of centre users. Not surprisingly, those out of work and claiming benefit entitlements, and lone parents had the highest level of take up, with more than one-quarter of centre users in these groups (28 and 27 per cent respectively) using Jobcentre Plus at the pilot children’s centres at W2, showing that the pilot was reaching its target groups.

Figure A.15 Current users of Jobcentre Plus services at children’s centre, gender, partner status, benefit status, number of children (%)

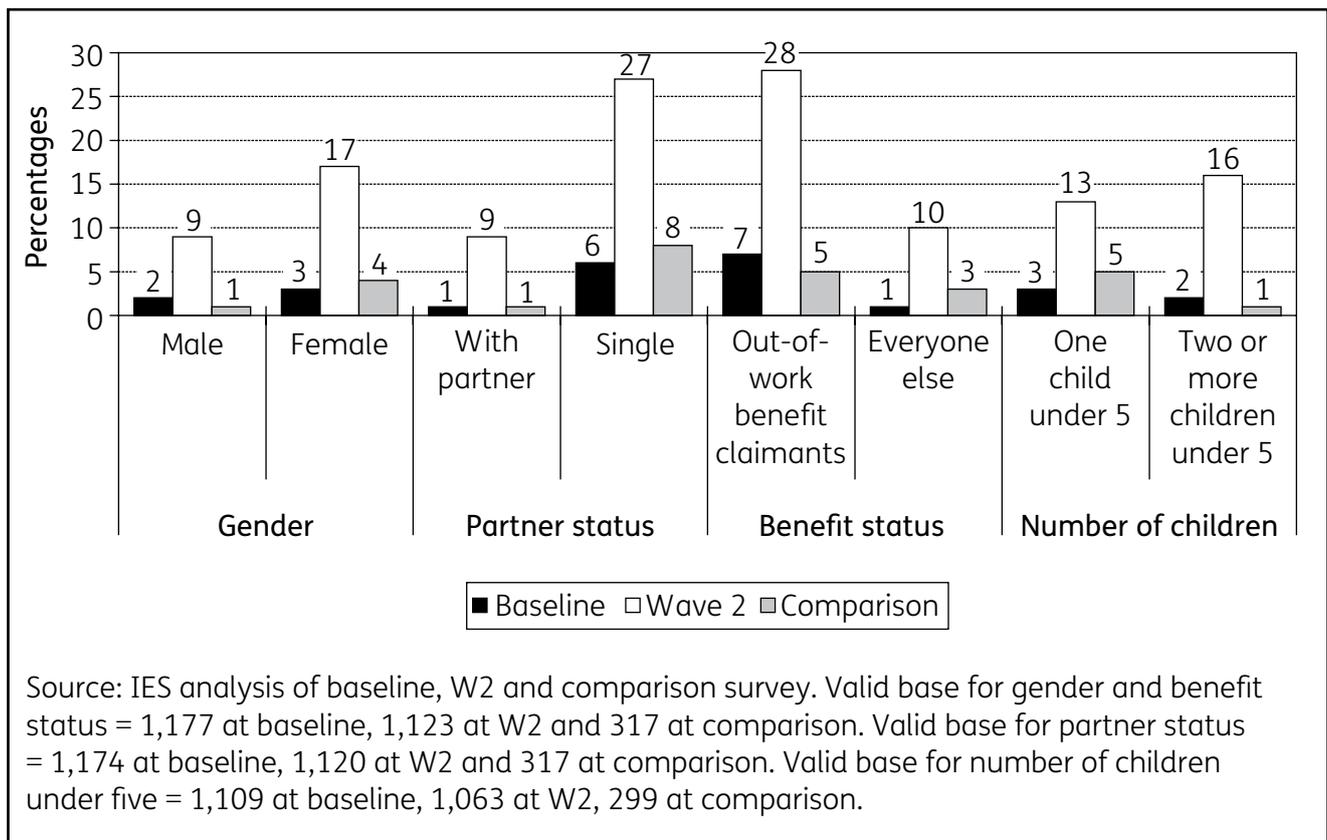
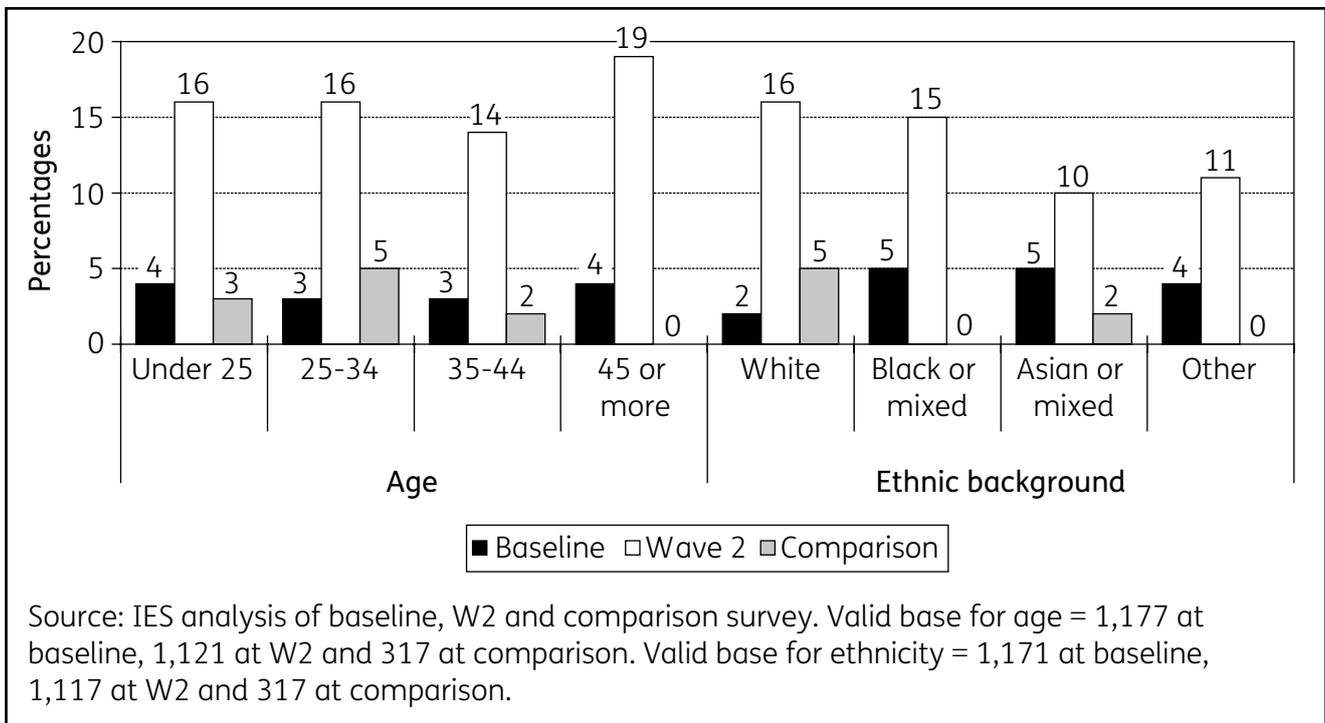


Figure A.16 Current users of Jobcentre Plus services at children’s centre, age and ethnic background (%)

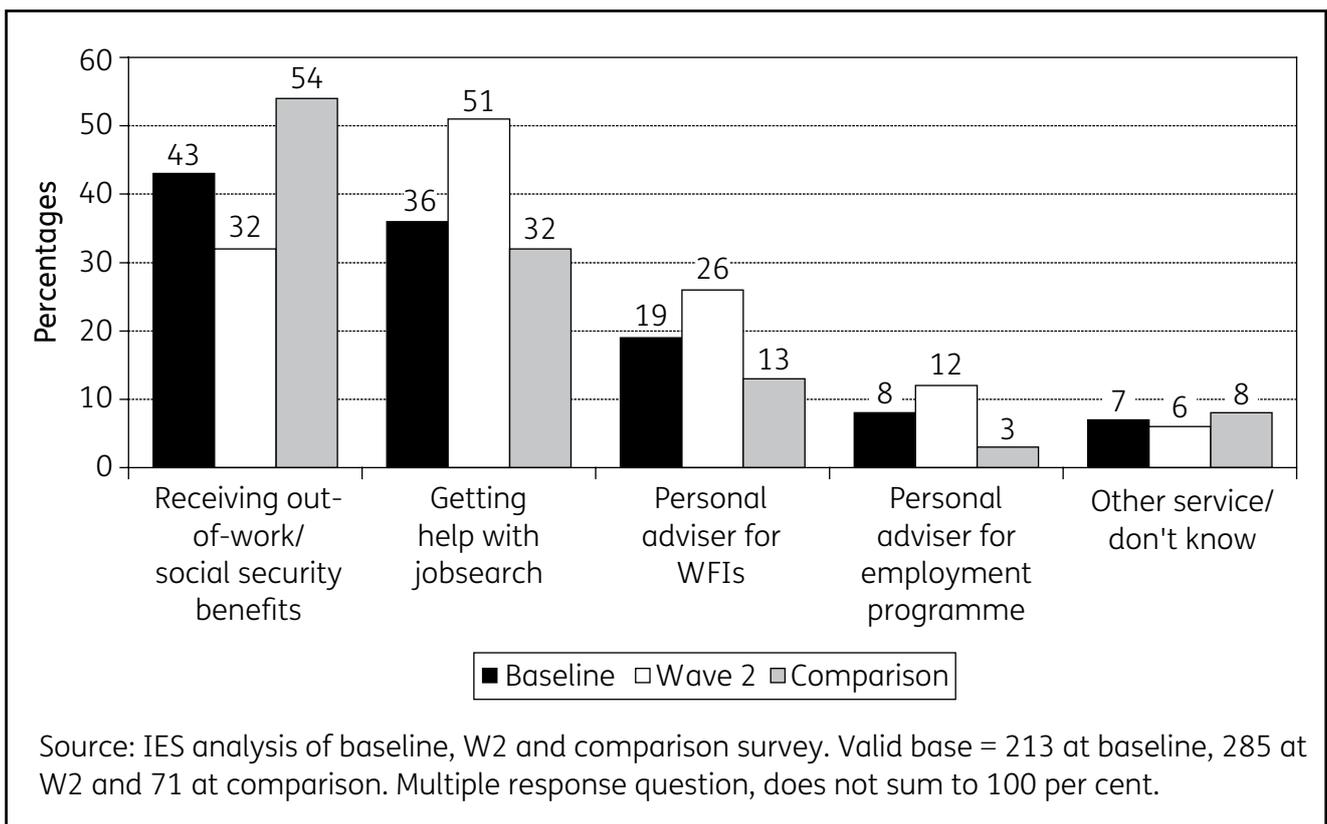


Types of Jobcentre Plus services used

When looking at the use of specific Jobcentre Plus services, it is possible to see that engagement with Jobcentre Plus services became more work-focused over the course of the pilot – ie between the baseline and W2 survey (see Figure A.17). Engagement with Jobcentre Plus services at W2 is also more work-focused than in comparison sites.

The most notable difference between the three surveys relates to the use of Jobcentre Plus for jobsearch, and jobsearch was in fact the most commonly reported reason for using Jobcentre Plus services at W2. Fifty-one per cent of children’s centre users at W2 reported that they used Jobcentre Plus to receive help with jobsearch, compared to 36 per cent at the baseline survey, and 32 per cent at the comparison survey. There was also a greater number of parents seeing a Personal Adviser for work-focused interviews or as part of an employment programme at the W2 survey, compared with the baseline and comparison surveys. The most commonly reported reason for using Jobcentre Plus services in the baseline and comparison surveys was to receive out-of-work/social security benefits. This reinforces evidence of the positive impact of the pilot in engaging parents in more work-focused activity to move them closer to work.

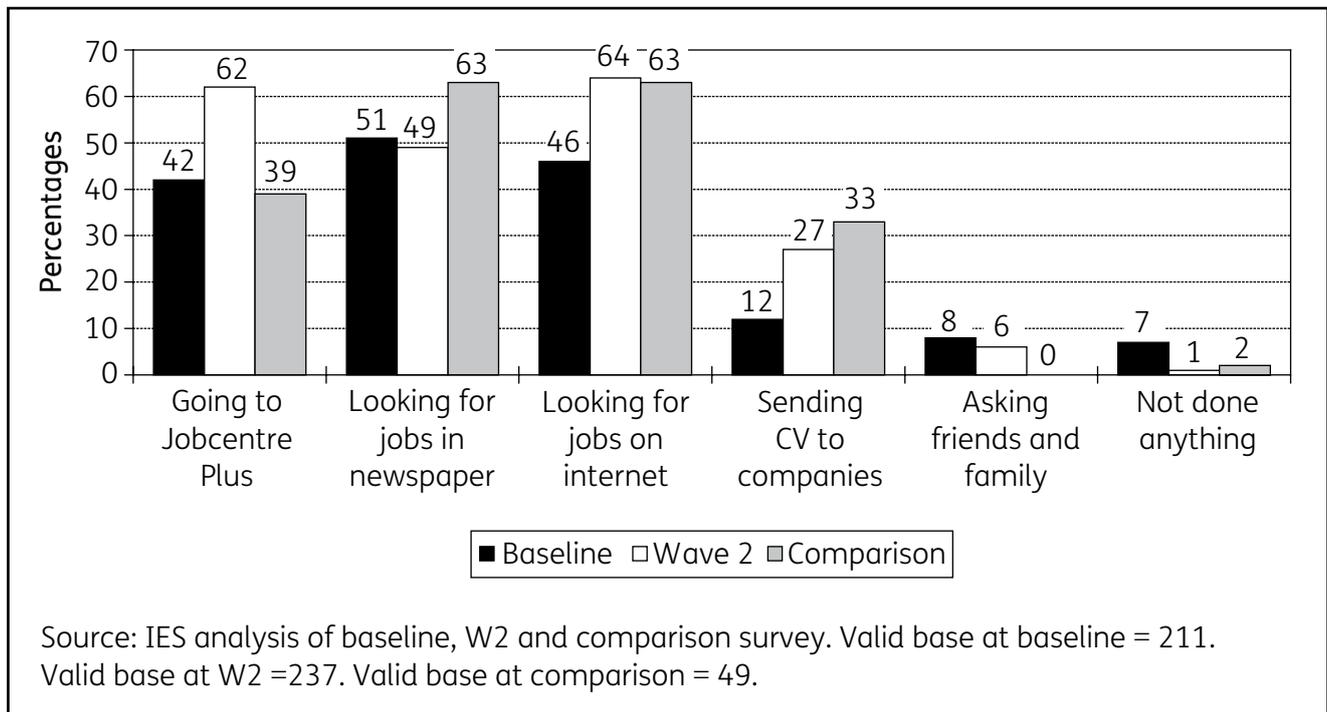
Figure A.17 Types of Jobcentre Plus services currently used (%)



Jobsearch strategies

Among those who said that they were looking for work, there was considerably greater use of Jobcentre Plus as a means of job searching at W2 (62 per cent of respondents), than at either the baseline or comparison surveys (42 per cent and 39 per cent of respondents respectively), suggesting that the pilot had helped to make Jobcentre Plus services more accessible to parents. There was also a large increase between the baseline and W2 in the number of respondents who reported sending their CV to companies (from 12 to 27 per cent) and looking for jobs on the internet (from 46 to 64 per cent), and a decrease in the number who said that they had not done anything to look for work (from seven to one per cent).

Figure A.18 Job searching strategies among those looking for work (%)



Unsurprisingly, there was a greater level of job search activity among those out of work and claiming benefit entitlements for all strategies of jobsearch, with the exception of using the internet, at the baseline and comparison survey.

Figure A.19 Job searching strategies among those looking for work, out of work and claiming benefit entitlements (%)

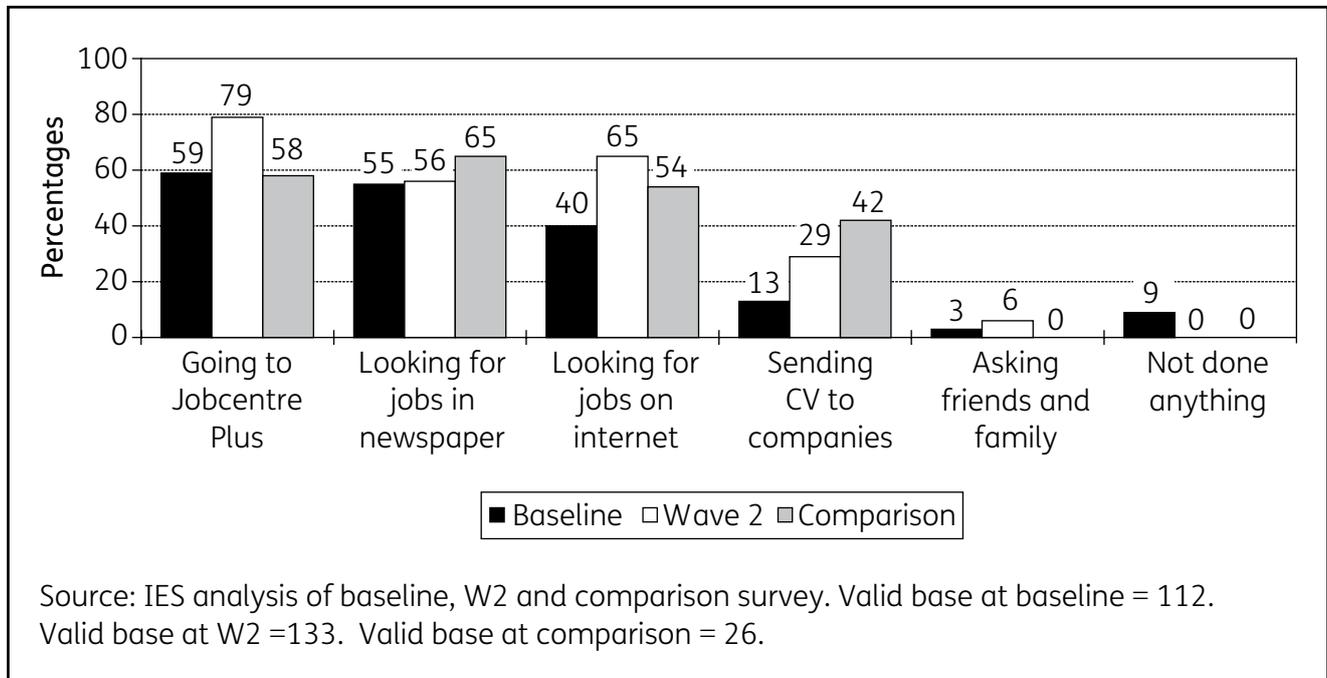
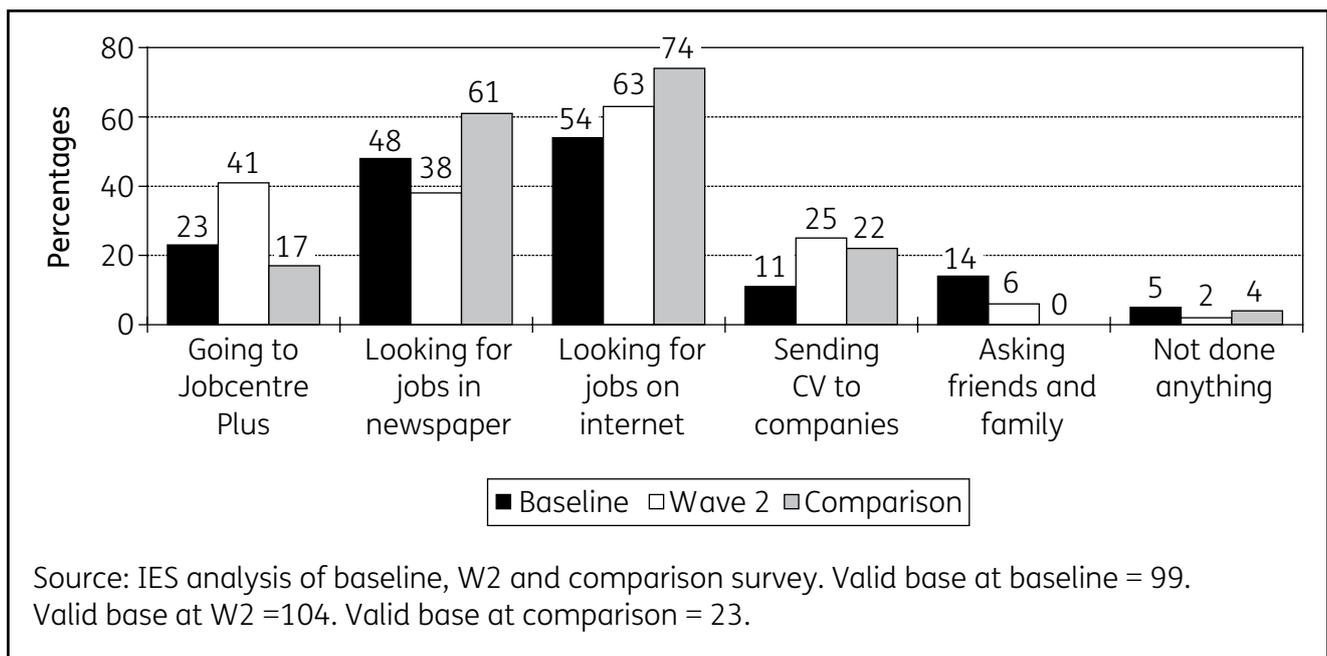


Figure A.20 Job searching strategies among those looking for work, everyone else (%)



Preferred site for Jobcentre Plus services

Preferred site for access

There was a strong preference among parents in all three surveys to access Jobcentre Plus services at children’s centres, rather than the Jobcentre Plus office, and this preference increased between the baseline and W2 surveys from 66 per cent to 77 per cent. Encouragingly, nearly as many comparison children’s centre users reported favouring the children’s centre site as pilot W2 centre users (74 per cent), suggesting a high demand for Jobcentre Plus even in children’s centre sites that had not had any experience of pilot provision.

Figure A.21 Preferred site for Jobcentre Plus services (%)

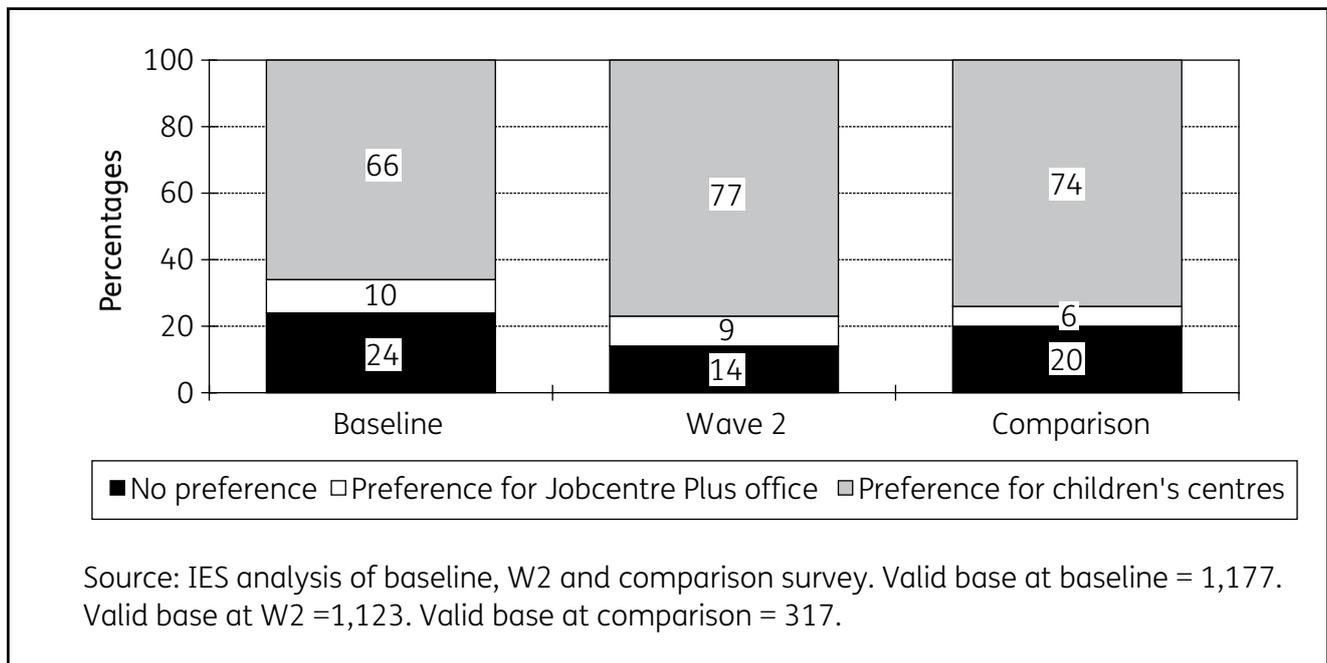
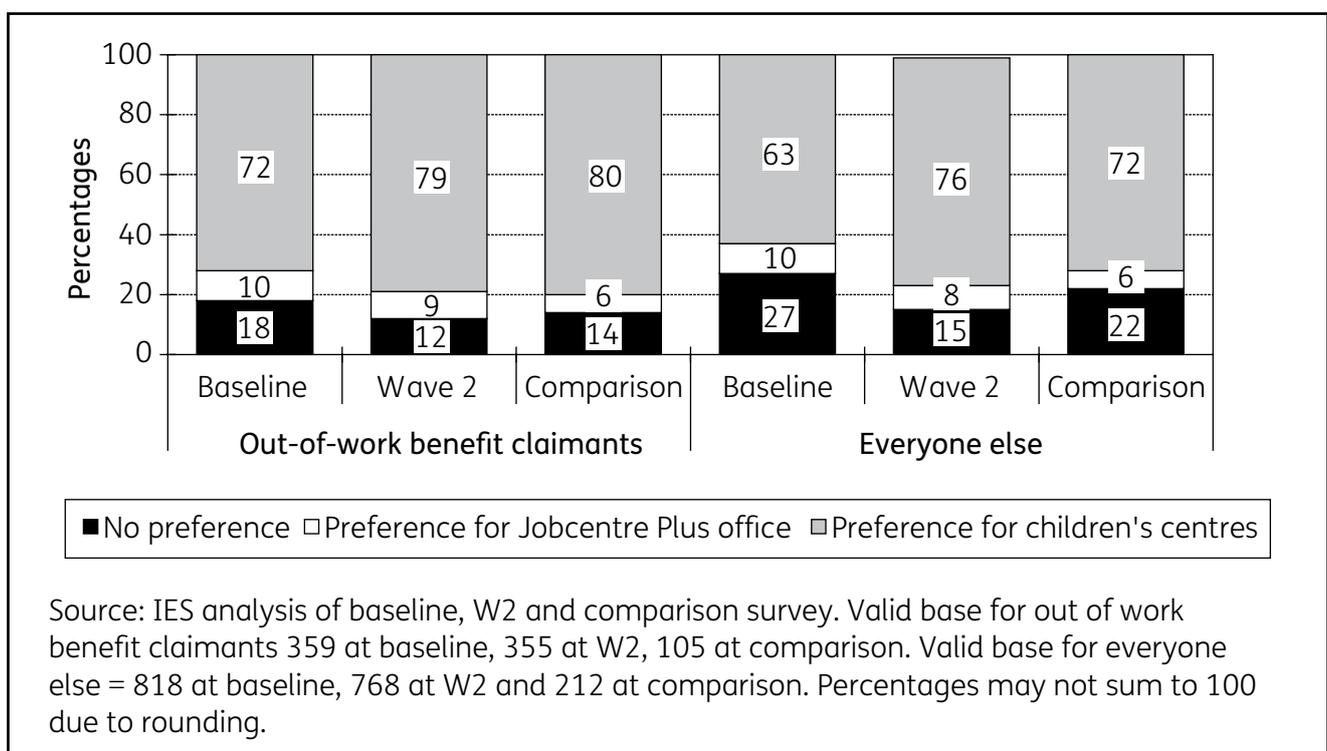


Figure A.22 shows that among centre users who were not claiming benefits, a higher proportion reported no preference for either the children’s centre or Jobcentre Plus office site to access Jobcentre Plus services at the baseline survey (27 per cent) and the comparison survey (22 per cent), when compared with the W2 survey (15 per cent). This difference was not significant among parents claiming out-of-work benefits. This may be because at the baseline and comparison surveys non-benefit claimants had no experience of Jobcentre Plus and so no basis on which to compare, whereas by the W2 survey they may have come into contact with pilot services. This is further evidence to suggest the pilot reached non-benefit claimants, many of whom will be potential second earners.

Figure A.22 Preferred site for Jobcentre Plus services, by work and benefit status (%)

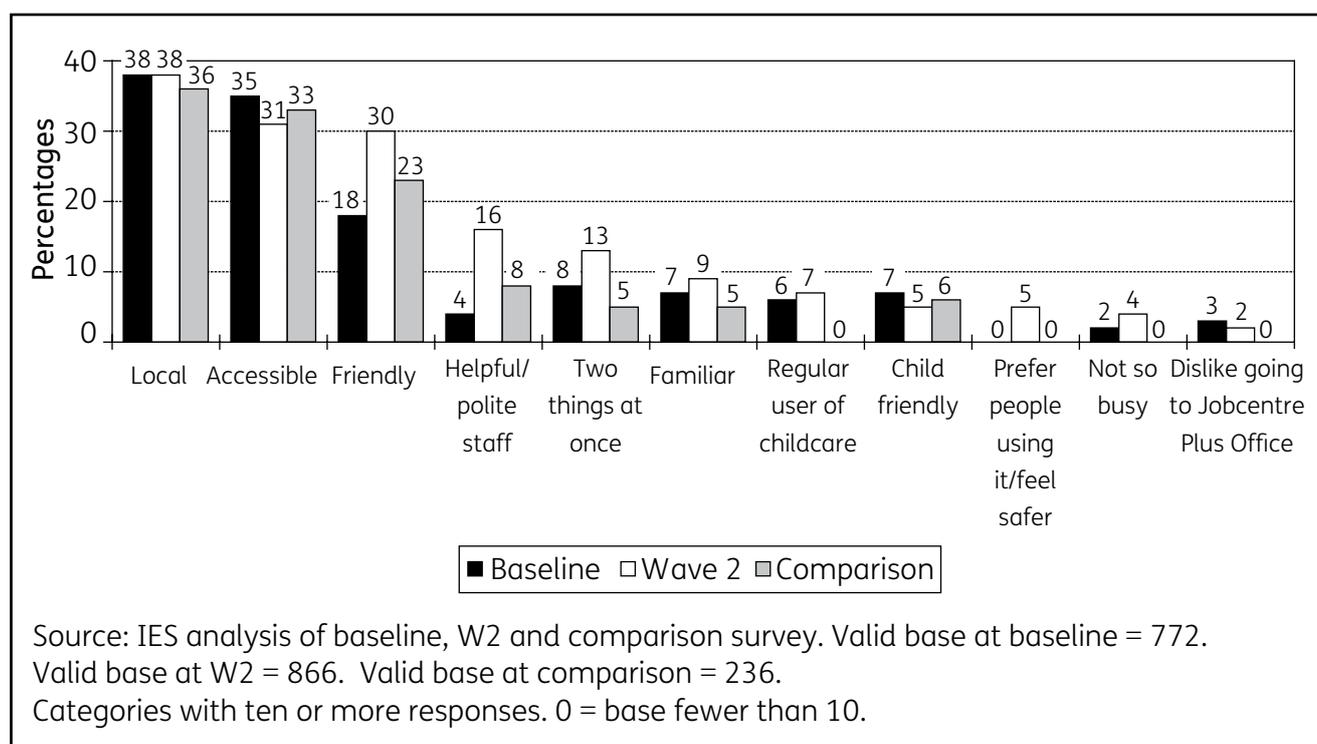


Reasons for preferring children’s centre site to access Jobcentre Plus services

The most commonly mentioned reason parents gave for preferring to access Jobcentre Plus services in their local children’s centre, rather than a Jobcentre Plus office, was because the children’s centre was nearer to their home, and so more convenient and accessible.

Interestingly, by the time of the W2 survey, centre users were also more likely to mention as a reason for their preference that the environment was friendly at the children’s centre, and that staff were helpful and polite, and they felt safer, compared with the baseline and comparison surveys. This reflects the many positive experiences reported by parents in the qualitative research about how approachable and helpful the Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers were. It also reflects the successful integration of the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser which took place in most pilot sites. Parents were also more likely to prefer the children’s centre because it allowed them to ‘do two things at once’ at W2.

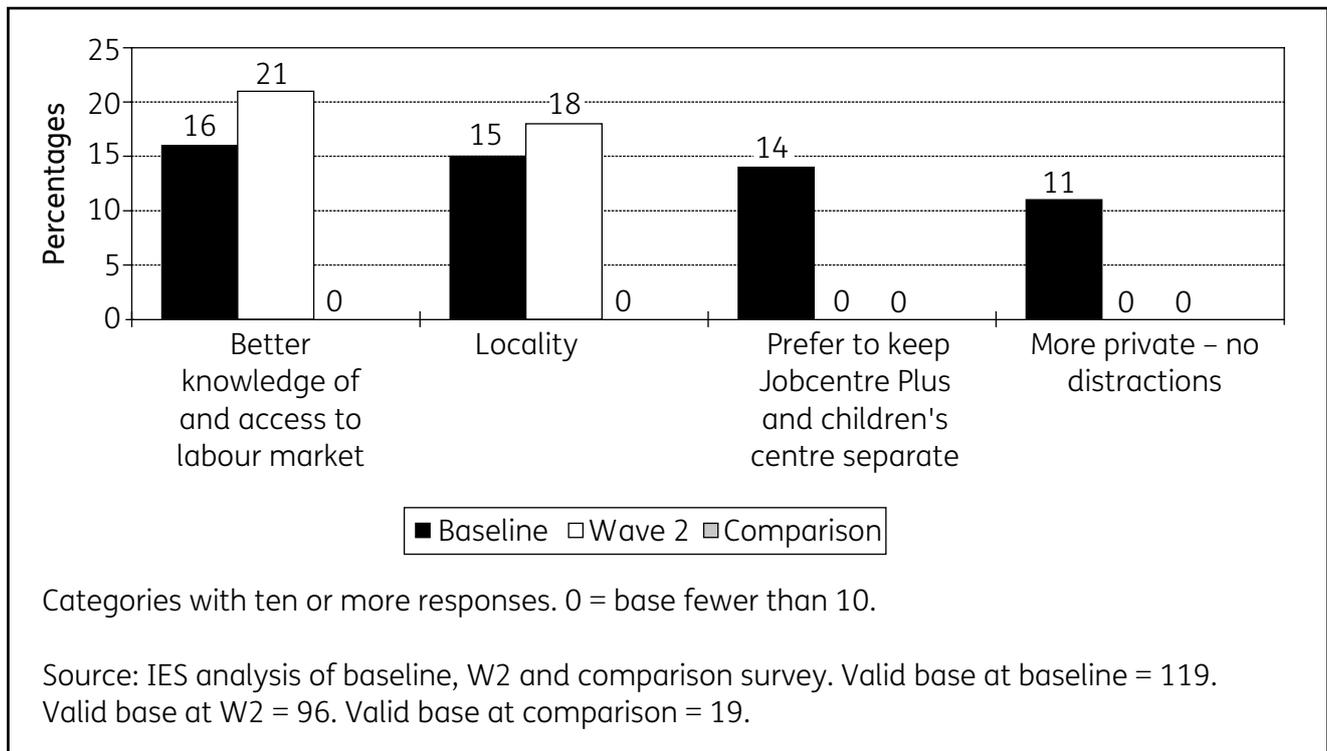
Figure A.23 Reasons for favouring Jobcentre Plus services at children’s centre sites (%)



Reasons for preferring Jobcentre Plus office to access Jobcentre Plus services

Among those who said that they preferred to access Jobcentre Plus services at the Jobcentre Plus office, the most commonly mentioned reason for this was because they thought they could access more jobs, contacts and knowledge of the labour market. Locality was also an important factor. However, in contrast, at W2 parents no longer stated a desire to keep Jobcentre Plus and the children’s centre separate, or the opinion that the Jobcentre Plus office was more private, with fewer distractions, both of which were reasons given at the baseline survey for preferring Jobcentre Plus as a venue.

Figure A.24 Reasons for favouring Jobcentre Plus services at Jobcentre Plus office (%)



This report provides findings from the final stage of the evaluation of the 'work-focused services in children's centres' pilot.

The work-focused services in children's centres pilot was one of a suite of Child Poverty Pilots announced in 2008. The pilot operated in ten local authority areas (30 Sure Start Children's Centres in total) in England, providing work-focused services through a dedicated Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser, as well as activities designed to meet local needs. It ran from January 2009 to March 2011.

The aim of the pilot was to test how children's centres can offer a more effective means of engaging parents in labour market activity, moving them closer to work, and ultimately into employment.

A mixed methods evaluation was put in place to assess the impacts of the pilot and explore experiences and perceptions of its implementation. The evaluation included surveys of centre users, interviews with parents, staff and stakeholders and analysis of DWP administrative data and data collected specifically for the evaluation. Research was also undertaken in a number of non-pilot children's centres by means of comparison.

The evaluation was undertaken by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES).

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