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# Evaluation of the Skills Health Check Diagnostic Tool

August 2009

**ⓘ For information**

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# 1 Executive Summary

1.1    Trials of version 1.1 of the Skills Health Check Diagnostic Tool (SHC tool) began in the West Midlands at the end of September 2008 among new Jobseeker's Allowance claimants. Customers were referred to **nextstep** by Jobcentre Plus advisers for a Skills Health Check as part of the wider Integrated Employment and Skills trials.

1.2    Research was required to evaluate version 1.1 of the SHC tool – a computer-based skills assessment designed to feed into a skills action plan developed by the **nextstep** adviser and customer. The evaluation was designed to provide operation-level actionable feedback on the tool which would feed into the development of future versions of the tool.

1.3    It should be noted that version 1.1 was considered by both the LSC and its designers as a prototype of the tool and was by no means expected to be the 'finished product' at the start of the trials. Known limitations of version 1.1 (prior to this evaluation) included concerns over readability, the appropriateness of developmental suggestions and the lack of integration between the pre-diagnostic and diagnostic sections. In advance of this evaluation being conducted, a second version of the tool was being developed which already addressed some of these concerns.

1.4    **Fieldwork took place in December 2008** and comprised depth interviews with key stakeholders, **nextstep** advisers across the West Midlands and a range of customers (in terms of age, gender and qualification level) that had used the tool.

**Positioning of the tool**

1.5    The evaluation suggests that at this stage of the trials many advisers misunderstood the role and purpose of the SHC tool, seeing it – incorrectly - as a proposed replacement for the Adult Directions tool. As such, it was criticised by most advisers for being a poor tool for generating tailored career suggestions (this stems from the misunderstanding that the job roles listed in the SHC report are suggestions of what the customer could or should do, rather than being illustrations of the application of particular skill areas).

1.6    Given the tool's early stage of development this misunderstanding is possibly due to inappropriate adviser training in the purpose and scope of the tool. More extensive training is needed to assert the tool's position as a means of assessing a customer's generic, transferable work-skills, rather than as questionnaire which generates career suggestions. As well as gaining adviser buy-in to the tool, additional training will support advisers in accurately introducing it to customers and in managing customer expectations of the output.

**Initial reactions**

1.7     Customers tended to be enthusiastic or open-minded about using the tool when it was suggested to them by an adviser. Where the tool was not used during a SHC appointment, this was because the adviser judged it to be inappropriate (either because advisers felt it was not appropriate for those customers who had a firm idea of the type of job they wanted to apply, or those identified as having basic skills needs).

1.8     Most customers and advisers felt that the tool looked professional and 'easy on the eye', albeit a little formal. There were no reported problems with technical functionality or usability. However, some advisers did note that accessibility could be improved for customers with poor eyesight.

**Pre-diagnostic section**

1.9     The customer experience of the pre-diagnostic tool screens was positive or neutral, with almost all feeling comfortable with disclosing the information asked for in this section of tool and giving consent for their SHC results to be shared. There were a couple of customers who assumed the results would be shared with prospective employers.

1.10    However, advisers tended to complain that the pre-diagnostic screens duplicated information they had already collected about the customer (even though only two fields are mandatory advisers tended to complete everything). Some advisers tended to collect all the information in the pre-diagnostic screens, even if this meant a duplication of information, because they were under the misapprehension that this information would be taken into account when the SHC report was produced.

1.11    Advisers do not view the SHC tool as something they would complete for all customers, therefore necessitating them to continue to collect their own customer records. In the future it may be that the SHC tool pre-diagnostic screens can replace these records, or can be linked to a central database allowing them to be pre-populated with customer data.

**The skills diagnostic questions**

1.12    Both advisers and customers were critical of this section, reporting considerable problems with customer comprehension. For many these problems can negatively impact on the whole SHC experience and undermine trust in the results produced by the tool.

1.13    The methodology of having to select a 'most like me' and 'least like me' answer from three options is seen as inappropriate for the customer group by the majority of advisers. Customers tended to reflect this view with around half noting they were frustrated and/or confused to some extent when completing the skills diagnostic.

1.14    Customers often found it de-motivating and frustrating to have to actively say something is 'least like them' or to find they cannot say that two (or indeed three) of the three statements are like them if they are relatively good at all three options. They also struggled with ticking only two boxes when there were three statements, finding this counter-intuitive and worrying that the middle statement was being 'missed out'.

1.15    There were particular issues with the readability of this part of the tool; well over half the 60 statements used in the diagnostic questions were found to be difficult for customers to understand. This was either because the language used was too advanced or because the concepts expressed were too abstract or vague for customers to apply to their own experiences. Advisers reported having to frequently rephrase statements into plain English (e.g. 'conscientious about meeting deadlines') or to provide contextualisation or real-life examples for statements such as 'able to solve problems' or 'able to analyse issues' (and the research found that advisers were not always consistent in their guidance to customers as to how to interpret or answer such statements).

1.16    Furthermore, around a fifth of the total statements (those relating to general attitudes to work or treatment of other people such as 'hardworking' or 'supportive of others') were perceived as being too 'loaded' to answer accurately; customers report feeling pressured to say these statements were 'most like them', thereby undermining the integrity of the results of the tool.

**The Skills Health Check report**

1.17    At an overall level, the majority of customers viewed the report reasonably positively. To some extent, this is because they viewed the overall experience of discussing their skills situation with an adviser positively and it is difficult for them to separate the report itself from the discussion that they had with the adviser about it. Customers were more positive where 'IT skills' appeared in their strengths or areas for development; this skill area tends to dominate discussions of the results as it is more tangible and easier to address than the other skill areas.

1.18    Advisers are much more negative. To some extent this is because they distrust the methodology of the diagnostic section of the tool and hence have limited faith in the report that it produces. There is also a degree to which this is a result of misunderstanding over the aims and objectives of the tool (i.e. the view that the Skills Health Check is an alternative to the Adult Directions tool) and hence criticise the lack of concrete job recommendations arising from the report.

1.19    The ranking of skills competencies that appears at the top of the report is probably the element viewed most positively by customers and advisers alike. The' traffic light' colour coding of the competency areas wass seen to be clear and attractive and the fact that two skills are highlighted as relative strengths for everyone wass seen as motivational (although some

advisers have concerns that customers do not realise that these strengths are relative leading to unrealistic conclusions about the skills they possess relative to the workforce as a whole).

1.20 The example job roles used to help define the competency areas were being misunderstood by both customers and advisers. Both groups were interpreting these as recommended job roles for the individual (rather than a mechanism to aid understanding of the individual competency areas referred to), leading advisers to criticise the limited range of job roles used and the fact that they do not take into account the customer's educational and situational details.

1.21 The developmental suggestions part of the report (which provides tips on ways of improving skills in the two areas identified as relative weakness) was viewed least positively. Both customers and advisers found these suggestions vague and/or patronising (particularly the recommendation to 'widen social circle').

**Recommendations**

1.22 As already discussed, some of the adviser criticism of the tool stems from a fundamental misunderstanding of its purpose and scope. As such, we would recommend that further training is given to **nextstep** advisers to ensure clarity concerning the purpose of the SHC tool and consistency in its use; particular focussing on its role as an assessment of a customer's strengths and areas for development in terms of transferable work-skills, and stressing that it is not intended to be used as a career suggestions tool. This would go some way to meeting some of the serious concerns advisers have about the SHC tool. However, not all the reported shortcomings of the tool are explained by incomplete adviser training, and recommended amendments or additions to version 1.1 arising from this evaluation are detailed below.

1.23 Some relatively small amendments could be made to the pre-diagnostic screens in response to adviser feedback, such as adding email address and middle name fields to personal details page; collecting all qualifications / licences held, not just the highest level; and replacing several of the example numeracy tasks on Skills for Life page (which are currently seen as irrelevant for most customers).

1.24 It would also be advisable to stress on the customer consent page that results of the SHC assessment are not shared with prospective employers.

1.25 We would strongly recommend making some changes to the methodology of asking the diagnostic questions. Similar data to the 'most like me' and 'least like me' approach could be obtained in a way that customers would be more comfortable with by:

> ➢ asking customers to click on the statement that is most like them;

➢ that statement is then removed, and the customer is instructed to and click on the option that is most like them out of the remaining two statements.

1.26 This approach has the benefit of allowing customers to say that two statements are 'most like them' which would be a much more positive experience. They also would not need to say that a desirable characteristic was explicitly 'least like them' whilst still capturing data relating to which characteristic the customers considers least like them. This approach would also simplify the process of answering on screen for those customers with poor IT skills (as currently customers need to select from two columns of three boxes which confuses some).

1.27 Alternatively, a third 'dummy' tick box could be added for customers to at least be able to select their 'middle' option which would be a more intuitive experience for many.

1.28 In terms of the diagnostic questions, we would suggest that:

➢ The readability level of the questions is re-visited and an assessment of reading age conducted, including giving consideration to phrasing all questions in the first person to aid comprehension;

➢ Wherever possible, abstract concepts are avoided. Where they are necessary adding a 'help' button next to the statement which brings up a list of real-life examples covering both work and non-work scenarios may help.

➢ Consideration is given to removing 'IT skills' from the list of skill areas assessed within the diagnostic section (or at least removing it from the ranking of competency areas). Advisers feel that it is possible to assess an IT skills need more quickly with more direct questioning, it tends to dominate the discussion of the SHC results and the prevalence of IT-related skills in the diagnostic questions can be off-putting for those who have already been identified as having poor IT skills. However, if it is necessary to keep it within the tool it could be addressed on a different screen (similar to the format of the 'Skills for Life' screen) and still incorporated into the action plan once the other skill areas have been given due consideration.

1.29 In terms of the report output, we would suggest:

➢ Removing the example job roles altogether and instead building on existing examples of how a particular competency area applies to a variety of workplaces. This might help to reduce confusion over the role of the SHC tool as it would be clearer that it was not intended an alternative to Adult Directions.

➢ Making the development tips more tangible and avoiding personal or social development suggestions that run the risk of alienating customers. Advisers would perhaps also benefit from guidance on courses, websites and other materials that might help with development

in every *skill* area (at the moment the tendency is to focus on IT skills because it is the area seen to be most 'actionable').

➢ Ensuring that the print out of the report retains the same formatting as the online version.

# 2 Introduction and methodology

2.1     The Skills Health Check Diagnostic Tool (SHC tool) is a new computer-based skills assessment used as part of the Skills Health Check process. Trials of the SHC tool began in the West Midlands at the end of September 2008, and form part of the wider Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) trials.

2.2     The first version (version 1.1) of the tool was trialled among new Jobseeker's Allowance claimants; (having been referred to **nextstep** by Jobcentre Plus (JCP)) customers are taken through the SHC tool by a **nextstep** adviser. The report produced by the SHC tool is used to develop an action plan which is taken back to JCP.

2.3     Ultimately, the vision is that the SHC tool will be available nationally in 2010 as a core part of the adult advancement and careers service offer, and will be accessible to all as an unmediated, online tool.

2.4     Research was required to evaluate version 1.1 of the SHC tool, with the scope of the evaluation limited to the computer-based tool itself (rather than the wider IES process).

2.5     More specifically, the evaluation sought to provide operation-level actionable feedback on:

➢ User (customer and adviser) views on efficacy, functionality and usability of the tool;

➢ The suitability of the format, language and content of the tool for the customer group;

➢ Views on the value of the SHC report;

➢ The extent to which customers feel the tool helped them;

➢ The extent to which the tool is appropriate for unmediated use.

2.6     Findings from this research will feed into the development of future versions of the tool.

**Methodology**

2.7     A qualitative research methodology was employed. The two main components to this research (which were conducted simultaneously) were:

➢ 24 face-to-face interviews with **nextstep** advisers who had experience of using the SHC tool;

➢ 28 face-to-face interviews with JCP/**nextstep** customers who had completed a SHC.

2.8    Further to this, four observations of the SHC tool being used 'live' were conducted. Prior to these observations an interview was conducted with the **nextstep** adviser, and following the observation, the customer was also given the opportunity to participate in a face-to-face interview (and all accepted).

2.9    **All interviews took place in the West Midlands in December 2008**.

2.10   A database of **nextstep** advisers in the West Midlands and a database of customers that had taken part in a SHC since trials began at the end of September 2008 were provided by **nextstep**. Before customer details were passed on to IFF Research, an opt-out exercise was conducted whereby customers were sent a letter inviting them to opt-out of being contacted in connection with the research.

2.11   Additionally, two depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders (involved in the design or implementing of the SHC tool and process) over the telephone.

*Sample profile – **nextstep** advisers*

2.12   All advisers interviewed had used the SHC tool with at least 2 customers. Frequency of use ranged from 2 up to 60 customers; on average advisers had used the SHC tool with around 15 customers.

2.13   Advisers had used the tool with a range of customers in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and qualification level (although the majority of the customers they had used the tool with had been qualified to Level 2 or below).

2.14   The table below shows the number of achieved adviser interviews by:

   ➤ Amount of times they had used the tool with a customer;

   ➤ Sub-region.

**Table 2.1: Adviser interviews achieved:**

| Amount of times used SHC | Achieved interviews | Sub-region | Achieved interviews |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2-5 | 6 | Cov & Warks | 4 |
| 6-10 | 4 | Hereford & Worcester | 6 |
| 11-20 | 8 | Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin | 2 |
| 21-30 | 4 | Bhm & Solihull | 4 |
| More than 30 | 2 | Black Country | 4 |
|  |  | Staffordshire | 4 |

2.15 Reflecting the profile of the customer group, the majority of respondents were male. A range of age groups were represented.

2.16 Most customers that participated in the research had Level 2 or below qualifications, with a notable proportion having no formal qualifications at all. A handful of customers with Level 3 or above qualifications were included within the research.

2.17 Table 2.2 shows the profile of customer interviews achieved.

**Table 2.2: Customer interviews achieved:**

| Gender | Achieved interviews | Qual level | Achieved interviews |
|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 20 | No qualifications | 9 |
| Female | 8 | Level 1 | 7 |
| | | Level 2 | 7 |
| **Age** | | Level 3 | 2 |
| 16-24 | 4 | Level 4 or higher | 3 |
| 25-34 | 8 | | |
| 35-54 | 12 | | |
| 55+ | 4 | | |

**Report Structure**

2.18 The remainder of this report is organised into 5 further chapters (Chapters 3-7).

2.19 Chapter 3 provides some context for the evaluation, discussing the process of customers and advisers completing the tool.

2.20 Chapters 4 and 5 then go on to explore customer and adviser experience of, and views on, the two key elements of the SHC tool, the screens leading up to the diagnostic questions (Chapter 4) and the diagnostic questions themselves (Chapter 5).

2.21 Chapter 6 then covers the report that is produced by the SHC tool on completion of the diagnostic tool, considering its usefulness for customers and advisers. In Chapter 7 we present some recommendations for the development of the tool based on this evaluation.

2.22 Throughout the report we make use of quotes from interviews to demonstrate the views and attitudes of respondents.

# 3 The Skills Health Check Tool process

3.1     This chapter discusses how the process of completing the SHC tool is working in the field, exploring areas such as:

- Occasions when advisers used the SHC tool with customers (and when they did not);

- Whether the SHC tool is completed during the first or second appointment with the **nextstep** adviser;

- Whether the adviser or the customer is actually inputting the answers to the SHC tool / the level of support given to customers;

- The length of time taken to complete the SHC tool;

- Customer and adviser views of the look and feel of the SHC tool.

**Chapter summary:**

➢ On the whole, customers were enthusiastic or open-minded about using the tool when it was suggested to them by an adviser.

➢ It was extremely rare that customers refused to complete the tool; in cases where customers had a SHC appointment but did not use the SHC tool this was due to advisers judging it to be inappropriate.

➢ Advisers felt the tool was not appropriate for those customers who had a firm idea of the type of job they wanted to apply, or those identified as having basic skills needs.

➢ When completing the SHC tool advisers usually enter information into the pre-diagnostic section screens before handing control over to the customers to complete the diagnostic questions themselves (though in a minority of cases the adviser would enter answers to the diagnostic questions if a customer was uncomfortable with using a computer or with the SHC tool in general).

➢ For the most part, the SHC tool was completed in the first meeting with a *nextstep* adviser, although some advisers preferred to leave the diagnostic questions and the report (or sometimes just the discussion of the report) for a second appointment.

➢ The length of time taken to complete the SHC tool varied according customer qualification level and IT skills; ranging from 20 minutes (for customers with a Level 3 or above qualification) to around 45 minutes for customers with a Level 2 or below qualification).

➢ The tool was felt to be easy to navigate by advisers, and no problems with technical functionality or usability were reported.

**Occasions when advisers used the SHC tool with customers**

3.2    The advisers that participated in the research reported that customers rarely refused to take the SHC. In fact, most customers either felt enthusiastic about the prospect of completing the SHC or else they at least were open-minded when it was suggested by their adviser.

3.3    Where a customer referred to **nextstep** for a SHC did not complete the SHC tool, this was almost always due to the adviser judging it was inappropriate or unnecessary. Sometimes this decision was made as the adviser had identified basic skills needs during their meeting with the customer (although strictly speaking these customers should not have been referred to **nextstep** by JCP advisers, it was reported that this did happened on occasion). On other occasions this was because the customer had a clear idea of the type of job or career they wanted, and some advisers felt the SHC was redundant in these instances.

3.4    This latter point - that some advisers felt the SHC tool was unnecessary when the customer already knew what type of job they wanted - is illuminating. Many advisers view the SHC tool as a career suggestions tool (i.e. an alternative to tools such as Adult Directions) rather than a tool which assesses the current transferable skills of a customer (which is equally useful whether or not the customer knows which industry or role they would like to work in). This lack of clarity among advisers on the role and positioning of the tool is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

**Whether the SHC tool was completed during the first or second appointment**

3.5    Advisers varied in their approach as to when the SHC tool was completed with customers.

3.6    In many cases all or most of the SHC tool was completed during the first meeting with customers. In this first session, prior to completing the SHC tool, advisers and customers usually had a general discussion, which might include assessing which qualifications customers held, what sort of work experience they had and whether they had a job role or any training in mind. If advisers felt it was appropriate to use the SHC, all or some of it was completed during the first session. This could mean:

> ➢ The customer completed the SHC up to the diagnostic questions in the first session and then completed the rest in the second session;

> ➢ The customer completed the entire SHC tool during the first session then talked through the report and developed an action plan in the second session.

3.7    However, some advisers felt that during the first session they needed to concentrate on building a rapport with customers and/or there was not enough time to collect the necessary information *and* use the SHC tool during the first session. In these cases the entire SHC was completed during the second session.

**Who inputted the answers / level of support given to customers**

3.8 For the most part, advisers entered customer information into the screens leading up to the diagnostic questions.

> ➤ This could be a time-saving measure;

> ➤ Advisers would have collected much of this information earlier in the meeting (or at the previous appointment);

> ➤ However some customers (typically those who had Level 3 or above qualifications) completed the pre-diagnostic questions screens themselves (with advisers ready to answer any queries that arose).

3.9 Most customers then completed the diagnostic questions themselves, although advisers gave varying levels of support in terms of explaining certain words customers did not understand or giving real-life examples to aid customer comprehension. In a minority of cases advisers reported entering the answers on behalf of customers who were very uncomfortable with using a computer.

3.10 Adviser support in completing the SHC tool was welcomed by the vast majority of customers. Only a handful of customers said they would have preferred to complete the SHC tool without an adviser present.

3.11 Of the majority that welcomed the support of the adviser:

> ➤ Around half felt that they could have completed the SHC tool on their own but preferred doing it with an adviser present;

> ➤ Whereas the other half felt that they would not have been able to complete it without an adviser present (either because of having low IT skills or because of difficulties encountered with the language and content of the SHC tool).

*"I feel confident that I could have done it anyway, but I'd have probably got less out of it. The adviser was really good at communicating with me, she made everything seem easy. She made me feel at ease. I think it would have been harder [without her] and you wouldn't have been able to understand some things that she explained along the way"*

**Customer: male, 60, Level 1 qualification**

*"I don't think I'd have finished it or even done it [without an adviser present] to be honest. I wouldn't have bothered on my own"*

**Customer: male, 42, Level 2 qualification**

**Time taken**

3.12    The time taken to complete the SHC tool varied according to the qualification level of customers; those with lower qualification levels generally needed more support in completing the skills diagnostic section (the extent and nature of this support is discussed in detail in Chapter 5). The level of a customer's  IT skills also impacted on how long it took to complete the SHC tool, with those with lower IT skills needing additional support completing the diagnostic section.

3.13    For customers with above average IT skills and a Level 3 or above qualification it could take as little as 20 minutes to complete the SHC. These customers may have completed the pre-diagnostic screens themselves and would have needed minimal support in completing the skills diagnostic section.

3.14    Completing the SHC tool with Level 2 customers might take around 30-40 minutes. These customers might need a greater degree of support in completing the diagnostic section of the tool (possibly including being given practical examples of statements and/or explanations of some language used).

3.15    Completing the tool with customers with no qualifications or a Level 1 qualification and/or those with very poor IT skills might take between 45 minutes and an hour. These customers would need a much greater level of support in completing the diagnostic tool section of the SHC; typically to the extent where advisers would need to read (or paraphrase) each statement to the customer and then provide practical examples of the statement.

**Views on look and feel of the SHC Tool**

3.16    The vast majority of customers and advisers felt that the SHC tool had been attractively designed. The SHC tool was felt to look professional and 'easy on the eye', albeit a little formal.

*"It was very easy on the eye, and easy to take in … there was nothing overwhelming about it. It wasn't messy"*

**Customer: male, 26, Level 4 qualification**

*"I suppose quite formal when you were doing it … that was okay but it could have done with, not necessarily [more] colour, but maybe different fonts…it did look quite important"*

**Customer: female, 22, Level 2 qualification**

3.17    A handful of improvements were suggested:

- ➢ Increasing the size of the font to make the screens easier to read for those with poorer vision;

- ➢ De-clutter some screens (for instance the Situational Details screen and the Skills for Life screen) as these might be too 'busy' and confusing for those who were did not use computers frequently;

- ➢ Replace the photo shown throughout the SHC with a photo of a person looking more cheerful / optimistic.

# 4 The pre-diagnostic section

4.1 Prior to customers completing the skills diagnostic questions which form the core element of the SHC tool, a number of screens are displayed which introduce the SHC tool and collect information about the customer. This 'pre-diagnostic section' also includes a screen which identifies whether a customer has basic literacy or numeracy issues, and links to tests to assess these if deemed necessary. The pre-diagnostic section comprises the following screens:

- Welcome screen;

- Customer Consent screen;

- Personal Details screen;

- Educational Details screen;

- Situational Details screen;

- Skills for Life screen.

4.2 This section also features, where basic skills needs are identified, access via hyperlink to literacy and numeracy tests on the Skills for Life website. It is important to note that these tests are not an integral part of the SHC tool.

4.3 This chapter explores customer and adviser views on the content, relevance and ease of use of each of these screens. It also considers the adviser view on the role of this section of the tool as a whole.

**Chapter summary:**

➢ Customers generally had a positive or neutral experience of the pre-diagnostic section; almost all felt comfortable with disclosing the information asked for in this section of tool.

➢ Customers did not have any issues giving consent for the information collected to be shared, although there is some suggestion that a minority of customers assumed the results of the SHC would be shared with prospective employers or training providers (but were still happy to give consent).

➢ However, advisers question the need for this section of the tool, viewing it as lengthy and burdensome (as much of this information will have already been collected by them).

➢ Even though only two fields in the pre-diagnostic section (in the Personal Details screen) are mandatory, advisers tended to fill in the whole pre-diagnostic section (despite it often replicating information they already held about a customer) – sometimes this was because advisers were under the misapprehension that this information would be taken into account in the SHC report.

➢ Advisers do not currently view the SHC tool as something they would complete for all customers, therefore necessitating them to continue to collect their own customer records. In the future it may be that the SHC tool pre-diagnostic screens can replace these records, or can be linked to a central database allowing them to be pre-populated with customer data.

➢ These concerns about the need for the pre-diagnostic section per se notwithstanding, advisers did have some suggestions for additional fields at these screens.

**Role of the pre-diagnostic section**

4.4     Advisers tended to question the value of the pre-diagnostic section of the tool, seeing it as adding unnecessarily to their workload as typically they would already have collected this information about customers earlier in the appointment or at a previous appointment. They generally saw this section as taking up valuable time in the short appointment they have with customers.

*"It would be easier if this could be pre-populated by the Jobcentre."*

**Adviser: 2 SHCs**

4.5     Some of this discontent arose due to advisers misunderstanding the intended role of this section of the tool.

4.6     It is currently not the case that the information collected in the pre-diagnostic screens is fed into the report produced by the SHC tool - only answers collected in the diagnostic section are used to generate the SHC report. However, the research found that some advisers were under the misapprehension that data from the pre-diagnostic section was supposed to be taken into account by the SHC report. Advisers therefore felt they needed to complete all the fields in this section in order to provide the SHC programme with as much information as possible.

4.7     Irrespective of whether advisers were *expecting* this information to be used in the SHC report, they were very critical of the fact that this does not currently happen. They felt that since information on qualification level and whether or not a customer holds a driving licence is collected by the programme it should be used to filter example job roles for customers (and some reported feeling embarrassed having to explain to customers that this was not the case).

4.8     Currently, only two fields in the pre-diagnostic section are mandatory (surname and first line of the address). As discussed above, despite this, advisers tended to complete all the fields, either because they thought this would be taken into account by the programme when compiling the report, or because they thought this was what was required of them.

4.9     As the pre-diagnostic screen information does not feed into the SHC report, instructing advisers to only complete the two mandatory fields before proceeding to the diagnostic questions (if they have already collected educational and situational information about customers) would meet these concerns about the length and burden.

4.10    The eventual aim regarding collecting customer data is for JCP/**nextstep** data collection systems and databases to be merged. Potentially, at this stage some or all of the pre-diagnostic section could be pre-populated, using the Unique Learner Number (ULN) to link customers completing the SHC to existing records.

**Welcome Screen**

4.11　The welcome screen (Figure 4.1) was thought to be fine by the vast majority of customers or advisers.

**Figure 4.1: Welcome screen**
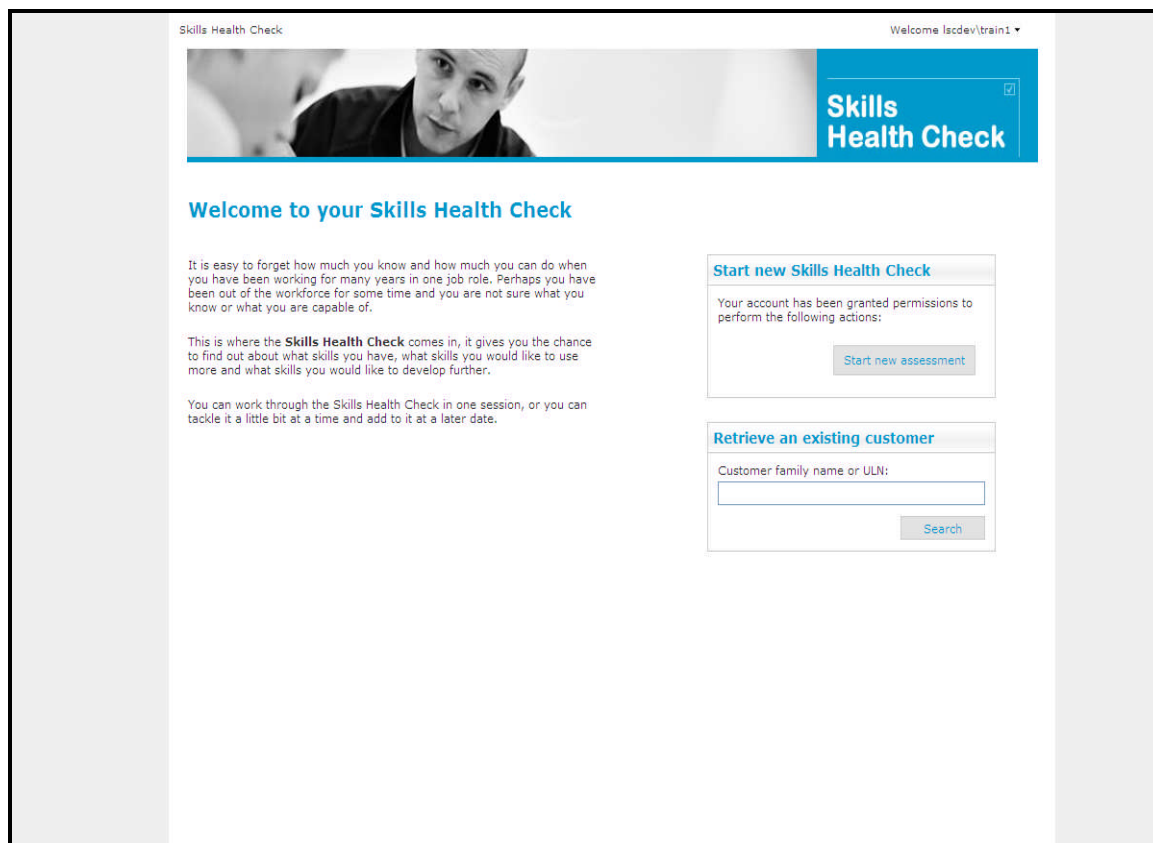


4.12　This screen was not generally well remembered by customers because advisers either paraphrased the information on the screen or skipped it entirely. Advisers stated that they would already have explained the aim of the SHC and what completing it would entail to customers before they got to the welcome screen. That said, neither advisers nor customers thought this repetition was a problem, and customers who could remember the screen were generally positive.

*"I thought it was clear and concise. She read this and also summarised… I didn't have any queries."*

**Customer: male, 31, Level 3 qualification**

*"It says what we want to achieve, which is positive – a good thing."*

**Adviser: 15 SHCs**

**Customer Consent Screen**

4.13    The customer consent screen (Figure 4.2) – which asks for customer permission to share the information given in the SHC with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), JCP and identified training providers - was seen as unproblematic by customers and advisers.

**Figure 4.2: Customer consent screen**



4.14    The vast majority of customers did not feel anxious about data protection issues, and in almost all cases consent was given for information to be passed on.

*"Normally when that option comes up online I say no; but, because it was the Jobcentre I felt a bit more secure."*

**Customer: male, 26, Level 4 qualification**

*"I think you'd have to be someone who lived in the Victorian Ages not to be aware of the Data Protection Act…I wasn't bothered. I just wanted to fill it in to make me more aware, or to get a job."*

*"I'd rather be asked than not and I was fine to let people see my answers."*

**Customer: male, 34, no qualifications**

4.15   However it should be noted that on a couple of occasions (in both cases with customers with low or no qualifications) customers had assumed or misunderstood that consenting to data sharing would lead to their SHC results being shared with potential employers (interestingly these customers had still consented for their information to be shared). It may be useful to further emphasise who SHC data will and will not be shared with on this screen to ensure that customers are as truthful as possible when completing the diagnostic questions.

*"She said it would help go towards employers."*

**Customer: male, 19, no qualifications**

4.16   Advisers interviewed usually paraphrased the information in the data protection box. They felt that the data protection section was too long and that reading it out verbatim might cause customers to disengage at an early stage of the SHC.

*"No, I do tend to paraphrase it. The problem is that the client will see an awful lot of forms whilst at the Jobcentre, and so when I get them to read this their eyes just tend to glaze over and I don't think they read it."*

**Adviser: 2 SHCs**

4.17   A handful of customers could not remember whether they had given their consent, and one customer said they definitely had not been asked about this. One possible reason for this is that a few advisers – across different sub-regions - felt this section was unnecessary to ask customers as they would already have signed data sharing / protection forms at JCP. The advisers that said this tended to be those that had used the tool more than 20 times.

**Personal Details Screen**

4.18    The screen which collects the customer's general details and address details is shown in Figure 4.3.

### Figure 4.3: Personal Details screen



4.19    Most customers did not have any reservations about this screen

*"This is all information that they give to the Jobcentre anyway, so they are OK about this."*

**Adviser: 10 SHCs**

4.20    Normally, advisers and customers read this screen together (or advisers read the screen to customers) and then advisers entered the information on behalf of customers.

*"I fill it out for them as I already have their details from a separate form."*

**Adviser: 15 SHCs**

4.21 Although on balance advisers questioned the value of collecting this information per se (as discussed earlier in this chapter), some advisers did make a few small suggestions for *additions* to the Personal Details screen:

➤ Adding a field for email address;

➤ Adding a field for middle name (this is often a distinguishing part of the name for ethnic minorities).

**Educational Details Screen**

4.22 This screen (Figure 4.4) collects the highest qualification level of customers (although an open text box is also provided to note any additional educational details that are considered relevant).

**Figure 4.4: Educational details screen**



4.23 The screen was felt to be straightforward by the majority of advisers as calculating customer qualification level is something they routinely do as part of their job (and most had already discussed qualifications with the customer by the time they got to this part of the tool).

4.24    Problems mentioned as occurring relatively infrequently were:

> Occasional difficulties assigning a qualification level for older customers who left school a number of years ago and can't remember the grades they achieved;

> Problems with classifying customers who have worked in a trade for a number of years (and are therefore highly experienced in that area), but who have general numeracy and/or literacy problems.

4.25    Advisers suggested that the following improvements could be made to this screen:

> Ask customers to list *all* qualifications held, rather than just the *highest* qualification;

> Add a field to collect which licences (e.g. forklift truck licence) are held.

4.26    For both the points above, while this information can currently be collected in the additional information box, advisers felt it would be motivational to some customers to be explicitly asked about these things.

*"Could give the opportunity to show all the qualifications someone had got, because they may have really good GCSE's that they want to shout about."*

**Adviser: 2 SHCs**

*"Some people are very proud of things like forklift licences etc. This could be added."*

**Adviser: 2 SHCs**

4.27    Some advisers thought it would be useful to add a function which could calculate the equivalent qualification level of international qualifications (a few advisers reported that a number of their customers are from outside the UK).

4.28    Most advisers were in agreement that it would be preferable if the qualification level collected at this screen was taken into account when producing the SHC report:

*"If I put in that someone had a Masters degree in Research that won't be reflected in any of the conclusions at the end. The conclusions seem to be based purely on the second part and don't take into account these qualifications."*

**Adviser: 20 SHCs**

### Situational Details Screen

4.29    This screen collects situational and employment details about a customer, such as any caring responsibilities or health issues they may have, their access to transport and previous work history (Figure 4.5).

**Figure 4.5: Example Situational details screen**



4.30    Customers were generally comfortable with this screen. Some felt that the questions were not really relevant to them, but were happy enough to be asked them.

4.31    Opinion was divided among advisers about the usefulness of the screen. Some felt that this was a useful way to identify barriers or problems customers might have (especially as they might not spontaneously want to discuss problems):

*"It identifies what the barriers are, whether there are any issues because we like to give realistic advice and support."*

**Adviser: 25 SHCs**

4.32    However, other advisers felt that, again, this screen duplicated information they would already have collected.

4.33    A handful of advisers queried whether a question on criminal record should be included in this section (as having a criminal record would impact on the type of work customers would be able to apply for).

**Skills for Life Screen**

4.34    This screen is intended to identify whether a customer has any literacy, numeracy or English language problems (those that do have these problems should be referred to appropriate training at this point rather than progressing to the skills diagnostic section of the tool).

**Figure 4.5: Skills for Life screen**
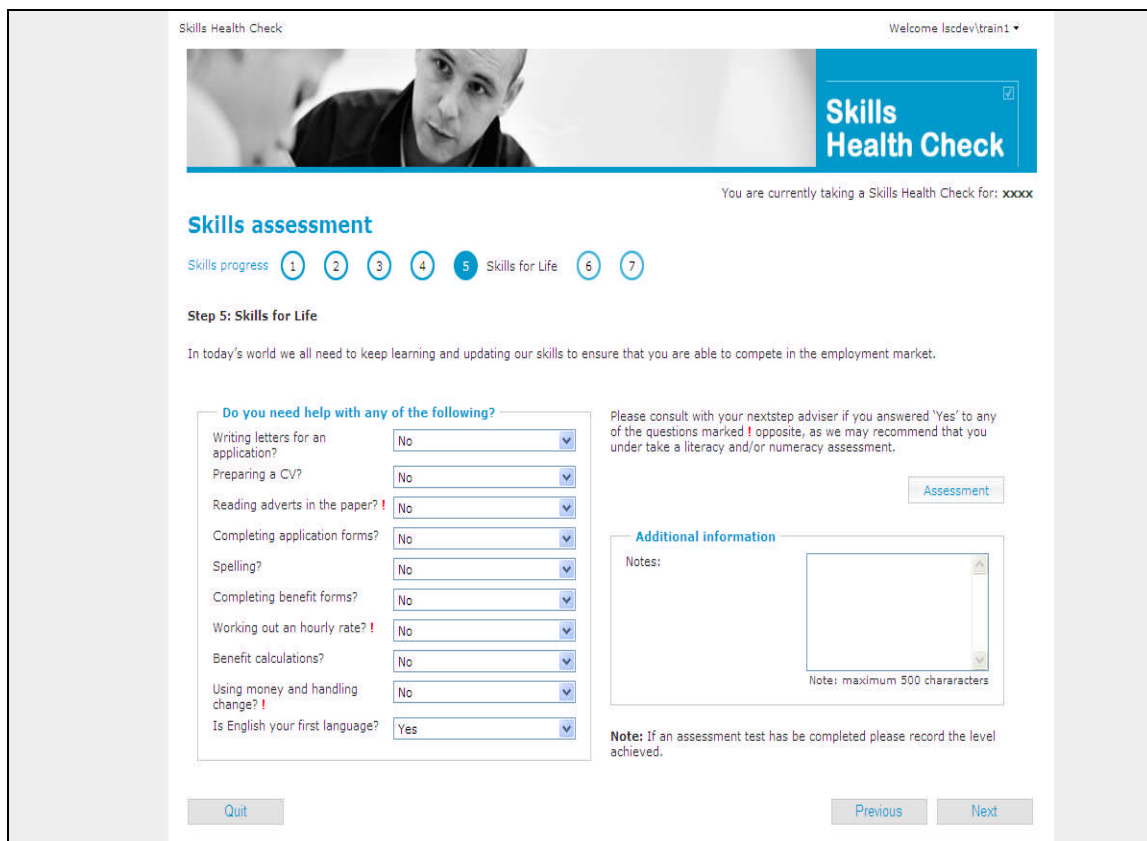


4.35    The majority of customers were happy with being asked these questions.

*"She read this out... I remember saying yes to preparing a CV because I've never had one."*

**Customer: male, 26, no qualifications**

*"There have been one or two that withdraw at that point, and it's down to me to make sure they feel comfortable about it, about perhaps admitting that they have problems."*

**Adviser: 9 SHCs**

4.36 A handful of customers, generally those with Level 3 or above qualifications, felt that these questions were not relevant to them (i.e. they were too basic). However these customers saw that these statements could be relevant to other people and did not mind being asked them.

4.37 Adviser opinions were again divided on this screen. Some found it useful, saying that it was a good way for them to introduce a discussion about basic skills and/or that it was useful here to record whether a customer needed support with their CV.

*"This is a good feature. I did wonder at some points whether one had some problems with basic skills so this took us into the literacy test"*

**Adviser: 2 SHCs**

*"It's good, particularly where it says about the CV, and people say that they haven't got one, and that leads to a second appointment for ourselves, which is quite useful"*

**Adviser: 30 SHCs**

4.38 Where advisers had reservations about the Skills for Life screen:

- ➢ Some questioned why the screen had been included at all, stating that JCP should not have referred customers with basic skills needs;

- ➢ Where a customer with basic skills needs *had* accidentally been referred, advisers felt that these would have been identified earlier in the discussion and the SHC tool would not have been used with the customer;

- ➢ Advisers felt that certain questions asked at this screen were not applicable to many customers:

  - o Customers would never be required to make **'benefit calculations'** (they would always be informed of this) – perhaps calculating monthly bills or a weekly shopping budget might apply to a wider range of customers.

  - o Customers would never need to **'work out an hourly rate'** (they would either be told what the hourly rate for a job was or a job would have a fixed salary) – this question might be better phrased as 'working out a weekly salary from an hourly rate';

  - o It is not useful to ask whether a customer can **'handle money and change'** because almost everyone would answer 'yes' to this. A more specific 'calculate

in your head how much change you should receive when buying something' might be more differentiating.

➢ A couple of advisers were not clear what they should advise customers to put if the customer said they could do these calculations using a calculator but not without.

*"It is of no use to me whatsoever because I am trained to assess people [in terms of basic skills needs]"*

**Adviser: 9 SHCs**

*"I've yet to understand some of the skills included here. I am yet to understand 'benefit calculations' because there is not a circumstance where a client will have to deal with that."*

**Adviser, 20 SHCs**

**Literacy and numeracy tests**

4.39    As previously explained, the literacy and numeracy tests that can take place during the Skills Health Check are not an integral part of the SHC tool, rather an additional device accessed via the Skills for Life website if basic skills needs are identified.

4.40    The majority of advisers had not conducted numeracy and literacy tests with customers they took through the SHC tool (and only one of the customers interviewed had undertaken a literacy/numeracy test).

4.41    This was partly because, as mentioned previously, advisers would not have started using the SHC tool with customers identified as having basic skills needs.

4.42    Among the advisers that had seen or used the tests that the SHC links to, most felt that they were unsuitable as they were pitched at too high a level for basic skills needs customers:

   o   The language level was felt to be too high;

   o   The tests were seen to be too long (especially when combined with the rest of the SHC);

   o   Advisers preferred existing (and more audience appropriate) numeracy and literacy tests.

*"It seemed to be pitched at a very high level. I was thinking that I would not score 100% on this test and I wondered who at the Job Centre would."*

**Adviser: 2 SHCs**

*"I didn't think that it linked in really with Basic Skills: It was above level 2."*

*"You need a high level of reading to answer the questions. It is not appropriate.*

# 5 The skills diagnostic questions

5.1    This chapter turns to the core part of the tool – the skills diagnostic which determines the relative strengths and areas for developments for each customer via a series of 20 questions spread over 20 separate screens. Each question requires the customer (after working through an example with the adviser) to consider three statements; selecting the statement which is 'most like them' and that which is 'least like them'. An example is show in Figure 5.1 below.

**Figure 5.1: Example skills diagnostic screen**



5.2    The chapter explores the customer experience of completing the skills diagnostic, examining the ease (or otherwise) by which they were able to complete the section, their comprehension of both the task and the individual statements, and their views on the integrity of the results (i.e. did they feel they were able to answer accurately). The chapter also reports on the adviser view of this element of the tool, particularly with respect to the methodology employed, the language used and the applicability of the statements to the customer group.

> ## 1.1 Chapter summary:
>
> - Both advisers and customers are critical of this section of the tool, reporting considerable problems with customer comprehension.
>
> - Around half of all customers report being frustrated and/or confused to some extent when completing the skills diagnostic.
>
> - The methodology of having to select a 'most like me' and 'least like me' answer from three options is seen as inappropriate for the customer group by the majority of advisers. At worst it can negatively impact on the whole SHC experience and result in customers mistrusting the results. Relatively straightforward changes could be made to the answering methodology which would improve the customer experience without changing the fundamental principles of the way the diagnostic tool works.
>
> - There are particular issues with the readability of this part of the tool; well over half of the 60 statements used in the diagnostic questions were found to be difficult for customers to understand (either because the language used was too advanced or because the concepts expressed were too abstract or vague for customers to apply to their own experiences);
>
> - Furthermore, around a fifth of the total statements (those relating to general attitudes to work or treatment of other people) were perceived as being too 'loaded' to answer accurately; customers report feeling pressured to say these statements

**The methodology**

5.3 This section discusses the approach used in the skills diagnostic of asking customers to tick a box to indicate which of three statements is 'most like them' and to tick another box to indicate which is 'least like them'. Overall, this is seen as the most problematic element of the SHC tool by both customers and advisers.

5.4 Most advisers reported that the methodology as it stands is inappropriate for the customer group. They tended to feel that, while this sort of 'psychometric testing' would be familiar to graduates or those with a Level 3 qualification, the vast majority of the customer group would not have encountered anything like this before. This view was echoed by customers themselves, with the great majority saying they had never seen or done anything similar (rising to almost all customers without a Level 2 qualification).

5.5 Advisers noted that many customers struggled to understand why they had to select a 'most like them' and a 'least like them' statement at every screen. Where customers felt that they were good at two or all three of the statements advisers frequently had to re-iterate that they could only select one. This tended to make completing this section a lengthy process, and often one where the customer became frustrated or anxious.

*"I think it's quite challenging for people at this level. It is forcing you to make a choice even if you are good at all of them."*

**Adviser: 2 SHCs**

*"With 3 statements and 2 possible answers this seems to throw people. Clients do think that they should be ticking 3 answers."*

**Adviser: 20 SHCs**

5.6 While, on the whole, advisers understand the principles behind the methodology themselves, they experienced problems communicating this to customers.

5.7 It was quite common for advisers to mention that they preferred the approach used by the Adult Directions tool, whereby customers could answer 'most like me' to 'least like me' on a 5-point scale for each statement independently. This reveals a misunderstanding of the purpose of the SHC among some advisers; many viewed it as a proposed alternative or competitor to Adult Directions rather than a tool with different objectives (i.e. to assess the strengths and areas for development of a customer's generic, transferable work-skills, rather than to provide career suggestions based on their interests).

5.8 Notwithstanding this possible misunderstanding of the role of the SHC by some advisers, it remains the case that customers find it difficult to answer the diagnostic questions in a way that is not observed with other online questionnaires such as Adult Directions.

*"Give me the opportunity to rate myself out of 5 on the statements, rather than [the statements] competing"*

**Customer: male, 25, Level 3 qualification**

5.9 A notable proportion of advisers reported that they had seen these problems leading to customers becoming disengaged with the process, sceptical about the results of the diagnostic questions and demoralised.

*"Around 50% of the cases they have really struggled to pick the "Least" option and that is when the defensiveness comes."*

**Adviser: 60 SHCs**

5.10 Customers reflected the views of advisers, with around half mentioning that they disliked this part of the process or felt uncomfortable with it to some extent. For a handful, completing the diagnostic tool (specifically being 'forced' to give one 'most like me' and one 'least least me' answer) was frustrating or confusing enough to undermine their whole experience of the skills health check.

*"[Overall experience was] negative because of the questions that I couldn't answer [two 'mosts' to], so it was misleading."*

**Customer: male, 35, no qualifications**

5.11    Negative experiences were reported by a broad range of customers. The most common complaints related to frustrations at not being able to indicate that they were good at more than one thing (and/or being forced to put 'least' for something a customer perceived themselves to be relatively good at):

*"The problem was being limited on the answers you could give. We read them all out and sometimes it caused a problem when we realised that I'd have to put 'least' on something I was good at."*

**Customer: male, 34, no qualifications**

"*The problem was where you could have given two answers on most or least but you had to choose only one*"

**Customer: male, 60, Level 1 qualification**

*"I wanted to tick "most" on some boxes and not "least"...I could only tick one of them as "most" but I wanted to tick two of them as "most" but I couldn't do it.*

**Customer: male, 35, no qualifications**

*"It might have been easier if you could have answered with a percentage, or a scale for each one [of the three statements] …maybe points out of ten for each one.  The word 'leas't sort of means, psychologically, that you are not very good at something, and there are ones where you might not be very good, but you might be average, which doesn't really mean least"*

**Customer: male, 44, Level 4 qualification**

5.12    Some customers found it counter-intuitive that there were only two boxes to tick despite there being three statements. This was confusing or distressing for some customers, who found it odd that the middle option was just 'lost' or 'missed out':

*"Even though it says choose one most and one least, my instinct was to try and fill one of the empty check boxes"*

**Customer: male, 26, Level 4 qualification**

*"Frustrating because I couldn't put first, second and third...with just the 'most' or 'least' I thought you might be missing out on important things. Because there were three options I did presume that one of them was going to be in the middle. You were having to leave one out even though you might be able to do that one. Ideally an employer would want you to do all*

*three, so if you are leaving one out, you are thinking that they might not employ you because you have missed it out"*

**Customer: female, 22, Level 2 qualification**

*"Overall I found the whole thing a bit tricky, it was more what they wanted us to answer and not what I wanted to answer…they only give you the two options so it is not a varied response...it is not accurate to what you have or you haven't got...I think that there should be more options for example – least, average, most."*

**Customer: female, 21, Level 2 qualification**

5.13   For a few customers, the problem was that they felt the methodology forced them to misrepresent themselves by saying they were good at something that they were not:

*"With a lot of them I wasn't able to say 'most' because I couldn't really do any of them…but I had to choose one"*

**Customer: male, 38, Level 1 qualification**

5.14   A few customers expressed confusion at the rationale behind the methodology. They were sceptical of the underlying 'system' and therefore many disengaged with the process and lost interest in seeing their results. Others tried to 'beat the system' (generally where this happened it was also the case that the customer had misunderstood the methodology).

*"I thought that they would want me to be in the middle - that they'd expect you to be between the one that was the most and the one that was least"*

**Customer: male, 19, no qualifications**

5.15   A related point raised by a couple of customers (and some advisers) was that the similarity of several of the statements was a cause for concern for some customers. They felt upset at having to contradict themselves, either because they thought this meant that they were doing something wrong, or because they thought the programme was trying to trick them. For these customers the SHC tool sometimes felt like a 'test' and produced the sort of anxiety that they reported normally experiencing in a test or exam situation. While this was a minority view, and it is presumably important for there to be this trade-off element between similar statements and themes during assessment, these concerns could perhaps be addressed through training advisers to be able to pre-emptively reassure customers before they start the test that giving seemingly 'contradictory' answers is nothing to worry about.

*"It got more difficult as it went along because the further I got in, the more it forced me to contradict my earlier statements"*

**Customer: male, 25, Level 3 qualification**

*The 20 questions were so confusing and you felt you couldn't answer the same statements twice and so your answers were distorting any real reflection of what your strengths were...it felt like it was trying to catch you out or trip you up."*

**Customer: male, 36, Level 2 qualification**

5.16 While it is true that the customers who reported a negative experience of answering the diagnostic questions did not understand the technology or general principles behind the methodology, this is not cause to discount their views. This evaluation found that customers who had a negative experience of answering the questions also had a negative view of the tool as a whole and the usefulness of the SHC report. It is important that customers are engaged with the whole process if they are to trust - and therefore benefit from - it.

5.17 While it may be fundamental to the design of the SHC tool for customers to be forced to choose between statements, it would be beneficial to explore ways to present this methodology in a manner in which it is less obvious to the customer that they are making this trade-off. For example, adding a third 'dummy' box for customers to be able to rank the three statements as first, second and third would be more intuitive for many. Better still, asking customers to select the statement that was 'most like them', followed by the one which was next 'most like them' would result in a more positive experience for customers (as they could select two statements they were good at, without having to explicitly state that anything was 'least' like them) while retaining the principle of identifying a 'most' and a 'least'.

**The language**

5.18   The research suggests that the language used in the skills diagnostic is too advanced for the customer group and is not sufficiently plain English.

*"It needs to be something simple and readable...if you think of someone in primary school, say they have the level of reading of an 8 year old, it may well be that it might need to be geared towards those kind of sentences."*

**Adviser: 8 SHCs**

*"Need to use appropriate language. In the past, we used to have leaflets, and they were developed for the client group. The wording was done by a Basic Skills company. They need to have a look at it, and there are organisations that will do that."*

**Adviser: 25 SHCs**

5.19   While a significant minority of customers (typically those with at least a Level 2 qualification or older customers with a Level 1 qualification) reported no problems with any of the words or statements used, the majority (and almost all of those with a Level 1 qualification or no formal qualifications at all) needed at least a couple of words or phrases explained to them (and some struggled with a good proportion of the words used in this section of the tool).

*"I didn't understand what a spreadsheet is."*

**Customer: Male, 37, Level 1 qualification**

*"I didn't understand 'resolve' – the adviser had to tell me what that means"*

**Customer: Male, 49, no qualifications**

5.20   Advisers reiterate this view; most said they needed to explain and rephrase statements for customers as a matter of course.

*"That one for example – 'Grammatically correct' – it's just not the sort of language clients use"*

*"[Optimistic] - more than 10 people have asked what this means - this word needs changing."*

*"Why not 'good at meeting deadlines'? Let's use English - and how many people that work on building sites are 'conscientious about meeting deadlines''? They do what they have to do"*

5.21 Overall half of all the statements were mentioned as problematic by at least some customers or advisers. Advisers tended to mention more statements as being problematic than customers did, although this is not surprising given that advisers on average had taken around 15 customers through the SHC and therefore are most likely to have encountered problems.

5.22 The analysis shows that following statements were commonly mentioned as problematic by both customers and advisers:

> ➢ A **competent spreadsheet** user;

> ➢ **Conscientious** about meeting deadlines;

> ➢ **Grammatically correct** in my speech and writing:

5.23 There was some suggestion that customers would find it easier to understand the statements if they were presented in the first person (i.e. "I am able to analyse issues" rather than "Able to analyse issues"). Considering whether "Able to analyse issues" is "most like them" is not normal, everyday speech and as such a further barrier to customer's comprehension.

5.24 The next section of this report goes on to look at how comprehension could be improved by providing context or real-life example for many of the statements,

**The context**

5.25 Advisers and customers also reported that many of the concepts expressed in the statements were too abstract or vague. Advisers were frequently required to contextualise the statements and provide concrete or real-life examples to help customers understand the meaning of the statement.

5.26 Some customers admitted confusion about the intended meaning of a statement (beyond issues with the vocabulary used as discussed in the previous section), finding them unclear and not focussed enough on a particular circumstance or scenario. Where customers did not fully understand what the statement was 'getting at', they felt uncomfortable selecting this as the option that was 'most like them' or the 'least like them'.

**Able to solve problems:** *"I'm assuming 'problems' is other peoples' problems, but it could be problems in the workplace."*

**Customer: Female, 46, Level 2 qualification**

**Able to settle arguments***: "That is quite a confusing one… if you are at work you are not allowed to settle arguments unless you are a supervisor or something.  That would not be your job.  If the argument is with you that is different.  That was what I thought."*

**Customer: Male, 33, no qualifications**

**Able to cope with the unexpected:** *"How are you supposed to know [if you can cope with the unexpected] if it is unexpected? You would deal with it the best at the time but it would depend on what it is."*

**Customer: Male, 26, Level 1 qualification**

**Able to communicate effectively with different people***: "I didn't know what it was asking me. Are we being PC and saying that's people who might not understand you through a language barrier, or different people as in well-to-do, or technically minded people; could you get the point across to them?  I wasn't sure if it was a PC question."*

**Customer: Male, 26, Level 1 qualification**

**5.27** Advisers raised this issue in connection with a greater number of statements than customers. To an extent this is because advisers found it easier to articulate what they saw as wrong with the individual statements, whereas customers were more likely to express a general sense of dissatisfaction with their experience of completing the diagnostic section:

*"Was confused as to why I was being asked the questions...thought this was about getting actual jobs"*

**Customer: male, 49, no qualifications**

5.28 A few advisers felt that the statements 'able to bounce-back from setbacks' and 'able to cope with the unexpected' were insensitive when dealing with customers who had recently been made redundant.

5.29 The research also found that advisers were not always giving consistent advice to customers when asked how to interpret a statement, and in several cases were not sure how to interpret the statement themselves:

**Able to solve problems:** *"What sort of 'problems' are we talking about? This resulted in some confusion because the interpretation he wanted was to be involved in social jobs. It is unclear*

*what sort of problems we are dealing with here; technical, personal, social, etc. Maybe it is not the language which is a problem, it is the lack of examples."*

**Adviser: 2 SHCs**

**Respectful of other people's views:** *"I did ask the lady about 'respectful'. I asked how that could come into it, because this is really about being at work. She said to put it as your least then."*

**Customer: male, 26, no qualifications**

**Able to resolve differences between people:** *"When they ask me what this means, I say to think about it only in terms of work situations...I don't know whether that's right"*

**Adviser: 20 SHCs**

*"I wonder if they are trying to get people to think about it from [the perspective of] themselves as people. I don't know whether it is just personally or just from a job situation."*

**Adviser: 10 SHCs**

5.30 While it is necessary to ensure the statements describe skills that are applicable across a broad range of situations and industry sectors, it is also important that customers understand what is being asked of them. The addition of a help button next to each statement which links to a range of real-life examples for each statement could provide customers with this clarification while ensuring the statements remain inclusive.

**Audience-appropriateness**

5.31 In addition to the problems described above with language and context, some advisers felt that several of the statements would not be applicable to the majority of their customers. This was because they were too office / business-services focussed and/or involved a level of seniority or autonomy atypical of the customer group (who more commonly had experience in machine operative or elementary roles). Statements that were seen as inappropriate for the audience were:

> ➢ Capable of using computer systems such as timesheets;

> ➢ A competent word processer user;

> ➢ A competent spreadsheet user.

➢ Conscientious about meeting deadlines;

➢ Able to make clear presentations;

➢ Able to work out what I need to do each day;

➢ Able to explain charts and diagrams to others;

➢ Able to reach clear conclusions.

5.32    While it seems correct that a customer should select 'least like me' for 'competent word processer / spreadsheet user' if they have not encountered word processors or spreadsheets before (as this would indicate that they do not possess these skills), there are some statements where a lack of relevance to the customer group maybe be affecting the integrity of the responses. For example, many customers selected 'able to make clear presentations' as 'least like them' because they had never had to make a presentation at work. However, they may possess the skills to present information clearly, and may use these skills in non-work situations, but on the whole did not consider this once they had seen the word 'presentation'.

5.33    Similarly, several customers and advisers noted that timesheets were not used widely. If a customer had not needed to use timesheets in a previous job they were likely to answer 'least like me' to the statements 'capable of using computer systems such as timesheets' because of this. However, they may have been competent users of other computer systems such as warehouse scanners. As noted earlier in the chapter in connection with certain statements being perceived as too vague, a list of varied real-life examples (covering both work and non-work examples) would overcome this confusion.

**Able to reach clear conclusions:** *"They are thinking 'Why is that relevant to the jobs that I did?' - I'm not quite sure what client base they are thinking of because a lot of them don't necessarily have to reach conclusions, they just go in and do the job and go away."*

**Adviser: 8 SHCs**

**Capable of using computer systems such as timesheets***: "It's a bit odd. Not that many people use timesheets. Not very relevant for customers, the majority will probably not be looking for a job that uses computer timesheets."*

**Adviser: 3 SHCs**

**Pressure to give a particular answer**

5.34    Some advisers and customers felt that there were particular statements where customers would experience pressure to say that a statement was 'most like them' (or avoid saying it was 'least like them'). In these instances, as well as falsely inflating the relative strength of the

particular area in question, it would also falsely deflate the strength of the other statements on the same screen.

5.35    Customers and advisers were generally in agreement about which statements would exert the most pressure on those completing the tool; around a fifth of the statements were mentioned as being problematic in this way in total, including:

**Respectful of other people's views:** *"I felt that if I didn't put "respect for others" as a "most" it would reflect badly on me. If you don't, then it's like you are being stereotypical and not respecting other people."*

**Customer: female, 21, Level 2 qualification**

**Dependable:** *"For instance 'I am dependable' - you wouldn't want to put that as 'least.'"*

**Customer: male, 42, Level 3 qualification**

**Respectful of other people's view / Keen to do my best:** *'On those, I really thought that wasn't one where I could put least. … I wanted to say 'most' on all of those so picking one was very difficult.  I would rather have not put anything than pick one.  The one I answered as weakest was in effect the wrong answer for me."*

**Customer: female, 21, Level 2 qualification**

**Able to work well with others***: "No one wants to say that they can't communicate with others. They are quite conscious that it is about work. Some of them also look at the 'able to work well with others' statement and answer that without being honest."*

**Adviser: 15 SHCs**

**Hardworking:** *"No one has clicked on the negative side of 'ability to work hard' because it is culturally unacceptable and thus not a good button to click on for them."*

**Adviser: 10-15 SHCs**

5.36    However, it should also be noted that roughly half of all customers that participated in the research reported that they answered all questions as accurately and honestly as they could. A couple stated that they had experienced pressure or temptation to portray themselves in a certain way, but had answered honestly in the end.

*"I wasn't sure whether it'd be a good idea to say 'least' for the 'managing time' statement...but I did put it in 'least' in the end"*

**Customer: male, 19, no qualifications**

# 6 The Skills Health Check Report

6.1    On completion of the diagnostic questions, a report is produced summarising the individual's skills status. This report can be viewed online or exported into a Word document for printing. In the context of this trial, it is anticipated that the **nextstep** adviser will discuss the report with the customer and agree an action plan to address skills shortcomings.

6.2    There are three key elements to the report:

➢    A rank ordering of eight key competency areas (problem solving, IT skills, working with others, communicating, handling change and pressure, planning and organising, delivering results and influencing). A traffic light system is used to code these competency areas with the two that the individual shows the greatest ability in shown in green, the two where there is the most scope for improvement shown in red and the remainder shown in orange.

➢    Definitions of the two competency areas in which the individual performs best and worst and examples of the types of job roles that might use these skills.

➢    Suggestions for ways of improving skills in the two competency areas identified as being the customer's area for development.

6.3    An example report is shown below.

Figure 6.1: Example SHC report

**Your areas for development**

*The items listed below are skill areas you may need to develop. For hints on how to develop these skills, see Development Suggestions.*

**Delivering results**

Delivering results is a relative area for development for you. This refers to the ability to focus on achieving objectives, and work in a conscientious and dedicated way.

This is likely to prove an important part of a variety of roles. Roles in which Delivering results proves especially useful include jobs where deadlines and targets are important, e.g. Sales Agent, Bus/Taxi Driver, Manufacturing Operative.

**Influencing**

Influencing is a relative area for development for you. This refers to the ability to successfully persuade and influence others, and maintain relationships, resolving differences where appropriate.

This is likely to prove an important part of a variety of roles. Roles in which Influencing proves especially useful include jobs that involve persuading others or settling differences between people, e.g. Sales Agent, Police Force, Supervisor.

**Development suggestions**

*Here are some development ideas, based on your relative areas for development:*

**Delivering results**

Actively experiment and try things out, to find better methods of getting things done. Try and think of the bigger picture. Consider how far you are progressing towards the things that really matter to you.

Have deadlines firmly in mind and treat them as crucial. When you finish doing something for someone else, get feedback on whether this was up to expectations, and consider how to do it better next time.

**Influencing**

Widen your social circle. Identify groups of people with whom you have little contact, e.g. who do different work, who hold different beliefs, who have different interests, and target them for social encounters. You can extend your social awareness through others by listening to friends talk about their acquaintances, by reading autobiographies, by listening to people talking on radio and television about their experiences and lives.

If a conflict arises, try to put yourself in the other person's shoes before defending your position. Look at the conflict as a conflict of ideas or approaches, rather than of people, remain neutral, and encourage others to do the same.

**Your actions**

*No additional actions have been identified in your Skills Health Check.*

Click on this button to copy the action plan to the clipboard so that you can paste it into your own document.

Copy to clipboard

Review    Home

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## 1.2   Chapter summary:

➢   The majority of customers view the report reasonably positively and tend to find it motivating (though it is difficult for customers to disentangle their views on the report with the whole SHC experience and their discussions with the adviser following the report).

➢   The fact that the report lists two relative strengths for each customer is generally seen as a good thing. That said there are some concerns that customers do not understand that these strengths are relative rather than assessed against the workforce as a whole.

➢   Advisers are more negative about the report, tending to be sceptical about the results due to limited faith in the methodology.

➢   Advisers currently see the SHC tool as a (weaker) alternative to the Adult Directions tool; this misunderstanding of the positioning of the SHC tool underlies much of the advisers' criticisms of its output.

➢   There is also a misunderstanding around the role of the example job roles. Advisers and customers assume these are intended to be tailored job suggestions for each individual and as such are very critical of them (in terms of them being limited in range and inappropriate for the customer's qualification level or situational details).

➢   The development suggestions section is seen as vague or 'wishy-washy' at best, and offensive at worst. The suggestion to 'widen your social circle' is viewed particularly negatively by advisers and customers.

➢   Customers were more likely to find the report useful where the more tangible, easily

**Overall views**

6.4    At an overall level, the majority of customers view the report reasonably positively. To some extent, this is because they view the overall experience of discussing their skills situation with an adviser positively and it is difficult for them to separate the report itself from the discussion that they had with the adviser about it. It was clear from discussions with advisers that they spend varying amounts of time discussing this output with customers and also that they often integrate their own suggestions into a discussion of the SHC report. As such, customer interpretation of the report in this environment is likely to be quite different from the experience that they would have if using the tool unmediated.

6.5    Some customers who were low in confidence or had low educational attainment, found the report output to be motivational, largely because it included some focus on areas in which they were comparatively good at.

*"It made me feel better about myself - I always knew I had something to offer - more confident, because of the IT skills. It's made me feel loads more confident."*

**Customer: male, 19, no qualifications**

*"There were jobs I was thinking I could not do it because my language is very bad, but when you see this it gives you the energy to do it."*

**Customer: male, 33, no qualifications**

*"It can be motivational in the sense that it does highlight areas of strength.... many clients say that they have no skills, that they have nothing to offer the employer.  And that is not true.  If they want to take something away, then that can be motivational.  They do have skills."*

**Adviser: 15 SHCs**

6.6    Customers were more likely to have found the report useful where 'IT skills' appeared in their strengths or areas for development. Where the former occurred, they were likely to find the experience very motivating as they found it easy to understand how this skill could benefit them when looking for work. Where 'IT skills' appeared in the areas for development it tended to result in a discussion about IT training that the customer could attend – a concrete outcome with a clear goal.

*"It suggested office clerk, computer engineer & PC engineer because of my IT skills - if I could get one of those jobs I'd be there, I'd have made it"*

**Customer: male, 19, no qualifications**

*"It said I needed computer skills which was right as they've only ever been basic. It was good to have to refer back to - clear and easy to understand."*

**Customer: female, 56, Level 1 qualification**

*"It advised me to up my skills in IT and it made sense. It was useful. There was no bad part to this section."*

**Customer: male, 60, Level 1 qualification**

6.7　Most advisers are much more critical of the report and tended to compare it unfavourably with the output of other online or computer-based programmes that they are used to using (most commonly the Adult Directions tool). In part they are critical because they lack trust in the methodology of the tool (and in particular the diagnostic questions) because of the difficulties they have seen customers face in understanding and completing this section. They believe that the current difficulties in comprehension (as discussed in the previous chapter) severely inhibit the accuracy of the diagnostic section and hence the quality of the reporting output.

6.8　They also feel that there can be quite limited variation in the content of the report across a wide range of different customers.

*"The first time I ever did it, I thought "Wow! This is brilliant!" Then when I did it with 2 or 3 clients, I noticed that they were all getting the same results, I thought "What use is that?"*

**Adviser: 30 SHCs**

6.9　Furthermore, advisers criticise the report as not being sufficiently complete to enable customers to address their skills needs without considerable interpretation/additional input from them. Arguably in this particular setting, the report is only intended to form the basis of a discussion with the adviser that will produce an action plan and hence is not required to be a 'stand alone' output. However, ultimately it is hoped that individuals will be able to access the SHC tool in an unmediated setting and for this to deliver positive outcomes, the report would need to be a comprehensive output that individuals could interpret and act upon themselves.

*"We add our own opinions to the report and make it a generally positive experience for them but if we were not there I don't think that many of my clients would be as appreciative of the report as they are. It's not a valuable tool in this respect."*

**Adviser: 50 SHCs**

6.10　In the remainder of this chapter, we discuss reactions to each of the three elements of the report in turn.

**Ranking of competency areas**

6.11    On the whole, customers find this element of the report useful. Some stated that they found it motivational that the report picked out two areas that they were comparatively strong in. Often customers were lacking in confidence and entered the meeting with the adviser believing that they did not have any marketable skills. Customers found the traffic-light colouring of this section of the report to be both attractive and clear.

*"When I first saw it I thought it was good the way they had drilled it down into eight key areas which employers might be looking for."*

**Customer: male, 26, Level 4 qualification**

*"I'm not a confident person so I probably know my weaknesses better than my strengths and it made me feel good – motivated to see my strengths set out."*

**Customer: female, 32, Level 2 qualification**

6.12    Where customers were less positive about this element of the report, it tended to be because they had experienced difficulties in completing the diagnostic element of the Skills Health Check and hence did not feel that the output could be an accurate reflection of their skills profile. Some felt that they had made guesses or picked statements at random in the diagnostic screens and hence distrusted the ordering of skills in the report.

*"It's useful – but I'd say that if I'd picked different answers in the 20 questions it would have come up with different results – and I could have picked different answers."*

**Customer: male, 42, Level 2 qualifications**

*"I don't think that it gave an accurate reading … because for too many of the questions I think I had to choose between perhaps an IT skill and a personal skill.  There were too many of them like that, meaning I wouldn't get a correct answer."*

**Customer: female, 46, Level 2 qualifications**

6.13    Advisers tend to agree that the fact that the report highlights two areas of relative strength has value in motivating customers and increasing their confidence. This is a distinguishing feature of the Skills Health Check in comparison to other tools that they are more familiar with such as the Adult Directions tool.

*"Everyone comes out with two positive strengths – because these people have just been made redundant, lost their jobs, so it is good that they can see something positive."*

**Adviser: 10 SHCs**

*It gives you, in writing, things that they are good at, so it is useful in writing application forms and building your profile or your personal qualities on a CV and things like that.*

6.14 However, a few advisers have reservations about the approach of always highlighting two strengths and two weaknesses. They feel that customers do not comprehend that these are areas of relative strength / weakness for them (as opposed to relative strengths in comparison to the workforce as a whole) and can place too much emphasis on the strengths believing that they will be sufficient to secure them employment. This was mentioned particularly in the context of IT skills – advisers feel that the competency ranking can be misleading to some customers with low to moderate IT skills but for whom IT appears in their top two strengths leading them to conclude that they will be well-suited to employment in the IT field. Others lack faith in this section of the report because they have seen the same skills competency ranking produced for a wide range of different customers.

6.15 Reflecting the frustrations that some advisers have with the diagnostic questions in their current format, some advisers feel that they could have ascertained a similar ranking of competency areas much more quickly through a discussion with the customer.

6.16 Advisers generally agree that the 8 competency areas are sensible ones to measure. However some feel that they are perhaps a bit generic. It appears that advisers sometimes have difficulty in identifying ways to address the skills shortages highlighted by the report. The exception to this is 'IT skills' which advisers are easily able to suggest ways of addressing through a wide range of IT courses that are available in the local area. Because of this, it appears that there is a tendency to focus on IT skills at the expense of other skills highlighted by the report. The desire for more actionable skills gaps leads some advisers to suggest the inclusion in the report of other more work-oriented skills such as team-leading/supervisory skills or more vocational skills.

**Example job roles**

6.17 The example job roles used to help individuals to understand the meaning of the different competency areas that the report focuses on are a source of confusion for customers and advisers. Both groups are tending to interpret these as recommendations for the type of employment to which the customer would be suited (or not suited in the case of the examples for the areas of relative weakness). This leads customers to report that they found this section useful when it suggested job roles that they had not previously considered and also to report that they found it motivating because a large number of different jobs were suggested.

*"That was good … it told you what jobs you might want and what skills would be good. It told me I was good for driving and things like that. That was exactly the kinds of things I was looking for … yes, it is useful."* **Customer: male, 33, no qualifications**

*"I'm now 60 and I want a lighter job than construction. I want to think about an inside job, on reception etc. Doing this test has made me think about what I apply for."*

**Customer: male, 60, Level 1 qualification**

*"In all fairness, I didn't think about administration [roles], which is under planning and organising. I had seen that as maybe just secretarial. The job I [will be starting] is as an accounting administrator. This report actually made me put administration into search engines."* **Customer: male, 26, Level 4 qualification**

6.18 Largely still with the interpretation that the example jobs given were recommendations of employment that should be sought, some customers did not find the report useful because the example jobs did not take into account their qualifications or licenses (for example, "recommending" a job as a taxi driver for an individual who did not have a driving license). Others stated that they did not find the report helpful because they already knew the type of employment that they were looking for. A few customers stated that they were disappointed when they received the report because it did not link their competencies to available vacancies.

*"Could be useful but they're awful jobs. They were quite interesting but not the sorts of jobs I'd want to do."* **Customer: male, 25, Level 3 qualification**

6.19 The example job roles tended to dominate the customer's experiences of the report – this is the thing they focussed on, and could best recall. For many customers these were seen as the key output of the tool, and the list of competency areas were overshadowed by reactions to what they saw as 'suggested' job roles.

6.20 Advisers tended to be very critical about the example job roles again because they largely interpreted them as recommended jobs for the individual customer. Hence, they state that they are not useful because they do not take into account a customer's qualification or situational details and because there is too limited a range of job roles 'suggested' (meaning that the same job roles are mentioned in the reports for a wide range of customer types).

"I think that they are overly simplified....because there are a relatively small amount of questions or scenarios presented in the test itself, what happens is that it makes a very cosmetic diagnostic judgement." **Adviser: 60 SHCs**

*"They have come up with very similar results, even though we had a good cross-section of people. It's just a case of looking at it in a bit more detail so that it is a bit more unique."*

**Adviser: 10 SHCs**

*"We are used to being able to list a number of job roles or careers that the client could pursue. They might not like some of them so we can then discuss what they like and what they want and introduce some careers information and give them routes into the job roles that they are interested in. This tool does not have this type of flexibility."*

**Adviser: 2 SHCs**

*"This gentleman came up with an area for development as 'IT skills', and one of his job suggestions was IT Analyst because it linked to his strength which was 'problem solving'. So it doesn't tie in with itself, let alone make it personal to the people."*

**Adviser: 30 SHCs**

6.21    Advisers also pointed out that some of the terms used for particular job roles ran contrary to those used in Jobcentre Plus / **nextstep** (for example, the tool uses the term 'fireman' instead of 'firefighter' and 'postman' instead of 'postal worker').

**Development suggestions**

6.22    The development suggestions element of the report was viewed negatively by the majority of both customers and advisers. Both groups tended to find these suggestions 'vague' at best and often felt that they were patronising.

6.23    A few customers found these useful but these tended to be customers who were given developmental suggestions in the (arguably more concrete) area of IT skills. A small number of customers stated that the developmental suggestions prompted them to think more about the longer term.

*"It was useful because it breaks things down and you can understand what you need to do and how to do it."*

**Customer: female, 22, Level 2 qualifications**

6.24    The more prevalent view was that the development suggestions were too basic and even insensitive. Customers were generally unclear as to how the development suggestions could assist them in finding employment (and particularly if they were not looking to change role or had particular career routes in mind). The development suggestion that tended to cause the greatest negative reaction was that customers should 'widen their social circle' which appears as a recommendation if customers need to work on 'influencing' skills.

*"Not useful at all really, they're very vague. It sounds more like a horoscope than anything else. It's also a bit patronising because a lot of this is copied and pasted from stock statements – it's not been personalised."*

**Customer: male, 25, level 3 qualifications**

*"It said that I should widen my social circle. That is like saying that I don't have any friends...It made me feel angry. "*

**Customer, female, 21, Level 2 qualifications**

6.25   Reflecting customer reactions, advisers feel uncomfortable discussing this section of the report because they feel the development suggestions given are too basic or patronising. Advisers, on the whole, do not feel that following the suggestions given will increase customers' chances of finding employment. They feel that there is a greater need to tailor these suggestions (perhaps taking into account the qualifications information etc. provided in the pre diagnostic screens) and to make them more tangible / more obviously work focussed if customers are to be expected to see value in pursuing them.

*"They are so wishy washy that they don't use it. There are no clear actions."*

**Adviser: 20 SHCs**

*"Needs to be more specific and have practical suggestions. Instead of just saying improve IT skills it should say what sort of skills e.g. typing, spreadsheets etc and say how they can improve it."*

**Adviser: 2 SHCs**

*"I think it is totally patronizing….Do you need an employment consultant saying to you to widen your social circle? To me, to sit in front of an intelligent, 58 year old guy who is very accomplished in his field and have him read that about himself is verging on immoral."*

**Adviser: 20 SHCs**

*"3 out of 4 found it insulting."*

**Adviser: 4 SHCs**

6.26   On a more presentational issue, some advisers pointed out that it is odd that the developmental suggestions are colour coded in orange even though they relate to the two skills most in need of improvement (that are colour coded in red in the earlier sections of the report).

6.27   Similarly, many customers and advisers noted that when printed, the clear formatting of the report (and the traffic light colouring) was lost and the output that they took away with them looked unprofessional and unclear.

# 7 Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 There is some work to be done in ensuring that advisers are clear on the aims and objectives of the Skills Health Check tool and in particular are clear that it is not being considered as a replacement for tools such as Adult Directions which are designed to identify particular careers to which customers may be suited. This could help to counter some of the criticisms that advisers are currently making of the tool.

*Look and feel*

7.2 Customers and advisers are generally positive about the look and feel of the SHC tool. They feel that it looks professional and the use of the traffic light colouring system for the report output is viewed as clear and engaging. It needs to be ensured that this clear format carries over to the print out as customers received black and white copies of the 'exported' report which were not formatted in such a clear manner.

*Diagnostic questions*

7.3 Advisers felt strongly (and customers largely confirmed) that the process of selecting statements that were 'most' and 'least' like them was very difficult and time-consuming for customers. Customers tended to feel unhappy with the concept of reporting that a characteristic was 'least' like them and equated this to stating that they did not have a skill in this area. They were also unhappy with (and to some extent confused by) not being able to state that they had skills in more than one of the three areas. Some customers felt that the fact that similar statements appeared on different screens meant that the tool was trying to trick them into giving inconsistent answers. Difficulties with the answering methodology are impacting negatively on many customers' overall experience of, and faith in, the tool.

7.4 Customers also had difficulties with the language used for a number of the statements in the diagnostic section of the tool. Generally the pitch of these was felt to be too high with the abstract nature of a number of the statements proving difficult for customers to engage with. This in turn means that advisers were frequently providing interpretations of these statements and there was some lack of consistency in the explanations being used.

*Report*

7.5 Customers (and particularly those with low confidence or qualification levels) find the fact that the report highlights two areas of relative strength to be motivational. Advisers also tended to be positive about this aspect of the tool. However, there is some suggestion that customers are sometimes not clear that these are **relative** strengths for the individual customer (as opposed to areas where they perform well relative to the labour market as a whole).

Customers were more satisfied with the report where the arguably more tangible 'IT skills' featured in their strengths or areas for development.

7.6 Advisers and customers are currently critical of the example job roles used to help describe the competency areas covered by the tool and the development tips suggested. Advisers are expecting these to demonstrate greater tailoring to the individual (for example by taking into account their qualification profile and work experience) and hence are critical that the same examples are suggested for a wide range of customers.

7.7 In the case of the example job roles, these are tending to be viewed by both customers and advisers as recommended career paths (rather than aids to the understanding of the competency areas covered). In the scenario of **nextstep** adviser interviews, this could perhaps be addressed through training provided to advisers but it is worth bearing in mind that these example job roles are likely to be viewed in this way when customers use the tool unmediated. Partly because of this misunderstanding, both audiences criticise the example job roles as being too limited and not tailored to the qualification level of the individual. Advisers also point out that the job roles used outdated language.

7.8 The development tips were the other key areas that both advisers and customers criticised. Both groups found these to be too vague and often patronising. Some customers actually stated that they found the tips offensive (often those who had received the recommendation that they should widen their social circle). Both customers and advisers had difficulty in believing that following the development tips would have any impact on the likelihood of the individual finding work. It is perhaps worth reviewing these tips to make them more obviously relevant to a work environment to encourage greater uptake of these tips.

**Recommendations**

7.9 As discussed, some of the adviser criticism of the tool stems from a fundamental misunderstanding of its purpose and scope. We would recommend that further training is given to **nextstep** advisers on the use and application of the tool, focussing particularly on:

➢ The role and objectives of the SHC tool (specifically that it is not a career suggestions tool);

➢ How to deal with the pre-diagnostic screens when personal, educational and situational details have already been collected in a previous meeting (i.e. is it okay to skip these, and enter only the mandatory fields?);

➢ While the methodology of the skills diagnostic remains the same (customers selecting a 'most' and a 'least like me' from three statements, briefing advisers on how to provide additional support during the example question to pre-empt customer concerns about the methodology).

- ➢ The purpose of the example job roles within the report (i.e. they are to illustrate the application of a particular skill area, rather than tailored suggestions for the particular customer).

7.10 However, not all the reported shortcomings of the tool are explained by incomplete adviser training, and recommended amendments or additions to version 1.1 arising from this evaluation are detailed below.

7.11 In terms of the pre-diagnostic screens, we would suggest that consideration is given to:

- ➢ Adding a line at the customer consent screen clarifying who *will not* see the results of the SHC (i.e. a prospective employer);

- ➢ Adding email address and middle name fields to personal details page;

- ➢ Collecting all qualifications / licences held, not just highest level;

- ➢ Replacing several of the example numeracy tasks on Skills for Life page.

7.12 In terms of the diagnostic methodology, we would suggest that:

- ➢ Similar data to the 'most like me' and 'least like me' approach could be obtained in a way that customers would be more comfortable with either by:

  - o Asking individuals to rank the statements in the order of applicability to them using a 'dummy' middle box (so that they can give an answer for each of the three statements and don't specifically have to pick out a characteristic as being 'not like them')

  - o Or ideally, asking them to click on the statement that is most like them, then removing that statement from the screen and asking them to click on the one that is most like them out of the remaining two (this has the benefit of again meaning that they do not have to say explicitly that a characteristic is not like them, they get to say that two statements are 'most like them' which is a more positive experience, and simplifies the process of selecting the statements on screen).

7.13 In terms of the diagnostic questions, we would suggest that:

- ➢ The readability level of the questions is re-visited and an assessment of reading age conducted;

- ➢ Consideration is given to phrasing all questions in the first person to aid comprehension / simplify wording;

➤ Wherever possible, abstract concepts are avoided. Where they are necessary adding a 'help' button next to the statement which then brings up a list of real-life examples covering both work and non-work scenarios.

➤ Consideration is given to removing 'IT skills' from the list of skill areas assessed within the diagnostic section (or at least removing it from the ranking of competency areas). Removing 'IT skills' from this part of the tool would have a positive impact as it tends to become the focus of discussions around the report because it is the most tangible skill area and hence the easiest to discuss and address. Advisers feel that it is possible to assess an IT skills need more quickly with more direct questioning. However, if it is necessary to keep it within the tool it could be addressed on a different screen (similar to the format of the 'Skills for Life' screen) and still incorporated into the action plan once the other skill areas have been considered.

7.14 In terms of the report output, we would suggest that consideration is given to:

➤ Removing the example job roles altogether and instead building on existing examples of how a particular competency area applies to a variety of workplaces. This might help to reduce confusion over the role of the Skills Health Check tool (it would also have the benefit of making the SHC seem more relevant for those who already know what type of job they would like to do). An alternative would be to move the example job roles to a separate part of the report and tailor them to a greater extent (to qualification level and competency profile in first instance).

➤ Making the development tips more tangible and avoiding personal or social development suggestions that run the risk of alienating customers. Advisers would perhaps also benefit from guidance on courses, websites and other materials that might help with development in every *skill* area (at the moment the tendency is to focus on IT skills because it is the area seen to be most 'actionable').

➤ Ensuring that the print out of the report retains the same formatting as the online version.