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Pathways to Work from incapacity benefits: A study of experience and use of the Job Preparation Premium

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

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Abbreviations

ADF	Adviser Discretion Fund
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
CMP	Condition Management Programme
CTB	Council Tax Benefit
DLA	Disability Living Allowance
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
HB	Housing Benefit
HGV	Heavy Goods Vehicle
IB	Incapacity Benefit
IBPA	Incapacity Benefit Personal Adviser
IFS	Institute of Fiscal Studies
IS	Income Support
JPP	Job Preparation Premium
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
NatCen	National Centre for Social Research
NDDP	New Deal for Disabled People
NHS	National Health Service
PCA	Personal Capability Assessment
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PSI	Policy Studies Institute

RTWC	Return to Work Credit
SPRU	Social Policy Research Unit
WFI	Work Focused Interview

Summary

Introduction

The Incapacity Benefit Reform Pilots, widely known as the 'Pathways to Work' pilots, were introduced in October 2003 with the aim of helping Incapacity Benefit (IB) recipients to move towards and into paid work.

The Job Preparation Premium (JPP) was introduced as part of the extension of Pathways to Work to existing recipients in February 2005. Job Preparation Premium is a weekly payment of £20 a week for a maximum of 26 weeks. To qualify, IB recipients must undertake some form of activity that contributes to an eventual move into paid employment.

This report is based on qualitative research conducted by the Social Policy Research Unit (SPRU), the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) in 2007, and presents findings on JPP recipients' and Jobcentre Plus staff members' use and experiences of JPP.

Staff perceptions and use of the Job Preparation Premium

Incapacity Benefit Personal Advisers (IBPA) recognised four possible roles for JPP: an incentive; an encouragement; a reward; and a reimbursement. There were very few examples of advisers using JPP as an incentive, with the majority feeling that it neither should nor could be used to engage unmotivated clients. However, where clients showed that they were willing to consider doing something, some advisers thought JPP could encourage engagement in work-related activities. The most frequently cited role of JPP was as a reimbursement for the costs of activities.

Written online guidance was staff members' main source of official information on JPP and this was commonly seen as relatively 'open ended'. Some advisers viewed this positively, as it gave them room to exercise discretion. Others felt that there was insufficient structure in the guidance, and saw it as ambiguous. Reports of limited managerial direction about JPP were common.

In general, JPP was not advertised widely to incapacity benefits recipients. Advisers were able to exercise discretion in deciding whether to introduce JPP to clients at all, when to do so, and for which activities. Some advisers expressed concerns that this discretion could result in inequitable practices, and there were examples of varied use of JPP between advisers in the study group. Advisers were led by three main criteria in deciding to award JPP: client motivation and commitment; client proximity to work; and financial implications.

Learning about the Job Preparation Premium and undertaking work-related activities

Most people had initially heard about JPP from their own adviser at a time when work-related activities had been agreed. Responses to learning about JPP were mostly positive, though some people had initial concerns about the possible conditions attached to the money and the effect it might have on other benefits.

Most people did not feel that JPP had any influence on their decision to take up a work-related activity and felt that they would have undertaken their activities regardless. Reflecting advisers' reported practices, most people had agreed to, or begun, their activities before JPP was introduced. In the small number of cases where JPP was felt to have been a key or contributory factor, it had been a further encouragement to take up a work-related activity at that time, or had provided assurance that the financial costs of doing activities would be met.

Activities undertaken by recipients in the study group can be grouped in four broad categories: health-related activities; training and qualifications; work preparation; and work experience. Decision-making was typically client-led, with a greater or lesser signposting role for advisers, depending on how far clients had developed their own ideas and plans.

The majority of people cited positive impacts stemming from their experiences of work-related activities. To varying extents, all types of activity were reported to have had a positive influence in building self-confidence, in reconnecting people to social and work environments, and in helping people to feel that employment was a realistic goal. At the time of the research interviews, almost everybody felt that they had moved at least some way closer to work.

Experiences of payment and receipt: the administration of the Job Preparation Premium

Many advisers who did not have a dedicated administrative team said that the processes involved in awarding JPP were burdensome, and this could deter advisers from making awards. In contrast, JPP recipients found that application for JPP was a quick and easy process, and most reported few problems or delays in receiving payments. There was evidence, however, that long initial delays, missed payments or overpayments could be problematic for recipients.

The manager's role in authorising payments rarely extended to discussing in detail individual cases with advisers. The speed at which managerial authorisation was granted varied, and some advisers felt the authorisation process sometimes contributed to initial delays to payments.

There was much variation in the timing and frequency of advisers' checks on recipients' compliance with the rule to continue participating in activities whilst receiving JPP. Advisers monitored compliance either by gathering evidence from the JPP recipient themselves, and/or by liaising with service providers. Variations in monitoring practices depended on adviser workload, as well as advisers' and clients' own perceptions of a need for more regular contact. The requirement to monitor recipients did not appear to have a negative impact on relationships between advisers and clients.

There were few examples of action plans having been reviewed and/or amended. When it had occurred, people had sought to exchange one activity for another; drop one activity that was found to be unsuitable, but continue a number of other activities; and add activities to address newly identified areas of need. There were no examples among recipients of JPP stopping because of unexplained non-compliance, and experience of this among advisers was also rare.

Experiences of payment and receipt: the difference made by the Job Preparation Premium

The experiences of JPP recipients in the study group showed that the £20 a week payments could make a substantive financial impact in four different ways:

- JPP had provided essential financial support for work-related activities (for example, course fees, travel expenses), where people felt they could not have sustained their participation without the £20 a week.
- Amongst people who said they would have been able to fund activities from other resources, JPP had eased the personal financial impact and provided peace of mind at a time when finances were already tight. For some, receiving JPP had promoted a sense of independence through not having to rely on other household members to fund activities.
- JPP payments enabled some people to take up work-related activities over and above what had been initially agreed in their action plan. Here, people said they felt financially able to participate in activities more frequently (for example, funding travel to a support group more often), or could afford to take up additional activities because they had not needed (all of) the JPP money for activities agreed with their adviser.
- JPP helped to improve general financial security and the standard of living amongst people who did not need, or chose not, to devote all of the payments to financing work-related activities.

Beyond substantive financial impacts, some recipients and staff highlighted the positive psychological impact that JPP could have. An additional £20 a week was seen as a demonstration of support from Jobcentre Plus and recognition of efforts made, and some people felt their morale had been lifted as a result. Some people described how receiving the money had provided motivation or a feeling of obligation to sustain their engagement in activities over time.

Although there were no reports of negative impacts, a small number of recipients said that they had not experienced any particular impact from receiving JPP.

Among recipients, advisers and managers, there was general agreement that £20 per week was an appropriate amount. Views were more mixed about the appropriate duration of JPP awards however, with arguments for both longer and shorter awards. There was a view from some staff and recipients that it would be useful to have greater flexibility and discretion to tailor amounts and durations of payments appropriately to individual needs and circumstances.

Reflections on the end of payments

For most people in the study group, JPP had expired after they reached 26 weeks' receipt. Although most of these people had expected payments to stop when they did and had not anticipated difficulties in readjusting to a lower weekly income, there was evidence of impacts on people's finances when payments expired. A small number of people had felt that they could not afford to continue activities without JPP and had stopped participating in work-related activities. An alternative response had been to draw on other financial resources, either making sacrifices in other areas of household expenditure, or limiting the financial burden by reducing the number, intensity or frequency of activities undertaken. In contrast, people who had not been reliant on JPP to fund activities, or had other resources available to them, did not report a financial impact and had continued or even increased their participation in activities. At the time of the research interviews, one person whose award had expired had moved into paid work. Others remained positive about working in the future and some were actively job-searching.

For a number of people in the study group, JPP awards had ended **before** 26 weeks because they had stopped doing their work-related activities. This happened where people moved into work; where the activity was of a fixed duration and had come to an end; or because health problems prevented continued participation. Unsurprisingly, people who had moved into work described no financial impact in losing JPP. There were also few feelings of loss among people who had stopped their activities for other reasons, largely because they had only used JPP money to fund these activities. Again, all those who had not returned to work by the time of the research interviews retained a desire to return to work and some were engaged in study or job-searching activities to aid their progress.

People who were still in receipt of JPP at the time of the research interviews knew that their payments would expire soon and were considering ways they could

adjust their household budgeting, in order to sustain their work-related activities. People here expressed hopes about returning to work in the long-term, but were mindful of health constraints.

Overall impressions and suggestions for change

Positive impressions of JPP, perceived by Jobcentre Plus staff, centred on the positive impacts on recipients in financially supporting work-related activities, providing further encouragement and boosting both finances and self-esteem. JPP was also seen as a useful tool for advisers in encouraging people and building rapport with clients. The disadvantages noted were the administrative burden on advisers, uncertainty arising from perceptions of imprecise guidance and the potential for inappropriate or inequitable use because of the discretionary nature of JPP.

Staff were asked to sum up their views on JPP in responding to the question 'Is JPP necessary?' Those who felt that JPP is necessary argued that receiving the payments can have positive impacts on people and their movements towards work; and that there are no alternative, similar kinds of support for people wanting to make progress towards work, but not yet ready to move into a job. Arguments that JPP is not necessary were that people should and would participate in work-related activities without the offer of money; and that other financial support available within the Pathways programme (such as the Adviser Discretionary Fund (ADF) and the Return to Work Credit (RTWC)) is more effective in encouraging and supporting steps towards, and movements into, paid work.

Recipients were generally happy with the way they had been supported by JPP and could not think of ways in which this money could be put to better use. By contrast, staff in the study group had a number of suggestions for change, relating to:

- increasing the number of JPP awards;
- improving the way JPP is monitored;
- widening applicability to other client groups;
- making the money more targeted to use on work-related activities;
- making access to JPP more equitable;
- reducing waste of resources.

Discussion and conclusions

There is good evidence from this research that receiving JPP payments can have positive impacts on incapacity benefits claimants. It can support people financially to do activities that they otherwise could not afford; it can ease the financial burden of undertaking activities; it can enable people to do more and to do things sooner. In addition, the money can act as an encouragement to sustain participation in

work-related activities, and can boost motivation and confidence where people feel rewarded by the payments. On the other hand, there is also strong evidence that people will take up opportunities to do work-related activities without the extra money, that people will find ways to continue their work-related activities without financial support after JPP payments cease, and that to some the £20 is more of a bonus and not a substantial or essential help.

Implications for policy drawn from a discussion of the main themes in the study findings are:

- clearer guidance about the intended aim(s) for JPP could help advisers become more certain about when and how to use JPP;
- the role of JPP as an incentive to people who are unmotivated or reluctant has not been tested in this research because advisers in the study group had not used JPP in this way;
- clearer criteria for what is meant by 'work-related activities' would be helpful to advisers and might help to increase the number and consistency of awards;
- some people need ongoing financial and advisory support after JPP stops in order to continue making progress towards work;
- JPP provides distinct and valuable support in the way it provides regular income to support the activities of people who are not yet ready to enter employment;
- numbers of JPP awards could potentially be increased by reducing the administrative burden on advisers, raising the profile of JPP amongst advisers, advertising JPP more widely and introducing performance indicators for JPP.

1 Introduction

The Incapacity Benefits Reform Pilots, widely known as the 'Pathways to Work' pilots, were introduced initially in October 2003, with the aim of helping Incapacity Benefit (IB) recipients move towards and into paid work. The pilots have moved through three main phases from early implementation in seven Jobcentre Plus districts, to an expanded coverage into a further 14 districts from October 2005, and finally to national roll out commencing in late 2007.

The pilots were originally aimed only at **new** claimants of incapacity benefits, but coverage was extended from February 2005 to **existing** recipients who had made a new claim in the two years prior to the start of the pilots. In April 2006 the provision was further extended to people making a claim between two and six years prior to the start of the pilots in six of the seven original pilot areas and to all existing IB recipients in Somerset.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has commissioned a research consortium¹ led by the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) to carry out a programme of evaluation of the pilots. The evaluation has been ongoing since 2003 and has produced a series of research reports to date². This latest report is based on qualitative research conducted by the Social Policy Research Unit (SPRU), the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and PSI in 2007, and presents findings from a study of the Job Preparation Premium (JPP).

Job Preparation Premium was introduced as part of the extension of Pathways to Work to existing recipients. Job Preparation Premium is a weekly payment of £20 for a maximum of 26 weeks. To qualify for JPP, IB recipients must undertake some form of work-related activity that contributes to an eventual move into paid employment.

¹ The consortium comprises teams of quantitative and qualitative researchers from the PSI, the SPRU at the University of York, the NatCen, the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), Mathematica Policy Research Inc. (USA) and David Greenberg of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

² These include Dickens *et al.*, 2004 and 2004b; Knight *et al.*, 2005; Barnes and Hudson, 2006a and 2006b; Corden and Nice, 2006a and 2006b; Dixon *et al.*, 2007; Bewley *et al.*, 2007.

This chapter begins (Section 1.1) by explaining the main elements of the Pathways to Work programme and the place of JPP within it. The purpose and design of JPP are also described in Section 1.1. Section 1.2 sets out the research questions about people's use and experiences of JPP that are addressed in this study, and Section 1.3 presents a summary of research design and methods. The chapter concludes by setting out the structure of the rest of the report.

1.1 Policy background

The JPP is part of the extension of the original Pathways to Work programme from new claimants to existing recipients. In this section the original design of Pathways is described with an explanation of the distinctive elements of the extension. The purpose and design of JPP are then set out to serve as context for the empirical analysis in the rest of the report.

1.1.1 The Pathways to Work programme

The Pathways to Work programme for new **IB recipients** was designed to encourage and support activity that would lead to an eventual return to paid employment. The key elements of the programme are a series of compulsory Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) and a range of optional services and financial support (collectively known as the 'Choices' package).

Under the Pathways programme, people making new incapacity benefits claims are required to take part in up to six mandatory WFIs at roughly monthly intervals with an Incapacity Benefit Personal Adviser (IBPA). In these meetings the adviser and claimant discuss work goals and the aspirations, possible barriers to work and how to overcome them, and agree an action plan setting out the steps towards a return to work. As part of the path back to work, advisers and claimants can access help from the Choices package.

The Choices package offers a range of provision to support a return to work. The package consists of access to existing programmes, such as the New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP)³, Work Preparation⁴ and Work-Based Learning for Adults (WBLA)⁵, a new service known as the Condition Management Programme

³ The NDDP is a voluntary programme that aims to help people on incapacity benefits move into sustained employment. It is delivered by a national network of local Job Brokers comprising public, private and voluntary sector providers of varying types and levels of work-focused support and assistance.

⁴ Work Preparation is a flexible, individually-tailored programme which aims to help people prepare for returning to work. It does so by helping people identify suitable kinds of work, providing work experience in a work environment and helping people to learn new skills or update existing skills.

⁵ Work Based Learning for Adults is a voluntary full-time training programme mainly aimed at people aged 25 and over who have been out of work for at least six months and are claiming a qualifying benefit.

(CMP)⁶ developed jointly between Jobcentre Plus and local National Health Service (NHS) providers and designed to help people understand and manage their health conditions, and financial assistance in the form of Return to Work Credit (RTWC) and the Adviser Discretionary Fund (ADF). The RTWC is a payment of £40 per week payable for a maximum of 52 weeks to people returning, to or finding new, work. The ADF can be used to make payments of up to £100 to purchase items and services that improve the likelihood of a person finding or taking up a job (for example childcare, or new clothes to attend interviews).

The Pathways provision for **existing incapacity benefits recipients** differs from that available to new claimants in two important respects. First, the number of WIFs that people are required to attend is three instead of six (although people can attend more interviews voluntarily). Secondly, an additional financial measure, the JJP is available in addition to the RTWC and the ADF. Otherwise, existing recipients are eligible for the full range of services within the Choices package.

1.1.2 The purpose and design of Job Preparation Premium

As mentioned above, JPP is a new and distinctive financial measure within the Pathways to Work programme. Before its introduction, the financial measures in place were intended to boost earnings of people when they returned to work (the RTWC) and to assist with actual costs incurred in moving towards work (the ADF). However, while these measures were designed as appropriate for new claimants of incapacity benefits, JPP was created in recognition of the needs of people who had been receiving incapacity benefits for longer periods and who faced different challenges in their route back to work (to be eligible for JPP people must have received incapacity benefits for at least nine months). This is evidenced in the following statement by the then Secretary of State when he announced the extension of Pathways to existing recipients:

'The longer people remain on Incapacity Benefit, the more barriers they face and the harder it is to get back to work. People are already banging on the door asking for more support and today we are extending the scheme...'

(DWP, 2005a)

The statement continues:

'The extension of help to long-term incapacity benefit claimants includes:

- *A new £20 a week Job Preparation Premium to encourage steps towards getting a job.'*

(DWP, 2005)

⁶ The CMP has been developed in response to the three main health conditions reported by people claiming incapacity benefits. The programme adopts a bio-psychosocial model with an emphasis on enabling people to better manage health conditions, to improve quality of life and employability.

The way in which this policy intention is meant to be implemented is elaborated in the formal guidance issued to Jobcentre Plus advisers. Box 1 contains the relevant (edited) extract.

Box 1 Official guidance to personal advisers on Job Preparation Premium

To qualify for JPP payments a customer must demonstrate to a specialist IBPA their commitment to a return to work and sign up to a mandatory Action Plan. The Action Plan will plot the customer's route back to work and show all the activities that the customer intends to undertake to help them move back into employment.

The process to pay JPP can be broken into the following steps:

- customer meets IBPA;
- customer demonstrates at the meeting that they are committed to a return to work;
- IBPA and customer agree activities to be included in the Action Plan;
- IBPA agrees that the activities are reasonable and relevant to achieve a return to work;
- IBPA recommends JPP payments and explains to the customer what their responsibilities are.

Source: Jobcentre Plus Guidance, Chapter 22.

The guidance also sets out what kinds of activity are to be considered 'reasonable and relevant' in contributing towards a return to work. These include a range of Jobcentre Plus activities (such as WBLA) and voluntary work. Some other activities are listed as 'desirable' but not sufficient on their own to qualify for JPP (including participation in community activities, joining a social group, joining a gym, and personal job-search activity).

1.2 Aims of the research study

The overall aim of the research study was to understand Jobcentre Plus staff and recipients' experiences and views of the operation and impacts of JPP. Specifically the study set out to address four main questions:

- What are the perceptions of the purpose, role and value of the Job Preparation Premium, and how do Incapacity Benefit Personal Advisers use it?
- What are the experiences of the application process and delivery?

- What do staff and recipients think about the impact of the Job Preparation Premium on views and behaviour?
- Is the Job Preparation Premium necessary?

In formulating these questions we were aware that in the first 18 months or so since the introduction of JPP into the initial seven Pathways to Work pilot areas an apparently low number of awards had been recorded (176 awards to September 2006). It was hoped that the study would shed some light on why so few awards had been made.

1.3 Research design and methods

The design of the study was based on qualitative methods, these being most suited to the research questions. Two pieces of preliminary work were undertaken before the main data collection phase took place. In summary, the elements of the design were:

Preliminary work

- Secondary analysis of qualitative data gathered during earlier studies in the evaluation of Pathways to Work.
- A survey of advisers.

Main fieldwork

- Twenty-five depth interviews with former or current recipients of JPP.
- Sixteen depth interviews with advisers.
- Eight depth interviews with Jobcentre Plus managerial staff.

Information about JPP had already been generated in earlier parts of the programme of evaluation of Pathways to Work. The NatCen, therefore, undertook secondary analysis of published reports and some original interview data and produced an internal working paper (Knight, 2006) that was used to inform the design of the survey of advisers and the topic guides for the depth interviews.

The purpose of the survey of advisers was to gain some background information about advisers' use of, and attitudes towards, JPP and to serve as a sampling frame a purposive sample of advisers could be selected for individual depth interviews later in the study. (The survey questionnaire is included in Appendix B.) From data collected via the adviser questionnaire, a classification of six approaches or perspectives on JPP was produced, using two variables. Firstly, advisers were categorised as either **high** or **low** users of JPP based on the number of JPP awards they had made. Secondly, advisers' overall attitudes to JPP were classified as either **positive, mixed/neutral or negative**. The interview sample was constructed to include each of the resulting six categories in approximately equal balance, thus covering the range of opinions and practices. (Appendix A sets out the main results of the survey.)

In the main fieldwork phase of the study the aim was to collect data from three groups of key actors: JPP recipients, advisers making decisions on JPP awards (including those who had made some awards and those who had made none), and managerial staff responsible for the oversight and supervision of the work of the advisers. Because of the personal nature of the experiences that we aimed to explore, individual, face-to-face interviews were judged to be the most appropriate primary means of data collection. Appendix A provides full details of the recruitment of people to the study, conduct of the interviews, analysis of data, and description of the main characteristics of the staff and JPP recipient samples (the latter according to gender, age, household arrangements, health conditions and financial situations). Appendix B contains the topic guides used for the interviews. Fieldwork was carried out in the four pilot areas identified from administrative data as having the highest number of awards of JPP. These were Derbyshire, Essex, Renfrewshire and Somerset.

1.4 Report outline

The remaining seven chapters in the report are based on the main themes that emerged from analysis. Each chapter, therefore, draws on and integrates data from JPP recipients and Jobcentre Plus staff appropriately. Chapter 2 explores the perceptions of Jobcentre Plus staff about JPP and their practices in making decisions about awards. Chapter 3 focuses on the perspectives and experiences of JPP recipients when learning about JPP and taking up work-related activities. In Chapter 4 the administrative processes involved in applying for and receiving JPP are examined. Chapter 5 examines the impact of JPP, including substantive effects on recipients' finances and the more intangible psychological effects on people's morale and motivation. Chapter 6 describes people's expectations about, and experiences of, JPP payments coming to an end. In Chapter 7 staff and recipients' overall impressions of JPP and suggestions for changes are presented. Chapter 8 returns to the research questions and summarises the main findings before discussing some of the policy implications from the study.

Appendix A is a full account of research methods, and Appendix B contains the research instruments used in the study.

In writing the report we have adopted the convention of referring to IBPAs as 'advisers' in order to make reading the text easier. When we refer to 'managers' we mean the eight staff interviewed as part of the study who had responsibility for managing the advisers and supervising their work. In practice they had a variety of job titles reflecting their roles within each District.

2 Staff perceptions and use of the Job Preparation Premium

This chapter considers Jobcentre Plus staff members' perceptions of the Job Preparation Premium (JPP) and their practices in using it. Firstly, Section 2.1 explores staff members' views on the role of JPP. Section 2.2 goes on to consider the sources of guidance which informed their understanding and use of JPP. Section 2.3 then considers Incapacity Benefit Personal Advisers' (IBPAs) practices in making JPP awards, including views about the discretion given to them in awarding JPP and the factors involved in deciding to introduce and/or award JPP. From its introduction in 2005 to the end of 2006, the number of JPP awards was much lower than expected. Section 2.4 highlights some possible reasons for this limited use, as perceived by Jobcentre Plus staff. Section 2.5 reflects on the secondary analysis of previous research data (Knight, 2006) drawing comparisons with the present findings. Section 2.6 concludes the chapter with a summary of its main points.

2.1 Perceptions of the role of the Job Preparation Premium

This section draws on spontaneous remarks and responses to a range of prompts about the possible roles for JPP. The prompts were based on the four roles for JPP identified in the secondary analysis of previous data: an incentive, an **encouragement**, a **reward** and a **reimbursement**. All four roles were recognised by staff in the research interviews, although opinions differed as to which were the more appropriate and effective. Advisers' views on appropriate and effective roles were influential in the way they made use of the award with clients (see Section 2.3).

2.1.1 Job Preparation Premium as an 'incentive'

One potential role of JPP was as a financial incentive that might serve as a 'carrot' to clients who showed little motivation to do any work-related activities. However, most staff were not comfortable with the notion of attempting to stimulate work-related activity through the offer of a financial incentive. Using JPP in this way was likened to a 'bribe'. Moreover, some staff felt that the offer of £20 a week would not be persuasive to clients who had no wish to return to work. Others highlighted that, if clients did take up work-related activities 'just for the money', their engagement would probably be low and any positive outcomes would not be sustained. Only one adviser described using JPP as an incentive and believed that it could motivate clients to take up work-related activities. In contrast, the vast majority of advisers introduced JPP at a time when some level of commitment and motivation had already been shown by the client.

2.1.2 Job Preparation Premium as an 'encouragement'

While there was agreement that JPP should not be used to persuade reluctant clients, there was a view that it could be used appropriately and effectively to encourage people who were showing willing, but were still hesitant to commit to a work-related activity. Where uncertainty was due to financial concerns, JPP could usefully address this barrier. For example, one adviser described how, if a client showed hesitations, a useful question might be, '*If I paid for your course, would you do it then?*'. Another felt that JPP could motivate people to take up a work-related activity sooner than they might otherwise have done. There were examples of both of these effects among the recipient study group (see Chapter 3).

However, where finances were not an issue, views were mixed about whether £20 a week was sufficient to 'tip the balance' in a client's decision.

2.1.3 Job Preparation Premium as a 'reward'

A third role for JPP was as a reward for clients' engagement in work-related activities. JPP could be awarded in recognition of people's positive efforts, sustained commitment or progress made towards work readiness. Some advisers cited this as their main use of JPP, describing the positive impacts that this 'financial moral support' could have on a client's engagement with Pathways and progression towards work. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, this positive impact on morale was evident in the experiences of some of the JPP recipients in the study group.

Other advisers specifically stated that they did not use JPP as a reward. For some, there was objection to rewarding clients financially for activities which, it was felt, they should reasonably be expected to undertake anyway. Others said they did not think it was necessary to offer JPP to clients who did not require an additional financial or motivational boost in order to undertake work-related activities.

2.1.4 Job Preparation Premium as a 'reimbursement'

Finally, a number of staff felt that JPP had a useful role in meeting (in part or full) any expenses that were associated with work-related activities. Moreover, certain advisers felt JPP should **only** be used where costs would be incurred through a work-related activity. Of the four possible roles for JPP, reimbursement of costs was the most frequently cited.

2.1.5 Perceptions of the intended role of Job Preparation Premium

Alongside giving their own views on appropriate roles for JPP, some staff also commented on their perceptions of what the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) had initially intended its role to be, and recollections differed. A means of reimbursement was not highlighted as having been part of the original design, which is perhaps notable, given that this role was given most prominence among advisers of the study group. In contrast, some staff did remember JPP being introduced as a financial incentive to encourage the uptake of work-related activities among clients who were not doing so already. This perception was at odds with most people's feelings about appropriate use of the award. In some cases, advisers explicitly noted the difference between their own use of JPP (for example, as a reward or reimbursement) and their understanding that DWP had intended it to be an incentive. There were also recollections of JPP being presented as an encouragement for clients already engaged in work-related activities to take additional steps towards work, and as a reward for efforts made.

2.2 Information and guidance in the use of the Job Preparation Premium

Advisers had first become aware of JPP either at District level meetings or at their initial adviser training. The predominant experience was that, on these occasions, JPP had been introduced to them in a brief and general manner. After these initial introductions, advisers had acquired more detailed information about how to use JPP from other sources⁷. The most frequently cited source of official instruction was Pathways to Work guidance on JPP, issued to advisers and available on the Jobcentre Plus intranet. The extent to which this guidance was referred to varied. For example, one adviser checked it regularly, being aware that online guidance was periodically updated. Others had looked at it when JPP was first introduced but, having taken in the key points, had not returned to it since. In part, this latter approach was influenced by the discretion associated with JPP, advisers

⁷ This echoes the description given by Irving *et al.* (2004) of how Jobcentre Plus advisers learned about the extension of the Adviser Discretionary Fund (ADF). Their evaluation of the ADF found that advisers' knowledge was 'largely self-taught following initial notification from managers or circulars' (p.4).

explaining that they knew the basic criteria and used their own judgement to make appropriate awards. A small number of advisers said they had received no training or guidance on JPP, one stating that the only source of information they were aware of was the leaflet designed for client use.

In the main, there was consensus among Jobcentre Plus staff that the written guidance on when and how to use JPP was relatively 'open ended' and 'open to interpretation'. Some people drew a contrast with the Return to Work Credit (RTWC), where the parameters for making awards were much more clearly prescribed. The perceived lack of definition in the JPP guidance was variously viewed as either positive or negative. Some staff appreciated the 'flexibility' of the guidance, while others saw it as 'woolly' or 'flawed'. As such, a further source of guidance for many people had been fellow IBPA, through both formal and informal conversations in their own office, at local area meetings or through an online forum open to Jobcentre Plus staff.

A number of people referred to a perceived change in message from official Pathways sources about how JPP should be used⁸. This had come some time after its initial introduction and was commonly understood as a broadening of the use of JPP. While early understandings had been that JPP should be used somewhat sparingly, the apparently revised message was understood as an instruction to make more awards. This had been interpreted in two ways. Firstly, that more people should be targeted by widening the scope of applicability to all those undertaking work-related activities rather than a focus on the unengaged, or to clients some distance from a return to work rather than just the almost job-ready. At the same time, advisers perceived a change to the guidelines on the number of activities a client must undertake to be eligible for JPP, from two or more to just one being sufficient. Many of the advisers who mentioned this issue felt that these messages had not been conveyed very clearly or explicitly. For some, this had compounded a sense of confusion about how to use JPP.

Among advisers in the study group, there appeared to have been little detailed discussion of JPP with managerial colleagues. As will be discussed in Chapter 4, while managers had a role in authorising JPP awards, they were rarely involved in detailed consideration of individual cases. Just one manager reported regularly discussing JPP awards with advisers on a one-to-one basis at monthly meetings. Some managers acknowledged that they were not familiar with the finer detail of the rules in awarding JPP, for example, saying that they would refer advisers to the online guidance if they came with a question, or acknowledging that they would be the one looking to advisers for information about JPP. Both advisers and managers noted that JPP was rarely referred to by those involved in more strategic

⁸ Department for Work and Pensions confirmed to the research team that in 2006 the official guidance had been reissued with a note reminding staff to use JPP and stating that JPP could be awarded to any eligible client (i.e. in receipt of incapacity benefits for nine months or more, and undertaking any eligible work-related activity).

levels of Pathways implementation. Where JPP had been mentioned more recently, at area or District meetings, this was generally with reference to the low number of awards, with reminders to make wider use of it.

2.3 Awarding the Job Preparation Premium

This section considers advisers' practices in awarding JPP, focusing on when and how they introduced JPP to clients, advisers' views on the discretionary nature of JPP, and the various criteria that guided advisers' practices in making awards.

2.3.1 Views on discretion

A key element of JPP is that it is a discretionary award, conferring a degree of autonomy on advisers as to how to use it. The JPP guidance issued to advisers explains that advisers have discretion in the nature and number of activities that are linked to a JPP award and in deciding on the time commitment that will be required of clients⁹. The guidance advises making these decisions according to clients' personal circumstances.

This discretion was welcomed by some staff, who found that it gave them the flexibility to use JPP in ways they felt were appropriate and beneficial. However, others would have preferred more 'framework' or 'structure' within the guidance, and found the lack of precise criteria for awards a source of confusion and ambiguity. There was evidence that some advisers had responded to this ambiguity by establishing their own fixed criteria for making awards, which tended to lead to more limited use of JPP, rather than breadth or creativity. For example, one adviser only used JPP if a client had registered with a Job Broker. The adviser had made this decision because it enabled clear and consistent use of the award and because close links with the Job Broker made it easy to monitor client participation.

The JPP guidance issued to advisers provides lists of 'suitable' activities that an action plan would 'normally' include, as well as activities that are 'desirable' and should be 'encouraged'. However, there is no explicit statement that any particular activity is compulsory in order to receive JPP. Most advisers did not feel there were any omissions in the range of activities that were listed as eligible within the JPP guidance. Given the discretion granted to advisers, some felt confident incorporating activities not listed, as long as they believed these supported the overall goal of a return to work. The point was also made that, if advisers were in essence being granted autonomy to make JPP awards for any activities they saw as helpful to individual clients, then there was little point in setting out a list of eligible activities at all.

⁹ Some advisers felt that discretion would be beneficial in an additional respect: that of the length and monetary amount of JPP awards. This is discussed in Section 5.2.

Finally, the perceived change in official instructions about JPP (see Section 2.2) was seen by some advisers to have curtailed their discretion, and in some cases was now at odds with the ways in which advisers had been awarding JPP. For example, in one area, the instruction to broaden the scope of JPP awards had resulted in an instruction from local-level management to award JPP to any client who took part in the Condition Management Programme (CMP), a practice which some advisers felt was inappropriate. Elsewhere, one adviser observed that the word 'discretionary' had been removed from the JPP guidance. This adviser and other local colleagues felt that JPP was now being presented as something of an entitlement for any client who agreed an action plan. Certain advisers had retained their more selective use of JPP despite the changed guidance. On the other hand, some were happy to adopt the new approaches, feeling that this had resulted in clearer criteria for making awards and reduced the potential for inequity in advisers' practice.

The next section considers how advisers used the discretion available to them in deciding whether to offer JPP to a client and at what point.

2.3.2 Introducing and awarding Job Preparation Premium

Advisers said that most clients were unaware of JPP until they themselves introduced it during a Work Focused Interview (WFI). In a small number of cases, advisers noted that Job Brokers¹⁰, CMP practitioners or other providers involved in work-related activities had been the first to mention JPP to a client. Some staff commented that JPP was not advertised widely due to a fear of 'word getting out' about the financial awards available. Examples of restricted publicity, noted by advisers, included that JPP leaflets were not on display in some Jobcentre Plus offices or that the leaflet was not given out routinely with the range of other Pathways documentation. Only one adviser cited cases of clients approaching Jobcentre Plus having heard by word of mouth that they were 'paying for driving lessons'. These accounts match the experiences of JPP recipients in the study group, discussed in Chapter 3.

A small number of advisers (largely concentrated in one pilot area) introduced JPP briefly to all clients at the first WFI. This was usually in the context of presenting the range of support on offer via the Choices package. Clients were given very general information verbally and/or were provided with a JPP leaflet to take away, alongside other literature about available support. Advisers taking this approach found that clients rarely returned with spontaneous requests for more details about JPP. Job Preparation Premium was then reintroduced by the adviser in more detail, if and when discussion in subsequent WFIs turned to possible work-related activities.

¹⁰ New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) Job Brokers aim to help people find, secure and sustain paid employment. Benefit recipients often have a choice of Job Brokers in the local area, but can only register with one Broker at a time.

More commonly however, advisers reserved both initial introduction and detailed explanation of JPP until such time as they felt an award would be appropriate. It was emphasised that clients arrived at their first WFI at various stages of thinking about a return to work and made progress at different rates, and therefore, there was no particular point in a series of interviews when JPP would be introduced. When asked whether there were any types of client for whom they felt JPP would not be appropriate, some advisers noted that they would not introduce JPP to a client whose health clearly prevented any sort of work-related activity at that time.

Perceptions about the appropriate time to introduce and award JPP differed amongst advisers. The criteria involved in advisers' decision-making can be grouped under three main headings:

- client motivation and commitment;
- client proximity to work (which, in turn, influenced the types of activity included in JPP action plans);
- financial implications.

Client motivation and commitment

For the majority of advisers, a demonstration of willingness to undertake work-related activities was necessary before they would introduce JPP to a client. Clients did not necessarily need to have specific activities in mind, but had to show engagement in discussing possibilities. JPP was generally not introduced to clients until they had agreed an action plan or sometimes even begun their work-related activities.

In some cases, advisers would award JPP to clients who were undertaking their first work-related activity. Others made awards to those who had already undertaken a number of activities, who had made significant progress and had demonstrated sustained commitment. These advisers felt that, in order to receive JPP, clients should be doing activities over and above what might be generally expected, and so made awards to people who were doing 'that bit extra'. On the other hand, some advisers felt that it was unnecessary to award JPP to clients who were already motivated and would undertake and sustain work-related activities without any additional support.

These contrasting approaches could mean that one client might be awarded JPP for a particular activity where another would not. Not only was this apparent between different advisers, but one adviser acknowledged that they had had a number of clients take up the same course, but had only awarded JPP to those who had demonstrated a particularly high level of self-motivation.

Client proximity to work

A client's stage in progression towards work was a factor in advisers' decisions about whether to introduce JPP. The JPP guidance issued to advisers specifies that action plans must '*clearly show the route back to work of 16 hours or more*' (paragraph 22.8). Given that JPP awards are for a maximum of 26 weeks, it might be inferred that it is therefore designed for claimants who are deemed to be no more than six months away from work-readiness. However, this did not shape the practices of all advisers in the study group.¹¹

Some staff did describe their use of JPP as focusing only on clients who were almost job-ready. Among this group, there was a view that JPP would be less appropriate for use with claimants who had been off work for several years, on the basis that they were likely to be some distance from work when they first came to a WFI. Where JPP was awarded to people nearing readiness for work, action plans tended to include activities which were strongly work-focused, or as one adviser described it, a 'total precursor' to entering work¹². One adviser described equating JPP to the Lone Parent Work Search Premium, and so made awards for similar activities, which had to be something 'concrete'. Another adviser awarded JPP only if a client attended a particular workplace skills course, which was geared towards people in the final stages of job preparation.

In contrast, some advisers were prepared to award JPP to any client who took steps towards readiness for work, however far away they were perceived to be from entering employment. Here, awards were linked to activities that focused on improving health or self-confidence, such as the CMP, using a gym or attending a support group for people with mental health conditions. One adviser described targeting clients who had substantial barriers to overcome or were very distanced from the labour market, rather than clients who faced fewer challenges, for example those with short-term health conditions or a likelihood of returning easily to a previous job.

These differing perspectives again show the potential for inequity. For example, clients assigned to one adviser might be awarded JPP for participating in the CMP while another client doing the same activity, but seeing a different adviser, would not. They also indicate that there were differing views on what constituted a work-related activity. In particular, some staff did not see the CMP or other health-related activities as demonstrating a clear, or in any way guaranteed, progression towards work. To give an example, one adviser had stopped awarding JPP for attendance at a particular mental health support group because none of the

¹¹ The fact that only a minority of JPP recipients in the study group had returned to work by the time of the research interview provides further evidence that JPP is not being exclusively targeted at incapacity benefits recipients who are nearing job-readiness.

¹² Examples here were Work Trials, work preparation courses and voluntary placements.

clients who had attended had moved closer to work by the end of 26 weeks of JPP receipt. Data from JPP recipients suggests, however, that activities involved in and stemming from the CMP can have a positive impact on **thoughts and feelings** about returning to work (see Chapter 3).

Financial implications

Some advisers said they would only offer JPP when a client would incur expenses by participating in a work-related activity. Furthermore, some said that JPP would only be used where there was no alternative funding source, for example the ADF.

One adviser described awarding JPP to clients who undertook unpaid workplace-based activities, on the basis that there should be a financial recognition of activities that so closely approximated actual work. These included unpaid 13-week placements (of up to 30 hours per week) which were available through the NDDP and a local programme that included training and work placements. The adviser explained that people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) who took part in this local programme would receive a £10 weekly Training Premium in addition to their normal benefit. Thus, this adviser awarded JPP to incapacity benefits recipients who undertook the same activity in the interests of fairness.

This same adviser had also awarded JPP to a client on incapacity-based Income Support (IS), whose benefit was reduced when undertaking Permitted Work¹³. In this way, JPP was seen as acting as 'compensation' for loss of benefits. However, regarding clients on non-means tested Incapacity Benefit (IB), another adviser was firmly of the view that it was inappropriate to award JPP on top of the additional income that could be earned through Permitted Work, and would not have awarded for this purpose.

2.3.3 The relationship between perceptions of the role of Job Preparation Premium and criteria used in awarding Job Preparation Premium

Recalling the four possible roles for JPP (discussed in Section 2.1) there are evidently some parallels between the criteria that advisers used in making decisions to award JPP and their perceptions of which of these roles are most appropriate. As has already been noted, the lack of support for an incentivising role is reflected in the practices of advisers who only awarded JPP to motivated and committed clients. When introduced to clients taking their first steps towards work, JPP might be seen as an encouragement and/or a reward. Where advisers offered JPP only to exceptionally proactive clients who were undertaking activities 'over and above' the norm, the reward role seems more prominent. There were also

¹³ Permitted work is paid work which may be done while receiving incapacity benefits, with the agreement of the DWP. There are rules covering the level of earnings allowed, the number of hours permitted and periods during which work may be done.

advisers who did not offer JPP to clients on the basis of a positive attitude alone, only using JPP in cases where there were costs associated with a client's activities. This demonstrates a perception of JPP as a reimbursement.

2.4 Factors contributing to limited use of the Job Preparation Premium

The lower than expected number of JPP awards made in the first 18 months of its operation was explored with advisers and managers in the study group. Staff members' responses to being told that a total of 176 JPP awards had been made across seven pilot sites, together with their other comments about using JPP, shed some light on its limited use.

There were mixed reactions to the figures regarding numbers of JPP awards. A slight majority responded with some degree of surprise, expecting that the numbers would have been higher. Advisers who had been identified as high users of JPP in the preliminary survey were sometimes surprised to discover that they had accounted for such a high proportion of awards made. Some of the lower users of JPP had thought themselves to be exceptional and had expected overall numbers to be much higher. However, some low users felt that the figures for awards made were unremarkable, sensing that many of their Pathways colleagues felt a similar disinclination to use JPP.

Whether they themselves were frequent or minimal users of JPP, most staff offered possible reasons for the low number of awards. These centred around four themes:

- lack of clarity in the official guidance;
- advisers' own views on appropriate use of JPP;
- perceived low priority of JPP within the overall Pathways initiative;
- the administrative burden posed by JPP.

2.4.1 Lack of clear guidance

A lack of clarity in the initial guidance, compounded by the perceived change in the official message that followed, was seen as a key factor in many advisers' limited use of JPP. Some advisers reported that they had colleagues who were 'scared' to award JPP because of worries that they would use it either too freely or for the wrong purposes and that it would then be '*their head on the block*'. It was felt that more explicit guidelines on when and how to use JPP would reduce such anxieties and increase advisers' confidence in making awards. Linked to this, one adviser highlighted the fact that, while discretion per se was not unfamiliar to Pathways staff, autonomous decision-making around awarding money was not something they were accustomed to. In comparison, the rules about when to award the RTWC and the ADF were thought to be more clear cut.

2.4.2 Incapacity Benefit Personal Advisers' views on appropriate use

Advisers' views on the purpose and role of JPP, and the criteria they used to determine when to make an award, inevitably had an influence on the extent to which they used JPP. Unsurprisingly, use was low among people who disagreed with the use of a financial reward or incentive, or who felt it was unnecessary for self-motivated clients. Even among those more positive about JPP in principle, use could be limited by the way in which the nature of their caseload related to their views on appropriate awards. For example, an adviser who felt JPP should only be introduced to clients who were almost job-ready, but whose clients tended to be some distance from the labour market, would be likely to use JPP very infrequently. Likewise, advisers who had set themselves strict criteria for awards, relating to specific courses or programmes, made infrequent awards where few clients became involved in these activities. It is also important to note, however, that there was evidence that advisers with negative opinions of JPP could make a high number of awards. This happened where official guidance instructed advisers to make awards where they themselves felt it was inappropriate or unnecessary, for example awarding JPP to all clients participating in the CMP.

2.4.3 The low profile of the Job Preparation Premium

A number staff were of the impression that JPP had been given a relatively low profile compared to other elements of Pathways to Work and they felt this had contributed to low use of the award. This perception stemmed from a range of factors, including: the apparent lack of focus on JPP at District or managerial level; the fact that JPP had been introduced once Pathways was up and running and so was seen by some people as an 'add on'; and the absence of targets relating to the number of JPP awards. Some staff acknowledged that they would be more driven to increase their use of JPP if there were performance indicators linked to it. One manager had, at one point, issued a reminder to staff about using JPP and said that this emphasis had led to a marked increase in use among advisers in the office. This evidence demonstrates how greater emphasis from senior levels might lead to more extensive use of JPP.

2.4.4 The administrative burden of the Job Preparation Premium

Finally, some advisers felt that the administration involved in JPP was a deterring factor, either for themselves and/or for other advisers. Many staff felt that awarding and monitoring JPP was a time-consuming and burdensome task. That said, some of the higher users of JPP felt that managing awards got easier with experience. Staff views on the administration of JPP are explored more fully in Chapter 4.

2.5 Discussion of secondary analysis of data

This section summarises the findings of the secondary analysis of data from previous research (Knight, 2006) and draws comparisons with those of the present study. We might expect differences between the secondary analysis and the present study findings owing to the timing of the data collection and the depth of exploration. Data for the present study were collected some 12 months later than earlier work and this study was focused solely on JPP so data were gathered in greater depth. However, overall the findings of the present research largely confirm those of earlier studies, and increase understanding of the themes that had emerged.

There were similar findings across both sets of data about:

- the perceived roles for JPP and views about the appropriateness of such roles;
- uncertainty regarding the intended role and use of JPP;
- sources of guidance for using JPP;
- concerns relating to the level of discretion and inconsistent use of JPP;
- advisers' practices in introducing JPP to clients.

Some of the findings from this study deepened understanding about what was found in previous studies. For example, in conducting the secondary analysis, Knight (2006) suggested that the lack of independent approaches from clients about JPP may have been due to the relative newness of the measure at the time of the earlier studies. However, the present data indicate that JPP has not become much more widely known among Pathways clients over time, with spontaneous enquiries still rare.

There were, however, some differences in the two sets of findings. In the secondary analysis, staff were found to have given largely consistent views about the types of activity which would meet JPP eligibility criteria. However, the more detailed exploration of JPP use among advisers in the present study has highlighted widely differing practices, including examples of inconsistent practice which might be perceived as problematic.

Perhaps more so than in the present study, there was a view in the earlier research that clients should be undertaking something 'extra' in order to warrant a JPP award. In contrast to some of the advisers in the present study group, most of those involved in earlier research felt that simply accessing the CMP or seeing a Job Broker would not be sufficient to make an award. This difference in practice over time may be a reflection of the later reissuing of guidance, which was perceived to have broadened the remit of JPP to specifically include clients undertaking just one work-related activity.

For the most part, the present study confirmed factors identified in the secondary analysis as contributing to low use of JPP. However, an additional factor which was only found in the earlier research was 'suspicion' or 'lack of enthusiasm'

for JPP amongst clients. This experience was concentrated among advisers who had introduced JPP to clients not yet considering work-related activities, adding some support to the view that JPP would not be an effective incentive for clients who were unengaged. While initial concerns and queries from prospective JPP recipients were noted by participants in the present study (see Chapter 3), this had not deterred clients from accepting awards. This may be a reflection of the fact that, among advisers in the present study, awards were largely offered only to people who were already motivated and committed.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has considered the perceptions, understanding and use of JPP among Jobcentre Plus staff. Under the overall remit of supporting clients' movement towards work, staff were variously using JPP as an encouragement, a reward and/or a reimbursement of expenses associated with participation in work-related activities. Few staff were using JPP as an incentive to motivate the initial uptake of work-related activities. This was not seen to be an appropriate or effective use of the award. Some advisers felt there had been 'mixed messages' about the role of JPP, which had caused some confusion.

The findings show that guidance about JPP was commonly perceived as quite 'open ended' and, for some advisers, this ambiguity was problematic and led to uncertainties in making awards. Others welcomed the flexibility this allowed, and appreciated the ability to exercise discretion in their use of JPP. A perceived lack of clarity in the official guidance had motivated some advisers to seek advice from elsewhere (for example, consulting peer colleagues) or to establish their own fixed criteria for making awards.

The level of discretion available to advisers resulted in markedly different awarding practices across the study group. In deciding whether to award JPP, advisers focused variously on the client's level of motivation and commitment, their proximity to a return to work, and the financial implications of undertaking activities.

Four main factors were identified as contributing to the relatively low number of JPP awards made. These were: a perceived lack of clear guidance; advisers' views on the appropriate role and use of JPP; a perception that JPP had a low profile compared to other elements of Pathways to Work; and the administrative burden associated with JPP.

On all of the above issues, there was much agreement in the views of staff involved in previous research. One possible area of difference over time was closer targeting of JPP on clients already committed to work-related activities, which seemed to have resulted in more consistently positive responses from clients. In the present study, there was greater evidence of variety in the criteria used by advisers in deciding to award JPP. Also, compared to advisers in earlier research, more staff in the present study seemed willing to award JPP to clients undertaking just one activity. However, the difference in depth of data between the secondary analysis and the present study means that these findings should be treated with caution.

3 Learning about the Job Preparation Premium and undertaking work-related activities

This chapter focuses on the perspectives and experiences of Job Preparation Premium (JPP) recipients in learning about JPP and undertaking work-related activities. Section 3.1 discusses people's thoughts and feelings about work at the time of their first Work Focused Interview (WFI). Section 3.2 then describes how recipients learned about JPP, their initial responses and their understanding of its role. Section 3.3 considers the influence JPP had on people's decisions to take up work-related activities. Section 3.4 looks at how work-related activities were chosen and gives an overview of people's experiences and perceptions of impact. Finally, Section 3.5 provides a summary of the chapter's main points. The analysis in this chapter draws primarily on recipient data, with the views of Jobcentre Plus staff briefly incorporated in some sections.

3.1 Thoughts and feelings about a return to work

In looking at people's thoughts and feelings about work this section provides some understanding of the circumstances of people who chose to undertake work-related activities and who received JPP whilst doing so.

People in the study group varied in the nature of their health condition, the length of time they had been off work, and the type of employment and career path they had had before becoming unable to work. At the time of attending a first WFI, people's feelings about readiness for work or work-related activities covered a broad spectrum including:

- people who were ready to take steps towards work and were making plans about what they would do;
- people who had started to think about doing something about work but were less sure how to go about it;
- people who were not thinking about work or work-related activities.

As has been found in previous studies involving incapacity benefits recipients (Corden and Nice, 2006a; Nice and Corden, 2006b; Sainsbury and Davidson, 2006), health was often the key factor in people's feelings about readiness for work. A fear of not coping when back at work was one of the obstacles people faced. The thought of taking on a job but then not managing and having to leave was a great worry for some people, and could be a major factor in not yet having tried to work again. A related concern was not wanting to let the new employer down. All of the people in the study group who had returned to work by the time of the research interview felt that their health had improved significantly since the time they made their IB claim.

Further to concerns about health at work, the thought of work itself could be daunting. Some people had been in receipt of an incapacity benefit for several years and found the thought of returning to work 'terrifying' or wondered how and if they would ever get back to work, even though they knew it would be beneficial. Some felt very distanced from the labour market and also from social contacts in general, talking of a sense of isolation and withdrawal. Others had had a relatively shorter spell of ill-health, perhaps just one or two years, but this could also be long enough to feel unconfident about managing a return to work.

3.1.1 Making plans for work or work-related activities

Some people in the study group were feeling ready to return to, or take steps towards, paid work at the time they attended their first WFI. Influences on feeling ready for work were improved health, a wish to regain the self-esteem and social contacts that accompany employment, and also financial need.

Some of these people had begun to think about possible options and several had already identified the particular kinds of work or work-related activity that they were interested in. Four members of the study group said they had approached Jobcentre Plus independently (rather than being contacted about a WFI), either to check that activities they planned to begin were permitted within their benefit rules, or to seek information on how to pursue their goals.

3.1.2 Starting to think about work or work-related activities

Others who were keen to take steps towards work were less sure how to begin. Therefore, being called to a WFI and exploring possible work-related activities was a positive experience. Some people said it would have been helpful if this contact had happened sooner. For example, a man with arthritis, back problems and depression felt he had become very inactive during his three-and-a-half years

on Incapacity Benefit (IB) and thought that it would now be harder for him to return to work than if he had pursued work-related activities earlier on. There were reports of being pleased or relieved when contact was made by Jobcentre Plus after several years without any communication. Evidently, some people with intentions and aspirations to return to work were, until this point, unaware of the support now available from Jobcentre Plus.

3.1.3 Not thinking about work or work-related activities

Some people had not been contemplating work at the time of their first WFI. Upon being requested to attend a meeting with an Incapacity Benefit Personal Adviser (IBPA), some people said they had been anxious because they thought they might be forced to take up work when their health condition was still limiting. However, the majority of people in the study group said their interactions with advisers had been positive. After attending a WFI and being introduced to a range of support options, some people's initial perceptions of the adviser role altered, with the understanding that they were there to offer support rather than push them into work. As such, there was a view from some people that the services provided by Jobcentre Plus should be made more widely known.

Some people who had not been considering work found that they were encouraged by the WFI process to start thinking about work-related activities. However, there were cases where people had felt their adviser had been too work-focused. There was a view that discussion of work-related activities needed to come at a time when clients themselves felt ready to consider such things. A gentle approach was appreciated, without too much pressure or too great an emphasis on the ultimate return to work. At the time of attending a first WFI, some people were only ready to start thinking about improving their health, as a precursor to discussion of more directly work-focused activity. One recipient noted that some incapacity benefit claimants might resist or rebel against suggestions that focused too strongly on a return to paid work, and that this may also be detrimental to people's mental health. Thus, focusing on **steps towards work** was considered a more positive and manageable approach.

3.2 Learning about the Job Preparation Premium

This section begins by presenting JPP recipients' recollections of how JPP was introduced to them. It goes on to consider people's reactions to the offer of JPP and their understanding of its role.

3.2.1 How the Job Preparation Premium was introduced

The majority of recipients in the study group had first been told about JPP by their own adviser. In a small number of cases, a different provider involved in work-related activities – for example, a Job Broker or Condition Management Programme (CMP) practitioner – had been the first to mention JPP, telling the client that they should follow this up with their adviser. Matching the evidence

from Jobcentre Plus staff, there was apparently little word-of-mouth effect, with no examples of recipients having learned about JPP from sources unconnected to Pathways to Work.

A small number of people thought that JPP had been mentioned briefly at their first WFI, but in most cases, people remembered JPP being introduced by their adviser either in tandem with discussing potential work-related activities or some time after they had already agreed to – or even begun – an activity. Only one person said he had been proactive in asking his adviser for more details following a brief mention at the first WFI.

As described in Section 3.1, individuals were at different stages in thinking about work when they first met their adviser and so plans for activities were established at different points in the series of WFIs. People nearer to being ready for paid work set in motion plans for work-related activities at the first WFI, and JPP was therefore introduced very early on. For people who were further away from work, discussions and decisions about work-related activities, and learning about JPP, occurred during later WFIs.

3.2.2 Responses to the offer of the Job Preparation Premium

On hearing about JPP, some people in the study group said they had been immediately positive in their response, for example, thinking it was ‘brilliant’ or ‘a really good idea’ or that they had ‘nothing to lose’. Advisers also reported largely positive responses from clients to whom they had offered JPP.

However, there was also evidence of initial apprehension, hesitancy or scepticism amongst some clients after learning about JPP. For some people who were already committed to their work-related activity and had no particular need for financial support, what appeared to be ‘money for nothing’ aroused suspicions or even feelings of guilt. For some people, the fact that this additional £20 a week would have no effect on other benefits seemed ‘too good to be true’ and left people with concerns about the effect on their benefits. One adviser described how a client had reported her JPP award to the local authority Housing Benefit (HB) department, despite assurances that JPP was disregarded as income. This led to a reduction of HB (in error), which the adviser helped to rectify. There were also people in the study group, and described by advisers, who had been worried that they may have to repay all the JPP money if they did not find work by the end of their award. Advisers also gave examples of clients who thought that accepting the money would give their adviser some sort of ‘hold’ over them, with repercussions if the activity was not maintained.

One adviser felt that clients’ reservations meant it was sometimes quite hard work to convince people to apply for JPP. In general, however, advisers and recipients themselves said that issues had been clarified, reassurances accepted and concerns put to rest. Very few advisers had known a client decline the offer of JPP.

3.2.3 Recipients' understanding of the role of the Job Preparation Premium

Recipients in the study group understood that JPP was awarded for steps they were taking towards a return to work. Chapter 2 considered Jobcentre Plus staff's perceptions of the role of JPP, discussing how it could operate as an incentive, an encouragement, a reward, or a reimbursement. In describing their perceptions of JPP, recipients tended to talk about the money being an encouragement or providing reimbursement.

At the time they first learned about JPP, several people expected to use the money to cover particular expenses. One explanation for this may be that their adviser had presented JPP as a form of financial reimbursement. Although none of the recipients said they had been told that the money had to be used for specific purposes, their advisers had sometimes suggested that JPP might cover costs related to the activities they undertook, such as travel expenses or course fees. Where financial support was not essential to an activity, or where there were no costs involved, some people had, nonetheless, notionally ascribed their £20 a week to a specific outgoing. Chapter 5 discusses in detail the ways that JPP money was used by recipients.

3.3 Influence of the Job Preparation Premium in the uptake of work-related activities

This section looks at the role JPP played in recipients' initial decisions to take up a work-related activity. Chapters 5 and 6 look at the wider and longer-term impact of JPP, as these activities were sustained, augmented or came to an end.

The majority of people in the study group said that the prospect of an additional £20 a week through JPP had had no influence on their decision to undertake a work-related activity. In part, this was because JPP was rarely introduced to people until work-related activities had been agreed, or (in some cases) had already commenced and, thus, could not have been taken into account in their decision making. Instead, people had been influenced to undertake activities by changes in their health, encouragement and information provided by advisers and financial and social needs. Most people confirmed that they would have undertaken work-related activities regardless of the offer of JPP. This was equally the case among people who had come to their first WFI with thoughts of work or potential activities already in mind, and among those who had not been considering work at this point.

In contrast however, two people in the study group felt that JPP **had** been the main factor in their decision to take up a work-related activity. For one recipient, the influence had been in encouraging participation in activities sooner than may otherwise have been the case. The other individual had plans to take up a higher education course in the coming autumn, but was persuaded to take an unrelated short course over the summer, because his travel expenses would be covered by

JPP. Two further recipients felt that, while JPP had not been a **critical** factor, it had perhaps contributed to or been the final factor in sealing their decision to take up a work-related activity. Mirroring the previous examples, one person had felt reassured that costs would be covered, while the other thought that the offer of money had provided the '*final push*' to try something.

3.4 Work-related activities: decision making, experiences and impact

This section begins by providing an overview of the work-related activities undertaken by JPP recipients in the study group, including a brief discussion of staff views on the range of eligible activities. Drawing on data from staff and recipients, it then considers how activities were identified and agreed upon, before going on to discuss the experiences and impacts of activities, as perceived by JPP recipients.

3.4.1 Activities undertaken

The work-related activities for which people in the study group had been awarded JPP covered several of those listed in the guidance and can be arranged into four broad groupings, as shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Work-related activities undertaken by Job Preparation Premium recipients

Type of activity	Examples
Health-related	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities within the CMP • Attending mental health support groups • Using a gym
Training and qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forklift or Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) licence training • Driving instructor course • Maths and English courses (basic skills, GCSEs) • IT courses • Access course in nursing • Post-graduate course in counselling
Work preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-employment or workplace preparation courses • Meeting with a Job Broker • Voluntary meetings with an IBPA • Accessing an employment support service (e.g. Job Action Team)
Work experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary work, e.g. charity shop, hospital, welfare advice service

Advisers' varying practices in making JPP awards (discussed in Chapter 2) were illustrated in the experiences of recipients in the study group. Some people had been awarded JPP for their first, and sometimes only, work-related activity, while

others had not been introduced to JPP until they embarked on their second or third activity. At least half of the study group had been involved in work-related activities for some time before making an application for JPP and some people had started these activities prior to their first contact with Pathways. Examples of long-standing activities were fulfilling a voluntary work placement or attending a mental health support group. Across the recipient group, there was also evidence of possible inequity, for example, some people had received JPP for attending the CMP while others had completed a course within this programme prior to being awarded JPP for a subsequent activity.

The timescale of work-related activities varied. Vocational courses and activities within the CMP ranged from three weeks to several months, but were usually of a fixed length. In contrast, activities such as voluntary work or engagement with an employment support service, were potentially of unlimited duration. Some people had achieved 26 weeks' receipt of JPP by continuing their participation in activities that did not have a defined duration. In other cases, people had pursued one activity after another in what might be seen as a rolling programme, for example, progressing from introductory to more advanced courses.

Most people had undertaken more than one work-related activity during the course of their involvement with Pathways, either concurrently or in succession, and a majority had continued with at least one of their activities after their 26-week period of JPP receipt had expired. (Chapter 6 will discuss the ending or expiry of JPP in more detail.)

3.4.2 Choosing activities

People came to their first WFI at varying stages of readiness for work and, therefore, the extent of the adviser role in signposting or making suggestions also varied. Data from both staff and recipients shows that clients with clear plans in place tended to need little or no assistance setting these in motion. In contrast, where thoughts about work were more preliminary, advisers played a larger role in generating ideas and identifying suitable work-related activities. To do so, staff explained how they would get to know the client's interests and aspirations, areas of prior experience and expertise, their health restrictions and other commitments and draw on their local knowledge of available courses and services.

People could also come to identify and learn about work-related activities in other ways. Some recipients had found out about their JPP-linked activity through another provider with whom they were already involved. For example, employment preparation programme staff and CMP practitioners had signposted people towards voluntary work possibilities or a mental health support group. One adviser explained how clients would be referred to a local employment support organisation which aimed to help people identify interests and goals.

Amongst the advisers in the study group, there was a view that selecting activities was client-led, open to negotiation, and that nothing was compulsory or forced upon a client. This perception of advisers being led by clients' needs, aspirations

and choices was also found in separate research on the role of advisers (Knight *et al.*, 2005). Advisers' client-led approach was largely recognised by recipients in the study group who said they had not felt pushed into doing any activity and had had a choice.

That said, some thought that the activities suggested by their adviser were not always appropriate or helpful. Sometimes advisers had seemed more focused on a return to paid work than the client felt was realistic. It was thought to be unhelpful, frustrating and even detrimental to health, when advisers or others did not seem to take the constraints of their condition into account. In contrast, people were appreciative of advisers (and other Pathways-linked practitioners) who had demonstrated an understanding of their condition, recognised the limitations and identified work-related activities or job opportunities that matched their own goals and aspirations.

One factor which was important to some clients in choosing activities was the amount of travel involved. Either for health, financial or confidence reasons, some people preferred not to travel too far to attend work-related activities or for potential future jobs.

The expected duration of work-related activities could be important to advisers in linking activities to a JPP award. Some advisers preferred to award JPP for activities which were likely to continue for the maximum 26 weeks' receipt. Others were willing to make awards of a shorter duration if the activity was of a fixed length, for example a three-week work preparation course. However, there was also a view that there was little point awarding JPP for courses that lasted only a few days.

In most cases, advisers were flexible about the amount of time clients spent **each** week doing work-related activities. For some activities, such as vocational courses, the timetable would be externally defined, but for others, advisers and clients would come to an agreement on an appropriate time commitment. Some advisers in the study group emphasised the need for manageable investments of time and energy, primarily in consideration of people's health conditions but sometimes also family commitments. The benefit of flexibility in hours spent on an activity was also noted by people in the study group who had childcare arrangements to work around.

3.4.3 Experience and impact of work-related activities

Although the primary focus of this report is on the experience, use and impact of the **Job Preparation Premium**, there was much valuable data on people's experiences of undertaking various work-related activities and how these activities had contributed to movements towards work. Experiences and impacts of work-related activities are of key interest to the wider evaluation of Pathways to Work and as such, the experiences and views of clients in the study group are briefly discussed here.

It was not always possible to establish exactly which of the activities undertaken by recipients in the study group had been specifically linked to the receipt of JPP¹⁴. However, in order to build understanding of the potential of various work-related activities, this section draws on experiences of all activities that come within the scope of JPP.

Health-focused activities

A majority of the study group had taken part in health-focused activities at some point during their Pathways involvement. Included among those who had participated in the CMP, were people at all stages of thinking about work at the time of their first WFI. However, people who had also attended a gym or mental health support group tended to be those who had not been thinking about a return to work.

Activities undertaken within the CMP varied depending on the nature of people's health conditions but were generally viewed very positively. People with physical and mental health conditions alike said that the CMP had provided them with knowledge, understanding and coping strategies, for example, relaxation techniques, breathing exercises and 'paced' goal setting. In consequence, some people felt their health had improved, citing such things as reduced anxiety or depression, fewer panic attacks and less back pain. Condition Management Programme practitioners also provided signposting to exercise programmes or peer support groups, which had further health and social benefits and positive impacts on self-confidence in particular. Other perceived plusses regarding the CMP included: the opportunity to meet others in a similar situation; the 'can do' ethos of courses, focusing on capabilities rather than limitations; and the perceived independence of the CMP from Jobcentre Plus. People making this latter point appreciated the assurance that discussions would be confidential, had found that practitioners had a fresh outlook on their situation, or felt there was a more supportive ethos than they experienced within Jobcentre Plus.

There was also evidence that the CMP impacted positively on feelings about work. Some people described how, through attending the CMP, anxieties about managing work had reduced, they had begun to feel capable of working and that returning to work was a realistic possibility. One person felt that the CMP had been an essential building block, in boosting confidence that enabled progress onto more directly work-focused activities. For another, the routine of engagement with the CMP was a useful reintroduction to a regular time commitment, though this was challenging at first. Moreover, some activities within the CMP provided information about employment rights and disability discrimination laws.

There were some negative experiences of the CMP. Some people did not feel their health practitioner demonstrated an appropriate level of knowledge or

¹⁴ Some participants struggled to recall the precise components of their JPP action plan and, as such, this could not be established in all interviews.

understanding about their condition. Others were initially anxious about what the programme might entail or found sessions draining. This uncertainty or lack of understanding about the aim of the programme and what might happen was also found amongst incapacity benefit recipients who took part in earlier research to evaluate Pathways (Corden and Nice, 2006b). For one participant in the present study, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) sessions were not found to have had any lasting impact, due to the deeply embedded nature of her mental health condition. However, at the same time, she missed the sessions when they ended and felt that losing this contact may have done some 'damage'. This recipient would have preferred to meet at an alternative location to her own home, which was the only option offered. Evidence emerging from research with CMP practitioners (Barnes and Hudson, 2006b) suggests that the programme was not designed to meet the needs of people perceived to be some distance from work.

Training and qualifications

As detailed in Table 3.1, courses pursued among the recipient group covered a range of subject areas and kinds of qualification. People whose JPP was linked to training or qualifications tended to be those who had already been thinking about work at the time of their first WFI and several had already embarked on some activity by the time they had contact with Pathways.

One clear impact of this type of activity was the attainment of specific qualifications. Beyond the acquisition of skills and the qualification itself, positive impacts included having a focus and a goal to reach for, (re)gaining self-esteem and confidence in one's capabilities, increased motivation and a sense of achievement. Re-engaging in social contacts and reducing isolation was also a commonly perceived benefit, which some people noted had further lifted their mood.

Negative aspects of undertaking courses included initial or ongoing lack of confidence (one person had not felt able to take the final examinations), challenges when courses were harder than expected, and disappointments when tests were not passed first time. As with CMP activities, getting used to a regular routine and time commitment could be exhausting. Some people with physical health conditions found the location of courses inaccessible or uncomfortable. Travel costs and family commitments also presented difficulties for some people.

Work preparation

Many people undertaking activities among those broadly termed as 'work preparation' were thinking about the possibility of work when they first attended a WFI, though not all had clearly formed plans. Being introduced to a range of employment possibilities by an adviser was thought to be a useful first step in generating ideas, identifying and matching skills and devising action plans. Job Brokers and employment support services were able to give general information on different types of work and identify specific job vacancies, in addition to providing internet access for wider job searching.

A range of specific elements was cited as helpful, including assistance with CV writing, job-search techniques, application forms and interview skills. Increased confidence about returning to work and seeing this as a realistic prospect, were again positive outcomes of participation. Engagement with a Job Broker or employment support service sometimes led to enrolment on more advanced work preparation or vocational courses, or work experience activities (see below).

Negative aspects of work preparation activities were uncommon, but centred on the approaches of certain Job Brokers or advisers, who were felt to be too focused on a return to paid work, were unsupportive of the client's needs or aspirations, or who suggested what the client felt were inappropriate jobs. There was also dissatisfaction for people who felt their meetings with Job Brokers were too brief or infrequent.

Work experience

The workplace experience of people in the study group was concentrated within voluntary placements, rather than Work Trials or part-time paid employment under the Permitted Work rules. As with courses and qualifications, people whose JPP award was linked to voluntary work tended to have had ideas about potential areas of employment, or were already undertaking their voluntary activities, when they first had contact with Pathways.

Most people had found voluntary work to be a positive experience. While several people had had anxieties about a return to paid work, voluntary work was often perceived as a more feasible option in the first instance, and was easier to contemplate for a number of reasons. There was a perception that there would be less pressure than in a paid work role, and that there would be more scope to negotiate flexible or part-time hours. It seems that the fewer obligations attached to unpaid and non-contractual work emboldened people to 'test the waters'. It might be inferred that, having less at stake, people would experience fewer negative impacts should the post be unsustainable.

Benefits of voluntary work included: (re)gaining workplace skills such as taking phone calls, handling cash, doing basic administration and serving customers; and gaining an insight into the types of work they might enjoy. Importantly, being back in a workplace restored many people's confidence that they would be able to cope in a more permanent role, and so encouraged them to think of paid work as a realistic possibility. The routine of regular activity, a 'reason to get up and dressed', and engaging in interactions with others also had benefits for people's mental health, reducing isolation and social anxieties.

For some people, however, voluntary work had not been wholly enjoyable. Negative experiences included initial challenges and apprehensions and occasional lack of support from colleagues. One recipient had been particularly disillusioned by his experience because his hopes that his 'work placement' would lead to a paid appointment were not met and he felt his efforts had been a 'waste of time'.

Impact of work-related activities on returns to work

Whichever work-related activities had been undertaken, most people felt that their participation had moved them at least some distance closer to work, either through improving health, increasing self-confidence or making a return to employment seem a less daunting and more achievable goal. Only one JPP recipient felt that he was now further from a return to work than when his contact with Pathways began. This was attributed to a negative experience with his adviser who, he felt, had been unsupportive and obstructive of his aspirations to undertake a particular voluntary activity.

People who had returned to work by the time of the research interview tended to have come to their first WFI with ideas already formed and, in some cases, activities under way. The majority had undertaken voluntary work or training with qualifications, usually accompanied by contact with a job broker or employment support team. In most cases, the evidence suggests that their work-related activities had played at least some part in their return to work. Most directly, where qualifications were very specific in their vocational application, completion of a course could sometimes be the main factor in a subsequent return to work (for example, gaining a specialist driving licence). Notably, few of the people in paid work at the time of the research interview had participated in the CMP, suggesting that this programme is being directed at clients who are in the earlier stages of job preparation.

Among people whose JPP had expired at 26 weeks, with no return to work as yet, a majority had continued at least one of their work-related activities, often voluntary work or contact with a Job Broker. Of the people who were still in receipt of JPP at the time of interview, most expected to continue with their activities if they had not started work by the end of 26 weeks' receipt. One JPP recipient explained how participating in a work-related activity had made it clear that she was **not** ready for a return to paid work at that time. However, she had maintained links with both a work preparation provider and a mental health support group, as these were beneficial steps in rebuilding connections with the world of work and increasing confidence.

Some people were not in work or undertaking any work-related activities at the time of interview. In almost all cases, people explained that their health was the major limiting factor at this time. Most people felt they had, nevertheless, gained some positive impacts from their work-related activity.

3.5 Summary

This chapter has considered people's views about being offered JPP and the experiences and impacts of participating in work-related activities.

The findings show that people at various stages of readiness for work can be supported to undertake work-related activities, with various amounts of help and signposting from advisers and service providers. In helping clients to think about

plans for moving towards work, it seemed important that advisers took account of individuals' aspirations and circumstances and did not appear to be too focused on a return to paid work.

Although JPP was largely seen as a positive initiative it was rarely the influential factor in people's decisions to take up work-related activities. Recipients' recollections accorded with staff accounts that JPP was mostly introduced to clients after an activity or set of activities had already been discussed and agreed, and most people said they would have started their activities regardless of the offer of JPP. In light of this, most people tended to perceive the role of JPP as an encouragement or as a reimbursement for costs associated with activities. The few recipients who said that JPP had been a key or contributory factor in their decision to undertake activities felt the money provided reassurance that costs would be covered, or had played a role in convincing them to do something sooner rather than later.

This study has also found that positive impacts of participating in work-related activities can be experienced by people no matter how far or near they are to returning to work. Whether health-related, training, work preparation or work experience activities were undertaken, people in the study group felt they had made some progress towards work, with most either returning to paid employment or continuing participation in work-related activities. Common impacts felt were improved self-confidence, moving from social isolation to re-engagement with the community and feeling that returning to work was a realistic possibility. Work preparation activities provided a range of useful job-search and employability skills, while voluntary work gave people practice in key workplace competencies. While negative experiences were generally more unusual, some people had found engagement in work-related activities physically or mentally challenging and some had not found the approach or attitude of providers to be helpful.

4 Experiences of payment and receipt: the administration of the Job Preparation Premium

Chapter 4 focuses on the administration of the Job Preparation Premium (JPP). The first three sub-sections report findings from both Jobcentre Plus staff and JPP recipient datasets; Section 4.4 presents findings from staff only. The chapter begins in Section 4.1 by examining the processes involved in getting JPP into payment, alongside any problems encountered. Section 4.2 looks in depth at the monitoring and negotiating activities involved in ensuring continued receipt of JPP and the circumstances when receipt is discontinued. The next section presents reflections on the periodicity and method of payment, before staff experiences and views of JPP administration are discussed fully in Section 4.4. The chapter ends in Section 4.5 with a summary of the main findings.

4.1 Getting the Job Preparation Premium into payment

4.1.1 Making an agreement

In order to receive JPP, potential recipients must agree an action plan for a return to work, involving an activity which the adviser agrees is both reasonable and relevant for achieving a return to work.

Most of the recipients understood that they had become eligible for the payment because they had agreed to do an activity. The process of agreeing an ‘action plan’ was less familiar. Advisers explained that the action plan recording clients’ agreement to do an activity and apply for JPP was the same as action plans made or updated at each Work Focused Interview (WFI). A few clients remembered signing an agreement, seeing their adviser make a note of the decisions taken or of being given a copy of an action plan to take home, but mostly this document was not well remembered.

Positive comments from staff show that writing an action plan for JPP can be a useful tool in a number of ways. Action plans were thought to help people understand more clearly what JPP is being paid for; encourage people by setting out steps towards work; provide opportunities to reflect on personal goals and progress and thereby help to build rapport between advisers and clients; and, crucially, gain individuals' commitment towards, and create 'shared ownership' of, plans to return to work. One view was that to be most useful, action plans need to be devised jointly by advisers and clients.

4.1.2 Making an application

Having made an agreement, clients must apply for JPP in order to start receiving the £20 a week payment. Making an application for JPP was mostly recalled by recipients as an easy and quick process. Advisers (or occasionally, service providers or practitioners) had completed the appropriate form and clients were asked to check and sign it. Where people remembered other times that they had applied for benefits, making an application for JPP was compared favourably because it was efficient, less tedious and forms were not lengthy.

4.1.3 Authorising and auditing awards

Guidelines issued to advisers state that an adviser or business manager must authorise JPP payments. There is also a requirement for an audit to be carried out by a nominated 'Test Checker' on five per cent of all JPP payments made each month in each district, to ensure: clients are eligible; the awarding of JPP is prompt and in accordance with the guidelines; and there is consistency in the way clients are dealt with.

Advisers in the study group referred JPP awards to their line manager or to a central administrative team for authorisation. There was awareness amongst some advisers of the need to make agreements specific and clear about the activities to be undertaken, in order to inform the authorisation and audit procedures.

Most advisers and managers described authorisation as a procedural exercise – a 'security check' to ensure individuals were eligible and that the form and action plan had been completed correctly – rather than a full review of the decision to award JPP. In general, managers felt that their advisers were in the best position to judge whether awards were appropriate and they trusted their decisions. Thus, dialogue with advisers about individual awards was minimal. It was especially difficult to discuss awards where managers worked part-time or from more than one office and their time to authorise awards was more limited. Having to wait for authorisation in such situations also helps to explain some delays in getting payments processed (see Section 4.1.4). There was also felt to be no need to discuss awards when the adviser took a narrow approach to awarding JPP (for example, only awarding if the client registered with a Job Broker) and this was known and agreed by the manager.

In contrast, however, there were managers who had become more involved and sometimes took time to assess the appropriateness of the agreement and awarding of JPP. It should be noted that these managers had received few JPP applications to authorise. Some of these managers entered dialogue with advisers for every application made, in order to understand clients' circumstances and determine for themselves whether the award was appropriate. Others said that only where the terms of the agreement were unclear or where they felt the suggested activities were not sufficient for a JPP award, had they asked for clarification, or suggested to advisers that the individual do more activities or spend more time on the agreed activities. In these latter cases, there was never any question about approving the applications, but the managers felt there had been room for negotiation about the content of the agreements with clients.

4.1.4 Problems and delays in receiving payments

Most people reported no problems or delays in setting up payments and first instalments had arrived as soon as a week after making the application. A short delay of two to three weeks between making the application and receiving payment was a common experience by recipients across Jobcentre Plus districts, but on the whole this was not perceived as a problem as activities which relied on the payment could be delayed too. People who had gone ahead and spent money in expectation of receiving JPP payments (for example, by travelling for voluntary work purposes) found that these expenses were met a week or two later by a backdated lump sum. Some people had been told by their adviser to expect the processing of their application to take this long, so were not surprised when it did. Advisers themselves explained that payment was usually delayed until they received confirmation that the individual had started an activity.

Longer delays – such as six or eight weeks – were, however, more problematic. One recipient felt that he had only started receiving payment because he had made several phone calls and 'chased it', and that although he had upheld his side of the bargain in doing an activity, the jobcentre was not keeping to their promise to pay him money for doing so. One person who experienced a significant delay thought other people who had to wait for payments may choose not to continue with their chosen work-related activity. However, this was not the experience of the recipients in the study group, who had undertaken activities regardless. During the period waiting for the payments to start, some people had relied on other sources of income to meet expenses incurred in doing work-related activities, such as travel and parking costs, and consequently, their finances had been strained and sacrifices had been made in order to reduce spending elsewhere. It could be confusing to people to not know what had happened to their claim and then to receive the money owed in a backdated lump sum without explanation. There were different responses to receiving this unexpected large payment: the money was used carefully by those who wanted to make it last longer but was spent immediately where people were concerned the amount paid was a mistake and would be recovered if it was not spent.

Other problems experienced in the delivery of JPP were:

- missed payments, which resulted in financial difficulty where the money was relied upon for paying pre-arranged driving lessons;
- feeling inconvenienced when, each week, the money was transferred a few days later than expected;
- having to pay back JPP money paid in error when the process to discontinue payments upon ceasing activities did not happen fast enough and payments continued. In this case, no extra financial hardship was experienced because the client had been warned that overpayments might be made and was, therefore, prepared to pay back the money.

4.2 Ensuring continued receipt

4.2.1 Monitoring activities

According to Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) guidance issued to advisers, compliance with the agreement to do work-related activities should be checked by advisers at 13 weeks into receipt. Advisers should send a letter requesting that recipients complete and return form JPP6JP. Jobcentre Plus managers who took part in the research said that they had no role in overseeing advisers' continued handling of JPP.

Most JPP recipients knew that there were conditions that needed to be satisfied in order to continue receiving JPP. Mostly, people spoke about the need to continue participating in activities and being able to demonstrate this. Informing Jobcentre Plus of any changes in circumstances and keeping in regular contact with the adviser were also perceived as conditions of receipt.

Together, analysis of staff and recipient data identified two main ways in which evidence of participation was gathered: firstly, by communicating with recipients directly, and secondly, by communicating with service providers and practitioners in contact with recipients. Most advisers in the study group used a range of methods to obtain evidence, within both of these main approaches. The methods chosen were influenced by formal guidance on monitoring JPP and their usual practice in maintaining contact with individuals and working with external organisations and services.

Monitoring by communicating with JPP recipients

The first approach – involving recipients directly – most often took the form of establishing contact with recipients by phone, letter or in person and asking them to complete and return a form, after it had been signed by a service provider or practitioner (who could verify their participation). In some cases, it seems that service providers took responsibility for returning forms to Jobcentre Plus. People not linked to any external organisation were asked to provide alternative written evidence, such as printed job vacancy adverts and job applications. The number

of times people were asked to provide written evidence, and the stage(s) during receipt at which this happened, varied and could sometimes depend on advisers' workload. Advisers reported variously that they asked for evidence at six or seven, eight, 11 and 13 weeks into receipt and the data from recipients confirms this picture of varied practice.

Another way of checking compliance by communicating with recipients was by discussing details of individuals' activities and progress during one-off or regular meetings at Jobcentre Plus, and/or by asking recipients to keep a diary of activities. There was much variation amongst the study group in the levels of contact between adviser and client during JPP receipt. There were advisers who telephoned or met with clients a few weeks after payments had started to see how they were doing, but had no further contact. Asking people to attend a meeting at Jobcentre Plus was mostly dependent on the number of WFs remaining and individuals' willingness to attend voluntarily, but people could be asked to attend regularly if there was some concern about their commitment to undertaking activities. Some recipients said they wanted to see their adviser regularly in order to give them progress updates. Keeping in monthly contact was considered the ideal arrangement by some advisers, in order to provide ongoing support, but support from Jobcentre Plus was not always required by recipients during receipt. Recipients who said they did not see or speak to their adviser regularly whilst receiving JPP had been happy with the level of contact with Job Brokers or other service providers and if action plans were kept, reviewed and renewed, these were done with such service providers. Some said they knew how to get back in touch with their adviser if they needed to, and contact was sometimes re-established after JPP claims had expired and people were thinking about their next steps.

Monitoring by communicating with service providers

The second main way advisers collected evidence of compliance did not involve recipients personally, but relied on contact with service providers or practitioners. Many advisers described being in regular contact with external organisations helping individuals undertake work-related activities (especially Job Brokers), and said that asking about individuals' progress would be part of discussions. It was also practice amongst some advisers to send the form requesting evidence directly to organisations, rather than recipients.

The study group included JPP recipients who were not aware of any monitoring activity; they did not talk about being involved in gathering evidence and did not demonstrate awareness of contact between their adviser and service providers. However, some of these people's claims had ended before their expiry date and it is possible that they had not reached the stage when verification was required. On the other hand, there were people who were aware that their participation was or may have been monitored, without being personally involved in providing evidence. Such recipients spoke of being asked to complete paperwork for the service providers' purposes, and thought it likely that this information was forwarded to Jobcentre Plus. Contact between service providers and the jobcentre

was perceived, by some JPP recipients, as having occurred regularly and that reports may have been made after each session or visit in which they had participated.

4.2.2 Attitudes towards monitoring compliance

Views were mixed amongst recipients about the checks on continued participation in activities. There had been expectations for more frequent checks because of the perceived need to monitor the use of 'tax-payers' money' closely. People who had held this expectation thought that there were too few checks and that, consequently, it was possible for people to avoid doing any activities towards work whilst receiving JPP payments over a period of time. Although some people were happy to ask service providers to sign forms, there was some embarrassment in doing so for people who were personal friends with staff.

There was no evidence that checking compliance had a negative impact on the relationship between adviser and recipient. Advisers explained that clients understood the need to make checks, to ensure money was being spent appropriately, and that people were used to their progress being monitored against action plans. It was helpful to explain the rules about monitoring early in discussions about JPP, so that there were no surprises when evidence was requested later.

Few problems in obtaining evidence were reported by staff in the research interviews. There had been an issue with some Condition Management Programme (CMP) providers about providing information which they felt was inapplicable, such as the specific number of days and hours attended by individuals. To overcome this problem, the adviser concerned no longer sent the standard JPP6JP form to CMP providers but instead, confirmed with them in person that individuals were attending sessions and then wrote a statement to support the continued payment of JPP.

4.2.3 Reviewing and renegotiating entitlement to Job Preparation Premium receipt

Official guidance for advisers states that where there is doubt that the agreed work-related activity is continuing, advisers must discuss this with the client as soon as possible and before JPP is stopped. The adviser can renegotiate the action plan if more suitable activities can be agreed and JPP would, thus, remain in payment. Job Preparation Premium payments will be terminated if agreement on suitable activities cannot be reached, or it is clear that the recipient will not be able to undertake activities for a period of time, due to ill health for example. One spell of up to two weeks non-activity in a 26 week JPP payment period is permitted before payments are suspended.

There were a number of advisers in the study group who had never renegotiated an agreement for JPP and/or discontinued payments. One explanation offered by staff for not having done so was that advisers are careful about selecting individuals who they think will be able to comply and sustain their activity for six months. It should also be remembered that some of these advisers had made few

JPP awards, so the number of recipients who needed to renegotiate or end their JPP agreement would also be small.

Amongst the recipients in the study group, there were some changes in personal circumstances during receipt, but not all had an impact on the agreement to do work-related activities and the continuation of payments. Short periods of ill health meant that some people had missed a week or two of their activity, but this had not resulted in any break in receipt of payments. Alterations to an activity's conditions, such as gradually increasing hours spent doing voluntary work, were not reported to the adviser and thus, were not recorded as a change to the action plan. It also seems that people who kept in regular contact with their adviser discussed their action plan a number of times during receipt, without necessarily making any revisions.

Recipients and staff explained situations in which reviews and renegotiations about JPP entitlement had taken place between advisers and clients. Such discussions had taken place where:

- the client sought to replace one activity with another (such as swapping a 'skills coach' for a Job Broker in order to receive more job-searching help);
- the client wanted to drop one of a number of activities (where the activity was too advanced, or travel was unfeasible, for example);
- the duration of the activity was extended (such as where more sessions of physiotherapy were added) and this meant that the JPP award would continue for longer than had first been expected;
- more barriers to work were identified and more suitable activities (such as CMPs and adult learning courses) were identified and added to the agreement.

In all cases, changes had been made within a few weeks and there had been no need to interrupt JPP payments.

In addition, circumstances which brought receipt of JPP to an end before expiry were identified by staff and recipients who experienced them. Changes in circumstances which made it hard to continue doing work-related activities were worsening health, needing to care for a sick relative and needing to focus attention on an impending court case. Moving into paid work meant people were no longer eligible for JPP. Other reasons for stopping JPP were finding that the chosen activity could not be sustained after trying it (such as being physically capable of going to the gym regularly), and deciding that it would be more appropriate to undertake an activity at a later date (for example, doing a gardening course during the spring, rather than the winter). In all such cases, it seems recipients had been proactive about discussing their situation with the adviser straight away and understood and agreed that JPP payments would stop. Experiences of JPP ending and future plans are discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

Stopping JPP for simply not complying with the agreement was rare amongst advisers in the study group, and none of the recipients said they had experienced

this. Advisers who had identified non-compliance explained that they had given recipients an opportunity to present their side of the story and offered support. At times, service providers' views had been crucial in decisions to stop JPP, where they had differed from recipients' explanations. One example given centred on a woman who attended meetings with her Job Broker but who, in the Job Broker's opinion, did not demonstrate a desire to take steps into work, having turned down all job opportunities suggested to her. JPP had also been stopped where people had disliked the activity they were doing, but an alternative had not be found and arranged soon enough.

4.3 Reflections on the periodicity and method of delivery

Job Preparation Premium is paid weekly for a maximum of 26 weeks. Weekly payments were the experience of all but one recipient in the study group, who said JPP had been paid fortnightly, despite preferring weekly payment. Amongst people who remembered being paid weekly, JPP was not always withdrawn on a weekly basis, where trips to the Post Office to access benefit income were only made fortnightly.

Staff and recipients' reflections on the periodicity of payments were linked to approaches in managing money and to uses for the money. The evidence suggests that many people on low incomes preferred weekly or fortnightly payments because they were used to budgeting on a weekly or fortnightly basis. Weekly payment was also most helpful to people who liked having some income each week (between fortnightly benefit payments) to meet bills or to pay for fresh food for example; or who perceived weekly payment as matching the extra costs incurred weekly in doing work-related activities.

In addition, there were recipients in the study who said they would have been equally happy with monthly payments and would have used a monthly sum in a different way. They thought they would have been more likely to save, and less likely to spend, the money if it had been paid less often; or considered monthly sums as 'more realistic' in contributing to paying bills.

Support for making lump sum payments, either at stages during receipt or at the end of the 26 week period, was found amongst some staff and recipient members of the study group. One view was that payment at the end might be more favourable, from the Government's perspective, as it would only be paid to people who had undertaken activities satisfactorily and no time or effort would be spent recovering overpayments. A 'pot of money' half way through receipt and at the end, might also act to encourage take-up as people might perceive it as more money. This last view, from staff, was linked to the belief that people would treat the money as a reward and use it for a particular item if it came in a lump sum, whereas weekly instalments were more likely to contribute to household expenses.

Job Preparation Premium is paid by direct payment into bank, building society or Post Office accounts, and only paid by cheque in exceptional circumstances. Paying the money directly into bank or Post Office accounts was suitable for most recipients in the study group, and having a choice about how the money was paid was sometimes recalled. One young man would have liked the option to have the money paid into his mother's bank account (with whom he lived), rather than his own Post Office account.

In general, people appreciated receiving notification in writing of JPP payments made directly into bank and Post Office accounts, though some wondered whether monthly rather than weekly notice would be more cost- and resource-efficient. The weekly arrival of a 'brown envelope' caused some anxiety to people worried about what the envelope contained.

4.4 Staff experiences of, and attitudes towards, Job Preparation Premium administration

There was a mix of positive and negative responses from Jobcentre Plus staff to research questions about administering JPP. Findings here help to explain some of the problems recipients experienced in getting JPP into payment and the reluctance to award JPP amongst some advisers (Chapter 2 explores, in more detail, possible explanations for not making JPP awards).

The main explanation for such polarised views was the presence, or otherwise, of a central or office administration team. Advisers who could pass much of the organisation of payments and workflow reminders to an administration team found JPP to be a simple scheme. Advisers who previously had, and then lost, the support of such a team noted how they had lots of administration work to do and JPP administration just added to it. JPP was also found to be manageable if few awards were made.

Evidence from advisers who did not have a dedicated administrative team confirms recipient data which showed that getting JPP into payment could sometimes be slow and not always run smoothly. Although the application form was perceived as simple, the numerous paperwork and workflow requirements which followed made the process complex and sometimes lengthy. These advisers also had responsibility for ensuring payments had started and for dealing with clients whose money was held up. The procedures involved in monitoring compliance, involving efforts to establish contact with individuals and setting reminders to request evidence, were also perceived as burdensome.

Advisers who had negative views of JPP administration spoke of how facing the extra workload had put them off making more awards, and how others might be deterred for the same reason. They felt advisers would be put off not only by the extra work, but by having no allocated time for it and no incentive to award JPP, as it is not included in performance targets. Advisers who had made

numerous JPP awards despite their dislike for the administration involved, said they did so because they strongly believed JPP made a difference to recipients. Holding meetings dedicated to explaining eligibility and procedural rules had proved helpful in encouraging advisers from one Jobcentre Plus district who had previously been uncertain about awarding JPP.

The secondary analysis of data from previous research studies supports findings drawn from the main data about the complicated and arduous nature of JPP administration and how this can act as a deterrent to making awards.

4.5 Summary

The problems associated with administering JPP were largely identified by Jobcentre Plus staff, rather than recipients. For most recipients, agreeing to do work-related activities, applying for JPP payments and receiving the money went smoothly. Where people recalled being asked to provide evidence as part of the monitoring process, this was perceived as reasonable and had been expected. However, a problem experienced by some recipients was the delay, by at least six weeks, of the initial JPP payment. The evidence from this particular group of recipients shows that not having the £20 as expected did not affect behaviour or motivation regarding activities.

The varied ways in which staff checked compliance is perhaps unsurprising given the range of different ways advisers used their discretion in introducing and awarding JPP. Whether clients were or were not directly involved in providing evidence, advisers seemed happy that their personal preferences in monitoring worked for them and no problems had been encountered. Relationships between advisers and clients had not been adversely affected where JPP payments needed to be curtailed early, because clients were aware of the circumstances when payment would cease and agreed with decisions to stop payments.

There was general support amongst recipients for the payment of JPP on a weekly basis, as it was readily available for use in meeting the expenses related to weekly activities and/or frequent bills. There were indications that monthly payments would have been used in different ways, such as contributing to larger household bills or put towards savings. Although some staff thought payment in lump sum(s) would also be welcome to recipients and would be seen as a 'reward' to be spent on one-off items, most people did not perceive the money in this way.

5 Experiences of payment and receipt: the difference made by the Job Preparation Premium

This chapter continues to explore experiences of payment and receipt by examining the difference made by the Job Preparation Premium (JPP). The various uses for the £20 a week and its substantive and psychological impact on the people who received it are presented first in Section 5.1. The latter part of the chapter (Sections 5.2 and 5.3) draws on staff and recipients' reflections about the amount and duration of JPP payments and the prospect of receiving JPP for a second time. Section 5.4 provides a summary of the findings.

5.1 Using the Job Preparation Premium and its impact

This section reports findings about how JPP was used by recipients and the impact of receiving this £20 a week. Four ways were identified in which JPP was thought to have made a substantive financial impact, relating both to people's financial capacity to do work-related activities and their general financial wellbeing. These four roles were:

- providing essential financial support for work-related activities through meeting financial costs;
- reducing the financial burden of undertaking work-related activities;
- providing financial resources to take up activities additional to those agreed at Jobcentre Plus, or to enhance participation in agreed activities;
- improving general financial resources.

In addition, receiving JPP had some psychological impacts in boosting morale and confidence, and in creating a sense of motivation or obligation to continue undertaking work-related activities. There was also evidence of JPP making minimal impact for some people.

This section primarily relies on data from recipients, but some Jobcentre Plus staff data is included. The impact of learning about JPP in relation to initial decisions about taking up work-related activities is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

5.1.1 Substantive impacts

Analysis of both staff and recipient data shows that a prominent role for JPP was in directly supporting participation in activities through meeting the financial costs involved. This financial contribution could be either essential in making work-related activities viable, or non-essential but welcome in reducing the impact on household resources. It could also provide the funds to do more in relation to making progress towards work, by increasing or enhancing participation in activities. Taken together, these findings about using JPP to meet the costs of doing work-related activities support the perception amongst advisers that JPP has an important role in **reimbursing** recipients.

Amongst recipients in the study group who used JPP to support work-related activities, the money was used variously to pay for travel expenses; parking fees; newspapers; fees associated with training courses, driving lessons and gym membership; and course materials. In most cases, people added the money to the general 'pot' of household funds, but earmarked the money for these specific work-related purposes.

Providing essential financial support for work-related activities

The data suggest there were recipients who felt they would not have continued to undertake work-related activities without receiving JPP payments. Despite having started a voluntary work placement prior to receiving JPP, one recipient said he would not have continued without the £20 a week, because this money was essential for meeting travel expenses. It could also be assumed that those in the study group who only decided to take up a work-related activity because they knew they could use JPP payments to offset expenses, felt able to sustain their activities because they continued to receive this money. Incapacity Benefit Personal Advisers (IBPAs) recruited to the study also described recipients who had been personally motivated to do activities, but who simply could not have afforded to sustain their participation using their own financial means. JPP was, therefore, felt to be an essential financial support to continue activities.

Providing non-essential financial support for work-related activities

In contrast, for many people JPP was useful in helping to meet the extra costs of doing activities, but was not considered essential in sustaining participation. Here, having £20 extra every week was appreciated for easing the financial burden of

undertaking activities and it meant that people did not worry about finances at a time when they were focusing on making important changes in their life. For a couple of women who had been out of work and on incapacity benefits for more than two years, having a source of income created some independence because they no longer had to rely on their husbands to pay for expenses associated with attending courses and Condition Management Programme (CMP) sessions. Most people who felt JPP provided non-essential financial support said they would have done the activity without JPP because they were personally determined to do so. However, they would have been worse-off financially and have had to make sacrifices elsewhere, or rely on other people, in order to find the funds necessary to pay for expenses and/or fees. Therefore, receiving JPP payments helped to maintain their standard of living.

Providing financial resources to increase or enhance participation in work-related activities

There was evidence from both recipients and staff that receiving JPP payments increased or enhanced participation in work-related activities. First, findings show that the extra money had provided opportunities to take up activities which were additional to those linked to the award of JPP; and second, there were people who had enhanced their participation in agreed activities because they felt they had the financial means to do so.

There were people in the study group who were keen to improve their readiness for work and had used some or all of the £20 each week to meet the costs of doing extra activities, which were not included in the agreement made with advisers. In some cases, people only saw an opportunity to take up an additional activity after finding there was JPP money left over once agreed activities had been financed. Alternatively, where people had already been doing the agreed work-related activities and had met the costs involved using other income, the entire £20 a week was devoted to another new activity. Either way, in the study group having this extra money was influential in decisions to start driving lessons, undertake voluntary work, and start job-search activities using library resources. One man had saved JPP payments and purchased a bike, which then enabled inexpensive travel associated with the additional training and job-searching activities he undertook. It was hoped that doing these additional activities would contribute to improved job prospects, and one person had found work by the time of the research interview. In support, one adviser felt that without JPP some people may not have been able to afford to do several activities at the same time, and doing so had helped them move nearer to work.

There were also examples of JPP providing the funds to enhance the time and effort spent on agreed, and sometimes established, activities. Receiving payments enabled and encouraged people to increase hours spent doing voluntary work, to attend more frequently sessions with a support group, and to buy more newspapers, thereby extending their search for jobs.

Improving general financial resources

In some cases, any money left over after meeting the costs of agreed activities was not spent on other work-related pursuits, but was used for other purposes. Sometimes people had only a small sum remaining, but others had all of the £20 because they had no, or minimal, expenditure associated with their activities. Generally, any surplus was put towards household bills and spending, though the money was deliberately not spent in this way where people were conscious about the money lasting for a limited period and did not want to get used to having the money and then missing it. JPP was sometimes put towards reducing debts. Looking back, one person felt the money would have been better spent if saved and used to purchase a computer.

Although not directly supporting progress towards work, JPP money which was not spent on work-related activities was considered valuable by many people because it helped to improve general financial security and standard of living (for example, being able to afford higher quality food), which had deteriorated since being off work and on benefits. People without financial responsibilities for others, or who were financially supported by parents, were among those who found they had freedom to spend JPP money on treats such as music, concert tickets, and a holiday.

5.1.2 Psychological impacts

There was evidence that support from JPP payments sometimes went beyond financial help to do activities, or to feel better-off, and could provide a less tangible, psychological impact. Psychological impacts discussed by recipients and Jobcentre Plus staff were boosts to morale and self-esteem, and providing motivation or a sense of obligation to continue with work-related activities.

Some recipients and Jobcentre Plus staff spoke of how the money was perceived as a definite show of support from Jobcentre Plus and an acknowledgement of efforts made. To some, receiving the money felt like being paid. People who had seen their finances deteriorate since being off work and on benefits talked of how the money had 'boosted their spirits'. People who could afford to do activities without the extra payments (because of other income from earning household members or from Disability Living Allowance (DLA)) and/or who said they would have done the activities without being offered JPP, were also amongst those who felt encouraged and rewarded by receiving the money. Feeling that confidence and morale had been lifted was a response to receiving this 'reward', and this boost was thought by some recipients in the study group to have been influential in seeking work more actively. This morale-boosting impact was identified mostly amongst recipients in the study who later moved into paid or voluntary work, which in some cases brought the JPP claim to an end before expiry. The finding that people can feel that their morale has been boosted by receiving extra money matches advisers' intentions to award JPP as a reward.

Different kinds of psychological impacts, identified within both staff and recipient data, were in providing motivation or a sense of obligation to keep doing activities. The person who described feeling **motivated** to sustain participation in an activity said the payments had provided a 'little push' to keep attending course sessions at college at a time when poor health made it hard to continue.

Of the people who felt **obliged** to sustain activities, one woman perceived barriers to feeling able to work again. She had not been thinking about work before attending a Work Focused Interview (WFI) and had felt obliged to continue the activities once started because she continued to receive money for doing so. In addition, one man felt that receiving the money created an obligation to engage more fully during sessions with a physiotherapist, and to follow advice about what to do between sessions by completing tasks and exercises set for him. Earlier research (Corden and Nice, 2006b) with people in receipt of incapacity benefits found that contacts between clients and the CMP could be fragile and that some people chose not to keep appointments. Some advisers in this study talked about clients who needed encouragement to complete an activity, such as a series of CMP sessions, and how receiving JPP was an incentive to keep going.

Therefore, being in regular receipt of an extra £20, seeing its positive effect on finances and not wanting to lose the money were themselves important reasons for continuing with activities, even when threatened by health circumstances and negative perceptions about job prospects. This finding suggests that the role for JPP in encouraging initial take up of work-related activities can also occur during receipt, when the money can encourage some people to sustain activities.

5.1.3 Making minimal impact

Within the study group, there were a number of recipients who reflected that receiving JPP had been a 'bonus', but that it had made only a minimal impact on them. Although receiving the money may not have been considered significant, the experience of undertaking work-related activities was often much more valuable (see Chapter 3).

These people explained that they either did not need £20 a week because there were no personal costs involved in doing activities (for example, when the activity was undertaken at home, or when lifts to and from activity venues were provided) or felt that their personal finances could accommodate the sometimes small expenses incurred. Some of these people said they did not always notice the extra £20 paid to them each week. There was a general feeling that they had received the payments simply because they were eligible and whether or not they needed the money was not considered. Amongst people here were adult children living with, and some financially supported by, parents; single people receiving significant sums in maintenance from ex-partners; and 40-50 year old partners of working spouses. Despite not needing the money for work-related activities, some had put JPP payment towards travel expenses or purchasing work clothes. Others had chosen to use it as they used other income, on everyday living expenses. Mostly,

people for whom JPP had not made a significant difference were people who said they would have undertaken and sustained activities towards work anyway.

5.2 Reflections on the amount and duration of payments

This section reports research participants' reflections on the £20 amount and 26 weeks duration of JPP. Recipients and staff sometimes had different ways of conceptualising these elements of JPP. In particular, it was notable that staff did not always separate their reflections on the amount and duration but talked about the two elements together, as combining in a package of support. This is explored further in Section 5.2.3.

5.2.1 Amount

There was general support for the current amount of £20 amongst recipients, advisers and managers. One argument was that the amount was 'fit for purpose': that it made a difference to the targeted client group; and that it was suitable for work-related activity expenses and would help people overcome the 'little barriers' in doing something towards work. Some recipients who felt £20 was about right said they were otherwise well supported financially. There was an understanding amongst recipients that there needed to be 'sensible' limits in spending public money. Both recipients and Jobcentre Plus staff shared concerns about higher amounts providing an incentive to apply for the money without intending to do any activities, and being too high a reward for people willing to do activities but not thinking about returning to work. More money might be more easily perceived as a 'bribe' to do something, and could change finances more drastically during receipt, leaving people feeling worse-off financially after it stopped. Arguments for not reducing the amount were that any less would be an 'insult', or would not make activities 'worthwhile'.

Recipients who argued for adopting a different set amount felt that in their circumstances they either could have used more money effectively, or could have managed with less. Thirty pounds a week was considered adequate support for people who wanted to afford driving lessons as well as other work-related activities. On the other hand, £10 a week would have been fine for one person who spent only two hours a week on work-related activities. One adviser thought that a higher amount might provide a bigger incentive and, consequently, that more people would see doing work-related activities as worthwhile.

5.2.2 Duration

Views about a defined duration of 26 weeks were varied. Those who felt 26 weeks was appropriate based their arguments on the idea that people who receive JPP should be near to returning to work, or on their own experiences of moving into work after receiving JPP payments.

Research participants who would have chosen a shorter duration for all JPP awards were all managers. To them, six months felt like a long time to be doing some activities and that there would be no negative impact in lowering the duration to three months. Although not explicitly supportive of a shorter time-frame for receipt, some recipients expressed surprise at having received payments for six months when the activity they had agreed to undertake had lasted for a much shorter period.

On the other hand, there were some recipients and advisers who wanted JPP payments to last for longer than 26 weeks. Some people who were participating in activities past 26 weeks (such as those learning to drive or doing courses lasting a minimum of 12 months) and who had relied on JPP money to support these activities, would have liked payments to continue till their participation came to an end. It could seem unfair to some recipients for the money to stop when they were still trying to make progress towards work, especially when they felt they could not afford to continue activities without the £20 a week. One suggested solution to accommodate people who need to take gradual steps towards work, lasting longer than 26 weeks, was to pay JPP intermittently, depending on individuals' circumstances and periods spent on work-related activities. A view from some advisers was that financial support for six months was not long enough for people who have been on benefits and out of work for a long time.

5.2.3 Arguments for discretion in amount and duration of payments

A section of the study group, composed of recipients and advisers, held the view that the amount and duration of JPP should be individually determined based on personal needs and circumstances. Some recipients who thought this had personal experience of needing less or more money for shorter or longer periods than stated in the rules; and advisers who shared this view had worked with individuals with similar experiences. Advisers considered that they were best placed to make judgements about clients' needs and should have the discretion to award JPP in amounts and for durations that they thought would be most appropriate. For example, for people who needed more time to take steps towards work, a weekly payment of £10 for one year, or £5 for two years might be a better way of providing support. Criteria suggested by recipients and advisers to be included in deciding appropriate amounts and durations were family responsibilities (for example, those with children could receive more); the circumstances surrounding the chosen activities (including the proximity of activity venues, the time and expense involved in participating, and the expected duration of people's participation); the number of activities engaged in at one time; and whether or not people continue to make progress towards work. A recipient suggested that a review process could help decision makers decide the length of awards, according to client progress and engagement in activities.

There were also advisers and recipients who were in favour of keeping JPP payable at £20 a week, but who wanted greater flexibility regarding the period of time

over which payments were made. Hence, one suggestion was to give advisers discretion to award JPP for any duration up to a pre-defined limit, based on expectations about the duration of proposed work-related activities. The need for a limit seemed more important where there was no duration set into the terms of the work-related activity, for example a college course would be completed over a set period of time, but job-searching may be indefinite. A different idea from several advisers was to allow an extension period to awards when recipients needed more time to prepare for work. One adviser suggested making such an extension applicable only where the time spent doing the activities would clearly lead to work, such as completing the final module of a course.

In contrast, there were research participants who considered and rejected ideas about making JPP amounts and durations discretionary. One recipient felt that this was not realistic as there would not be enough money to support individual needs and trajectories towards work. Some Jobcentre Plus staff were mindful of how being more flexible would bring a greater administrative burden.

5.3 Reflections on applying again for the Job Preparation Premium

Some recipients in the study were asked for their views on the rules about applying for JPP again. Those who welcomed this possibility had in mind activities which they wished to do (such as driving lessons, or the remainder of a course) and had doubts that they could finance the costs involved without extra financial support. Conversely, there were recipients who had concerns about receiving JPP again. Being supported by JPP payments for a second time seemed unfair to one person approaching state retirement age and not intending to return to work; and unnecessary and undeserved to another person who was prepared to keep looking for jobs without the extra money and who perceived the payments as pressure to take the first job available. Also, negative past experiences of meeting with an adviser were a deterrent to seeking JPP support again, as contact with Jobcentre Plus would have to be renewed.

5.4 Summary

Amongst the people included in the present study, a prominent impact of receiving JPP was in feeling financially supported to do work-related activities. The money was variously perceived as essential to those who could not otherwise have afforded to undertake work-related activities; as non-essential but useful in preserving existing financial resources during participation in activities; and in providing extra money to fund additional activities or enhance participation in existing activities. The money was, therefore, very much tied to participation in activities, and the expenses incurred in doing so. Where this money was not needed for work-related activities expenses, it could still be influential in boosting financial security and feeling financially 'better off'.

Receiving JPP also had psychological impacts. For some people, receiving an extra £20 a week and noticing an improvement in their finances provided motivation or a sense of obligation to continue engaging with activities throughout receipt. In addition, there were people who felt the offer and receipt of this financial support had been valuable in providing a boost to self-esteem and morale, which may in turn have contributed to feeling more ready to work.

There were also people for whom JPP made only a minimal impact because they did not need the money to support or motivate their participation in activities. The money was perceived as a bonus but did not serve to influence their progress towards work in any observable way. No negative impacts relating to receiving and using JPP emerged from analysis of the data.

Reflections on the amount and duration of payments tied in with perceptions about the impact made and people's experiences of continuing work-related activities after receipt. People who continued to do work-related activities after JPP stopped and who had found JPP valuable in meeting the costs involved, would have liked financial support to continue until their engagement in activities ceased. People whose participation in activities had lasted less than six months, and who had not needed all of the £20 each week to reimburse expenses, made arguments for a smaller amount and shorter duration of payments. Indeed, strong arguments were made amongst staff and recipients for making the amount and duration of payments a discretionary decision based on individual circumstances and aims.

6 Reflections on the end of Job Preparation Premium payments

This chapter describes people's expectations about, and experiences of, Job Preparation Premium (JPP) payments coming to an end. Job Preparation Premium payments can be made for 26 weeks to people who continue to meet the eligibility criteria. Entitlement can be lost during this period if people stop doing work-related activities. In considering the experiences of recipients in the study group, a distinction was made between those whose JPP payments had **expired** at the end of 26 weeks' receipt and those whose payments had **ended** before 26 weeks. There were also a small number of people who were still receiving JPP at the time of the research interview.¹⁵

The findings reported here focus on whether, and how, people understood JPP would end; any plans made in anticipation of JPP ending; the financial and other impacts of losing the £20 payments; and plans for the future. The experiences of people whose payments expired are considered first in Section 6.1, followed in Section 6.2 by the experiences of people whose payments ended part-way through receipt. Section 6.3 explains how people currently receiving JPP viewed the end of payments. The chapter summary is in Section 6.4. This chapter draws only on data from recipients in the study group.

¹⁵ One recipient, whose health condition caused memory loss, was not able to recall expectations about, or experiences of, the end of JPP. Therefore, this person has not been included in the analysis in this chapter.

6.1 Expiry

Thirteen people described how their receipt of JPP had reached the maximum duration and had expired.¹⁶ In a few cases, the payments had not long expired at the time of the research interview, so their experience of no longer having the £20 was limited. However, most people here were able to reflect on the time leading up to when JPP stopped, the impact of not having the money and decisions and plans made since.

6.1.1 Anticipation of the end of Job Preparation Premium payments

Most of the people whose JPP claim expired were expecting payments to stop when they did. They had known from the outset that receipt was time-limited and knew roughly when it would stop being paid. People who had been more certain of the date when payments would stop lived in the same Jobcentre Plus district and had either received written notification, or had been told by a practitioner associated with the work-related activity they were undertaking. For one recipient, the end date for payments came into question because of confusion about the duration of his agreed activity. The recipient, his adviser and Condition Management Programme (CMP) practitioner understood that there would be 12 sessions of physiotherapy and the original payment end-date was based on this lasting 12 weeks. However, when the sessions were in fact spread over a longer period of time, this end-date was no longer applicable and payments continued until the full course had been completed. Only one person said they had planned for the loss of JPP payments, by choosing from the outset not to rely on the £20 to meet household bills. Some people explained that they had not needed to plan ahead because they knew they would adjust relatively easily to not having the £20 each week, either because they were used to re-budgeting according to changes in income, or because they could rely on other sources of income to meet the costs JPP had been put towards. Another person talked about preparing for the end of his work-related activity, rather than the end of JPP. He had been encouraged by a physiotherapist to think about the activities he might do next and, in the last few weeks of receipt, had applied for a number of voluntary jobs.

In contrast, a few recipients in the study group said they had not expected JPP to expire when it did. There were people here who did not recall being told when they applied for JPP that receipt was time-limited. For such people, finding out that JPP was no longer being paid and that this was not an administrative error could come as a 'shock'. In addition, one person had been confused about how long it would last when the money continued to be paid past the 20 weeks she was expecting. All said they would have appreciated notice prior to the payments stopping. For some people, not receiving weekly notification of payment, as had

¹⁶ One person understood from talking to their adviser that the maximum period of receipt was 13 weeks long and this was their experience. All other people who said their award had expired received payments for 26 weeks.

been the case during receipt, was an indication that receipt had expired. These people had been unable to plan for the loss of the £20 each week. One man who had felt unable to afford work-related activities after JPP stopped, wondered that he might have sought alternative funding or have adjusted his budget to accommodate work-related expenses, if he had had time to prepare for the loss of JPP.

6.1.2 Financial impact of no longer receiving the Job Preparation Premium

Although one person had only stopped receiving JPP within the week before the research interview, other people had been without JPP for between three and 12 months, with most being at least five months past expiry. Participants' reflections on personal circumstances and participation in work-related activities since JPP expired, and at the time of the interview, showed that not everyone felt the loss of JPP financially and that amongst those who did, responses to the financial impact varied.

No financial impact

Amongst people who said they did not feel a financial impact when JPP stopped, all but one person was either continuing to do something towards work, or in paid employment, at the time of the research interview. In fact, some had increased their activity, by taking on new courses and voluntary work. It might be argued, therefore, that there were potential needs for ongoing financial support. However, there were a number of reasons why these people felt they had managed, and could continue to manage, without JPP: Firstly, losing JPP did not make a financial impact where people had never felt financially dependent on JPP to do work-related activities. This was the case where people had other financial resources on which to draw, such as partner's earnings. Secondly, changes in financial circumstances had softened the blow of losing JPP, where people had since moved into paid employment and started receiving Return to Work Credit (RTWC) or had seen an increase in their weekly benefits.

The one person who was not taking any further steps towards work after JPP expired, did not miss the weekly £20 because she had not come to rely on it for household budgeting and had no work-related expenses for which it was needed.

Most of the people who felt that JPP stopping did not affect them **financially** had also said that it did not make a significant financial impact during receipt. However, as there were psychological impacts associated with receiving JPP, a different kind of impact was felt by one woman upon losing this financial support. She felt she had lost independence by no longer being able to support herself through a course and having to ask her husband (who was in full-time employment) for money again.

Feeling a financial impact

Moving to those who said JPP stopping had affected them financially, the findings show different responses to this loss: First, there were people who felt unable to continue some work-related activities because they no longer had support from JPP. Conversely, there were also people who continued undertaking activities despite feeling the loss of the extra £20 each week. The experiences of these two sets of people are now explored. All of those who experienced a financial impact had used at least some of the JPP payments to meet expenses involved in doing activities.

Only two people felt they either had to cut back their activities or stop them altogether when JPP expired. Neither expressed knowledge of alternative sources of funding for work-related activities. One of these people had used JPP to fund driving lessons and felt that she could not afford to keep paying for them from other income whilst this was being used to support her continued job-searching activities and voluntary work. Despite this, her motivation and determination to find paid work remained high and she hoped to restart driving lessons when she was earning.

For the second person, the impact of no longer receiving JPP was apparently more marked. Although he had started doing voluntary work before being offered financial support through JPP, after it expired he no longer felt able to afford the travelling costs associated with the voluntary placement or the additional job-seeking and social activities he had started during receipt. In discontinuing these activities, he had begun to feel more isolated, less motivated regarding work and less self-confident. He also thought that he had missed out on a job opportunity related to the voluntary work, which was advertised after he left. It is not possible to say what this man would now be doing regarding work if he had never been awarded JPP. However, it seems that having had JPP and having it taken away had some effect on his perceptions about his financial capacity to accommodate work-related expenses.

People who felt the loss of the £20 payment, but continued to undertake work-related activities, had made decisions to fund their activities from other financial resources. All of these people wanted to complete or continue an activity, but not all did so at the same intensity or frequency as they had done whilst supported by JPP. People prepared to make the same level of expenditure on activities as before, appeared to be the most determined not only to do activities, but to make progress towards work. They had chosen to make savings elsewhere in their household budget to accommodate costs involved with activities, such as spending less on food and restricting the use of the family car. Some of these people were used to adjusting budgets on low incomes, but this was a relatively new experience where there had also been significant changes in other household income (such as a partner taking up a lower paid job) since JPP expired. Mostly, these people had been motivated to take steps towards work prior to meeting with their adviser and learning about JPP. However, one person had only started

to feel that she wanted to work since going to Jobcentre Plus, being offered JPP and starting an activity. Although she felt her motivation had dipped immediately after the payments stopped, her new-found motivation for work returned when she got back into the routine of looking for jobs.

A slightly different approach was to spend less on work-related activities to fit an established budget, rather than adjust the household budget to allow the same spending on activities as when JPP was received. Examples of cutbacks made were:

- reducing attendance at a training course;
- combining trips out for work-related activities with planned visits to the supermarket, to save spending twice on travel;
- no longer purchasing a weekly bus pass;
- making fewer trips to an internet café to look for jobs;
- deciding not to buy the most expensive newspaper (even though this restricted the number and range of jobs considered).

At the same time, however, one person was still giving the same time to a training course as he had done when receiving JPP, because this course was fully funded by another source. The people who spent less on activities once JPP ceased had only started taking steps towards work since speaking to an adviser at Jobcentre Plus and one person had decided to do a course because JPP would provide financial support; it seems her decision to continue the course after JPP stopped was, in part, influenced by learning that she would soon start receiving Disability Living Allowance (DLA). The evidence suggests that those who struggle the most financially may need ongoing financial support if they are to continue making progress towards work.

6.1.3 Future plans

Looking to the future, most people whose JPP claim had expired had a desire to be in paid work again. They envisaged that working would provide more financial security, something useful to do, more scope to interact socially and a sense of independence and freedom. One person had started full-time employment since JPP finished and was receiving RTWC. For the remainder, gaining employment seemed nearer to some than to others. There were:

- people who were looking for jobs, either through their own searches using newspapers, the Internet and resources at Jobcentre Plus, or with help from Job Brokers and Job Action Teams;

- people who planned to start looking for paid work after undertaking, or completing, courses and periods of voluntary work providing relevant skills and experience. Included here was one man whose lack of success in searching for employment had prompted him to think about doing a college course, with the aim of improving his job prospects. Gaining access to desired voluntary work placements locally was not always easy, however, and one man perceived Jobcentre Plus as having been unhelpful by failing to support the kind of voluntary work he was interested in;
- people who wanted to work, but had no current plans to take steps nearer to paid employment because health conditions continued to pose significant barriers.

In addition, there was one person who was nearing state retirement age and was not intending to work again because of her age and enduring health problems.

Even when looking for jobs or hopeful about looking for work sometime in the future, some people were doubtful about working again. These people were worried about coping in work with ongoing physical and mental health problems, making a transition off benefits and into work without being financially worse off, and being able to find employment when close to retirement age and responsible for grandchildren during parts of the daytime. This finding suggests that there is a role for active Personal Adviser support extending past the award and receipt of JPP, until clients return to work.

6.2 Ending Job Preparation Premium payments before expiry

Job Preparation Premium payments ended before expiry for eight of the 25 recipients recruited to the study. Entitlement ended because people stopped doing work-related activities for various reasons, including:

- moving into paid employment;
- undertaking an activity which reached its conclusion before six months' receipt, such as a training course;
- deteriorating health and feeling unable to continue activities;
- finding it hard to sustain participation in activities when health problems were affected by environmental conditions, such as difficult access and needing to sit down for long periods.

Not everyone who was aware that their JPP claim had ended before it expired knew how long they had received payments. Amongst people who had some recollection, the duration of payments ranged from six to eight weeks, to almost six months. Although most of these people had only learned about JPP after deciding to do work-related activities, there were people who learned about JPP first and who had felt encouraged by this information to do an activity.

6.2.1 Anticipation of the end of Job Preparation Premium payments

Nobody said they had been surprised when JPP payments stopped. They had each understood, before payments ended, that they needed to continue participating in agreed work-related activities in order to receive JPP, and thus, expected the money to cease when their participation ended. One person applied for JPP knowing that the course linked to the JPP award would only last for 13 weeks, and hence, that the payments would only last for the same period. In most cases, people had discussed the end of payments with their adviser after informing them that their course had finished, that they had found a job or that they felt unable to continue with the activities because of health problems. There was evidence to suggest that former recipients were not always sure when they stopped doing agreed activities whether their JPP award was merely suspended until activities were resumed, or conclusively discontinued.

In some cases, payments stopped part-way through receipt because people had taken part in fixed-length courses of less than 26 weeks. In all other cases, however, people themselves had made decisions to stop doing activities which could have continued for longer. Knowing that JPP would end did not affect such decisions as moving into paid work or doing what was necessary for health reasons was considered to be more important.

6.2.2 Impact of the Job Preparation Premium ending before expiry

At the time of the research interviews, the time that had elapsed since payments had ended ranged from two months to 14 months. We might have expected to see different impacts, relative to the time that had elapsed, yet there was almost universal conformity in the view that losing JPP had made no impact.

Job Preparation Premium payments came to an end for three people when they started paid employment. A fourth person moved into paid work shortly after JPP stopped at the end of a fixed-length training course. One of these four people had taken advantage of the Permitted Work rules and remained temporarily on Incapacity Benefit (IB) whilst working part-time on a self-employed basis. For all four people, losing the £20 a week made no impact because they started receiving earnings, augmented either by the more substantial RTWC (£40 a week) or by continuing to receive benefits. The person who became self-employed also received personal and financial help from a Job Broker to set up his business.

Similarly, there were few feelings of loss amongst the people who did not move into paid work upon the discontinuation of JPP payments. Mostly, these people did not miss the £20 a week because they had used this money to fund participation in activities which they were no longer undertaking. In contrast, one man explained how he had fallen behind with bills for a few weeks after payments ceased, because he had got used to the contribution they made to general household spending. By the time of the interview, however, he had adapted to its absence and was managing without it.

6.2.3 Future plans

At the time of the research interviews, three of the four people who had moved into paid work before JPP expired were still working and intended to remain in work. One man who had moved into a new line of self-employment described how he was making a gradual return to work, with plans to come off benefits and to move to full-time self-employment later in the year. The one person who had not sustained employment was receiving benefits, had experienced problems in reapplying and described his financial situation as difficult. However, he was actively looking for a new job – making applications and attending interviews – because he had got used to earning a wage and wanted to do so again.

The person whose JPP ended upon the conclusion of a 13-week course had taken steps to advance his pre-established plan of starting a teaching career by enrolling on a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course, with support from his adviser and the RTWC.

Where health circumstances had been influential in bringing JPP to an end, people were waiting for improvements in health, and sometimes finances, to renew efforts to move towards work. All of these people had already made decisions to undertake a work-related activity when they became aware of JPP and had been, and remained, personally motivated to make efforts towards work. Some remained focused on reaching employment or self-employment in the future and had medium-term plans to do further work-related activities (such as a university course and driving lessons), or to recommence previous activities (such as job searching with a Job Broker). To achieve such plans, some people talked about returning to Jobcentre Plus to seek help and one man was still in regular contact with his adviser. People here who expressed an intention to apply for JPP again, also stressed that they would still make efforts to return to work if the money was unavailable to them. One young man hopeful about setting up his own business expected to seek financial help from the Prince's Trust.

6.3 People in receipt of the Job Preparation Premium: understanding and thinking towards expiry

At the time of the research interviews only three of the 25 recipients recruited to the study were still in receipt of JPP. All of these people had agreed to do work-related activities or were already undertaking them, prior to finding out about and receiving financial support through JPP. No-one had more than one month's receipt outstanding. These people provided some insights into whether and how people receiving JPP think ahead about the end of JPP and their future beyond.

All understood that their payments would stop soon because they knew the payments lasted six months and could recall roughly the date when JPP had been awarded. One person was aware of the last date of payment, having received written notification.

In thinking towards the expiry of their JPP claim, people considered the financial impact of losing £20 a week and their plans regarding work-related activities and employment. In the short- to medium-term, all hoped to continue the work-related activities they were currently undertaking, such as CMPs or computer skills courses, and sometimes to take part in additional activities, such as voluntary work. One person who felt well supported financially by parents did not expect the loss of JPP to hamper her involvement in activities. The two people who felt they would miss the extra £20 were nevertheless determined to continue activities and to meet related expenses from other sources. This would mean being more careful with money in general and compromising expenditure in other areas, such as food. Therefore, the data suggests that being motivated to take steps towards work may act to minimise the impact of losing the extra £20 a week.

With regard to longer-term plans, all had aspirations to return to paid employment and were motivated by feeling 'bored' out of work, the prospect of improved finances in work and preferences for earning money through work rather than being given benefits. Health conditions were perceived as major barriers to work and hence, paid employment was sometimes perceived as a long way off or as something to be approached gradually. One person felt that his mental health problems would make finding a job hard, and consequently, that self-employment was his only option. Not everyone discussed whether they would seek help in moving towards work but one man talked about the possibility of getting in touch with mental health charitable organisations. He did not want to return to Jobcentre Plus because during earlier meetings with an adviser he had felt 'pressured' and that his condition was not understood.

6.4 Summary

This chapter has set out JPP recipients' expectations and experiences of JPP payments stopping. In general, recipients in the study group had been expecting JPP to end when it did or knew that it was time-limited and would end soon. Most people had not made plans to adjust to losing the payments because they expected to readjust their budgeting easily or to rely on other sources of income to fund work-related activities. People who did not recall being told that JPP was limited in duration were surprised when the payments stopped and would have liked to have received notice of it ending in advance. People whose payments ended before the expiry date knew that they would lose JPP as a result of moving into work, feeling unable to continue in activities because of poor health or finishing an activity in less than six months.

The analysis shows that not everyone felt the loss of JPP financially and when people did, the impact varied. Some people stopped or reduced their participation in work-related activities in response to the £20 reduction in their weekly income. There was some evidence that feeling able to afford work-related expenses using other sources of income, prior to receiving JPP, did not always return after JPP had stopped. There were also people who continued as before in undertaking

activities, whether they felt the loss of JPP financially or not. People who did not feel the loss financially had other financial resources on which they could draw, such as partners' earnings or increase in weekly benefits. Where people had felt a financial impact but continued to do something towards going back to work, they were motivated by their determination to find paid work and made sacrifices elsewhere in their household budgets in order to fund their activities. Some people spent less on activities in order to fit an established budget. People who moved into paid work did not miss JPP because they now received more valuable earnings supplemented by RTWC or continued to receive benefits whilst doing permitted work.

Looking to the future, most people who were not already in work had aspirations to get a job at some point. At the time of the research interviews, some people were searching for jobs, some were aiming to look for paid work after completing courses and work experience and some had not yet formulated plans to move nearer to work because of significant health problems. There was evidence that people who have done a six-month period of work-related activity and who want to work, can still have doubts about being able to make a transition into work. Therefore, there seemed a need for ongoing support to demonstrate the financial benefits of being in work, to advise on how to find suitable work and to support people concerned about working with persistent health problems.

7 Overall impressions and suggestions for change

At the end of the research interviews with advisers and managers, interviewees were invited to reflect on their overall impressions of the Job Preparation Premium (JPP). Within this discussion, staff members highlighted their perceptions of the pros and cons (Section 7.1) and their opinions on whether JPP is a necessary form of support within Pathways to Work (Section 7.2). There was also an opportunity at the end of interviews with both staff and JPP recipients, to think about how their experiences could inform future policy. Suggestions for change are presented in Section 7.3. The chapter ends with a summary of the main findings in Section 7.4.

7.1 Staff overall impressions of the Job Preparation Premium

Some of the points discussed at the end of interviews with staff had been talked about in more detail at an earlier stage (and some have been reported in more depth in earlier chapters of this report). This sub-section presents the views that occurred to staff when reflecting on their overall experiences and thus, appeared to be the most salient.

7.1.1 Positive impressions

In talking about the advantages of JPP, staff tended to highlight the positive impacts on recipients. Impacts mentioned were:

- providing encouragement to complete activities;
- giving essential financial support to people who would otherwise be unable to afford planned work-related activities;
- helping people to feel better off financially overall;

- boosting self-esteem;
- potentially providing an ‘incentive’ to work, as people may choose to seek work when JPP ceases, in order to maintain their level of income.

Job Preparation Premium was also described as a ‘great tool’ and as useful when people needed extra encouragement. For some Incapacity Benefit Personal Advisers (IBPAs), it felt good to be able to offer tangible support in the form of £20 a week, as a ‘bonus’ for people making an effort to get back to work. The offer of this ‘bonus’ was sometimes felt to have had a positive impact on how clients perceived Jobcentre Plus because it was ‘good news for a change’. One adviser particularly liked the discretion she had in deciding what activities to award JPP for. Another view was that more staff would come to consider JPP a valuable tool if they made more awards.

7.1.2 Negative impressions

At the same time, a number of elements of the design and use of JPP were picked out by staff as being disadvantages, problems or concerns: Firstly, the impact of awarding JPP on adviser workloads attracted some strong criticism. Workloads were inflated by administrative demands such as completing paperwork and the responsibility to monitor JPP recipients throughout receipt. In addition, for certain work-related activities, such as training courses or unassisted job-searches, advisers retained responsibility for contacting and supporting clients rather than transferring responsibility to a service provider, such as a Job Broker.

A second key issue was that of the open-ended nature of the guidance (which left some staff uncertain about what were ‘acceptable’ activities) and the potential for inequity resulting from the use of adviser discretion. Reflecting on the amount of money available, one member of staff felt it was difficult to identify work-related activities that could be afforded using the £20 a week payments and whatever financial resources the client could contribute.

One manager was uneasy about the idea of using JPP as an incentive to persuade clients to take up work-related activities, because of the potential to drive the ‘wrong behaviour’. She was not alone in saying that people need to be interested and engaged in activities – to want to do them – in order to draw something positive from the experience and make progress.

Perceptions about receiving JPP and its effect on other benefit claims were highlighted as disadvantages to the client. One adviser noted that people receiving Income Support (IS) would lose any money they received which exceeded the earnings disregard during periods of Permitted Work. This would mean that there would be no overall financial gain to clients in receiving JPP. In addition, one adviser talked of cases where clients had informed doctors of their participation in

work-related activities when attending Personal Capability Assessments (PCAs)¹⁷ and had subsequently had their benefit withdrawn. The adviser thought that losing benefit at this time was detrimental to helping such clients make progress to work.

Finally, some staff expressed concern about the financial impact of losing £20 a week on recipients who get used to the extra money in meeting household costs and who do not make enough progress to move into paid work. However, this impact was not apparent amongst recipients who took part in this study, who had either used the money only to fund their activities (and had since cut back or stopped doing activities when JPP stopped); or had missed the money initially, but had quickly got used to budgeting without it again.

7.2 Is the Job Preparation Premium necessary?

In order to make an assessment of the value of JPP as a tool for Jobcentre Plus staff in helping their clients, staff were asked whether they considered JPP to be a necessary form of support. It was hard for people to make this judgement where their knowledge of its effectiveness was restricted by the small number of awards they had made. There were several people who said that JPP was useful and could be particularly effective for a small number of clients but that ultimately, it was not indispensable. This sub-section outlines arguments asserting that JPP is necessary and that it is not. As will be shown, advisers' and managers' views were closely linked to their perceptions of the intended role of JPP, their practices in encouraging clients to use it and clients' proximity to work at the time they awarded JPP.

7.2.1 The Job Preparation Premium is necessary

Two main arguments were made in support of the notion that JPP is necessary: First, that receiving the payments can have positive impacts on people and their movements towards work. Second, that there are no alternative, similar kinds of support for people wanting to make progress towards work but not yet ready to move into a job.

Arguments that JPP was necessary for the positive impacts it had on clients tended to come from staff who saw the role of JPP as reimbursing expenses or to reward people for taking steps. They thought that although the money was not necessary for encouraging people to undertake activities it was important in helping people to meet the expenses presented by such activities, and in providing psychological boosts to people who felt supported and that their actions had been acknowledged. JPP was also felt to be necessary because it had enabled or

¹⁷ The PCA assesses a person's ability to do any work, and is applied for purposes of determining entitlement to incapacity benefits. The test looks at ability to carry out a range of activities such as walking, standing and sitting, and includes an assessment of mental health where appropriate.

encouraged people to take steps more quickly than they otherwise would have done and, in some cases, to do more.

A second argument was that there was no satisfactory alternative form of financial support to help people in preparing for work, who were not yet ready for active job-searching or paid employment. This view was linked to a perception that JPP could be used appropriately and effectively with clients at early stages of feeling ready for work. Without JPP, a lack of funding for certain activities, such as training courses, was identified. Compared with the Adviser Discretionary Fund (ADF), JPP was preferred for providing ongoing support over a period of time, rather than a one-off payment; and for allowing more freedom to tailor use to individual needs and circumstances. People acknowledged that there was support at a later stage, when people were ready to move into work, for example from Job Brokers and the Return to Work Credit (RTWC). However, this was felt to be inapplicable for people who were still making tentative progress.

7.2.2 The Job Preparation Premium is not necessary

Turning now to look at the reasons given for why JPP is not necessary, there were again two main sets of arguments: First, people should and will do work-related activities without being offered the money as an incentive. Second, other support available within the Pathways programme is better at encouraging or incentivising people to take steps towards work and is effective in helping people into work.

Staff who argued that people will do work-related activities without being offered money supported this argument by saying that they had only ever introduced JPP **after** people had decided to do an activity. In their view, if the policy intention was to incentivise movements towards work, then JPP was redundant because, in their experience, clients would decide to take these steps without being motivated by money. Instead, staff thought clients took decisions to do work-related activities either because they were personally motivated and felt ready or because advisers' skills were sophisticated enough to encourage people to take up support. There was also a view that £20 a week would not make the difference in persuading 'reluctant' clients – people who did not want to work or feel ready to take steps towards work. Some staff offered a slightly different argument, saying that, as a principle, people **should** be expected to take steps without money.

The second main argument was that other support available in Pathways is adequate and better in helping people take steps towards work. Some people reflected on the most effective timing of financial support for clients moving from incapacity benefits to work. There was a view that the need for financial support was more acute at the point when people move off benefits and take up paid employment and, therefore, that RTWC is a better idea. Staff who considered that there were financial needs at earlier stages in making steps towards work, cited both the ADF and the money made available by Job Brokers as alternative, adequate sources of financial help. Advisers here preferred using ADF payments because they wanted to ensure money was used to meet costs specific to moving

towards work, rather than providing money for unspecified use as is the case with JPP. Having made these arguments, some staff felt that rather than paying JPP, money could instead be directed towards increasing the value of RTWC or the ADF. Overall, these arguments suggest a more narrow perspective on the role of JPP, as a reimbursement only, rather than a reward or encouragement.

7.3 Suggested changes to the Job Preparation Premium and support offered by Jobcentre Plus

Both recipients and staff were invited to offer suggestions for how the support from Jobcentre Plus could be changed and improved. The changes and improvements suggested related both to JPP specifically and to the support offered by Jobcentre Plus more generally.

Recipients were asked whether they thought the money they received through JPP could have been spent better in other ways. Some people referred to particular needs which they felt would have been better met by other, more specific forms of support, for example support to become self-employed or in-house training for those who wished to develop particular skills. One suggestion, made by someone unaware of the RTWC, was to provide financial support at the point when people are ready to start work. At this point in the interview, some people chose to talk again about labour market and financial barriers to work, perhaps illustrating a need for change in external factors alongside individuals' progress.

However, the large majority of people were happy with the way they had been supported financially by JPP and could not think of ways in which this money might be put to better use. The principle of giving extra money to people who do work-related activities was well supported, though careful monitoring of its use was felt to be necessary. Overall, JPP had seemed a 'positive, constructive help' and was seen to have the potential to benefit a range of people. For example, several people who did not have dependent children themselves thought that the extra money from JPP would be particularly helpful to people with families to support. Echoing the views of some Jobcentre Plus staff who saw only a reimbursement role for JPP, one view expressed was that JPP recipients should only be able to spend JPP money on work-related activities.

Turning to the perspectives of Jobcentre Plus staff, there were ways in which staff felt the design, delivery and effectiveness of JPP could be improved. There were suggestions to:

- widen the availability of JPP to people on benefit for less than nine months who want to take steps towards work;
- make the money more targeted towards supporting movements towards work by payment in a single or several lump sums;
- improve advisers' understanding of the purpose of JPP and the activities for which it should be awarded by making the guidelines clearer and providing complementary training specifically about JPP;

- provide an incentive to advisers to make JPP awards, perhaps by setting targets;
- make JPP easier to accommodate within adviser workloads by transferring the burden of administration to dedicated administration teams;
- improve the way compliance is monitored. Closer monitoring (conducting checks more frequently than at 13 weeks receipt) was felt to be necessary particularly amongst the larger teams of advisers with busy caseloads, who do not work closely with external service providers;
- make access to JPP more equitable by providing written information to all clients;
- improve advisers' knowledge about the effectiveness of JPP by sharing examples of positive impacts on recipients;
- reduce waste by no longer sending weekly notification of payments.

7.4 Summary

In providing overall impressions of JPP, staff identified a number of positive and negative elements of the design and delivery of JPP. The positive impressions were led by perceptions of positive impacts of receipt on recipients, both financial and psychological. Negative impressions centred on the impact on advisers' workloads, the task of identifying suitable work-related activities, the idea of using money to motivate people, perceptions of the interplay between JPP and benefits, and perceptions of the impact on recipients of losing £20 a week.

There were arguments asserting both that JPP is a necessary tool to help Pathways clients and that it is not necessary. Both sets of arguments contested the impact that JPP can make on take-up and throughout receipt, and the necessity for JPP given the range of other Jobcentre Plus support. Also, arguments appeared to be influenced by staff members' perceptions and views of the role of JPP. Thus, staff who used JPP as an encouragement to clients and to reward people who decide to take steps, felt the money was unique, and thus essential, in making substantive and psychological impacts on recipients. On the other hand, staff who saw its role merely as a reimbursement for costs involved in doing work-related activities felt that other financial help available, such as the ADF and money from Job Brokers, was sufficient.

Recipients were generally happy with the way they had been supported by JPP and could not think of ways in which this money could be put to better use. By contrast, staff in the study group had a number of suggestions for change, relating to increasing the number of JPP awards, improving the way JPP is monitored, widening the applicability to other client groups, making the money more targeted to use on work-related activities, making access to JPP more equitable and reducing waste of resources.

8 Discussion and conclusions

This chapter discusses the key findings and implications for policy that have emerged from this study of the Job Preparation Premium (JPP). Section 8.1 returns to the main research questions, highlighting findings relating to: perceptions of the role of JPP; experiences of application and delivery; the impacts of receipt on views and behaviour; and whether JPP is necessary. Section 8.2 then presents some implications for policy, drawing on themes that emerged throughout the analysis of the data. The report concludes with a chapter summary in Section 8.3.

8.1 Study findings

8.1.1 What are the perceptions of the purpose, role and value of the Job Preparation Premium, and how do Incapacity Benefit Personal Advisers use it?

With very few exceptions, advisers were only introducing JPP to clients who had already shown some degree of commitment to participating in work-related activities. Thus, JPP was not being used as an incentive to motivate the initial take-up of activities. Instead, advisers talked about JPP having a role as an extra encouragement for clients to take up an activity; as a reward for efforts and commitment; and as a reimbursement for costs associated with work-related activities. Some staff only used JPP in one of these three ways, but others felt that each had a place. Job Preparation Premium recipients tended to understand the award as an encouragement or as help in covering the costs of their activities.

Advisers' main formal source of knowledge on when and how to use JPP was written guidance available online, but understanding was also informed by discussions with colleagues. Many people thought the formal guidance was quite 'open ended' and open to individual interpretation. Some advisers said that this made it difficult to know whether they were using JPP correctly and there was evidence that this could limit advisers' use of the award. Others appreciated this flexibility and opportunity to use discretion in making awards.

Three criteria guided advisers' decision-making in when and how to use JPP: Firstly, as noted already, clients had to show commitment and motivation before JPP was offered. However, some advisers felt there was no need to 'reward' such clients, and so would not necessarily introduce JPP for this reason alone. A second criterion was the client's proximity to work. Some advisers only introduced JPP to people who were almost job-ready. Others made awards to people at varying distances from the labour market, including people who were taking more preliminary steps. These differing approaches influenced the types of activity that were linked to JPP awards. Thirdly, some advisers only offered JPP if participation in a work-related activity would incur expenses for the client.

Parallels can be drawn between the criteria used by advisers in making decisions to award JPP and their perceptions of the appropriate role(s) for JPP. For example, it might be presumed that an adviser awarding JPP only where a client incurred expenses through participating in an activity would see reimbursement as a key role for JPP. Alternatively, where advisers offered JPP to clients because they were seen to be undertaking activities 'over and above' the norm, JPP would take on the role of a reward.

8.1.2 What are the experiences of the application process and delivery?

The requirement to agree formally to do an activity or set of activities was recognised by most recipients in the study group. However, seeing this agreement in an action plan was a less familiar experience, suggesting that action plans were not used by recipients in making progress towards work. Few advisers in the study had ever needed to renegotiate agreements regarding JPP. Circumstances described by staff and recipients when agreements had been reviewed and/or renegotiated were when people sought to replace an activity with another, reduce the number of activities they were undertaking, amend the agreed duration of an activity or take on additional activities in response to identifying additional barriers to work.

From recipients' perspectives, applying for JPP was generally a quick and smooth process because help was received from their adviser. For some people, problems were encountered later, when initial payments were delayed, in some cases by more than six weeks. However, not having the money as expected had not prevented people from starting activities as planned, though finances were sometimes strained as a result. From the perspective of staff, the processes involved in awarding JPP were simple where administrative responsibility was passed to a dedicated administration team. However, where there was no such team, staff described administration as complex and lengthy.

Managers had a role in authorising payments and this role was mostly described as a procedural exercise to provide accountability, rather than a full review of the decision to award JPP. Mostly, dialogue between managers and advisers about decisions was minimal.

Advisers in the study group described monitoring clients' compliance with agreements to do activities in two main ways: by communicating with recipients directly and discussing progress or requesting a form be completed and signed; and by communicating with service providers and practitioners. Within both approaches, there was little consistency amongst advisers in the number of checks made and the time intervals between checks. Stopping JPP for non-compliance was a rare experience amongst the advisers in the study group and there was no evidence that checking compliance had a negative impact on the relationship between adviser and recipient.

There was also much variation in the level of contact maintained between adviser and client during JPP receipt. The number and frequency of contacts could depend on advisers' workload, whether clients were being supported by contacts with external service providers, the number of Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) remaining, clients' willingness to attend meetings voluntarily, and clients' desire to keep their adviser informed of their progress. Contact was sometimes re-established after JPP claims had expired and people were thinking about their next steps.

8.1.3 What do staff and recipients think about the impact of the Job Preparation Premium on views and behaviour?

For the majority of recipients, finding out about JPP did not have any influence on decisions to undertake work-related activities. One reason for this was that they were not told about JPP until they had already committed to doing activities. A number of people commented that they would have decided to undertake their activities regardless of JPP. In the few cases where learning about JPP had been the key factor or a significant contributor in decisions to take up work-related activities, the offer of money had given assurance that costs would be covered, or had provided motivation to take up activities sooner than expected.

The findings show that receiving JPP can have substantive and psychological impacts on recipients. Staff and recipients talked about various ways in which receiving £20 a week could financially support work-related activities. This extra money was essential to people who felt they could not otherwise afford the direct or indirect costs associated with their activities. For people who felt their own financial resources could have been stretched to accommodate extra expenses, JPP eased the financial burden and meant fewer sacrifices had to be made elsewhere in household budgets. The money also enabled some people to spend more time doing activities or to undertake activities that were additional to what had been agreed when JPP was awarded.

Job Preparation Premium also made a difference to people financially where it was added to their general budget and contributed to household spending. By increasing household income, it helped to improve financial security, freedom in spending and standard of living. People who put JPP money towards household costs either had a sum remaining after spending on work-related activities or had few costs associated with their activities.

Receiving JPP was also found to have more intangible, psychological impacts, sometimes in addition to financial impacts. One way the money affected people psychologically was in boosting morale and self-esteem. People felt supported and rewarded for their efforts and in some cases, the boost to confidence was thought to be influential in choosing to seek work more actively. Other kinds of psychological impact were feeling motivated or obliged to sustain participation in activities whilst the payments continued.

Thus, while it rarely motivated the initial uptake of work-related activities, there is evidence to show that receiving JPP did influence people to think and behave in ways that they would not otherwise have done. Without JPP some people would not have:

- felt financially able, or motivated, to sustain participation in work-related activities;
- undertaken as many activities simultaneously or dedicated so much time to activities;
- felt the same boost to their confidence, which could contribute to decisions to start looking for work.

There were also people for whom receiving JPP made minimal impact. To these people, the money was a 'bonus', but was not necessary for motivating movements towards work, or for financially supporting work-related activities.

To understand further the impact of JPP, recipients in the study group were asked about their experiences of JPP payments ending or expiring and their responses to losing this money. There were people who experienced a financial impact when payments stopped and people who did not. A financial impact was not felt where people moved into work and started receiving earnings and sometimes Return to Work Credit (RTWC); where people had other financial resources which they could use to meet the costs of activities; or where people felt they could not continue with activities for health reasons and, thus, no longer needed the extra money to meet expenses incurred.

On the other hand, people felt the loss of JPP financially where they had become accustomed to using the money for household expenses or where they continued to be engaged in activities for which JPP had previously met the costs. Mostly, people who felt a financial impact but who were motivated to move towards work managed to sustain participation in activities. This was achieved either by making sacrifices elsewhere in their household budget to allow for similar spending on work-related activities, or by cutting back the time and money spent on activities to what could be afforded. Only one person in the study group felt they could not sustain work-related activities at all because they no longer had income from JPP.

Findings about the impact of work-related activities themselves also aid understanding about what helps people move towards work. For most people, participation in work-related activities had been a positive experience and key

benefits, common to a range of activities, were improving self-confidence, feeling less isolated and feeling less daunted about returning to work. Where people had achieved specific vocational qualifications, these had often been the key factor in later obtaining work.

Recipients in the study group were at different stages in thinking about work when JPP had been awarded to them. Having gained experiences of work-related activities and received JPP payments, there remained some variation in people's readiness for work at the time of the research interviews. Although the majority of the study group were still in receipt of benefit, most of these people felt they had moved some distance closer to work and many were continuing with at least one work-related activity. A number of people had made the transition off benefits and into paid employment, supported by RTWC. One person was taking advantage of the Permitted Work rules in making a gradual return to paid work.

8.1.4 Is the Job Preparation Premium necessary?

There were contrasting responses from staff when asked the question, '*is JPP necessary?*'. Their arguments were influenced by their perceptions of the role of JPP and the people for whom they thought JPP was an appropriate support. Staff who thought JPP was an essential part of the Pathways toolkit saw the offer of money as a reimbursement or a reward, and were more willing to award it whatever stage their clients were at in being ready for work. They argued that JPP was necessary because it can have positive impacts on recipients and there is no other financial support available to people making initial, tentative steps towards work.

In contrast, staff who only awarded JPP to clients who were near to moving into paid employment felt JPP was not necessary. They argued that, for people who were job-ready and intended to use the money on work-related expenses, alternative financial measures – the Adviser Discretionary Fund (ADF) and Job Broker funds – were adequate in providing support. To argue their case, they focused on the perception that JPP was intended to be an incentive and that there was no need for an incentive because people who want to take steps will do so without being offered money.

8.2 Implications for policy

8.2.1 Clarifying the purpose of JPP

Job Preparation Premium was created when Pathways to Work was extended in the pilot areas to people with existing claims for incapacity benefits – that is, people whose claim pre-dated the operation of the pilots. There was an expectation that people who had been on benefits for longer would face different challenges in trying to get back to work. At the time JPP was introduced, a statement by the Secretary of State described the purpose of JPP as '*to encourage steps towards getting a job*' (DWP, 2005a). Reading this statement alone, it appears that JPP

was added to the package of support to encourage and incentivise people to try to move nearer to work. However, at other times the policy intent for JPP has been expressed differently. An internal memo for staff of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), dated March 2005, explains that '*JPP is intended to assist people to move into work from incapacity benefits*' (DWP, 2005b). In June 2006, an internal audit review of JPP states that the policy aim was to use JPP '**to reward** people who participate in '*eligible activity*' (DWP, 2006).¹⁸

One finding from this research was that Jobcentre Plus staff were often uncertain about the purpose for awarding this financial measure. A main source of reference for advisers on the purpose of JPP is the official Pathways to Work guidance, which is issued to all advisers and available on the Jobcentre Plus intranet site. This document identifies JPP as '*part of a package of work incentives*' and a '*financial incentive*'. However, in contrast with the original intention for JPP, the guidance promotes a narrow interpretation of how and when to award JPP. The guidance instructs advisers to recommend and explain JPP **after** clients have shown a commitment to a return to work and agreed an action plan. Thus, if advisers follow these instructions, they will only introduce and award JPP to people who have committed to undertaking work-related activities without being incentivised by the offer of money. It is possible, however, to understand that JPP can incentivise and encourage recipients after agreeing to do activities. The study findings show that recipients could feel encouraged to take on more activities and be motivated to sustain participation because they received the £20 payments each week.

Findings have shown that JPP can serve multiple purposes – it can incentivise or encourage, assist and reward people. Advisers in this study have shown how JPP can be used flexibly, fulfilling different purposes for different clients.

Firstly, although there was little evidence of JPP being used as an incentive in the form of a motivational tool or a 'bribe' for people who were unmotivated or reluctant, there were cases when JPP had been used as an encouragement. Here, learning about JPP had 'tipped the balance' in decisions to undertake activities amongst people who wanted to make progress towards work but had doubts about their capacity to do an activity or to meet the financial costs involved. However, there was strong evidence that people who feel able to do something towards going back to work might not need the offer of £20 a week to motivate the initial take up of activities. Earlier research (Corden and Nice, 2006b) showed that the RTWC can have a role as an incentive. Findings showed that although some people chose to enter work without knowing about the £40 a week supplement, people who learned about RTWC whilst considering work could be influenced by this knowledge. Without knowing about RTWC, some people said they would not have tried work, would not have returned so quickly or would not have been confident about being better off financially in work. However, it has not been possible to assess a similar incentive role for JPP. Advisers' uncertainty and reluctance about using JPP as an incentive, as well as the instruction to introduce

¹⁸ Bold in this paragraph were added by the authors for emphasis.

JPP to people after they decide to undertake a work-related activity, means that this potential role remains untested.

The findings show that JPP was used to assist people towards work. Advisers and recipients seemed most comfortable with the idea of JPP being a financial support during attempts to move closer to work. Job Preparation Premium assisted people by reimbursing the expenditure associated with doing activities. Variously, this financial support meant people felt able to do activities they otherwise could not have afforded, that the personal financial burden of undertaking activities was eased and that there was extra money available to pay for additional activities or more time spent participating in an established activity.

Some advisers said they used JPP as a reward and the evidence from recipients suggests that some people felt rewarded by receiving the payments. Feeling rewarded was linked to boosts in morale and self-confidence, which in turn had been influential in some people's decisions to start looking for work.

Therefore, the research has shown that JPP can be used successfully as an encouragement, financial assistance and a reward. Each of these roles has been shown to be important for some people in moving towards work. However, the findings from this study and from the secondary analysis of data collected in earlier research show that there is confusion amongst Jobcentre Plus staff about the intended policy aim(s) for JPP. Being uncertain about the intended role of JPP was a factor which deterred some advisers from awarding JPP. It also meant that individual advisers formed their own views and interpretations about appropriate role(s) for JPP and made decisions to award JPP accordingly, resulting in markedly differing practices amongst advisers. Therefore, clearer guidance about the intended aim(s) for JPP could help advisers to be more certain about when and how to use JPP, with the possibility of increasing the number of awards as a result.

8.2.2 The use of discretion

Findings show that advisers had different views about, and approaches to, the use of discretion in making JPP awards. Although there are eligibility criteria which must be satisfied in order to award JPP, advisers are not obliged to award JPP whenever these criteria are met. And, while a range of suitable activities are listed, advisers are free to decide what activities are appropriate in making individual awards. There was evidence that one client could be awarded JPP for a particular activity, where another would not. The discretion to award JPP also meant that advisers took different approaches regarding the time at which they awarded JPP: some awarded JPP to people at any stage in preparing for work, others only awarded it to people who were near to moving into work. The different practices in awarding JPP described by advisers illustrate the potential for inconsistent use of the award both within and between Jobcentre Plus offices.

However, there are two opposing ways of understanding this variation that provide arguments for and against the use of discretion in awarding JPP. Variation could be viewed positively, as appropriate tailoring to individual needs, attitudes and

aspirations. Greater uniformity in awarding practices may not mean that everyone who receives JPP will feel significant benefits or experience it as necessary support. This perspective is supported by the views of advisers who felt comfortable exercising discretion and who made arguments for greater discretion in being able to decide the amount and duration of payments according to individuals' needs and circumstances. However, it is clear to see how discretion could lead to **inconsistent** use that, therefore, results in **inequity** amongst incapacity benefits recipients. There were advisers who expressed concerns about the imprecise nature of the guidance and who would have preferred more tightly defined guidelines. In some cases, advisers appreciated clear directives from managers about the appropriate use of JPP. If greater numbers of awards and greater consistency in awarding practices are to be achieved, not only does the purpose for awarding it need to be clear to advisers, but more clearly defined criteria for what is meant by 'work-related activities' would also be helpful. However, a risk here is that more rigidly prescribed guidelines might limit creative use of JPP and might act against the effective tailoring of support to client needs.

8.2.3 Providing support tailored to people's needs and circumstances

Arguments about discretion are also linked to considerations about the differing support needs of people who need longer to prepare for work and those who are closer to being job-ready. The research findings suggest that JPP can be a support to people on the cusp of moving into work **and** to people who are taking tentative first steps towards work. Amongst recipients in the study group, payments had been equally helpful in financially supporting the activities of some of the people who later moved into work and some of those who did not. Also, amongst some people who still did not feel near to work after JPP stopped, the money had been an encouragement to sustain their activities and had felt like a reward for the efforts they had made. It is worth noting that three of the four people who moved into work within 26 weeks of receiving JPP had not been **doing** anything towards work prior to this (though they were thinking about returning to work), perhaps illustrating how rapidly some people can move between receiving advice and support and making a transition into work.

In general, people felt that they had made progress, even if further steps were required before looking for a job. The intention of most people to keep taking active steps towards work indicates some considerations for policy: First, that some people will need ongoing financial and advisory support after JPP stops in order to continue making progress towards work and that, therefore, 26 weeks receipt off JPP may not always be sufficient. Second, in most cases the financial impact of losing £20 a week will not diminish hopes to return to work, but may make the transition harder and perhaps longer. This discussion about appropriate support at different stages in preparation for work continues below by comparing JPP with alternative sources of financial help.

8.2.4 Keeping the Job Preparation Premium as a separate financial measure

It is worth considering JPP next to other financial support currently available in order to understand its value. The findings as a whole do not clearly suggest that JPP is an essential part of advisers' toolkit any more than they indicate that it is dispensable given other available financial support. What is more certain from the research evidence is that most people will need or will derive value from receiving financial support whilst taking steps towards work. The question arises, therefore, whether other support would be better at supporting people at various stages in preparing for work, or whether JPP is providing distinct and valuable support. Two existing forms of financial support are considered alongside JPP in this debate: the RTWC and the ADF.

Return to Work Credit is available to people who make the transition off benefits and into paid employment. Research has shown that RTWC can be an effective incentive or encouragement to people at the stage when they are thinking about finding a job (Corden and Nice, 2006a). However, it does not serve the needs of people who need extra financial support prior to entering work, as JPP aims to do.

The ADF is a maximum award of £100 that can be made to benefit recipients to pay for items or services that overcome barriers to job-search or job entry. Evaluation of the ADF (Irving et al., 2004) showed that the money was being used predominantly to pay for items that overcame 'practical and immediate' barriers, such as new clothes, childcare, transport and equipment. However, there were examples of more 'creative' use, including confidence building activities such as joining weight loss clubs or personal care to improve appearance.

The ADF and JPP are different forms of support despite both being aimed at helping people **prior to** entering employment. JPP is less limited than the ADF in the purposes for which it can be awarded. Recipients of the ADF can only spend the money on pre-specified items or services related to movements towards work. In contrast, there are no stipulations as to how JPP payments must be used. Although it might be assumed that advisers and recipients would enjoy the freedom to use payments in ways which fit needs and circumstances best, the findings from this study show that some staff and recipients were unfamiliar or uncomfortable with awarding/receiving Government money for unspecified purposes. This was apparent in the views of advisers who felt that JPP should only be awarded where activities incurred financial costs; in many recipients' initial suspicion about there being 'no strings attached' to the award; and in many recipients' use of the weekly supplement to meet the costs of preparing for work, even where there were no direct costs relating to agreed work-related activities. Recipients' use of JPP money in this way may in part be explained by its presentation by advisers as reimbursement for expenses, which may have curbed the potential for more creative use of the money by recipients. Also, the research shows that, for some people, JPP money was essential for affording the costs involved in doing work-related activities.

This linking of JPP to specific expenses suggests that, for many advisers and recipients, the ADF would, in principle, provide an acceptable form of support. However, although the ADF provides a similar reimbursement function as JPP, JPP is considerably more generous: £520 over six months, compared to the maximum of £100 in 12 months available in the ADF. In addition, the ADF is only available in one-off payments. This research study has shown that paying JPP in regular instalments can match the costs of regular participation in activities over an extended period of time. Also, JPP has the potential to be used in alternative ways by saving the money for more substantial purchases or one-off activities.

Therefore, it could be argued that JPP provides support to people trying to make progress towards work, in ways that are not replicated elsewhere in the package of support offered within Pathways. It can have a place alongside other financial support, though a cultural shift may be necessary in order to realise its full potential. Staff and benefit recipients who are unfamiliar with the type of undesignated funds found in JPP, may need to learn to think differently and more creatively about the possibilities in using payments to support progress towards work.

8.2.5 Increasing the number of Job Preparation Premium awards

If there is acceptance that JPP can support people preparing to move into work, then there is an argument for making JPP accessible to greater numbers of incapacity benefits recipients. This sub-section outlines possible policy responses to boost the number of awards made by advisers. Clarifying the aim(s) of JPP and limits of discretion have already been discussed in the context of increasing awards. In addition:

- reducing the administrative load on individual advisers by transferring responsibility to dedicated administration teams could remove some of the reluctance amongst advisers to make wider use of JPP. However, this would inevitably have resource implications for other areas of Jobcentre Plus operation;
- advertising JPP more widely, by providing written information and instructing advisers to introduce JPP to every eligible client, would bring this form of support to the attention of more incapacity benefits recipients and this knowledge might initiate, or contribute to, early thoughts about taking steps towards work. The suggestion from some advisers, that £20 per week was not enough to persuade reluctant clients to take up a work-related activity provides some assurance that wider publicity would not necessarily lead to an influx of people seeking to do activities ‘just for the money’;
- raising the profile of JPP amongst advisers by actively encouraging greater use and promoting examples of positive impacts and outcomes for recipients might change advisers’ perceptions about the importance of JPP and, consequently, increase the number of awards;
- introducing performance indicators for JPP might increase advisers’ motivation to make awards. However, this focus on targets may detract from more tailored and appropriate use of the award.

8.3 Summary

This research study was not a specific study of impact as no comparison group was used. Therefore, it has not been possible to explore quantitatively whether people make quicker and better progress towards work because they have undertaken work-related activities and received JPP payments. It has also not been the aim of the study to identify causality, such as whether receiving JPP leads to making moves into paid employment.

However, there is good evidence from this research that receiving JPP payments can have positive impacts on incapacity benefits claimants. It can support people financially to do activities that they otherwise could not afford; it can ease the financial burden of undertaking activities; it can enable people to do more and to do things sooner. In addition, the money can act as an encouragement to sustain participation in work-related activities and can boost motivation and confidence where people feel rewarded by the payments. On the other hand, there is also strong evidence that people will take up opportunities to do work-related activities without the extra money, that people will find ways to continue their work-related activities without financial support after JPP payments cease and that, to some, the £20 is more of a bonus and not a substantial or essential help.

Appendix A

Job Preparation Premium focused study: research methods

A.1 Recruiting participants

A.1.1 Jobcentre Plus staff

In designing the study, it was felt important to include both Incapacity Benefit Personal Advisers (IBPAs) (who are responsible for meeting with benefit recipients, assessing their support needs and offering available support) and their line managers, as the two were perceived as having distinct roles in the administration and awarding of Job Preparation Premium (JPP), and as such were likely to offer different perspectives.

Recruiting Incapacity Benefit Personal Advisers

The ideal was to recruit advisers who would represent a range of views about JPP and a range of experience in awarding JPP. In order to achieve this mix, recruitment was conducted in a series of stages: Firstly, in conjunction with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) research staff and Jobcentre Plus management, all advisers working in the seven pilot areas were sent a short questionnaire in December 2006 by email (via their line manager in two areas). The aim of the questionnaire was to collect basic information about advisers' use and views of JPP. An accompanying letter explained the research and outlined the main project components. Advisers were, thus, advised that they may be invited to take part in an interview with a researcher at a later stage. (The questionnaire and letter are appended in Appendix B.)

In total, 99 questionnaires were completed and returned by email or post. Using advisers' answers to questions about the number of JPP awards made and their responses to a series of attitudinal statements about JPP, researchers were able to allocate each adviser to one of six groups. Table A.1 shows the defining characteristics of each group. The number in each box represents the number of advisers who demonstrated each set of characteristics.

Table A.1 Incapacity Benefit Personal Adviser groupings using questionnaire responses

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
High number of awards	High number of awards	High number of awards
Mostly positive views	Mixed views/no opinion	Mostly negative views
13	3	1
Group 4	Group 5	Group 6
Low number of awards	Low number of awards	Low number of awards
Mostly positive views	Mixed views/no opinion	Mostly negative views
21	22	25

The next stage in recruitment was to select advisers to invite to take part in an interview. A decision was taken to conduct fieldwork in the four Jobcentre Plus districts with the largest number of returned questionnaires and the widest range of views amongst advisers: Derbyshire, Renfrewshire, Essex and Somerset. One researcher from Social Policy Research Unit (SPRU) then took responsibility for selecting four advisers from each area and making initial telephone contact with them. To achieve a balance of views and experiences this translated as recruiting three advisers from each group, except group 3 which contained only one adviser. It was also important to hear a range of views within each area, so each of the four advisers selected from each district represented a different group.

After telephoning potential participant advisers and gaining their agreement to take part, research teams at SPRU, National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and Policy Research Institute (PSI) were responsible for making contact for a second time, for arranging interviews and sending confirmation letters.

Recruiting managers

Department for Work and Pensions research management staff were able to provide a list of contact details for Jobcentre Plus managers of advisers whose responsibilities included authorising JPP awards. Managers were to be recruited from the same four pilot areas where interviews with advisers would take place.

In January, all managers in the four pilot areas were sent a letter by a senior research officer at DWP, explaining the research and notifying the recipient that they may be contacted and invited to take part in an interview. It was felt to

be practical to try and recruit managers from the same Jobcentre Plus offices as participating advisers. Therefore, once advisers had been recruited, two managers from the same area were also contacted by the research teams. Appointments for the face-to-face interviews were arranged and confirmation letters were sent afterwards.

A.1.2 Job Preparation Premium recipients

At an early stage in designing the study a decision was made to recruit JPP recipients from only three of the seven pilot areas: Derbyshire, Renfrewshire and Somerset. These three areas stood out for having made the most JPP awards and thus, they would provide the most potential participants.

The most important sampling criterion was to recruit people with the most recent experience of JPP, including, if possible, people who were currently receiving it. It was hoped that the more recent experience people had, the more immediate their recall would be of what it was like to receive an extra £20 a week, to have stopped receiving it, to have taken part in work-related activities and, perhaps, to have made a transition into work. The researchers were able to identify people who had received JPP most recently using information in the database provided by DWP.

It was not possible, as it had been in a similar study of Return to Work Credit (RTWC), to recruit the sample on the basis of award status: people in receipt of JPP, people whose claim had ended before it was due to expire and people who had completed a full six months of receipt (expired). Researchers had to move fast to recruit people still receiving JPP, as the database did not include awards made in the last two months. There was an expectation that a number of people with 'ended' awards and with 'expired' awards would be recruited to the study group without sampling specifically for these characteristics.

In addition, the researchers sought to include a mix of ages, a roughly equal balance between men and women, and similar numbers of people who moved into work after receiving JPP and people who did not. Although the database showed whether people had confirmed job entry dates, this information could not be expected to be up to date as transitions in and out of paid work may have happened recently. Again, the research team expected to find people with and without experience of moving into work without sampling for it.

Letters were sent to the 101 people who had been awarded JPP since August 2005 in the three pilot areas. The letter introduced recipients to the research and explained that a researcher may be in touch to invite them to take part in an interview. Recipients of the letter had the opportunity to opt out of the study at this stage by returning reply slips in pre-paid envelopes or contacting the researchers by telephone. Only one person chose to opt out at this stage by reply slip. However, it emerged later that some other people did not want to take part and had returned the reply slip, but these had not been received by the research team. At this stage, one person contacted the research team to say they would like to take part and was included in the final sample.

Using the database information on age, sex, JPP award date and job entry date, the researchers then selected and recruited the people to the study group by telephone. In total, as Table A.2 shows, 41 people were contacted at this time and nine people declined to take part. Reasons for not taking part were being too unwell, receiving treatment as a hospital in-patient and not wanting to take part. One person was willing to take part, but did not keep the original appointment with the researcher or the later, rearranged appointment. Another person agreed to be interviewed but later cancelled the appointment because of family responsibilities. Both of these people were thanked for their interest but did not take part in an interview.

Table A.2 Recruitment

	People across all three areas
Invitation letters sent	101
Opted out after receiving the invitation letter	1
People contacted by telephone	41
Refusals upon being contacted by phone	9
Willing but appointments not kept/cancelled	2
Interviews completed	25

Appointments for the face-to-face research interviews were arranged by telephone and confirmation letters were sent afterwards.

A.2 Conducting the research interviews

Before fieldwork commenced a briefing session was held for fieldwork researchers to discuss how to use all of the fieldwork instruments and to identify and clarify the key topics of enquiry in the interviews. All present found this to be a useful way of preparing for the interviews. This section sets out the instruments used and describes how interviews were conducted.

A.2.1 Jobcentre Plus staff

Based on the core aims of the research study, separate topic guides (see Appendix B) of key questions and areas for exploration were produced for interviews with advisers and managers. The main areas of enquiry for both sets of Jobcentre Plus staff were:

- perceptions of the purpose and role of JPP and how it is used by staff;
- staff roles in awarding, authorising, administering and monitoring JPP;
- views on the value of JPP and the lessons learned.

In addition, discussions with advisers sought to explore the following:

- how advisers introduce JPP, what clients are told about it and when;
- the responses made by clients to learning about JPP;
- how agreements to do work-related activities and receive JPP, are made, monitored, reviewed and renegotiated;
- the guidance and supervision given to advisers regarding JPP.

Headline questions marked each new line of questioning. Suggested prompts in each section of the topic guide enabled researchers to move through the interview in a responsive way, tailoring questions and prompts, and time spent, to the topics most salient to individuals' circumstances.

Most interviews took place on Jobcentre Plus premises; two were conducted by telephone because an attempt to meet in person had failed and contact by telephone was the most convenient for all. A second interview with one participant took place over the phone after it emerged that the recording of the original face-to-face interview had failed and the data was lost.

After explaining the purpose for the research and what topics would be explored in the interview, the researchers discussed how the interview was confidential and that participants could withdraw from the research at any time. All participants were asked if they consented to take part and all signed an agreement (see consent form in Appendix B). People interviewed by telephone were asked to give verbal consent at the time of the interview and to sign and return consent forms sent to them in the post. Permission to audio record the interview was asked of all participants. In general, interviews with advisers lasted for around an hour; interviews with managers were roughly 40 minutes.

A.2.2 Job Preparation Premium recipients

Another, separate topic guide was created for use with JPP recipients. The main areas of enquiry here were:

- the key influences on people's take-up of work-related activities and the influence of JPP in particular;
- recipients' knowledge and understanding of JPP;
- people's experiences of applying for, and receiving, payment of JPP;
- how JPP payments were used and the impact they had on people's standard of living;
- the impact of JPP payments ending;
- recipients' overall views on the experience of receiving JPP.

A 'flashcard', listing six statements about financial support, was provided for participants to read in the final part of the interview. The card helped to stimulate

and focus discussion and to help participants summarise their overall impressions of JPP.

Most interviews took place at respondents' homes; two took place in local Jobcentre Plus offices; one in a coffee shop; and two were conducted by telephone, either because this was requested by the participant, or because it was the most convenient for both the interviewee and the interviewer.

As with the staff interviews, researchers explained the purpose for the research, the topics to be explored and the confidential nature of the interview. All participants signed a form to demonstrate their consent to take part (see consent form in Appendix B). A money gift of £20 was given to participants as a token of thanks. Again, people interviewed by telephone were asked to give verbal consent at the time of the interview. They were then sent consent forms and the money gift in the post and asked to return the signed consent form and receipt. All interviews were recorded with participants' permission and lasted for around one hour.

A.3 Data analysis

A.3.1 Job Preparation Premium recipients and Jobcentre Plus staff

Following the interview, all recordings were transcribed professionally.

The data was analysed systematically and transparently, using the **Framework** method originally developed by the NatCen (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994). Data were extracted after each interview by either the researcher who conducted the interview or a member of their own research unit team.

A thematic framework was developed for classification and summary of the data from interviews according to the themes emerging. This approach meant that the analysis was grounded in respondents' own accounts, at the same time enabling analysis to address key policy interests and issues. The building of the charts enabled data interrogation and comparison both between cases, and within each case, and the researchers used the data to build descriptions and search for explanations.

Two members of the research team took responsibility for the analysis of the data and first draft of the report.

A.4 Characteristics of participants – Jobcentre Plus staff

The 16 advisers who took part in an interview were recruited on the basis of their views about JPP and the number of times they had awarded it. This information was available in the questionnaires they had returned and was used to assign advisers to one of six analytic groups. Table A.3 shows the representation of these groups amongst the advisers recruited to the study in each area.

Table A.3 Incapacity Benefit Personal Advisers recruited to the study

	Derbyshire	Renfrewshire	Essex	Somerset
Group 1 High number of awards; mostly positive views		•	•	•
Group 2 High number of awards; mixed views/no opinion	•	•	•	
Group 3 High number of awards; mostly negative views	•			
Group 4 Low number of awards; mostly positive views	•		•	•
Group 5 Low number of awards; mixed views/no opinion	•	•		•
Group 6 Low number of awards; mostly negative views		•	•	•

Four advisers were recruited from each of the four areas. Each adviser in an area represented a different group, and thus a different combination of views and awarding behaviour. Only one person was recruited from group 3 because no other adviser who returned the questionnaire shared this combination of characteristics.

A.4.1 Other characteristics

The group of advisers recruited to the study comprised thirteen women and three men. Six of the managers who took part were women and two were men.

The Pathways to Work pilots have been operating from October 2003 in Derbyshire and Renfrewshire and April 2004 in Essex and Somerset. Therefore, the maximum time in-post for both advisers and managers of advisers at the time of the interviews was three years and four months, or two years and ten months. Table A.4 shows the job experience of the Jobcentre Plus staff in the study group.

Table A.4 Experience as an Incapacity Benefit Personal Adviser or manager of advisers

	Advisers	Managers
Derbyshire		
Under a year	–	2
Between one and two years	1	–
More than two years	3	–
Renfrewshire		
Under a year	–	–
Between one and two years	1	–
More than two years	3	2
Essex		
Under a year	–	1
Between one and two years	–	–
More than two years	4	1
Somerset		
Under a year	–	1
Between one and two years	2	1
More than two years	2	–

Most advisers had experience of more than two years and none who took part in an interview had been an adviser for less than a year. Experience amongst the managers varied more considerably. Four managers had been in their current post for less than a year compared with three who had managed advisers for more than two years.

A.5 Characteristics of participants – Job Preparation Premium recipients

Targets for purposive sampling were a balance of men and women and a spread of ages. Fourteen men and 11 women took part in the study. Table A.5 shows the ages of the study participants.

Table A.5 Age and sex of participants

Ages	Men	Women
18 – 30	3	2
31 – 49	9	3
50 plus	2	6
Totals	14	11

A.5.1 Stage of Job Preparation Premium receipt

There were no set targets for JPP receipt status. Research teams were asked to recruit people with the most recent experience and it was expected that people 'receiving JPP', those whose JPP had expired and those whose JPP had ended before expiry, would be recruited without sampling purposefully for it. Table A.6 gives details of the JPP status of those recruited to the study group.

Table A.6 Job Preparation Premium status at the time of interview

	People across all three areas
Still receiving JPP	
–	3
Ended before expiry	
Move into work	4
No move into work	3
Expired after six months	
Move into work	1
No move into work	14

As expected, most people's JPP claim had expired by the time of the interviews. However, some of these people had very recent experience of receiving the £20 a week having only just reached the maximum six months' receipt. Five of the 25 participants said they had done some paid work since claiming JPP and doing a work-related activity and all but one were still working at the time of the interviews. This move into work was during the six months' period of receipt for four people, bringing their receipt to an end; one person started employment after JPP receipt had expired. Those who had moved into work of at least 16 hours per week had made applications for RTWC. In addition, one person was receiving RTWC because he had started a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course.

A.5.2 Household arrangements

People's views on working and their income requirements are strongly related to household and family circumstances. At the time the research interviews took place, a number of family types and households were represented by the participants, as demonstrated in Table A.7.

Table A.7 Household types amongst participants

Household type	Participants
Two parents and dependent children	5
One parent and dependent children	0
Parent(s) and adult children	6 (two of whom were parents and four were adult children)
Living with partner	3
Living alone	11

Many of the participants were living alone, four of whom said they were divorced or widowed. Although five participants were living in households with dependent children, no single parents were recruited to the study. One father who did not live with his child said he did not make financial contributions to their household. Most people's domestic partners worked either full- or part-time, although some did not work because of ill-health. One person's partner had recently returned to work after a period of ill-health, during which time he had claimed Incapacity Benefit (IB) and attended sessions as part of the Condition Management Programme (CMP). The study group included parents and adult children of households where young people lived with their parents. The extent to which adult children were reliant on their parents for financial security varied, as some were earning and made financial contributions and some did not work. Seven people lived with their partner and another seven lived alone.

Recent changes to living arrangements had occurred for some people when they spoke to the researchers. Some younger people had returned to live with their parents as their health condition had worsened or upon encountering financial difficulties.

A.5.3 Health

People's health conditions were not used in purposively selecting the sample. The expectation was that a spread across different kinds of conditions, particularly over the three main types of conditions reported by incapacity benefits recipients, would emerge naturally amongst those eventually selected. People told researchers about health complaints that had contributed to their decision-making in claiming incapacity benefits and that affected their capacity to work. Some of these health conditions continued to affect people's day-to-day activities at the time of the interviews and had sometimes been influential in decisions to stop doing work-related activities or paid work. Some people had multiple health problems and all those mentioned to the researchers are recorded in Table A.8.

Table A.8 Self-reported health conditions

All self-reported conditions	
Musculoskeletal	10
Mental health	17
Cardiovascular	0
Other	12

Some musculoskeletal conditions had appeared gradually. Other musculoskeletal problems were the result of road traffic accidents, or injuries sustained at work. Arthritis and repetitive strain injuries were amongst conditions reported. A variety of anxiety and depressive illnesses, some of which had affected sufferers for a number of years and had resulted in breakdowns, were identified as main health conditions. No one in the sample discussed having cardiovascular illnesses. Among other conditions people talked about were asthma, diabetes, thyroid problems, ME, neurological illnesses, alcoholism and drug abuse.

A.5.4 Financial situation

In giving information about the influences on their decisions to take up work-related activities, people spoke about their financial situation before they had claimed JPP. Most participants, of whom some were entitled to National Insurance credits only, had received IB or Income Support (IS). The duration of people's benefit claims prior to their return to work varied, ranging from two and a half years to more than ten years. Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) were additional benefits received by some.

Appendix B

Research instruments



Pathways to Work Pilots:
Focused study on the Job Preparation Premium

Topic guide for depth interviews with IBPAs

Interviewer's introduction

- Explain that this research is funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, and is one part of their overall evaluation of the Pathways to Work pilots.
- The research units conducting the work are all independent organisations.
- Thank them for completing the questionnaire about JPP and explain that, based on this, we are talking to a number of IBPAs with a range of experience and views. In this interview we would like to talk about:
 - your perceptions of the purpose, role and value of JPP
 - how JPP is introduced to people
 - how people respond to hearing about JPP
 - the steps involved in awarding JPP and continuing payments
 - the impact on clients of having an extra £20 and undertaking a work-related activity.
- The interview will take around one hour, and will be in the form of a discussion.
- Ask for permission to use recorder. Explain that recordings will be typed up professionally and seen only by the research team.
- Explain confidentiality and how material will be used – a report for DWP in which their views are included, but they will be anonymous.
- Taking part is completely voluntary.
- Check informed consent.

Background

- Brief details about experience as IBPA, working with extension clients.

1. Firstly, we are interested to know PA perceptions of JPP.

How do you see the purpose and role of JPP?

- Probe: an incentive to move into work?
 - a reward for trying an activity?
 - a way of encouraging activity?
 - reimbursing expenses when undertaking work-related activity?
 - a way of getting people to do something they are resistant to?
- Is the purpose and role clear/ambiguous?
- Do you use it for these purposes?
- From what sources have you formed your impression of the purpose and role?

2. Moving on to think about how JPP is introduced to clients.

Are people aware of JPP when they come to see you?

- Probe for source of awareness: meeting with another adviser, posters, leaflets, word of mouth.

Do you tell people about JPP? Everyone or only some people?

- Influences on decision:
 - o Timing
 - o in series of interviews;
 - o fit with client's progress towards work: do you wait for people to express an interest in work or talk about it with people who are not thinking about work?
 - o Particular work-related activity in mind
 - o Whether the client might be helped by a range of other services/support
- For whom would you consider JPP to be inappropriate?

How do you introduce JPP?

- Information given.
- Presentation of information: encouraging/persuasive or information-giving only.
- Anything particularly helpful to mention/emphasise when talking about JPP to encourage take-up.

3. How do clients respond after hearing about JPP?

- Examples of clients with positive responses.
- Examples of clients with negative responses; barriers to taking up JPP (e.g. health, financial, concerns about effect on benefits, family).

Who decides to take up the offer of JPP?

- Examples of JPP recipients: health, length of time on IB, previous job history, financial circumstances, family responsibilities.
- Do people have any work-related activities in mind?

4. Let's focus now on what happens once a client has decided to undertake an activity and receive JPP.

How are Action Plans drawn up?

- IBPA role in identifying suitable work-related activity, setting out aims/targets in the plan.
- How do you decide what activities and time spent doing these activities is reasonable and will help the client move towards work?
 - o Probe for influences: barriers to work inc health, work experience, family responsibilities, financial situation; JPP guidance.
- Client involvement.
- Range of work-related activities undertaken; any gaps in providing/permitting activities suitable for clients.

How do you make sure people keep to the agreement in the Action Plan?

- Practice in monitoring activity and reviewing AP:
 - o evidence looked for
 - o reviewed at times apart from 13 week check? In what circumstances?

Any experience of someone not doing what is required in the agreement?

- Reasons for non-compliance: e.g. health problems, personal/family problems, non-attendance/completion of activity, not enough hours.
- In what circumstances would APs be renegotiated? Examples.
- In what circumstances would JPP payments be stopped? Examples.
 - o Client responses to JPP withdrawal; impact on progress towards work.

What is the impact of monitoring and renegotiating APs on your relationship with the client?

What are your experiences of administering JPP?

- Processing initial paperwork and getting JPP into payment; the process of suspending payments.
- Problems and their impact.

5. We are also interested to know about any guidance and/or supervision that may be available to you about awarding JPP

- Probe: JPP rules, formal training, other members of staff, managerial steer, case conferencing, informal discussions.
- Experience of usefulness and adequacy.

Are decisions to award JPP authorised by another member of staff?

(Explain that the JPP rules stipulate that Adviser/Business Managers need to authorise JPP payments.)

- Any problems: speed of authorisation and fit with client's plans.

6. Finally, I have some questions about the lessons learned from offering JPP to clients.**Overall, what are your views of JPP?**

- Pros/cons.
- Positive and negative impacts: on health, work readiness, financial circumstances, family responsibilities.
- Probe for views on elements of JPP design/rules:
 - financial support whilst doing work-related activity
 - agreeing an action plan with a return to work as its aim
 - amount
 - periodicity of payments
 - period of receipt
 - rules on the kinds of activity permitted:
 - too widely/narrowly drawn?
 - other activities they would include.
- Suggestions for changes or improvements.
- What motivates people to take up JPP and do an activity?

What do you feel about the level of discretion given to you in awarding and monitoring JPP?

- Compare with other discretion in Pathways.
- Any tension between your role in supporting individuals and your role in monitoring compliance with JPP rules?

Is JPP a necessary element of the package of support you can offer people?

- Are people who receive JPP doing more than they would have done otherwise?
- Is there enough financial support without JPP?
- Is there enough to encourage work-related activity without JPP?

Between February 2005 and September 2006 there were 176 JPP awards across the seven pilot sites. Does this surprise you?

- What are your impressions of other IBPAs' views on JPP?

What do you think can be learned from JPP to inform future policy?

The Department is currently considering requiring all incapacity benefits recipients who are deemed able to undertake work-related activity. The idea is that if the work-related activity is not undertaken then a segment of their benefit would be cut.

What do you think of the idea of mandatory work-related activity?

- Views on reducing benefit for those who do not do activities.
- What work-related activities would be appropriate for such a scheme?
- Views on possible IBPA role: monitoring activities, reducing benefits for non-compliance.

Thank you very much.

Check they are happy for their views to be included in our work.



Pathways to Work Pilots: Focused study on the Job Preparation Premium

Topic guide for depth interviews with Adviser Managers

Interviewer's introduction

- Explain that this research is funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, and is one part of their overall evaluation of the Pathways to Work pilots.
- The research units conducting the work are all independent organisations.
- Explain that this research involves a number of different participants: IBPAs, JPP recipients and Adviser Managers. We want to speak to managers to understand their role in relation to JPP and their perspectives on this form of support. In this interview we would like to talk about:
 - your perceptions of the purpose, role and value of JPP
 - your role in relation to JPP, and
 - lessons learned about the value of JPP and how it might inform thinking about the Employment Support Allowance proposals
- The interview will take around 30 minutes, and will be in the form of a discussion.
- Ask for permission to use recorder. Explain that recordings will be typed up professionally and seen only by the research team.
- Explain confidentiality and how material will be used – a report for DWP in which their views are included, but they will be anonymous.
- Taking part is completely voluntary.
- Check informed consent.

1. Background

- Brief details about experience of working at JC+.
- Role as an Adviser/Business Manager.

2. We are interested to know perceptions of JPP amongst JC+ staff

How do you see the purpose and role of JPP?

- Probe: an incentive to move into work?
a reward for trying an activity?
a way of encouraging activity?
reimbursing expenses when undertaking work-related activity?
a way of getting people to do something they are resistant to?
- Is the purpose and role clear/ambiguous?
- Is it being used for these purposes by IBPAs?
- From what sources have you formed your impression of the purpose and role?

3. Can you describe the role and responsibility you have regarding JPP awards?

- providing guidance to IBPAs on JPP rules and their application
 - o tools available and used; usefulness
- supervising IBPAs in their use of JPP
- authorising JPP awards
 - o considerations in decision making
- monitoring IBPAs continued handling of action plans and JPP payments
- Are you involved in auditing JPP payments?

[NB An audit is required on 5% of all JPP payments made each month in each district, to ensure clients are eligible; the awarding of JPP was prompt and in accordance with the guidelines; and there is consistency in the way clients are dealt with.]

- o Are all clients who are put forward for JPP eligible for it?
- o Are JPP awards made promptly and in accordance with guidelines?
- o Are IBPAs consistent in making JPP awards?

4. Finally, I have some questions about the lessons learned from offering JPP to clients

Overall, what are your views of JPP?

- Pros/cons.
- Positive and negative impacts: on health, work readiness, financial circumstances, family responsibilities.
- Probe for views on elements of JPP design/rules:
 - o financial support whilst doing work-related activity
 - o agreeing an action plan with a return to work as its aim
 - o amount
 - o periodicity of payments
 - o period of receipt
 - o rules on the kinds of activity permitted – too widely/narrowly drawn?
- Suggestions for changes or improvements.
- What motivates people to take up JPP and do an activity?

Between February 2005 and September 2006 there were 176 JPP awards across the seven pilot sites. Does this surprise you?

- What are your impressions of IBPA views on JPP?
- Problems/concerns.
- Is the level of discretion in awarding and monitoring JPP an issue for IBPAs?
 - o Compare with other discretion in Pathways
 - o Any tension between their 'enabler' and 'enforcer' roles

Is JPP a necessary element of the package of support you can offer people?

- Are people who receive JPP doing more than they would have done otherwise?
- Is there enough financial support without JPP?
- Is there enough to encourage work-related activity without JPP?

What do you think can be learned from JPP to inform future policy?

The Department is currently considering requiring all incapacity benefits recipients who are deemed able to undertake work-related activity. The idea is that if the work-related activity is not undertaken then a segment of their benefit would be cut.

What do you think of the idea of mandatory work-related activity?

- Views on reducing benefit for those who do not do activities.
- What work-related activities would be appropriate for such a scheme?
- Views on possible IBPA role: monitoring activities, reducing benefits for non-compliance.

Thank you very much.

Check they are happy for their views to be included in our work.



Pathways to Work Pilots: Focused study on the Job Preparation Premium

Topic guide for depth interviews with JPP recipients

Interviewer's introduction

- Explain that this research is funded by the Department for Work and Pensions, and is one part of their research to see what is happening as a result of trying new services for people receiving incapacity benefits.
- The research units conducting the work are all independent organisations.
- Explain that they were invited to take part because they have experience of the Job Preparation Premium (the £20 per week when doing an activity towards moving into work). This is new and the government needs to know about people's experiences and views. So, in this interview we would like to talk about:
 - the experience of getting JPP
 - the experience of doing some kind of work-related activity
 - whether JPP influenced your thinking about work
 - the financial impact of JPP, and
 - your general views about this kind of support.
- The interview will take around one hour, and will be in the form of a discussion.
- Ask for permission to record interview. Explain that recordings will be typed up professionally and seen only by the research team.
- Explain confidentiality and how material will be used – a report for DWP in which their views are included, but they will be anonymous.
- Explain that taking part will have no effect on any benefits or tax credits, or any dealings with Jobcentre Plus or any other organisations. Taking part is completely voluntary.
- Check informed consent.
- Give money gift.

1. To start with, a few questions about your background and current situation

- Age.
- Household arrangements.
- Current situation:
 - working or not (FT, PT)
 - benefits received
 - JPP receipt (*NB establish JPP status for Q9*)
 - work-related activities currently undertaken

2. As I understand it, there was a period of time when you were unwell and did not work, then you went to see someone at Jobcentre Plus. Can you tell me about your situation when you first met with someone at the Jobcentre?

[NB Probe for circumstances at the time of first contact and developments since then.]

- Length of receipt of IB/IS; reason for claiming.
- Developments in health/condition.
- Employment circumstances, expectations and wanting to work.
- Financial circumstances and expectations (including incentives).
- Family/household circumstances (partner's work/benefit circumstances).
- Contacts with Jobcentre Plus: number, nature (WFIs, meeting with DEA).
- Contacts with support and advice services: CMP, JBs, other e.g. CAB.

3. Can we talk now about finding out about JPP?

- Sources of information received (significant people; leaflets; advertising; friends/family).
- Timing of receiving information (in relation to thinking about work or doing a work-related activity).
- Did you have the information you needed? Any missing information?

What did you think about JPP when you heard about it?

- Pros/cons.
- Concerns/anxieties.
- Understanding of rules of JPP (inc. when they found out).

[NB spontaneous response initially, then prompt]

- o agree an action plan with a return to work as the aim
- o undertake the agreed work-related activities on a regular and ongoing basis
- o amount paid
- o maximum period of receipt (6 months)
- o re-application at 13 weeks

4. Did knowing about JPP influence:

- thoughts about working, inc undertaking a work-related activity (at what stage did JPP influence thinking)?
- plans for returning to work?
- behaviour in relation to undertaking some kind of work-related activity and/or looking for jobs (at what stage did JPP influence behaviour)?

Do you think you would have undertaken the work-related activity if there had been NO JPP?

5. I have some questions about the work-related activity you undertook in order to receive the JPP payments

- Work-related activity (or activities) agreed and undertaken.
- Whose idea?
 - o client involvement in choosing an activity; did you want to do the chosen activity?
 - o availability of chosen activity/activities
- What was involved in doing the activity, who did you have contact with?
- How often did you do the activity, how long did it last?
- Helpful/unhelpful elements of participation.
- Any problems, negative experiences or feelings.
- Match with expectations.
- What impact has doing this activity made on you?
 - o thoughts/action about work (e.g. for those in work, getting a job and the kind of job taken)
 - o health

6. What has been your experience of satisfying requirements for continued receipt of the £20 a week?

- Have you been asked to provide evidence of regular and continued participation in work-related activity? Anyone else involved in this?
- Have you used the action plan? Experience of AP/agreement being reviewed with IBPA.
- Any changes made to the agreement.
- Any breaks in activity and receipt of JPP; have you had to give any money back?
- Any other contact with IBPA during receipt.

7. And thinking about how you got the £20 a week**What was your experience of applying for JPP?**

- How handled (JC+ staff involvement; form-filling).
- Awareness of making an agreement (action plan) and that it planned how a return to work might be achieved.
- How easy was the whole process?
- Any problems, delays, negative experiences or feelings.
- Match with expectations.
- Comparison with application for other benefits/tax credits.

What has been your experience of the way JPP is paid to you?

- Choice available, and made (bank/building society account; PO account; giro), suitability
- Experience of speed of setting up, regularity of payments, problems.
- How do weekly payments suit you? Preferences for other periodicity.

8. We are interested in how you have used the JPP payments and what difference it has made financially**Have you used the money for something in particular, or put it into the general pot?**

[NB Spontaneous response initially, then prompt]

- to enable participation in work-related activity (e.g. travel, child-care expenses)
- use for general housekeeping
- use for big bills/items: what in particular
- 'extra' treats/items, e.g. holidays, presents, leisure

- who controls its spending – preferences, usual patterns, compare with other sources of income

Overall, what is/has been impact on standard of living?

Would you have been financially able to undertake work-related activity without this extra money?

9. It is also important to know what impact there is when JPP stops being paid

Check JPP status: JPP stopped on discontinuing work-related activity –

go to Q9a

JPP expired after 6 months receipt – go to Q9b

Still receiving JPP – go to Q9c

9a. If JPP has stopped on discontinuing work-related activity:

- Understanding of why JPP ended (e.g. not doing enough hours, stopped doing activity).
- Did you understand JPP would end when you stopped doing the activity as you had agreed?
- What influenced your stopping this activity?

IF NO MOVE INTO WORK:

- o Perception of readiness for work
- o Has experience of JPP receipt influenced your thinking about doing work-related activities again?
- o Has experience of JPP receipt and undertaking an activity influenced your thinking about working again?

IF MOVED INTO WORK:

Do you think you would have returned to work if there had been no JPP?

- o Probe for impact of agreeing an action plan with a return to work as the aim
- o Probe for impact of undertaking a work-related activity
- o Probe for impact of receiving an extra £20 a week

9b. If JPP has expired after 6 months receipt:

- Were you expecting JPP to end when it did?
- Had you made plans for this (financial, budgeting, increasing income in other ways; increasing efforts to move into work, undertaking a different activity).
- What was the impact of losing JPP? (financial, motivational, health)

- If subsequently stopped work-related activity, was losing JPP an influence?
- Influences on continued work-related activity.

IF NO MOVE INTO WORK:

- o Perception of readiness for work
- o Has experience of JPP receipt influenced your thinking about undertaking work-related activities again?
- o Has experience of JPP receipt and undertaking an activity influenced your thinking about working again?

IF MOVED INTO WORK:**Do you think you would have returned to work if there had been no JPP?**

- o Probe for impact of agreeing an action plan with a return to work as the aim
- o Probe for impact of undertaking a work-related activity
- o Probe for impact of receiving an extra £20 a week

9c. If still receiving JPP:

- When do you expect the JPP payments to stop?
- How will this affect you? (finances, motivation, health)
- Do you have/will you make any plans for dealing with this?
- How will JPP stopping affect your thoughts/plans regarding work?
 - o Perceptions of readiness for work
 - o Expectations/plans regarding work-related activities/working, e.g. any increase/decrease in work-related activity, efforts to find work.

10. In the last part of our discussion, can I ask you to look back on your experience of undertaking a work-related activity and receiving JPP?

We know from earlier research what some people think about work and financial support. I'd like to show you some of the things people have said and ask you whether you agree with them or not.

Show flashcard, read statements and invite responses. Probe fully.

Flashcard

1. *"I wouldn't have done what I did without the extra money."*
2. *"I had already decided to do something about going to work when I found out about the money."*
3. *"The money came in handy for paying expenses, like travel and child care costs."*
4. *"Having the extra money was nice, a bonus, but I would have done something about going back to work anyway."*
5. *"I was confused about what the money was for."*
6. *"People should be made to do something about going back to work."*

[For last statement, prompt for views on whether the offer of more money would motivate more people to take steps towards going back to work.]

And some final questions:

- How do you feel about the amount of money, and the time it lasts?
- Would there be a better way of spending this money to support people in your situation?

Thank you very much.

Check they are happy for their views to be included in our work.



Job Preparation Premium Incapacity Benefit Personal Adviser questionnaire

A. Personal details

Name: _____

Jobcentre Plus office and district: _____

Work address: _____

Work telephone number: _____ Email: _____

We may be in touch after Christmas to ask if you would like to take part in an interview.

B. IBPA experience

Length of time as an IBPA: _____ years

Length of time working on the extension to existing benefit recipients: _____ years

How many people do you currently have on your caseload?

Is your caseload made up of (*please tick one box only*):

- New benefit recipients only
- Existing benefit recipients only
- Both new and existing benefit recipients

C. Use of Job Preparation Premium

How many JPP awards have you made?

Have any of the JPP awards you made ended before the 6 months expiry?
(tick one box)

Yes

No

Don't know

D. Guidance in using JPP

Who (*named individual if possible*) gives you guidance on awarding JPP?

Who (*named individual if possible*) reviews the decisions you make regarding JPP?

E. Views about JPP

Please tick to show the strength with which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I feel uncomfortable about advertising JPP					
2. People who want to engage in work-related activity will do so without JPP					
3. There is no need for JPP because there is already sufficient financial and other support					
4. JPP is a good incentive for people					
5. I sometimes use JPP to reward people who try to take steps towards work					
6. Making a JPP award feels like bribing people					
7. JPP is an effective way of helping people back to work					

Please return to Katharine Nice by **Friday 15 December**. You can do so by email to kn5@york.ac.uk or by sending it to the Social Policy Research Unit, University of York, Heslington, York, YO10 5DD.

Thank you very much for your help.

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