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Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 634

An exploratory comparison of the interactions between advisers and younger and older clients during Work Focused Interviews

Annie Irvine, Roy Sainsbury, Paul Drew and Merran Toerien

A report of research carried out by Social Policy Research Unit, the Centre for Advanced Studies in Language and Communication at the University of York on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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Summary

Introduction

This report presents findings from an exploratory comparison of interactions between personal advisers and older and younger clients during Work Focused Interviews (WFIs). The study was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and conducted by researchers at the Social Policy Research Unit and Department of Sociology at the University of York.

In light of previous evaluation evidence to date and from internal analysis of management information, that older clients did not appear to benefit as much from certain back-to-work programmes as their younger counterparts, the study aimed to identify whether there were differences in the content and structure of WFI interactions with older and younger client cohorts. There was also a more general interest in expanding the evidence base on adviser interactions with older clients, with consideration of what makes for effective interactions with this age group. For the purposes of this analysis, the older client cohort was defined as people aged 50 and above.

Method

The study used the method of Conversation Analysis (CA) to explore a set of video/audio recordings of WFIs taking place in Jobcentre Plus offices. These recordings were selected from a body of data that had been collected for a larger-scale study (Drew *et al.*, 2010). The subset of data used in the present study included 28 recordings with people aged 50 and above, covering a wide range of WFI types, and a comparison sample of 28 recordings with people under the age of 50. The comparison sample comprised three WFI types selected to match those which featured most commonly among the 50+ sample: initial Incapacity Benefit (IB) WFIs under the Pathways to Work programme, New Jobseeker Interviews (NJIs) and subsequent New Deal WFIs for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants (New Deal 25+ (ND25+) and New Deal 18-24 were included in the comparison sample).

Emerging findings and draft recommendations of the study were presented and discussed at a consultative workshop of Jobcentre Plus advisers in May 2009.

The study was small-scale, exploratory and opportunistic and the sample of recordings was not representative of the wider claimant population. In many respects, the scope for comparative analysis was limited and given the one-off 'snapshot' nature of the WFI recordings, little can be inferred about longer-term outcomes for the individuals involved. It is important to understand these limitations of the data and to bear them in mind when considering the findings reported here.

Interactional difference by age cohort

The approach to comparative analysis was two-fold: firstly looking across the different age cohorts as a whole to explore whether there were any aspects of adviser practice that seemed to differentiate the age groups **overall**; and secondly (where the data allowed) considering the practices of **individual advisers** when meeting with clients of different ages.

Aspects of the WFI process which seemed to show some evidence of overall variation by client age came predominantly from NJIs. These differences included:

- fewer job goals being agreed with older clients (this difference began to emerge at the 25+ boundary);
- where clients had existing Jobseeker's Agreements (JSAs) from previous claims, job goals being revisited in less detail than with younger repeat claimants;
- assisted job searches being carried out less frequently with older clients (the difference again emerging at 25+);
- fewer job submissions for older clients when an assisted job search was carried out;
- 'softer' explanations of the requirements to evidence job search activity given to older clients;
- no mention of the possibility of benefit sanctions in WFIs with older clients.

In NJIs and initial IB WFIs, there was some evidence to suggest that individual advisers modified their approaches when meeting older or younger clients. These included:

- weekly job search activity requirements were more minimal for older JSA clients (difference emerging at 40+);
- tailoring explanations of the use of the national minimum wage in Better Off Calculations (BOCs), to acknowledge older clients' higher previous and potential future earnings level (the difference emerging at 40+);

- stronger explicit expressions of adviser optimism for older JSA clients;
- a stronger balance of emphasis on return to work when giving initial explanations of the WFI purpose to younger IB clients;
- return to work treated as a less definite possibility for older IB clients;
- suggestions for work-related activity tending towards voluntary or therapeutic activity for older IB clients.

The diversity in programme stage, and hence WFI content, for people in the New Deal recordings meant that it was particularly difficult to draw out any comparative findings from this section of the data. What was apparent, however, was that advisers' individual interactional style did not alter significantly when meeting with clients of different ages. Additionally, in the NJIs, some advisers demonstrated a striking degree of consistency in the 'linguistic routines' which they used in approaching various tasks within the WFI.

Considering the set of recordings with 50+ clients as a whole, there was a lack of evidence of any common patterns that characterised the way in which advisers interacted with older clients overall or indeed the way that older people interacted with advisers. In part, this is likely to be a reflection of the different aims and structures of the various WFI types included in the 50+ data set. However, we suggest that the heterogeneity of the 50+ cohort is also important in explaining the apparent absence of consistent features that typify interactions with older clients.

Age-related barriers to work

Aside from the comparative analysis, the data also shed some light on how older clients may raise concerns about age barriers to work, and how advisers respond to such concerns. There was evidence to suggest that perceptions of employer age discrimination develop as people spend longer periods in unemployment, rather than being of concern at the point of making a new benefit claim. Advisers in the recordings used a variety of approaches in responding to clients' comments about age being a barrier to securing employment. These included concurring that age discrimination was a 'real issue' and presenting a range of alternative perspectives which, to varying degrees, challenged or countered the notion that age was a barrier to work. However, while adviser responses were generally supportive of the claimant, there was often little in the way of practical or personalised advice on how age-related barriers to work might be tackled. As such, this report makes the following recommendations for improving the effectiveness of advisory support for older clients:

- Acknowledging clients' concerns about age discrimination and inviting them to elaborate on how they have arrived at this view.
- Offering examples of employers who take a positive approach to older workers (identifying local employers where possible).

- Working collaboratively with the client to identify the particular skills they **personally** can offer employers.
- Providing specific advice on how to convey such information in applications.
- Providing accessible information on age discrimination legislation to equip and empower the client.

Some of these suggested strategies may be beyond the scope of the Jobcentre Plus adviser remit as currently designed and thus, require the input of specialist external organisations. As such, it would be important for advisers to have comprehensive knowledge of a wider range of support sources and have the means to make referrals as appropriate.

Policy implications

The more wide-reaching question of what makes for effective strategies when interacting with older clients is not one which can be answered in any comprehensive or unequivocal way from the present study. This is partly due to the acknowledged limitations of the available data but also relates to the question of whether the older client cohort is one which can be meaningfully defined or described. The present study's data both illustrated the diversity in circumstances of people aged 50 and above and found no evidence that circumscribing a 50+ cohort is necessarily a meaningful distinction. We conclude that the central importance of taking an individualised and flexible approach to advisory support applies across clients of all ages and that differentiated practice does not necessarily mean discriminatory practice. Some of the areas of difference that have been tentatively revealed by this study could be argued to be nothing more than the appropriate application of Jobcentre Plus policy as currently designed, or may be strategies that advisers use to engender rapport with older (or more experienced) clients. On the other hand, some areas of differential practice may result in missed opportunities to support older clients in their back-to-work journey. As such, we suggest that the next step for policy is to consider what implications the various types of difference might have for client outcomes, should they be found to reflect more widespread tendencies.

In summary, from the insights provided by this study, we suggest that it would be valuable for policymakers to:

- think through the aspects of the WFI process which might be appropriately and effectively tailored to different clients and those which should remain consistent;
- equip advisers with accessible information about age discrimination legislation and referral channels to more specialist sources of advice and guidance;
- consider the concept of the 'older client' and ways in which this can be meaningfully defined and applied.

Future research

If DWP believes there is value in commissioning a larger-scale, purposively designed study to further investigate advisory practices with older and younger clients, we suggest this include: **a longitudinal, multi-method design** which follows clients through the duration of a back-to-work programme and considers all the aspects of support they encounter; and a more **robust comparative element**, including substantial numbers of WFIs conducted by the same adviser with clients of different ages.

1 Introduction

This report presents findings from an exploratory comparison of interactions between personal advisers and younger and older clients during Work Focused Interviews (WFIs). The study was commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and carried out by the Social Policy Research Unit (SPRU) and the Department of Sociology at the University of York. The study drew on a subset of data from a larger project which used the method of Conversation Analysis (CA) to consider client-adviser interactions across a range of WFI contexts (reported in Drew *et al.*, 2010) and henceforth referred to as the **main study**). Over 200 recordings of WFIs taking place in Jobcentre Plus offices and Employment Zones (EZs) were collected for the purposes of the main study, including interviews with claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Incapacity Benefit (IB) and Income Support (IS) for lone parents.

In light of current policy concerns about the economic impact of an aging population, the team conducting the main study was asked by DWP's Extending Working Lives (EWL) division to carry out an analysis of a subset of the data focused particularly on WFI recordings with older clients¹. The analysis was commissioned in order to add to the presently limited knowledge base about the provision of DWP and Jobcentre Plus services for the 50–69 age group and to contribute insight for EWL strategy and policy. This report presents the findings of that study.

A complementary evidence review was carried out concurrently by the Policy Studies Institute (Vegeris *et al.*, 2010), to investigate what is known about outcomes on back-to-work provision for the 50+ population and what types of provision are associated with positive work outcomes. That review also aimed to identify evaluation datasets which offered potential for secondary analysis. There was consultation between the Policy Studies Institute and University of York research teams as the two studies prepared and reported their findings. Both of these studies form part of a wider process of enquiry by the EWL division into the circumstances and experiences of older workers and older benefits claimants.

¹ In this context, 'older' was defined as people aged 50 and above, in line with the definition in general use within DWP and Jobcentre Plus programmes.

1.1 Policy context

The UK population is aging and the gap between the age at which people leave the labour force and overall life expectancy is increasing. The effect is that there is a growing period of dependency on pensions and, in turn, growing costs to employers and State Pension providers. Against this context, the UK government is reviewing welfare, pensions and labour market policies with the aim of stimulating the economic and social inclusion of older people. An aspiration has been set for an 80 per cent employment rate (DWP, 2006). This includes a long-term aspiration to increase the number of older workers by one million (over and above the natural increase due to growth in the size of this age cohort). Alongside encouraging and supporting individuals to stay in work longer, achieving this aim will require the movement into employment of significant numbers of IB recipients, among whom people aged over 50 make up almost half of the claimant population.

However, evidence from evaluations of Jobcentre Plus programmes indicates that older people do not fare as well from some back-to-work provision as their younger counterparts. For example, quantitative evaluation of the Pathways to Work programme for IB claimants found that there has been a lesser impact on employment entry and exits from benefit for older people than for younger cohorts (Bailey *et al.*, 2007; Bewley *et al.*, 2007; Bewley *et al.*, 2008a, Bewley *et al.*, 2008b). Qualitative research with Incapacity Benefit Personal Advisers (IBPAs) found that being near to retirement age was one of a number of characteristics that could mean people were less likely to make progress through the Pathways to Work programme (Dickens *et al.*, 2004; Knight *et al.*, 2005). There was some evidence that IBPAs were generally willing to accept older clients' position that they did not intend to return to work and as such did not strongly pursue any back-to-work discussion (Knight *et al.*, 2005). Additionally, a survey of new and repeat IB claimants (Bailey *et al.*, 2007) found that older people were more likely than younger people to attend just one WFI, with younger people more likely to attend a series of three or more.

There is also evidence that outcomes from the New Deal 25+ (ND25+) programme for long-term JSA claimants are poorer overall for older people than younger people (NAO, 2004). Until recently, the requirements of the ND25+ programme were different for people aged 50 and over, with this older cohort not required to participate in a mandatory 'intensive activity period' following the initial 'gateway'. As part of an increased emphasis on supporting older people back into employment, the requirements have now been aligned for people of all ages (DWP, 2006). Quantitative evidence from the pilot of mandatory intensive activity periods for older ND25+ participants indicated positive impact on sustained employment (Dorsett and Smeaton, 2008). However, at the time of writing, we were not aware of any data on whether this change had resulted in a significant narrowing of the gap in outcomes according to client age. Additionally, there is some evidence that within the 50+ cohort programmes are more successful for people at the younger end of the age range. The evaluation of the voluntary New

Deal 50+ programme found that people aged 50-54 were more likely to take up this voluntary support and that subsequent job entry was twice as high for people aged 50-55 than for people aged over 60 (Atkinson, 2001).

The importance of the personal adviser role to the effectiveness of Jobcentre Plus provision has been highlighted in previous research and evaluation (e.g. Hasluck and Green, 2007; NAO, 2006) and some studies have identified that the personal adviser relationship is particularly valued by older people (Moss and Arrowsmith, 2003; Collins, 2006; Atkinson, 2001). However, in view of the evidence that suggests the needs of older clients are less well met by Jobcentre Plus provision, DWP saw an opportunity in the data collected for the main study to explore, in more detail, the content and structure of adviser interactions with older clients. In particular, there was an interest in whether personal adviser practices during WFIs with younger and older clients varied in any way that might be contributing to these differential outcomes. Our approach to addressing these questions is detailed in the following sections.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the study was to provide insight into whether there are differences in the content and structure of interactions between Jobcentre Plus advisers and younger and older age cohorts during WFIs.

The objectives of the study were to:

- conduct an analysis of WFIs with clients aged 50+ to identify common patterns;
- understand the structure and content of adviser and 50+ client interaction, under a variety of settings and contexts;
- compare and contrast the interaction patterns identified with the 50+ clients to those patterns identified for a comparison sub-sample of younger clients to gain insight into how they differ (if at all);
- as far as possible, compare and contrast the interaction patterns identified with the 50+ clients to findings from across the wider sample of WFI interactions (i.e. the main study) to gain insight into how they differ (if at all)²;
- identify the patterns of interaction that have positive and negative impacts for the WFI for the 50+ client group;
- contribute to understanding what makes for effective Jobcentre Plus adviser interactions with 50+ clients;
- add to the evidence base regarding adviser and 50+ client interactions and provide effective practice recommendations for conducting WFIs with the 50+ client group.

² Analysis and reporting for the two studies progressed simultaneously during 2008/09. Substantial preliminary and provisional findings of the original study (but not final conclusions) were available for comparative purposes.

1.3 Research questions

The study's four overarching research questions were:

- How do Jobcentre Plus advisers differ (if at all) in the ways they interact with older clients in comparison with younger ones during WFIs?
- How do older clients differ (if at all) in the ways they interact with Jobcentre Plus advisers, in comparison with younger clients during WFIs?
- How do these differences in interaction (if they exist) between the younger and older cohorts influence the Jobcentre Plus advisers and the subsequent interaction and its effectiveness?
- What are effective strategies for the Jobcentre Plus advisers when interacting with older clients?

A set of more specific research questions had been constructed in the design of the main study and, where possible, these were also applied to the present subset of data, with the addition of the comparative question of whether any of the findings differed by age. These questions are shown in Box 1.1.

Box 1.1 Research questions drawn from the main study

- How is the compulsory nature of WFIs (for some clients) explained?
- How is the requirement to agree and complete an Action Plan introduced and negotiated by the Jobcentre Plus advisers?
- How are BOCs used and presented to clients by Jobcentre Plus advisers?
- How are the other requirements on the Jobcentre Plus advisers (referred to by DWP colleagues as the 'must do' list) managed?
- How and when do Jobcentre Plus advisers introduce the notion of **work** into WFIs?
- How do Jobcentre Plus advisers attempt to engender in clients a positive attitude towards moving into work?
- How do Jobcentre Plus advisers attempt to encourage and support clients?
- To what extent do Jobcentre Plus advisers refer to conditionality and sanctions in interviews?
- How does the 'agenda' of the client emerge in interviews, and how is it managed by the Jobcentre Plus adviser?
- Are there misalignments in the interaction between the two age cohorts and Jobcentre Plus advisers? If so, how are these managed/realigned?

- Are there points in interviews that act as either positive or negative ‘triggers’ – for example in moving reluctant clients to thinking positively about work, or conversely diverting the client from a work focus?
- Do findings on the above differ across the two age cohorts?
- If so, how?

In the focused analysis of 50+ client interactions, DWP was also interested in the broader overarching questions of whether or not advisers’ approaches during WFIs with older and younger clients seemed to be equally ‘work-focused’, whether advisers seemed equally committed to pursuing a back-to-work discussion with older clients, and also the extent to which older workers’ views about barriers to work were challenged or ‘unpacked’.

Our methodological approach to addressing these questions and concerns is set out in the next section, along with some important caveats regarding the scope and limitations of the available data set.

1.4 Methodology

This section provides a brief introduction to the method of Conversation Analysis (CA) (Section 1.4.1), describes the sampling approach (Section 1.4.2) and details some important methodological limitations which should be borne in mind throughout this report (Section 1.4.3). The research brief for the study also included a consultative workshop with Jobcentre Plus advisers, to present emerging findings and gain feedback on the feasibility of proposed practice recommendations. This workshop is described in Section 1.4.4.

1.4.1 Analytic approach

The main study used the method of CA in considering client-adviser interactions during WFIs. This methodological approach is comprehensively described in the report of the main project (see Drew *et al.*, 2010, Chapter 1) and the interested reader is referred there for more detail.

To briefly introduce the method, CA is a sociological approach which seeks to identify the strategies that individuals use to accomplish ‘social actions’ through talk and the interactional consequences of selecting one strategy or format over another. This is pursued through the detailed examination of collections of audio and transcribed data, to identify recurring patterns and structures in interaction. Originally developed as a method of examining naturally occurring conversations, CA has since been applied to a wider range of more formal or ‘institutional’ interactions, such as the WFI. A key feature of CA is the detailed analysis of recordings of **real life interactions**. This methodology considers a record of what actually took place, rather than relying on participants’ recall of what happened or generalised assessments of encounters.

The methodology of CA involves the following stages:

- **recording, transcribing and analysing** recordings of actual interactions – in this case WFIs;
- examining **what participants do** in interaction and **how** they do it;
- examining the **consequences** of specific ways of saying something for the progress of the unfolding interaction;
- **comparative analysis** across cases both within the same interview type and across interview types.

The principal advantages to using CA (rather than interview surveys and other methods) to study the interaction between personal advisers and clients in WFIs are that it does not rely on the accuracy of participant recall (which can be incomplete, inaccurate or subject to 'reframing') and that a much finer level of detail can be captured, including the specific forms of words and other interactional strategies that participants employ.

The present study drew on the principles of CA in conducting a close analysis of detailed transcriptions and audio recordings of WFIs. However, in order to provide findings that were as comprehensive and pertinent as possible, the study also took a more general content analytic approach to considering the content and structure of the WFIs. Our approach to the comparative analysis included two elements:

- Looking across the different age cohorts as a whole to identify areas of **overall** variation in adviser interactions with older and younger clients.
- Considering (where data permitted) the interactional practices of **individual advisers** when meeting with clients of different ages.

In this report, we also draw upon the insights gathered during the informal conversations that were conducted with advisers after the WFIs with clients. These brief conversations sought primarily to gather demographic and claim-related information for each client, but (where time allowed) also included brief commentary from advisers on clients' current circumstances, perceived employment prospects and any other information which the adviser thought pertinent. These 'post-interviews' (as they will be referred to) were not intended to form a central part of the data and were not conducted sufficiently systematically to be subjected to analysis. However, they provide some useful insights and contextual information which we draw upon where appropriate.

1.4.2 Sampling approach

The 50+ sample was opportunistic and simply comprised all of the recordings from the main study which involved older clients. Among the 243 WFI recordings collected for the main study³, 28 were with people aged 50 or over. The 28 recordings cover a wide range of WFI types (13 in all), relating to JSA, IB and IS. Table 1.1 gives an overview of the study sample. A more detailed breakdown of contextual details for each WFI is provided in Appendix A.

The type of WFIs which appear in the data set reflect the targets set within the main study design, which were selected to focus on key themes of current policy interest⁴. In order to enable the most robust analysis possible given the available data, the comparison sample of younger clients was drawn from the three WFI types which appeared most frequently among the 50+ sample: NJIs, subsequent New Deal WFIs for JSA claimants; and initial IB WFIs under the Pathways to Work regime⁵. Where possible, the younger group was further divided into equal sub-groups of people aged 18-24 and aged 25-49, reflecting the age stratification that is applied in current JSA programmes, as shown in Table 1.1. Thus, the comparison sample included participants in ND25+ and New Deal 18-24 programmes. (Note that all of the WFIs in the comparative analysis were mandatory.)

³ See main study report (Drew *et al.*, 2010, Chapter 1) for a full description of the data collection process.

⁴ The main study covered the following types of WFI: mandatory initial IB (Pathways to Work); NJIs; mandatory initial and subsequent JSA ND25+ (and EZ equivalent); mandatory initial and review lone parent Income Support; and voluntary initial and subsequent New Deal for Lone Parents (and EZ equivalent).

⁵ The alternative sampling option, which was decided against, was to match WFI types case for case (i.e. include one younger lone parent WFI, two younger subsequent IB WFIs, etc.) While this would have made for a more directly comparable sample, the size of each sub-group would have been so small as to provide extremely limited findings.

Table 1.1 Overview of study sample

	Older	Younger	
	50+	25-49	18-24
IB			
IB initial	7	5	3
IB subsequent	2	-	-
3-year 'trigger' interview	1	-	-
JSA			
New Jobseeker Interview	5	5	5
18-month review	1	-	-
24-month review	1	-	-
New Deal (25+ or 18-24)			
Initial	1	-	-
Subsequent	5	5	5
Employment Zone (JSA)			
Initial	1	-	-
Subsequent	1	-	-
Restart	1	-	-
New Deal 50+			
Subsequent	1	-	-
Lone parent			
Initial	1	-	-
Total recordings	28	28	

The younger comparison sample was purposively selected from the available recordings within each of the three WFI types to ensure a mix of client gender and age (teens, 20s, 30s, 40s) and to achieve the widest possible coverage of Jobcentre Plus offices and personal advisers – thus limiting duplication and bias. The overall data set for the present analysis comprises 56 WFIs conducted by 26 different PAs across eight different Jobcentre Plus offices and two EZs:

- eleven advisers only appear once in the data set (with either a younger or an older client);
- six advisers appear twice, four of which were with one older and one younger client and two having both recordings with either younger or older clients;
- six advisers appear three times, all featuring a mix of younger and older client WFIs;
- three advisers feature more frequently (four, five or six times) including WFIs with both younger and older clients.

Eleven of the people in the 50+ sample were female and 17 were male. Ages ranged from 50 to 59 years (see Appendix A for a more detailed breakdown). The younger sample included 16 males and 12 females, aged between 18 and 49 years (see also Appendix A). The main study did not stratify its sample by age

or gender, however, and so the data set available for the present study cannot be considered to be representative of the wider claimant population on any criteria. All of the people in the 50+ and younger comparison sample were of white British ethnic origin⁶.

The analysis reported here focused predominantly on client-adviser interactions in Jobcentre Plus offices. The main study included a comparative analysis of Jobcentre Plus New Deal and their equivalent EZ interviews with JSA (25+) claimants and lone parents. As shown in Table 1.1, the 50+ sample contained only three EZ interviews and so there was only limited focus on EZ WFIs in the present study.

1.4.3 Methodological limitations

From the outset, this study was understood to be exploratory in nature. The sample of WFIs available for analysis was opportunistic and relatively small and the client characteristics were not representative of the wider claimant population. As such, the analysis was intended to gather detailed knowledge about a specific set of contexts, rather than determining broader or more generalisable findings. Throughout the chapters which follow, all reported findings should be considered tentative and not generalisable.

In addition to the total number of WFIs with older people being small overall, when this sample was broken down by WFI type, there were very few recordings of any one type (see Table 1.1) and exploration of the data revealed that the structure and content of each WFI type was quite distinct. Therefore, in many respects it was not feasible to consider the 50+ sample as one analytic whole. The nature of the different WFI types also offers varying scope for comparative analysis. While NJIs and initial IB WFIs follow a relatively uniform structure and so permit some degree of systematic comparison, it was more difficult to draw conclusions from the subsequent New Deal recordings because of the diversity of content and format of the WFIs. People in the recordings were at different stages through the programme (meeting with their adviser for between the second and tenth time) and so the 'agenda' for their WFIs varied considerably. In summary, the combination of small size and great diversity of the data set meant that it was not possible to address all of the research questions comprehensively.

Finally, it is important to recall that the perception that the needs of older clients are met less well by Jobcentre Plus provision has developed largely from the evaluations of longitudinal programmes such as Pathways to Work and ND25+. The cross-sectional 'snapshot' nature of the WFI recordings in this data set which form part of Jobcentre Plus back-to-work programmes, particularly limits what can be concluded about advisory practice in this respect. We have only a one-off insight into the experience of each client and, in the case of IB claimants, this is only their first WFI. We do not have a full picture of people's trajectories through

⁶ Only 12 of the total 243 individuals who took part in recordings for the main study described their ethnic origin as other than White British.

the New Deal or Pathways programme and have very little knowledge of the wider range of support elements with which people were involved, which will all contribute to eventual programme outcomes.

1.4.4 Adviser consultative workshop

In order to ensure that practice recommendations emerging from the study were practical and feasible, the study design incorporated a consultative workshop with Jobcentre Plus advisers, at which emerging findings and draft practice recommendations would be presented for their feedback. Due to an unforeseen high level of demand on Jobcentre Plus staff time around the time this study was conducted, it was not possible to convene a workshop exclusively for the purposes of this project. However, a one-hour session was made available to the research team during a day-long focus group which had been convened for a related purpose and to which a relevant range of Jobcentre Plus staff members had been invited. This workshop was held in May 2009, with 11 participants including: front-line advisers (covering JSA new claims, JSA New Deal and Pathways to Work for IB clients); Disability Employment Advisers; Adviser Service Managers; and members of staff from Jobcentre Plus strategy units.

During the workshop, members of the research team presented a brief introduction to the main study and the 50+ comparative project, and then facilitated discussion around:

- conceptualising the 'older customer';
- key findings of the comparative analysis;
- clients' concerns about age barriers (video/audio extracts from the data set were shown);
- suggested practice recommendations.

The workshop was audio recorded and detailed notes were made on the comments and reflections received from participants. Brief summaries of these responses are included, as relevant, in the discussion of main findings which can be found in Chapter 6.

1.5 Structure of the report

Bearing in mind the data limitations noted above, in this report we have presented findings thematically, in order to draw out the aspects of the data which provide most insight into the key questions of interactional difference and the extent to which a 'work focus' is pursued with clients of different ages. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 draw primarily on the data from the three WFIs types around which the comparison sample was constructed: initial WFIs for IB claimants; NJIs; and subsequent New Deal WFIs.

- Chapter 2 considers the ways in which the topic of work is introduced and expanded in WFIs and the matter of engendering a positive attitude towards work;
- Chapter 3 focuses on how advisers support clients' back-to-work journey, through various aspects including assisted job search, the Choices package for IB claimants, performing BOCs, forming action plans and offering more general positivity and encouragement;
- Chapter 4 looks at aspects of the WFI which relate to mandatory activity and conditionality, including agreeing job search activities with JSA claimants, the requirement for people receiving JSA to provide evidence of active job search, the mandatory nature of attendance at WFIs and the matter of benefit conditionality and sanctions.

While the comparative analysis of WFIs with older and younger clients forms the central focus of the report, we have also drawn out some of the data which illustrates older clients' particular age-related concerns about their back-to-work journey and how these are addressed by advisers during WFIs. This is presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 concludes the report with a summary and discussion of key findings, recommendations for effective advisory practice with older clients, policy implications and suggestions for further research.

Throughout the report, findings are illustrated with reference to extracts from the transcribed WFI recordings. These detailed transcriptions use various conventions to show aspects of spoken interaction, for example, speaker overlap, pauses and changes in pitch. Appendix B provides a guide to the symbols which appear in the data extracts. In certain places we highlight sections of the transcript, to draw the reader's attention to particular points of note. Longer extracts are also given line numbers to aid location of specific sections of the dialogue.

For the purposes of the main study, each recording was given a unique identification number. These are noted alongside each extract in square brackets. For each extract, we also note the type of WFI, client gender and age, and the date the recording was made, for example:

Extract X [104] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 56 (October 2007)

2 Talking about work in Work Focused Interviews

This chapter considers the ways in which the topic of work is introduced (Section 2.1) and expanded (Section 2.2) in Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) with new claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), people attending initial WFIs for Incapacity Benefit (IB) and people attending subsequent New Deal WFIs. The chapter also considers the matter of engendering positive attitudes to work among these client groups (Section 2.3). In each of the three subsections, we present data from recordings with IB claimants and then JSA claimants (new jobseekers and New Deal participants⁷), and draw out observations about how advisory practice differs – if at all – in relation to client age.

2.1 Introducing the notion of work into Work Focused Interviews

2.1.1 Incapacity Benefit

During initial IB WFIs, the topic of work was sometimes introduced by advisers during their initial explanations of the purpose of the WFI. Advisers varied in the specific form of words that they used to describe the purpose of the WFI, but in general they focused on the notion of help and support available to the individual while they were in receipt of benefit. Some advisers did not explicitly mention work at this preliminary stage. Among those who did mention work, this was often accompanied by an emphasis that this was only **as and when appropriate** for that person.

Where we have examples of the same IBPA conducting WFIs with people of different ages, some advisers appeared to give a different emphasis to the 'back-to-work' element with older clients as compared to younger ones. For example, as shown in Box 2.1, the adviser who appears in recordings [013] (client male,

⁷ The comparison sample included New Deal 25+ (ND25+) and New Deal 18-24 participants.

aged 23) and [014] (client female, aged 54) focuses only on the work aspect when explaining the purpose of the WFI to the younger person, but gives a two-fold explanation of the WFI purpose to the older person, mentioning also support for condition management.

Box 2.1 Explaining the purpose of the initial IB WFI

Extract 2.1a [013] Initial IB WFI Male, aged 23 (July 2007)

PA: I'd a (0.3) brief word with you I think the
other day a[s to why you were are here

CLA: [Yeah
(.)

CLA: Mhm=

PA: =Er:m: (.) basically because you're claiming Incapacity Benefit .hh
we need to erm look and see if there's any help or support we can
give you
(.)

CLA: [Mhm

PA: [.hhh to look at getting you back into work
(0.5)

PA: So: (0.2) that's the main reason why you've come
(.)

CLA: Mhm

Extract 2.1b [014] Initial IB WFI Female, aged 54 (July 2007)

PA: I'll explain a little bit about the processes an:d (.) the reasons
why you've:e (.) wha- (.) you know why we have af- asked you to come
in today .hhh ba:sically anybody now who makes a claim to Incapacity
Benefit .h has to be seen: by an adviser
(0.3)

CLA: [Right

PA: [.hh And we look to see: if there's any help or support we can give
you .h eh
either .h (0.2) managing your condition .hh or: (0.4) and or getting
you back into work

In another example, the adviser who conducts WFIs [143] (client male, aged 59), [177] (client female, aged 59) and [182] (client female, aged 20) also gives a stronger emphasis on work when explaining the purpose of the WFI to the younger person, as shown in Box 2.2. In all three cases, the adviser emphasises the help aspect of the WFI, stressing the voluntary nature of support and the lack of pressure. However, in the two WFIs with older people, there is no direct reference to work in the opening introduction, whereas a focus on *trying to help people back to work* is made explicit with the younger client.

Box 2.2 Explaining the purpose of the initial IB WFI

Extract 2.2a [143] Initial IB WFI Male, aged 59 (January 2008)

- PA: Things have changed slightly now since probably the last time you claimed
- Cla: Yeah
- PA: Er whereas before e:rm it was sort of voluntary whether you had to come and see us we now do these sort of mandatory interv[IEWS
- Cla: [Yeah
- PA: Which we have to do as part [of your claim to benefit now] [e:rm
- Cla: [Yeah [yeah
- PA: and though- although it is mandatory it's (0.6) everything we talk about's voluntary it's just [you have to come in that's all and
- Cla: [Yeah
- Yeah
- PA: just to tell you what help's available and find [out a bit more
- Cla: [Yeah
- PA: about your situation see if we can help you in that way so that's all it's about really to[day
- Cla: [Yeah yeah
- PA: E:rm just to see if there's anything we can do to help you basically with your current situation or whatever

Extract 2.2b [177] Initial IB WFI Female, aged 59 (January 2008)

- PA: It's nothing to worry about today anyway we're not (0.4) sort of here to
- Cla: No
- PA: put you under pressure o:r .hhh affect your benefits or anything like that just to tell you what help's available [e:rm
- Cla: [mm
- PA: and things like that .hhhh so (9.0) ((adviser typing))
- PA: yeah so today's just a initial work focused interview then which we have to do now as part of any claim to benefit we have to do one of these interviews
- Cla: Mm
- PA: like I say just to tell you about what help's available find out a bit more about your current situation and things like that .HH er make sure you're getting the right benefits as well

Extract 2.2c [182] Initial IB WFI Female, aged 20 (January 2008)

- PA: Do you know why I've asked you to come in fo:r appointment today or
- Cla: I think so yeah
- PA: It's called er a work focused interview so really we look at trying to help people back into work [but
- Cla: [r:right
- PA: if work's not an option for you at the minute w- we're not (0.2) pressuring people [into work or anything like that
- Cla: [Oh yeah yeah
- PA: E::rm (0.8) so t' interview's just (.) find out a bit more about your current circum[stances
- Cla: [Yeah
- PA: Tell you what help's available
- Cla: Yeah
- PA: And see what's most appropriate for you really so it's nowt to worry about

However, there were also examples of advisers who did directly refer in their initial WFI introductions to the possibility of *getting you back into work* with clients across the age range. Likewise there were advisers who focused only on the help and support aspects in their opening explanations and did not explicitly mention work to people of various ages at this point. Thus, while the preceding extracts give some indication of possible age-related variation in the practices of particular advisers regarding WFI introductions, this was not evident across the whole sample. Moreover, the absence of a reference to work during initial introductions did not mean that work was not discussed at a later point in the conversation.

A second context where the topic of work was raised in initial IB WFIs was in establishing the details of a client's most recent job and their current employment circumstances (i.e. whether they were still under a contract of employment). We understand that, at the time the data were collected, gathering this information formed part of the screening process during initial IB WFIs⁸ and, as such, the presence of this enquiry showed no variation by client age. Talk about most recent employment sometimes served to open up wider discussion of plans for work, which we return to in Section 2.2.

2.1.2 Jobseeker's Allowance

To some extent, the question of 'introducing' the notion of work during New Jobseeker Interviews (NJIs) does not seem to be very applicable, given that the relevance of work to the benefit claim is largely implicit. We can observe, however, the ways in which advisers set out the purpose of the NJI and how they talked about work at this point. Advisers often established the focus for this part of the client's appointment by contrasting it with the Financial Assessor meeting, from which most people had come directly. Thus, they explained that this aspect of the appointment was *the work focus part or kind of more your job search side of it*.

Some advisers opened the NJI with a fairly comprehensive description of the agenda for the interview, including, for example, that the WFI would cover availability for work, type of work, job search steps, the issuing of signing arrangements, the 'rules and regulations', and (in some regions) a Better Off Calculation (BOC). In contrast, there were examples where advisers did not give an introductory overview of the appointment at all, or simply said that this part of the appointment was to set up the Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg). Although these WFIs did include all the required elements of the NJI, the full list of tasks and activities was not set out in a preliminary introduction.

⁸ At the time recordings were made for this study, initial IB WFIs included the use of a computerised 'screening tool' through which the adviser would gather details of a claimant's circumstances to establish whether or not they would be required to attend a series of mandatory interviews under the Pathways to Work programme. Thus, a client could either be 'screened in' to mandatory participation in Pathways or 'screened out' (but could participate on a voluntary basis). Since conducting this study, use of the screening tool has been discontinued.

These various approaches showed no patterning by client age, but rather seemed to be part of that adviser's individual style⁹. Evidence for this can be found in the high degree of similarity that can be observed when considering different WFIs with the same adviser, as illustrated in the Box 2.3. For each of these two advisers, the extracts are drawn from three different WFIs with people aged 18-24; 25-49; and 50+ and a markedly consistent 'linguistic routine' seems to be in operation in all cases. We can see in Extract 2.3c that the interjection from the client regarding his current employment circumstances does not deter Adviser A from resuming her 'script' some two minutes later:

Box 2.3 Consistent linguistic routines associated with introducing the NJI

Adviser A

Extract 2.3a [181] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 18 (January 2008)

PA: .hh [Hi. My name's ((name)), I'll be doing the=
 Cla: [()]
 PA: =work focus part of your interview toda:y,
 Cla: O[kay
 PA: [Okay. .hh Have you ever signed on before ((name))
 Cla: No
 PA: Right. Okay. What we're gonna do today then .hh we're gonna talk about availability for work, .hh we'll talk about the type of work you're looking for and we'll also agree the steps that you are going to take every week in order to get back in to employment [Okay?
 Cla: [Okay
 PA : .hhh From that discussion we are gonna draw up a document called a jobseeker's agreement. Which is a mandatory requirement of claiming jobseeker's allowance.
 (.)
 PA : Alright? .hhh Erm I'm also going to give you::- your signing arrangements so you know when to come in and see us next. .hh and I'm going to do something called a better of in work calculation.

⁹ It is perhaps also notable that the advisers who did the most comprehensive 'agenda setting' were from the same Jobcentre Plus office, potentially indicating that this was a result of specific training.

Extract 2.3b [152] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 45 (January 2008)

PA: My name's ((name)) I'll be doing the work focused part of your interview.

Cla: [Right.

PA: [Have you ever signed on before?

Cla: No.

PA: Right, okay. What we're gonna do today then, we're gonna talk about your availability for work.

Cla: Mm hmm.

PA: Talk about the type of work you're looking for .hh um and we'll also agree the steps that you're going to take every week in order to try and get back into employment.

Cla: Right.

PA: Okay er from that discussion we'll draw up a document called a jobseeker's agreement which is a mandatory requirement of claiming Jobseeker's Allowance. I'm also going to give you some signing arrangements so you know when you come in and sign on again and then I'm going to do something called a better off in work calculation which is a calculation we do for everybody

Extract 2.3c [151] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 53 (January 2008)

PA: ((Name)) .hhh I'll be doing the work focussed part of your interview today. .hh Have you ever signed on before mister ((name)).
(0.4)

Cla: Yes. Er two years ago:

PA: Right.
(.)

PA: [Oka:y.]

Cla: [Erm but] it was a waste of time

PA: Alright. Well e- do you want me to recap what we're actually going to talk about today,
(1.4)

Cla: Well I've got no id- this is the very first
[for me.] So I've got no idea [what to expect.]

PA: [Right] [Ah right. That's why]
I asked if you'd signed before. 'Cause if you've signed
[on before you normally had have had an in-]=

Cla: [No no. I've- I've worked all me life]

PA: =.hhh Ri:ght. Okay. .hh So what we're going to talk about today mister ((name)) is we're going to talk about your availability for work, .hh [talk] about the type of work you're looking fo:r.=

Cla: [Mm:]

PA: =And we'll also agree the steps that you're going to take every week to try to get back into employment

((lines omitted while client explains circumstances of job loss))

PA: .hhh erm what I'm also going today mister ((name))is give you your signing arrangements so you know when to come in and see us,
(.)

PA: And I'm going to do a calculation that I have to do for everybody at this stage of unemploy[ment.]=

Cla: [Mm]

PA: =called a better off in work calculation.

Adviser B**Extract 2.3d [026] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 19 (July 2007)**

PA: .hh anyway my name's ((name)) I'm here to do: the: Jobcentring part
of the interview
(0.3)

Cla: [Yeah

PA: [.hh Which is basically to find out the type of work that you're
looking for: how you're gonna look for it tell you rules regulations

Cla: [yeah

PA: [how to sign on that sort of thing
(0.2)

PA: .hhh But before we go there (0.2) what I need to do (0.2) is check
the information that they've given me is correct

((lines omitted while background information gathered))

PA: .hhhh uh now the next thing we need to do is what we call is a
jobseeker's agreement now this is ba:sically where you're saying the
type of work you're looking for: how you're gonna be looking for it
any restrictions that you feel there needs to go on the:re and that
sort of stuff so (1.4) type of work that you're looking for at the
moment

Extract 2.3e [085] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 46 (October 2007)

PA: Right, my name's ((PA's name)) I'm here to do the Jobcentring part
of the [interview

Cla: [right yeah

PA: which is basically find out what type of work you're looking for how
you're [gonna look for it

Cla: [Yeah

PA: and all that sort of things .HHH Right, first of all though I've got
to:: check the information that they've give me

((lines omitted while background information gathered))

PA: Well what we need to do now is what we call a Job Seeker's
agreement, now that's basically going to say the type of work you're
looking for

Cla: [Yeah.

PA: [How you're going to look for it and that sort of thing, so (1.0)
it's got on here any particular work that you're going to be looking
for first of all?

Extract 2.3f [025] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 58 (July 2007)

PA: Okay My name is ((name)) .hh I'm here to do the jobcentring part of
the interview, .hhh (I want to) basically find out the type of work
you're looking for: how you're going to look for it tell you the
rules regulations how to sign on

Cla: °Yeah.°

PA: all the things like that

((lines omitted while background information gathered))

PA: .hhhh Right, (.) job seekers agreement last time you were in? (0.2)
looking for a job as a rigger?
(0.2)

Cla: Y:a[h.]

PA: [So] that's still the same?

It was common for advisers to begin by asking people whether or not they had claimed JSA before, and there was some evidence that subsequent explanations of the agenda for the NJI were tailored according to the individual's amount of prior experience of the system. Among the five 50+ new jobseekers in the data set, two were contract workers and had made claims in the fairly recent past; the introductory explanations given by advisers in these WFIs were among the briefest in the sample. However, there were also repeat claimants among the 50+ subgroup who were given lengthier explanations and there did not seem to be any consistent tendency for advisers to provide older people with less information about the WFI procedure.

For subsequent New Deal WFIs, the question of 'introducing' the notion of work again seems somewhat inapplicable. What can be observed, however, is that the extent to which work or work-related activity formed a focus of subsequent New Deal WFIs could vary according to the situation of the individual client and the circumstances which they brought to the WFI on a particular day. This is discussed further in the next section.

2.2 Discussing plans for work

2.2.1 Incapacity Benefit

The main study (see Drew *et al.*, 2010, Section 4.6) identified that advisers always asked people about their plans to return to work – thus, there was no age differentiation in this matter. At some point during the majority of initial IB WFIs, advisers asked a more or less direct question about the individual's work intentions¹⁰. Two forms of enquiry about return-to-work intentions used by advisers were questions of **when** the individual thought they might be returning to work and of **whether** they expected to return to work. The **when** formulation contains a 'built in' assumption that the individual will provide a positive response, i.e. some sort of timeframe, however long, over which they expect to be back in work. In contrast, the **whether** formulation offers more scope for answering in the negative. A positive finding, therefore, is that in almost all cases, the advisers in this data set used the 'when' form of enquiry.

Only three of the initial IB WFI recordings included a form of question that implied the person might be considering never returning to work¹¹. All three examples came from initial IB WFIs conducted by the same adviser, who consistently posed his first question about future work intentions in the 'whether' formulation:

¹⁰ Exceptions to this were where the person had spontaneously begun to describe their work situation and conversation about back-to-work plans had flowed from this, without the need for a direct question from the adviser.

¹¹ One further instance where a 'whether' question form was implied was in the three-year trigger interview [012], where the adviser asked the client (female, aged 51): *Do you think there might be a time when you might look to go to work or...*

Right, one of the questions we have on here is um would you see yourself working again then? That's entirely up to you, but it's just to give us an indication of what plans you might have for the future.

([177] client female, aged 59)

Right, so this might sound like a bit of a daft question but would you see yourself working again at all?

([143] client male, aged 59)

I'll ask you some of these questions they won't apply to you but I'll just go through 'em anyway (0.2) U::m .tch no job to return to? e::r would you see yourself working again in t' future?

([182] client female, aged 20)

What appears to be the case is that this adviser had a tendency to pose this particular question from a range of on-screen prompts in enquiring about people's work expectations, regardless of their age. It is unfortunate that the available data is confounded by the fact that both of the oldest people in the 50+ data set (aged 59) met with this adviser, thus it is difficult to assess whether an age-related practice is in operation or whether this was simply a matter of individual adviser approach.

It can be noted that the adviser moderated his question to both of the older clients with some kind of qualifying statement, which seemed to presuppose that they might respond in the negative. Recalling also that this adviser did not mention return to work in his initial introduction of the WFI purpose to the two oldest clients, where he did so with the 20-year-old (see Box 2.2), we have here a tentative indication of adviser presumption of a lesser work focus among the very oldest IB claimants. However, it is also important to consider what the adviser already knew about each person's circumstances at the point his question about return-to-work intentions was presented. For the young woman in recording [182], it had already been established that the sole reason for her claim was severe sickness during pregnancy – thus, a return to health (and capacity for work) could be expected in due course. The older female in recording [177] had developed severe anxiety and depression following the sudden and unanticipated dismissal from her employer of 13 years, but this information had not been elicited at the point the adviser asked about future plans for work. In contrast, the adviser's question to the older male in recording [143] came after a lengthy discussion of his long-standing heart problems, previous operations and likely further surgery in the coming months. Thus, the adviser's apparent presumption of lesser likelihood of returning to work was influenced by the combination of health circumstances and age¹², as his post-interview comment indicates:

¹² At the time of the study, people became ineligible for participation in Pathways to Work at the age of 60. Therefore, it might be inferred that this adviser's viewpoint was also influenced by this structural aspect of the benefits system.

I don't know how much further we'll be able to take things really cos of his condition, he's possibly gonna need another heart bypass and with him being 59 as well it's- it's gonna be difficult, if we can actually make any progress towards work...I think with his condition and- I don't see us making too much progress, but we'll just have to see how it goes.

(Post-interview to recording, [143] client male, aged 59)

Returning to the **when** formulations, it was notable that in responding to advisers' questions about timeframes for return to work, people often did not give specific or direct answers. In initial IB WFIs, advisers' enquiries into return-to-work intentions most commonly elicited further information about people's health circumstances or other difficulties they were facing – i.e. reasons delaying their return to work – rather than a direct answer to the question of when they would be ready to return to work. This did not seem to vary by age – people across the age range focused on providing a more qualitative response that conveyed relevant contextual information about their own current health or work circumstances. These contextual details did vary in certain ways which to some extent related to age (and also gender). For example, two of the youngest females (aged 18 and 20) explained that they would not be considering a return to work for some time yet because they were pregnant, a scenario which becomes less likely as women enter their 40s and 50s. However, the available data indicated no greater level of resistance to general discussion of work among people of any particular age group.

The extent to which discussion of future plans for work (or work-related activity) was elaborated varied quite widely among the recordings. In some WFIs, questions about previous employment and general intentions to return to work at some point in the future were followed up with more detailed consideration of what possibilities might be pursued, while in others there was little more than a gathering of information about work history. The method of Conversation Analysis (CA) does not seek to infer or interpret the motivations of participants in an interaction. However, taking into account the contextual information that we can gain from what was discussed during the WFI and what advisers added in post-interview, it seems that the extent to which plans for work were discussed in initial IB WFIs, and how concrete or abstract this discussion was, seemed, in part, influenced by the people's past and current employment circumstances as well as the nature of their health condition and the client's expressed feelings of work-readiness.

Across the range of ages, at the time of the initial IB WFI there often remained uncertainties about people's health conditions, for example, formal diagnoses, prognoses, test results or dates for pending medical procedures. Greater clarity around these matters was often treated by advisers as a prerequisite to more concrete consideration of specific return-to-work plans or activities. As such, for people of all ages, discussion of future work plans typically remained at a fairly abstract level at the initial WFI stage, for example, broadly what types of work, hours or locations might be compatible with health constraints.

Where people were still involved with their previous employer (either under contract or in some other way remaining 'attached') the feasibility of returning to that job was discussed. There was also some evidence that people who were still involved with an employer had given some thought to their return-to-work options prior to attending the initial IB WFI. For example, in two such cases, individuals described to the adviser how they were in discussion with their current employer about alterations to their role or job conditions¹³. It is perhaps notable that, among the individuals in this sample, claims to IB while still under a contract of employment were found more often among people in their 40s and 50s, whereas none of the youngest (aged under 30) were still with an employer at the time of their initial WFI. In this respect, therefore, there was perhaps greater opportunity for advisers to open up a rather more 'anchored' work-focused discussion with older clients.

Overall, there was little evidence to suggest that the depth of back-to-work discussion varied directly in relation to age and the data did not suggest any overall tendency among advisers to be less inclined to talk about future plans for work with older clients. However, returning to the one adviser who met with the two oldest IB claimants (both aged 59), in these WFIs returning to work in future was talked about more as an 'if' than a 'when'. Additionally, in the case of the adviser who met with a 23-year-old and a 54-year-old, when presenting elements of the Choices package, the adviser seemed to treat future work as a less definite possibility for the older claimant, as shown in Box 2.4.

Box 2.4 Future work as an 'if' or a 'when'

Extract 2.4a [013] Initial IB WFI Male, aged 23 (July 2007)

PA: one of the good things: (0.3) about being on Incapacity Benefit .hhh is the fact that .hh it is exactly what it say:s "choices" .hh you know we're not gonna say to you you've got to do that you've got to do this .hhh sometimes it's a good chance .h for people to reassess .hh [and take a step back and say right what do I

Cla: M[hm
(0.3)

PA: what do I really want to do what do I want from this .hh I don't wanna be (0.2) signing on (0.2) or I don't wanna be sending sick notes in for the rest of me life you're on[ly a young guy

Cla: [Mhm

PA: .hhh you want to see what's: (.) out there and what's available for: you

¹³ To some extent, it seemed that in these cases, line managers or occupational health departments were fulfilling a similar role to that of an IBPA in helping the individual to consider their future options for work.

Extract 2.4b [014] Initial IB WFI Female, aged 54 (July 2007)

PA: these are other bits and pieces that you'd be eligible fo:r .h
that's that are al- have al:ways been there
(0.2)

PA: .hh it's probably one of those if I'm honest I'd say: .hh we'll
leav:e (.) leave the:se and just know that they're there
(.)

Cl a: Know tha[t they're there for now m[hm

PA: [so that [if- you know if you do deci:de
.hh to go back to work if you do decide to take some work
on we'll look and s[ee

Cl a: [We'll look at (0.2) what's
[yes what's (sort of suitable)

PA: [Yea:h to see what's available at the ti:me

2.2.2 Jobseeker's Allowance

Previous research (McKenna *et al.*, 2005) has found that discussion of work during New Jobseeker Interviews (NJIs) tends to be shaped by the structure of the Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg). This was also evident in the WFI recordings in the present study, where discussion of work plans or aspirations was generally limited to establishing the client's immediate job goals, the steps they would take to look for work, and the parameters and restrictions on work they were willing to accept (for example, hours, geographical locations). In this section, we focus on how job goals were established for people of different ages (Chapter 4 considers how agreed job search activities were arrived at).

As part of the mandatory JSAg, new claimants of JSA must agree one or more job goals with their personal adviser. Among the five 50+ clients attending NJIs, only one was establishing a JSAg from scratch. All of the other four had made previous claims to JSA within the past two years and had existing JSAGs held on the Jobcentre Plus system. As illustrated in Box 2.5, in each of these four cases, the advisers (different individuals in each case) used a form of enquiry about job goals which was tended towards 'confirming' that the client's job goals remained 'the same' as they had been at the time of constructing their prior JSAg. In response, we can see that none of the individuals expressed a wish to alter the job goals which they had in place. Extracts 2.5a, b and c follow a very similar pattern, while in Extract 2.5d, the adviser approaches the matter of previously established job goals through the discussion of a permitted period¹⁴:

¹⁴ Where an individual has an established field of work, a 13-week 'permitted period' may be granted at the beginning of a new JSA claim, during which the claimant can restrict their job search activity to their usual occupation and rate of pay.

Box 2.5 'Confirming' older jobseekers' job goals from previous JSAGs

Extract 2.5a [025] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 58 (July 2007)

1 PA: right (.) jobseekers agreement last time you were ↑in (0.2)
 2 looking for a job as a rigger?
 3 (0.2)
 4 Cla: ye:a[h.]
 5 PA: [so] that's still the same?
 6 Cla: ye:ah
 7 PA: yeah

Extract 2.5b [118] New Jobseeker Interview Male, in 50s (October 2007)

1 PA: oka:y jobseeker's agreement um
 2 (2.8)
 3 PA: okay last time you had elec- electrical contractor that still the
 4 same yeah
 5 (0.6)
 6 Cla: yeah
 7 PA: yeah
 8 Cla: yeah just the s- everything's basically the same
 9 PA: yeah

Extract 2.5c [146] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 56 (January 2008)

1 PA: so we had on here (0.6) erm that you were looking fo::r light
 2 delivery driving [work
 3 Cla: [yes
 4 PA: Er car park attendant [maybe or
 5 Cla: [yes something like that
 6 PA: or care[taker handyman [that type of [work
 7 Cla: [yes [yes [yes
 8 PA: Is that still currently [that's d-
 9 Cla: [yes
 10 PA: [You're happy with those]
 11 Cla: [Yes] yeah
 12 PA: job goals

Extract 2.5d [151] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 53 (January 2008)

1 PA: Erm now (0.8) one thing that is still the same
 2 (.) that I can do for you is give you: (.) a
 3 permitted period still. Because .hh erm I don't
 4 know whether it was explained to you at ((city))
 5 the way that a permitted period works it means
 6 tha:t for the first thirteen weeks of your [claim]
 7 Cla: [Mm:]
 8 PA: Which hopefully will be ample time for [you]=
 9 Cla: [Yeah]
 10 PA: =to get back into [.hh more regular work.]
 11 Cla: [Oh yeah I'll be working by then]
 12 PA: Absolutely. .hhh erm:: (.) what that is going
 13 to do: is give you the opportunity to just
 14 look. .hh to remain in [erm] HGV driving
 15 Cla: [Mm]
 16 PA: Okay class one driving .hhh erm so that
 17 means up to the ((date)) you can
 18 focus on returning to your usual occupation.
 19 .hh Which [in] turn will protect your level of income
 20 Cla: [Mm]
 21 Cla: [Mm]
 22 PA: [Ok]ay .hhh So er:m (0.2) if you would like to
 23 do that which I would imagine you probably
 24 would yeah?
 25 (.)
 26 Cla: Yeah

In the subset of data used for the 50+ comparative analysis, there is only one instance of a previous JSAG being revisited in an NJI with a younger person. This is shown in Box 2.6. Here, we can see a subtle difference in the way in which the adviser approaches the question of whether the client's job goals remain the same or not. With this younger person, the adviser asks whether anything has **changed** rather than whether the job goals are **the same**. The adviser goes on to ask a follow-up question regarding whether the client's order of preference is reflected in the ordering of the job goals on the system. This leads to an alteration to the JSAG (lines 12-19):

Box 2.6 'Revisiting' a younger client's job goals from previous JSAg

Extract 2.6 [148] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 20 (January 2008)

1 PA: now then that screen there is what we call your jobseeker's
 2 agreement um ((name of adviser)) did this with you back
 3 [(at-) like you say June yeah you're [right ye[ah June yea:::h
 4 Cla: [Yeah [Yeah [Ju(h)ne
 5 PA: [U:::m
 6 Cla: [See I got that one correct ha
 7 PA: So has anything changed in:: what you're looking for you know
 8 the- the kind of jobs that you want is- (.)
 9 i[s it any different or
 10 Cla: [Yeah no- no it's (like) it's (all) it's still the sa[me
 11 PA: [Yea:::h
 12 so: (.) is waiter your favourite one o:::r
 13 Cla: Mm:: [usually kitchen portering like I've- (.) [done portering
 14 PA: [#U:::#[Yeah
 15 Cla: loads of time[s at race[s so
 16 PA: [I- i- [would- is that the one you look for more
 17 than (.) [waiter I'll change them round 'cos we tend to like to
 18 Cla: [Yeah
 19 PA: put your favourite at the top so

There is one further individual among the under-50s ([075] female, aged 34) who had made a previous claim to JSA. We learned from the post-interview that this claim ended only five months previously. However, in this WFI, there is no mention of an existing JSAg. Whether or not the adviser has computerised access to an existing document, his approach to establishing the JSAg during this WFI gives no indication that he is 'updating' a previous agreement. The adviser in this case uses a very open approach to initiate discussion of the client's employment aspirations, as shown in Box 2.7.

Box 2.7 Establishing a new JSAg for a repeat claimant

Extract 2.7 [075] New Jobseeker Interview Female, aged 34 (September 2007)

1 PA: We're gonna put together a Jobseeker's agreement a::nd
 2 if you're happy with it we'll get you sign it off and er
 3 explain when you need to come back and [sign on
 4 Cla: [Mm
 5 PA: and that kind of thing .hh er:m address any queries that you've
 6 got that kind of thing at the end .h um with that in mind um
 7 tell me a bit about what kind of work you um you see yourself
 8 doing or what er
 9 Cla: I'd like to do care care work
 10 PA: Okay
 11 Cla: And I've just f- finished doing a cleaning (0.4) with a cleaning
 12 firm
 13 PA: Yeah
 14 (0.8)
 15 Cla: Or shop assistant
 16 PA: Oh right right right
 17 (1.2)
 18 PA: Tell me a little bit about your last job

Following a discussion of the client's recent work experience and current aspirations (which is relatively lengthy as compared to other NJIs across the data set), her job goals are summarised by the adviser as care work 'number one', followed by cleaning and shop assistant 'in no relevant order'. Notable here is that the client's primary job goal is not the same type of work as the job she has most recently finished (cleaning).

From the examples in the preceding three boxes, all taken from WFIs with people who have claimed JSA in the fairly recent past, we have some tentative evidence that job goals may be revisited more thoroughly with younger people when making a repeat claim for JSA¹⁵. None of the advisers meeting with repeat claimants aged 50 and above opened up exploration of job goals afresh.

Box 2.8 shows the section of the WFI where job goals were being established for the first time with the one 50+ new jobseeker who did not have an existing JSAg. This individual (male, aged 56) had substantial prior work experience in senior managerial posts and had most recently worked in sales. Here we can see that a degree of interactional difficulty arises at the point where the client is asked to establish a second job goal (line 22 onwards). The client's first suggestion (property letting) is evidently not acceptable to the adviser, who indicates this with a sharp intake of breath followed by *yeah, that's not*. The adviser then goes on to suggest a range of employment types (office work, driving, gardening [lines 30-37]), which do not seem to relate directly to the client's past experience. The client offers two alternatives (IT work [lines 38-40] and sales [lines 61-62]), but these are again not taken by the adviser as suitable for entry into the JSAg. What is ultimately entered as the second job goal is *admin and clerical* (line 50), a field of work about which the client has explicitly expressed reservations (lines 43-46):

Box 2.8 Establishing job goals with an older client

Extract 2.8 [104] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 56 (October 2007)

1 PA: Where are we now then with what you'd like to do
 2 Cla: Right, well I mean for the last, really for the last six months
 3 when I was previous job to this one I was filling in and
 4 looking for something else
 5 PA: Mm
 6 Cla: and the people I was working for knew it and they were quite
 7 happy for me to be there but .hhh it was um not my thing really
 8 PA: mm hm?
 9 Cla: Um (2.0) I would like to do something go back into manage†ment
 10 (0.4) which is what I've done I've always either been self-
 11 employed or
 12 (0.6)
 13 Cla: [employed in other places
 14 PA: [I saw you'd been sel- self-employed

¹⁵ We are aware of at least one further instance in the wider data set (as utilised by the main study) of a younger repeat client's JSAg being revisited in a more open manner, adding support to this tentative finding.

15 Cla: Yeah
 16 PA: What sort of manager were you
 17 Cla: I was an operations manager which is logistics basic logistics
 18 Planning

((lines omitted while adviser identifies correct job code))

19 PA: that's lovely .HH now initially we can leave it with one job
 20 goal but we do en[courage people
 21 Cla: [mm
 22 PA: to have more than one .hh is there any other form of employment
 23 you would be prepared to [expect
 24 Cla: [Yeah um (0.2) previous to that job I-
 25 I got involved in property quite a lot so things like property
 26 letting and that sort of thing
 27 PA: .HHH yeah that's not
 28 (0.8)
 29 Cla: But you know
 30 PA: Yeah duh- ud- er- would- would you consider office work
 31 sa[y or driv-
 32 Cla: [erm office work my typing isn't really up to it [I mean
 33 PA: [bu-
 34 Cla: people phone up and say what's your typing speed and I have
 35 to say "with which finger" .hhh [but er
 36 PA: [Driving jobs gardening
 37 I [mean there's hundreds
 38 Cla: [Driving jobs um I can do IT work
 39 (0.6)
 40 Cla: I'm good [with spreadsheets and that sort of thing (.) (what)
 41 PA: [I mean we've got admin and clerical which is like
 42 this job (.) [this would be a]
 43 Cla: [but when I've-] when I've previously I've
 44 applied for things which have been like um (0.2) office
 45 management basically .hh it seems to be a euphemism
 46 for secretary which I'm not .HH [huh
 47 PA: [.HHH NO that shouldn't be
 48 the [case
 49 Cla: [Yeah
 50 PA: Is- if I put down admin or clerical work
 51 Cla: Yeah
 52 PA: Erm
 53 (2.2)
 54 PA: that should
 55 (1.6)
 56 PA: literally (0.2) only apply to- I mean I'm not a typist
 57 Cla: No
 58 PA: And I wouldn't be able to apply for for that [sort of job
 59 Cla: [No
 60 PA: And that's what we're looking at [here
 61 Cla: [yeah and I've also done sales
 62 work
 63 (1.0)
 64 Cla: last job was a sales adviser so
 65 PA: Well I think to start off with if you're happy with the two job
 66 goals
 67 Cla: Yeah [no problem
 68 PA: [we'll leave it at that .hhh because what will happen is
 69 if you were unemployed in thirteen weeks they'd want you to
 70 look at putting another one in
 71 Cla: Sure
 72 PA: So this is probably the best way to start then you've got
 73 somewhere to go and [you can look at the
 74 Cla: [Yeah
 75 PA: retail side of things then .hhhh right

There is another recording in the data set where the same adviser meets some tension in establishing mutually satisfactory job goals, this time with a younger person. A key difference here is that the client (female, aged 20) does not have a clear idea of the kind of work she would like to do and, unlike the older person in Box 2.8, does not offer alternatives to the suggestions made by the adviser.

Box 2.9 Establishing job goals with a younger client

Extract 2.9 [122] New Jobseeker Interview Female, aged 20 (November 2007)

1 PA: So what sort of work you looking to go back into retail
2 again?
3 Cla: Not really but that's what the lady like said on the phone
4 PA: We'll have to start with that one [on there
5 Cla: [Yeah
6 PA: Cos that's where all your experience is?
7 Cla: Yeah
8 PA: But you can look for other things as we:ll what other things
9 would you be interested in doing what about office work
10 (1.0)
11 Cla: uuh yea::h can do
12 (0.4)
13 PA: What do you want to do
14 (1.4)
15 Cla: I'm not sure really that's why- I came in to see someone the
16 other day on the- right at the end bench to talk about all the
17 jobs that you can do which isn't- doesn't involve mainly being 18
18 in- indoors all the time? (0.8) but we couldn't really think of
19 many like (0.8) what I could get straight away o- [obviously
20 PA: [Mm hm
21 (1.8)
22 PA: .tch well what this does at the minute (.) this- this is what you
23 agree to look for, the sort of work um (1.0) that you would
24 (1.8)
25 PA: °just put, sorry°
26 (3.2) ((adviser typing))
27 PA: um (0.6) be looking- we would expect you to apply for all jobs
28 that were retail or office
29 Cla: mm

While most people in the data set seemed to be content with the job goals that were recorded on their JSAg, both of the individuals in Boxes 2.8 and 2.9 appear to 'concede' rather than to agree to their second job goal. Thus, it appears that neither the older nor the younger client had a discussion about work during their initial WFI which led to multiple job goals about which they were enthusiastic. However, we can observe rather more explicit interactional difficulty emerging in the interaction with the older client, who has a clearer idea of the kind of work he would – and would not – like to pursue.

Where job goals were established afresh during NJIs, the type and number of job goals which were set seemed to show some association with age. Most of the youngest people (aged 18-24) agreed to three job goals, while people in their later

20s to 50s tended to agree two job goals or just one (where the individual had an established field of work and was granted a permitted period). However, the data indicated that as older people spent longer on JSA, their job goals were expanded; in two of the 50+ recordings, JSAs were revised with people who had previously participated in the New Deal programme – both now had three job goals listed. Among the youngest new jobseekers, one had aspirations to work on an oil rig ([026] male, aged 19) and one was already some way through the enrolment process to enter the emergency services ([181] male, aged 18). These aspirations were acknowledged by the advisers but were not recorded on the JSAs at all, in each case three more low-skilled job types being listed. In contrast, people in their 40s and 50s tended more often to succeed in getting their preferred job goal listed on the JSAs (usually in 'first' position)¹⁶ and all were able to settle on just two goals, at least for the permitted period.

Considering the subsequent New Deal WFIs, across all age ranges some were very work-focused, with time devoted to supported job search, exploration of specific job vacancies and strategies for making effective applications, or discussion of financial implications of particular employment outcomes. However, there were also WFIs which were dominated by administrative aspects of the New Deal programme (e.g. making referrals to courses or placements) or were limited in what they could achieve because the client – though they had attended the WFI – was currently quite unwell. Thus, there were some subsequent New Deal WFIs in which the specific matter of the client's job search was barely addressed, with examples among both older and younger people.

The subsequent New Deal WFIs in the data set were too diverse to draw out any meaningful comparative evidence on the extent to which back-to-work discussion is pursued by advisers with clients of different ages. However, as with the IB WFIs, there were examples of very work-focused discussions with older people in the data set and we find no evidence to support a hypothesis that advisers overall are less inclined to pursue a work-focused discussion with older clients during subsequent New Deal WFIs.

2.3 Engendering a positive attitude towards work

One of the study's research questions refers to how advisers **engender a positive attitude** towards moving into work among benefits claimants. As an overall observation, across both JSA and IB claimants in the data set, it seemed that most people did hold generally positive attitudes towards work. As such, it seems that the task of advisers during WFIs is less often about 'turning around' negative attitudes to work, per se, and more about helping clients to develop effective job search strategies, to address and overcome health-related and other obstacles to

¹⁶ Note that across the larger data set of NJIs, as utilised in the main study, it was found that advisers were 'normally willing' to record primary job goals as expressed by the client (see Drew *et al.*, 2010, Section 3.3.4).

progression back to work, and to encourage motivation and optimism. In Chapter 3, we consider in more detail the matter of how advisers encourage and support clients, and whether age-related differences are apparent in the WFI recordings. In this section, we briefly present the evidence that suggests most people did hold generally positive attitudes towards work, and consider adviser approaches in the small number of instances where people stated that they did not expect to return to employment.

2.3.1 Incapacity Benefit

The majority of IB claimants said that they did expect to return to work at some point in the future and there were two people who had either already secured employment ([082] male, aged 45) or had in fact already returned to work ([154] male, aged 56) by the time of their initial IB WFI¹⁷. Only two people attending initial IB WFIs stated that they did not anticipate working in the future. One was a female aged 49 and the other a male aged 59. These passages from the recordings are shown in Box 2.10.

Box 2.10 IB claimants' statements that they do not expect to return to work

Extract 2.10a [143] Initial IB WFI Male, aged 59 (January 2008)

PA: Right, so this might sound like a bit of a daft question but would you see yourself working again at all
 Cla: N(h) (h) o.
 PA: No
 Cla: No
 PA: That's fine
 Cla: huh huh .hh
 (2.4)
 PA: No like I say it's all sort of voluntary work side of [things
 Cla: [Yeah
 PA: And stuff like that we're not sort of pushing people [into work
 Cla: [Yeah
 PA: If- [if you do want to work
 Cla: [mm yeah
 PA: we'll try and help you but if not then
 Cla: yeah
 PA: not to worry

Extract 2.10b [156] Initial IB WFI Female, aged 49 (January 2008)

PA: Ri::ght e::r when do you see yourself sort of working again e::rm
 .hhh uh- do you think it's gonna be in the next three months six
 months are you not sure at this stage or
 Cla: I don't think I'm gonna be working again
 PA: Ri::ght well (0.4) s- er something we have to ask er what's your
 what's your reason for claiming Incapacity what- what's actually
 happened
 ((lines omitted))

¹⁷ Though it should perhaps be noted that in the case of [082] the initial WFI had been waived and the client had been off work for six months by the time he first met with an adviser.

PA: yeah .hhh Has your doctor sort of said (0.6) you won't be able to
work then o::r
(0.4)
Cla: Yeah
PA: Ri:::ght
Cla: Well my doctor told me: (0.4) quite a few years ago I
PA: Right
Cla: would probably never go back to work again
PA: Right. So before this happened (0.4) did you ha- do you have
problems leaving the house like [walking and
Cla: [Yeah

It can be noted that in neither of the two cases did advisers (different individuals in each case) directly challenge or in any way unpack the client's position, seemingly treating it as an acceptable response. The individual in recording [156] was 'screened out' of mandatory participation in Pathways to Work and, across the sample of initial IB WFIs, it could be said that this interview was among the least work-focused. The adviser did not pursue any particular discussion of work preparation activities and the WFI was rather dominated by elaboration of the client's health problems. However, the adviser nonetheless introduced the Choices package and there was discussion of whether the client's more holistic support needs were being met.

However, in the case of recording [143], immediately following the exchange shown in Box 2.10, the client went on to note that he had in fact had discussions with his previous employer about the possibility of returning to his job on a part-time basis, if this proved feasible after recuperation from his forthcoming surgery. From this, there follows a quite lengthy discussion of the possibility of returning to this job, which provides an opportunity for the adviser to think through with the client the ways in which the work might be managed (a different role, part-time hours) and to offer a number of what could be considered broadly positive, encouraging comments (*that'd be handy; it's good that they've sort of thought of you in that way I suppose; There might be an opportunity for you*). However, had it not been for the client voluntarily offering this information, it seems from his initial response *that's fine* that the adviser may not have pursued the matter of returning to work.

The two above examples are of interest in that they highlight how an IB claimant's stance that they do not expect to return to work can go unchallenged by an adviser, perhaps reflecting a concern not to be seen to be 'pressurising' such clients to return to work. However, the very small number of people indicating a lack of expectation of returning to work does not allow for any particular exploration within the present data as to whether or how this relates to age.

2.3.2 Jobseeker's Allowance

Among NJIs, there were aspects of the interactions in several recordings that provided evidence of a work focus among new claimants, with examples to

be found across the range of ages. We take such evidence to include people's spontaneous comments that they wanted to return to work (or did not want to be making a benefit claim), and also actions such as having already identified suitable vacancies, submitted job applications or secured interviews. There was some suggestion in the data that older JSA claimants may in fact have a more active work focus than younger people at the time of making a new claim. For example, two of the individuals in the 50+ sample had done a day or two of temporary work in between initiating their claim and attending the NJI and one had already secured new employment, closing his JSA claim during the same interview. We found no evidence to suggest that, at the time of a JSA new claim, older people required greater input from the adviser in engendering a positive attitude towards work.

As has been noted in Section 2.2, the extent to which subsequent New Deal WFIs could be described as work-focused varied according to the particular circumstances of each person at that time. However, among the WFIs of this type which did maintain a stronger work focus, there was again evidence that people were engaged in job search activity between WFI appointments (some having made positive progress with specific employers) and also expressions of positive interest in courses or placements. It is notable, however, that there were occasions in New Deal WFIs where advisers could be observed doing a lot of interactional work to engender positive attitudes in relation to getting clients 'on board' with **elements of the mandatory New Deal programme** (where recent or past experiences had been negative), rather than with regard to their overall attitude towards work. This is perhaps an important finding with respect to where advisers' energies may have to be directed during New Deal WFIs.

2.4 Summary

This chapter has considered how talk about work is introduced and developed in WFIs with clients of different ages. In initial IB WFIs, by one means or another, the topic of work was always introduced with people across the age range. Some differences were observable in how far this discussion was elaborated during the initial IB WFI, but there was no evidence to suggest that age was a direct influence on this. Rather, it seemed that an interplay of contextual factors including the individual's current employment status, previous work history and nature of health circumstances all had a bearing on how far back-to-work discussion developed during this first WFI.

Considering the practice of individual IB advisers, there was some evidence that a differing balance of emphasis was given to the status of work (alongside mention of condition management or non-specific reference to 'help and support') when **introducing** the purpose of the WFI. The data suggested that some advisers gave greater or more explicit focus on the 'back-to-work' aspect of WFIs in the explanations given to younger clients. Additionally, there was a small amount of evidence from some individual advisers to suggest a lower expectation of return to work among older IB claimants, including those aged 59, at the very upper end of the IB cohort. However,

overall, the available data did not support a notion that advisers are generally less inclined to pursue a work-related discussion with 50+ clients.

The topic of work forms a more inherent part of WFIs with JSA claimants, and so the question of 'introducing' this theme was of rather less significance in NJIs and subsequent New Deal WFIs. From the NJI recordings, however, what could be observed was the striking consistency in the forms of words which advisers used to open up the WFI (and to approach various subsequent tasks, as we will illustrate further in Chapters 3 and 4). These 'linguistic routines' did not appear to vary according to client age, but remained a consistent feature of individual advisory style.

A notable feature of the present data set was that four of the five new jobseekers in the 50+ cohort were repeat claimants and had existing JSAs on the Jobcentre Plus computer system. When comparing advisers' practices with younger repeat claimants, there was some evidence to suggest that advisers did not reopen discussion of job goals to the same extent with older clients as compared to younger ones, simply confirming rather than revisiting or revising job goals.

The data was particularly limited in what could be observed about establishing job goals 'from scratch', given that this was the case for only one of the new jobseekers in the 50+ cohort. However, what was apparent in the available example, as compared to a younger jobseeker, was a rather greater degree of interactional difficulty in agreeing job goals about which the client was not especially enthusiastic. The data also suggested that at the point of the NJI, older people (including those in the 25-49 age group) tended to agree a smaller number of job goals than people aged 18-24.

There was limited scope for age comparison in the subsequent New Deal data, given the wide variety in content of each WFI and the fact that each person in the New Deal subsample was at a different stage in the programme. Overall, it seemed that a subsequent New Deal WFI could comprise a greater or lesser amount of directly work-focused activity depending on the circumstances of the individual at a given point in time. However there was no evidence to suggest that client age had a bearing on this.

Considering the matter of engendering a positive attitude towards work, the data showed no strong evidence that people attending the three WFI types under consideration held negative attitudes to work per se. As such, we did not observe advisory practices that were specifically geared towards 'turning around' negative attitudes. However, there were illustrations of how advisers could provide encouragement and engender optimism in helping clients to think through options and opportunities on their back-to-work journey. We consider these aspects of the data in the next chapter.

3 Supporting the back-to-work journey

This chapter considers the key question of how advisers support and encourage people in taking steps towards work, and specifically whether there is any evidence of age-related variation. As noted in the previous chapter, in many cases advisers in the Work Focused Interview (WFI) recordings apparently did not need to do very much in the way of encouraging a positive attitude to work per se – there were examples of Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) and Incapacity Benefit (IB) claimants who were evidently already work-focused and expressed a wish to return to work when circumstances permitted. However, advisers have an important role in encouraging people to think through the particular obstacles they are facing in returning to work, supporting and guiding their job search activity, helping them to explore alternative options that are compatible with health constraints or skills, and facilitating access to the range of support available via Jobcentre Plus.

Through consideration of the content of the WFIs in the available data set, we have drawn out five aspects of support which could be observed in sufficient quantity to allow comparative consideration. These include: assisted job search for JSA claimants (Section 3.1); the Choices package for IB claimants (Section 3.2); better off calculations (Section 3.3); action plans (Section 3.4); and more general positivity and encouragement offered by advisers (Section 3.5).

3.1 Assisted job search for Jobseeker’s Allowance claimants

The assisted job search is one context through which advisers may offer direct support to clients during the New Jobseeker Interview (NJI) and New Deal WFIs. Among the full data set used in the main study (which included 42 NJIs) job searches were carried out more often with people aged 18-24 (15 out of 20) than they were with those aged 25+ (12 out of 22). Separating out the oldest cohort, job searches were carried out in three of the five NJIs with people aged 50 and above. While these numbers are too small to provide meaningful statistics, these figures seem indicative of a trend towards less frequent adviser-assisted job search in NJIs with people aged 25+ as compared to the 18-24 cohort.

There was a notable case among the 50+ sample in which the client (male, aged 58) had already secured new work and signed off JSA in the same WFI as his new claim was processed. In the following extract, we see how the adviser suggested that the requirement to conduct a job search could be bypassed given these circumstances. However, the client expressed a wish to see the outcome of a job search, with the aim of identifying more long-term job opportunities. Here, the adviser seemed to misjudge the client's level of interest in job search: he was apparently more keen to explore what other jobs might be available than the adviser initially anticipated.

Box 3.1 Older client interest in assisted job search

Extract 3.1 [025] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 58 (July 2007)

PA: .hhh Right, Now (.) next bit whereas we would normally do a jobsearch a::nd everything for you but you said you've already go[t something (that's) started up]

Cla: [Well I've got one to] start but it's only a couple of weeks so you could have a quick one if you want and that [see if there's] owt in[terests me]

PA: [R:ight yeah] [See if there's anyt]hing e:h: (0.2) longer in there

Cla: Yeah. (0.6)

PA: °R:ight.°

In the 15 subsequent New Deal WFIs included in this data set, job searches were carried out in seven cases: two of the five WFIs with people aged 50+, three of the five with people aged 25-49 and two of the five with those aged 18-24¹⁸. Thus, a tendency towards less frequent job search with older clients was not so apparent here. However, we can note that one adviser who features in five subsequent New Deal WFIs conducted job searches with both clients who were in their 30s and none with the three clients in their 50s.

Beyond the basic matter of whether a job search is carried out or not, the assisted job search can potentially provide opportunities for the adviser to encourage and 'coach' the client further. In the present data set, advisers varied in the extent to which they 'took the lead' in identifying and suggesting appropriate vacancies to clients. At one extreme, some advisers simply allowed people to look at the search results and select for themselves any vacancies which appealed to them from the on-screen list. Some advisers pointed out particular job titles to the client, and one New Deal adviser had an approach of identifying potential vacancies for his clients prior to their arrival at the WFI.

When potential jobs were identified, the extent and way in which advisers engaged in further exploration of the vacancy varied along a scale ranging from:

¹⁸ Analysis of the numbers of job searches carried out across the full data set of subsequent New Deal 25+ WFIs was not carried out for the main study.

simply printing details of any job in which the client showed interest; reading aloud the detailed job description and information on how to apply; making brief evaluative comments (positive or negative) about a particular job's suitability or appeal; to the most exploratory approach of considering in detail how the person's specific skills and experience matched the job requirements and how they might go about presenting themselves positively to the prospective employer¹⁹. While it is difficult to fully illustrate all of these aspects of the data without recourse to lengthy passages of transcription, the three extracts in Box 3.2, give some contrasting examples from subsequent New Deal WFIs. These range from a relatively procedural consideration of a vacancy (Extract 3.2a), through one where the adviser goes somewhat further in highlighting positive features of the vacancy (Extract 3.2b) to one where the adviser engages in a very personalised and exploratory consideration of the vacancy with respect to the particular client's skills, experience and the practicalities of taking up that role (Extract 3.2c):

Box 3.2 Different approaches to assisted job search

Extract 3.2a [032] Subsequent New Deal WFI Male, in 20s (July 2007)

PA: Um::::: right hh. part of a team of eighteen on a shop floor
(0.6) duties involve manufacture of roof kits to meet customer requirements:: (0.4) operate relevant tools for cutting and drilling measuring () hand tools machinery (0.5) etcetera (0.6) and ensure that quality assurance producers an- and health and safety procedures are followed (0.6) So that's 5.50 to 8 pounds an hour forty hours a week Monday to Friday eight till four-↑thirty (0.8) .tch sounds good .hhh a::nd that's a written application and/or CV to ((recruitment agency [name]))

Cla: [Oh it's just down the road from us so I can
[just pop it in

PA: [Yeah
so I'll print that one off for you

Cla: Right yeah (0.4) thanks

Extract 3.2b [040] Subsequent New Deal WFI Male, aged 55 (August 2007)

PA: what's this one at the Toyota dealership .h delivery driver required for busy service department collecting and delivering customer ca:rs dealing with customers must have full clean licence .hh that's six pound an hour .hh eight thirty till five th- you know the: er- Nis- the er Toyota dealer ((company name))

Cla: .hh The one up er (.) ((place name))
(0.2)

PA: Yeah: they've got a place there and they've also got a place in:
er:m: (.) ((place name)) now
(.)

Cla: Just opened up han't it
(0.2)

PA: (That's it) newish one yeah [that- that-

Cla: [Yeah

¹⁹ For further discussion of varied adviser approaches to conducting a job search, see Drew *et al.*, 2010, Sections 3.5 and 6.11.

PA: yeah so I think the ((place name)) is gonna be the main one whereas this tends to deal with the used cars more
(0.2)

Cla: That's [right

PA: [So that's delivering car:s to customers and collecting them
(0.5)

PA: That could be quite a- (0.3) an enjoyable job
(0.2)

PA: Would that interest you at all or no:

Cla: Yeah we could put- yeah
(0.3)

Cla: Prin[t us that one out

PA: [Give you details on that I mean they're a- I mean they're
a good local employer

Cla: Yeah
(3.7)

PA: And the rate of pay is: er (0.2) good as well

Cla: Yeah

Extract 3.2c [213] Subsequent New Deal WFI Male, in 30s (March 2008)

PA: Can you tell me what your thoughts are about that job
(2.8)

PA: You've obviously- you know you've seen it downstairs .HHH
so (0.8) how much of that (1.2) would you be very comfortable with
(1.4)

Cla: All of it cos I can do all tha:t (0.5) See the- the hotel the
cashiering part cos I've done retail (0.3) so I know retail and
taking reservations switchboard I can do .hhhh

PA: Which is why when it pop- popped up you were the first person
th(h)at I th(h)ought of where [.HH

Cla: [Mm

PA: That's what I was going to talk about today was "oh I've seen a job
on" but y- you've already seen it on the Tuesday .HHH so what was
the application thing was it go in and ask for an application from
them

Cla: I wasn't sure cos I- I didn't er pay much attention to that one or-
or did I apply for that one (0.5) Did I apply for that one on
Tuesday?

PA: Let's have a look

Cla: I can't remember if I applied for that cos I applied for four

PA: Collect application form from employer's address (0.2) right

Cla: Well I haven't been to the ((hotel name)) so I don't think I applied
for that one

PA: Well a- well (0.5) that's- that's the format [for it

Cla: [Mm

PA: So it's [collect application

Cla: [It's- it's er

PA: .HHH so let's- I mean we'll- we'll go through the individuals=You've
mentioned there right billing and cashiering, you've got the retail
experience so that's
(0.4)

Cla: Yeah

PA: You can give a good example of that one
(1.4)

PA: Switchboard operation the phones? So (.) yeah you've got experience
of using telephones

Cla: Yeah

PA: Dealing with cus[tomers

Cla: [A good telephone manner as well

PA: Goo:d
 Cla: Yeah .hhh
 PA: General customer service again that links into the retail then
 Cla: Mm hm? Good communication skills with the customers which I've got .hh[h
 PA: [So everything on there: so what- they said previous experience preferred but not essential as training can be given good (0.5)
 Cla: So it's not (0.2) essential is it (0.2) but I've got the j- I've already got the experience as well
 PA: You've- you've got the experience [of different AREAS
 Cla: [Well some experience
 PA: [to dra:w on
 Cla: [Mm
 PA: to then show them well okay I don't have specific experience in (0.2) a hotel
 Cla: Mm
 PA: But stuff that I've done (0.4) in this (0.2) role or in that role or in the other role .hh is all relevant because it's all customers coming in .hhhh getting the correct money the correct change paying the correct amount
 Cla: Mm
 PA: And not you know having five people booked in one room and zero people b(h)ooked in another [.hhhh
 Cla: [huh huh
 PA: How- how would that be fo::r getting to and from the ((hotel name)) is that basically quite close for you (0.5)
 Cla: [Very
 PA: [Straight down the town
 Cla: It's a- it's about er it's like about ten minutes away from where I live (0.4) fifteen minutes
 PA: So it's walking distance so actually (0.6) putting yourself doing the job so it's (0.7) (willing to) work (0.3) no travel costs so the times aren't too bad a- I mean it- it- it's literally open throughout the day .hh so there could be some late finishes and some early starts [because the reception's always got to be covered
 Cla: [Mm
 PA: .hhh erm (0.8) so could you see yourself doing that job?
 Cla: Aye definitely [say I wouldn't mind a hotel
 PA: [right
 Cla: it's um hospi- hospitality work isn't it then (.) that's what they call it isn't it? Or is it something like that.
 PA: It's under the- yeah it's under the broad heading of it
 Cla: Yea:h (0.3) it's entertainment isn't it cos it's like (0.8) e::r hospitality type of work
 PA: So you've got- it's a mixture of admin- on that position (0.4) customer service hospitality and also the clerical.
 Cla: Mm
 PA: Side of it as well .hh I don't know I've never watched Hotel Babylon have you ever seen that?
 Cla: No but I've seen Fawltly Towers [huh .hh huh
 PA: [Oh
 Cla: Well I- hopefully it's not like [er Fawltly T(h)owers [huh huh huh huh huh huh .hh no

Among subsequent New Deal WFIs, there is some evidence to suggest that a more or less exploratory approach is not consistently associated with a particular advisers' practice. For example, the adviser who we have shown taking a very client-focused approach in Extract 3.2c can be observed taking a rather less in-depth approach to job search in a WFI with a different client (also in their 30s). Considering the wider context of these WFIs, it seems that New Deal advisers' approaches to job search may be in part influenced by the stage in a client's back-to-work journey. In the WFI in which the aforementioned adviser takes a less engaged approach to job search, it is apparent that in the previous WFI the lack of a particular licence has been identified as the client's key barrier to the field of work he wishes to enter. Steps are evidently under way to obtain this licence and it seems that during the particular WFI we recorded, the adviser is prepared to accept that the client will not – at this moment – find jobs for which he is qualified to apply.

While there is insufficient data to draw inferences about whether advisers are more or less inclined to take an exploratory approach with older people, it is notable that among the NJIs the three job searches conducted with 50+ clients all have a sense of being rather brief. Table 3.1 shows that among the NJIs where a job search was carried out, two of the people aged 50 and above went away with no vacancies to follow up. In these two instances, the adviser and client established that there was **nothing** suitable on the vacancy system at the present time that fitted the individual's field of work. This did not occur with any of the younger cohort, although the range in number of job submissions shows no clear patterning with age among the under-50s.

Table 3.1 Number of job submissions when assisted job search is carried out

New Jobseeker Interviews			Subsequent New Deal WFIs		
ID	Client age	Number of job submissions	ID	Client age	Number of job submissions
025	58	0	047	57	0
104	56	0	040	55	1
118	(50s)	1	041	41	1
085	46	9	213	(30s)	2
075	34	2	220	38	0
110	29	3	032	(20s)	3
122	20	5	042	18	1
109	19	7			
026	19	1			
181	18	1			

The decision on whether to make a job 'submission' was always left up to the client. Across job searches with people of all ages, where the client indicated they did not want to pursue a particular vacancy, advisers rarely initiated a discussion

which resulted in a change of attitude. In the NJIs, there were no clear instances of advisers encouraging or persuading people to a more positive view on a particular vacancy in which they did not express an explicit and immediate interest. There was some evidence of New Deal advisers taking a somewhat more persuasive or even challenging approach, but still only two instances where it seemed a client had been persuaded to follow up a vacancy which they were initially not keen to consider (one in their 30s and one in their 40s).

Among the subsequent New Deal WFIs, it is worth noting that four of these WFIs [040; 047; 041; 042] were carried out by the same adviser who appeared to be consistently satisfied with one job submission for each client, despite a number of vacancies usually being mentioned in considering the search results²⁰. There is also evidence to suggest that other advisers were primarily concerned with quantity – getting a satisfactory minimum number of job submissions – rather than maximising the number of submissions or (perhaps more importantly) focusing on the specific job-match suitability of the jobs identified. Vacancies were dismissed for a number of reasons including lack of required training or experience; distance from the individual's home; or that the length of temporary contract was too short. Across the data set, there were examples of both client and adviser being the one to raise these barriers.

3.2 The Choices package for Incapacity Benefit claimants

The Choices package was introduced in all but one of the initial WFIs with IB claimants, but the extent of detail in which this was described or discussed varied. At one extreme, there was simply the provision of a leaflet with the briefest of overviews of its content while at the other, very detailed and tailored explanations of the elements of Choices was given. Age did not appear to be an influential factor in the extent to which advisers elaborated their presentations of the Choices package. Indeed, despite some indication of a presumption of lesser return-to-work intentions (see Chapter 2), the adviser who met with both of the 59-year-old IB claimants gave some of the most detailed explanations of Choices among the sample of recordings.

Apparently more influential on the depth of advisers' introduction of the Choices package was whether or not the adviser was expecting to see the client again in further WFIs, although this could operate in different ways. Where people were 'screened in' to mandatory participation in the Pathways to Work programme and so would be attending further WFIs, advisers sometimes deliberately limited the amount of information they provided at the initial WFI as this could be expanded

²⁰ Regarding recording [047] where the client leaves with no job submissions, the adviser explained in post-interview that the client's circumstances were posing a particular challenge to moving forward and he felt it would not be appropriate to submit him to jobs at the present time.

upon next time they saw the client²¹. Sometimes advisers explained this approach to the researcher in the post-interview and at other times this was (also) made explicit during the WFI itself, as in the following quote:

°Okay-° it's telling me you need to come in for six- for the six: .hh so:: (0.4) that then (.) it- it sort of depends then on how (0.2) much I tell you because if I'm gonna meet you six times .hh I don't need to tell you (.) the whole lot as if I was he- gonna be: er .hhhh there for er: just the one.

([013] client male, aged 23)

Where the client was 'screened out' of Pathways and therefore not required to attend further mandatory WFIs, there were striking differences in advisers' approaches, some giving only brief introductions to Choices where people were screened out, but others continuing with detailed descriptions of the various elements of support.

The main study (Drew *et al.*, 2010) identified that one aspect of effective adviser practice (across all WFI types) was to be **proactive** in attempting to 'recruit' people to particular activities or gain their commitment to certain actions during the WFI itself. Among the initial IB recordings, there were few examples of this type of active recruitment of participants. Instead, a theme which emerged from across the range of initial IB WFIs was a sense of postponement. In introducing the elements of the Choices package, advisers often presented these as *something to think about; for the future; when you're ready*. One influence on this approach seemed to be the voluntary nature of work-related activity and advisers' efforts to stress that the individual was under no obligation to undertake activities. A second factor in this sense of deferral was that it was often established that the client (and adviser) would be 'waiting until' some kind of event or outcome before taking things further. Examples included: surgical procedures; the results of hospital tests; or the birth of a child where the client was pregnant. The sense of deferral of work-related activities did not appear to vary according to age²².

There were just three examples of a client being referred to the Condition Management Programme (CMP) during their initial WFI; these involved two different advisers. Interestingly, two of these individuals had been screened out of mandatory participation in Pathways (one with each of the two advisers). The three people who took up referrals to CMP during their initial IB WFI were all female, aged 46, 49 and 51. All three could be considered to have 'self-recruited' without the adviser having asked a direct question about whether or not they wished to participate. At some point in the adviser's explanation of the programme, the client voluntarily indicated that they were interested in taking up this element of support.

²¹ Previous research on the Pathways advisory role has also identified that IBPAs endeavour not to 'overload' clients with information at their initial WFI (Knight *et al.*, 2005).

²² For further discussion of 'deferral', see Drew *et al.*, 2010, Section 4.7.

Although proactive recruitment onto elements of the Choices package was rare during initial IB WFIs, advisers sometimes highlighted certain aspects of provision which they thought would be particularly suitable for clients in the future. In some respects, this did not show variation by age, for example, the adviser in recordings [013] (male, aged 23) and [014] (female, aged 54) gave a very similar explanation of CMP in both instances and asked both clients to think about this in the time leading up to their next WFI, at which point they would consider making a referral. However, there was also some indication that advisers might present future options in somewhat different lights depending on client age. One example comes from the way training was suggested as a possibility to a younger person and to two older people, as shown in Box 3.3. In the case of the younger person (Extract 3.3a), training was described as having specific vocational benefits (e.g. to gain a fork lift licence) while for the two older people (Extracts 3.3b and 3.3c), training was suggested as a more therapeutic activity, a way to keep active and mentally engaged. The adviser is the same in the latter two cases.

Box 3.3 The benefits offered by training under Pathways to Work

Extract 3.3a [013] Initial IB WFI Male, aged 23 (July 2007)

PA: it's a job broker service and it looks at training
(.)

PA: They look at different types of training so if you knew (or) if you had a rough idea .hh what you'd like to do (0.3) .hhh it's a lot easier for them because they

Cl a: [Mm

PA: can .hh look and see if you need any training .hh forklift licence might be a good one [for you if you're

Cl a: [Mm

PA: interested in stores .hh they'll look at things like that and they'll also look at work placements for you
(0.3)

PA: .HHHH Erm: (0.4) so that- that's something maybe when you're feeling a bit better

Cl a: [Mhm

(0.2)

PA: to consider

Extract 3.3b [143] Initial IB WFI Male, aged 59 (January 2008)

PA: Training could be an option for you as well just to give you something to do [more than anything else

Cl a: [Yeah

PA: Something to work [towards

Cl a: [Yeah

PA: Even if it's not necessarily work related

Cl a: Yeah

PA: Er:m there's things like IT courses available if you wanted to do any IT er::m we've run all sorts of different courses in the past

Extract 3.3c [177] Initial IB WFI Female, aged 59 (January 2008)

PA: You can always come back and see me on a voluntary basis if you do want to look at work options [or
 Cla: [Mm
 PA: want to do some training er:m even if it's just to sort of get you out and about meeting people again [that side of things
 Cla: [keep this ((indicates head))
 going
 PA: Well that's it I mean (0.5) we often refer people onto training for that particular reason
 Cla: Mm
 PA: It might not be something that you think well this is going to get me a brilliant job or anything like that or it's- might not even be something you're particularly interested in but to sort of help you with [your overall condition and getting you, getting you better
 Cla: [Mm

As noted in Chapter 2, there was a further recording ([014], client female aged 54) where the adviser seemed to perceive future work as a less than definite possibility for this older person. In this case, the client explained fairly early in the WFI that she was pursuing early retirement from her current employer on the grounds of ill-health. While the adviser did open up discussion of what alternative work the client might consider if she did take the retirement package, at a number of points in the WFI, the adviser's suggestions were steered towards the client considering something voluntary or 'therapeutic' rather than moving back into the mainstream labour market. In contrast, this adviser's discussions with a 23-year-old (recording [013]) were clearly geared towards a return to paid work as and when his health permitted.

3.3 Better off calculations

This section considers the question of how Better Off Calculations (BOCs) are used and presented to people of different ages by Jobcentre Plus advisers in NJIs, subsequent New Deal WFIs and initial IB WFIs. The main study (see Drew *et al.*, 2010, Section 5.3) additionally gives consideration to the use and impact of BOCs with lone parents, who do not form a focus of the present report.

Of the 42 NJIs in the wider data set (as utilised by the main study), BOCs were conducted in just nine cases – all of which were with advisers in the same Jobcentre Plus office. Advisers from this office feature in five recordings in the present subset of NJI data and were consistent in conducting a BOC with all of these clients, which included people in their teens, 20s, 40s and 50s. The way in which the BOC was explained to people of different ages showed little variation. Advisers described the purpose of the BOC as being to demonstrate or make the client aware that they would be better off in work. For the most part, the outcome of a BOC for JSA claimants is a given (i.e. the JSA claimant will always be better off in work) and this was often evident in the way that advisers treated the outcome as a foregone conclusion.

Of the five NJI recordings where a BOC was carried out, three were conducted by the same adviser, and here there was some evidence of subtle age-related difference in the way the BOC was presented. Overall, the extracts in Box 3.4 provide a further illustration of how advisers may employ consistent linguistic routines for certain tasks across multiple WFIs. However, in Extracts 3.4a and 3.4b (clients aged 53 and 45 respectively), the adviser makes a point of stressing that the use of minimum wage for the purposes of the BOC is in no way a reflection of the wage or salary that the individual has earned in the past or might hope to attain in future. The matter of minimum wage being 'no reflection on' expected earnings is not highlighted by the same adviser in a WFI with an 18-year-old (Extract 3.4c). Instead the adviser implies that this is the level of income the younger man might attain:

Box 3.4 Describing the better off calculation

Extract 3.4a [151] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 53 (January 2008)

PA: Er now the other thing that we do for everybody on these calculations is use national minimum wage (.) okay (.) which not necessarily reflects any previous income you've had or (.) hopefully doesn't reflect er the income that you have in your next job .hh er however we know it's the very least you could expect to earn in any given job

Extract 3.4b [152] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 45 (January 2008)

PA: Now we do use national minimum wage for everybody for these calculations. .hhh er not that that necessarily has any sort of reflection o:n: the wage that you were on before. Or would hope to achieve .hh erm: in your future work .hh erm: but we do er we use national minimum wage because we know that's the very least you could expect to earn in any given job

Extract 3.4c [181] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 18 (January 2008)

PA: Now we do these calculations for everybody that makes a claim to jobseeker's allowance. Okay? .hh er:m:: We do the calculation based on national minimum wage and what this computer does is shows us what your take-home pay would be. (0.4) That in tu:rn .hh enables me to do a quick calculation to see how much better off you are working .hh compared to signing on with us

By tailoring her explanations of why the national minimum wage is used for BOCs, this adviser may be acting effectively in acknowledging and showing sensitivity to the older jobseekers' circumstances.

Better off calculations were conducted in four of the subsequent New Deal 25+ (ND25+) WFIs, two with people aged 50 or above and two under the age of 50. Three of these four were with the same adviser. None of the five subsequent New Deal 18-24 WFIs in the data set contained a BOC. The limited evidence from the available recordings suggests that within the New Deal programme, BOCs tend to

be conducted in the context of fairly detailed consideration of a specific job. While it is likely to be a product of the data set, it is perhaps notable that there are no such circumstances among the ND18-24 WFI recordings.

Across all age groups, BOCs appeared very infrequently in the sample of initial IB WFIs, featuring in only one of the 15 recordings of this type. The client in this instance was aged 49 and had no job to return to. The adviser picked up on financial concerns as a barrier to work and so carried out a better off calculation to demonstrate the financial advantages of work, also introducing the range of in-work financial support available through Pathways. In a few further instances, advisers mentioned that a BOC was one of the elements of support that could be provided within the Choices package – something that could be done for the client in future. Most commonly, however, BOCs were not mentioned at all during initial IB WFIs with people of any age in this data set.

3.4 Action plans

Action plans are intended to be the key tool through which advisers and clients construct and agree steps in a journey towards work. However, across initial IB WFIs with people all ages of in this data set, action plans were rarely mentioned explicitly and so little can be said about any age-related advisory practice. Sometimes particular **actions** were discussed, for example the adviser requesting that the client think about participating in CMP in advance of their next WFI, but not in a way that suggested the client was aware that a written action plan was being compiled²³. There were only four initial IB WFIs where an action plan was referred to explicitly. One of these was with a younger person ([013] aged 18) who had recently taken part in New Deal 18-24; during the initial IB WFI, the adviser brought up this action plan on screen and used it as a basis for further discussion. This was apparently the only IB WFI in which the client was asked to sign an action plan. As his one action point from this initial IB WFI, the client was asked to take a CMP leaflet to his next counselling appointment to discuss with his counsellor the possibility of taking part.

The other three instances of action plans being mentioned in initial IB WFIs were with one person aged 49 and the two 59-year-olds. These all took place in the same Jobcentre Plus office, suggesting a stronger explicit focus on the action plan in this location. However, in one instance, the advisers' reference to the action plan was only in as much as she would not be completing it during the WFI on that occasion, because the client was in a hurry to leave for a doctor's appointment. The other two cases are illustrated below in Box 3.5.

²³ This apparently limited use of, and reference to, action plans in initial IB WFIs, is echoed in other research findings on WFIs with non-JSA clients (McKenna *et al.*, 2005, p.94).

Box 3.5 Actions agreed during initial IB WFIs

Extract 3.5a [143] Initial IB WFI Male, aged 59 (January 2008)

PA: We do normally rec- record on an action plan that we keep one action item which we have to agree each time so all I've put is just to just to consider phoning that benefit enquiry line

Cla: [Mm

PA: [You don't have to but it's just to [consider if

Cla: [Yeah

(0.6)

PA: If [you feel it's appropriate

Cla: [Yeah

Extract 3.5b [177] Initial IB WFI Female, aged 59 (January 2008)

PA: Right so all I've put on here is we just draw up a quick action plan *e:r* I've just put (0.6) I've done t' initial interview today I've put you're not looking for work at the moment but might consider this in't future if- [if things do improve

Cla: [Mm

PA: And then I've just put erm (0.4) consider that Condition Management Programme and let me know if you're interested in t' [future

Cla: [Mm

(1.4)

Cla: That's fine

There is insufficient data on the agreeing of action plans to explore whether advisers have greater or lesser expectations of older IB claimants. While it might be noted that the actions agreed in the above extracts (Box 3.5) are rather insubstantial, this may be as much a reflection of advisers' reluctance to place any pressure or strong demands on IB claimants, at least at this early stage in their claim, than an age-related approach.

What can be said about action plans in subsequent New Deal WFIs is also rather limited. The study's research question refers to how advisers introduce and negotiate the completion of an action plan; by the time of the subsequent New Deal WFIs in the present data set, action plans had presumably already been 'introduced' and there was little detailed conversation about action plans during these WFIs. Explicit mention of an action plan was made in around half of the subsequent New Deal WFIs. This covered the range of ages and it seemed that particular advisers tended to more consistently make explicit reference to action plans. Where action plans were mentioned, contexts included:

- an adviser explaining that they were 'updating' the action plan; here the action plan seemed to serve primarily as a document for minuting what had taken place during that WFI but sometimes also included specific actions for the client;
- reference to the action plan as a document that would be/had been sent to an external provider to give background to the client's skills and job preferences;

- in one case, using the action plan to record the next WFI appointment in lieu of the client's signing book, which they had forgotten to bring.

In the few cases where agreed actions were made explicit in the WFI recordings, these included following up a particular vacancy and attending a voluntary or mandatory appointment with a provider. The data is limited in that we do not have access to the full written content of action plans that were compiled (or added to) during these WFIs. However, across people of all ages, it was notable that discussion of action plans did not seem to form a central part of the spoken interaction during subsequent New Deal WFIs.

3.5 Positivity and encouragement

This section considers what could be observed in the recordings regarding more general positivity and encouragement conveyed from adviser to client during the three WFI types.

One broadly positive and encouraging strategy, which was often employed by advisers during WFIs with JSA claimants and which appeared several times across the recordings with people of all ages, was to wish the client 'good luck' with job vacancies they had taken away from the WFI or other employment plans they had described. There were also some instances where the adviser expressed the expectation or hope that the individual would not be unemployed for very much longer. Some illustrations are given in Box 3.6.

Box 3.6 Expressions of optimism and encouragement for jobseekers

Extract 3.6a [151] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 53 (January 2008)

PA : The way that a permitted period works it means tha:t for the first thirteen weeks of your [claim]

Cla: [Mm:]

PA : Which hopefully will be ample time for [you]=

Cla: [Yeah]

PA : =to get back into [.hh more regular work.]

Cla: [Oh yeah I'll be working by then]

PA : Absolutely. .hhh erm:: (.) what that is going to do: is give you the opportunity to just look. .hh to remain in [erm] HGV driving.

(lines omitted)

PA : If you were still with us at the end of that thirteen weeks. Which I doubt very very [much. But I do:] I [am obliged to [er=

Cla: [Ah ha I kno:w.] [HHHH HH] [I kno(h)w

Cla: that's [the case.] [Hih hih]

PA : =[You kno(h)w] that. [That's good.]

PA : I am obliged to tell you just exactly [how the]=

Cla: [Yeah]

PA : =permitted period works.

Extract 3.6b [104] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 56 (October 2007)

PA: The only thing I will say is after six months we do have um (2.2)
certain incentives and we [do run a scheme
Cla: [mm
PA: for the over fifties which
Cla: mm ((slow nodding))
PA: no I know
Cla: [I'll get my bus pass soon
PA: [I can hear you sort of, no .hh bu:t it (.) I'm (.) I'm very, very
confident you won't be with us for very long.
Cla: No I shan't be, can't afford to be .hh hgmm

Extract 3.6c [032] Subsequent New Deal WFI Male, in 20s (July 2007)

PA: And then what I'll do next time I see you which (.) I'm
going to arrange in a minute it m(h)ight be a little
while off
Cla: °mm°
PA: cos I'm away on holiday shortly [.hhh
Cla: [°okay°
PA: Er:m is we'll- we'll review and see how these have gone
Cla: Right
PA: And with a bit of luck huh huh
Cla: aye
PA: you won't see me at all .HH r:ight .HH oka::y er:m

Extract 3.6d [213] Subsequent New Deal WFI Male, in 30s (March 2008)

Cla: And what happens at the- at the end of the placement if I don't get
a job and I need to sign on, do I just make a new claim or?
PA: Just phone up. If it's on the last week, well first of all you will
get a job, we need to move you into a job isn't it
Cla: Yeah
PA: Er, but if it gets to the last week and you're still not sure about
whether you're going to be moving straight into employment from the
placement or no other irons in the fires have come off, give us ring

Extract 3.6e [148] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 20 (January 2008)

PA: Yeah .hh alright love (0.2) .hh Right that's it
(0.2)
Cla: [Right
PA: [Yeah
PA: Is that alright
Cla: Yeah that'[s okay
PA: [Yeah alright [best of luck love alright and uh (0.6)
Cla: [Alright cheers thanks a lot
PA: hope we don't see you too much if you [know what I mean
Cla: [Yeah
PA: ha ha ha ha ha
Cla: I'll try and uh
PA: Yeah
Cla: get mysen into a j[ob
PA: [Please yeah that'd be great
Cla: Ok[ay cheers thanks a lot
PA: [Alright ((name)) alright best of luck ta ra

While there were examples from WFIs with younger and older people, it is perhaps notable that the strongest adviser expressions of optimism were given to people in their 50s. The post-interview discussions indicated that the advisers conducting these WFIs held a genuine view that these older clients (three of whom were skilled and experienced manual 'contractors' with a good track record in their field of work) would move back into employment fairly quickly and that their JSA claims were simply 'bridging a gap'. However, for one of the 50+ new jobseekers who (with the exception of one recent week in work) had been unemployed for two years, the recording showed two points during the WFI at which the adviser self-corrected his use of the word *if* to *when*:

If you- when you do find a job are you able to start straight away?

So once, if you did er find a job, or when you did find a job erm there would be the er possibility of you claiming Tax Credits as well to make your wage er up to a more liveable standard.

These two instances from recording [146] (client male, aged 56) suggest rather less optimism for this longer-term claimant.

In the subsequent New Deal WFIs, the way in which advisers described the potential benefits from mandatory courses and placements, for example, gaining work experience and recent references, might also be considered a form of encouragement to clients. There were examples of such approaches with clients of different ages and no evidence that advisers were less positive or encouraging of older people.

Advisers in initial IB WFIs offered positive and encouraging comments to clients in a range of contexts, including: highlighting and complimenting their range of skills and experience which could be brought to bear in future jobs; expressing support for return-to-work plans which the client described or steps they had already taken; offering optimistic comments regarding the scope for improvements in health conditions; and, in various ways, conveying a view that work – or at least some form of occupation or activity – would be beneficial. These features did not appear in all WFIs and were to some extent contextual, depending on the content of different conversations and individual client circumstances. However, there was again no evidence to suggest that advisers were less positive or encouraging in their interactions with IB claimants of different ages.

3.6 Summary

At the level of overall differences between age cohorts, the main study (as reflected in the present subset of data) found that assisted job searches were conducted less frequently in NJIs with older people, in this case the distinction becoming apparent at the 25+ boundary. Among the 50+ jobseekers attending NJIs, where job searches were conducted, these tended to be briefer and result in fewer job submissions as compared to the under-50s. These overall patterns were not so

evident in the subsequent New Deal WFIs, although one adviser (who appears in six recordings) did not conduct job searches with any of his three 50+ clients.

For IB claimants, the depth in which the Choices package of support was explained and explored varied overall, but this variation showed no apparent relation to age. However, where particular elements of support were discussed in more detail, there was some evidence to suggest that certain advisers may steer older clients more towards voluntary or therapeutic activities rather than vocational training or a return to mainstream paid employment. In one case, this evidence emerged from one adviser's differing approach with a younger and an older client. In the second case, as we have explained in earlier sections of this report, the adviser met with both of the oldest claimants in the data set (aged 59) and so whether age or individual adviser style is more influential cannot be known.

Variation in whether or not a BOC was conducted in NJIs seemed primarily related to location, with advisers in just one Jobcentre Plus office routinely conducting BOCs with new jobseekers. However, the data showed how one adviser subtly modified an otherwise consistent linguistic routine when explaining the BOC to younger and older clients. Among the present data, BOCs during subsequent New Deal WFIs were infrequent overall, but it can be observed that none were conducted with 18-24-year-olds. Discussion of action plans was limited in both subsequent New Deal WFIs and initial IB WFIs, with explicit mention very uncommon during the latter. It seemed that variation in referring explicitly to action plans during the WFI related largely to particular Jobcentre Plus offices or to individual advisers, rather than having any association with age of the client.

As has been noted in Chapter 1, a key limitation of the data when considering advisory support for long-term JSA claimants participating in New Deal 25+ is that we have only 'snapshots' of each person's back-to-work journey. Because these snapshots were of different points in the journey for different people, the scope for a comparative approach to differing types or levels of support is very limited. However, as a general observation, while different advisers in the sample could be considered to vary in the extent to which their overall approach seemed personalised, engaged or strong in the effective strategies identified in the main study (collaborative, directive, proactive, positive and challenging – see Drew *et al.*, 2010, Chapter 6), where there were multiple recordings with the same adviser, individual advisory style seemed to remain fairly consistent across WFIs with clients of different ages.

Comments from advisers which – in various ways – conveyed positivity, optimism or encouragement were to be found across the range of WFI recordings, with claimants of all ages. Among the present data, however, some of the most explicit adviser expressions of optimism regarding a return to work were found in NJIs with people in their 50s.

4 Mandatory activity and benefit conditionality

In this chapter, we consider certain aspects of the Work Focused Interview (WFI) process which pertain to mandatory activity and benefit conditionality. These include the commitment from Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants to actively seek work (Section 4.1), the requirement to provide evidence of this activity to Jobcentre Plus staff on a fortnightly basis (Section 4.2), the mandatory nature of attendance at WFIs for (some) benefits claimants (Section 4.3) and the matter of benefit conditionality and sanctions (Section 4.4).

4.1 Agreeing job search activities with Jobseeker's Allowance claimants

JSA claimants are required to agree certain activities that they will carry out each week in their search for work. Where we have more than one example of the same adviser meeting with people of different ages, there were two instances of an adviser requesting different amounts of activity from their clients. In one case, of three New Jobseeker Interviews (NJIs) conducted by the same adviser, individuals in their 40s and 50s were asked to use Jobcentre Plus services at least once a week, while a teenage client was asked to agree to twice-weekly use of Jobcentre Plus channels. However, there were also examples of advisers asking the same of 18-24-year-olds as people in their 50s; in one instance this was once weekly contact and in another both were asked to use Jobcentre Plus services twice a week. The other case of possible age-related difference pertains to how many job applications the client was expected to make per week. The quotes below show how an adviser took a rather more 'minimising' approach with an older client as compared to a younger one²⁴:

Apply for two jobs a week, that's only if they're available in your field so don't worry about that.

([104] client male, aged 56)

²⁴ For further discussion of a more 'minimising' advisory approach, and its potential implications, see Drew *et al.*, 2010, Chapter 3.

'We would expect you to apply for all jobs that were retail or office.'

([122] client female, aged 20)

However, there were also examples of advisers requiring the same number of employer contacts from people across the age range (as illustrated by Adviser A in Box 4.1).

Considering the way in which advisers approached the discussion of which job search channels a client would use, there was a notable degree of variation in how thoroughly advisers worked through various options. This ranged from an adviser who barely mentioned any specific job search channels at all, to one who mentioned only the internet and Jobcentre Plus services, to (more commonly) advisers who discussed a wider range including local papers, employment agencies, word of mouth among friends and family, and speculative applications. The available evidence indicated that these different approaches varied by individual adviser with no apparent patterning by age. Where a range of channels was discussed, a common approach was for advisers to pose questions to the client about job search approaches they might take or were already taking and then converting answers to these questions into agreed activities that were recorded on the Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg). Some advisers used specific questions (e.g. *do you use the internet?*) and others began with one or more open questions (e.g. *what sort of things have you been doing to look for work?; where else would you look?*) before going on to make more specific enquiries or suggestions regarding job search channels that the client had not already mentioned²⁵.

To some extent, the types of job search channel people agreed to use varied among the recordings, with advisers demonstrating a degree of flexibility in accommodating the individual's most relevant and convenient methods of job search. For example, where people had no access to the internet at home, it was agreed that their access to Jobseeker Direct could be by telephone or by coming into the Jobcentre Plus offices. Where people had specialist fields of work, advisers took into account that their most relevant websites and publications for job search may be industry-specific rather than the more generic job sites and newspapers. However, among the advisers who did discuss job search channels in detail during WFIs, it seemed that most people of all ages arrived at a JSAg which included a similar basic range of job search activities and commitments.

Perhaps the most striking finding when considering the approach to constructing JSAgs is the evidence that advisers employ very consistent linguistic routines across WFIs with clients of different ages. The extracts in Box 4.1 illustrate just how similarly advisers opened up discussion of agreed job search activities and rounded off the negotiation of the JSAg in multiple WFIs.

²⁵ For further discussion of varying adviser approaches to talking about job search strategies, see Drew *et al.*, 2010, forthcoming, Section 3.4.

Box 4.1 Agreed activity: advisers' consistent linguistic routines

Adviser A

Extract 4.1a [181] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 18 (January 2008)

PA: .hhh Do you have access to the Inter Internet at home
 [((name)).

Cla: [Yeah

PA : Right. Okay. .hh have you ever used to Jobcentre plus website before

Cla: Yeah

((lines omitted))

PA: ((sniffs)) mcht Right. Okay then ((name)) so your jobseeker's
 agreement then it's an exact copy of everything we've discussed and
 put on to the computer, .hh erm and you've agreed that you'll phone
 at least two employers every week [okay

Cla: [okay

PA: And we have explained down there that that er (.) will possibly
 include phone calls to ((agency)) as well

Cla: [Okay

PA : [Okay? .hh So if you can just pop your signature
 above mi:ne in both boxes please?

Extract 4.1b [152] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 45 (January 2008)

PA: Um:: do you have access to the Internet?

Cla: Yeah.

PA: Yeah okay
 (0.8)

PA: So:: er do you use the Jobcentre Plus website for jobsearch (0.4) or
have you ever used the Job Centre Plus website?

((lines omitted))

PA: okay so your jobseeker's agreement then is an exact copy of
 everything we've discussed and put on to the computer .hh and you've
 agreed that you'll write to at least two employers every week and
 we've expanded on there to say that that will be by email

Cla: Mm [hmm

PA: [m:okay?

Cla: [so

PA: [so if you could pop your signature above mine on both copies of
 your jobseeker's agreement?

Extract 4.1c [151] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 53 (January 2008)

PA: So you do have access to the internet at all.
 Cla: Don't have a landline.
 PA: Right. Oh course you don't. No that's right .hhh erm:: so::- (.)
 will you:: sort of go into the library to use the internet do you
 think. Or do- or would you prefer to come into the do- jobcentre to
 use our job points.

((lines omitted))

PA: ↑Right. Okay then. So your job seeker's agreement then it's an exact
 copy of everything that we've discussed and put on to the computer,
 Cla: Yeah
 PA: .hhh Er:m: we've agreed that you'll phone at least two employers
 every week. In[cludin]g employment=
 Cla: [Mm] yeah
 PA: =agencies. An[d inclu]ding your contacts in the industry=
 Cla: [Yeah]
 PA: As well. .hhhh er so if you can just pop your signature above mi:ne
 (.) in both boxes

Adviser B**Extract 4.1d [026] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 19 (July 2007)**

PA: Now how you contact people is entirely up to yourself I mean you can
 obviously phone people up? you can send them letters you can visit
 them .hh you can even do it through ourselves
 Cla: Yeah well: I've currently: put a load of CVs out
 PA: Mhm
 Cla: round town
 (0.3)
 PA: Ri[ght]
 Cla: [like all the way through the town centre and ((company name)) an:
 PA: Yeah
 (0.2)
 Cla: applied online and
 (0.2)
 PA: Right
 Cla: An[d I've obviously had nowt ba[ck really
 PA: [Yeah [Well that's fine
 Cla: .hhh
 (0.2)
 PA: Well like I say I mean er:::::m (0.9) .hhh there's like the
 Jobseeker Direct that we do
 (11.2) ((adviser typing))
 PA: And you can either do that through the phone or the internet=
 Cla: =Yeah:
 PA: .hhh

((lines omitted))

PA: Anything else on there that you want to add on (0.2) or take off (or) change at all (0.4)
 PA: Typing errors spelling mistakes you just
 Cla: No=
 PA: =can't bear [to live with
 Cla: [I can't spot them out
 (.)
 PA: Right [okay then
 Cla: [a mile off .hh

Extract 4.1e [085] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 46 (October 2007)

PA: Okay, so I've got the things like, now how you contact employers is entirely up to yourself, you can phone them, you can e-mail them, send them letters.
 Cla: Yeah.
 PA: Er do it through ourselves. If you are doing it through ourselves you can er do it through Job Seeker's Direct and there's a telephone number for them that you can ring up, or if you want to do it through the Internet you can do it through the Internet.
 Cla: Yeah.
 PA: Or if indeed, if you're in the office, we've got the little touch screen computer things.
 ((lines omitted))
 PA: Ri:ght so you've got the things in there (.) .h is there anything else on there that you want to add on or anything you want to take off, change at all, typing errors, spelling mistakes you [just want to point out?
 Cla: [No, no.
 PA: No

4.2 Evidencing active job search

One aspect of the data which showed some potentially age-related variation was with respect to providing evidence of job search activity. Here, there were some signs that advisers took a less directive approach with older clients when explaining this part of the claiming regulations. All but one of the NJIs featured some discussion of the need to keep a record of job search activity and in the majority of cases, advisers indicated that the client should keep a written record of their job search either using the official Jobcentre Plus booklet (which was sometimes referred to as the ES4JP) or in another way, for example, on a separate piece of paper or by retaining printed details of the vacancies they had pursued. However, while it should be reiterated that numbers of recordings are very limited, the way in which this requirement was conveyed to older people seemed somewhat 'softer' overall.

In most cases, advisers explained that at the Fortnightly Jobsearch Review (FJR), the member of staff would either check the client's record of evidence or otherwise enquire about their job search activity over the last fortnight. This was made fairly

explicit in most of the WFIs with people aged 18-24 and aged 25-49. However, in only one of the five NJIs with older people did the adviser make explicit that the client must bring his record of evidence to the FJR. Where advisers in the other four cases did mention a record of evidence, this requirement was rather minimised in comparison to some of the instructions given to younger people, as illustrated in the extracts in Box 4.2. The first two extracts (4.2a and 4.2b) are with people aged over 50 and the second two (4.2c and 4.2d) are with people aged 18-24. Note also that recordings [104] and [122] are with the same adviser.

Box 4.2 Explaining requirements to evidence job search activity (NJIs)

Extract 4.2a [104] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 56 (October 2007)

PA: A:ll it's asking you to do is use our services=now our services are either a telephone call, the Internet .hh um or you can come in and see us twice a week.

Cl a: Mm hmm.

PA: Um to keep a written record of your job search. I will give you a little locally produced form, your name on it and you just write down everything you do. So I've applied for jobs in the paper .hh >you know< not don't worry about

Cl a: mm

PA: it being a huge monologue of every time you've done an[anything

Cl a: [No

PA: Just basi:cs

Extract 4.2b [025] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 58 (July 2007)

PA: .hhh You know about the job seekers direct, where you can: do the job searches over the phone or through the internet, h[h]

Cl a: [Y]:ah.

(0.5)

PA: *E:h:m::*

(2.6)

PA: >You know< you can keep a reco:rd of your job search:, (.) e:h to show us, (.) e:h if we ask [fo]r .hhh

Cl a: [Mm]

Extract 4.2c [122] New Jobseeker Interview Female, aged 20 (November 2007)

PA: And you have to fill this out, showing us what you've been doing. So write down .hhh when you went on the Internet, all the jobs you applied for when you looked in the paper, etc.

Cl a: Ye[ah.

PA: [All right?

Cl a: Okay

Extract 4.2d [148] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 20 (January 2008)

PA: That's quite important um .t they will expect you to probably to hand this in every fortnight and well show them it [you know
 Cla: [Yeah about
 looking for wor[k yeah
 PA: [It is y- your diary if you like of what you're doing to look for work so (0.2) you know anything you do whatsoever .hh (0.2) just put it on there (.) however daft you think it is [anything at all ringing a fr[iend you kn[ow you na(h)me it
 Cla: [Ye(h)ah [It's okay [Yeah
 PA: Yeah .hh alright love (0.2) .hh Right that's it (0.2)

Moreover, there were a small number of instances in which older people were told that they did not necessarily need to keep a written record of job search. With one client, aged 56, the adviser stated that a written record was encouraged but not compulsory because by signing the declaration each fortnight, the client was affirming that he had been actively seeking work. A similar explanation was given by a different adviser to an older client attending his second New Deal WFI, in which the JSAG requirements (including evidencing job search) were reviewed in some detail. This is shown in Box 4.3.

Box 4.3 Explaining requirements to evidence job search activity (subs New Deal)**Extract 4.3 [040] Subsequent New Deal WFI Male, aged 55 (August 2007)**

PA: .t Will keep a written record of jobseeking activities and bring it to all your j- .h SO: (1.4) we can't make you: (0.5) write down your job search (0.4) However it's a preferable option: .h so if you: bring in: a written: proof of what you've been doing to look for wo:rk=
 Cla: =Yeah
 PA: ((clears throat)) (0.9)
 PA: You can then bring that in:: (0.2) we then: s- (0.2) log that (.) cos each ti:me we see you or a member of staff sees you we have to log what you've been doing (0.8) And it's all by way of providing .hhh a non-biased service so it's cs- (.) consistent with everyone that we see: .hh however (.) as long as you let us know verbally (.)
 Cla: [((clears throat))
 PA: [You don't have to write it down it's preferable=if you don't write It down it just means that we then a:sk you what [you've been doing to find work
 Cla: [aye I'm with you tha:t's no problem at all

4.3 Mandatory Work Focused Interview attendance

The main study considered in some depth the matter of advisers' explanations about mandatory attendance at Pathways to Work WFIs for Incapacity Benefit (IB) claimants, describing how advisers sometimes appeared to encounter difficulties in conveying the combination of mandatory and voluntary aspects of Pathways, partly because they did not know, at the stage of giving these explanations, whether or not the individual would be 'screened in' to the programme (see Drew *et al.*, 2010, Section 4.3)²⁶. The main study also considered the way in which an outcome of being 'screened in' and thus having to attend up to five further mandatory WFIs was explained to people (see Drew *et al.*, 2010, Section 4.5). Frequently, advisers described this in terms of *needing to* or *having to* attend WFIs, thus conveying a sense of imposition or penalty. Alternatively, some advisers used a form of words that suggested further WFIs provided a positive opportunity to receive help and support. Among the present subset of data, the form of these explanations did not appear to vary according to age. Considering the cases in the present data set where people were screened in, the manner in which advisers dealt with this outcome seemed to be more a matter of individual IBPA style. For example, one adviser used very similar phrasing to explain to an older and a younger client that they would need to attend further WFIs:

°Okay-° it's telling me you need to come in for six- for the six:

([013] client aged 23)

Eh:m (0.2) yeah: it said that you need to come in for the six

([014] client aged 54)

In another example, the adviser had a style of not explicitly announcing the 'screened in' outcome to the client at the point when it became known to her via the computer screen. Instead, she simply explained later in the WFI that she would like to see them on a further occasion. Again, this approach was evident across WFIs with people of quite different ages:

Ri:ght (0.1) I thi:nk .hhh what I'd like to do: is (0.3) °e::rm° meet you again °in about° (0.1) a month's ti:me

([116] client aged 28)

So:: (.) I'm looking (0.4) at anothe::r appointment for u:s in about (.) a month's ti::me

([127] client aged 47)

²⁶ Note that since conducting the research for the main study, the use of the screening tool has been discontinued.

The matter of mandatory attendance at WFIs did not emerge in subsequent New Deal WFIs (presumably having been explained at the initial New Deal interview), although, where relevant, advisers reiterated the mandatory nature of attendance on certain courses or placements within the New Deal programme. During NJIs, the requirement to attend FJRs was routinely conveyed to people of all ages, although the fact that attending this appointment was mandatory often seemed to be implicit in the issuing of 'signing on' times rather than explicitly expressed.

4.4 Benefit conditionality and sanctions

The matter of benefit conditionality arises predominantly in the NJIs. In considering whether there are differences in the way that advisers refer to conditionality requirements in WFIs with younger and older people, we have looked at a number of contexts in which conditions of benefit may be conveyed during the NJI, including:

- stating that the individual must be actively available for, and seeking, work;
- explaining that adhering to the JSAg is mandatory;
- explaining what the client is declaring in the action of signing on fortnightly.

Around half the NJIs contained a verbal statement from the adviser to the effect that the individual must be *actively available for and seeking work* in order to receive JSA. These were evenly distributed across the three age cohorts. More commonly, advisers gave an implicit message of the requirement to seek work through their description of the Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg), which was typically introduced as *what you're gonna do to look for work, the steps you're gonna be taking* and in later reviewing or summarising the JSAg as *what you've agreed* or *what you've signed up to*. Only a few advisers explicitly spelled out the conditional link between the specific actions detailed in the JSAg and the receipt of benefit; here, there were examples with people of different ages and some suggestion that this was more a matter of personal style, with repeated instances from the same advisers. Explicit references to benefit sanctions were rare in NJIs across all age ranges²⁷. Two of these are from the same adviser with very similar wording, indicating a personal linguistic routine when explaining sanctions. These are shown in Box 4.4.

²⁷ In the New Deal recordings, there were a small number of instances of sanctions being discussed in relation to the mandatory nature of attendance at elements of the programme. However, these were context specific to those particular WFIs and do not lend themselves to comparative consideration.

Box 4.4 Consistent linguistic routines when explaining sanctions**Extract 4.4a [026] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 19 (July 2007)**

PA: You're signing the Jobseeker's Agreement basically to say that you understand what you need to do to get Jobseeker's Allowance

Cla: Yeah
(.)

PA: that you're er::: (0.2) er: (1.1) happy with what we've got on the computer and you're er::: (1.0) understand (.) about the availability and actively seeking work (.) yeah,

Cla: Yeah
(0.8)

PA: .hhh I'll sign it on behalf of the government basically to say .hhh (0.5) that providing you do what you said you were gonna be doing (.) we pay the money that we (0.4) you're entitled to=

Cla: =Yeah
(0.2)

PA: If you don't do it
(0.5)

Cla: We don't get the money=

PA: =We don't get the money

Cla: Yeah

Extract 4.4b [085] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 46 (October 2007)

PA: You're signing it to say that that's what you've agreed to do:: and you understand what you need to do to get [Job Seeker's Allowance

Cla: [Yeah

PA: And I sign on behalf of them to say providing that's what you do, we pay you Job Seeker's [Allowance

Cla: [Ri(h)gnt huh huh

PA: oka:y .hh inference of course is that if you do:n't do what you said you were going to do we do:n't pay you

However, it may be notable that none of the NJIs with people aged 50+ featured a direct mention of benefit sanctions. Of the four instances overall, two were with 18-24-year-olds and two were with people in the 25-49 age range²⁸. Some tentative evidence of differential individual adviser practice by age comes from recordings [104] and [122]. There is no mention of sanctions with the 56-year-old in recording [104] but in recording [122] the 20-year-old receives a very explicit account of what will happen if she does not maintain her JSAG, as shown in Box 4.5.

²⁸ In three of the four cases, the adviser's mention is in relation to the requirement to actively seek work, but in one instance, the adviser is meeting with a client who has moved from lone parent Income Support (IS); here the adviser focuses on the mandatory nature of WFI attendance, presumably to highlight the change in conditionality requirements of the client's new benefit status.

Box 4.5 Explaining conditionality and sanctions to a younger client

Extract 4.5 [122] New Jobseeker Interview Female, aged 20 (November 2007)

PA: So that's part of the conditions that we ask you to do to get benefit, so you have to show us you're n- actively seeking employment.

Cla: Yeah.

PA: So if you were to say there was a job come up, oh I don't know, in ((shop name))

Cla: mm hm

PA: and you said "I don't want to do that" and you didn't apply, we would be able to stop your benefit

Cla: yeah

PA: if we thought that there was no other reason that you couldn't do the job?

Cla: Yeah

At the point when advisers asked people to sign the written declaration (to the effect that they were available for and actively seeking work), there was variation in the extent to which advisers talked through this statement with the client. In some cases, the adviser verbally ran through the conditions to which the individual was signing, in others clients were asked to 'read through' the statement themselves before signing and in others still, a signature was taken with no verbal reference to the content of what the client was signing. There was again evidence here of individual advisers having particular linguistic routines, with the same approach to the declaration taken across multiple WFIs. Some examples are given in Box 4.6. It is perhaps notable that Adviser C gives a somewhat more embellished explanation of the declaration to the youngest person, although the brevity of this adviser's explanation to the oldest client is likely due to the fact this person has previous experience of the JSA system and, moreover, has already secured new work and is closing his claim during the same WFI.

Box 4.6 Consistent linguistic routines when explaining the JSA declaration

Adviser A

Extract 4.6a [122] New Jobseeker Interview Female, aged 20 (November 2007)

Now I'd like some signatures from you. That's to sign you up to date. This is your specimen signature, so we can see how you sign, make sure it's you.

Extract 4.6b [104] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 56 (October 2007)

Specimen signature there for me, so we know we've got you when we see you .hh and if you wouldn't mind signing for the receipt of that book there, that'd be lovely and then I just need you to sign this form as well to get you up to date.

Adviser B**Extract 4.6c [181] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 18 (January 2008)**

Okay, .hh And then if I could just ask you to read through this declaration. This declaration is the same declaration you'll sign every time you come in to sign on. .hh So it is important that you just have minute to read through that now. .hh And when you've read that if you can sign and date it at the top there.

Extract 4.6d [152] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 45 (January 2008)

If I can just ask you while I go to the job s- er to the printer to get your job seeker's agreement .h if you can just read through that declaration so you know exactly what you're signing for .h normal fortnightly declaration that you'll sign every time you come in to sign on .h so it is important that you just take a moment to read through that.

Extract 4.6e [151] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 53 (January 2008)

An:d whilst I go to the printer to get your job seekers agreement, if I can just ask you to read through this declaration. The statement there where it says that you've done no work paid or unpaid unless you've told us you- [you have] told us about it.

Adviser C**Extract 4.6f [026] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 19 (July 2007)**

PA: .hh Now you also need to sign (your) declaration coupon .hh now when you're signing your coupon downstairs you are actually signing to s:ay: .hhh that there's been no change in your circumstances so you haven't changed name or address so if you do actually get somewhere to live er::: that's not a >care of address< you got to let us know (0.4)

Cla: [Right

PA: [Okay?

(.)

Cla: [Yeah

PA: [That's all that's saying (0.2)

PA: .hhh Also says that you've been available for work so if there's any times you feel you're not gonna be available .hhh you're going on holiday you're going on a training course you're going on the s[ick or

Cla: [(Got to:)

PA: something like [that (.) again (.) let us know

Cla: [Yeah (0.3)

PA: .h And we'll let you know what paperwork to fill in (0.5)

PA: .hhhh (0.3) You've been looking for work and you're capable of doing the work you're looking for so you're not looking for a job as an airline pilot because (.) you haven't told us abou[t any airline [hhh. hah yeah:

Cla: f: licences [that you have

Cla: [.hhhhh (0.2)

PA: .hh A:nd finally: that you haven't done any work paid or unpaid unless you told us about it

Cla: Yeah (0.2)

Extract 4.6g [085] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 46 (October 2007)

PA: and finally we need you to sign your declaration coupon. Now this is the coupon you'll sign every fortnight when you come in

Cla: Right

PA: now today you're signing to say that you're registered as unemployed but when you're coming in downstairs you are actually signing first of all to say there's no change in your circums[tances

Cla: [Yeah

PA: .hhh er::m that you've been available for work, so if there's any time you feel you're not available, you're going on holiday, you're on the sick or things [like that

Cla: [Yeah

PA: L:et us know about it so we can tell you what you need to do .hhh it also says like you've been looking for work, you were capable of doing the work you were looking for but you [haven't actually done any work

Cla: [yeah

PA: unless you've told us about it

Cla: Yeah

Extract 4.6h [025] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 58 (July 2007)

PA: and we'll also need to sign your declaration coupon
(0.4)

PA: °°° .hlhhh huhhh°°°
(0.3)

PA: °Right. that's from the twenty third
(3.1)

PA: °(until the day it is twenty sixth)°
(3.8)

PA: .hhh Now when you sign this downstairs, or if you sign this downstairs, you actually be signing to say that there's been no change in yer circumstances, .hhh[h th]at you've been available

Cla: [Yeah.]
for work:, .hh that you've been (0.2) e:h:: looking for work, that you are capable of doing the work >you're looking fo:r .hh but you haven't actually done any work unless you told us about it:.

Cla: Yeah.

PA: Okay.

Turning briefly to the IB claimants, benefit sanctions were not referred to in any of the initial IB WFIs. While (as applicable) it was explained to people that they 'have to' or 'need to' come to more interviews, Incapacity Benefit Personal Advisers (IBPAs) in the sample did not talk about the possible consequences for benefit receipt of non-attendance at subsequent WFIs. Where IBPAs did refer to effects on benefits, this was in their assurances that people's benefits would not be affected, for example, if they chose not to participate in the voluntary aspects of Pathways or if they were to take up permitted work.

4.5 Summary

Across the sample of NJIs, we found some evidence to suggest a general tendency among advisers to take a somewhat softer approach with older clients when explaining their obligations to provide evidence of active job search activity. While the requirement to be actively seeking work was conveyed to people across the age range, the need to provide comprehensive written evidence of this at FJRs was generally not conveyed so strongly to people in the 50+ cohort. Additionally, benefit sanctions were not explicitly mentioned to any of the 50+ new jobseekers, and there was one illustration of variation in individual adviser practice with clients of different ages in this respect.

There were some instances of advisers requesting different amounts of weekly job search activity from people of different ages, but equally some advisers who settled on the same number of job searches or employer contacts with younger and older clients. Although there were differences in the ways that advisers approached the task of agreeing which job search channels an individual would use, this did not appear to vary according to age. Most notable was the consistency in language with which advisers approached certain aspects of the NJI, for example, agreeing job search activities or explaining the fortnightly declaration.

Finally, there were no notable age-related differences in how advisers explained the mandatory nature of WFIs for IB claimants, and the matter of mandatory attendance at WFIs generally did not arise in NJIs or subsequent New Deal WFIs.

5 Age-related barriers to work

Previous research has identified a number of barriers to work that are likely to be directly related to age. These include: health problems, caring responsibilities, lack of qualifications/work experience, unrealistic attachments to former job status, lack of confidence in the ability to find work, personal attitudes about age and employment, and employer attitudes towards older people (Moss and Arrowsmith, 2003). In this chapter, we consider occasions in the Work Focused Interview (WFI) recordings where some of these issues came to the fore.

Most notable in the present data set were instances where the client expressed a view that their age was a barrier to work, believing that employers would look less favourably on them as job candidates. All instances in the 50+ data set in which the matter of employer age discrimination was raised are presented in Section 5.1, with consideration of how advisers responded to these client concerns. Section 5.2 brings together instances from the data where other types of age-related barrier were mentioned or alluded to during WFIs. These were fewer in number, but there were instances where people alluded to their capacity for certain types of work as they became older and also changes in employment aspirations. Some observations can be made about how advisers 'deal with' these matters as and when they arise in WFIs of different types. Section 5.3 concludes the chapter with a summary of main findings.

5.1 Employer attitudes as a barrier to employment prospects

This section considers the instances where age was explicitly raised as a potential barrier to employment during WFIs. The recordings in which this occurred are summarised in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 WFI recordings in which employer attitudes to age are mentioned

Recording	Client details	Benefit	WFI type	Approximate length of current claim
039	Male, 58	JSA	Initial ND25+	9 years
047	Male, 57	JSA	Subs ND25+	7 years
237	Male, 56	JSA	Initial EZ 25+	5 years
146	Male, 56	JSA	New Jobseeker Interview	(2 years) ¹
080	Male, 50	JSA	24-month restart	2 years
072	Male, 57	JSA	18-month restart	18 months
014	Female, 54	IB	Initial Pathways	2 months

¹ This individual had been claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) for the past two years, broken only by one recent week of work in a job which he was unable to sustain. The adviser explained in post-interview that this appointment had been booked in as a New Jobseeker Interview (NJI) and that he therefore treated the WFI as such, but that it should technically have been a Rapid Reclaim.

As an initial observation, it is notable that almost all of the WFIs during which employer attitudes towards age were mentioned were with JSA claimants who had been in receipt of benefit for a relatively long time. There was only one occasion of an Incapacity Benefit (IB) claimant explicitly raising age-related barriers to work. Each of these instances is discussed below, with reference to extracts from the WFI recordings and also (as relevant) any comments relating to client age that were made by the adviser in the post-interview discussion.

Recording [072] is an 18-month restart WFI during which a main activity is to make a mandatory referral to an external Employment Zone (EZ) provider. The client has already been through the EZ process with this provider before and had a positive experience. Box 5.1 shows the point at which the client spontaneously comments that he finds his age to be a barrier to securing employment. Although the first full mention of age does not come until line 36-37, the recording suggests that the client's first attempt to raise the issue of his age comes in line 9: *cos- because of me-*. The adviser begins here in overlap, with a comment about the provider being able to help with updating the client's tickets and licences. The client's *pardon* (line 14) suggests that this was not what he was going to mention (although he goes on to concur that this would be useful). Rather, the client's point was that the EZ provider may help to overcome age-related problems he has experienced in the past. He goes on to elaborate this problem as being a lack of interest from employers once he has stated his age.

Box 5.1 Employer attitudes to age as a barrier to work

Extract 5.1 [072] 18-month restart Male aged 57 (August 2007)

1 PA: And so you're still looking for the same sort of wo:rk
 2 (1.0)
 3 PA: [You're still wanting to be [the construction
 4 Cla: [mainly ye- [yes
 5 ((clears throat))
 6 PA: Crane driver
 7 (0.6)
 8 Cla: I think ((organisation name)) they- they could come in well
 9 in handy because [cos- [because of me-
 10 PA: [gonna say (are) all [your tickets up to
 11 date and everything
 12 Cla: Yeah
 13 PA: Hmm
 14 Cla: Pardon?
 15 PA: All like your tickets and licences and everything
 16 [all up to date no: [you see they will=
 17 Cla: [N:o [°no:°
 18 PA: =they'll pay [for that hopefully
 19 Cla: [I know because every time you look in the
 20 paper there's been jobs there right up my street .hhh
 21 certificates certificates
 22 PA: °yeah°
 23 (0.6)
 24 PA: ye[ah [yeah
 25 Cla: [CIS and every[thing like that
 26 (.)
 27 Cla: Yeah
 28 PA: Yeah
 29 (0.8)
 30 PA: Yeah so I mean th- they'll help you with all that. They'll
 31 you put on like a site safety [cou::rse
 32 Cla: [mm
 33 PA: and if you need to like update your .hh driving (0.4) you
 34 know your crane driving licences and things like that
 35 they'll do all that [so::]
 36 Cla: [yea::h] pe- uh plus i- i- (0.6) I
 37 always find me age is a barrier a- but with ((organisation
 38 name))
 39 (1.2)
 40 Cla: they sort that out for you don't they
 41 PA: Yea::h
 42 Cla: yeah
 43 PA: I think cos they have like marketing officers that go out
 44 and speak to employers, and say "Look, we've got this man"
 45 so th- th- the employer kno:ws about you before they
 46 actually see you really
 47 Cla: Yeah
 48 (0.2)
 49 PA: More so
 50 (0.2)
 51 Cla: Cos I have [applied for jobs er:m
 52 PA: [so
 53 (0.8)

54 Cla: there was one not so long back (.) erm I had to phone the
55 boss, the boss was out, the receptionist said .hh "Give us
56 your name (0.4) address (0.2) phone number (0.2) get him to
57 ring you back" (0.6) Never heard a thing [so::
58 PA: [.tch
59 Cla: You get- y- you do get disheartened
60 PA: yeah
61 Cla: yeah
62 PA: I think sometimes it's- it's not- you'll- you'll think it's
63 your age or whatever but it's not ne[cessarily you know
64 Cla: [but
65 PA: [sometimes it's just them
66 Cla: [I- I know that you have to meet the person
67 (.)
68 Cla: [really [yeah
69 PA: [Yeah [you do
70 PA: yeah
71 Cla: yeah
72 PA: yeah .hh and it's- is- it's getting past the telephone and
73 getting through the [door isn't it to get to speak to 'em
74 Cla: [and I- and I don't like tel-
75 hopeless talking on the telephone (0.6) applying for
76 jobs=it's e:r it's when you- they ask you your age
77 (0.8)
78 PA: You see they shouldn't really cos it shouldn't make
79 [any difference
80 Cla: [Well y- exactly yeah but
81 (0.6)
82 PA: And [you're probably fitter than some twenty year olds
83 Cla: [they do a-
84 Cla: Oh yeah, I'm quite fit yeah yeah
85 (1.0)
86 PA: Yeah and I think *u-* I think if an employer saw you (.)
87 they'd- they'd rea[lise that but
88 Cla: [Oh no I do I'm- I'm a good grafter
89 PA: [Yeah
90 Cla: [I do e::r
91 (.)
92 Cla: oh yeah I'm [no slouch
93 PA: [Yeah
94 (0.6)
95 Cla: I'm hyperactive I have to keep on the go
96 PA: yeah
97 (0.2)
98 Cla: Yeah
99 (0.6)
100 PA: O:h you'll get something (.) but yeah like I s-
101 ((organisation name)) probably a good idea because if there's
102 anything that needs updating they'd be
103 Cla: I'll probably finish up [back where I was
104 PA: [°(sort it out)°
105 Cla: HUH HUH [huh huh

Despite the initial incorrect presumption about the focus of the client's comment, the adviser apparently picks up on his main area of concern quickly (lines 41-46). Prior to the client's more specific description of perceived age discrimination, the PA notes that the EZ provider has 'marketing officers' who assist in engaging the initial interest of employers.

The adviser goes on to offer some – albeit rather gentle – challenge to the client's perception that his lack of success in securing job interviews is due to his age: *I think sometimes it's- it's not- you'll- you'll think it's your age or whatever but it's not necessarily, you know ... sometimes it's just them* (lines 62-65). While on the surface these comments could be considered broadly supportive and encouraging, on closer consideration, the adviser's statement *sometimes it's just them* might be considered not particularly constructive; at least, it does not give the client any useful information about how such employer positions might be overcome.

The client goes on to describe explicitly how he feels employers dismiss his applications when he gives his age. The adviser then comments that employers *shouldn't really [ask your age] cos it shouldn't make any difference*. This comment seems similarly supportive of the client in a general sense, but again lacks any element of specific advice. This is perhaps a missed opportunity to offer the client some more detailed information about his rights under age-discrimination legislation. This pattern continues through the discussion of the client's physical fitness for the type of work he is interested in (line 82 onward), with the adviser making complimentary and encouraging but somewhat insubstantial comments. Her summing up *o:h you'll get something* is optimistic but not very concrete. Throughout the exchange, the adviser's responses might be considered broadly supportive of the client, but they do not offer much in the way of specific advice or support as to how to challenge employers' age-related (mis)conceptions. At the end of this passage, it is interesting to note that the adviser turns the focus back to her original point; that the EZ provider will be able to help with updating the client's licences.

In the post-interview to recording [072], the researcher asked the adviser what she felt had been this client's barriers to getting work so far. This response (quoted below) indicates that the adviser did not perceive the client's age-related concerns to be entirely misplaced. This adviser specialised in New Deal 50+ and she described herself as always being *on the defensive* when clients suggest their age is a barrier to work. This was evident from the WFI extract in Box 5.1. Notably, however, what was not expressed to the client during the WFI was the adviser's perception that he may experience age-related barriers due to the **particular type of work** he was looking for:

With him I don't know [what his barriers to getting work are] because he was very well presented, he had skills, he's a roofer, been a roofer for years and years and years, and so used to like construction. He says it's his age. And I'm always on the defensive straight away when they say that to me because of just the job that I'm in, you know, I see them getting jobs all the time so. But it- I suppose the sort of job that he does go for, yes it could be his age, because at that age, it's hard to get into construction. Cos when they see the age on the CV- if they'd seen him, I don't think it would have been a problem, cos he was fit and active. I think when they see- if they just see it on paper, yeah, or they speak to them on the phone, then they haven't actually seen him. So it could be his age.

([072], client male, aged 57)

A matter for consideration is whether or not it might have been more effective practice for the adviser to voice this concern to the client during the WFI and to open up discussion of alternative forms of work that he might consider.

In recording [039] the client's concerns are similar to those expressed in [072]. He believes that employers do not follow up the applications of people who they know to be older. Here, however, the adviser offers a more thorough response to the client's concerns about age barriers. Prior to the passage shown in Box 5.2, the adviser has introduced the matter of identifying 'underlying issues' which might prevent securing or retaining a job, and the client's use of alcohol has been discussed. However, there has been no mention of age until this point.

Box 5.2 Employer attitudes to age as a barrier to work

Extract 5.2 [039] Initial New Deal WFI Male, aged 58 (August 2007)

1 Cla: Not being in work does cause me [problem
 2 PA: [Yeah:
 3 Cla: .hh I get up at about half past six seven o'clock in the
 4 morning
 5 (0.3)
 6 PA: Yeah
 7 Cla: .t (.) And that it seven days a week fifty-two weeks a year
 8 .hh [cos it's what me body clock is
 9 PA: [Right
 10 Cla: set to .hhhh
 11 (0.5)
 12 Cla: My main issue with getting a job is me age I'm fifty-nine
 13 (0.4)
 14 PA: .t .hhhhhhh Anyone who's anyon- the- yeah (.) that's a real
 15 issue and anyone that says it's not I think is is not really
 16 living in the real world i- the fact that you're fifty-eight
 17 is: (0.5) I [think an issue it's- it's
 18 Cla: [I'm fifty-nine in a (0.3) in::: ((birth date))
 19 PA: Yeah
 20 Cla: couple of weeks .h[hhhh
 21 PA: [You're more than capable of doing the wo:rk
 22 you and I know that but the- the reality i:s (0.6) it is an
 23 issue but the problem is no one's gonna openly say hey it's
 24 be[cause of
 25 Cla: [hhhhhhhh.
 26 PA: your age it'll be buried under some other reason or excuse
 27 (.)
 28 PA: [Possibly .hh[h
 29 Cla: [I- [hh. I've talked to (.) I've had (1.2) .t forms
 30 out of here .hh (0.7) phone the people up (.) for the job (.)
 31 yes mister ((name)) can you send your CV in
 32 (0.2)
 33 Cla: .h[hhh O:r: (0.4) can you give me your date of
 34 PA: [Mhm
 35 Cla: birth Mister ((name)) .h[hh and as soon as I
 36 PA: [Yeah:
 37 Cla: give `em my date of birth .hhhh (0.4) seventy five per cent of
 38 jobs go out that [window
 39 PA: [Yeah

40 (0.5)
 41 PA: .hhh It i- yeah (.) it is an issue .hh [I mean erm
 42 Cla: [You can hear
 43 (0.3)
 44 Cla: They don't say mo- mu- (0.2) they can't say that .hh[hh
 45 PA: [No:
 46 Cla: because it's against the law to [say that .hhh
 47 PA: [That's right
 48 Cla: but you can hear the tone of the voice [and I know that[]
 49 PA: [Yeah [].t
 50 .hh and it- a lot of it c- can depend on the job and it- there
 51 are certain employer:s there's- well there are more and more
 52 employers who are .hhh coming round to the way of thinking
 53 that they- (.) they're starting to appreciate that .hh the
 54 more mature workforce offers (0.3) better consistency more
 55 [reliability: life
 56 Cla: [Y:eah
 57 PA: skill[s work experience .hhh but it's still
 58 Cla: [Yeah
 59 PA: only a small amount ehm yeah: but it is an issue yeah and it's
 60 something that obviously (0.2) we'll need to .hh look at .hh
 61 but (.) at the end of the day: ehm (0.4) I mean what I'll do
 62 is I'll give you an overview of New Deal but at the end of the
 63 day no matter what cou:urse (0.9) programme training provider
 64 you're with .hhhhh it w- (.) it u- ultimately boils down to an
 65 employer (0.3) offering you a job
 66 Cla: .hh[h
 67 PA: [And you've got to do everything you can to try and (1.2)
 68 improve your chan[ces
 69 Cla: [How many more times am I gonna have to come
 70 here and talk to you
 71 (0.8)
 72 PA: .t .hh Well
 73 (0.4)
 74 Cla: hhh.
 75 (0.6)
 76 PA: .t that we'll discuss

Unlike the adviser in the previous extract, in [039] the adviser directly concurs with the client's viewpoint that age is a 'real issue' with regard to employment. Similarly to the adviser in [072], this adviser offers a positive perspective on the client's capability to carry out a given job, but goes on to elaborate on the ways in which employers might practise covert discrimination (*it'll be buried under some other reason or excuse*, line 26), which are then echoed by the client (*they can't say that because it's against the law to say that but you can hear the tone of the voice*, lines 44-48). Next, however, the adviser offers a certain degree of challenge to the perception of discriminatory employers, highlighting how some companies appreciate the benefits offered by older workers, such as reliability, consistency and experience. These encouraging comments by the adviser could perhaps have been even more effective if they had been presented to the client more specifically as attributes which he himself could highlight to potential employers. Conveyed as it is in Extract 5.2, this message is perhaps too subtle to be translated independently by the client into advice for his own job search strategy.

The adviser sums up the discussion with the comment that *it ultimately boils down to an employer offering you a job and you've got to do everything you can to try and improve your chances* (lines 64-68). At this point (lines 69-70), the client initiates an enquiry about the Jobcentre Plus process; whether or not the adviser would have elaborated on what the client might have done to 'improve his chances' cannot be known, but for the duration of this WFI, there is no further discussion of how the client might address or overcome age-related barriers to employment.

Later in [039], the adviser returns to the theme of barriers to work and begins a kind of recap, reintroducing the matter of age as a barrier (shown in Box 5.3). However, the adviser cuts short his use of the word 'age', suggesting that he – somewhat belatedly – thinks twice about offering up this direct proposition. This is supported by his subsequent rephrasing of the question more openly. The client confirms that age is a barrier but adds that health is also a problem; the matter of health forms the focus of the subsequent discussion from this point onwards.

Box 5.3 Employer attitudes to age as a barrier to work

Extract 5.3 [039] Initial New Deal WFI Male, aged 58 (August 2007)

1 PA: So ((name)) what would you s:ay I mean (.) would you say it's
 2 you age- what- what- I mean .hhh what would you say the main
 3 reasons why do you think you are unemployed still
 4 (0.3)
 5 PA: That s- that sounds like a really stupid question but in your-
 6 (.) why do you (0.4) [think you are
 7 Cla: [h Eh:er:m: basically me age and the
 8 Other thing is m:edical
 9 (0.6)
 10 Cla: pro[blems I have[]
 11 PA: [.t []R:ight which:: (1.0) arthritis in your hands
 12 and knees back
 13 (1.0)
 14 PA: Yeah is that- and white finger as well isn't it
 15 that's [from the ol:d erm:: yeah
 16 Cla: [Yeah hhh.
 17 (0.3)
 18 PA: .t That's like is it- pins and needles
 19 (0.4)
 20 Cla: [Yeah
 21 PA: [Quite yeah .hhh ehm:
 22 Cla: That's why I've had injections in there to: .HH[H
 23 PA: [.hhhh

In the post-interview to recording [039] the researcher asked the adviser whether age was an issue for this client. The adviser reiterated what he had expressed to the client during the WFI, but – similarly to the adviser in [072] – added that the client's age could be an obstacle with regard to the particular type of work he was seeking (driving, warehouse, labouring). This was again not discussed with the client during the WFI, perhaps indicating a missed opportunity to explore the broadening of job goals.

Yeah, I would say it is [age is an issue]. Yeah, he's right in that sense, but- it's probably an issue for what he wants to do, but he could probably get other work. It's maybe one- yeah, but it is an issue yeah, I think, without a shadow of a doubt. I think people who say it's not, got their head buried in the sand somewhat. The problem is employers and no one's gonna openly admit yeah it's age. They'll dress it up as something else, but I think it is, generally speaking yeah.

([039], client male, aged 58).

However, the adviser went on in the post-interview to say that at the next WFI appointment he would be reviewing the client's Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg) and this would include making sure that the client's job goals were 'realistic'. Thus, the limited engagement with the matter of appropriate employment during this first New Deal WFI may be reflecting the adviser's 'paced' approach to developing back-to-work plans during the New Deal programme.

In recording [080], the client raises the matter of age as a barrier at the very end of the WFI, by which time the adviser has already moved to close the conversation twice by means of asking whether there is 'anything else' the client wishes to discuss. At the very beginning of this WFI (extract not shown), the adviser asks the client *what particular difficulties have you been encountering in um, in, in finding your way back into work?*, to which the client responds that the problem is the expiry of the licences that allow him to work in his normal profession (railway maintenance). Exploration of how his licences might be renewed forms the focus of most of the remaining conversation. Towards the end of the WFI, the adviser asks *Is there anything you'd like to ask me Mr ((name)) while you're here at all, or anything you'd like to know?*, the client initially says no, but then revises this with a query about whether his travel expenses can be reimbursed. After dealing with this, the adviser reiterates his question of whether there is *anything else at all that you'd like to ask me Mr ((name)) or anything er you're wondering about for the time being*. At this point, the client raises the matter of his age being a perceived barrier to securing employment, as shown in Box 5.4.

Box 5.4 Employer attitudes to age as a barrier to work

Extract 5.4 [080] 24-month restart Male, aged 50 (September 2007)

1 PA: Anything else at all that you'd like to ask me ((customer's
2 name)) or anything er you're wondering about for the time
3 being

4 Cla: Not really, just hah you know, just, only other reasons is
5 being fifty, you know, as regards like [not getting
6 PA: [so you f-
7 Cla: replies to any jobs really.

8 PA: So you're feeling a bit er, as though that might be?
9 Cla: Well hh. you don't like to think it's:: the case, but
10 (0.8)
11 PA: [Right
12 Cla: [I think, I think it is
13 PA: .hhhhhh [I mean-
14 Cla: [cos I have applied for other jobs, you know, I- cos
15 I- I- I do realise there is a problem with the PTS²⁹ .hhHHHH
16 But like driving jobs, valeting jobs and I just don't seem to
17 get um a reply, you know

18 PA: I mean wou- would you be interested in coming in for er: a
19 sort of like a slightly more in depth meeting to sort of
20 discuss sort of like (.) training that's available or other
21 options that are available to sort of help you?
22 (1.0)
23 Cla: U::m b- I will (.) I'll- I'll chase this up first, the um
24 PTS
25 PA: Give that a try [you've got
26 Cla: [and then
27 PA: You've got [my number
28 Cla: [I'll continue applying for, you know, just to try
29 and get back on my feet cos it's- I'm obviously struggling
30 with me mortgage and everything [right now
31 PA: [Right, right
32 Cla: Er and then if nothing comes of the PTS then, yeah
33 [cos I'm going to have to do summat [it's either that or
34 PA: [.hhhhh [hhhhh. wel-
35 Cla: sell the house [s(h)o .hhh
36 PA: [Well give me well give me, give me a phone
37 call, we'll book an appointment, you can come back in er
38 ((customer's name)) and we'll, we'll talk er in more, more
39 detail specifically around like sort of training or possibly
40 help that's available, or maybes like looking into work in
41 other areas, or .hh [um
42 Cla: [Well yeah
43 PA: Re[fer you somewhere
44 Cla: [ah-
45 PA: you know e- e- thing- there's various things that are
46 available. So give that a try um, good luck with it ((customer
47 name)) like [I say
48 Cla: [Cheers
49 PA: give- give me a call er if if nothing comes of it and you
50 wanna and you wanna follow things up

²⁹ This refers to the Personal Track Safety (PTS) licence which the client requires to resume work in his normal profession.

Unlike the advisers in recordings [072] (Box 5.1) and [039] (Boxes 5.2 and 5.3), the adviser neither directly counters the client's perception that his age is a barrier nor concurs that this is a 'real issue'. Instead, the adviser's response *so you're feeling a bit er, as though that might be* (line 8) is very open and invites elaboration from the client. However, at no point does the adviser engage directly with the matter of potential age discrimination. Instead he focuses on the possibility that the client might wish to come back for a more in-depth discussion about further support around training, other forms of 'help' and potentially expanding the type of work the he is pursuing. The client declines the invitation to come to another WFI to discuss these options, at least for the time being, while he attempts to obtain his PTS card. While this could be considered a sensible 'step-by-step' approach, there seems to be a missed opportunity to engage this client further. Leaving the onus on the client to re-initiate contact with Jobcentre Plus seems risky, especially given the length of time he has been unemployed (two years) and the length of time until he will next be seen at a WFI on a mandatory basis (presumably six months).

The fact that the client in [080] only mentions the matter of age at the very end of the interview, on his second opportunity to raise 'anything else' (and having not mentioned this in response to the adviser's opening question about barriers to work), suggests that he may have been deliberating for some time as to whether to mention his concerns about age to the adviser. The client's tone and demeanour at the close of this WFI are decidedly downhearted. There is a sense that the adviser could have done more to address the client's age-related concerns and to leave him on a more positive and encouraging note. It is notable that in the post-interview to this recording, the adviser makes no mention of the fact that the client raised concerns about age discrimination.

Recording [237] is the only instance where it is the **adviser** who first raises the possibility that age could be a barrier to work. As shown in Box 5.5, this occurs when the adviser is reading through a list of potential barriers from which the client has been asked to choose those that are applicable. The client selects age, doing so in overlap with the adviser's continuation of reading the list. The adviser then asks whether this age barrier has been made explicit by employers or not, the client replying that it is more of a feeling he gets.

Box 5.5 Employer attitudes to age as a barrier to work

Extract 5.5 [237] EZ initial WFI Male, aged 55 (June 2008)

1 PA: Right, these ones (0.6) .tch do you feel employers don't
 2 consider you for any of the following so: it's things like you
 3 know a::ge and educa[tion and stuff like that so
 4 Cla: [I find er age yeah
 5 PA: Age (0.6) o:kay
 6 (1.0)
 7 PA: Has anyone said it directly to you more or less or (0.8) you
 8 just get that impression sometimes when (0.3)
 9 [you go for interviews
 10 Cla: [they were actually looking for a younger person
 11 PA: mm
 12 Cla: you know
 13 PA: yeah
 14 Cla: yeah fine
 15 PA: oka- .hh what about er education? Has that ever been an issue
 16 for you
 17 (1.3)
 18 Cla: Not really no

The adviser does not invite elaboration about this area of concern and the matter of age discrimination is not discussed further during this WFI. Nor does the adviser mention the client's perceptions of age barriers during the post-interview for this recording.

In recording [146], the focus on age is much briefer and the suggestion that age could be a barrier to employment is made in a much less explicit manner³⁰. The client in this recording had recently worked for one week, but other than this, had been claiming JSA for almost two years. During the WFI, the client explains at some length the nature of the job he had taken up and the reasons why he had not been able to continue with the work. The extract in Box 5.6 begins at the conclusion of this narrative.

Box 5.6 'Not on the scrap heap'

Extract 5.6 [146] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 56 (January 2008)

1 Cla: as I say that- that is exactly what happened
 2 PA: okay .HHH erm I'm just gonna to put in here that you::'re
 3 aware that you'd be better off working financially
 4 [than you are claiming [Jobseeker's Allowance
 5 Cla: [Oh yes [yes yes
 6 (4.4)
 7 Cla: I was looking forward to this very very much you see I was

³⁰ By chance, the client in recording [146], who makes a brief reference to age in his NJI, reappears in the sample as an EZ member some months later. During this later WFI, he does not mention his age at all.

8 [very sad it didn't work out (.) but
 9 PA: [yeah
 10 (0.9)
 11 PA: .HHH I know it's unfortunate sometimes in't it (.) [e::rm
 12 Cla: [Well I'm
 13 fifty-six, I mean I'd like to think I'm (.) not on the
 14 scrapheap as yet I've got [you know
 15 PA: [Mm::
 16 Cla: can give
 17 (0.4)
 18 PA: Mm hm? (0.8) .tch .hhh is it erm (0.6) so what- what sort of
 19 things have you been doing to look for work then how have
 20 you been finding [vacancies
 21 Cla: [Well I've been round to ((agency name))
 22 obviously for the last six months
 23 PA: Mm hm

The client's explicit statement of his age and about his not wanting to think he is *on the scrap heap as yet* indicates his intention and aspiration to return to employment and a feeling that he still has something to offer employers. The adviser gives a brief verbal acknowledgement of the client's comment but does not go on to open up further discussion of his thoughts about how age might be affecting his prospects of employment. The adviser's next question is about the client's job search activity – continuing his process-led agenda of completing the JSAg. The matter of age as regards employment prospects is not referred to again by the client or the adviser during this WFI.

The one example of an IB claimant suggesting their age could be a barrier to gaining employment comes from an initial IB WFI [014]. Here, the client has been describing her past employment experiences to the adviser and mentions that some years ago she had considered retraining as a social worker. However, calculating how old she would be by the time she qualified, she felt that her prospects of employment by that time were limited and so had abandoned this idea.

Box 5.7 Too late to retrain?

Extract 5.7 [014] Initial IB WFI Female, aged 54 (July 2007)

1 Cla: I always: ehm (1.2) well probably about (0.3) seven years ago
 2 I went (0.9) I explored into it and gave up really but I
 3 always fancied doing social work. I was gonna go back to
 4 colleg:e
 5 PA: O:h right
 6 (0.3)
 7 Cla: An:d (.) like the educational side
 8 (0.5)
 9 PA: [Mm
 10 Cla: [I thought that was nice you know. I couldn't (0.7) do the
 11 emotional
 12 PA: Mh[m
 13 Cla: [bit [but
 14 PA: [Mhm

15 (0.8)
 16 Cla: the: what the educational social workers I s- I spoke to a
 17 couple of them and (0.5) I- their job was really interesting
 18 (1.7)
 19 Cla: But when I went back and I thought well I was training for
 20 Three years and then (1.4) kind of (.) took me to fifty and I
 21 was thinking well (.) is it a bit too old to start (0.3)
 22 looking for (0.3) do people want you do they .hhh want young
 23 people
 24 PA: .h[hh
 25 Cla: [And I talked meself out of it in the end
 26 PA: No::: I mean I- .hh I know what you m:ea:n I would- I would
 27 disagree on the age part of it because a [lot of employers
 28 Cla: [Mhm
 29 PA: nowadays they're looking for people with experience .hhh and
 30 you [only get that experience with
 31 Cla: [Mhm:
 32 PA: the[:
 33 Cla: [It's li[fe isn't it
 34 PA: [life that's you've led and the [life skills and
 35 Cla: [Mhm
 36 PA: everything .hh having said all of that I: was a residential
 37 Social worker an:d: [er
 38 Cla: [Were you
 39 (1.1)
 40 PA: .t .hh that in itself can be rea:lly
 41 (0.2)
 42 Cla: Yeah:
 43 (0.3)
 44 PA: it's: a i-
 45 (.)
 46 Cla: There's [s:ides of it I'd probably er:
 47 PA: [pulls at your heart strings

The adviser offers some fairly direct challenge to the client's perspective on older workers' employment prospects, stating that she would *disagree on the age part* (lines 26-27) and presenting the counterargument that a lot of employers are looking for people with experience. The client's comment *it's life isn't it* (line 33) shows that she has grasped the adviser's point that life experience is also of value to employers. However, as in recording [039] (Box 5.2), the adviser does not go further to assist the client in identifying more specifically the skills she could 'sell' to employers, and how to go about this. Moreover, although she says *'I know what you mean'* regarding the client's hesitancy to retrain in her late 40s, this adviser does not offer any kind of acknowledgement that age discrimination may exist.

As shown in Box 5.8, age is made relevant in a less explicitly problematic way by the client in [047], who first raises the matter of age by spontaneously commenting to the adviser *I wish I was as young as you* (line 4), which elicits some jovial discussion about the adviser's age. The client goes on to describe how he has become aware (through a friend) that a particular local employer has positive policies towards employing older workers. This echoes the comments made by

other advisers during WFIs (noted previously) regarding certain employers' more positive recruitment practices. However, at the same time, the client's reference to age indicates an awareness that age discrimination may exist among other employers more generally. The adviser's response to the client's comments about this particular employer (line 47) is positive but fairly minimal and unengaged.

Box 5.8 Awareness of positive employer attitudes to age

Extract 5.8 [047] Subsequent New Deal WFI Male, aged 57 (August 2007)

1 PA: Once you've narrowed em dow:n [there's not a great deal of
2 Cla: [I wish I was::
3 PA: cho[ice
4 Cla: [wish I was a young as you ((name)) son.
5 (0.2)
6 PA: How old do you think I am like=that'd be telling
7 Cla: ['Bout thirty-four
8 PA: [Huhhh
9 (0.2)
10 Cla: Thirty-two.
11 (.)
12 PA: 'Bout thirty-two I [(make)
13 PA: [Bit higher
14 (0.6)
15 Cla: Are ya f***
16 (0.4)
17 PA: O::h yeah
18 (0.6)
19 Cla: Yer a::ren't ((name)) ma::n [you're (in your)/(early) thirties
20 PA: [Thirty-eight::
21 PA: Thirty-eight (now)/(me)
22 Cla: Yer jo::k[ing
23 PA: [Na::h
24 Cla: Are you son
25 PA: Yeah
26 (.)
27 PA: Heh heh .hh
28 Cla: 'Bout twenty year[s younger than (me)/(that)
29 PA: [What are you after like yeah
30 [huh huh huh]
31 Cla: [No no no:] [how old are ya ((adviser's name))
32 PA: [I have- I have- I've been told I look forty-two
33 at times though so [(hhhh.)
34 Cla: [But that- m- (.) me mate- (.) me mate
35 works at e::r (.) he works at that what they call it?
36 That [er
37 PA: [((name of supermarket))
38 Cla: ((name of super[market)) yeah
39 PA: [Yeah
40 Cla: But they do- th- th- I think they just pack up and all that
41 PA: Yeah they d- yeah
42 Cla: But- t- t- (.) what they do: (.) they don't want- they wan-
43 they don't mind taking older blokes on
44 (0.2)
45 Cla: Don't forget me ma:te's older than me. He's e:r (0.4) I'm
46 fifty-seven (0.2) he's fifty-nine

47 PA: That's- that's positive then isn't it
 48 Cla: But sometimes they don't like (.) might only (be) sixteen (.)
 49 sixteen hours or twenty hours
 50 PA: Mm:
 51 Cla: And some days you're like tw- twenty hours (on) thirty hours
 52 (0.2) know what I mean son
 53 PA: Right ye[ah so
 54 Cla: [No allowance on a night
 55 PA: But if the rate of [pay's good
 56 Cla: [But- but they get about nine [pound odd an
 57 PA: [Yeah
 58 Cla: hour don't they,
 59 (0.2)
 60 PA: As long as you don't mind working [shifts
 61 Cla: [Hm:: o:::h here (.) here
 62 (.) that- that'll do me

During this WFI, the adviser does not open up any further discussion of the matter of potentially restricted labour market opportunities for older workers, an issue of which the client is apparently conscious, but which is expressed in a more subtle way in this instance. The post-interview to this recording does not include any reference to the client's age.

5.2 Other types of age-related barriers to work

This section describes the small number of instances where there is an explicit or implicit indication that the client's age may have a bearing on their capacity for work or otherwise influence their employment aspirations and expectations. Discussion in this section does not focus on the circumstances of individuals making claims to incapacity benefit specifically because of health conditions.

5.2.1 Age-related capacity for work

One passage which involves reference to age-related capacity for work comes from recording [237], as shown in Box 5.9. Responding to the adviser's question about qualifications held, the client notes that he is a qualified mechanic but goes on to say that *it's a young man's job now anyway* (line 10). The adviser does not immediately respond to this, but picks up on the comment just under six minutes later, following on from some discussion about any 'health issues' that might affect work (line 16). The adviser asks the client to elaborate on what he meant by 'a young man's game', with the prompts that it could relate to tiredness or susceptibility to injury, suggestions which imply a link with stamina or health. The client's response is not entirely clear. He first says that tiredness and injury are *not really* the reason he perceives the work of a mechanic as a young man's game, rather it's just that *old men like me* tend to be the supervisors. However, with his addition that it's the 'young lads' who do the heavy lifting, there seem to be a combination of two arguments, the client implying both that he is too senior to do the manual work and that the manual work would be difficult.

Box 5.9 'A young man's job'**Extract 5.9 [237] EZ initial WFI Male, aged 55 (June 2008)**

1 PA: What's happened with the er (0.6) the mechanic side of your-
 2 of your job search .hhh
 3 (0.8)
 4 Cla: Haven't got any tools (0.5) when my car got stolen and all
 5 (my/the) tools were in the back of it [and it
 6 PA: [mm hm
 7 Cla: cost about three grand to replace them (0.4) and I don't have
 8 three grand
 9 PA: Mm
 10 Cla: It's a young man's job now anyway (0.2) mechanic basically
 11 PA: R:ight have you- are you time served in- in that industry?
 12 (0.5)
 13 Cla: Time served yeah
 14 PA: yeah
 15 Cla: with e::r (0.7) what used to be ((company name))

((lines omitted - approx 6 minutes of dialogue))

16 PA: You mentioned before tha:t you know (0.6) being a mechanic is
 17 a young man's game (0.4) your words (0.6) was that to say
 18 that you know yo- you get (0.6) you feel tired or you, you may
 19 be more prone to injury if you were going into that sort of
 20 like heavy labour kind of work
 21 (0.6)
 22 Cla: N::o it's not really (0.2) just I know myself it is a young
 23 lad's game and
 24 PA: yeah yeah
 25 Cla: e::r (0.6) all the old men like me are service advisers or
 26 PA: mm
 27 (0.8)
 28 Cla: er supervisors
 29 PA: yeah yeah
 30 Cla: you're not actually doing the heavy lifting
 31 PA: Yeah so it's all the younger lads that tend to do that sort of
 32 work anyway, the- [your heavy lifting.
 33 Cla: [I mean I loved it when I- I left school it
 34 was
 35 PA: [yeah
 36 Cla: [it was my passion just to be a motor mechanic (0.8) and me
 37 dad knew somebody that worked in a garage, got me in there,
 38 served my, my apprenticeship
 39 PA: right
 40 Cla: and I just loved (0.6) taking gear boxes out taking engines to
 41 bits [and
 42 PA: [yeah
 43 Cla: putting it all back together again
 44 PA: hm great stuff
 45 Cla: coming home at night and servicing me neighbours' motor
 46 (sometimes)
 47 (0.4)
 48 Cla: I was working [eighteen hours
 49 PA: [obsessed with it was you huh huh
 50 Cla: eighteen hours a day

51		(0.8)
52	Cl a:	I was making good money but I never had any time to spend it
53	PA:	huh huh (0.2) sometimes that's a good thing though blessing in
54		disguise isn't it? Cos you get to save up a bit .hhh have you
55		got a criminal record at all?
56	Cl a:	No
57	PA:	No

The client elaborates his passion for working as a mechanic when he was a younger man, which the adviser engages with (line 33 onward). However, the adviser then returns to his prescribed set of questions (line 54), the next relating to criminal records, and the matter of physical capacity for the work for which he is trained is not returned to during this WFI. However, there is further comment from the adviser during the WFI itself and the post-interview on the need for this client to expand his job goals. As with recording [039], this suggests that the adviser may be taking a 'paced' approach to revisiting job goals through a series of WFIs:

With him I think the biggest problem will be opening up his job goals to realise that even though he hasn't got experience within certain industries, he's got loads of transferrable skills that he could easily pass across to different industries and therefore get a job that he's gonna enjoy. Cos just because he hasn't done it doesn't necessarily mean he's not gonna enjoy it. So sometimes you do have to make them aware that there's new stuff out there that potentially they might enjoy ... It is gonna be a case of well I'd have to open up his job goals or we'll gonna struggle, basically. And I don't wanna be struggling for six months with someone like him that's got so much to offer.

([237] initial EZ, male aged 56)

It is recognised that older benefits claimants may face additional obstacles to work due to the increased likelihood of ill-health or disability in older age. Setting aside the individuals who were making claims to IB specifically due to ill-health, there were also instances of older people who mentioned longstanding health conditions or disabilities during NJIs or initial New Deal or EZ WFIs. These will not be elaborated here, as neither clients nor advisers drew explicit links to age in relation to their health in these instances. However, as a brief observation, there were some instances where it was clear that health problems were posing a barrier to certain forms of employment, for example, there were two people who described being prevented from taking up driving work (for which they had previously been qualified) because of their medical history. One older person also described having had to leave a job after a very short time because the physical demands of the job and the amount of travel involved were too exhausting. It is notable that in only one of the WFI recordings where health conditions were mentioned by older JSA claimants did the adviser enter into any specific discussion of how any longstanding health limitations would be taken into account in establishing reasonable job goals.

5.2.2 Personal employment aspirations

Among the older JSA claimants, there is no evidence of an intention or expectation not to return to work, but there are some indications that people have altered their aspirations or preferences for types of work as they become older. In some cases, advisers do not appear to 'pick up on' such inferences, as in the extract in Box 5.10. Here, the client explicitly states that he is in a 'winding down period' in his life and this is why he has chosen to go into driving work. The adviser makes no response to this statement, simply continuing to pursue a response to her earlier question about temporary contracts, which we see at lines 25 and 29.

Box 5.10 A 'winding down period'

Extract 5.10 [151] New Jobseeker Interview Male, aged 53 (January 2008)

1 PA: Oka:y? .hh er::m So this is probably as rea:sonably up to date
 2 as it needs to be we've got on here that you'd consider- you
 3 prefer full-time work .hh prepared to do shifts including
 4 nights if you needed to. .hh You're looking for permanent work
 5 rather- or sort of like steadier wor:k rather than .hh a day
 6 here and a day there. .hh But would you take a take a
 7 temporary contract
 8 (0.5)
 9 Cla: Well I' [ve] do- I have been [in the past. It's not]=
 10 PA: [i-] [It is pretty much the]=
 11 Cla: =[been a problem. Er:::]
 12 PA: =[nature of what you've] done isn't it
 13 Cla: I don't I don't=er I've not just been a lorry driver all my
 14 life
 15 PA: Yeah
 16 Cla: It's just something I've chosen to do
 17 be[cause] there's a lot of work hhh huh hhh
 18 PA: [Yeah]
 19 PA: Yeah. Yeah.
 20 Cla: .hhh And it's it's a winding down period
 21 period in my life where you know I've done all sorts in the
 22 past.
 23 PA: Yeah
 24 Cla: You name it I've done it. I've been- I've [been a teacher]
 25 PA: [So:: a temp-]
 26 Cla: An area manager::. I've worked in various different
 27 [lines of] business. [Every]thing
 28 PA : [Right] [Yeah]
 29 PA : .hh So a temporary contract how long would you want that to be
 30 for at a minimum.
 31 Cla: It doesn't matter.
 32 PA : Okay?
 33 Cla: [It's irrelevant.] (Yeah)
 34 PA : [That's fine]
 35 PA : So I'll put no preference.

In other cases it seems that advisers support or sympathise with the client's position, as in Box 5.11. Having already mentioned earlier in the WFI that he is aware of an employer who looks favourably on older workers (see Box 5.8), the client later

describes the type of work he is looking for at his *prime of life*, apparently linking his desire for part-time work with his advancing age. This client appears to have quite a clear picture of the kind of job and conditions he would like, stating that he would not mind working nights, he just wants some odd jobs, caretaking or basic painting and decorating type role, and that he is happy just to earn a living wage at this stage of life. He notes, however, that many people of his age are looking for this type of work and so competition is strong (lines 30-31)³¹. The adviser gives verbal responses to all these statements, and apparently supports the client's position. However, he does not respond in any detail or offer any suggestions as to how the client might pursue such work opportunities or make himself a more attractive candidate in order to overcome the competition. He only advises rather vaguely that the client needs to put himself *in the driving seat*³²:

Box 5.11 Aspirations for work in later life

Extract 5.11 [047] Subsequent New Deal WFI Male, aged 57 (August 2007)

1 Cla: Problem is (.) as i- what it is: the reason I'm- I'm I'm-
 2 (0.2) the reason why I'm saying like er .hh I want them like
 3 a: (1.4) odd job man .hh (.) I can do the painting and
 4 decorating I can cha::nge plugs[:
 5 PA: [Care[taking
 6 Cla: [I can plumb this in .hh I
 7 can do: a::ll this son (0.2) I can lay carpet I can do all
 8 these thing
 9 PA: Mm
 10 (.)
 11 Cla: And it's not (bad)/('bout) wa::ge just steady work .hh I
 12 don't- in my:: in my: prime of life now .hhh I don't want a
 13 lot (.) son I don't want a- [I live on me own
 14 PA: [No pressure
 15 PA: Yea[h
 16 Cla: [I live on me own=
 17 PA: =I see where you're coming [from
 18 Cla: [I live on me own. I don't need a
 19 lot
 20 PA: Steady (a[way)
 21 Cla: [As long- as long as I pay me bills .hh me gas and
 22 electricity, (.) I've got (a-)/(it-)
 23 (1.2)
 24 PA: No [problem
 25 Cla: [Buy a couple of drinks now a- (0.2) [very rarely

³¹ He also refers (line 42-43) to an additional barrier posed by a widely-reported criminal act by a school caretaker, which he perceives has subsequently posed problems for men seeking caretaker jobs.

³² It should be acknowledged that, in the post-interview to this recording, the adviser explained that he was experiencing particular difficulties in supporting this individual, because of problematic alcohol use and apparent lack of coherence during WFIs.

26 PA: [Ahh
 27 Cla: I don't go (out-) (.) well (0.2) (know what I mean) (0.6)
 28 that's all I need, (.) son.
 29 PA: No problem
 30 Cla: But it's getting them jobs I think a lot of people
 31 [my age (they all) want them jobs, don't they
 32 PA: [(Right)
 33 (0.2)
 34 PA: A lot of them sorr[y,
 35 Cla: [A lot of them want them jo:bs
 36 PA: We:ll yeah but it's just a case [of putting yourse[lf in-
 37 Cla: [And- i- [Plus::
 38 PA: [in the dri:ving seat an-
 39 Cla: [plus::
 40 Cla: it's very difficult to get them job(s) bec[ause of a:ll that
 41 PA: [It can be
 42 Cla: e:r (1.2) the weirdo thing like oh that (.) guy like er the
 43 caretaker thing and all that like you know what I mean

In two recordings, both with people aged 57, the advisers use the phrase *steady away* during discussion of future work plans (see Box 5.11 [line 20] and Box 5.12). This apparently regional phrase (both advisers are from the same Jobcentre Plus region, though different offices) seems to mean a steady and even pace, indicating that the adviser perceives the client's employment pathway as on a plateau, if not winding down towards retirement. In Box 5.12, the adviser and client are referring to the likelihood of the individual 'finishing back up' with an employer he has worked for in the past.

Box 5.12 'Steady away'

Extract 5.14 [072] 18-month restart Male, aged 57 (August 2007)

1 Cla: So I'll probably finish up back there again
 2 PA: Oh well
 3 Cla: huh huh huh
 4 PA: well if you were a- you know [if it was all alright
 5 Cla: [oh yeah
 6 Cla: yeah
 7 PA: And probably in hindsight you'd probably you'd stay this time
 8 you know the grass isn't always greener is it?
 9 Cla: That's right yea:h yea:h
 10 PA: You know steady away for a couple of years and
 11 (0.4)
 12 Cla: Yeah
 13 (0.8)
 14 PA: And get your Tax Credits
 15 (4.4 seconds)
 16 PA: Normally sign on a Monday don't you
 17 Cla: That's right yeah
 18 PA: So we've brought you in not on your signing day we're mean
 19 aren't we

Finally, age-relevant factors are implied in recording [104] when discussing the client's agreed restrictions (nights, shifts, temporary work). The client (male, aged 56) rejects shift work on the grounds that *I think my body clock is too set in its ways these days* to which the PA responds *that's fine* and moves on to further questions about work parameters.

In addition to adviser comments in post-interviews where clients had discussed age barriers to work during the WFI itself, there were also some instances where advisers noted potential attitudinal barriers among older clients during post-interviews where this had not been discussed explicitly with the client during the WFI. Two examples came from New Deal WFIs, both with the same adviser. The first was a subsequent WFI, the adviser's second meeting with a client who had been in receipt of JSA for ten years. In the post-interview, the adviser raised age as a potential barrier to work for this client when this had not been mentioned at all during the WFI itself (by client or adviser):

I think again it's his age to a certain degree and I daresay his motivation's probably- he's probably got to the stage where he's doing what he needs to and doesn't really believe he'll get a job. But you know we can do what we can to try and keep him positive...Just erm his age I think and motivation are key issues.

([040] subsequent New Deal WFI, client male aged 55)

The second example came from a post-interview for an initial New Deal WFI, where the client had been in receipt of JSA for nine years. Here, the adviser conveyed his view that the client had little motivation to return to work and his perception that the client's age made it hard to tackle this barrier:

I suppose it's an awful thing to say but people like him I think are probably never gonna get a job because they don't really want to. That's the way I would interpret it. I don't think there's much of an incentive for him to get a job, for whatever reason. He seems fairly happy with the way things are and he's at that age where it's difficult – you're dealing with adults aren't you, you can't just force people. And there's only so much we can do and as long as he's doing what the minimum requirements are, that's the way it goes.

([039] initial New Deal WFI, client male aged 58)

Among the IB recordings, there was also some evidence that advisers perceived clients' attitudes towards returning to work as becoming more negative as they got older, as the following quote illustrates:

She said that she would be looking at other work but erm you kind of get a feel for people as to whether they are or whether they aren't. And I think by the time she has her hip replacement she'll be well into her fifties and she'll probably start thinking oh I'm too old now. Wrongly, but that's the way that her mindset will probably tell her.

([012] 3-year trigger, client female aged 51)

Additionally, in more general comments, one adviser mentioned how she had found it difficult during the period when they had called in the long-term 'stock' IB claimants as part of the extension of Pathways to Work. She had not enjoyed conducting these WFIs because she had found that older clients, who were more *set in their ways* and *getting on a bit*, were harder to move on.

5.3 Summary

The data available to this study suggests that among older individuals, the matter of age as a barrier to work is not at the forefront of people's minds at the time of making a new claim and attending an initial WFI. Rather, among JSA claimants, the perception that age is a barrier to employment apparently becomes more common as the length of time people spend on JSA increases. Among the five NJIs, there was direct reference to age in relation to employability in only one recording [146]. As has been explained earlier, this person's circumstances were actually more akin to longer-term JSA claimants.

The JSA claimants who suggested that their age was posing a barrier to employment were aged from 50 to 58 years, while those who did not mention age barriers were aged 52 to 58. While the nature of the sample does not allow for firm conclusions to be drawn, this suggests that it is length of time on benefit, along with multiple experiences of unsuccessful job applications, rather than being at the higher end of the 50+ age bracket that influences thoughts on age barriers to employment. Where advisers mentioned in post-interviews the matter of client age in relation to lowered return-to-work aspirations, this also tended to be in relation to longer-term claimants.

For the most part, explicit discussion of age as a barrier to employment only arose in WFIs with longer-term JSA claimants who were meeting with a personal adviser for the first time in several months. People attending 18- and 24-month restarts or initial New Deal (or EZ equivalent) interviews all discussed age as a perceived barrier to work. We cannot know from the available data whether age concerns had been raised by other New Deal participants at earlier WFIs, but age barriers did not appear to be a recurrent theme in subsequent New Deal WFIs.

There was variation in the way in which advisers responded to clients' comments on perceived age discrimination. To different degrees, advisers concurred with these views, challenged them, offered a more gentle 'countering' of the client's viewpoint, or did not seem to engage with the client's comments at all. Where advisers did oppose the client's suggestion, this was typically in presenting the idea that some employers take a more positive view about the advantages which older workers can offer. Additionally, advisers sometimes offered positive comments about the client's skills, experience or capacity for work which seemed aimed at encouraging them to think more optimistically about their prospects. However, advisers rarely invited elaboration or 'unpacked' client's concerns about age discrimination and there seemed a lack of specific or practical advice as to how

the client might overcome obstacles if faced with employers who were not open to considering older workers. Advisers' comments about older worker attributes that were looked on favourably by some employers were not explicitly translated into personalised advice on how the individual could go about presenting their own skill set. There was also very limited reference to age discrimination law.

It is notable that in both [072] and [080] (see Boxes 5.1 and 5.4), the advisers brought discussion of employer age discrimination to a close by (re)turning to focus on the client's skills or training needs. This perhaps suggests that advisers feel more confident in responding to individuals' skills gaps than directly to the question of age discrimination.

There was only one instance of the adviser being the first to raise the possibility that age could be a barrier to employment – and this was in the context of reading through a more wide-ranging list of potential barriers. As such, there was no strong evidence from this study that advisers present older clients with the suggestion that they may not return to employment at all or that advisers initiate discussion of age discrimination by employers. However, the post-interview data suggested that advisers also perceived age-related barriers for some clients, which they did not express to during the WFI itself. While advisers very rarely brought up the matter of age with older clients during the WFI itself – and for the most part either overlooked or countered any suggestions that age was a barrier to work – there were some indications in the post-interviews that advisers' perceived a greater significance of client age than they conveyed during WFI discussions, particularly in relation to the type of work some clients were pursuing.

There were only limited data on older clients' changing employment aspirations. However, what illustrations we have indicate that advisers either do not engage with clients' comments in this respect or broadly accept or empathise with these perspectives.

6 Conclusion

This study set out to identify whether there are differences in the content and structure of interactions between Jobcentre Plus advisers and younger and older age cohorts during Work Focused Interviews (WFIs). One rationale underpinning this research question was an awareness within the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), from evaluation evidence to date and from internal analysis of management information, that older clients did not appear to benefit so much from certain Jobcentre Plus programmes, namely Pathways to Work for those claiming Incapacity Benefit (IB) and New Deal 25+ (ND25+) for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants. Therefore, there was an interest in examining the WFI data to explore whether older people seemed to be receiving provision that was in some way different to – and possibly less comprehensive than – that provided to younger cohorts. A second motivation for the study related to the broader agenda of extending working lives and it was hoped that the project could shed light on what advisory practices might be particularly effective for the older client cohort. From these findings, it was intended that a set of practical recommendations for conducting effective WFIs with older clients would be established. The project remit also included the identification of policy implications and areas for further research. This chapter addresses each of these objectives in the following sections:

- 6.1 Summary and discussion of key findings.
- 6.2 Recommendations for effective practice with older clients.
- 6.3 Policy implications and future research.
- 6.4 Final reflections.

6.1 Summary and discussion of key findings

In this section we provide a summary and discussion of the main findings reported in previous chapters. Section 6.1.1 covers the key findings on interactional difference by age cohort and Section 6.1.2 considers the findings on age-related barriers to work. As relevant, we also present brief summaries of the comments and reflections on these findings that were offered by Jobcentre Plus staff during the adviser workshop (as described in Chapter 1). These are shown in shaded boxes to distinguish them from the main analysis.

Prior to summarising the results of this analysis, it is important to recall the limitations of the available data as set out in Chapter 1. The study was opportunistic and exploratory, drawing upon data that was gathered according to a different research design. The data set is small and not representative of the full claimant population. Therefore all findings should be considered tentative and not generalisable.

6.1.1 Interactional difference by age cohort

Our approach to identifying interactional difference was two-fold: Firstly, we considered whether there were any differences which seemed, at an **overall** level, to differentiate adviser practices with the older and younger client cohorts as a whole. Secondly, the data allowed us, in some cases, to consider whether the practices of **individual advisers** differed when interacting with older and younger clients. Our findings for the three WFI types included in the comparative analysis are summarised in Table 6.1. The first column shows observed areas of adviser practice which indicate age-related differences at an overall level. The second column highlights aspects of the WFIs where we observed single advisers doing things somewhat differently when meeting with clients of different ages. As we have described in the earlier chapters, apparent age-related differences sometimes emerged at the 25+ boundary, or with clients in their 40s and above, rather than a distinction above/below age 50. As relevant, this is noted in the table.

Aspects of the WFI process which did show some evidence of overall variation by client age came mainly from New Jobseeker Interviews (NJIs). Where we observed differences in the type and number of job goals set at the NJI, it is possible that these differences were influenced primarily by the context of clients' employment background (i.e. profession and level of experience or qualification) rather than a direct age-related practice on the part of advisers. We understand from the WFI recordings that people's job goals must be 'realistic' in the sense of being available in the local area and obtainable with the individual's current qualifications. Thus, our observation that some younger people did not have their main or long-term job goal listed on their Jobseeker's Agreement (JSAg) is unlikely to be evidence of age-related discrimination by advisers, but rather a reflection of the requirement for claim-related job goals to be immediately achievable³³. Likewise, it seems that any evidence that older people making new claims to JSA were required to agree fewer job goals was primarily related to the nature of their employment history rather than a direct influence of age on adviser practices. Where an individual already had a JSAg held on the Jobcentre Plus system from a previous JSA claim, the data suggested that these existing documents were revisited in less detail with older clients compared to younger ones, with existing job goals being 'confirmed' rather than 'revisited'.

³³ The main study gives further consideration to how advisers might balance the need for job goals to be both 'realistic' and in line with clients' aspirations and preferences (see Drew *et al.*, 2010, Section 3.3).

Reflections from the adviser workshop

During the adviser workshop, it was commented that in the current economic climate (May 2009), New Claims Advisers were likely to be granting 13-week 'permitted periods' (during which an individual can restrict their job search to their usual field of work) to much larger numbers of younger people, as the Jobcentre Plus client group now included greater numbers of professionally qualified young people.

Table 6.1 Main findings on interactional difference

	Areas of overall difference	Differences in individual adviser practice
Initial IB WFIs	[None observed]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger balance of emphasis on return to work when giving initial explanations of the WFI purpose to younger clients • Return to work treated as a less definite possibility for older clients • Suggestions for work-related activity tend towards voluntary or therapeutic activity for older clients
NJIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer job goals agreed with older clients (25+) • Existing JSAg revisited in less detail with older clients • Assisted job search carried out less frequently with older clients (25+) • Fewer job submissions for older clients where job search is carried out • 'Softer' explanations of requirements to evidence job search given to older clients • No explicit mention of benefit sanctions to older clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly job search activity requirements more minimal for older clients (40+) • Tailoring explanations of the use of the national minimum wage in Better Off Calculations (BOCs), to acknowledge older clients' higher previous and potential future earnings level (40+) • Stronger explicit expressions of adviser optimism for older clients
Subsequent New Deal WFIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No BOCs with youngest clients (18-24) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisted job search carried out less frequently with older clients

Regarding our observation that job searches were carried out less often with older clients, it is important to consider the relevance and purpose of the job search to different individuals at various stages in their JSA claim. The main report (see Drew *et al.*, 2010, Section 3.5) suggested that advisers may be less likely to conduct job

searches with new JSA claimants aged 25+ because of the probability of a clearer career history, a clearer path back into work and more experience of Jobcentre Plus systems and job searching more generally³⁴. However, there were examples in the data where the assisted job search brought to the client's attention jobs that they had not identified through their own search of the Jobcentre Plus database. Moreover, there was evidence from one recording ([025] see Chapter 3, Box 3.1) that an adviser's assumption that a job search is not necessary could be contradicted by the client.

There was some evidence to suggest that older clients are 'submitted' to fewer jobs during an assisted job search. However, there are likely to be several contextual factors as to why an individual may find more or fewer suitable vacancies on the Jobcentre Plus system, including how specialist the individual's field of work is, whether there are sources other than the Jobcentre Plus database which will be more appropriate for identifying vacancies of this type, and whether there are seasonal variations in the individual's type of work.

Another area of apparent difference was the way in which the requirement to provide evidence of job search activity was conveyed by advisers. Here, we found some suggestion that advisers take a 'softer' approach towards conveying the conditionality requirements to older jobseekers, and are perhaps less inclined to mention explicitly the possibility of benefit sanctions.

Reflections from the adviser workshop

Among advisers participating in the workshop, there was some identification with the findings on approaches to conditionality. One person suggested that this softer approach could relate to advisers showing 'respect' for older clients. There was some consensus that younger people may need a firmer or more explicit approach when stating the legal regulations attached to benefit receipt, because they may not have such an established awareness of these requirements compared to older people. It was also suggested that older clients had a better appreciation of the 'something for something' principle, and so would have less objection to the requirement to provide evidence of job search activity. In contrast, younger clients might not perceive this as a reasonable requirement.

Where we noted differences in individual advisers' approaches with younger and older clients, these included: more minimal weekly job search requirements

³⁴ The main study (Drew *et al.*, 2010, Section 3.5) also noted that, where advisers did not conduct a job search with younger clients, they usually gave a reason for this (e.g. lack of time), suggesting that they thought a job search should, ideally, have been carried out. With older clients, the possibility of a job search was more commonly not mentioned at all if it was not carried out.

requested of older people; stronger explicit expressions of adviser optimism that new work would be secured quickly; and subtle differences in the way that the BOC was presented. However, perhaps more striking than individual adviser differences in NJIs was the extent to which some advisers adopted consistent 'linguistic routines' around certain aspects of the WFI process, which could be seen recurring with clients of different ages.

We did not find evidence of any overall differences in the ways that advisers approached initial IB WFIs with younger and older clients. The distribution of client age among the set of IB WFI recordings rather limited the scope of the comparative analysis in that the majority of people were clustered around a similar age range, mid-40s to mid-50s (see Appendix A). However, this did usefully highlight that there were few apparent differences in interactions with clients in their 40s and those in their 50s.

Different advisers varied in the extent to which they engaged in discussion of future work plans and in the level of detail that they described the elements of the Choices package, but this did not appear to be related to client age. Rather, variation in adviser practice seemed to be influenced by a combination of individual adviser style and range of contextual factors relating to: the client's work circumstances (for example, length of time since last in work; extent to which the client had an established career or field of work; whether or not the client was still 'attached' to an employer); the nature or trajectory of a client's health condition (for example, uncertainties about diagnosis or prognosis; scheduled operations or awaited test results; cases involving pregnancy/maternity); and whether or not the client was 'screened in' to Pathways and would therefore attend further mandatory WFIs. While some of these variables perhaps have an **underlying** relationship with age, we found no clear relationship between client age and the way that advisers approached initial IB WFIs.

Where we did observe differences in individual adviser practice, there was some suggestion that when meeting older clients, advisers placed somewhat less emphasis on work in their initial introductions of the purpose of the WFI and that their suggestions for future work-related activity tended towards voluntary or more therapeutic activity, rather than focused on returning to the mainstream labour market. Suggestions that advisers held lower expectations of clients returning to work seemed mainly to emerge as clients approached age 60. This echoes findings of earlier research with Pathways advisers (Dickens *et al.*, 2004; Knight *et al.*, 2005) which identified adviser perceptions that clients approaching retirement age were harder to progress. However, the small amount of data with people approaching retirement age in the present data set was confounded by the fact that both of these recordings took place with the same adviser, making it somewhat unclear whether practices were age-related or particular to that adviser.

To some extent, initial IB WFIs involved a greater amount of broadly work-focused discussion when the client had an established work history or career path and had thought about future plans or aspirations which were related to this. People in

their 40s and 50s who had worked in recent years tended to have an established career area and were sometimes still attached to an employer. The recordings suggested that this provided advisers with clearer routes into discussion of work with some older clients, than with some of their younger clients who did not have such a background to draw upon. In this respect, work-focused discussion may potentially be easier to initiate and sustain during WFIs with older clients.

In most cases, the initial IB WFI did not appear to be a point at which support was actually **implemented** for clients of any age. This first WFI seemed to be primarily about establishing background information and introducing the range of support available which could be drawn upon at some point in the future. This again reflects one of the limitations of the available data; that we have only one-off snapshots of the advisory input for each person at the very beginning of their involvement with Pathways to Work. However, it is notable that our observations of the scope and content of initial IB WFIs in this respect echo the findings of previous qualitative research on how Incapacity Benefit Personal Advisers (IBPAs) 'manage' the initial WFI (Knight *et al.*, 2005).

Given the diversity in the content of the subsequent New Deal WFIs and that people were at very different stages through the programme, it was particularly difficult to draw out any overall comparative findings from this section of the data. The two areas of difference we have noted in Table 6.1 relate to key aspects of WFI content (rather than interactional **style**), and these may have been influenced by a number of contextual circumstances for each client at the time of that WFI. There were some notable differences between the interactional styles of different advisers. Some demonstrated more extensive use of the advisory styles which have been identified by the main study as more effective in encouraging work focus and back-to-work activity, i.e. collaboration, directivity, proactivity, positivity and challenge (see Drew *et al.*, 2010, Chapter 6). There were advisers whose overall approach seemed to be more **process-led** and those who took a more **client-focused** approach (see Drew *et al.*, 2010, Chapter 7). However, where the data permitted direct comparison with clients of different ages, these styles could be observed in multiple interactions conducted by the same adviser with clients across the age range.

Finally, considering the set of recordings with 50+ clients as a whole (n=28), there was a lack of evidence of any 'common patterns' that characterised the way in which advisers interacted with older clients overall or indeed the way that older people interacted with advisers. To some extent, we suggest that this is a reflection of the different aims and structures of the various WFI types included in the 50+ data set. However, it is also likely that the heterogeneity of the 50+ cohort accounts for the apparent absence of consistent features that typify interactions with older clients.

Reflections from the adviser workshop

Among advisers participating in the workshop, there was no strong conceptualisation of a generalised 'older client' who required or received a different type of approach. One person described the positive recruitment policies operated by Jobcentre Plus itself, and suggested that this age equality ethos permeated the practices of advisers. It was also noted that the structure of Jobcentre Plus programmes and benefit entitlements could influence the way in which advisers perceived and categorised clients. For example, now that all JSA clients aged 25+ were subject to the same mandatory provision, a 50+ distinction was not prominent in advisers' minds. To some extent, advisers felt 60+ was a more salient borderline, given that this was the point at which Pension Credit became a consideration.

As noted by Hasluck and Green (2007) in their review of 'what works' for different client groups, the cohort of benefits claimants aged 50 and above is very diverse. The present study sample illustrated this diversity of 50+ clients' personal and work-related circumstances, for example, manual contractor, white-collar professional, lone parent, long-term unemployed, carer, sick/disabled. This diversity among the 50+ cohort is relevant in our consideration of recommendations for effective advisory practice with this client group, which we turn to in Section 6.2.

6.1.2 Age-related barriers to work

It is known from previous research that there are certain types of barriers to work which may be more commonly experienced by older people. Some of these came to the fore during WFIs with older people in the present data set and in Chapter 5 we have provided some illustrations of how advisers dealt with such scenarios in the WFI context.

In particular, the data shed some light on adviser approaches in contexts where clients raised the matter of perceived employer age discrimination. Examples of this type were numerous enough to identify a number of different strategies used by advisers in responding to clients' comments that their age presented a barrier to finding employment. These included direct acknowledgement that age discrimination was a 'real issue' and offering a range of alternative perspectives which, to varying degrees, challenged or countered the notion that age was a barrier to work. The counterviews that were offered by advisers might be further categorised as those which were:

- generalised: where the adviser stated that the client's view was 'not necessarily' the case or 'some employers' took a more positive view on older workers;
- personalised: where the adviser expressed the view that the particular client was not limited by their age, being physically fit or having a range of marketable skills;

- idealised: advisers stating that employers 'should not' or 'were not allowed to' discriminate on the basis of age.

Notably, advisers could employ more than one strategy during the same interaction, thus offering both acknowledgement and a degree of challenge. However, while advisers generally made encouraging and supportive comments about the individual client's capacity for work, specific or practical advice on how to address or overcome potential employer discrimination was rarely forthcoming. Advisers' comments on the types of positive attributes that are recognised among the older workforce tended to remain at a general level, rather than a personalised discussion which went on to identify the specific skills and attributes which that particular client could offer to employers. There was very limited reference to age discrimination legislation and it was also notable that enhanced support through the voluntary programme New Deal 50+ was mentioned in only one of the NJIs with older people.

Reflections from the adviser workshop

During the adviser workshop, one participant described how some clients perceive themselves as 'older than they are', and that she had met with people in their 30s who believed that their age already posed a barrier to work. It was also recognised that some people who are approaching statutory pension age may begin to consider themselves 'retired' some time before actually reaching this point, and that attempting to change this perspective could be difficult for advisers. The advisory approach of concurring that employer age discrimination was a real issue was perceived by one participant as reinforcing a client's lack of motivation and in effect 'talking him into retirement'. A more solution-focused approach was thought more effective. The need to intervene earlier with older jobseekers, before motivation became low and people 'wrote themselves off' was also mentioned. It was suggested that group sessions might be an effective and efficient way of conveying information and support to large numbers of older JSA claimants, including, for example, guidance on job search strategies, information about available support, details of age discrimination legislation, and presentations or activities designed to motivate and encourage older jobseekers.

People who raised age as a barrier to work tended to be longer-term JSA claimants. There was some suggestion, therefore, that age becomes an 'explanatory factor' in prolonged periods of unsuccessful jobseeking. Moreover, mentions of perceived employer age discrimination came mainly from people who were meeting with an adviser for the first time in several months, rather than new claimants or those attending subsequent New Deal WFIs. This finding suggests that there may be fairly limited and discrete 'windows' in which people take the opportunity to raise concerns about age as a barrier to work. Recalling the recording [080] (see Chapter 5, Box 5.4 and accompanying discussion), where the client delayed for

some time mentioning his concerns about age to the adviser, there is perhaps an implication of a need to offer multiple interactional 'openings' to give older clients opportunities to voice their full range of concerns.

The post-interviews suggested that advisers have varying levels of optimism about what can be done to help different clients back to work. A key observation was that, where advisers voiced some pessimism about a client's prospects for work, this tended not to be evident in the WFI itself. We do not know from the available data whether advisers pursued discussion of the interplay between age and capacity for certain types of work in subsequent meetings. However, the topic of retraining or redeployment seems an important area of discussion to expand with older clients for whom changes in health or general stamina may increasingly preclude returning to certain types of work which they have undertaken in the past. Additionally, although we cannot draw inferences from the present data, the potential influence of low adviser expectations on their practices during WFIs (be that conscious or subconscious) is another question of significance.

6.2 Recommendations for effective practice with older clients

The question of what makes for effective strategies for Jobcentre Plus advisers when interacting with older clients is not one that can be answered in a straightforward way from the present data alone. The question is complicated particularly by the matter of whether 'older clients' form a cohort that can be meaningfully defined or described. Having conducted the present study, we concur with Hasluck and Green's observation that *in many instances the customer groups are simply too all embracing to be useful as a guide to provision* and that an holistic approach is required, rather than one based on the perceived relevance of one characteristic (2007, p.44). Moreover, the present data provide little evidence to suggest that 50 years of age is necessarily a point beyond which clients become meaningfully or consistently distinct from those below age 50.

The implication is that we cannot say in any unequivocal way what constitutes 'more effective' practice for advisers when interacting with older clients. Given the heterogeneity in the 50+ group, there is arguably no particular set of 'strategies' that works specifically for older clients thus defined. The main study (see Drew *et al.*, 2010, Chapter 6) has identified a range of strategies which may be more effective **overall** in client-adviser interactions, including collaboration, directivity, proactivity, positivity and challenge. We propose that each of these remains important across the age range; none appears to be age-specific and all are effective only when applied in a way that is appropriate and tailored to the individual client's circumstances. In summary, we suggest that – in common with people of any age – effective advisory practice with older clients should remain centred on a personalised and flexible approach, involving (as appropriate to the individual) a combination of collaboration, directivity, proactivity, positivity and challenge.

However, we suggest that there is scope for advisers to engage more effectively in scenarios where clients raise the matter of age discrimination, through more direct, practical and constructive responses to such concerns. Therefore, the following approaches are recommended:

- acknowledge clients' concerns about age discrimination and invite them to elaborate on how they have arrived at this view;
- offer examples of employers who take a positive approach to older workers (identifying local employers where possible);
- work collaboratively with the client to identify the particular skills they **personally** can offer employers;
- provide specific advice on how to convey such information in applications;
- provide accessible information on age discrimination legislation to equip and empower the client.

Based on the available data and findings of this study, we are less inclined to make more overarching practice recommendations relating to adviser interactions with the 50+ client group. The aspects of advisory practice where we have identified tentative areas of difference (summarised in Table 6.1) cover both substantive content of WFIs, for example, whether or not a job search or a BOC is carried out, and more nuanced interactional differences in advisers' choice of words or emphasis used in conveying different elements of the WFI. Prior to formulating specific practice recommendations (which we do not feel is within the scope of the present study), an important next step is to reflect on the **implications** of the findings which have emerged from the analysis of WFI recordings with people of different ages. The key question to be asked at this point is: if these findings do reflect more general and widespread tendencies, what difference do the differences make? In the final section of this chapter, we offer some initial reflections on this.

6.3 Policy implications and future research

As discussed in Section 6.1, this study has highlighted a number of areas in which differential advisory practice was apparent during WFIs with clients of different ages. In considering the implications of these differences, what is important to keep in mind is that differential practice does not necessarily equate to less effective practice for one or another cohort or individual. In developing recommendations for effective advisory practice, it is essential to think through the possible effect of, or rationale for, each area of difference. Some of the differences summarised in Table 6.1 appear to be nothing more than the appropriate implementation of current Jobcentre Plus policy, for example, granting 13-week 'permitted periods' to people with established fields of work, during which they can limit the types of work that they look for. At the more interactional level, taking a more moderate approach to explaining the conditionality requirements of JSA receipt may indeed

facilitate a better rapport with older clients during NJIs, particularly people who have previous experience of the regime. Likewise, offering the acknowledgement that the national minimum wage may not reflect a client's prior earnings level may be an effective way of showing sensitivity to an older jobseeker's circumstances. However, overlooking the assisted job search or presuming that older clients' job goals will remain unchanged over time may miss important opportunities to support older clients in thinking through – or perhaps **rethinking** – their route back to work.

This study looked only at initial WFIs for IB claimants and, as is known from previous research, this first meeting is often not the time at which detailed return-to-work plans are discussed. It may indeed be appropriate to take a gentler and more paced approach to work-related activity with this benefit cohort. However, the present data indicates that even the oldest IB claimants generally do hope to return to some kind of employment as and when health permits. Therefore, too great a degree of caution or reticence on the part of advisers to initiate work-focused discussion with this client group may be misplaced and again miss opportunities to assist clients in thinking through their options. The data set available to this study is not sufficient to form conclusions with regard to the influence of adviser practices on **outcomes** of Pathways to Work for older clients. However, it might be inferred that the implications of deferring more active focus on work-related activity and support could be greater for older clients, particularly those who are not mandated to attend further WFIs under Pathways to Work.

Regarding the recommendations we have made in Section 6.2, the feasibility of such adviser practice within the scope of the advisory role as currently designed is something which Jobcentre Plus and DWP policy makers may wish to consider further. Some of these elements of support may be beyond the scope of the Jobcentre Plus adviser remit and require the input of specialist external organisations, such as training providers, careers counsellors or advocacy groups. As such, it would be important for advisers to have comprehensive knowledge of the wider range of support sources and have the means to make referrals as appropriate.

Finally, it seems there would be value in reflecting on the notion of the 'older client' and how this cohort is identified and defined. In investigating age-related difference, this study took the age range 50 and above as defining 'older' clients, following from the definition in general use in DWP and Jobcentre Plus policy and programmes. However, the findings of this study and also previous research (e.g. Hasluck and Green, 2007; Kemp and Davidson, 2007; Phillipson and Smith, 2005) suggest that attitudes to employment begin to change more significantly in people's later 50s and may vary by subgroup. There was some evidence in this study that people in their early to mid 50s may retain more in common with those in their mid to late 40s. Thus, 50+ may not necessarily be a meaningful division around which to design policy interventions.

In summary, the policy implications emerging from this study are to:

- think through the aspects of the WFI process which might be appropriately and effectively tailored to different clients and those which should remain consistent;
- equip advisers with accessible information about age discrimination legislation and referral channels to more specialist sources of advice and guidance;
- consider the concept of the 'older client' and ways in which this can be meaningfully defined and applied.

If DWP believes, from the tentative findings presented here, that there is value in commissioning a larger-scale, purposively designed study of interactional difference across age cohorts, we suggest that any future research design include the following elements:

- longitudinal, multi-method case studies: following a panel of individuals throughout their programme journey on New Deal or Pathways to Work and including recordings of all WFIs and also qualitative interviews with client and adviser, information about all elements of programme provision experienced by an individual, and linked data on overall outcomes;
- comparative analysis of individual adviser practice: including substantial numbers of WFI recordings of the same adviser meeting with clients of different ages;
- a focus on adviser age matching: in view of the findings of previous research (Moss and Arrowsmith, 2003; Collins, 2006) that older people appreciate meeting with an adviser of a similar age, investigation into interactional difference when the age gap between adviser and client is of different magnitudes may also be insightful.

Finally, there also seems scope for further research to establish an empirical basis for defining the older age cohort(s) to be targeted by specific back-to-work programmes and policies.

6.4 Final reflections

Considering our more general observations on content and scope of WFIs, there were few examples among this particular set of WFI recordings of clients' barriers being explored or unpacked in any depth. We recognise that this may largely be a reflection of the type of WFIs included within the data set. However, it nevertheless raises questions for policymakers and those involved in designing and defining the advisory role with regard to the intended function and remit of the adviser in different types of WFI.

As an overall observation, it seems that the NJI, as currently designed, is generally not a context for more personalised advice and support; potential barriers to work were rarely explored with clients of any age and there was little assessment of what individualised support the client might need at this stage of their JSA claim.

During NJIs, advisers' questions about qualifications, training and skills seemed only to be for the purposes of background information and were not opened up for further discussion with clients of any age, even where people stated that they held **no** formal qualifications or current vocational credentials. Similarly, where long-term health conditions were noted during NJIs, this did not lead to detailed discussion of how health might interact with work.

At the stage of the NJI, there was generally evidence of motivation to find work quickly and also sometimes a sense of optimism from both client and adviser. Thus, it may be considered appropriate that NJIs are kept rather more swift for people who demonstrate a work focus, have clear job goals and have shown from past success that they have an effective approach to job search (for example, among long-time contract workers). However, under the JSA regime in place at the time the WFI recordings were collected, older people would have been unlikely to meet with an adviser for at least 13 weeks into their claim and would not have received more intensive support for up to 18 months. It may be that this is too long to leave an older client without additional or more intensive support, especially if they would benefit from guidance in broadening their job goals or retraining.

Among longer-term jobseekers in the data set who were meeting with an adviser for the first time in several months, perceptions of age as a barrier to work became far more apparent and were mentioned by clients with some consistency. The enhanced support for new jobseekers recently introduced in view of the current economic downturn will include immediate support for those with limited job search skills and more intensive support and intervention (on a voluntary basis) at the six-month stage; it seems that older jobseekers can only stand to benefit from this.

We are aware that work is under way to reconsider the advisory role, in view of the large volume of changes undergone by Jobcentre Plus in recent times. However, an overall impression emerging from the WFI recordings, in particular NJIs, was the extent to which the agenda is governed by a relatively inflexible set of tasks which the adviser must complete during the meeting. Despite individual advisers finding more effective ways to engage a client in work-focused discussion, the process-driven structure of WFIs (particularly for JSA claimants) often seemed to prevail. If the WFI process is going to offer something different or more tailored to the older client group, then there perhaps needs to be a more radical change to the WFI regime and the role of the personal adviser.

However, for older jobseekers who are struggling to make the journey back into work, a far broader spectrum of support will be necessary beyond that which can be delivered by a personal adviser during a 30 to 40 minute interview; one which will need to draw in the co-operation and support of employers, training providers and careers coaches or counsellors.

Appendix A

Detailed overview of participants in WFI recordings

Data in Tables A.1 and A.2 are taken from information provided by Jobcentre Plus and Employment Zone advisers, supplemented by details that could be gleaned from the Work Focused Interview (WFI) recordings themselves. Some figures are estimated or approximate and the data are provided here for contextual rather than analytic purposes. The columns are as follows:

- recording number: unique identifier assigned to that audio/video recording;
- WFI type: distinct type of WFI the client was attending;
- client gender: male or female;
- client age: in years, precise where this could be gleaned from the WFI recordings; to nearest decade where not known;
- adviser ID: distinct identifier to show where adviser was the same individual across multiple WFIs. Letters A-D distinguish different Jobcentre Plus regions and numbers distinguish individual advisers;
- adviser gender: male or female;
- adviser age: indicated to the nearest decade;
- approximate length of WFIs: given to the nearest whole minute;
- approximate length of current claim: as estimated by adviser (information not recorded for new claims, but note that initial Incapacity Benefit (IB) claims were likely to be around eight weeks since the claim was initiated);
- WFI number: the number of times (including the WFI recorded for the research) that the adviser had met with that client.

Table A.1 Older client sample

Recording number	WFI type	Client			Adviser		Approximate length of WFI	Approximate length of current claim	WFI number
		Gender	Age	ID	Gender	Age			
12	IB 3-year review	Female	52	A3	Female	40s	18 minutes	3 years	-
113	IB initial	Female	51	B4	Female	60s	45 minutes	-	-
81	IB initial	Male	53	A4	Female	50s	32 minutes	-	-
14	IB initial	Female	54	A3	Female	40s	27 minutes	-	-
149	IB initial	Female	55	C4	Male	40s	16 minutes	-	-
154	IB initial	Male	56	C2	Female	30s	18 minutes	-	-
143	IB initial	Male	59	C6	Male	30s	34 minutes	-	-
177	IB initial	Female	59	C6	Male	30s	28 minutes	-	-
33	IB subs	Female	(50s)	A4	Female	50s	34 minutes	-	-
73	IB subs	Female	(50s)	A7	Male	50s	25 minutes	-	-
118	New Jobseeker Interview	Male	(50s)	B1	Male	30s	9 minutes	-	-
151	New Jobseeker Interview	Male	53	C3	Female	30s	32 minutes	-	-
104	New Jobseeker Interview	Male	56	B2	Female	40s	17 minutes	-	-
146	New Jobseeker Interview	Male	56	C7	Male	30s	40 minutes	(2 years) ¹	-
25	New Jobseeker Interview	Male	58	A8	Male	40s	12 minutes	-	-
80	JSA 24-month review	Male	50	A5	Male	40s	18 minutes	2 years	-
72	JSA 18-month review	Male	57	A2	Female	40s	27 minutes	18 months	1
215	ND25+ subs	Female	(50s)	A1	Male	30s	28 minutes	4 years	5
217	ND25+ subs	Male	(50s)	A1	Male	30s	25 minutes	5 years	7
214	ND25+ subs	Female	53	A1	Male	30s	30 minutes	3 years	4
40	ND25+ subs	Male	55	A6	Male	30s	22 minutes	10 years	2
47	ND25+ subs	Male	57	A6	Male	30s	11 minutes	7 years	3
71	ND50+ subs	Male	52	A2	Female	40s	22 minutes	6 months	6

Continued

Table A.1 Continued

Recording number	WFI type	Client			Adviser		Approximate length of WFI	Approximate length of current claim	WFI number
		Gender	Age	ID	Gender	Age			
228	EZ subs	Female	56	C5	Female	30s	77 minutes	2 years	3
232	EZ subs	Male	56	C1	Female	20s	33 minutes	2 years	19
237	EZ initial	Male	55	D1	Male	20s	80 minutes	5 years	-
39	ND25+ initial	Male	58	A6	Male	30s	53 minutes	9 years	-
98	LP initial	Female	51	B3	Female	30s	62 minutes	-	-

¹ This individual had recently worked for one week. The adviser explained that what should technically have been a Rapid Reclaim was been processed as a New Claim and that he treated the WFI as the latter type.

Table A.2 Younger client sample

Recording number	WFI type	Claimant			Adviser		Approximate length of WFI	Length of current claim	WFI number
		Gender	Age	ID	Gender	Age			
036	IB initial	Female	18	A4	Female	50s	35 minutes	-	-
182	IB initial	Female	20	C6	Male	30s	20 minutes	-	-
013	IB initial	Male	23	A3	Female	40s	20 minutes	-	-
116	IB initial	Male	28	B4	Female	60s	30 minutes	-	-
082	IB initial	Male	45	A4	Female	50s	15 minutes	-	-
156	IB initial	Female	46	C4	Male	40s	14 minutes	-	-
127	IB initial	Female	47	B4	Female	60s	42 minutes	-	-
155	IB initial	Female	49	C2	Female	30s	35 minutes	-	-
181	New Jobseeker Interview	Male	18	C3	Female	30s	26 minutes	-	-
026	New Jobseeker Interview	Male	19	A8	Male	40s	34 minutes	-	-
109	New Jobseeker Interview	Female	19	B1	Male	30s	25 minutes	-	-
122	New Jobseeker Interview	Female	20	B2	Female	40s	15 minutes	-	-
148	New Jobseeker Interview	Male	20	C8	Female	40s	20 minutes	-	-
110	New Jobseeker Interview	Male	29	B1	Male	30s	39 minutes	-	-
075	New Jobseeker Interview	Female	34	A5	Male	40s	19 minutes	-	-
152	New Jobseeker Interview	Male	45	C3	Female	30s	34 minutes	-	-
085	New Jobseeker Interview	Male	46	A8	Male	40s	39 minutes	-	-
006	New Jobseeker Interview	Female	47	A9	Female	40s	45 minutes	-	-
042	ND18-24 subs	Female	18	A6	Male	30s	23 minutes	10 months	7
059	ND18-24 subs	Male	18	A1	Male	30s	19 minutes	2 years	5
032	ND18-24 subs	Male	(20s)	A11	Female	40s	14 minutes	12 months	10+

Continued

Table A.2 Continued

Recording number	WFI type	Claimant			Adviser		Approximate length of WFI	Length of current claim	WFI number
		Gender	Age	ID	Gender	Age			
016	ND18-24 subs	Male	21	A10	Female	30s	12 minutes	7 months	3
020	ND18-24 subs	Male	23	A10	Female	30s	29 minutes	2 years	4
141	ND25+ subs	Female	30s	B5	Male	40s	7 minutes	18 months	10+
041	ND25+ subs	Male	41	A6	Male	30s	30 minutes	18 months	4
213	ND25+ subs	Male	30s	A1	Male	30s	45 minutes	2 years	4
220	ND25+ subs	Male	30s	A1	Male	30s	18 minutes	19 months	2
002	ND25+ subs	Female	40s	A12	Female	50s	29 minutes	21 months	7

Appendix B

Transcription conventions

PA:/Cla:	Speaker labels (PA: = Personal Advisor; Cla = claimant)
=	Links talk produced in close temporal proximity (latched talk)
° °	Encloses talk which is produced quietly
<u>underline</u>	Underlining used to mark words or syllables which are given special emphasis of some kind
CAPS	Words or parts of words spoken loudly marked in capital letters
s:::	Sustained or stretched sound; the more colons, the longer the sound
.hhh	Inbreath, each 'h' indicating one tenth of a second
[]	Encloses talk produced in overlap i.e. when more than one speaker is speaking
(word)	Parentheses indicate transcriber doubt
(this/that)	Alternative hearings
((description))	Description of what can be heard, rather than transcription e.g. ((shuffling papers))
cu-	Cut-off word or sound
(0.6)	Silence in seconds
(.)	Silence of less than two tenths of a second
↑	Marks high pitch
> <	Marks speeding up delivery (in talk between the facing arrows)
(h)	Indicates laughter while speaking (aspiration)

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