

Channel Shift Case Study

Guidance Area #1:	Understanding How/Why People Use Your Service
Provided By:	Hertfordshire County Council (HCC)
Sector:	Local Government
Service:	Online Free School Meals

Free school meals and other related benefits can be claimed by parents of school children from families on low income in receipt of certain 'gateway' benefits. HCC deals with 350 to 400 free school meals transactions per month and launched its online service in 2005. The online service currently deals with about 60% of transactions; the agreed proportionate and realistic target being 70% - given local accessibility and capability issues. HCC remain on course to meet their 70% target this year.

This case study - based on actions taken before the development of the Government Service Design Manual and the guidance on Increasing digital take-up - illustrates the importance of *understanding how and why people use your service*.

What They Did:

HCC asks everyone using an online service to complete a short [exit survey](#) with seven questions about their experience of using the online service.

There is a separate [customer satisfaction](#) link on the main website that collects additional feedback.

All exit survey replies and any relevant feedback from the customer satisfaction surveys are regularly reviewed to improve understanding of the customer experience.

Appropriate responses are made to comments (if contact details are provided) and changes are made (where practicable) to improve the customer journey. For example, from user feedback HCC have added more links or additional material; included contact details, and developed specific Q&A for their FAQ pages.

Key Lessons Learnt:

Work with partners in the delivery chain: Initially, the online service was built to support the internal processes within HCC. However, the full end to end process could not be done without checking that the applicant was in receipt of DWP benefits. This need to verify entitlement to the gateway benefits created an inbuilt delay to the service and an offline intervention by HCC staff. In 2009 an eligibility checker was added to the service with the support of DWP. This enables

HCC, using informed consent, to electronically request confirmation from DWP that the relevant benefit(s) are in payment and this is done during the application process. This created a true end to end online service - removing unnecessary delays in awarding free school meals.

Internal perceptions can create barriers: The eligibility checker uses informed consent to make requests for information to a third party (DWP) but HCC have been prevented from using e-mail for correspondence to parents or carers because of perceived risks in the use of personal data relating to the child/ren. This means that while the application is done online, and background checks are made electronically, it has not been possible to automate correspondence processes where they include parent/carer and child/childrens personal data. HCC plans to revisit this issue shortly to see if alternative solutions can be used to automate and speed up the correspondence processes.