Universal Fiction: Imagining Something Different

Colin Watson, Open Lab, Newcastle University

The Digital Benefits and Disbenefits project explored e-government technology-generated remote self-service encounters in welfare benefit public services, from the point of view of claimants. The aim was to identify and mitigate the harms (negative effects on claimants) arising from digitisation design itself, separate to policy choices (e.g. legislation, regulations) or the inherent nature of digital channels (e.g. availability of devices, internet access, ability to use devices and software).

Ad:Visor

Camera and microphone-enabled glasses providing a collaborative

real-time shared view of a citizen's digital device and paperwork,

and audio communication with, a remote welfare benefits advisor,

advice and support due to work, caring, health, distance, poverty.

correspondence when using a telephone for both internet access

and speaking with an advisor, and sometimes also to the Helpline.

sharing the citizens environment (sight and sound) synchronously

head mounted and separate to the citizen's device (smartphone.

laptop, etc) so that nothing needs to be installed or adapted, and

<mark>also possible to look at</mark> other artefacts such as paper document The microphone and speakers allow verbal communication

apart from being able to see what is on someone's screen, it is

between the citizen and advisor, and also to collaborate in a

What is seen and heard by the advisor is entirely under the

need to be configured, made or consumed.

into the audio stream.

already used by advice agencies

Bene:Factor

Design Attributes

UC specificity

Coupling with DWP

Benefit knowledge

Design Attributes

UC specificity

Coupling with DWP

Benefit knowledge

Complexity

is built in using a mobile data SIM so that no other connections

control of the citizen, and can be undertaken wherever they feel

has easier access to their documents and other records, such as

at home. The advisor does not need log-in credentials to access

what needs to be undertaken and any updates to be made to the

online account. Telephone interpretation services can be linked

Head-mounted displays like Google Glass Enterprise Edition.

but predominantly using the "point of view" video streaming

capabilities to access "expert remote assistants over WiFi" rather than glanceable/voice-activated information access on

Continuous monitoring and validation of benefit rule eligibility,

ensuring citizens' rights to benefits are taken up and accurately

relationships between employment and benefits are not clear.

eligibility and awards; often this is reliant on Journal messaging.

3. Delays by citizens understanding and responding to Journal

Universal Credit account monitoring to ensure the correct award

is in place by cross-referencing the citizen's circumstances. with third-party algorithmic models of Universal Credit which

are updated as legislation, policy, and official guidance are

updated (e.g. as the result of appeal decisions). Also combines intelligence from all its aggregated citizen users' data to look for

possible to consume personal data feeds (e.g. HMRC employer RTI, open banking data, local authority council tax account

statements) and other public data (e.g. landlord portal, births,

have an effect on a claim (e.g. a new DLA payment). With live

deaths and marriages). These are scanned for possible changes

access to the citizen's account, and its eligibility/award checking

capabilities it is also possible to identify and track tasks required

of the citizen and agents/work coaches (e.g. To Do List, Journal

entries) and support assisted decision-making by analysing available data to propose actions to optimise a claim. If there is a

complete and return the UC50 form we have posted to you). Bene:Factor would indicate how this action might affect future

payments and also whether there were risks of sanctions and

side-effects on employment, housing, other benefits or awards.

Services charities and campaigning organisations offering guides

and benefits calculators, linking these to citizens' own real time

data feeds for the use and benefit of citizens. Some similarities

with DWP's use of HMRC Real Time Information (RTI) payroll

data and proposal to consume citizens' bank current account

ney advice. DWP's advice for decision making: staff (

data to assess people's savings. Automated/assisted decision-

making software. Financial services robo-advisors and apps giving

entries, and reporting changes, can lead to sanctions.

2. People's changing circumstances have a direct effect on

lated, and possible changes are correctly reported.

entitlements, and accuracy of award payment amounts and timings,

the wearer's device. Third-party telephone translation services

the citizen's Universal Credit account, as the citizen can log in

and show them what they can see, much like what would have occurred in a physical face-to-face appointment. The citizen and

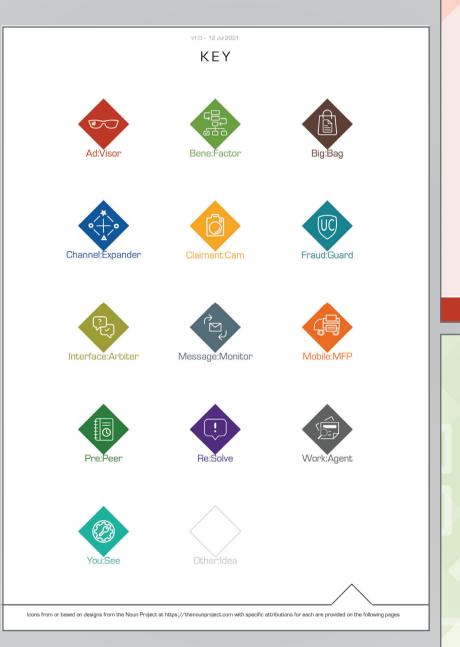
safe, secure and confident. This may also be where the citizen.

2. Difficulties sharing digital device screen or printed

shame, movement restrictions, etc.

Thirteen imaginary citizen-focused technology ideas inspired by discussions with claimants who are using the remote self-service welfare benefit system, Universal Credit Online, and those who provide advice or assistance. The full descriptions are published on the project website (link below).

A fourteenth blank indicates how other harms can be identified and other concepts to address those could be added for exploration.



A piece of narrative fiction was also created which describes the future use of these thirteen concepts in a single story, published on the project website (link below).

Four of the concept ideas (Ad:Visor, Channel:Expander, Pre:Peer and You:See) were developed further as speculative scenarios to be used as prompts in subsequent interviews and surveys with Universal Credit claimants. The scenario documents described the harms being addressed, depicting claimants using the concept and identified some examples of what might go wrong.

This work contributed to creating knowledge about how harms, negative impacts which impact citizens, arise in the existing Universal Credit Online, and how introducing additional citizen-focused features using digital technologies would add, remove, amplify or attenuate harms. The knowledge was then used to contribute to the design and evaluation of two digital prototype interventions which aimed to reduce some harms.



Complete descriptions of all concepts



Narrative fiction short story



Design Attributes

UC specificity

Speculative scenario documents

relying on memory recall, the actual conversation and events

can be replayed to ensure information and actions are better understood. Meta data collected with each recording includes

date, time and location permitting the construction of a diary-like

The recordings are encrypted and stored securely in the cloud

be added as Journal entries as a record of the conversation for both parties. Similarly, face-to-face meetings at Jobcentres or

assessment centres can be recorded and copies forwarded to

evidence to support mandatory reconsideration and appeals, and

The recording capabilities can also be used to provide evidence

chnologies. DWP guidance on citizens audio recording their

to counter errors in recollection or interpretation.

letter and CV writing, employer research and attending

but copies of Universal Credit beloline calls can automatically



Fraud:Guard

names without their knowledge.

when assistance is required.

mobile data and WiFi to people's own locations.

share information with intermediaries.

Physical multi-function peripherals which travel around

Multi-function peripheral (printer) which can be found in

every office. Local authority provided mobile library services unity transport services. Mobile-phone discou ariffs for households on low incomes such as Vodafone's "For





Colin Watson thanks all the claimant and other participants for their knowledge, experience and time, and Dr Ahmed Kharrufa and Prof Ruth McAreavey for their supervision. This work was funded through the UK's Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) Centre for Doctoral Training in Digital Civics, Open Lab, Newcastle University (EP/L016176/1).