

# PACE FAQs



Money &  
Pensions  
Service

## What is PACE?

Pilot of Adviser Capacity and Efficiency (PACE) is a technology-focused pilot to simplify how people access and experience the debt advice journey, while increasing efficiency to allow us to help more people in need to receive free debt advice.

## What will PACE be testing?

PACE started in March 2020, with a first phase which will test three key innovations:

1. **Virtual contact centre** to improve the customer journey by directing clients to an agency with capacity to help immediately or, where one isn't available, the MaPS contact centre. Clients will also be offered the choice of a scheduled call back or a self-serve digital debt advice route.
2. **Open data proposition** utilising credit reference, open banking and other data to improve the customer journey by increasing the accuracy and ease of data collection.
3. **Improved progress feedback** to allow creditors to receive updates on client progress throughout the debt advice journey to tailor collection activities.

## How will customers be referred through PACE?

During a phone call with a customer about their debts, creditors will assess whether that customer is struggling with unmanageable debt and discuss the benefits of referring them to debt advice.

The creditor will introduce the 'Money Adviser Network' and gain the customer's consent to refer through PACE, at which point they will have the option to receive an immediate or scheduled call back for debt advice, or to opt for online help.

## What is the Money Adviser Network?

The 'Money Adviser Network' is a new support network developed in partnership with the Money and Pensions Service to deliver PACE, where customers will be engaged with specialist teams of expert debt advisers from a range of high quality, free and impartial debt advice agencies.

## How does PACE differ to normal creditor referrals?

Many creditors have existing referral processes in place with individual debt advice agencies, whereas PACE, through the Money Adviser Network, is piloting the benefits of a shared infrastructure for the whole debt advice sector.

## Are customers forwarded directly to a debt advice agency?

PACE technology routes a customer directly to the next available debt adviser wherever they are in the network or, where a debt adviser isn't immediately available, to the MaPS overflow service which identifies emergencies and helps the customer prepare for debt advice. Where a customer has chosen to receive advice digitally, they will be routed immediately to one of the FCA-approved advice agency online tools.

All customers will have agreed to be referred through PACE, and will receive an email with links to further, detailed information about PACE.

### **Is PACE free to customers?**

Yes – our advice will always be provided free of charge. If, later on, there are costs involved in the debt solution a person chooses, these will be fully explained before they make the decision to go ahead.

### **How is PACE quality controlled?**

As with all debt advice commissioned by MaPS, members of our network and their advisers are Financial Conduct Authority regulated, which means that they must offer full advice and act in the customer's best interests at all times. Advice and systems are subject to strict quality assurance which means we, and the customer, can have confidence in the advice given.

### **Can a customer choose which debt advice agency they are referred to?**

Calls are routed to the next available debt adviser in any one of the debt advice provider agencies in the Money Adviser Network. Those customers taking the digital route will be offered one of two digital options on an alternating basis.

### **What if a customer does not want to talk to their allocated debt advice agency?**

When progressing through PACE, customers are engaging with advisers through the Money Adviser Network. All advisers within the Money Adviser Network, regardless of their organisation, are qualified to provide the highest standards of free money and debt advice.

If, for whatever reason, a customer is reluctant to engage with the Money Adviser Network, referring creditors can follow their standard process and/or refer a customer to the MAS Debt Advice Locator Tool.

### **What role does Open Banking play?**

Open Banking allows people to tell their bank to securely share information from their account on a time limited basis to a third party to help improve or simplify the service they deliver to that individual.

Through PACE we are exploring the benefits Open Banking can bring to the debt advice journey. In particular we are looking at how open banking data can provide a quicker and more accurate understanding of the customer's budget position so they are provided with the most appropriate advice for their individual circumstances.

### **Can customers refer themselves through PACE?**

In phase one, PACE will not initially be accessible via a public facing telephone number or website to ensure controlled volumes in which to test the PACE concepts. However, once proven, our intention is for PACE to also be public facing. In later phases we will route people to an extended variety of channels, including digital, face-to-face and telephone.

### **What are the PACE opening hours?**

For Phase 1, PACE will only be available for immediate call backs Monday to Friday with defined opening hours (from 9am to 3pm). Outside of these times customers can still be offered scheduled call backs or the digital route or a creditor may choose to follow their usual referral processes.

Part of future upscaling of PACE will include expanding the opening hours.

**Does PACE cover customers with business debts?**

Customers with business debts should be referred direct to the Business Debtline, which offers expert debt advice according to individual circumstances for the self-employed and those with small business debts.

This service is outside the scope of the PACE pilot.

**How will PACE be reviewed?**

MaPS has commissioned an external agency to evaluate the PACE pilot. As part of the pilot all stakeholders will be invited to participate in the evaluation giving feedback via surveys and interviews.

This comprehensive evaluation will inform developments within the pilot to help improve the service to customers and creditors.

**Creditors already refer customers to debt advice, so why is PACE needed?**

MaPS remains supportive of Creditor referral processes with individual debt advice agencies. However, it can be difficult for the creditor to choose a referral partner who offers the best fit for every individual customer and who is available to offer the help they need without delay.

Part of the purpose of PACE is to test the concept and benefits of a shared infrastructure for the whole debt advice sector which will route customers to effective debt advice and appropriate solutions via the next available adviser in the network regardless of which debt advice agency they work for. The PACE project will test alternative customer journeys and introduce open banking to support completion of financial statements.

**What debt advice agencies are involved in the PACE pilot?**

Citizens Advice, National Debtline and StepChange Debt Charity are the debt advice agencies participating in PACE as telephone providers. In addition, National Debtline and StepChange Debt Charity are also offering digital, self-help, debt advice support.