BBC NEWS

Lie detector to target claimants

Lie detection technology will be used for the first time on telephone calls of unemployment benefit claimants.

The system analyses speech patterns to identify callers who may be telling lies over the phone.

Those who are identified as suspicious or high risk will then be interviewed more closely by Job Centre staff.

Critics of the technology say it will intimidate people out of claiming benefits they are owed, and that it is an unreliable way to uncover deception.

Claimants 'scared off'

Anti-fraud minister James Plaskitt said a pilot project in Lincoln would help ensure taxpayers' money went only to the people who really needed it.

"We are stepping up our efforts to combat benefit fraud by testing the effectiveness of this technology in Jobcentre Plus," Mr Plaskitt said in a statement.

The Lincoln project will start from a call centre in January and the current plan is to interview claimants from the Nottingham area.

But Richard Excell, of the Trades Union Congress (TUC), told BBC Radio Five Live: "What happens, of course, is that lots of people get scared off at that stage, even though they do have a genuine claim.

> **No one's been wrongly refused a benefit**
> Paul Osborn, Harrow councillor

"There's a US National Academy of Sciences report which said the practical performance of voice stress analysis for detecting deception has not been impressive.

"This is bad science being used to victimise genuine claimants."

In recent months, some local authorities have already used the system to combat housing benefit and council tax fraud.

They include Durham City, Sedgefield, Chester-le-Street and Derwentside, in County Durham, Edinburgh City Council, Harrow, in north-west London, and Birmingham.

Targeting resources

Harrow councillor Paul Osborn, a Conservative, said a pilot of the system had saved the authority £120,000.

> **This is bad science being used to victimise genuine claimants**
> Richard Excell, TUC

He told Five Live: "No one's been wrongly refused a benefit. If they're identified as high risk, all it means is they need to provide further evidence.

"The whole purpose of this is to help us target our resources so the vast majority of people who are genuine claimants can get a much faster service.

"Those people who we think we need to take a closer look at, we can actually dedicate our resources to take a closer look at their claim."

Similar systems have already been used for a number of years in the insurance industry.