

Research report

Study of School Gates Employment Support Initiative

by Rachel Marangozov and Sara Dewson

Department for Work and Pensions

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Rachel Marangozov and Sara Dewson

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Abbreviations

ABG	Area based grant
CPU	Child Poverty Unit
CRB	Criminal Records Bureau
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
EMO	Ethnic Minority Outreach
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
IES	Institute for Employment Studies
IS	Income Support
LA	Local authority
MI	Management information
NDLP	New Deal Lone Parent
PA	Personal Adviser
PET	Pre-employment training
POEM	Partners Outreach for Ethnic Minorities
PR	Public relations
PSA	Parent Support Adviser
RDA	Regional Development Agency
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
UK	United Kingdom

Summary

This report presents qualitative findings from the study of the School Gates Employment Initiative. This mostly involved qualitative research in 13 of the 25 pilot areas which included interviews with school heads, Regional Development Agency (RDA) leads, Jobcentre Plus, local authorities (LAs) and devolved administrations, parents and parent support staff in schools. It also involved two semi-structured group discussions with local partners at two practitioner events in November 2010, as well as a review of evidence presented in the Management Information (MI) and the quarterly reports from the pilot areas.

The findings of this report strongly support the notion that schools, Jobcentre Plus and LA employment advisers can play a potentially important role in moving parents from low incomes towards work. School Gates' reach to potential second earners and parents on low incomes, many of whom are not on benefits and are new customers to Jobcentre Plus, has been a key strength of the pilot. Many parents engaged in the pilot were also lone parents, some of whom were also not in receipt of benefits. In this way, many school sites have provided a critical mass of families within these target groups for Jobcentre Plus and other LA employment advisers to engage with.

However, simply making employability support available in schools is not enough. The experience of School Gates clearly highlights the need for a range of proactive techniques to engage parents and the important role that trusted school staff and word-of-mouth have in facilitating this engagement.

Overall, the qualitative evidence of the pilot's impact on parents' journey towards work has been considerable, emphasising the value of outreach in offering a personalised, tailored and flexible service in an environment which parents feel comfortable in. Parents appreciated being able to access support on their own 'turf' and moving towards work at a pace which better reflected their needs. Local partners also considered these features to be core strengths of the School Gates pilot.

The most effective approaches to moving parents towards work have been delivered by one or more of the Jobcentre Plus and LA employment advisers who have been able to co-ordinate a multi-agency response, or address the parents' needs by linking in with a wider network of local support. This has avoided duplication and has ensured that barriers are not addressed in isolation by different agencies. One particular 'added value' of having Jobcentre Plus as a delivery partner has been in providing in-depth advice around benefits and in doing better-off-calculations.

Closer partnership working has been a key outcome of the pilot in many areas, with many local partners effectively linking the pilot into existing provision and/or forming new partnerships to ensure that they can provide flexible parent-focused employability support. Successful partnership working has often depended upon the sustained and committed engagement of all senior partners, and particularly schools. It has also depended upon how far partners can demonstrate flexibility towards their own organisational culture and working practices in order to progress the pilot aims.

Beyond this, there is evidence to suggest that the pilot adds important value in other ways. School Gates provides an opportunity to embed the 'bigger picture' of work being the 'norm'. This is consistent with the Government message that parents who have children in full-time education and who are able to work, should be in work or actively seeking work. This is particularly relevant for communities that are characterised by entrenched worklessness and at a time when changes to the benefit system will require more lone parents claiming Income Support (IS) to seek work sooner rather than later.

There is also evidence that School Gates has been a key public relations (PR) opportunity for Jobcentre Plus, with positive support from Jobcentre Plus advisers resulting in many positive comments about the organisation from parents, often in stark contrast to much lower expectations that they had about Jobcentre Plus.

In the light of the findings and conclusions set out in this report, we make the following recommendations to local partners and to the Child Poverty Unit (CPU). All of these recommendations centre around how similar provision could be delivered more effectively and efficiently in the future.

- 1 Effective partnership working needs to underpin the delivery of employability support in schools.** Partnership working between local partners is key to delivering positive outcomes for parents on low incomes. As such, lead delivery agencies such as LAs and devolved administrations should work to ensure that they have secured the buy-in of key partners and that, where possible, the pilot is embedded within existing networks of complementary support in order to deliver longer-term sustainability and value for money. However, in some cases this may also involve linking the pilot with new providers in areas which have previously not worked together (for example linking employability support with wider family support or early years provision).
- 2 Involve the right schools.** Selecting schools in the most deprived areas has proven key in this pilot to reaching the target group of parents. However, within this selection, an equally important factor needs to be selecting the right school. The experience of School Gates suggests that the 'right' school is one with a head who is committed to, and on board with the pilot aims and who can recognise the ways in which the pilot could benefit the work of the school and its community of parents and children. The evidence also suggests that having a school which has the staff capacity to support the advisers is key, particularly in providing trusted 'frontline' school staff who could help engage parents in the pilot. Schools without these features would need to demonstrate that they have other support functions in place to integrate employability provision into the school and to help facilitate the engagement of parents. This would help ensure greater efficiency when delivering employability support in schools.
- 3 Allow a longer lead-in time and a longer time to run an initiative of this kind.** This is important in ensuring that enough time is given to plan delivery, secure relevant partners and achieve results. The experience of School Gates clearly demonstrates that 18 months is not at all an adequate timescale, particularly given some of the multiple barriers to work that many parents had.
- 4 Have dedicated resources upfront** to provide local areas with sufficient leverage to draw in local partners and hold them accountable to some degree. Additional resources do not always lead to additionality in provision or outcomes, as some areas have achieved both on very limited funding. However, it does help plan delivery and also ensures better levels of trust with both local partners and parents.
- 5 Draw on the pilot's archive of good practice to guide other LAs and schools** who are looking to address child poverty in their area through tackling worklessness and unemployment. The future trend towards greater localism in service provision will require experiences drawn from a variety of delivery models, such as those which were deployed in School Gates. Local partners in other areas may find this archive of good practice and achievements particularly useful when encouraging schools to participate in similar partnerships.

1 Introduction

This report presents qualitative findings from the study of the School Gates Employment Initiative. This mostly involved qualitative research in 13 of the 25 pilot areas which included interviews with school heads, Jobcentre Plus, LAs, enterprise providers, LA employment advisers, devolved administrations, parents and parent support staff in schools. It also involved two semi-structured group discussions with local partners at two practitioner events in November 2010, as well as a review of evidence presented in the MI and the quarterly reports from the pilot areas.

1.1 About the School Gates pilot

The School Gates Employment Initiative was aimed at helping parents and potential second earners back into work by providing employment and enterprise advice and support in and around primary schools. Ten million pounds overall was split between 25 areas in the UK with the highest levels of families with children dependent on out of work benefits. The 25 LAs involved in the pilot were:

- Barking and Dagenham
- Birmingham
- Blaenau Gwent
- Camden
- Enfield
- Glasgow
- Hackney
- Hammersmith and Fulham
- Haringey
- City of Hull
- Islington
- Knowsley
- Lambeth
- Lewisham
- Liverpool
- Manchester
- Merthyr Tydfil
- Middlesbrough
- Newham
- Nottingham
- Southwark
- Tower Hamlets

- Waltham Forest
- Westminster

The project ran from September 2009 to March 2011 and brought together in partnership LAs, primary schools, Jobcentre Plus advisers, RDAs and the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales.

1.2 Policy and research context

This section outlines the policy context to child poverty and the key research evidence on other outreach initiatives that have aimed at increasing employability among disadvantaged and low income groups.

1.2.1 The policy agenda on child poverty

In 1999, the previous Government pledged to eradicate child poverty by 2020 and the current Government remains committed to that pledge. Interim targets were set to reduce child poverty by a quarter by 2005 and by half by 2010. A reduction of 600,000 less children living in poverty meant that this first target was narrowly missed. Between 2004/05 and 2006/07, there was a 200,000 reduction in children living in combined low income and material deprivation. Tax and benefit changes made families with children better off financially, with the greatest increases for the poorest fifth of the population. Research has shown that child poverty would have risen without these reforms, but also shows that since 2005, these early reductions have plateaued.¹ There has been no reduction in child poverty since 2005 and the 2010 target was also missed, despite these earlier achievements.²

The 2008 Budget recognised this challenge and included a commitment to increase funding aimed at addressing child poverty. At the same time, *Ending child poverty: everybody's business* identified a need for a renewed drive on tackling child poverty to ensure sustainable progress is made.³ The CPU was established to drive forward the agenda across government departments. *Ending child poverty: making it happen* provided details on how this drive to tackle child poverty would be realised. In particular, it announced details of the Child Poverty bill.⁴

The 2010 Child Poverty Act set out four challenging United Kingdom (UK)-wide targets to be reached and sustained from 2010:

- Relative poverty – to reduce the proportion of children who live in relative low income (families with income below 60 per cent of the median) to less than ten per cent.
- Combined low income and material deprivation – to reduce the proportion of children who live in material deprivation and have a low income to less than five per cent.
- Persistent poverty – to reduce the proportion of children that experience long periods of relative poverty, with the specific target to be set at a later date.
- Absolute poverty – to reduce the proportion of children who live in absolute low income (families with income below 60 per cent of 1998/99 median) to less than five per cent.

¹ JRF (2009). *Poverty, inequality and policy since 1997*. York, JRF.

² Brewer, M. et al. (2009). *Poverty and inequality in the UK: 2009*. London: Institute for Fiscal Studies.

³ HM Treasury (2008). *Ending child poverty: everybody's business*. London: HM Treasury.

⁴ CPU (2009). *Ending child poverty: making it happen*. London: CPU.

Making it happen outlined four 'Building Blocks' for action to address child poverty, which LAs are expected to address in meeting the requirements of the Act:

- **Education, Health, & Family:** work here will ensure that poverty in childhood does not translate into poor experiences and outcomes.
- **Employment & Adult Skills:** work here will ensure that more families are in work that pays and have the support they need to progress.
- **Financial Support:** work here will ensure that financial support is responsive to families' situations.
- **Housing & Neighbourhoods:** intended to ensure that each child's environment supports them to thrive.

1.2.2 Tackling child poverty through increasing employability for parents

Employment for parents is at the centre of child poverty policy. *Ending child poverty* described work as 'the surest and most sustainable route out of poverty'.⁵ Similarly, welfare reform is premised on work 'as the best route out of poverty'.⁶ These policy assertions are backed by international research which shows that personalised, supportive approaches with an element of conditionality are most effective for those who are out of work, and particularly for those who are harder to help.⁷

Realising Potential proposed a new system of personalised conditionality, which entailed virtually everyone claiming benefit also being required to engage in activity that will help them move towards work.⁸ The review identifies the high levels of skill required of Personal Advisers delivering personalised and flexible support and the importance of locally available provision to meet individual's needs, including those of their family and the centrality of childcare in particular. *Realising Potential* is clear that progression must be rewarded, echoing previous research that demonstrates the importance of 'soft outcomes' receiving recognition.⁹

Since November 2009, lone parents have been expected to seek work once their youngest child reaches the age of 12, and since 2010 this has been reduced to seven years of age.¹⁰ In November 2010, the Government White Paper, *Universal credit: Welfare that Works* set out the Coalition Government's plans to introduce legislation to reform the welfare system by creating a new universal credit.¹¹ Universal credit is an integrated working-age credit that will provide a basic allowance with additional elements for children, disability, housing and caring. The amount of universal credit will depend on the level of income and other family circumstances. Universal credit aims to radically simplify the system and to make work pay and combat worklessness and poverty.

⁵ CPU (2009). *Ending child poverty: making it happen*, p.6.

⁶ DWP (2008). *Raising expectations and increasing support: reforming welfare for the future*. London: DWP, p.63.

⁷ Daguere, A. and Etherington, D. (2009). *Active labour market policies in international context: what works best? Lessons for the UK*. London: DWP.

⁸ DWP (2008). *op.cit.* p. 8.

⁹ Stafford, B. and Duffy, D. (2009). *Review of evidence on the impact of economic downturn on disadvantaged groups*. London: DWP.

¹⁰ DWP (2008). *op.cit.* p. 8.

¹¹ DWP (2010). *Universal Credit: Welfare that works*. London: DWP.

Raising skills and employability is one part of the government's strategy to tackle child poverty and worklessness. However, the 'Building Blocks' for ending child poverty also recognise the need to address in work poverty; around half of children living in poverty have a parent in work.¹² There is also a need to improve the take-up of benefits and in-work tax credits; evidence indicates that there are 400,000 children in poverty as a result of families not claiming all that they are entitled to.¹³

The role of outreach in increasing employability

Outreach has been shown to be effective in a number of recent employment programmes, targeted at ethnic minorities and partners of ethnic minorities. The evaluation of Ethnic Minority Outreach (EMO) highlighted that innovative methods used by outreach projects had particular success amongst Indian and Pakistani women, as well as people from the Chinese, Turkish and Somali communities. Key to success often involved employing workers from the same ethnic communities and supporting their work by innovative use of media and technology.¹⁴ Partners Outreach for Ethnic Minorities (POEM) also found that employing workers from the same ethnic communities facilitated outreach. It also found that outreach at the community level was key to accessing harder-to-reach ethnic minority groups and that sufficient start-up time was necessary for providers to test out what engagement methods worked best for which groups.¹⁵

Outreach targeted at deprived families and parents on low incomes also recognises the important role that outreach has to play in ensuring that adequate support reaches these groups. Baseline and interim findings from the work-focused services in children's centres pilot has highlighted the following key findings:

- There is a significant demand among children's centre users for work-focused services to be provided in Sure Start children's centres.
- It is important to establish trust and engage with parents in settings which they find more comfortable and child-friendly.
- Effective partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and children's centres is particularly key to ensuring parents are linked into holistic support and a wider support network, should they need it.
- A flexible, friendly, informal and personal approach is effective at engaging parents, and particularly those that are hard-to-reach.
- Many parents are far from the labour market, or are not considering returning to work in the immediate to short term. Therefore, the value of outreach lies in preparing parents to return to work in the medium to long term and moving them closer to work.¹⁶

¹² Harker, L. (2006). *Delivering on Child Poverty: what would it take?* London: DWP.

¹³ CPU (2009). *Ending child poverty: making it happen*.

¹⁴ Barnes, H., Hudson, M., Parry, J., Sahin-Dikmen, M., Taylor, R., Wilkinson, D. (2005). *Ethnic Minority Outreach: An evaluation*. DWP Research Report No. 229. London, DWP.

¹⁵ Aston A., Bellis A., Munro M., Pillai R., Willison R. (2009). *Evaluation of Partners Outreach for Ethnic Minorities*. DWP Research Report No. 598, DWP.

¹⁶ Marangozov, R. (2009). *Work-focused services in children's centres pilot: evaluation baseline report*. DWP Research Report No. 602. London, DWP; Marangozov R. and Stevens H. (2010). *Work-focused services in children's centres pilot: Interim report*. DWP Research Report No. 677. London, DWP.

Recent work on the evaluation of the Local Authority Child Poverty Innovation Pilot has drawn out fairly similar messages on the importance of engaging parents in work-focused activity by developing an open-ended, welcoming and flexible approach. The evaluation also highlights high demand for flexible and holistic approaches to supporting parents towards employment, and the innovative ways in which parent-focused approaches have been valued. However, the evaluation also highlights the time and resources necessary to secure partnership working, and also the time necessary to establish and develop trust with particular communities.¹⁷

1.3 About our study

An overview of the relevant literature provided the starting point for the IES research team, and most of the background to this chapter. The IES research team then chose 13 areas within which to conduct our qualitative research. These 13 sites were primarily selected on the basis that they represented a good geographical spread across England, Wales and Scotland and a variety of different approaches to delivering the pilot. However, we also included those areas which had started delivering provision early on and those which only started much later, to see what impact this had on the pilot. Also included in the selection were a few sites which were also running the work-focused services in children's centre pilot, to see what transferable impact (if any) this was having upon delivery.

Fieldwork in each of these 13 areas consisted of three days 'on site', conducting in-depth interviews with school heads (and in some cases, children's centre heads), Jobcentre Plus advisers, enterprise advisers, LA employment advisers, RDA leads, LA leads and parent support staff in the schools. We also conducted interviews with parents who had engaged in the pilot, as well as with ContinYou advisers.

Table 1.1 The number and type of local partners engaged in in-depth interviews

Type of local partner	Number of interviews
RDA leads and enterprise providers	5
LA leads	15
Jobcentre Plus and LA employment advisers	15
School heads and deputies	11
Parent Support Advisers (PSAs)/learning mentors or equivalent	17
ContinYou advisers	4
Parents	61
Other	4

While this gave us some in-depth insights into the workings of School Gates in specific settings, analysis was also conducted of the quarterly reports from each of the 25 areas to give a broader overview of the pilot. This included summary reports provided by the CPU, MI and case studies provided by ContinYou and the School Gates website.¹⁸

¹⁷ GHK (2010). *Local authority child poverty innovation pilot: First national evaluation report*. DCSF Research Report No. 208, London: DCSF.

¹⁸ www.schoolgates.org.uk

1.4 Overview of this report

Chapter two provides a review of pilot delivery. It details the scale and nature of 'core' provision across the 25 pilot areas before then reviewing the role of the RDAs, the LAs and devolved administrations and Jobcentre Plus.

Chapter three details the main methods of engagement which pilot areas have utilised, and which have proven more successful than others. It also identified those factors which made parental engagement more challenging and those which facilitated engagement. Finally, Chapter three looks at the evidence relating to who has been engaging in the pilot.

Chapter four looks at partnership working in the pilot – both that which existed prior to the pilot and those partnerships which were formed as a result of the pilot. The chapter then goes on to identify critical success factors to effective partnership working.

Chapter five looks at pilot outcomes – for local partners as well as for parents themselves. Finally, Chapter six reflects on the evidence presented in preceding chapters to draw conclusions and make recommendations for the CPU and local partners going forward.

2 Pilot delivery

This chapter sets out the scale and nature of pilot activities across the School Gates areas. It also assesses the roles of key partners in each area, including that of the RDAs, the LAs and devolved administrations and of Jobcentre Plus.

Pilot areas were given the flexibility to design their own delivery models of School Gates, so the scale and nature of provision varied from area to area. As such, this chapter mostly highlights generic themes and findings from across all the 25 areas, but attempts to draw out important caveats to these where relevant.

2.1 Pilot activities

Key to the School Gates initiative was the offer to parents of a coordinated package of support which would engage them, encourage them to take up training and employment support and address any barriers that might prevent them from returning to work. Local partners were granted the flexibility to deliver the pilot in a way which would be the most effective and sustainable, taking into account local programmes and partnerships. However, there were five core activities which should have been present in all pilot areas. These were:

- signposting;
- outreach and recruitment;
- personal advice;
- peer support; and
- tailored activities.

With the exception of peer support, all of the core activities listed above were present across the School Gates areas and were all identified as key strengths to pilot delivery. They are each described, in turn, below.

2.1.1 Core activities

Our study found that **signposting**, both to the pilot and from it, was effective in all School Gates areas to some extent. It was largely evident through marketing materials which were distributed in and around schools, as well as in other outreach locations which raised awareness of School Gates provision among parents in the local communities. It was also evident through the number of referrals from schools onto the Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers¹⁹, and also from these advisers onto other support agencies.

The extent to which signposting was present in a pilot area depended on a number of factors:

- the strength of partnership working (see Chapter four);
- partners' awareness of the pilot and its provision;
- Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers' awareness of local provision;
- the scale and effectiveness of marketing materials in and around the schools.

¹⁹ In the context of this report, 'LA advisers' refer to employability advisers who worked for the LA and who delivered employability support alongside Jobcentre Plus advisers in some pilot areas.

Signposting to the pilot emerged as particularly important in those communities where there existed a general mistrust of public authorities. In these areas, partners reported that signposting to the pilot, through organisations or community settings which the parents were already familiar with was key because it meant that parents were more likely to take up employment support. Local partners reported that mistrust of public authorities was often down to parents feeling as if they had been let down by similar initiatives and pilots in the past, and so a referral through a more trusted organisation often made the difference as to whether they would seek help or not. Signposting to and from the pilot was also important among those parents who faced multiple barriers to work and so often required the intervention of more than one local partner/agency.

Outreach and recruitment was also present in all School Gates areas as a core activity. In nearly all areas, this was conducted by the Jobcentre Plus adviser and/or the PSA and/or the LA advisers, all of whom took on the primary responsibility for conducting outreach and recruiting parents to the pilot. The PSA role in particular (or its equivalent in schools where it is named something different) emerged as particularly key to successful recruitment and this is discussed in more detail in Chapter three. However, in some other areas there were a number of other local partners who were responsible for assisting with outreach and recruitment. For example, in one area, this included an employability consultant and community worker – both employed by the LA; in another, this included a representative from a social enterprise which aimed to help women with children find flexible, part-time work. Most outreach and recruitment took place in the primary schools selected to participate in School Gates. However, in a few areas it was not restricted to these sites, with both Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers demonstrating a degree of flexibility in where they conducted their outreach and recruitment, often to fit around the needs and schedules of parents. More detail on engaging parents through School Gates is provided in Chapter three.

The provision of **personal advice** as a core activity of School Gates was a feature in all School Gates sites. This was mostly provided by Jobcentre Plus advisers, particularly when advice was sought about employment or training options, benefits or better-off calculations. In the areas which had an enterprise element to School Gates provision, personal advice was also provided by providers of enterprise support who were able to offer advice around self-employment and access to related training. In other areas, this was also undertaken by employability advisers employed by the LA. In some instances, there were other practitioners who School Gates partners could refer onto for more specific support, such as PSAs or learning mentors. In one area, local partners reported that personal advice through School Gates had helped complement their existing provision (which was mainly employment orientated) to offer parents career planning and information about career options as their children got older.

In nearly all cases, personal advice through School Gates was provided on site, in one or more of the selected primary schools where advisers had their own private space through which to engage with parents on a one-to-one basis. Personal advice was occasionally provided at promotional events (market stalls, job fairs, etc.) or at various school events (sports days, parent evenings, etc.) where Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers and other partners were present, albeit with less time available for in-depth discussions.

The development of **peer support groups or networks** featured very little across the School Gates sites. These peer groups or networks were to encourage parents to support each other as they progressed towards and into work. However, this was evident in only a few areas. Partners reported that the main reason why this was the least developed aspect of the pilot was because the limited duration of the pilot (18 months in total), and in some cases limited resources allocated to the pilot, did not allow for these groups or networks to be developed in any meaningful sense. As a result, this aspect of the pilot was less of a priority among School Gates areas, or where it had been a priority

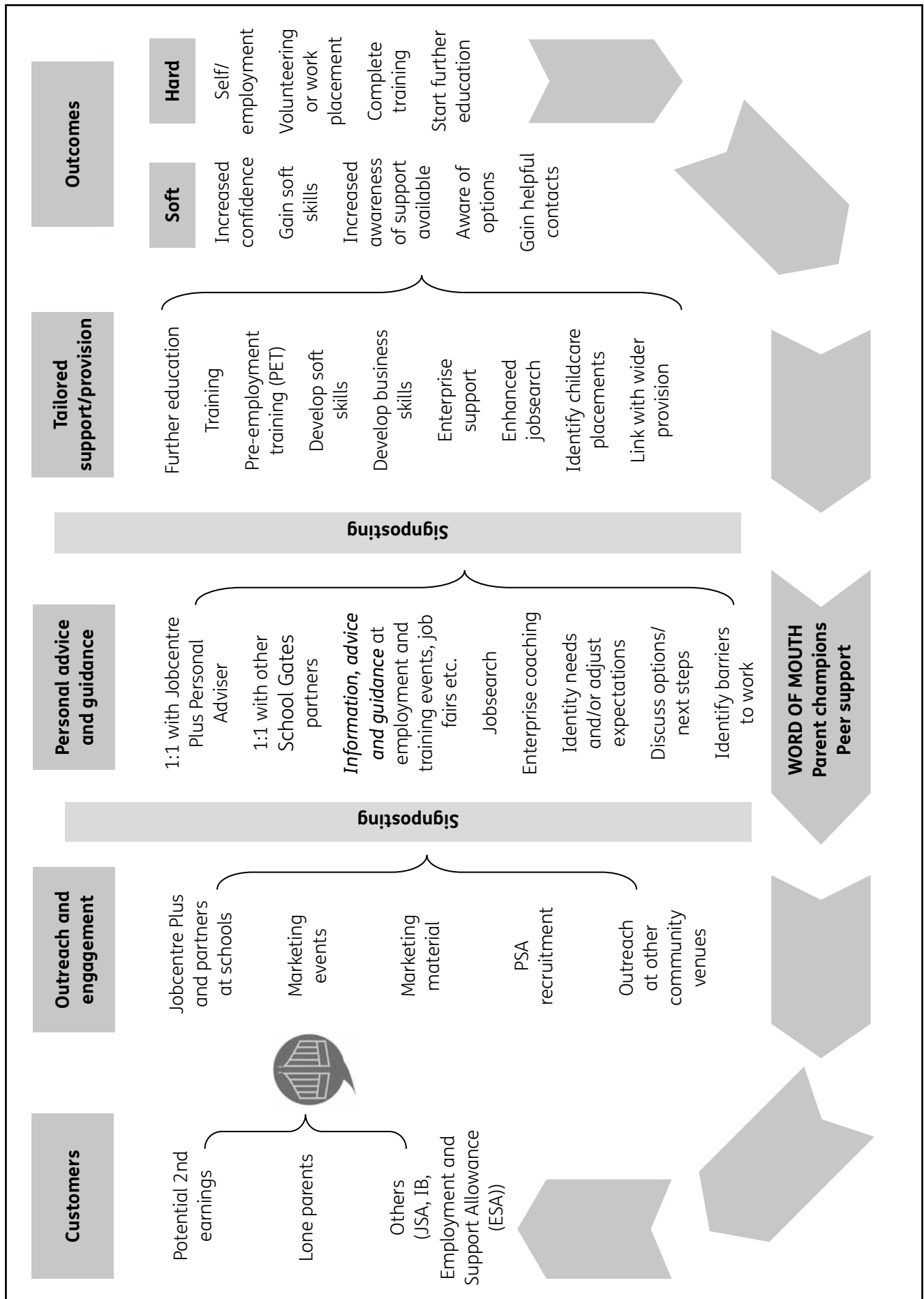
it was less developed at the time of writing. A few areas had started to think about the role of peer support and parents champions at the time of conducting the fieldwork, but many local partners reported that they needed more time for sufficient learning and achievements to filter through before they could develop this bit of work more substantially.

While parents in many areas may not have supported each other in any formal, structured or consistent way, their informal conversations and relationships with one another often played a key role in helping promote School Gates through word-of-mouth (see Chapter three).

Evidence of **tailored activities** could be found in all School Gates sites. Most frequently, this took the form of intense personalised advice, guidance and support to several parents on multiple occasions, in response to their needs (see Chapter five for more on this). This also took the form of referrals to particular training courses which were designed to meet the specific needs of some parents, for example, short courses on confidence building or assertiveness. Other tailored activities took place within school times and terms, and on school sites to obtain maximum reach into the target groups. A number of School Gates activities around employment support ran around, or with consideration to the school term timetable, with some local partners preferring to piggy-back off planned school events, such as school open days or after-school clubs. Where schools shared their site with a children's centre, Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers were often able to identify childcare places for younger children of parents, as well as accept referrals from children's centre staff who were aware of the pilot.

The core activities detailed above were envisaged from the start of the pilot to be of particular relevance to the target group involved: non-working parents from poor households who might not be in touch with employment services. This has been validated by the findings of our study, which show that the provision of these core activities were key strengths of the pilot, both in terms of successfully engaging and building trust with parents and in granting partners the flexibility to personalise and tailor support to those furthest away from the labour market. The illustration below highlights how the core elements of School Gates provision often worked to progress parents towards work.

Figure 2.1 The Parent Journey: School Gates Towards Employment



2.2 The role of the Jobcentre Plus and local authority advisers

The role of the Jobcentre Plus advisers within the School Gates initiative was to work with other local partners to offer support and advice to parents in an outreach location through a subsection of primary schools. Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers were expected to work with and through schools to engage parents in creative ways, in order to:

- increase eligible parents' awareness of, and take up of Jobcentre Plus support, particularly the New Deal packages;
- increase the effectiveness of Jobcentre Plus services for parents, and hence improve the number of job outcomes amongst the target group; and
- raise awareness of the Jobcentre Plus 'offer' for parents amongst other practitioners working with parents.

These aims mark something of a departure from the traditional adviser role at the Jobcentre, not just because employment services are to be delivered in an outreach setting, but also because it requires a new way of working which is arguably more proactive and flexible. As Chapter one highlighted, while Jobcentre Plus have undertaken outreach in the past, they have had less experience in delivering this on a full-time basis and no experience in delivering this in schools.

Other advisers working on School Gates tended to work for the LA, usually as employability advisers. In a few cases, this also included enterprise advisers, who were also known as 'School Gates advisers' and outreach workers. For the vast majority of these advisers, working in schools was a new experience.

This section details the experiences of the Jobcentre and LA advisers in terms of how they have settled into their roles and assesses their impact, drawing on qualitative evidence from local partners and the parents who have engaged with School Gates.

2.2.1 Experiences and impact of Jobcentre Plus and local authority advisers

Overall, Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers have settled into their role well, particularly considering that this has involved a new environment (school); a new way of working (less structured than a more traditional role at the Jobcentre Plus office); and a different organisational culture, with schools having different priorities, agendas and working practices to that of Jobcentre Plus and LAs.

A number of challenges to this role were mentioned by local partners (and these are described in more detail in Sections 3.1.1 and 4.2), but from these it is possible to identify a number of essential skills and qualities that an adviser requires to work on an outreach initiative of this nature:

- Good communication and social skills – they have to be a 'people person'.
- The ability to be flexible – to work around parents' busy schedules and also around school and term timetables; several advisers reported working in the evenings to cover parents evenings and at the weekends, attending school fetes, etc.
- The ability to be proactive and assertive – often the job required 'going the extra mile', following up on particular cases and proactively offering encouragement and support.
- Resourceful – in order to find out what provision is available locally and also to make best use of the school's own resources.

- Knowledge of benefits and the ability to do better-off calculations. Often there were other partners involved in School Gates who were also offering employability support, but Jobcentre Plus advisers brought with them an in-depth knowledge of benefits and in-work tax credits and the ability to carry out better-off calculations.
- Commitment and enthusiasm – Jobcentre Plus advisers working on School Gates often mentioned that they needed the ability ‘to stick at it’ as it was not always easy to engage parents who were a long distance from labour market participation. Enthusiasm for School Gates and its aims also emerged as an important quality in helping to engage parents and encourage positive working relationships with partner organisations.

In addition to these qualities, a sound knowledge of local provision also emerged as important for an adviser to have, with many interviewees saying that it was essential to know about, and to link in with, what is available locally.

Perhaps the most powerful testament to the success of many Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers in engaging parents (using many of the skills listed above) came from parents themselves, many of whom reported that they thought the advisers were friendly, helpful and trustworthy. Many knew their advisers by first names only and described their relationships with them in positive terms.

‘My self-esteem was very low but [named Jobcentre Plus adviser] has helped me get my confidence back. As a result of this, I have gone to college, passed my exam and will be moving on to the next level. I have also started paid employment and feel that I have much brighter prospects.’

(Parent)

2.3 The role of Regional Development Agencies and enterprise provision

Six RDAs across England were part of School Gates pilot: The North West Development Agency, the East Midlands Development Agency, the North East Development Agency, the West Midlands Development Agency, the Yorkshire and Humberside Development Agency and the London Development Agency.

The role of the RDAs in the School Gates pilot was to encourage more parents from the target group to consider enterprise as an option as they return to work, and to support those who want to start their own business. Specifically, RDAs’ work on this pilot was to:

- ensure that more low income parents, particularly mothers, understand and consider enterprise as an option for them;
- ensure more parents make informed decisions to become self-employed;
- consider working with Jobcentre Plus so that parents are prepared for, and consider, both employment and self-employment as options as they return to work; and
- increase the engagement of low income, non-working mothers with Business Link and other enterprise services.

Due to different governance structures in Scotland and Wales, the devolved administrations were given responsibility for these tasks in their corresponding areas. In the case of London, the responsibility for delivering enterprise provision was deferred to LAs.

2.3.1 The scale and nature of provision

The scale of enterprise provision varied considerably across the 25 School Gates areas. In some of the areas, where there was dedicated enterprise provision provided through the RDA, this mostly took the form of at least one dedicated enterprise coach or adviser working in schools. This was often supported by promotional events to raise the profile of the School Gates project and raise awareness of the enterprise support on offer among parents. It was also often supported by training courses offering business skills or other support for self-employment. The findings from our qualitative fieldwork indicate that most local partners were satisfied with the additional enterprise services provided in their area, particularly when they received feedback from parents which they had referred onto enterprise activities. Parents were also satisfied with the support they received with some reporting that they were already trading as self-employed as a result.

Case study 1: From School Gates to self-employment

Parent 'A' has two children aged one and six. She had worked before in skilled catering jobs, working as a chef in one job and running a food outlet in another.

She found out about School Gates through a 'market place' event in Autumn 2010, where a number of local partners were present. Through this, she met a representative from a social enterprise which was participating in the School Gates project. This representative explained what support was on offer and booked an appointment for her.

At first, parent 'A' admitted to being 'quite sceptical' about the help on offer, but attended the appointment nonetheless.

Thereafter, she attended several further appointments with this School Gates partner, who identified her previous work experience and skills and helped her identify what type of work she would like to do (which was to run her own business). She then gave her advice on being self-employed, organisations who could support her set up her own business, how to build up her confidence, how to network with self-employed people, and how to improve her organisational skills. Parent 'A' said she also helped motivate her by proactive encouragement.

Parent 'A' is now renting a shop and waiting for the licence to come through so that she may open a patisserie. She has also enrolled on an enterprise course with the main enterprise provider in the LA that will support her business.

Summing up the impact that the School Gates project has had on her, parent 'A' states: 'I always had this idea, but until I met [named adviser], I never had the confidence to do it.'

(Source: Qualitative evidence from IES fieldwork)

In most of the other areas, there appears to have been no dedicated enterprise provision for School Gates as such. Instead, many of the remaining areas chose to link into existing enterprise provision and support in the local area. This mostly took the form of referring or signposting parents who wanted to pursue self-employment onto local organisations which provided enterprise training workshops, programmes, free business advice, enterprise coaching and one-to-one business advice. In some cases, School Gates areas would bring in enterprise advisers or business coaches 'as and when' they had a parent or group of parents interested in self-employment. In other cases, the School Gates project would ensure that enterprise coaches and advisers were present at School Gates launches or promotional events. In one area, there was no additional enterprise provision but the School Gates project would purchase items required by parents who were in the early stages of starting up their own business.

2.3.2 Variation in the scale and nature of provision

There appear to be two main reasons why there has been considerable variation in the scale of enterprise provision provided across the School Gates areas. First, because School Gates funding was not ring-fenced, some areas reported that they had had funding withheld from the LA and, therefore, would not be planning to deliver dedicated enterprise support as part of School Gates. Second, the flexibility built into the overall School Gates delivery model meant that partners could deliver enterprise in a way which they best thought would meet local needs. So, in some areas, it had been thought to be more cost-effective to link School Gates in with local networks of enterprise provision, rather than commission or recruit dedicated School Gates enterprise advisers or business coaches. In a few other areas, partners reported that they already had good links with the RDA and existing providers and so would be building on this, not just for cost efficiency but also for sustainability, post School Gates. One area reported that they did not think enterprise provision was appropriate for their target group of parents, many of whom were deemed to be too far from the labour market to consider self-employment as an option. In this instance, the LA decided to use the enterprise funding to put on confidence-building courses, which they felt were more appropriate.

The variation in the scale and nature of enterprise provision across the School Gates areas makes it difficult to assess the success of it. It should also be noted that at the time of the pilot, RDAs were in the process of being disbanded, which also makes it difficult to assess how successful enterprise provision was across the School Gates areas because RDA capacity and ability to support School Gates was sometimes limited. One RDA had already informed several areas that it would only be available for advice on an ad-hoc basis, and another RDA had handed responsibility for monitoring enterprise provision to the LA lead. The relatively short timescale of the pilot (18 months) also meant that there were limits on how much enterprise support could be provided and how many outcomes could be achieved. One area, for example, only managed to commission enterprise support in October 2010 and so the full outcomes of this provision will not be captured within the lifetime of the pilot.

An analysis of the MI on enterprise provision across the School Gates areas against some of the outcomes achieved (where data has been made available) shows that where areas had access to dedicated enterprise provision, funded through School Gates, there tended to be higher numbers of parents engaged in enterprise-related activities. Conversely, areas that did not have this provision tended to have markedly fewer parents involved in these activities. This is perhaps unsurprising as many of the former areas had dedicated enterprise coaches and advisers working alongside Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers in schools to engage parents.

However, there are exceptions to this tendency in a handful of areas. This suggests that additionality to the pilot, provided through dedicated enterprise provision, was not always critical to engaging significant numbers of parents in enterprise activities. Some areas had relatively high numbers of parents engaging in enterprise activities, despite having no additional enterprise provision through the pilot. It is difficult to provide a detailed explanation of why this might be because of the partial data provided in the MI, but from the information provided in the February 2011 quarterly reports, it is apparent that having effective working links with local enterprise providers often played a key role in ensuring that parents had access to enterprise support, should they need it (even if there was no additional enterprise provision through School Gates).

2.4 The role of local authorities

There were 25 LAs participating in the School Gates pilot: 22 in England, two in Wales and one in Scotland. The key aims of LAs were as follows:

- to secure the buy-in of key stakeholders at a local level, and ensure that work was planned and coordinated to have maximum impact;
- to build and utilise connections with other related services in the local area, so that parents involved in the initiative could be signposted to existing provision and understand and take up opportunities available to them in their local area;
- to support and encourage local schools to work in partnership with employment and enterprise providers, and to allocate resources, as appropriate, to enable them to do this;
- to secure the delivery of parent support groups or networks in schools, either by providing individual schools with the resources and support to do this, or through providing centrally commissioned services that could operate across a cluster of schools; and
- to direct resources and deliver services in schools where they would be most likely to engage the target group.

In addition to this, LAs in London were responsible for the delivery of enterprise provision.

2.4.1 Planning and coordinating delivery

Evidence shows that most LAs and the devolved administrations played a key role in planning and coordinating the delivery of School Gates, usually via a dedicated School Gates project manager. Nearly all LAs had set up steering groups and operational delivery groups to facilitate this, most of which followed on from initial meetings at the start of the project with key delivery partners. These groups were usually led by the LA and were convened frequently to plan delivery, monitor progress, and address any problems or potential issues. In most cases, these steering groups were key to ensuring School Gates linked in with wider provision because they included members from partnership organisations. Some local partners also reported that they were useful in maintaining partners' commitment to the pilot and in raising general awareness among all partners about local provision and who/what they might be able to refer onto.

In a few areas LAs took the partial lead on delivery, alongside Jobcentre Plus which was usually the main delivery partner in pilot areas. In both of the devolved administrations, for example, advisers were drawn from both Jobcentre Plus and the local council.

It is also clear that many LAs and councils worked closely with schools (both heads and PSAs) to explain the aims and objectives of the pilot, to gauge their interest in participating, to explain the support available and to jointly plan delivery. This was particularly the case at the start of the pilot, but many LAs and councils continued to be in regular contact with the schools to monitor progress and obtain feedback from them. The number of schools involved in the pilot varied significantly from area to area, but many areas seemed to have on average about two to four schools involved at the start, with some areas including more schools as the pilot progressed and more schools expressed an interest in participating.

There is some evidence that previous experience of running Jobcentre Plus outreach schemes brought with it certain benefits to those LAs also running School Gates. Some of the School Gates areas, which also hosted the work-focused services in children's centre pilot reported that they had taken many lessons from this earlier pilot and embedded them into School Gates. A number of these insights were around pilot delivery and implementation, particularly in the early stages, but other lessons imported into School Gates were also around aspects of good practice, such as what works well when engaging parents and how best to manage relationships.

A few LA leads in London reported that they had spent a considerable amount of time managing partnership relationships and keeping some partners on board, which required more work because of the lack of funding guarantees. A couple of LAs had invested further time and effort trying to lobby to secure School Gates funding from the LA Area Based Grant (ABG). Only a few LAs were involved in working with schools to facilitate peer support networks, as this was not, overall, a significant feature of pilot provision across the School Gates areas.

2.4.2 Oversight and monitoring

At the start of the pilot, most LAs and the devolved administrations also had an oversight role in addressing the practicalities of pilot delivery, such as ensuring that risk assessments were carried out or that the Jobcentre Plus adviser had a private space in which to engage parents in one-to-one meetings. Some LA leads reported that this was not without its challenges, not least because of the short lead-in time for the pilot which left little room for delays caused by CRB checks or proper consultation with partners.

Nearly all LAs took on the responsibility of monitoring pilot progress, which included collecting data on outcomes and producing quarterly reports for the Child Poverty Unit. Where possible, LA leads were also actively involved in planning promotional and marketing events and securing the participation of wider local partners at these events.

2.4.3 Linking the pilot to local provision

Perhaps one of the most important roles that LAs and councils played in the pilot was that of linking it in with existing local provision. There is evidence to show that this linkage via the LA was crucial in ensuring that the pilot staff (Jobcentre Plus advisers, PSAs and other support staff, such as enterprise advisers) came to know about wider provision that they could refer parents onto, or wider support services which would complement their own. As a result of this, there is evidence of parents benefiting from a wider range of support services. This was particularly the case in areas which had seen reduced School Gates funding from the LA, and so which had to depend more heavily on effectively linking the pilot into local provision and pilots already running in the local area (see case study 2). Access to a wider range of support services brought a number of benefits to parents, included increased awareness of local support and provision which they could access, tailored support to address specific barriers to work such as housing or childcare costs, and access to specialist information, advice and guidance.

Case study 2: Linking School Gates to wider provision

Area 'X' decided to make use of existing locally commissioned arrangements for pre-employment training and support programmes, and develop further specialist support through external agencies as gaps in support arose. This was largely coordinated by the LA.

The key partners involved (Jobcentre Plus, the LA and a training provider) all put forward advisers to engage parents in School Gates and offer support. However, they were also linked in with the LA employment service, which provided extensive links with other employment and self-employment organisations in the area. Through this, Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers were linked into a wider network of provision and as a result were able to make over 200 referrals to other organisations.

As many of the parents were described as being a long way away from employment due to a number of social, skills and language barriers, the ability to link School Gates employability provision in with this wider provision was seen to be of key benefit to parents. As further links and referrals were being made, one local partner described the project as 'going from strength to strength' and one school head reported that she was finding the School Gates adviser ideal as a 'one-stop-shop' for the parents as the adviser was able to assist with employment as well as refer parents to any other relevant support they may need to overcome barriers and move them closer to work.

(Source: Quarterly report for Area 'X')

2.5 Chapter summary

The flexibility for local areas to design their own delivery models seems to have benefited most areas, as they have sought to link it into their own networks and existing partnership structures. Although the scale and nature of provision varied from area to area, there is evidence from most areas that all key partners have made a valuable contribution to the pilot.

Analysis of the core activities, however, has highlighted the key strength of this pilot: the provision of employability support within schools. The value of this outreach role is described in more detail in the following chapter.

3 Engaging parents

Engaging more parents with employment support services was a core aim of the School Gates pilot and so it is important to assess the extent to which this took place across the pilot areas, the challenges it faced and what worked well.

This chapter sets out the most common methods of engagement across the pilot areas and then describes some of the key challenges and facilitators to engaging parents.

3.1 Methods of engagement

All the School Gates areas deployed a variety of engagement methods to encourage parents to participate in the pilot. Two particularly effective ways of engaging parents were repeatedly mentioned in a number of fieldwork areas: the role of the PSA (or their equivalent) and word-of-mouth.

The role of the PSA (or similar) has emerged as critical in providing a ‘gateway’ into parental engagement for the Jobcentre Plus adviser in many areas. Nearly all PSAs were already familiar with parents and had trusting relationships established with many of them before the pilot started. Hence, their role in engaging parents and referring onto the Jobcentre Plus adviser emerged as key to effective parental engagement with the pilot. It also enabled Jobcentre Plus advisers to gain parents’ trust more quickly, particularly where PSAs and Jobcentre Plus advisers worked closely together on the school site. This was particularly valuable, given the relatively short timescales in which areas had to plan and deliver School Gates.

In some areas, however, where PSAs were not present, other key staff emerged as important in playing a similar role – for example, Learning Support Mentors, Learning Link Workers or Community Outreach Workers. In another area, one Jobcentre Plus adviser described school secretaries as the ‘heart’ of the school and received many onward referrals from their day-to-day contact with parents. A common thread running through all these roles was that they required frequent contact with parents and so allowed parents to build up an established and familiar relationship with these practitioners. A second common thread to all these roles was that they were often supportive in nature, and so required a degree of trust between the parent and practitioner.

Case study 3: Utilising trusted school staff to help engage parents

Parent 'H' has three children, aged eight, five and four. She had not worked for nine years.

She found out about School Gates through a coffee morning at the school, where she saw a leaflet. She was interested in the initiative but was worried that the Jobcentre Plus adviser was only there to 'check up on people'. As such she did not approach the adviser at this event. At another coffee morning, however, she was approached by the PSA, whom she was familiar with from previous chats and through having seen her in the school on a regular basis for a few years. The PSA told her about School Gates and reassured her as to why the Jobcentre Plus adviser was there. After this, she agreed to meet with the adviser and the PSA booked an appointment for her at the reception desk.

At the first meeting, the adviser gave parent 'H' additional reassurances and offered her an opportunity to ask any questions. After this, parent 'H' felt confident enough to seek further support from the adviser and eventually described the adviser as 'more like a friend'.

(Source: IES qualitative fieldwork, parent interview)

Word-of-mouth also emerged as particularly effective at engaging parents in the pilot. By definition, this relied upon a certain number of parents accessing and benefiting from the pilot first before they could inform other parents about it. However, many School Gates areas reported that once the pilot had got underway, this was often the quickest and most effective method of engaging more parents onto the pilot. Personal testimonials from other parents, friends or family were often the most powerful way of engaging parents with the pilot. Much of the word-of-mouth activity originated from positive personal experiences people had had with the Jobcentre Plus adviser, and to a lesser extent with other partner organisations working alongside School Gates. Some parents reported that they had first heard about School Gates through trusted family and friendship circles, while other parents said they had already told their partners and friends about the pilot, and how it might help them.

'Everyone in my family knows [named Jobcentre Plus adviser] because she is the only one who's actually really helped me to find a job.'

(Parent)

A few Jobcentre Plus advisers reported that targeting particularly 'influential' or popular parents within friendship circles was also effective, as this would then mean the other parents in the friendship circle would also engage with the pilot.

Some local partners also reported that word-of-mouth held a particular credibility among some groups of parents which was more effective and powerful than marketing materials or promotional events. This was particularly the case among parents who distrusted public authorities, or who had previously had a negative experience with Jobcentre Plus.

Key to all the above methods has been engaging parents through already-established and trusted routes.

School Gates areas have deployed a range of other engagement techniques which have also proven effective in some areas. These have included:

- flyers, posters and other marketing materials;
- School Gates stands at community events, job fairs or school events;

- ‘freebies’ for parents to encourage them to find out more about the pilot and to raise awareness;
- School Gates information in school newsletters, notice boards and websites;
- presence of Jobcentre Plus adviser in school staff meetings; and
- the recruitment of bilingual staff to reach out to parents who have English as a second language.

The most creative techniques have involved a social networking site in one area to keep parents notified about School Gates events and progress, and the use of prize draws in other areas to attract parents and initiate first contact. Some areas also reported targeting the school children (for example, through toys or games) as a means of then engaging the parents, while a couple of areas reported success with proactively texting parents to remind them of their appointments with the Jobcentre Plus adviser. In most areas, they were using a combination of one or more of the above methods.

How Jobcentre Plus advisers ‘branded’ themselves varied from area to area. In most cases, it was decided that overt displays of the ‘Jobcentre Plus’ brand (for example, name badges and written material) would make parents less keen or more wary to engage with the pilot. In these cases, advisers were simply known as ‘School Gates advisers’ or similar. Most advisers stated that while they did not ‘advertise’ the fact that they were Jobcentre Plus advisers in the first instance, they did not deliberately conceal the fact either as they considered this would be a breach of trust with the parent. In a few areas, it was decided that the Jobcentre Plus brand would not be hidden in any way, and advisers were openly known among parents as being from the Jobcentre. The evidence indicates that there is little between these approaches in terms of one being more effective than the others, and the feedback from parents (see Section 3.1.1) strongly suggests that it was often the quality of the service which they valued and not the organisation delivering it. The only exceptions to this tended to emerge in particularly deprived areas which were characterised by high levels of deprivation, entrenched worklessness and complex social problems such as crime and substance abuse. In these areas, local partners reported a strong mistrust of public organisations such as Jobcentre Plus, as well as of authority more generally, which would indicate that the former approach would be more effective at establishing initial contact and engagement with parents.

In many cases, pilot areas settled upon their engagement methods through a process of trial and error, and through their experiences of what worked well as the pilot proceeded. Time to test methods out, therefore, proved crucial for many areas. In some cases, methods of engagement were also based on local knowledge of the target community and in consultation with schools and local partners. For example, in a couple of areas, partners reported that printed literature about School Gates would be ineffective as levels of literacy in the local community were very low.

‘We’ve had a learning curve as to what events to attend: school concerts have yielded very little, whereas sports day has been very successful. I also think that each school is different, and speaking to teachers, dinner staff and road crossing staff to find out the best method of engagement is key.’

(School Gates Coordinator)

Engagement activities took place mostly in and around school premises. Many Jobcentre Plus advisers and school heads noted that ‘pick-up’ and ‘drop-off’ times in the playground or at the school gates were key opportunities for them to make their presence known, chat to parents, get to know them and raise their awareness about employment support. Some advisers noted that as they got to know the school children better, they were able to familiarise themselves with the parents more, and with the families’ circumstances too.

'I received a leaflet from my son regarding the School Gates gardening project, and starting your own business at [named school]. I felt I needed time out, but my son gave me the push I needed and encouraged me to meet with the School Gates adviser.'

(Parent)

Seasonal or term-time events in the school timetable (for example, Christmas fairs, open days, sports days, open evenings) were also mentioned as good opportunities at which to engage parents at the school, while more regular events such as weekly coffee mornings in schools had proven to be successful in engaging parents on a more informal basis.

Depending on the local delivery plan of an area, some Jobcentre Plus advisers engaged with parents on their own. More often than not, however, this was done alongside the work of the parent support staff, such as PSAs. Many areas had launch days to promote the pilot among the community, and information stalls at local job fairs or community events to raise awareness of the pilot among parents. Local partners often tagged onto each other's events, or to local community events to take full advantage of events that were already planned and would provide them with a critical mass of parents from the target groups. Many local partners reported that these events were a good opportunity not just to engage parents but also to get to know other providers in the local area that they could refer on to.

3.1.1 Challenges and facilitators to parent engagement

Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers who were engaging parents on a regular basis reported a number of challenges to their work in this respect. **One of the most frequently mentioned challenges to the work of parent engagement was the profile of some of the hardest-to-reach parents.** Some of the characteristics of this group meant that they were much harder to engage, either because they lacked the confidence or motivation to work or because they faced multiple and complex barriers to work.

'The project has had its issues. We weren't prepared for the level of parents with confidence and basic skills needs.'

(School Gates coordinator)

Local partners identified a number of barriers to work which parents commonly experienced and these included:

- lack of work experience;
- low levels of skills and/or qualifications;
- English language needs;
- childcare (availability, cost and often a reluctance to take up formal childcare);
- lack of confidence or motivation;
- mistrust of public authorities, such as Jobcentre Plus, and of public initiatives offering support;
- lack of awareness as to what local provision was available;
- poor health, illness or disability;
- entrenched worklessness and a lack of aspirations within some communities;
- complex social problems within some families, including domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health conditions;

- high levels of debt and financial exclusion; and
- involvement in the grey economy.

In response to this, many advisers reported that they were delivering very intense forms of personalised help which could often leave them with less time and energy to work with other parents. Examples of this kind of intense ‘hand-holding’ include one adviser accompanying a parent to a job interview and another adviser booking an appointment for a parent at her GP surgery, and accompanying her to the appointment where she was subsequently diagnosed with a severe mental health condition. While these examples were all challenging, Jobcentre Plus advisers often reported this kind of work to be rewarding nonetheless and many demonstrated a commitment to these parents that extended beyond just offering employment support. A few even reported that often they felt unable to refer these parents on to other support because it would be like ‘starting all over again’ for the parent to build up a trusting relationship with another practitioner.

Case study 4: Tailored, personalised support to progress parents towards work

Parent ‘X’ was a single parent with two children aged nine and ten. She had been on benefits since 2006, when her partner left her.

Parent ‘X’ wanted to work but did not know what support was available to her, or who to go to for this support. Due to her lack of spoken English skills and the fact that her partner left her, she lacked confidence and self-esteem. Although she had been assigned a PA at the Jobcentre, she only ever attended mandatory work-focused interviews there and felt she ‘was never able to find someone patient enough to let me put my points across’.

After meeting the Jobcentre Plus adviser at a parent’s evening at her child’s school, she had a one-to-one with her to discuss her aims, job goals and a plan of action. Subsequently, the School Gates team supported parent ‘X’ through reviewing her CV, helping her with application forms and interview techniques.

With this support, her confidence in her spoken English abilities grew and her spoken English improved tremendously. She was also referred onto a work placement and voluntary work from School Gates, both of which also helped boost her confidence. The School Gates adviser then informed her of accounting courses that were being run in the local area. Parent ‘X’ was keen to do the training and after attending the assessment and interview has now started the course which she is very pleased about.

(Source: Case study provided by a School Gates LA)

Another challenge to engaging parents was a partner failing to deliver what they had said they would. These instances of ‘over-promising’, tended to damage parents’ trust in the School Gates brand, or among the other School Gates representatives working in the school. In a couple of areas, for example, provision which had been promised through an enterprise provider and an LA respectively was not delivered. As a result, the Jobcentre Plus adviser and other local partners reported that this made their job of engaging parents much harder because the disappointment caused and the trust lost in the process tended to undermine the credibility of the pilot. Trust was often emphasised as being particularly important to engaging many harder-to-reach parents, and so letting these parents down tended to have a significant impact on how the rest of the pilot progressed. As one local partner, working in an exceptionally deprived community, put it:

‘Deliver what you say you are going to deliver!’

(Jobcentre Plus adviser)

A further challenge reported by some local partners was that they had noticed that engagement was more difficult in some schools but relatively easier in others. In a number of cases, this was because school heads were more committed to the pilot in some schools which meant that it was easier to secure the help and support of staff on the ground in engaging parents. In a few cases, this was because some schools did not have a PSA or similar to help facilitate a 'way in' to engaging parents. In other areas, it was felt that because some schools had very good relationships with their parents and the wider community in which they were located, it was easier to market the pilot through those relationships and links.

Case study 5: Schools facilitating parental engagement with the pilot

School 'B' was keen to build on its existing good practice and expand the ways staff engage and interact with parents, carers and children. They had seen an increase in family poverty in recent years at the school and felt School Gates was a positive way to work in partnership with a range of other organisations so that some of the issues relating to child poverty could be addressed through raising aspirations and offering a range of training, volunteering and job opportunities.

As a result of the full engagement and support from the school, the project steering group was able to plan and deliver a number of activities on site for parents, including one-to-one meetings, coffee mornings, group sessions, and jobsearch. The Jobcentre Plus adviser also received frequent referrals from school staff, including teachers, the Learning Mentor and the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO).

(Source: Quarterly report for Area 'Y')

A lesser challenge in some areas was that the Jobcentre Plus adviser did not have a private space within the school to engage parents on a one-to-one or confidential basis. This seemed to be less of a challenge overall as many advisers subsequently found a way round this, either by seeking to work out of another outreach venue (for example, a nearby children's centre or library) or by negotiating a room-share arrangement with the school staff. Many LA areas did consider this issue when they were deciding which schools would have the capacity to host the pilot, and so this did not emerge as a significant problem overall.

The biggest facilitator to parental engagement was undoubtedly the fact that employability support was largely being delivered in schools. This brought with it many benefits for parents.

Firstly, parents clearly appreciated the informality of the approaches by Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers, as well as the informal setting of the school. The informal setting of the school and the often informal approaches in the playground or at school events and activities meant that parents often felt more comfortable, more able to open up and trust the support on offer, and more free to discuss personal issues. A number of parents also mentioned that they felt less intimidated and less 'judged' by the PA than they had felt using the Jobcentre Plus office.

'The Jobcentre is more official and a bit scary.'

(Parent)

Secondly, having employment support at school offered parents more convenient access, as they often had to be present at least once a day, either at 'drop-off' or 'pick-up' times. Schools were also local to most parents' homes and some mentioned that it was closer to their homes than their Jobcentre Plus office.

'The school, I'm here every day dropping the little ones down. If I was to go to the Jobseekers I'd have to go to [named town], that's a bus ride and that's just misery. Then I'd have to take [child's name] with me on the bus and if I was to go to jobseekers she'd be on my lap, talking to me...I wouldn't get there, it'd be a Saturday morning thing and I don't even know if they're open on a Saturday morning.'

(Parent)

'I think it's great just because I've never been to the Jobcentre to meet any individual; I just used their computer terminals. I just feel, because I'm very attached to the school and I've been attached to many activities at the school, that this kind of opportunity for us at the school gate is more convenient, and I guess more comfortable to some extent. I'm familiar with this school, I feel comfortable and I guess in a sense you become more willing to approach [named Jobcentre Plus adviser] and talk to her.'

(Parent)

Finally, continuity of the employability adviser helped to a great degree the extent to which parents felt able to build up a personal relationship and trust with the Jobcentre Plus adviser or LA adviser. This, in turn, also positively impacted on how much detail parents felt able to disclose to advisers about their circumstances, and any barriers they might be facing in progressing towards employment, education or training. Continuity of the adviser role was also seen as practical for many parents who did not feel as if they had to 'start over again' with a new adviser every time they needed advice or support – both in terms of explaining their circumstances again, but also in terms of familiarising themselves to someone new.

A key facilitator of engaging parents was the lack of targets attached to the pilot. Many Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers noted that a lack of targets meant they had the time to conduct much of the outreach work that was so central to a pilot of this nature: to build a trusting relationship with parents, get to know their circumstances in-depth, and tailor their support accordingly.

'With School Gates, parents are more comfortable and open up more too. I get to find out more about their circumstances then and their barriers.'

(Jobcentre Plus adviser)

Another facilitator to successful engagement was widely reported to be consistency – that is, PSAs and Jobcentre Plus advisers being at the school on the same day and at the same time each week. Local partners reported that this sort of consistency was crucial for establishing trusting relationships with parents and for providing reassurance for those who might have felt let down by other organisations in the past, or who might have more complex needs.

3.2 Evidence of who is engaging in the pilot

The School Gates pilot was aimed at targeting parents from low income families and particularly potential second earners. To a large degree, we know that this was successful because of the way in which nearly all LAs and local partners selected schools which were in areas which fared the worst on a number of indicators of deprivation (for example, the index of deprivation or the areas which had the highest number of free school meals). This strong focus on the most deprived areas from

the outset meant that School Gates was already well positioned to reach out to low income families, and this is backed up by strong qualitative evidence from local partners on the labour market profiles of many of the parents they engaged with (see previous section).

The pilot MI does not provide a full picture of the number of lone parents that were engaged in School Gates, as only 23 out of the 25 areas provided this data against the total number of parents contacted through the pilot.²⁰ Across these 23 areas, there is significant variation across areas, with some reporting that over 20 per cent of their total number of parents contacted through the pilot were lone parents, and other areas reporting this figure to be less than ten per cent. However, an average taken from across these 23 areas shows that approximately 16 per cent of all parents who were contacted through the pilot in these areas were lone parents.²¹

The pilot MI does not provide numbers of potential second earners engaged through the pilot (the target group), and so it is not possible to provide quantitative information on this either. However, six areas did provide some data on the proportion of parents on their advisers' caseload who were potential second earners, and this ranges from 17.25 per cent in one area to an estimated 55 per cent in another (the average across the six areas is 41 per cent).²² While this latter figure is not a robust representation across all 25 areas, it is strongly supported by qualitative evidence from all local partners which suggests that a significant proportion of the parents engaging in School Gates were potential second earners. It is also supported by evidence in the quarterly reports, which indicate that many areas had a high number of parents who were not in receipt of benefit, either as the main claimant or as a partner, and so were effectively 'new' customers to Jobcentre Plus. Again, there is some variation across the areas but according to data provided in the October 2010 Quarterly Reports, two areas reported that a staggering 70 per cent and 90 per cent of their parents respectively were new customers to Jobcentre Plus. A further two areas reported this figure to be 70 per cent and 67 per cent respectively, while three further areas reported their figures to be between 24 per cent and 35 per cent.²³

This evidence strongly points to the ways in which the pilot was reaching families on low incomes: those who were either potential second earners, those who were not in receipt of benefit support at all and those who were in receipt of benefit but needed assistance to progress towards work.

3.3 Chapter summary

The experience of School Gates highlights that schools can provide a good reach into target groups of parents on low incomes or out of work, which Jobcentre Plus and other LA employment advisers would be looking to engage with and progress towards work. The pilot has reached a number of potential second earners, many of whom are not on benefits and are new customers to Jobcentre Plus. Many parents are also lone parents, some of whom are also not in receipt of benefits.

In terms of engaging parents, evidence presented in this chapter has highlighted the need for a range of techniques to proactively engage and target parents, as well as the importance of trusted school staff and word-of-mouth to facilitate this engagement.

²⁰ According to cumulative pilot data, February 2011.

²¹ Cumulative pilot data, February 2011.

²² Deduced from data provided in the October 2010 quarterly reports.

²³ Figures extracted from October 2010 Quarterly reports.

4 Partnership working

In many ways, successful delivery of the School Gates pilot hinged upon effective joint working between key local partners. This chapter details the extent and nature of partnership working in the pilot. It begins by outlining what partnership working looked like in many of the pilot areas prior to School Gates, and how School Gates linked in with this. The chapter then goes on to identify critical success factors for effective partnership working.

4.1 Partnership working prior to the pilot

Many LA areas already had some partnerships in place through previous experience of delivering and commissioning a number of public services, and drew on these contacts and existing relationships where appropriate to compliment pilot provision. Similarly, many schools had existing partnerships and programmes in place to support the delivery of School Gates, such as the role of the PSA or extended services provision. In many cases, RDAs also had a number of enterprise providers which they were able to recommend in support of the pilot.

In some LAs, School Gates was linked into wider employability programmes that were already running in the LA, such as Glasgow Works or Want2Work and Genesis in Wales, or into existing initiatives, such as *Skills and Schools* in Manchester.

Local partners reported a number of benefits of linking the pilot into existing provision, partnerships and networks. First, it reduced the dependency on pilot funding which many thought would help sustain provision after the pilot finished. Second, it built upon what was already there in terms of existing partner relationships; partners often already knew of each other's provision, had worked together in the past and trusted each other. Third, it was a cost efficient in terms of avoiding duplication and improving links between existing providers. Fourth, it meant that the pilot was more likely to complement existing provision, rather than compete with it. Lastly, partners reported that this approach was more likely to better meet the needs of parents by improving referral routes onto or from employment support.

Case study 6: Linking School Gates into existing partnerships

One pilot area linked School Gates into their extended schools partnerships that started in 2002 and which had become well established over the past four years. Each of these extended schools partnerships was managed by a cluster of head teachers from 8-14 schools who decide on its priorities.

Embedding School Gates within this extended schools partnership has meant that little additional outreach or engagement activity has been necessary to promote the pilot. It has also meant a wider network of schools (67) have been able to get involved in the pilot.

The extended schools offer is well-established in this area and local partners report that this, along with strong partnership working, has been invaluable in delivering the pilot and achieving results in a limited timeframe. It has also been invaluable in delivering School Gates in a cost effective and efficient way, integrating it into a much wider partnership network and thus improving the chances of such provision being sustained beyond the lifetime of the pilot.

(Source: IES qualitative fieldwork)

As mentioned in Chapter two, those areas that had also had prior experience of running a Jobcentre Plus outreach pilot (work-focused services in children's centre) benefited from this experience, particularly with regard to insights around partnership working and Jobcentre Plus delivery in an outreach setting. The insights around partnership working centred around the need to ensure that key stakeholders were on board and committed to delivering the pilot. Many noted that this kind of commitment often went hand in hand with a recognition of the direct benefit of the pilot to the partner's own 'client' group. Another key insight around partnership working which had been gained from prior experience was the need for flexibility when working with partner organisations (that is, schools) that have quite different priorities and cultures to that of Jobcentre Plus. Other key insights around delivering Jobcentre Plus services in outreach settings mainly centred around implementation, for example, the need to get Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks completed early on.

One partnership which was new to almost all areas was that between schools and Jobcentre Plus.²⁴ This was arguably the most key partnership in terms of the day-to-day delivery of the pilot. This is discussed in more detail below.

4.2 Critical success factors to effective partnership working

Partnership working in the context of this pilot was aimed at achieving sustainable improvements in the delivery of local employment services through utilising schools to improve outreach and accessibility to parents from low income families. A secondary aim was that School Gates areas might become 'trailblazers' by demonstrating to other areas what can be done to support parents back to work through schools.

Throughout our fieldwork, and analysis of the quarterly reports from the pilots, it was possible to identify a number of examples of effective and ineffective partnership working between Jobcentre Plus and the schools. By collectively analysing these examples, it is possible to identify critical success factors that were common to many of these cases. These are detailed below.

4.2.1 Senior buy-in from all partners, particularly schools

In many School Gates areas, the feedback to the IES research team was often around the importance of ensuring that there was senior buy-in from all key partners, and particularly from schools. It was felt that buy-in from heads of schools was particularly important in ensuring that School Gates and its aims were understood by key staff, that it was promoted through key routes in the school (newsletters, through the PSA, etc.) and that it became a priority at the operational level for all those staff who had regular opportunities to engage parents and refer onto the pilot.

'I have been very lucky that the schools and children's centres in the area very quickly got behind the service, which really helped me in terms of establishing myself with parents.'

(Jobcentre Plus adviser)

'You need to have one committed person at the school to drive it forward and if this is not the Head, then this person needs the backing of the Head. You need to ask the Head "Where does School Gates fit in with the ethos of the school?" You can't just pay lip service to community involvement. You have to walk the walk.'

(Extended Services Co-ordinator)

²⁴ Almost all areas reported that schools had had little or no contact with Jobcentre Plus prior to the pilot. School Gates Quarterly reports, February 2011.

In other cases, this buy-in took the form of heads sitting on the project steering group and/or getting involved in the delivery of the pilot at the operational level.

Local partners who were often working in more than one local school reported that the buy-in of the school head often made the difference to how successfully the pilot could be delivered in a school setting. It was felt that this level of commitment from heads often filtered down the school to impact upon more ‘frontline’ staff who would be working alongside the Jobcentre Plus adviser. Local partners also reported that it gave the pilot more of a profile in the school community of parents and that it made Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers feel that their work in the schools was welcomed, valued and supported.

The drivers behind this kind of buy-in from school heads were heads having a sound understanding of the child poverty agenda, of how it is experienced in their community of families and of how the pilot could work to improve the outcomes for not just the parents, but for the children as well. In other words, they could see the way in which the pilot could potentially work to improve the outcomes (educational and otherwise) of their school children.

‘[School Gates] has been a valuable addition to my parent community, particularly in assisting with parents’ English language needs.’

(School head)

Some local partners also mentioned that senior buy-in from Jobcentre Plus was important, particularly in terms of continuing some form of employability support in schools after the pilot had finished and in terms of understanding the value that outreach could play in hard-to-reach communities. In a few cases, buy-in from Jobcentre Plus line managers was also mentioned as important in supporting the Jobcentre Plus adviser in their new role, their new environment and their (arguably) new way of working, which was less structured and target-driven. For example, one Jobcentre Plus adviser reported that some of her colleagues thought her job was a bit of a ‘jolly’, especially when they heard about ‘coffee mornings’ and ‘school fairs’ (despite her feeling that in many respects her work was actually harder than the role she had back at the Jobcentre Plus office). It was in these instances that she felt reassured to know that senior colleagues were in support of her and her role in the pilot.

4.2.2 Having staff in schools who are trusted by parents and who can support the frontline work of Jobcentre Plus and local authority advisers

Parent support advisers and other parent support staff played a key role in helping Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers engage parents (see previous chapter). However, they also played an important role in facilitating the partnerships between schools and Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers, particularly at the operational level. Other recent research on Jobcentre Plus outreach in children’s centres has highlighted the importance of on-site support for Jobcentre Plus advisers working in outreach roles, largely because they are remotely managed and are working in a new environment.²⁵ Evidence from the School Gates pilots suggests that many PSAs and other parent support staff were working alongside Jobcentre Plus advisers to provide that support, acting as a frontline contact for the advisers and helping them with any queries they may have had about their work within schools, or with particular parents.

²⁵ Marangozov, R. and Stevens, H. (2010). *Work-focused services in children’s centres pilot: Interim report*, DWP Research Report No 677, DWP.

‘[Named Parent Support Partner] has been key to success. She has been on board from the start and she sends texts to parents every fortnight to remind them that I’m coming in. I know ‘Jobcentre Plus’ puts people off but [named Parent Support Partner] has reassured them.’

(Jobcentre Plus Adviser)

This support was particularly important in the context of School Gates because school heads were often too busy to offer consistent support to the Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers, on a day-to-day basis.

4.2.3 Sustained and committed engagement of all partners

In a few areas, partnerships were greatly affected by changes in staff who had previously acted as the School Gates lead contact within their organisation. This sometimes put a strain on the partnerships in place as it meant a lack of continuity to the pilot and drifting attendance at steering groups. This was particularly notable in a couple of LAs, where the School Gates ‘lead’ changed more than twice during the course of the pilot. However, it is worth keeping in mind that at the time of the pilot, many partner organisations were themselves in a state of flux or in the process of being re-organised, so this undoubtedly had an impact on the pilot. In at least three LAs for example, the future of the extended services team looked uncertain at the time of conducting fieldwork, and there had already been some staff turnover as a result of impending LA spending cuts.

Where partners were committed and consistently engaged with the pilot, it was usually because they all recognised the benefit (often mutual benefit) of being part of the pilot – either for their own organisation or, more often, for the benefit of their clients. More detail on this is provided in Chapter five.

4.2.4 Flexible attitude to own organisational culture and working practices

In many areas, interviewees mentioned that flexibility among partners was an important prerequisite for effective joint working. This was particularly the case between schools and Jobcentre Plus, where there existed different organisational priorities that could make the logistics of working together difficult. More often than not, this was not a problem and when issues did arise, partners were able to resolve them quickly by demonstrating flexibility with their own working practices. However, in a few cases, issues did arise between schools and Jobcentre Plus which did slightly sour relations between the two organisations. These issues did not prove detrimental to partnership working but they did depend heavily on a willingness on both sides to be open to each other’s organisational cultures and ways of working, and if necessary, to adjust established working practices to accommodate the requirements of the pilot.

One such example was the Jobcentre Plus contracts governing working hours of the Jobcentre Plus adviser and their annual leave. This proved to be a sticking point for some schools who thought that the Jobcentre Plus advisers should be starting work earlier (before 9am) to coincide with drop-off times, where they would get to engage a critical mass of parents accessing the school. In a few other cases, school heads were annoyed to learn of Jobcentre Plus advisers taking annual leave (of which they were entitled) within term time, when schools were at their busiest.

In other places, Jobcentre Plus advisers struggled to adjust their working practices to the school’s ethos and priorities. In one area, the Jobcentre Plus adviser felt as if the number of parents she could help within the school had been exhausted, and so was considering the possibility of inviting parents from other local schools on site to meet with her and participate in training courses at the school. However, this was vetoed by the school who saw that this would be in conflict with its top priority of safeguarding children. Both points of view could be perfectly justified in this case, but yet

no reasonable solution could be reached. In another area, Jobcentre Plus (and the LA lead) found it difficult to engage the school in pilot activity because the school had prioritised the delivery of its core offer and not the pilot. Again, this was justified given the context of the school's recent performance (it was close to having special measures imposed), but it did mean that joint working between Jobcentre Plus and the school was made more difficult.

4.2.5 Other factors impacting upon partnership working

The critical factors mentioned above do not represent an exhaustive list. As each area had the flexibility to deliver School Gates in a way which they felt would be the most effective and sustainable, many areas had different experiences of partnership working. Additional factors which some areas thought important to effective joint working included:

- the lack of pilot targets, which local partners felt facilitated closer joint working to meet parents' needs because organisations were not competing with each other to meet their own targets;
- all partners understanding the aims of the pilot and sharing similar expectations about the pilot outcomes;
- regular communications, whether through formal steering groups or through informal catch-ups with colleagues about the day-to-day running of the pilot; and
- previous experience of partnership working within the local area to deliver employment and training support.

It is worth noting that partnership working in the context of School Gates faced a number of wider challenges throughout the pilot. The timescale of 18 months for the pilot meant that there were limits on the extent to which new partnerships could be formed and developed. It also meant less time for pilot areas to see the outcomes achieved as a result of new partnerships. This was not as much of a problem for areas which were able to draw on existing partnerships, but it did present more of a challenge for those that could not. Some partners also reported that a lack of funding guarantees for the pilot made it much harder to draw partners into the pilot and to hold partners to account. There were also wider pressures on key delivery partners caused by impending budget cuts, staff turnover and policy changes in their own organisations. This meant that not all partners could participate in School Gates as a priority. At the time of the pilot, many Jobcentre Plus districts were experiencing organisational changes, as were some LAs, and RDAs were in the process of being disbanded. It also meant that some LAs cut School Gates funding as part of efficiency and cost savings.

4.3 Chapter summary

A strong message from all local partners was the importance of linking School Gates into existing provision where appropriate. There were a number of benefits attached to this, including being able to deliver better value for money, avoiding duplication of provision and ensuring greater sustainability of provision. Perhaps the most important benefit of this was the ability to meet the more complex needs of parents through a more joined up network of provision.

This chapter has identified a number of critical success factors to effective partnership working. Arguably one of the most important which emerged from many pilot areas was the buy-in and commitment of school heads. This commitment and involvement then tended to filter down to staff on the ground who were then more likely to refer onto the Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers. Drivers of this kind of commitment from heads tended to be aware of the child poverty agenda and understanding of the way in which School Gates could work to alleviate child poverty amongst

families at their schools. Other committed heads tended to be more community-focused in their priorities and in their belief that their school was a resource for the wider community. Often the most committed heads, however, were those who could see the potential knock-on benefits to their school children of having their parents progress towards work.

Another important factor in effective partnership working between employability advisers (Jobcentre Plus or other) and schools has been having frontline staff in schools who could support the advisers in engaging parents and settling into their new work environment. These staff often took the form of PSAs (or similar roles) or school secretaries and administrative staff, who had frequent contact with parents and had already established a trusting and familiar relationship with them.

Partnership working in the pilot areas has also depended upon how far partners can demonstrate flexibility towards their own organisational culture and working practices in order to progress the pilot aims. This has proven to be particularly relevant with regards to the joint working between some schools and Jobcentre Plus.

5 Pilot outcomes

This chapter looks at pilot outcomes from School Gates based on findings from our qualitative fieldwork and from the evidence available at the time of writing.²⁶ This chapter identifies the outcomes for key delivery partners and the outcomes for parents themselves as a result of the pilot.

5.1 Pilot outcomes for partners

Local partners identified a number of key outcomes from the School Gates pilot, and these are discussed in more detail below.

5.1.1 New partnerships formed; existing partnerships consolidated

Perhaps one of the most evident outcomes in many pilot areas was the way in which the School Gates pilot had improved partnership working among School Gates partners. New partnerships had been forged through the pilot and this was most evident between Jobcentre Plus and schools, almost all of whom had never worked together prior to School Gates. In most cases, it was evident that this success had been largely down to LAs selecting only those schools who were willing and able to accommodate the pilot (mostly within areas that were known to be deprived). In other cases, it was also down to some or all of the key delivery partners (RDAs, LAs and Jobcentre Plus) briefing the schools about exactly what would be involved in the pilot and what their responsibilities would be. This ensured that these schools were then able to make an informed decision about whether they would be able to commit to the pilot requirements. Overall, this early consultation with schools clearly paid off in many areas, ensuring that the pilot involved mostly those schools who were willing to commit to the pilot and, therefore, forge a new relationship with Jobcentre Plus. Nonetheless, many strategic pilot leads from schools, Jobcentre Plus and LAs commented on how well this partnership had been established and delivered given the relatively short timescale of the pilot and some of the ‘teething’ problems that many areas experienced.

Evidence of other new partnerships was apparent in the enterprise work that was also being delivered in schools (and in some cases, attached nurseries and children’s centres). These partnerships were greatly facilitated in many cases by school heads receiving positive feedback from parents and school staff about the enterprise support, mostly around the observed changes in parents as a result – changes such as increased confidence, greater interested in self-employment options or improved business skills. Sometimes school heads and deputies would report that they knew some of these parents on a personal level, usually because the parent or child had additional support needs, and had observed these positive changes for themselves as a result of the enterprise provision. This particular partnership was also facilitated by the fact that enterprise providers could often see the benefits of working within schools (see Section 5.1.3 below).

As School Gates was being delivered under wider policy/delivery frameworks in some local areas (for example, local area umbrella organisations for employment and training provision), many local partners envisaged these new partnerships continuing through these links, post School Gates provision. Many partners participating in other delivery models reported that they would be trying to maintain new partnership relationships via other routes post School Gates, but that this would

²⁶ This includes quarterly reports from the pilot areas, from February 2011, cumulative MI from February 2011 and good practice case studies provided by the findings of our own fieldwork, the good practice case studies on the School Gates website and good practice case studies provided by ContinYou.

depend very much upon their own capacity and the pilot's exit strategy in their area (not finalised at the time of writing).

In some School Gates areas, there was evidence of partnerships being consolidated and/or extended through pilot provision.

Case study 7: Consolidating partnership working through School Gates

The Jobcentre Plus adviser in one pilot area set up a partnership Co-operative which is made up of local employability and training organisations that work together to engage with clients for mutually beneficial outcomes. They use this to promote inter-partnership working, organise events, share good practice and keep their local provider knowledge up to date. This has been an excellent way of getting the word out to people who can make referrals to the initiative. It has also allowed partners' knowledge to be kept up to date, which again benefits the clients. The Jobcentre Plus adviser feels that this Co-operative is one legacy of the School Gates pilot and one which has consolidated the partnerships that existed prior to the pilot, as well as the new ones that have formed as a result. The adviser has also noted that the Co-operative will help keep school staff informed about employability support and activity for the parents so that they can continue to encourage parents to access this support, even after the pilot has finished.

(Source: Qualitative evidence from IES fieldwork and material from the www.schoolgates.org.uk)

In the majority of School Gates areas, local partners reported that they would like to continue to build upon the partnerships forged through the pilot for a variety of reasons which are detailed below.

5.1.2 Increased awareness of local provision

Local partners involved in School Gates frequently mentioned that they were more aware of local provision as a result of the pilot. Often this was in reference to the other partners who were also part of the pilot, for example, Jobcentre Plus advisers reporting that they were more aware of enterprise providers as a result of delivering School Gates alongside enterprise advisers, or school staff reporting that they were more aware of exactly what help Jobcentre Plus advisers could offer. Often, however, partners would report that they were more aware of wider provision in the local area as a result of increased contact with schools, training and education providers, and the LA. A few Jobcentre Plus advisers also reported that much of their increased awareness had arisen out of necessity and the need to proactively find out about local provision in order to meet parents' wider needs.

'Knowing what provision is available locally is really important. My District Lead and [named contact] from the LA have been very helpful in terms of signposting me to provision I didn't know about, but most of the time I have had to find this out for myself.'

(Jobcentre Plus adviser)

Much of this increased awareness about provision was accumulated knowledge which gathered over time, as the pilot progressed and as more parents were engaged. It was evident that much of this was facilitated not only through increased contact with other School Gates partners, but also through pilot steering groups, joint events, LA coordination of delivery and the linking up of partners' own network of contacts.

5.1.3 Better links with schools

Arguably one of the most critical outcomes for partners has been better links and relationships with schools. For Jobcentre Plus, enterprise providers and some LAs who were also directly delivering provision alongside Jobcentre Plus in schools, the pilot has given them an opportunity to work more closely with schools and forge new relationships with school heads, deputies and parent support staff. In many areas, the number of schools participating in the pilot or expressing an interest in it increased as the pilot got underway.

5.1.4 Access to new client groups/more engagement with parents

School Gates partners often reported that working in schools had given them access to new client groups that they would not have usually worked with, or had the opportunity to access. This was particularly the case for Jobcentre Plus advisers who reported better access to potential second earners, and some enterprise providers who had previously not worked with large numbers of parents. This access to parents was facilitated in the obvious sense of being on site at school premises (all of which were located within deprived areas), which granted reach into groups of parents who were either on low incomes and/or out of work. However, it was also facilitated by a host of other benefits which came with engaging parents in a more familiar, comfortable and relaxed environment (see Chapter three for more on this).

Some schools reported positively that the pilot had led to parents becoming more involved in school activities by being on site, either for School Gates courses or for consultations with the Jobcentre Plus advisers.

5.1.5 Partners recognise the mutual benefit of working together

In cases where effective partnership working was evident, local partners often said this was because they all recognised the mutual benefits of working together to meet the needs of the clients they had in common. This was particularly valuable in cases where clients/parents were reported to have multiple or complex needs that required the intervention of one or more partners. Evidence from the pilot indicates that School Gates facilitated much better linkage with other partners in many cases and so placed providers in a much better position to help these sorts of clients/parents.

‘School Gates benefits us because the School Gates courses benefit the families we work with. It gives them valuable skills and increases their confidence. School Gates has also paid for some Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks so that the parents could come in and volunteer in school.’

(Enterprise adviser)

5.1.6 An opportunity for Jobcentre Plus to address negative perceptions and improve its local knowledge

A particularly key outcome for Jobcentre Plus was the progress many of their advisers made in successfully challenging negative perceptions of the organisation and its service among some parents. The opportunity to provide tailored and personalised support was key in this regard and a few Jobcentre Plus advisers reported that they were deliberately overt about their links with Jobcentre Plus precisely so that they could challenge these perceptions directly, and in person, but on parents’ ‘turf’ so to speak.

'Being able to meet with [named Jobcentre Plus Adviser] at my kids' school in such a convenient and friendly, yet private, environment helped break down the barriers and stigma I previously associated with attending the Jobcentre. I have attended several courses and am really enjoying the opportunity to explore starting a business with other parents on the course. [Named Jobcentre Plus adviser] emails me regularly with possible job opportunities. I have got more support through this project than I ever got through the Jobcentre.'

(Parent)

Jobcentre Plus advisers frequently noted that improved knowledge of local provision was also a key outcome from the pilot. Some of this knowledge was known prior to the pilot, but most of it was gained as the pilot progressed, and as parents' needs demanded greater linkage with a number of support agencies.

5.2 Outcomes for pilot participants

There is strong qualitative evidence from the pilot to indicate a number of key outcomes. These are described in more detail below.

5.2.1 Hard outcomes and cost effectiveness

The MI from the pilot provides a partial picture of some of the 'hard' outcomes that were achieved across the School Gates areas. These include the number of parents in work placements/voluntary work, the number of parents in work, the number of parents who have attended a training course and the number of parents who have engaged in enterprise activities/with an enterprise adviser as a result of School Gates. The totals of the cumulative MI from all the pilot areas for the duration of School Gates is presented below.

Table 5.1 Cumulative data for School Gates, February 2011

	No. of parents attending 1-2-1 session and/or engaged with Jobcentre Plus adviser	No. of parents in work placements or voluntary work	No. of parents in work	No. of parents having attended training course in school	No. of parents on external training courses (including further education)	No. of parents engaged with enterprise advisers or taken part in enterprise activities
Totals from all areas	5660	279	337	946	808	1185
Average	226	11	13	38	32	47

Source: Pilot Management Information, Child Poverty Unit

The results of the MI differ across areas, reflecting the variety in the scale and nature of School Gates provision, as well as the varying levels of investment in some places and the short timescale which many areas had to roll out provision. As the data shows, an average of 13 parents across all areas entered employment as a result of School Gates. This figure is not an insignificant achievement across the board, particularly given that most areas only started delivering pilot provision in 2010 due to delays in CRB checks coming through, or delays in securing funding from the LA.

However, given the total levels of investment in School Gates, the MI presented above does mean that issue of cost effectiveness is a valid one, particularly at a time when almost all LAs are facing spending cuts. The table below presents the levels of investment in two School Gates areas, which both had similar (almost full) levels of investment against the outcomes achieved.

Table 5.2 Levels of investment in two School Gates areas against data supplied by the project MI

	Total allocated investment (09-11)¹	Total investment in school gates (09-11)²	Unit cost per parent entering into employment	Unit cost per parent entering into a work placement, volunteering or training course³	Unit cost per parent of engagement in enterprise activities
Area 1	£285,637	£285,637	£11,425.48	£3,071.37	£887.07
Area 2	£285,637	£285,137	£8,386.38	£6,631.09	£2,081.29

¹ Data provided by CPU.

² Data provided to IES through qualitative fieldwork.

³ <http://campaigns.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrep110.pdf>

The data presented in the table above suggests a relatively high cost attached to the School Gates programmes, particularly when considering the unit costs for other employment programmes. The unit cost of the New Deal Lone Parent (NDLP) prototype programme, for example, over the period of approximately 16 months was £1,493 per participant leaving IS for employment.²⁷ However, this data represents only a small part of the overall picture when considering the question of cost effectiveness, for several important reasons.

Firstly, due to missing financial information from some LAs, the table above does not detail those areas where School Gates received very little financial support but nevertheless delivered significant job outcomes. For example, one area which only received a fraction of the levels of investment stated in the table above achieved almost double the average number of parents into work. In these places, where funding had often been held back from the LA, School Gates was delivering exceptional value for money for every parent who entered employment, training, self-employment or a work placement. In other words, numbers of job outcomes were not entirely dependent upon levels of financial investment, but also on other factors such as the strength of partnership working or the ability to link School Gates in with existing provision.

Secondly, the School Gates pilot had just 18 months to run in some places (in most areas, this was less). This does not provide enough time to capture a full range of job outcomes for any pilot, but especially one which has very little lead-in time and which appears to have engaged so many harder-to-reach parents (see Section 3.2). Evidence from another recent outreach initiative has shown that job outcomes increased as the pilot progressed into its second year, which suggests that even the full set of MI across the full 18 months of School Gates is unlikely to represent all outcomes achieved as a result of the pilot.²⁸

²⁷ <http://campaigns.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrep110.pdf>

²⁸ Aston, A., Bellis, A., Munro, M., Pillai, R., Willison, R. (2009). *Evaluation of Partners Outreach for Ethnic Minorities*, DWP Research Report No. 598, DWP.

Thirdly, all the qualitative evidence from School Gates suggests that for many parents, the value of School Gates would have been to help them to make the ‘smaller steps’ necessary for them to progress further towards work. These may include greater levels of confidence, more informed choices about childcare options or increased motivation (see the following section for more on this). While these interventions may appear to be costly given the ‘snapshot’ costs provided in Table 5.2, the longer-term financial benefits of supporting exactly these kinds of parents (on low incomes) towards employment is likely to exceed these short-term costs. Indeed, it is more than reasonable to assume from our evidence that the social return on investment in employment outreach schemes, such as School Gates, is likely to be great and to exceed initial levels of investment.²⁹ While the short-term nature of the initiative cannot account for the longer-term knock-on benefits to the children of these families, there is a need to recognise the longer-term socio-economic benefits of employment upon the well-being of parents and their children. Given that child poverty costs the Government around £25 billion a year, the assessment of costs to any initiative must set out the social value derived from such spending as well as the direct costs.³⁰ Such calculations are beyond the scope of this report but models such as the Social Return on Investment offer a framework for these assessments.

Lastly, much of the evidence presented in Chapter three strongly suggests that many parents in some areas would probably not have accessed Jobcentre Plus support to find work if it had not been for the outreach function provided through School Gates. As Chapter three details, issues of mistrust, suspicion and negative perceptions often meant that parents were reluctant to access Jobcentre Plus services unless it was a mandatory condition of their benefits. In this way, the added value of School Gates lies in its outreach function of employment support, which successfully engages harder-to-reach families who are on low incomes and so at risk of falling into poverty.

5.2.2 ‘Soft’ outcomes and distance travelled

While there is evidence of nearly all areas achieving ‘hard’ outcomes, there is a great deal more evidence to suggest that the value of this pilot lies more in supporting parents’ ‘journey’ towards work than in delivering high numbers of parents into work.

One of the most significant ‘soft’ outcomes to emerge from the pilot was an **increase in confidence** among parents. Lack of confidence was one of the most widely reported barriers to work for many parents furthest from the labour market. Many Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers tackled this through referring parents onto confidence-building courses and/or working with them on a one-to-one basis to identify transferable skills which they could use in the workplace.

‘I’ve realised I’m not just a mum, you see.’

(Parent)

‘I have applied to numerous jobs in the past, completed job applications forms, sent out loads of CVs but never got any response. This really knocked my confidence as I did not know what I was doing wrong and was not sure who to turn to.’

(Parent)

²⁹ For example, there is already evidence which demonstrates the clear, long term economic and social return on investment in services such as universal childcare and historically underpaid skills, such as caring. See for example, Lawlor, E., Kersley, H. and Steed, S. (2009). *A Bit Rich*. New Economic Foundation.

³⁰ Hirsch D (2008). *Estimating the costs of child poverty*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Parents also reported that their confidence levels had improved after regular contact with the Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers, or through attendance on a training course.

A number of Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers as well as parents also reported **improved levels of motivation** as a result of the support delivered through the pilot. Some parents reported that they had been thinking about work or training, but just needed the ‘push’ that the Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers provided. In other areas, where entrenched worklessness was a feature across more than one generation, advisers found themselves improving motivation by focusing on ‘smaller steps’ and by regularly identifying significant milestones for harder-to-help parents. Very often, however, this took the form of addressing a high level of ‘fail-to-attends’ by consistently chasing some parents to remind them of their commitments or to reschedule their appointment.

Improved access to and awareness of wider provision around employment, training and childcare emerged as another key outcome from the pilot. Much of this involved talking through with parents about their previous work, education and training experience and identifying their employment goal or future aspirations. From there, Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers would identify relevant opportunities such as appropriate job vacancies, education or training placements or volunteering experience. Many parents who were already thinking about work or training sought advice as to how their future plans might affect their current income level and their tax status, and where they might be able to gain financial support along the way. Both Jobcentre Plus/LA advisers and parents noted that this kind of engagement had made a major impact in terms of raising awareness of the possible routes and avenues that were available to parents and of the financial support that could be available in some cases.

‘Knowing the support and services available enabled me to get back on track, such as getting a job.’

(Parent)

An important part of increasing awareness around opportunities and options was making parents aware of their childcare options. There was evidence that many Jobcentre Plus and LA advisers had made parents aware of the availability of local childcare and the sources of financial support for childcare costs. In some cases, the pilot had directly funded childcare so that the parents could attend a training course. This was particularly beneficial for those parents with children who were under school age.

‘Before the School Gates project started, there was nothing much happening for me. Although I wanted to work, there seemed to be nothing out there for me. I would go for the usual quarterly work-focused interviews at the jobcentre, but nothing much resulted from these meetings. Now I am happy to say that I am very busy with work.’

(Parent)

Local partners and some parents noted a number of other outcomes of School Gates support. In a few cases where parents had taken up formal childcare provision as a result of the pilot (often for the first time), local partners reported that parents had become more comfortable and trusting in leaving their children with these providers. In a few other cases, schools and parents noted that the pilot had positively impacted upon the children. In one case, a school noted that pilot engagement with a parent had noticeably improved the impact on their child’s behaviour. In another case, a mother reported that she was now more confident in disciplining her children as a result of her increasing confidence overall after participating in a training course through the pilot, while another mother thought that additional income from employment will make both her and her son happier.

'This is assisting with my job search. When I go back to work I'll be earning nice money and it'll be better for him. Happy mummies equal happy boys.'

(Parent)

5.3 Chapter summary

The evidence of parents moving towards work highlights that School Gates is as much about supporting the 'journey' to work as it is about parents entering into work. Many of these 'soft' outcomes are crucial milestones in parent's progress towards employment and the evidence from School Gates shows that the pilot has offered a great deal of support in this way.

Nearly all local partners also report significant outcomes, which include the formation or consolidation of new partnerships, greater awareness of local provision and better linkage with schools (which has in turn granted them better access to new client groups). Perhaps one of the most significant outcomes has been for Jobcentre Plus, which has not only had the opportunity through the pilot to address negative perceptions of Jobcentre Plus which exist among some parents, but also had the opportunity to enhance their knowledge of local provision through their Jobcentre Plus advisers working on the pilot.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

The findings of this report strongly support the notion that some schools can play a potentially important role in moving parents from low incomes towards work. The experience of School Gates highlights that schools can provide a good reach into target groups of parents on low incomes and/or out of work, which Jobcentre Plus and other LA employment advisers would be looking to engage with and progress towards work. In his Independent Review of Poverty and Life Chances, Frank Field has alluded to this by recommending that schools continue the early years efforts to minimise the gap between richer and poorer children, especially by improving parental engagement.³¹

Overall, the qualitative evidence of the pilot's impact on parents' journey towards work has been considerable, emphasising the value of outreach in offering a personalised, tailored and flexible service in an environment which parents feel comfortable in. Parents appreciated being able to access support on their own 'turf' moving towards work at a pace that better reflected their needs. Local partners also considered these features to be core strengths of the School Gates pilot.

The most effective approaches to moving parents towards work have been delivered by one or more Jobcentre Plus and LA employment advisers who have been able to co-ordinate a multi-agency response, or address the parents' needs by linking in with a wider network of local support. This has avoided duplication and has ensured that barriers are not addressed in isolation by different agencies. The 'added value' of having Jobcentre Plus as a delivery partner has been in significant in providing in-depth advice around benefits and in doing better-off-calculations.

Closer partnership working has been a key outcome of the pilot in many areas, with many local partners effectively linking the pilot into existing provision and/or forming new partnerships to ensure that they can provide flexible parent-focused employability support. Successful partnership working has often depended upon the sustained and committed engagement of all senior partners, and particularly schools. It has also depended upon how far partners can demonstrate flexibility towards their own organisational culture and working practices in order to progress the pilot aims, as detailed in Section 4.2.4.

Another key strength of the pilot has been its reach to potential second earners, many of whom are not on benefits and are new customers to Jobcentre Plus. Many parents are also lone parents, some of whom are also not in receipt of benefits. In this way, schools have provided access to target groups of parents who are on low incomes and often in deprived circumstances. Alongside this, however, the pilot has also highlighted the need for a range of techniques to proactively engage and target parents and the importance of trusted school staff and word-of-mouth to facilitate this engagement.

³¹ Field, F. (2010). *The Foundation Years: Preventing poor children becoming poor adults*.

Beyond this, there is evidence to suggest that the pilot adds important value in other ways. School Gates provides an opportunity to embed the ‘bigger picture’ of work being the ‘norm’. This is consistent with the Government message that parents who have children in full-time education and who are able to work, should be in work or actively seeking work. This is particularly relevant for communities that are characterised by entrenched worklessness and at a time when changes to the benefit system will require more lone parents claiming IS to seek work sooner rather than later.

There is also evidence that School Gates has been a key ‘PR’ opportunity for Jobcentre Plus, with positive support from Jobcentre Plus advisers resulting in many positive comments about the organisation from parents, often in stark contrast to much lower expectations that they had about Jobcentre Plus.

6.2 Recommendations

In the light of the findings and conclusions set out in this report, we make the following recommendations to local partners and to the CPU. All of these recommendations centre around how similar provision could be delivered more effectively and efficiently in the future.

- 1 Effective partnership working needs to underpin the delivery of employability support in schools.** Partnership working between local partners is key to delivering positive outcomes for parents on low incomes. As such, LAs and devolved administrations should work to ensure that they have secured the buy-in of key partners and that, where possible, the pilot is embedded within existing networks of complementary support in order to deliver longer-term sustainability and value for money. However, in some cases this may also involve linking the pilot with new providers in areas which have previously not have worked together (for example linking employability support with wider family support or early years provision). Many of our findings indicate that Jobcentre Plus has a key role to play as a lead delivery agency, particularly given its in-depth knowledge of benefits, and that this was often linked in effectively with enterprise support and pre-employment training. However, some School Gates pilot areas chose to complement this provision with LA employment support, which appeared to work just as well. Either way, it is important for individual LAs and the devolved administrations to identify which agency is best placed to deliver employability support in their communities. As the experience of School Gates highlights, the needs and barriers can differ between areas and so provision needs to be tailored accordingly.
- 2 Pick the right schools.** Selecting schools in the most deprived areas has proven key in this pilot to reaching the target group of parents. However, within this selection, an equally important factor needs to be selecting the right school. The experience of School Gates suggests that the ‘right’ school is one with a head who is committed to, and on board with the pilot aims and who can recognise the ways in which the pilot could benefit the work of the school and its community of parents and children. The evidence also suggests that having a school which has the staff capacity to support the advisers is key, particularly in providing trusted ‘frontline’ school staff who could help engage parents in the pilot. Schools without these features would need to demonstrate that they have other support functions in place to integrate employability provision into the school and to help facilitate the engagement of parents. This would help ensure greater efficiency when delivering employability support in schools.

- 3 **Allow a longer lead-in time and a longer time to run** an initiative of this kind. This is important in ensuring that enough time is given to plan delivery, secure relevant partners and achieve results. The experience of School Gates clearly demonstrates that 18 months is not at all an adequate timescale, particularly given some of the multiple barriers to work that many parents had. Previous research has indicated that job outcomes from outreach initiatives are often higher in the second year than in the first, when the pilot is still bedding in.³²
- 4 **Have dedicated resources upfront** to provide local areas with sufficient leverage to draw in local partners and hold them accountable to some degree. Additional resources do not always lead to additionality in provision or outcomes, as some areas have achieved both on very limited funding. However, it does help plan delivery and also ensures better levels of trust with both local partners and parents.
- 5 **Draw on the pilot's archive of good practice to guide other LAs and schools** who are looking to address child poverty in their area through tackling worklessness and unemployment. The future trend towards greater localism in service provision will require experiences drawn from a variety of delivery models, such as those which were deployed in School Gates. Local partners in other areas may find this archive of good practice and achievements particularly useful when encouraging schools to participate in similar partnerships.

³² Aston, A., Bellis, A., Munro, M., Pillai, R., Willison, R. (2009). *Evaluation of Partners Outreach for Ethnic Minorities*. DWP Research Report No. 598, DWP.

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This report presents qualitative research findings from the study of the School Gates Employment Initiative. The initiative ran from September 2009 to March 2011 in 25 areas. It was aimed at helping parents and potential second earners back into work by providing employment and enterprise advice and support in and around primary schools.

The research involved qualitative interviews in 13 of the 25 pilot areas. Interviews were held with school heads, Regional Development Agency leads, Jobcentre Plus, local authorities and devolved administrations, parents and parent support staff in schools. It also involved two semi-structured group discussions with local partners at two practitioner events in November 2010, as well as a review of evidence presented in the Management Information and the quarterly reports from the pilot areas.

The report provides a review of pilot delivery. It details the main methods of engagement which pilot areas have utilised and identifies those factors which made parental engagement more challenging and those which facilitated engagement. Partnership working in the pilot is assessed and it looks at pilot outcomes – for local partners as well as for parents themselves.

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