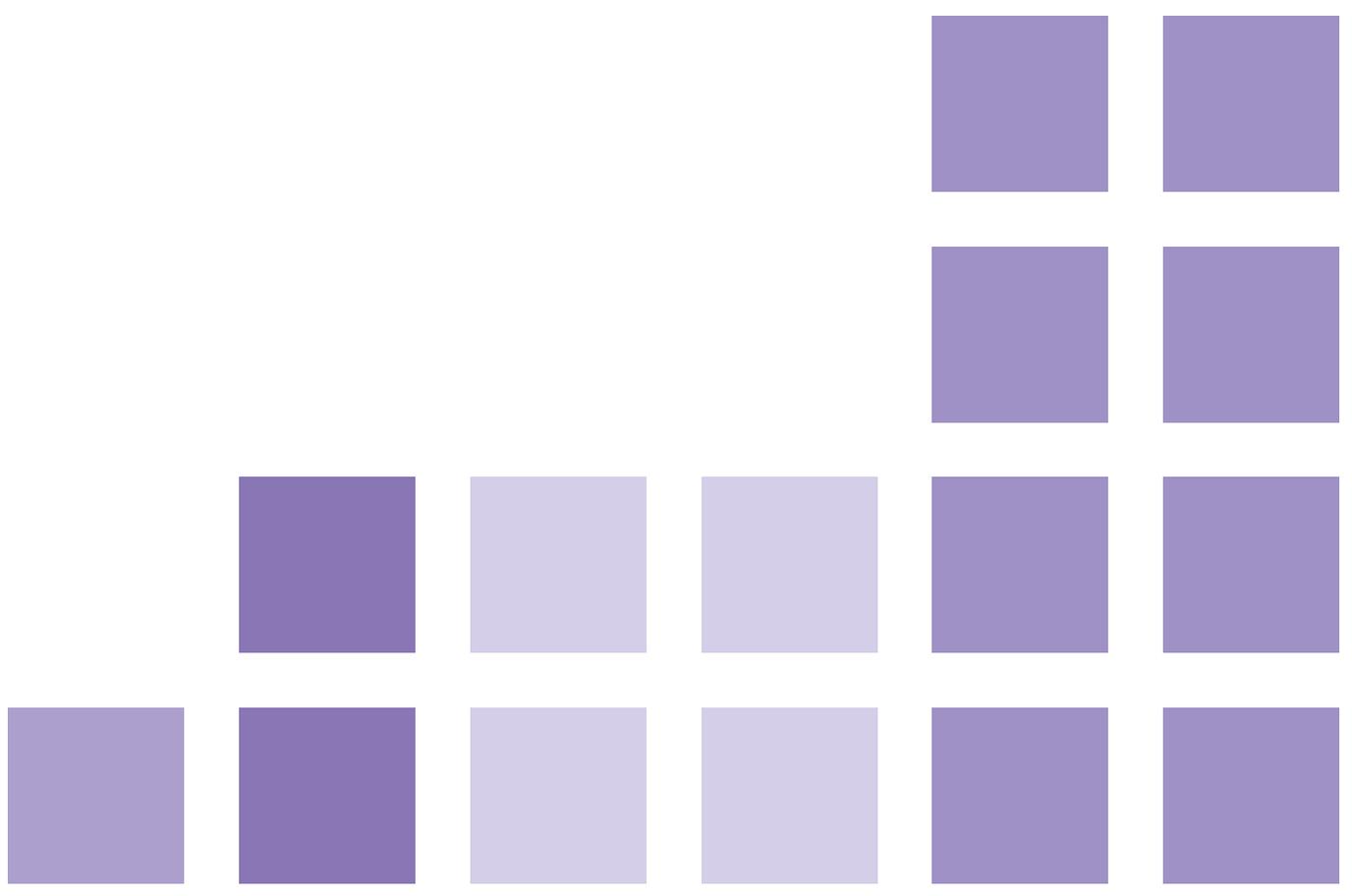


# Review of the Customer Experience in the Employment and Skills System

June 2010





This report is based on evidence produced for the UK Commission for Employment and Skills by London Economics and i-works research Ltd.

# Contents

Abbreviations and Acronyms .....	2
Executive Summary .....	4
1. Introduction .....	11
2. Satisfaction with the Benefits System and Jobcentre Plus .....	16
3. Young People .....	27
4. Older People .....	35
5. Lone Parents .....	40
6. Disabled People and People Living with Health Conditions .....	65
7. Long-term Unemployed .....	80
8. Ex-Offenders, Drugs and Alcohol Misuse and Homelessness .....	88
9. Personalisation .....	96
10. Skills .....	107
11. Conclusion .....	121
Bibliography .....	126

# Index of Tables & Figures

Figure 1: Approach to undertaking systematic review of literature .....	14
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# Abbreviations and Acronyms

<b>ADF</b>	Advisor Discretion Fund
<b>ASA</b>	Advancement Support Adviser
<b>BET</b>	Basic Employability Training
<b>CMP</b>	Condition Management Programme
<b>CTC</b>	Child Tax Credit
<b>DEA</b>	Disability Employment Adviser
<b>DWP</b>	Department for Work and Pensions
<b>EMO</b>	Ethnic Minority Outreach
<b>ERA</b>	Employment, Retention and Advancement Programme
<b>ES</b>	Employment Service
<b>ESOL</b>	English for Speakers of Other Languages
<b>ETF</b>	Environment Taskforce Option
<b>ETO</b>	Employment and Training Opportunity
<b>ETP</b>	Employer Training Pilots
<b>EZ</b>	Employment Zone
<b>ETF</b>	Fortnightly Jobsearch Interview
<b>FETC</b>	Full-time Education and Training Option
<b>IAG</b>	Information, Advice and Guidance
<b>IB</b>	Incapacity Benefit
<b>IES</b>	Integrated Employment and Skills System
<b>IS</b>	Income Support
<b>IWBC</b>	In-work-benefit calculation
<b>IWC</b>	In-Work Credit
<b>IWEF</b>	In Work Emergency fund
<b>JOT</b>	Job Outcome Targets
<b>JRRP</b>	Job Retention and Rehabilitation Pilot
<b>JSA</b>	Jobseeker's Allowance
<b>LPWFI</b>	Lone Parent Work Focused Interview
<b>NDDP</b>	New Deal for Disabled People
<b>NDLP</b>	New Deal for Lone Parents
<b>NDLTU</b>	New Deal for the Long Term Unemployed

<b>NDP</b>	New Deal for Partners
<b>NDPA</b>	New Deal Personal Advisor
<b>NDYP</b>	New Deal for Young People
<b>ND25+</b>	New Deal 25 Plus
<b>ND50+</b>	New Deal 50 Plus
<b>NJI</b>	New Jobseeker Interview
<b>NVQ</b>	National Vocational Qualification
<b>PA</b>	Personal Advisor
<b>PCA</b>	Personal Capability Assessment
<b>PJA</b>	Personal Job Account
<b>RTWC</b>	Return to Work Credit
<b>SDA</b>	Severe Disablement Allowance
<b>WBLA</b>	Work Based Learning for Adults
<b>WFI</b>	Work Focused Interview
<b>WTC</b>	Working Tax Credit
<b>VS</b>	Voluntary Sector Option

# Executive Summary

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills has been tasked to critically challenge and review the employment and skills system through the eyes of employers and individual users and advocate proposals to achieve a step change in the performance of those systems. As part of this work, the UK Commission asked London Economics and i-works research to undertake a literature review of the customer experience of services that assist with the journey into work and progression. The aim of this research is to review and analyse the publicly available academic and policy evidence that details the individual's experience of the employment and skills system in terms of the support provided to help people into work, training and progression. This analysis has been commissioned with the aim of gaining further insights into how the system is perceived and experienced by the individual user.

## Satisfaction with the Benefits System and Jobcentre Plus

The individuals' overall level of satisfaction with the employment and skills system is generally high. In the case of Jobcentre Plus, results from the 2007 Customer Satisfaction Survey reveal that eighty per cent of Jobcentre Plus customers were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the service they had received. However, satisfaction levels with particular services cannot be deduced from the survey findings. For example, it cannot be determined whether the customers were satisfied with the timely benefit payments they received or whether they were satisfied with the broader service delivered by Jobcentre Plus. Furthermore, it is difficult to separate out negative feelings towards the services that Jobcentre Plus offer and other DWP contracted provision provides with negative feeling towards jobs currently available<sup>1</sup> or the nature of conditionality in the UK benefits regime. In describing satisfaction, the one consistent determinant was a good relationship with a Personal Advisor and, in-turn, the provision of tailored advice. This finding was consistent across several customer groups, including: both young and old adults, lone parents and disabled people and people living with health conditions. This relationship was particularly relevant for the most disadvantaged and furthest away from the job market within these groups. However, one of the primary issues with Jobcentre Plus on the part of the view of the customer has been the more mechanised feel of the support offered from Jobcentre Plus in comparison to the more personalised and tailored support offered through other programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> For example many customers interviewed in a variety of reports are unhappy at the level of temporary and/or low paid work available.

## Young People

The journey for young adults through the employment and skills system is changing with the introduction of the new Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal (FND) replacing the current New Deal for Young People (NDYP) and Employment Zones (EZ) programmes. However, the evidence examined on both NDYP and EZs highlights some interesting findings that will remain relevant for the successful operation of the new labour market programmes.

Evidence from the evaluation of NDYP suggests that the vast majority of those young adults leave the programme at the initial Gateway stage prior to the more intensive support periods of Options and Follow-through consisting of access to training, work experience and further support. For those young adults furthest from the labour market their relationship with their New Deal Personal Advisor (PA) is particularly important if they are to achieve a positive experience. The better able the PA is to match provision to the individual need of the customer, the better the results are in terms of both customer satisfaction and outcomes. Young adults perceive the elements of work experience and placements of employment support programmes positively and are keen to have the opportunity to gain work experience and are optimistic about the effect of these activities on their future employability. The EZ programme was positively viewed by young adults. Satisfaction with the EZ programme was high particularly amongst those who were accessing the programme as a result of NDYP being unsuccessful. The personalised and flexible nature of the support delivered through the EZ programme, the nature of the EZ Advisors and the amount of time EZ Advisors spend with their customers has also been a real positive aspect of the programme.

## Older People

Evidence suggests that participants of New Deal 50+ (ND50+) have largely viewed the programme positively. One of the real success factors for the ND50+ programme has been the customer-advisor relationship and the maintenance of the on-going support phase (caseloading) of the programme. There is a reported lack of evidence of what works in terms of training for older adults. For many adults, skills are a barrier to employment entry and retention while for others training is too basic as they may have a lifetime of experience. There is also evidence that with many older adults it is a feeling that they are too old to train and already possess the necessary skills for the job. In terms of the influence of Working Tax Credits (WTC) on moving into work, it has been suggested by older adults that the role WTC plays in their decisions to work depends on factors such as closeness to the labour market, the extent and quality of discussion with advisors about the tax credits and whether a better off calculation demonstrated that employment was worthwhile financially.

## Lone Parents

As a result of the largely voluntary nature of NDLP and the complexities of family circumstances, recruitment and engagement of lone parents on to the programme has been low. Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) have been introduced to bolster participation and whilst this had some affect on take-up, engagement of lone parents is still relatively low compared to the large proportion of lone parents that say they would like to work. Outreach has been effective in engaging with a small number of lone parents who are hard to reach both in terms of labour market and physical distance. In terms of the experience of engaging in NDLP, particularly through the now compulsory WFI process, the most positive experiences come from those lone parents that are closest to the labour market and who have most recently been in work. Evidence finds that the advice and guidance provided by NDLP is highly effective for lone parents with the NDLP programme raising the proportion of lone parents entering work.

In terms of training and skills provision through the NDLP programme, evidence suggests that customers find their training options limited, a view held by both Jobcentre Plus staff and lone parents is that these options are often not very 'aspirational' and that many courses were too short to up-skill people who had been removed from the labour market for an extended period of time. As with young adults, the experience of EZ has been a positive one for lone parents and is viewed as an improvement on previous support received through Jobcentre Plus. Lone parents have reported that they particularly valued the intensity of support provided by their EZ advisor, the way in which the programme was embedded in their community and the use of child friendly delivery mechanisms.

Childcare, both in terms of pre-employment and in-work, is one of the most raised concerns of lone parents. Childcare is still seen as unaffordable by many parents, and as outweighing the financial benefits of working. If a lone parent is working 16 or more hours a week and using approved childcare, there is potential entitlement to help with childcare costs through the Working Tax Credit (WTC). However, the entitlement criteria relating to the same maximum benefit irrespective of whether there are two or more children is a significant issue, particularly where there are three or more children in a family and the financial costs of paying for childcare far outweigh the benefits of working. Rules for the childcare element of WTC further means that provision of childcare must be with a registered childminder. Research into *Work and well-being over time: lone mothers and their children* found that sometimes mothers were paying for private informal care without the childcare element of WTC.

## Disabled and People Living with Health Conditions

As with young adults, older adults and lone parents, individuals who have disabilities or work limiting illness report the positive effects of a personalised service and the importance of the advisor/customer relationship particularly in enabling positive long-term progress and effective referral mechanisms. In terms of in-work support provision, whilst a design feature of NDDP and pathways to work, evidence suggests that not all Job Brokers provided adequate in-work support. Qualitative research of participants who were receiving in-work support reported that they generally did not receive an intensive service, and the priority Job Brokers gave to in-work support and the nature of the provision within their service profile varied.

There have been a number of further issues raised with the lack of in-work support. Lack of access is one issue with individuals only able to take-up the NDDP after-care programme if they had used a Job Broker. One of the primary differences between Pathways IWS and NDDP after-care reported is that Pathways IWS provided more in-depth support than NDDP after-care, including more intensive after-care support and access to sub-contracted specialist support services. NDDP was generally seen to provide more 'light touch' support. Evidence suggests that certain groups gain significantly as a result of the Access to Work programme. For example, for people where alternative transport arrangements are not feasible, the provisions made by the Access to Work programme are particularly beneficial.

## Long-term Unemployed

The one-to-one advisor/customer relationship provided through the ND25+ programme is of key importance for ND25+ customers. Many customers have reported that the one-to-one contact with an advisor during Gateway was one of the best elements of the programme and distinguished it from other programmes they had experienced in the past, or from their regular Jobcentre experiences. The experience of skills and training support is mixed with much dependent on the quality of the learning provider. However, in common with other customer groups there is a view that many of the course options are too basic with many being general and insufficiently tailored. Whilst there have only been a small number of evaluations of EZs, as with other customer groups there is a consistent positive message across a number of customer groups of their experience of EZs. Evaluations have consistently found that EZs have been more effective than ND25+ in terms of both customer satisfaction and also enabling customers to move into employment. Pilot pre-employment and in-work support programmes such as StepUp have had real impacts on job outcomes for those furthest away from the labour market.

## Ex-offenders, Drugs and Alcohol Misuse and Homelessness

The experience of Jobcentre Plus amongst individuals who have had a history of offending, drug and/or alcohol misuse and homelessness, as with other customer groups, is mixed. Whilst some view their experience as a positive one, others point to a lack of personalised support particularly in enabling those who have a view on where they want to get to in terms of career and learning aspirations. There is also evidence that many individuals leaving prison are unaware of the employment support options that are available to them.

For those who engage through Jobcentre Plus, there is some evidence, as with other customer groups, of a focus by Jobcentre Plus Advisors on job outcome targets, getting customers into jobs regardless of their interests or circumstances. This lack of personalised support is in contrast to the provision of programmes such as Progress2work and Progress2work-LinkUP where there is evidence of real positive experiences of tailored support.

Housing and homelessness is a significant issue for many individuals within this customer group and is one particular area where there is evidence of a lack of effective working partnerships and referral mechanisms. A reoccurring theme for providers of support programmes such as Progress2work was homelessness with providers describing how many of their client group are considered a low priority for many local councils who are trying to cope with waiting lists in a housing market characterised by a lack of affordable housing.

## Personalisation

Demand for personalised services amongst customer groups is high and the better able a PA is to match provision to the individual need of the customer, the better the results are in terms of both customer satisfaction and outcomes. Satisfaction with the customer journey increases the more personalised services become. The nature of the support from Jobcentre Plus is criticised for not being tailored in comparison to the New Deal programmes and even more so in comparison to Employment Zones. The personalised and flexible nature of the support delivered through the EZ programme is seen as a real positive aspect to the programme. By contrast the evaluation evidence that highlights many Jobcentre Plus PAs feel that EZs were delivering nothing different to the support that they were able to provide lone parents. While this appears true of the content of the advice and guidance supplied, the context and delivery of such support in EZs appears significantly different.

There are a number of reasons why Jobcentre Plus Advisors are less well viewed than New Deal and EZ Advisors. Jobcentre Plus Advisors are more constrained by having to deliver certain programmes. These are linked to performance and job outcomes targets which constrain the ability to deliver a more personalised service. Advisors have performance targets relating to the number of people moved into paid work, which was observed to be in conflict with helping people that are less job-ready. Various studies reported evidence of “cream skimming” whereby some individuals are prioritised more than others. This is a significant issue because targets appear to create a risk of “deadweight” through Advisors’ incentive to help those that perhaps need less support (i.e. the more job-ready).

Time pressures are a further issue and one that has been identified by Jobcentre Plus staff with evidence suggesting that many feel they do not have enough time with customers and can only provide the time needed at the expense of other customers.

One of the knock-on effects of these pressures has been that in some areas customers have felt that they are being forced into taking jobs or going onto programmes that they do not want to do. There will be little motivation and engagement if customers feel forced into participation or feel that they are being directed towards provision that does not meet their needs. Therefore, the individual capabilities and attitudes of Advisors and the techniques they use have an important impact on the effectiveness of interventions.

## Skills

The individual experience of skills and training is quite diverse and can vary according to whether individuals are engaging from inside or outside the employment support system or their individual preferences and attitudes to learning. For example, individuals who are in receipt of benefits are often obligated to take part in training under the New Deal if they want to maintain full benefits.

Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) services are an important part of the learning and skills system. People need to be aware of the existing training offers and also need support to choose the training that fits their needs. The most immediate benefits of receiving IAG take the form of helping users find and make best use of relevant information while increasing their awareness of learning and job opportunities most relevant to them. IAG services increase an individual's self-confidence and encourage and support clients to engage in learning. Generally customers find IAG services helpful but, there seems to be scope for improvement related to more information about financial support for training, wider learning opportunities offered as well as more emphasis given to careers, job opportunities, the local labour market and the changing world of work.

In terms of basic skills learning, recent evaluation evidence has found that labour market outcomes such as employment and earnings, barely increases as a result of basic skills training. However, employability is indirectly improved through improved self-esteem, health and employment commitment. While there is an association between poor literacy and numeracy skills and employment outcomes, what is not clear is that improving literacy and numeracy skills on their own has more than a limited direct effect on employment success.

In general, learners are very satisfied with their Skills for Life courses. Satisfaction with teaching was particularly high with 85 per cent of basic skills learners reporting that their course was well taught and 84 per cent that the speed of teaching was about right. Three quarters of those surveyed felt that their course was well organised.

Jobcentre Plus aims to help people into work and an important part of the support provided is enabling people to develop the skills and qualifications needed to find and keep jobs. Customers' experience of Jobcentre Plus is very diverse, in part because the nature of the relationship will depend on their benefit. Evaluation evidence has reported some customers finding that Jobcentre Plus staff had not offered the advice they needed about training or the benefits of training, while others were not offered training to help them to improve their skills. The Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) agenda is attempting to mitigate this lack of advice. Current evaluation research has so far reported that customers have found the interaction with nextstep has been largely positive in terms of gaining confidence, motivation and an insight into what they can achieve. Customers interviewed as part of the evaluation responded positively about nextstep advisors, as well as the personalised service they received.

Financial barriers play a crucial role in customers' decision to undertake training. Many learners, particularly older adults, believe that they would be liable for course fees despite being aware that some courses were subsidised for unemployed people. Illustrating the impact of credit constraints, customers will often be unable to pay for travel, even when they can subsequently claim it back.

Some individuals in receipt of benefits perceive a lack of good training opportunities. In particular, some customers did not find training as part of New Deal courses useful. The main complaints related to poor quality of the courses, limited progress in terms of learning outcomes and the fact that the work placement options within New Deal had not led to permanent work. In addition a lack of flexible training options was perceived by some with training geared around academic years and the resultant long waits seen as a particular barrier.

Train to Gain is an in-work support programme available across England. It is a service managed by the SFA that is designed to help employers improve the skills of their workforce. Generally, people were mainly informed by their employers about Train to Gain. Awareness of Train to Gain is far lower amongst those who were previously unemployed and there is a lack of crossover of this customer group and the Train to Gain cohort. The most recent evaluation of Train to Gain finds that just 2 per cent of the learner cohort had been unemployed in the year before their learning started.

# 1. Introduction

## Aims and Objectives

As part of this work on reviewing the employment and skills system from the perspective of the individual user, the Commission has commissioned a literature review of the customer experience. The aim of this research is to review and analyse the academic and publicly available research evidence and literature that details the individual's experience of the employment and skills system in terms of the support provided to help people into work, training and progression. This analysis has been commissioned with the aim of gaining further insights into how the system is perceived and experienced by the individual user.

The analysis primarily encompasses adults aged (19+) accessing support from the employment and skills system to enter and/or progress in work. The employment and skills system includes any kind of assistance or support an individual may receive through the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus via its contracted provision and/or publicly funded skills provision (Further Education and Information, Advice and Guidance etc.) as an individual moves into work and progression.

This review forms part of the Commission's wider Customer Journey Project. The goal of the overarching Customer Journey Project is to provide recommendations that:

- Improve the individual's experience of the system and ensure that "user voice" is used to improve effectiveness
- Advise on the appropriate roles and responsibilities of personal advisors and present options to help enable advisors and simplify processes from an advisor perspective
- Contribute towards the practical delivery of the policy goal of a seamless journey between worklessness, training, employment and progression
- Reduce complexity from the point of view of the individual and therefore reduce risk and perceptions of risk associated with entering work and/or training
- Allow for easier cross-referral between agencies so that individuals benefit fully from the system
- Improve employment and skills outcomes for individuals by reducing churn in the system and drop-out rates.

## Methodological Approach

In this section, we present the methodological approach applied to reviewing the literature on the customer experience of the employment and skills system. The key challenges associated with this review related to establishing the data sources to be trawled for relevant material, the initial search criteria, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that the most recent and relevant research work proceeded to the full in-depth review from which policy recommendations can be drawn.

### *Stage 1: Development of parameters and identification of potential sources*

We commenced this study by defining a number of parameters for selection of research material that might be considered for review. These parameters included temporal factors (i.e. only empirical studies undertaken since 2001 were considered), factors relating to the nature of the study (e.g. ensuring that in-depth qualitative work is complemented by larger-scale survey work) and geography (i.e. sufficient UK-wide coverage).

We then established detailed, multiple search criteria and rigorously applied these search terms to ensure that data sources were robustly exploited and the full range of articles were included in the initial identification of potential sources.

Given the focus of the analysis relating to the assistance or support a customer may receive from DWP/ Jobcentre Plus, we initially focused on these information sources. In particular, evaluation work conducted by DWP proved to be one of the sources that yielded the most useful information in relation to the customer experience of employment and skills pilots and programmes. In addition to evaluation material, an extensive assessment of research material produced by academic sources was used to complement output from policy research relating to particular programmes.

The total number of articles initially considered for inclusion in the report was in the region of 300-350 articles.

### *Stage 2: Development and application of exclusion criteria and initial filter of articles*

**Objective: To ensure that the existing literature has been sifted for quality and validity using the criteria below**

- The **appropriateness** of the questions, populations and outcomes addressed
- Evidence of **selection bias** in the primary studies
- Evidence of **performance bias** in the primary studies
- Evidence of **attrition bias** in the primary studies
- Evidence of **detection bias** in the primary studies

This stage of the analysis established the multiple exclusion and inclusion criteria used to identify which elements of the literature were to be analysed in detail and included in the final research report.

Immediately after the trawl for literature (Stage 1) was completed, we screened each and every one of the initial documents selected to assess whether these pieces of research work were pertinent to the study and provided a potential range of research on specific topics, based on criteria developed in consultation with the Commission.

We found that two-thirds (i.e. over 200) of the articles identified in Stage 1 were of relevance and these were carried forward to the final review. The articles explicitly covered the range of topics contained in the ITT, including:

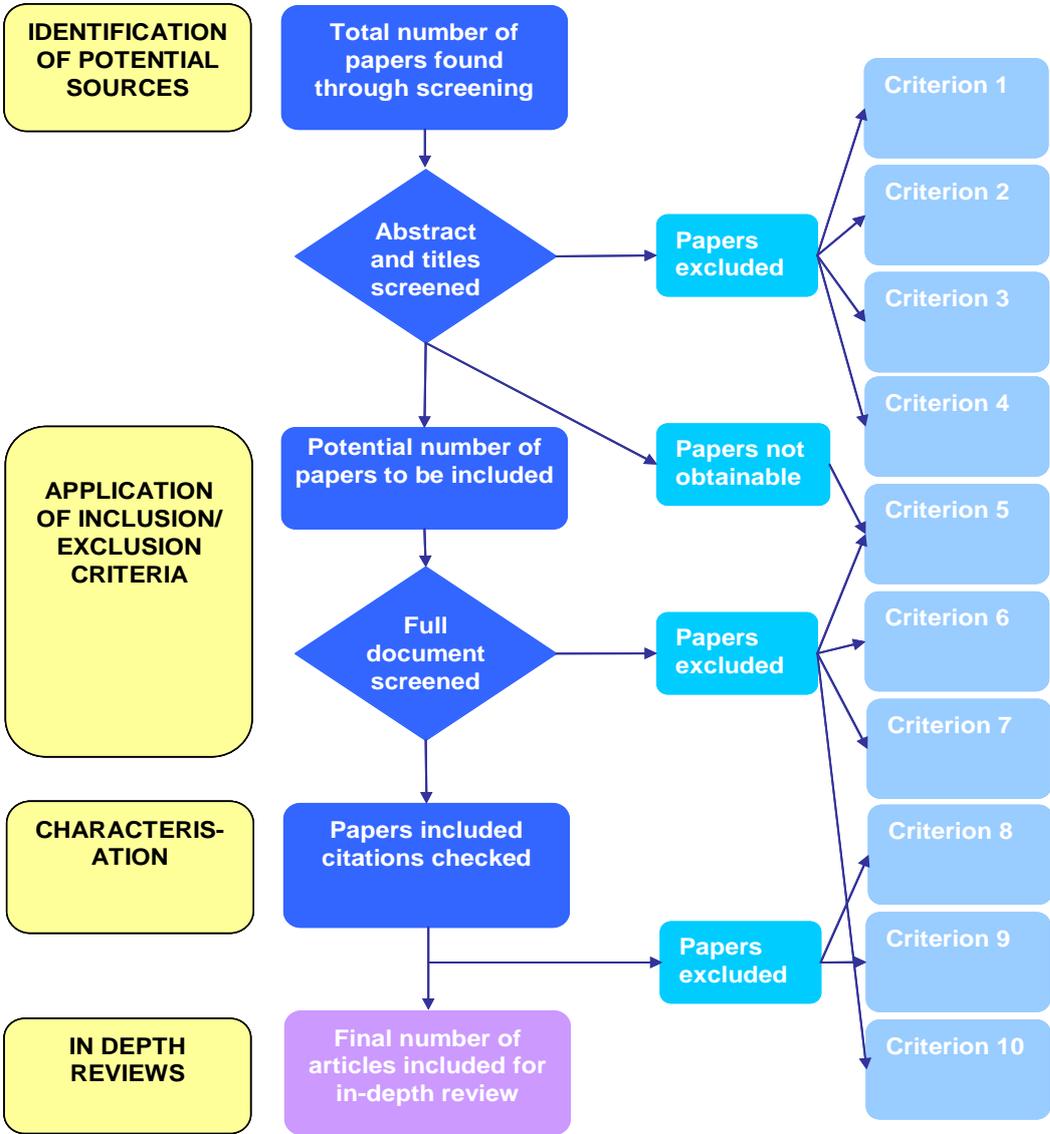
- The experience of different of people
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Ethnicity
  - Geography
  - Health
  - Skill level
  - Circumstances (length of time unemployed, women returners, lone parent, homelessness, ex-offender)
- Referral/ Hand offs
- Personalisation
- Links with other parts of the public sector
  - Social housing
  - Criminal justice system
  - Health sector
  - Tax credits
  - Childcare

### *Stage 3: Application of review specific exclusion criteria and second filter of articles*

Having applied the initial exclusion criteria in Stage1 and 2, the next step involved undertaking a further review to identify the documents to be included in this report. We carried out a full review of each document to ensure that they were of interest to the detailed research questions posed.

Particular inclusion/exclusion criteria that were of relevance at this stage included whether: the documents/articles considered the customer experience, the articles refer to under-represented groups; issues relating to barriers; challenges in relation to gaining employment/training; and risks associated with customers' experience of the employment and skills system. This stage of applying exclusion criterion is displayed below and is based on a full screening of documents.

Figure 1: Approach to undertaking systematic review of literature



Stage 4: Full scale review of articles selected for inclusion

**Objective: To ensure that a strategy been planned for extracting data from the included studies that considers the issues below?**

- Information about the **characteristics** of included studies
- Verification of **study eligibility** for the review
- Details of **study characteristics**
- Details of **study methods**
- Details of **study data** and **information sources**
- Details of **study participants** (i.e. populations and sub-groups)
- Details of **study interventions**
- Details of **study outcomes** and **findings**
- **Reliability check** for data collection/extraction

This final stage involved the in depth academic review of the remaining articles and documents that have not been excluded at any of the previous stages. The outcomes of this research are highlighted in the remainder of the report.

### **Final Note on the Evidence Base**

As can be seen from the bibliography at the end of this report there is a huge volume of evidence that describes the individual's experience of the journey into work, learning and progression and much of this material has been covered. However, despite this large evidence base gaps remain. First of all the Review aimed for UK wide coverage and so sought evidence that particularly described the experience in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and this is one area where evidence is less abundant. The DWP's research base was a major source and this evidence tended to cover Great Britain as a whole without highlighting specific findings for individual parts of the UK. Individual reports on the experience in each of the devolved nations have been included but they are in the minority. However, it should be noted that the evidence is fairly clear on the fact that the major determinant of the individual's experience of the employment and skills system is their individual circumstances and aspirations and that while differences between countries can be found differences within the devolved nations i.e. between urban and rural areas are equally important. Furthermore the evidence base on the individual's experience is far greater for the employment side of the system than the skills side.

## 2. Satisfaction with the Benefits System and Jobcentre Plus

Customers of the benefits system can provide valuable feedback on services, identifying unintended consequences or unanticipated complexities<sup>2</sup>. Customers' involvement can enhance accountability, improve provision and provide an essential counterweight to the interests of service providers. People in the employment and skills system comprise a large and diverse population, with different competences, interests and levels of engagement.

This chapter focuses on the satisfaction with Jobcentre Plus as the primary vehicle for delivery of the employment and skills system for the Department for Work and Pension (DWP). Jobcentre Plus has the aim of moving those in receipt of benefits into paid work, which tends to be the people most in need of a supportive employment and skills system. Since the New Deal was introduced in 1998, Jobcentre Plus has had a particular focus on the long term unemployed, people with disabilities and anyone in need of extra help to find work. There are other institutions in the employment and skills system such as the Learning and Skill Council (LSC) in England, Skills Development Scotland, Careers Wales or Success through Skills that provide important training with the more general aim of improving the skills of people of working age.

This strand of literature focuses on the satisfaction of people in receipt of benefits with Jobcentre Plus and reveals a number of interesting insights. The overall satisfaction with the service delivered at Jobcentre Plus is quite high. Nevertheless, the individual relationship between clients and Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisors (PAs) seems to be central to the success of the intervention. The support provided by Jobcentre Plus and the associated customer experience seems to matter in particular for groups of the population that are disadvantaged compared to the rest of the population. Jobcentre Plus staff, however, have to meet job outcomes targets which give the incentive to concentrate their knowledge and efforts on easy to reach clients. It is not clear how these job outcome targets affect service delivery and referral to other programmes.

When evaluating the overall satisfaction with Jobcentre Plus, it has to be kept in mind that the nature, frequency and methods by which Jobcentre Plus customers contact and interact with the organisation differs significantly across different programmes and benefit schemes. The majority of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) customers are in regular contact with Jobcentre Plus, whereas Income Support (IS) and Incapacity Benefit (IB) customers visit Jobcentre Plus offices much less frequently. Thus, the experiences of Jobcentre Plus customers tend to be quite diverse.

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<sup>2</sup> Finn, D., Mason, D., Rahim, N., and Casebourne, J. (2008), "Problems in the delivery of benefits, tax credits and employment services", Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Another issue that needs to be considered is that the customer journey through the benefit system has a survivor bias since only the opinions and attitudes of people that complied with the requirements of the benefit system are considered. Moreover, Finn (2008) et al.<sup>3</sup> point out that the most disadvantaged people in the labour market are often those who are also least able to take advantage of expressing their opinion. They argue that more careful and imaginative consideration needs to be given to making voice mechanisms effective. It has also been noted that there is a 'systematic lack of user consultation about service design and delivery and few mechanisms for participants to express their views about the support they receive or to seek redress for poor performance'.<sup>4</sup>

## Overall Customer Satisfaction with Jobcentre Plus

Eighty per cent of Jobcentre Plus customers surveyed as part of the Jobcentre Plus *Customer Satisfaction Survey 2007*<sup>5</sup>, stated that they are 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the service that they have received. Whilst this represents a good majority it is difficult to separate out whether this is just gratefulness for receiving timely benefits or more broad support. Indeed, one of the primary issues with Jobcentre Plus on the part of the view of the customer has been the more mechanised feel of the support offered from Jobcentre Plus in comparison to the more personalised and tailored support offered through other programmes. Likewise it is difficult to separate out negative feelings towards the services that Jobcentre Plus and other DWP contracted provision provides with negative feeling towards jobs currently available<sup>6</sup> or the nature of conditionality in the UK benefits regime.

The 2007 figure has decreased by six percentage points compared to the 2005 survey.<sup>7</sup> The vast majority of the customers surveyed in 2005 and 2007 had some form of contact with Jobcentre Plus during the 12 months prior to the survey. Contact takes place through interviews, telephone and postal means. The least satisfied respondents are JSA customers, long term benefit claimants, males, older customers, customers in London, the South East and Wales as well as customers from black, Chinese or mixed race backgrounds. JSA customers are likely to incur more problems due to more frequent use of the three channels of Jobcentre Plus: the website, jobpoints<sup>8</sup> and warmphones<sup>9</sup>. Since respondents were not asked to indicate frequency of use, it is not possible to derive a connection between satisfaction and frequency of use.

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<sup>3</sup> Finn, D., Mason, D., Rahim, N., and Casebourne, J. (2008), "Problems in the delivery of benefits, tax credits and employment services", Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

<sup>4</sup> Bennett, J. and Cooke, G. (eds), (2007), "It's All About You: Citizen-Centred Welfare", Institute for Public Policy Research.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson, S. and Fidler, Y. (2007), "Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Survey 2007", DWP Research Report 480.

<sup>6</sup> For example many customers interviewed in a variety of reports are unhappy at the level of temporary and/or low paid work available.

<sup>7</sup> Sanderson, I., Fidler Y. and Wymer P. (2005), "Jobcentre Plus National Customer Satisfaction Survey 2005", DWP Research Report 282.

<sup>8</sup> Jobpoints are computer terminals in Jobcentre Plus offices that allow people to search the job data base of Jobcentre Plus

<sup>9</sup> Warm phones provide customers with free call access for their job search.

However, negative comments tend to focus on technical and system issues such as problems with the telephone system, queues and slow service. These issues are likely to lead to a higher level of frustration when experienced frequently. Moreover, the service factors that appear to be driving overall satisfaction in particular for JSA customers appear to be dissatisfaction with office conditions. Some customers feel uncomfortable due to the limited privacy in open plan offices. McNeil (2009)<sup>10</sup> found that some participants in this study felt intimidated and uncomfortable in the Jobcentre Plus environment while Goldstone (2008)<sup>11</sup> finds that customers perceive the Jobcentre atmosphere as cold or hostile. Moreover, some customers in the study by McNeil (2009)<sup>12</sup> complain about the administrative nature of the interviews. They do not feel that advisors engage enough with them beyond their computer screen.

Another interesting finding is that people expressed the highest rates of dissatisfaction with respect to “timeliness” and “providing relevant information”. Lack of timeliness is generally due to Jobcentre Plus staff running late, but sometimes delays are caused by customers coming late. The survey results also indicate that Jobcentre Plus sometimes falls short of its service standard targets in relation to timeliness of meetings, telephone response and written response.<sup>13</sup>

Fourteen per cent of all respondents of the 2007 survey stated that they had felt like complaining about some aspect of the service at some point during the previous six months but only three per cent actually made a complaint. This finding could be related to the fact that the most disadvantaged people in the labour market are often those who are also least able to take advantage of expressing their opinion.<sup>14</sup> The proportion of JSA customers who felt like complaining is significantly higher than average amounting to 27 per cent. Most common reasons for complaints related to staff attitudes, lack of knowledge on the part of staff and problems with benefit payments. Unfortunately, few complaints have been answered or resolved and many customers were disappointed that they did not receive an apology or acknowledgement that their complaint was legitimate.

Approximately one in five Jobcentre Plus customers feel that their access to the service is limited in some way. However, 23 per cent of people in receipt of IB perceived barriers to service provision. The nature of these difficulties vary considerably. The most often mentioned constraint was that Jobcentre Plus offices are inconvenient to get to and that physical access was limited. Other issues were access to Job points, problems with telephone contact as well as perceived barriers to arranging face to face meetings with staff. The service factors that appear to be driving overall satisfaction (for IS and IB customers in particular) relates to the provision of incorrect or contradictory information.

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<sup>10</sup> McNeil, C., (2009), “Now It’s Personal: Personal advisers and the new public service workforce”, Institute for Public Policy Research.

<sup>11</sup> Carol Goldstone Associates (2008), “A ‘User Voice’ study: Jobcentre Plus customers’ perspective on DWP/DIUS strategy for skills”, DWP Research Report 519.

<sup>12</sup> McNeil, C., (2009), “Now It’s Personal: Personal advisers and the new public service workforce”, Institute for Public Policy Research.

<sup>13</sup> Jobcentre Plus has the target to stick to the schedules meeting times, answer a phone call within 30 seconds and reply to a letter within 10 working days.

<sup>14</sup> Finn, D., Mason, D., Rahim, N., and Casebourne, J. (2008), “Problems in the delivery of benefits, tax credits and employment services”, Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

One in five customers expressed that the quality of the service provided by Jobcentre Plus had improved over the 12 months prior to the survey with only six per cent indicating that service quality had declined. Interestingly, lone parents and customers from non-white ethnic groups, as well as customers in London and the West Midlands, are most likely to have perceived improvements in service quality since 2005. This seems to be connected to features of integrated offices or other more recent changes made, as there is some evidence that integrated offices in Jobcentre Plus are increasingly successful in getting more lone parents and people with health conditions and disabilities into work.<sup>15</sup>

Customers were more likely to express dissatisfaction with their experiences of written and telephone contact with Jobcentre Plus, as compared with face to face contact. This hints at the importance of face to face contact in the employment support system.<sup>16</sup>

Hasluck et al. (2005)<sup>17</sup> find that customers need continuing face-to-face contact with staff because staff provide essential practical and much needed emotional support and information about relevant services. Nonetheless, there are negative aspects associated with face to-face contact, in particular the waiting times to see PAs and meetings where staff are felt to be unhelpful or to provide unreliable information. Customers also criticised a lack of effective direction to alternative channels, which hints at the importance of the PA in the support provided to and experienced by a customer.

Generally, customer dissatisfaction cannot be connected to certain characteristics or groups.<sup>18</sup> Demographic factors such as age, gender and ethnicity play a relatively minor role in explaining the extent to which individual customers are likely to be dissatisfied with Jobcentre Plus services. However, there seems to be two different groups of IS customers with differing propensities to express dissatisfaction.

Lone parents are significantly more likely to be satisfied than males and customers with a disability. This might be an indication that disabled people need more attention and support than other people, which will be further considered in the next sections. Region predicts customer dissatisfaction well, even when demographic and 'benefit type' factors are taken into account. Customers in London, the South East and Wales are significantly more likely than average to express dissatisfaction with Jobcentre Plus services.

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<sup>15</sup> Sanderson, I., Fidler Y. and Wymer P.(2005) "Jobcentre Plus National Customer Satisfaction Survey 2005", DWP Research Report 282.

<sup>16</sup> Johnson, S. and Fidler, Y.(2007), "Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Survey 2007", DWP Research Report 480.

<sup>17</sup> Hasluck, C., GHK International, Mhonda,J., Winter, E., Durrant, C., Thompson, M., Dobbs L. and Christou, G. (2005), "The use and development of alternative service delivery channels in Jobcentre Plus: a review of recent evidence" DWP Research Report 280.

<sup>18</sup> Johnson, S. and Fidler, Y.(2007), "Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Survey 2007", DWP Research Report 480.

Interestingly, ethnic minority customers were more likely than average to feel that Jobcentre Plus services had improved over the previous year in 2005.<sup>19</sup> However, among ethnic minorities, the lowest ratings for the performance of Jobcentre Plus tend to be given by black customers. This finding could hint that these groups have some special needs that are not being met through the current Jobcentre Plus service. Generally, JSA customers from ethnic minority groups are more likely than white customers to mention job search as their primary reason for contact with Jobcentre Plus. They are in general less aware than white people of the Customers' Charter; however, they attach a high importance to service quality, such as the friendliness and politeness of staff and the speed at which their business is dealt with.

As mentioned earlier, customer satisfaction decreased from the 2005 to 2007 with 86 per cent being satisfied in 2005 compared to 80 per cent in 2007.<sup>20</sup> The 2005 survey presents a picture of limited change from 2004, with many changes apparently moving in a positive direction. However, the 2005 survey is interesting since the number of integrated offices increased significantly since 2004 and thus the survey identified customers' views on the Jobcentre Plus service in comparison to the legacy service<sup>21</sup>.

The response of customers to the integrated service appeared to be very encouraging, with the majority reporting that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the new service.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, staff also expressed very positive views about the office environment, indicating it helped them to provide a more professional service to customers. There was also positive feedback in terms of job outcomes as job entries have risen since the introduction of Jobcentre Plus.

Nevertheless, there are some aspects of the service for which customer perceptions have not improved or even deteriorated. The proportion of respondents who had felt like complaining remains relatively high amongst JSA customers. Specifically, the overall proportion of customers who expressed a reason to complain was 12 per cent in the 2005 survey compared to 14 per cent in 2007. The proportion who had actually made a complaint remained stable at three per cent. Staff attitudes and staff lack of knowledge remained the primary reasons for people feeling like complaining. Moreover, lacking privacy in offices as well as constantly engaged phones or phones not being answered have been issues.

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<sup>19</sup> Johnson, S. and Fidler, Y. (2006) "Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction: Ethnic Minority Booster Survey 2005", DWP Research Report 338.

<sup>20</sup> Johnson, S. and Fidler, Y. (2007), "Jobcentre Plus Customer Satisfaction Survey 2007", DWP Research Report 480.

<sup>20</sup> Sanderson, I., Fidler Y. and Wymer P. (2005) "Jobcentre Plus National Customer Satisfaction Survey 2005", DWP Research Report 282.

<sup>21</sup> Jobcentre Plus was created in 2001 but it took time to change the existing service to the new integrated system. The Jobcentre Plus Service brings together the Employment Service (ES) and those parts of the Benefits Agency (BA) dealing with people of working age to deliver a single, work-focused, integrated service. The new service is more work-focused and encourages people of working age making new or repeat claims to consider work as an option before proceeding with their claims.

<sup>22</sup> Corkett, J., Bennett, S., Stafford, J., Frogner, M. and Shrapnell, K. (2005), "Jobcentre Plus evaluation: summary of evidence", DWP Research Report 252.

## Personal Advisors and Client Relationships

A key element of the UK Government's reform of the welfare system over the past decade has been the provision of personalised support to help people back into work. Over 20,000 PAs provide one-to-one employment support in the employment and skill system. Jobcentre Plus staff, in particular the PA, seem to be critical to the success of interventions. Often a strong and ongoing positive relationship with advisors is one of the key determinants of long-term progress.<sup>23</sup> Those who are allocated a PA tend to have more positive views overall about the Jobcentre and the service it provides. With a small number of exceptions, PAs are highly thought of and considered a valuable help to the customer.<sup>24</sup> In order to build up a positive rapport it is important that a customer always sees the same advisor.<sup>25</sup> McNeil (2009)<sup>26</sup> points out that customers complain about seeing a different advisor every visit and furthermore feel that they do not have sufficient time with an advisor. Those customers who saw new staff on each visit felt that they would benefit by being allocated a PA. Interestingly, 47 per cent of the advisors said that they did not have sufficient time to support their clients.<sup>27</sup>

The successful employment support provided by PAs depends significantly on the skills they possess to motivate the customer to move into work. This seems to be particularly the case for people who have some specific labour market disadvantage.<sup>28</sup> In case of disadvantaged groups, PAs generally need quite a lot of empathy to be able to identify and address the barriers to employment and to begin providing a customer with the necessary support and encouragement to return to work. Engendering a desire amongst customers to seek, and accept employment is likely to be more difficult for these groups. However, there will be little motivation and engagement if customers feel forced into participation or feel that they are being directed towards provision that does not meet their needs<sup>29 30</sup>. Therefore, the individual capabilities and attitudes of PAs and the techniques they use have an important impact on the effectiveness of interventions.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Lewis, J., Corden, A., Dillon, L., Hill, K., Kellard, K., Sainsbury, R. and Thornton, P. (2005), *New Deal for Disabled People: An In-Depth Study of Job Broker Service Delivery*, DWP Research Report No. 246.

<sup>24</sup> Carol Goldstone Associates (2008), "A 'User Voice' study: Jobcentre Plus customers' perspective on DWP/DIUS strategy for skills", DWP Research Report 519.

<sup>25</sup> Dorsett, R. (2008) "Pathways to Work for new and repeat incapacity benefits claimants: Evaluation synthesis report", DWP Research report 525.

<sup>26</sup> McNeil, C. (2009), "Now It's Personal: Personal advisers and the new public service workforce", Institute for Public Policy Research.

<sup>27</sup> McNeil, C. (2009), "Now It's Personal: Personal advisers and the new public service workforce", Institute for Public Policy Research.

<sup>28</sup> Lewis, J., Corden, A., Dillon, L., Hill, K., Kellard, K., Sainsbury, R. and Thornton, P. (2005), "New Deal for Disabled People: An In-Depth Study of Job Broker Service Delivery", DWP Research Report No. 246.

<sup>29</sup> Loumidis, J., Stafford, B., Youngs, R., Green, A., Arthur, S., Legard, R., Lessof, C., Lewis, J., Walker, R., Corden, A., Thornton, P. and Sainsbury, R. (2001), "Evaluation of the New Deal for Disabled People Personal Adviser Service Pilot, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 144.

<sup>30</sup> Corden, A., Harries, T., Hill, K., Kellard, K., Lewis, J., Sainsbury, R. and Thornton, P. (2003), "New Deal for Disabled People National Extension: Findings from the First Wave of Qualitative Research with Customers, Job Brokers and Jobcentre Plus Staff", DWP Research Report No. 169.

<sup>31</sup> Hasluck, C. and Green A. E. (2007), "What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions", DWP Research Report No 407.

## Job Search Assistance

One of the main functions of the Personal Advisor is to provide job search support and assistance. Qualitative evidence suggests that experiences are mixed with some reporting good experiences and others reporting negative experiences. However, it is difficult to separate out negative feelings towards the job search support offered by Jobcentre Plus with negative feelings towards the vacancies available in the local labour market, especially if these are temporary and/or low paid<sup>32</sup>.

The findings above are echoed with regard to Work Focussed Interviews (WFIs) where some clients felt they were an exercise designed to force them into unsuitable work. Furthermore, some customers felt that their WFIs were too short and too infrequent to build up a good working relationship or adequately discuss customer needs and aspirations. In addition some customers were disappointed at the lack of training or progression focus in WFIs and that there was a lack of advice and financial support for training<sup>33</sup>.

## The Effect of Job Outcomes Targets

Jobcentre Plus Advisors are required to meet specific sets of performance targets, such as a certain quota of people moving into paid work. Thus, there is an incentive for Jobcentre Plus Advisors to devote resources and effort to customers that are more job ready than others (Coleman et al. (2003)<sup>34</sup>, Hasluck (2007)<sup>35</sup>). Targets are set up in terms of customer groups rather than individuals; however, individuals within customer groups are very diverse. PAs have reported that they sometimes provide support to a job ready member of a high priority group rather than to a more needy member of a low priority group.<sup>36</sup> Thus, there seems to be the risk that PAs choose the customers who are easy to help and neglect the ones who face greater or multiple barriers to returning to work. Thomas (2004)<sup>37</sup> found that advisors are seeking 'easy hits' from lone parent WFI process by concentrating their efforts on the most job-ready customers. These customers justify the investment of limited time and resource for the PA as they have the best probability of a positive employment outcome. There is also evidence for selective caseloading in McNeil (2009) whereby some customers are excluded or "parked".<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> DWP Research Report No 575 "A qualitative study of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with Jobcentre Plus" (2009).

<sup>33</sup> DWP Research Report No 575 "A qualitative study of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with Jobcentre Plus" (2009).

<sup>34</sup> Colemann, N., Rousseau, N. and Laycock, M. (2003), "National Evaluation of Lone Parent Personal Adviser Meetings: Findings from a Longitudinal Survey of Clients", DWP Research Report No 172).

<sup>35</sup> Hasluck, C., and Green, A.E. (2007) "What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions", DWP Research Report 407.

<sup>36</sup> Hasluck, C., and Green, A.E. (2007) "What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions", DWP Research Report 407.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas A. and Griffiths R. (2004), "Integrated Findings from the Evaluation of the First 18 Months of Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews", DWP Research Report No 184.

<sup>38</sup> McNeil, C. (2009), "Now It's Personal: Personal advisers and the new public service workforce", Institute for Public Policy Research.

BMRB (2006)<sup>39</sup> find that a third of repeat claimants feel that people are pushed into positions that they do not want to accept by Jobcentre Plus. This seemed to be particularly the case among those that had more contact with the Jobcentre, such as people on the New Deal25+ and those with caring responsibilities. Ex-offenders also expressed the belief that that Jobcentre Plus staff were focused on meeting targets and getting them into any job, regardless of their circumstances or interests.<sup>40</sup> This was in contrast to their experience of Progress2Work LinkUp, where advisors provided personally tailored help and support.

## Changes to the Employment Support System

The system of support offered through Jobcentre Plus is currently changing through the introduction of a new four stage Jobseekers Regime process whereby a claimant's level of job search and assistance increases the longer they remain on JSA, culminating in a referral to the new employment programme – Flexible New Deal. The four stages include:

- Stage 1: A self-managed job search with fortnightly job search reviews with Jobcentre Plus where the onus is on the individual to find work themselves
- Stage 2: A directed job search. If a customer is still claiming JSA after three months they will receive a formal review of their Jobseeker's Agreement with a Personal Advisor
- Stage 3: Supported job search. After six months of claiming JSA, customers will have a number of mandatory interviews with a PA that include action planning and activities to help customers to make a return to work
- Stage 4: Flexible New Deal. Customers who do not find work at the end of stage three are referred to Flexible New Deal

The Flexible New Deal programme is a move away from the rigid distinctions of the current New Deals between age groups.<sup>41</sup> This new regime has also incorporated some of the early elements of the Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) system. Flexible New Deal will replace the current New Deal 18-24 (New Deal for Young People), New Deal 25+ and Employment Zones programmes. Flexible New Deal is now operating across some areas of England and Scotland and all areas in Wales. During 2009-2010 some areas will still provide the earlier New Deal 18-24 and New Deal 25+ programmes.

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<sup>39</sup> BMRB (2006), "Repeat Jobseekers Allowance spells", DWP Research Report 394.

<sup>40</sup> Hartfree, Y., Dearden, C. and Pound, E. (2008), "High hopes: Supporting ex-prisoners in their lives after prison", DWP Research Report No 509.

<sup>41</sup> Bellis A., Aston J. and Dewson S. (2009), "Jobseekers Regime test site evaluation: Qualitative research", DWP Research Report No 580, DWP.

Qualitative research by Bellis et al. (2009) provides some early insights into the implementation of the revised JSA regime across a number of test sites.<sup>42</sup> At Stage One of the JSA regime customers interviewed reported that they had found the advisor at their first New Jobseeker Interview (NJI) to have been helpful and pleasant, but that there had been a great deal of information for them to absorb during a relatively short amount of time. By Stage Two of the regime interviews with customers had become more mixed.

Approximately half of the customers interviewed who had experienced a 13 week Stage Two review were fairly positive with many saying that the interview had given them some useful clarification about the process of signing on and what was expected of them. Negative reports from customers were from those who could not see how the service they were now receiving was in any way different to the service they had previously received. A number of the customers interviewed felt that their needs were 'still not understood' and that Jobcentre Plus had nothing to offer them. The issue of continuity with Jobcentre Plus staff was also raised. As part of the regime, customers are required to attend weekly meetings for six weeks after their Stage Two interview. Some of the customers interviewed reported that they never saw the same member of staff twice. The research reports that it became apparent that customers, even within the same office, were being treated differently by Fortnightly Jobsearch Review (FJR) staff, with some being asked for evidence of job-searching and some not.

Interviews with customers at Stage Three found that a number of customers were very pleased for the more intensive support and felt that they were receiving a more personal and tailored service from advisors under the new regime in comparison to the old style New Deals. However, some customers who had been through the system before there was a feeling that the new regime was just 'more of the same'.

The Back to Work group sessions were outlined as part of the change in the revised JSA regime and the new Flexible New Deal. The Back to Work group sessions were provided to set out individuals' rights and responsibilities and highlight the support available through Jobcentre Plus to help customers move into employment.

Back to Work group sessions have been the subject of a pilot stage evaluation published by the DWP in 2008.<sup>43</sup> At this stage, participation in the sessions was voluntary and so evaluation results may refer to an atypical group of jobseekers as they volunteered to attend. The evaluation found in terms of the customer experience that around half of the customers participating in the evaluation felt that they had not learnt anything new as a result of attending their session. For those who had learnt something new, participants most frequently reported that the sessions had helped them to understand:

- the range of services available from Jobcentre Plus – Participants reported that they found that the range available was greater than they had been aware of previously and that support was available even after they had started work

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<sup>42</sup> Bellis A., Aston J. and Dewson S. (2009), 2Jobseekers Regime test site evaluation: Qualitative research2, DWP Research Report No 580, DWP.

<sup>43</sup> Jenkins S. and Lloyd R. (2008), 2Evaluation of the trial of Back to Work group sessions2, DWP Research Report 518. DWP.

- Jobcentre Plus did not hold all the vacancies in their area and that their approach to jobseeking needed to reflect this
- customers would be better off in a job on the minimum wage than on benefits, although some customers questioned the applicability of the calculations they were shown to their specific circumstances

One of the main criticisms of the Back to Work sessions was that almost none of the programmes and initiatives that customers were informed about during the sessions were currently accessible by the majority of JSA customers. In many cases customers had to be unemployed for at least six months before New Deal, Programme Centres, Work Trials and Advisor Discretion Fund (ADF) could be accessed. The support customers could access after attending the sessions was limited leaving them in many cases frustrated.

### Integrated Employment and Skills Trials

In response to the recommendation of the 2006 Leitch Review of Skills for the development of a better integrated system of employment and skills support, the government published the White Paper *Opportunity, Employment and Progression: making skills work*, which outlined a commitment to an integrated employment and skills system. The DWP, Jobcentre Plus, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the LSC are working together to develop a new integrated employment and skills system which has been trialled in a number of Jobcentre Plus areas in England. Wales and Scotland are developing their equivalents but evaluation evidence is not available as yet. Some elements of the IES have been integrated into the revised JSA regime.

In integrating the employment and skills system, Jobcentre Plus has the role of referring customers to Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services that are currently nextstep and learndirect/Careers Advisory Services (these will be merged into the new universal Adult Advancement and Careers Service) through a targeted system of skills screening and referral. During the trial phase, this takes place through two stages:

- At the New Jobseekers Interview (NJI) or 13 week review, skills barriers are identified with customers. Advisors signpost customers to telephone and web-based careers services and those with basic skills needs can be signposted or referred to basic skills assessment or training.
- At 26 weeks, customers who are still unemployed undergo a further skills review and can be directed to attend nextstep if a need is identified.

Evidence of customer experiences from the draft stage one evaluation of the IES Trials based on three rounds of fieldwork conducted in 10 IES trial districts is summarised below.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Levesley T., Francis R., Sissons P., Oakley J. And Johnson C. (2009), "Qualitative Evaluation of the Integrated Employment and Skills Trials: Implementation Report", DWP Research Report No 618 (2009).

The evaluation research reports that customers have found the interaction with nextstep to be largely positive in terms of gaining confidence, motivation and an insight into what they can achieve. Customers interviewed as part of the evaluation responded positively about nextstep advisors, as well as the personalised service they received. Customers felt that, in contrast to Jobcentre Plus advisors, nextstep advisors had more time to spend with them and worked in a more personalised and unpressured way. While the evidence as to what extent the IES trials have improved employment chances is not yet available, many long-term claimants who had not found work during the evaluation research tended to be more negative about the nextsteps and Jobcentre Plus support. Perceptions of the recession and resultant bleak job prospects also added to the perceptions of the programme. Jobcentre Plus advisors themselves reported that they were unsure that IES interventions are the best option to pursue given that customers reaching this stage of getting a nextstep interview (by 26 weeks) were likely to have quite significant barriers to employment.

Few customers had been referred to training and few had actually changed their career direction as a result of the interview with nextstep. However, many reported that the interview had broadened their horizons. Some customers felt that opportunities for training were limited, and customers said they needed advice about training alongside discussion of the impact on benefits and information about funding. For many customers the main benefit of the IES process was in improving their CV which is an activity possible outside of IES and was an issue identified by Jobcentre Plus staff.

## 3. Young People

### Summary

The journey for young adults (18-24) through the employment and skills system is changing with the introduction of the new Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal replacing the current New Deal for Young People (NDYP) and Employment Zones (EZ) programmes. The new Jobseekers Regime and Flexible New Deal are in the early stages of operation and thus lack any evaluation information specific for the experiences of young adults. There is limited recent literature examining the experience of young adults therefore we consider the NDYP programme mechanism of employment support. The evidence examined on both NDYP and EZs highlights some interesting findings that will remain relevant for the successful operation of the new labour market programmes. From the launch of NDYP in 1998, a comprehensive programme of evaluation has been undertaken. However, the evidence from the national programme of evaluation relates mainly to the first four years of delivery. Since then, there has been little further research and any research that has been undertaken tends to focus on the marginal changes that have been made to the flexibility aspects of NDYP delivery. There are some further areas of research that examine the experiences of young adults in other parts of the employment and skills system, however, research is limited with little specifically focusing on this age group. Views and attitudes towards training and of support mechanisms such as Care to Learn are detailed in the relevant sections and chapters.

Given the changes in the employment support system for young adults and the lack of recent research the review of literature can only give a retrospective account of the experiences of young adults of the employment and skills system. NDYP has been the largest of the New Deal programmes with nearly 1.5m individuals having started the programme up to August 2009. Evidence from the evaluation of NDYP suggests that the vast majority of those young adults leave the programme at the initial Gateway stage prior to the more intensive support periods of Options and Follow-through consisting of access to training, work experience and further support.

The relationship between the customer and New Deal PA is, as with all customer groups, important for a positive experience and is particularly 'pivotal' for those young adults who are furthest from the labour market and/or those who have the most complex needs. The better able the PA is to match provision to the individual need of the customer, the better the results are in terms of both customer satisfaction and outcomes. This is interesting following evidence that some PAs are working most intensively with those who are thought to be most 'job ready'. There has also been acknowledgement that there are practical issues with referring and brokering support mechanisms for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged with evidence of a lack of services.

The experience of NDYP is different for different groups of young people. For those young people that are closest to the job market there has been some questioning of whether NDYP caters appropriately for their level of qualifications and experience.

Young adults have perceived the elements of work experience and placements of employment support programmes and the FTET Option of NDYP positively and are keen to have the opportunity to gain work experience and optimistic about the effect of these activities on their future employability. Those taking part in the EO felt that it gave them routine and stability helping to increase their self-esteem and confidence.

In terms of the role in-work support, evidence suggests that there has been a lack of routine in-work support provision through the New Deal programme. There is also evidence of churn within the system with under half of young people returning to, or started, work once leaving the New Deal programme.

The EZ programme has been positively viewed by young adults. Satisfaction with the EZ programme has been high particularly amongst those who were accessing the programme as a result of NDYP being unsuccessful. The personalised and flexible nature of the support delivered through the EZ programme, the nature of the EZ Advisors and the amount of time EZ Advisers spend with their customers has also been a real positive aspect of the programme.

## New Deal for Young People

The NDYP programme was introduced in 12 Pathfinder areas during early 1998 and rolled out nationally from April 1998. Participation in the programme is mandatory for 18 to 24 year olds who have been unemployed and claiming JSA for six months. The NDYP programme is delivered in three stages<sup>45</sup>. 'Gateway' is the first stage lasting up to 16 weeks. At this stage a customer will meet their personal advisor every week to:

- work out the steps needed to move towards getting a job
- set an action plan
- work out the types of jobs that can be applied for
- complete application forms and CV writing
- careers advice
- referral to other support mechanisms as needed
- eligible for help job seeking costs e.g. travel fares

If completion of the first stage did not result in a job, then the customers join the 'Options' or second stage which lasted 13 weeks. This stage involved gaining access to training and work experience to help find work. The final stage was 'Follow-through' consisting of an extra programme of support lasting for up to 26 weeks. Research by Beale et al. (2009)<sup>46</sup> found that NDYP was the largest government labour market programme with nearly 1.5m<sup>47</sup> individuals having started the programme up to August 2009. Most participants leave the

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<sup>45</sup> Jobcentre Plus, New Deal for young people, Help finding work if you're 18-24, Information Bulletin, Jobcentre Plus. [http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/stellent/groups/jcp/documents/sitestudio/dev\\_015305.pdf](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/stellent/groups/jcp/documents/sitestudio/dev_015305.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> Beale I., Bloss C. and Thomas A. (2008), "The longer-term impact of the New Deal for Young People", DWP Working Paper 23.

<sup>47</sup> DWP Tabtool (<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/tabtool.asp>) NDYP Starters (individuals) Jan '98 to Aug '09.

programme during Gateway before they reach the relatively more expensive options. For instance, of the 170,000 clients referred to NDYP between March 2003 and March 2004, 150,000 started the Gateway, 50,000 started Options and 30,000 started Follow-Through.

Participants are expected to remain available for work during the Gateway period and to take employment if a suitable job is offered. If the young person remains unemployed after Gateway they are offered the opportunity to participate in one of four options:

- Subsidised employment (Employment Option)
- Full-time education and training (Full-time Education and Training Option)
- Environment Taskforce (ETF) Option
- Voluntary Sector (VS) Option

The Employment Option offers a subsidy to employers of £60 per week for 26 weeks where the job offers more than 30 hours of employment per week and £40 per week for part-time jobs. This option includes the equivalent of one day per week of training, for which the employer receives a grant of £750. The Full-time Education and Training (FTET) Option entitles participants to up to 52 weeks of training designed to lead to a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 2 or equivalent qualification. The ETF Option offers work placements and short training vocational courses where appropriate. Placements can last for up to 26 weeks and are intended to enhance the employability of participants. The VS Option is similar to the ETF Option with participants placed in a job with a voluntary sector employer for up to 26 weeks<sup>48</sup>.

## Satisfaction with NDYP

As with many customer groups, the role of the New Deal Advisor is of fundamental importance to a positive experience of the programme. O'Connor et al. (2001)<sup>49</sup> researching the experiences of NDYP participants, as part of the wider national NDYP evaluation, found that the role of PA was crucial not only for identifying the needs of the young person but also in responding to those needs with the right advice and support. As would be expected, the better able the PA is to match provision to the individual needs of the customer, the better the result both in terms of customer satisfaction and outcomes. This relationship becomes further 'pivotal' for those young people who were furthest from the job market and/or had the most complex needs. For example, for the young homeless, the PAs were critical to the process of identifying special needs, referral to other agencies, providing advice, encouragement and support and generally being available when the young people enter the programme.

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<sup>48</sup> Hasluck C. and Green A. (2007), "What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions", DWP Research Report 407.

<sup>49</sup> O'Connor W., Ritchie J. and Woodfield K. (2001), "Experiences of New Deal: Qualitative Profiles of Young Participants," Employment Service.

A small scale case study of four Jobcentre Plus districts by Finn D (2003)<sup>50</sup> interviewing approximately 100 each of Advisors and young people, found that the New Deal PAs were able to provide a range of individualised services for the young person such as identifying barriers to work, helping with applications, contacting employers and discussing and clarifying employment goals. However, there was some evidence that PAs worked most intensively with those who they thought were most 'job ready'. Additionally, in each of the four Jobcentre Plus districts areas, New Deal PAs acknowledged problems in making successful referrals to the other services needed by the most disadvantaged. In some cases local services were either unavailable or had long waiting lists.

Research by O'Connor et al (2001)<sup>51</sup> examined the experiences of different groups of young people including those without qualifications and far from the job market; and those who were qualified and with some employment experience. The research found that for those who were qualified and experienced questioned whether the scheme was appropriately catering for their level of qualifications and experience. These young people felt that the jobs available through the NDYP were aimed at the low skilled and poorly qualified. This group of young people further felt that the PAs were not able to offer them the specialist job searching that they felt needed to in order to find employment in their chosen field.

## Gateway and Options

The NDYP Gateway offers a mixture of different types of advice and guidance, from help with job search and careers advice to short courses designed to improve motivation, build confidence or address basic skills weaknesses. The provision of various forms of advice and guidance is absolutely central to the NDYP design.<sup>52</sup>

Young adults using the Gateway for jobsearch found that the level of support both needed and offered by PAs varied. As with all customer groups, those closest to the labour market feel they require the least help. Those with minimal experience of applying for jobs feel they needed more assistance and support.

Experience of the Gateway, in terms of the support offered, was varied depending on the extent to which individual needs and circumstances had been explored at the initial stages. PAs were reported by young adults as being sympathetic, helpful and supportive. However, the system was criticised by young adults for whether it was appropriately catering for entrants with their level of qualifications and experience as outlined earlier by O'Conner et al (2001). Young adults further reported concerns that NDPAs were not equipped to assist in specialist or national jobsearch which some participants felt they needed to undertake in order to find employment in their chosen field.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Finn D. (2003), "The 'Employment First' Welfare State: lessons from the New Deal for Young People", *Journal of Social Policy and Administration*, Vol 37, Issue 7, pp 709-724.

<sup>51</sup> O'Connor W., Ritchie J. and Woodfield K. (2001), "Experiences of New Deal: Qualitative Profiles of Young Participants", Employment Service.

<sup>52</sup> Hasluck C. and Green A. (2007), "What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions", DWP Research Report 407.

<sup>53</sup> O'Connor W., Ritchie J. and Woodfield K. (2001), "Experiences of New Deal: Qualitative Profiles of Young Participants", Employment Service.

Indeed, those with advanced qualifications were disappointed in cases where either their Option placement failed to provide work experience or where the work experience was unchallenging and not related to their future goals.

NDYP offers a number of routes for young adults to undertake work placements through the Work Trials programme and through the Options of the Gateway period of NDYP. The Work Trials programme is available for customers on the NDYP programme; however, there is little evaluation research on Work Trials that relates specifically to the 18-24 year age group. Through the Options programmes young adults can take part in a subsidised employment, a placement with the Environment taskforce (ETF) or a placement with a voluntary sector organisation.

Research by Woodfield et al (2000)<sup>54</sup> found that young adults entering into the Employment Option were keen to have the opportunity to gain work experience and were optimistic about the effect of such work experience on their future employability. Gaining work experience was central to positive experiences for those who had minimal work experience on joining the scheme. Not only did these young people feel better equipped to convince an employer of their abilities but also reported increased confidence as a result of the placement.<sup>55</sup> Research by Finn (2003)<sup>56</sup> found that many of those young people who were interviewed and on an option agreed that taking part in the programme gave them routine and stability, helped increase self-esteem and confidence and they were hopeful participation would improve their job prospects.

The Employment Option was seen by many young adults as providing 'a proper job' and was particularly attractive to those young adults that had not been able to find unsubsidised employment<sup>57</sup>. A parallel survey by Hales et al. (2000)<sup>58</sup> of employers providing subsidised employment places found over 60 per cent of NDYP recruits had been retained at the end of the subsidy period and just over half remained with their NDYP employer after nine months. This research did however find concerns over the low pay levels in many the work placements and the lack of continued job search amongst participants whilst in a subsidised job.

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<sup>54</sup> Woodfield, K, Bruce, S. and Ritchie, J. (2000), "New Deal for Young People: The National Options, Employment Service", Employment Service Research Report ESR37.

<sup>55</sup> O'Connor W., Ritchie J. and Woodfield K. (2001), "Experiences of New Deal: Qualitative Profiles of Young Participants", Employment Service.

<sup>56</sup> Finn D. (2003), "The 'Employment First' Welfare State: lessons from the New Deal for Young People", Journal of Social Policy and Administration, Vol 37, Issue 7, pp 709-724.

<sup>57</sup> Woodfield, K, Bruce, S. and Ritchie, J. (2000), "New Deal for Young People: The National Options, Employment Service", Employment Service Research Report ESR37.

<sup>58</sup> Hales, J., Collins, D., Hasluck, C. and Woodland, S. (2000), "New Deals for Young People and for Long-Term Unemployed: Survey of Employers", Employment Service Research Report ESR58.

Woodfield et al. (1999)<sup>59</sup> found that the VS placement Option was criticised by young adults as offering mainly low skilled and repetitive opportunities with poor quality training provision. Evaluation evidence of the ETF Option found a high proportion of young adults referred to the ETF Option were young males with no qualifications raising concerns that the Option might have become the 'option of last resort' where difficult to place customers were referred<sup>60</sup>. However, evidence from ETF participants found that for those who aspired to a career in conservation or certain sections of the leisure industry, ETF provided a real route to an improvement in the individuals' future job prospects, providing appropriate experience, relevant skills and useful contacts<sup>61</sup>.

## NDYP Skills and Training

Participants on the NDYP programme can access support for training through a number of routes. Whilst on Gateway those young adults with basic skills needs can access short courses. For those young adults undertaking the subsidised Employment Option there is a requirement that that young adult also receives training for which the employer receives an additional subsidy.

The FTET Option was intended to address longer-term barriers to employment arising from a lack of qualifications. FTET option was seen as an attractive route by those young adults who wanted to shore up their existing qualifications, gain specific qualifications or to learn new vocational skills which would assist them in finding employment.<sup>62</sup>

A national survey of NDYP that participants found that the majority who were participating in FTET had chosen to join the Option and also were very positive about their experiences.<sup>63</sup> Young adults felt that the FTET Option would provide them with the qualification they needed to pursue their chosen career or job goal. Further to this, those without a clear career goal felt that the FTET gave them the 'breathing space' they needed to work out their career direction while obtaining qualifications. Those who had been referred to the FTET Option rather than having chosen to be there were less positive about their experience.

Whilst the customer experience has been positive there have been a number of studies that have identified issues with the FTET Option. These included a lack of provision where a young person wished to train for a qualification but could not find a provider in their area, lack of options above level 2 and poor support for special needs. Where qualifications take more than 12 months to complete, it is often not possible to gain such qualifications within NDYP.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Woodfield, K., Turner, R. and Ritchie, J. (1999), "New Deal for Young People: The Pathfinder Options", Employment Service Research Report ESR25.

<sup>60</sup> The Tavistock Institute (1999), "New Deal for Young Unemployed People: National Case Studies of Delivery and Impact", Employment Service Research Report ESR30.

<sup>61</sup> Woodfield, K., Turner, R. and Ritchie, J. (1999), "New Deal for Young People: The Pathfinder Options", Employment Service Research Report ESR25.

<sup>62</sup> O'Connor W., Ritchie J. and Woodfield K. (2001), "Experiences of New Deal: Qualitative Profiles of Young Participants", Employment Service.

<sup>63</sup> Bryson, A., Knight, G. and White, M. (2000), "New Deal for Young People: National Survey of Participants: Stage 1", Employment Service Research Report ESR44.

<sup>64</sup> Hasluck C. and Green A. (2007), "What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions", DWP Research Report 407.

## In-Work Support

Hasluck and Green (2007)<sup>65</sup> find that there is no evidence that NDYP PAs routinely provide in-work support for young people entering jobs from NDYP. Evidence from the national survey of the destinations of NDYP and ND25+ leavers by Coleman et al (2004)<sup>66</sup> found that for those leaving NDYP, under half (46 per cent) of those who confirmed they left the programme returned to, or started, work. Those leaving at the pre-Gateway stage or from the employment option were most likely to have work as their destination.

In-work support is provided by Employment Zones (EZs) for those young adults who have been through the NDYP without obtaining employment and would otherwise repeat that programme and for those young adults entitled to early entry due to the disadvantages they face in the labour market. Support is available once the young adult has entered employment and the support takes the form of moral support, advice, financial support and help in negotiations with employers where it is necessary to prevent a customer from dropping out of a job. The experience of young adults of EZs is outlined in the following.

## Employment Zones

Employment Zones (EZs) were introduced in April 2000 in fifteen UK areas with high concentrations of long term unemployment. EZs target unemployed people over the age of 25 who have been claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) for at least twelve months. EZs were expanded in April 2003 to include lone parents, unemployed people aged 18-24 otherwise returning to New Deal and JSA claimants entitled to early entry due to the disadvantages they face in the labour market. Participation for young people, and early entrants who choose to join, is mandatory.

The EZ programme offers practical assistance with a number of activities to get young adults into work such as job searching, job applications and interview techniques. Evaluation research by Griffiths and Jones (2005)<sup>67</sup> into the EZ extensions to young people, lone parents and early entrants found EZ Advisors using In-Work Benefit Calculations (IWBC) for the 18-24 client group as standard practice. It was felt that these calculations were helpful in overcoming attitudinal barriers among young people regarding the financial benefits of working. Advisors also reported the need and use of good referral mechanisms as many of the 18 to 24 year olds had other issues that they needed support with such as housing problems, reported to be common amongst this age group. Some advisors were liaising with housing associations and local authorities, frequently over many weeks, to help secure suitable accommodation for their clients. The research by Griffiths and Jones (2005) further found the Personal Job Account (PJA) being used as an incentive to pay for housing bonds and deposits if clients found work. Other uses of the PJA included clothing for interviews, haircuts and dental work. Relative to the cost, items purchased through the PJA could have a sizeable impact on 18-24 customers.

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<sup>65</sup> Hasluck C. and Green A. (2007), "What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions", DWP Research Report 407.

<sup>66</sup> Coleman N., Wapshott J. and Carpenter H. (2004), "Destination of Leavers from NDYP and ND25 Plus", DWP.

<sup>67</sup> Griffiths R. and Jones G. (2005), "Evaluation of Single Provider Employment Zone Extensions to Young People, Lone Parents and Early Entrants, Interim Report", DWP Research Report 228. DWP.

Satisfaction with the EZ programme on the part of the young adults is shown to be high amongst those who were accessing the programme as a result of NDYP being unsuccessful. The evaluation research by Griffiths and Jones (2005)<sup>68</sup> reported that being able to exercise choice and the sense that their job preferences will be given a sympathetic hearing, appears to help motivate young people who have participated in New Deal to find work. The service was reported by young adults as being personal, with EZ advisors sympathetic to their circumstances and aspirations. Young people also mentioned the greater amount of time and effort EZ advisors were able and willing to spend helping them. The flexible and holistic support EZs offer that takes into account individual needs and circumstances was viewed positively. For those early entrants to the EZ programme the majority found the EZ service more flexible than Jobcentre Plus. Jobcentre staff were seen to operate under stricter guidelines which were believed to impair their ability to offer a customer focused service. This contrasted with the discretion and flexibility available to EZ advisors to deliver a more tailored service taking into account clients' individual needs and circumstances.

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<sup>68</sup> Griffiths R. and Jones G. (2005), "Evaluation of Single Provider Employment Zone Extensions to Young People, Lone Parents and Early Entrants, Interim Report", DWP Research Report 228. DWP.

## 4. Older People

### Summary

This section examines the experiences of older adults aged 50 plus of the employment and skills system. Older adults can experience the employment system through a number of different programme including those targeted at the general adult population and more specifically New Deal 50 plus (ND50+), targeted at adults over 50.

Unlike New Deal for Young People, ND50+ is a voluntary programme and so the journey through this programme and satisfaction with it will be different in comparison to those programmes where participation is mandatory.

Evidence suggest that participants of ND50+ have largely viewed the programme positively. Those customers that did not find their experience of ND50+ a positive one were those who began the programme with less than average confidence both within themselves and the programme itself.

The relationship between the PA and the customer and the personalisation of the support offered is particularly important for this customer group. One of the real success factors for the ND50+ programme has been the customer-advisor relationship and the maintenance of the on-going support phase (caseloading) of the programme. ND50+ participants who received this ongoing support from their advisor reported that they felt this enabled advisors to be personally committed to the customer, be on their side and really understand the problems that they faced when moving into work.

In terms of training and skills there are two issues. The first is that there is a reported lack of evidence of what works in terms of training for older adults. On the one hand skills are a barrier to employment entry and retention for many older adults. On the other, there is evidence that some training is too basic for older people who have a lifetime of experience. The second issue evidenced is attitudinal, with many older adults feeling that they are too old to train, too old to see much return on training and that they already have the necessary skills for the job.

There is evidence that the in-work support mechanism of the 50 plus return to work element of the WTC with the WTC being a more complex incarnation of the EC system and this having a negative effect on participation. In terms of the influence of WTC on moving into work, it has been suggested by older adults that the role WTC plays in their decisions to work depends on factors such as closeness to the labour market, the extent and quality of discussion with advisors about the tax credits and whether a better off calculation demonstrated that employment was worthwhile financially.

## New Deal 50 Plus

ND50+ is a voluntary programme offering support and advice for people over 50 to find work. The programme was rolled out nationally in April 2000. Adults aged 50 or over and who have claimed IS, JSA, IB, Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) or State Pension Credit for at least six months are eligible to participate in ND50+. The programme, through a New Deal PA, assists older people to develop action plans to help them towards finding work, helps with job-search and applications and organises training opportunities to improve skills. Adults participating in ND50+ have, through their NDPA, access to the full range of mainstream Jobcentre Plus programmes.

Whilst there has been a national programme of evaluation of the ND50+ programme, evaluation occurred at the early stages of the programme and there is little recent evidence of the customer experience. The scale of the ND50+ programme is also relatively small in comparison with other programmes. A 2003 review of ND50+ also found that evaluation evidence had so far focused on 'active' customers and little research has so far been focused on 'inactive customers' and so there are few conclusions about 'what works' for inactive customers.<sup>69</sup>

Qualitative evaluation of ND50+ found that customers' initial impressions of the programme were very positive with the majority of customers feeling that the programme had been helpful. Evidence shows that 30 per cent thought it had been 'very helpful' and an additional 33 per cent had found it 'quite helpful'. Only 20 per cent said it was 'no help at all'.<sup>70</sup>

For those who had not found the ND50+ programme particularly helpful, survey evidence from the 2001 evaluation found that these customers had less than average confidence in both themselves and the programme, had been less likely than average to enter the caseload phase of the programme (intensive continued support phase of ND50+), were more reluctant than average to reduce or change their expectations of wage levels when returning to work, and were much less likely than average to find work.<sup>71</sup>

## Advisor and Customer Relationship

The relationship formed between the PA and customer and the personalisation of the support offered is particularly important for older people. The 2003 report *A Review of what works for clients aged over 50* found that matching expectations and the experience of personal support was important, with lower levels of support than anticipated being counterproductive, leading to decreased motivation. The report further found that having PAs of a similar age to customers can help to remove some of the barriers to work and secure rapport.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Moss, N. and Arrowsmith, J. (2003), "A review of 'what works' for clients aged over 50", DWP Research Report 174.

<sup>70</sup> Aston, J., Willison, R. and Kodz, J. (2001), "Evaluation of New Deal 50 plus – Qualitative Evidence from Clients: Third Phase", ESR99, Employment Service.

<sup>71</sup> Atkinson, J. (2001), "Evaluation of New Deal 50plus: Research with Individuals (Wave 2)", ESR92.

<sup>72</sup> Moss, N. and Arrowsmith, J. (2003), "A review of 'what works' for clients aged over 50", DWP Research Report 174.

The evaluation of ND50+ found that one of the real success factors for the programme was the customer-advisor relationship and the maintenance of the ongoing support (caseloading) from the PA. ND50+ participants who received the ongoing support of their PA reported that this support enabled advisors to really be personally committed to the customer, be on their side and really understand the problems that they faced in moving into work.<sup>73</sup> PA support generally helped to encourage moves toward the labour market with more than half of customers reporting that they could not have managed without the sustained support of their PA. The 'one' evaluation highlighted that customers over 50 were more likely to receive advice or help from staff and the proportion saying they were treated 'well' or 'very well' was highest amongst those aged 50 plus.<sup>74</sup>

The ability for the NDPA to signpost and broker to other services is also important.<sup>75</sup> However, the effectiveness of NDPA in referral varies between programme offices, partly reflecting the degree to which they specialise in particular client groups and related programmes of help, and their experience and training.<sup>76</sup> The National Audit Office (2004) found that in the three Jobcentres examined, the majority of advisors felt that their training was insufficient to enable them to provide an adequate assessment and advisory service for older people, and some had received no formal training at all.<sup>77</sup>

## Training and Skills

A 2006 review of research literature by Phillipson and Smith (2006) suggests that there is a lack of evidence in understanding 'what works' in training older people.<sup>78</sup> What is clearer is that a lack of skills is a barrier to employment entry and retention for many older people.<sup>79</sup> However, evidence suggests that some training can be too basic for older people who have a lifetime of experience. This finding is echoed by those young adults going through NDYP who are already qualified and have some employment experience.

Research commissioned from the Third Age Network on *Information, Advice and Guidance for Older Age Groups*<sup>80</sup> reported that many older people faced difficulties in finding the support they needed by staff who had the experience and expertise to assist them. The research highlighted that older people felt that they would benefit from accessible, personally relevant and detailed information to support career choice, expert advice and continuity in support, alongside affordable training opportunities relevant to the needs of the local labour market and opportunities for work trials, work sampling and work experience.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Atkinson, J. (2001), "Evaluation of New Deal 50plus: Summary Report", DWP WAE103.

<sup>74</sup> Davies and Johnson (2001).

<sup>75</sup> Atkinson, J. (2001), "Evaluation of New Deal 50plus: Summary Report", DWP WAE103.

<sup>76</sup> National Audit Office (2004), "Tackling the Barriers to Employment of Older People", NAO.

<sup>77</sup> National Audit Office (2004), "Tackling the Barriers to Employment of Older People", NAO.

<sup>78</sup> Phillipson C. and Smith A. (2005), "Extending working life: A review of the research literature", DWP Research Report 299.

<sup>79</sup> Moss, N. and Arrowsmith, J. (2003), "A review of 'what works' for clients aged over 50", DWP Research Report 174.

<sup>80</sup> Third Age Employment Network (2003), "Challenging Age: Information, Advice and Guidance for Older Age Groups", Department for Education and Skills.

<sup>81</sup> McNair S., Flynn M., Owen L., Humphreys C. and Woodfield L. (2005), "Changing work in later life: a study of jobs transitions", Centre for Research into the Older Workforce, University of Surrey.

Evidence from an evaluation of Work Based Learning for Adults (WBLA) showed that the majority of older trainees were pleased with their training provision. Many of those interviewed found WBLA had impacted positively increasing their self-confidence and making them more optimistic about their job prospects. WBLA had a positive impact on soft skills (especially confidence building and motivation), work related skills (e.g. team working and communication) and hard skills (e.g. job search skills and IT).<sup>82</sup>

A review into *Training older people* found that programme centres were an effective method of delivering training for customers aged 50 plus. The review found that many older users of programme centres enjoyed the social contact and company they got through attending the centre and found it helpful to meet other older people in their situation.<sup>83</sup>

Evaluation evidence suggests that training available through ND50+ has been less effective. Participants of the ND50+ programme can access the Training Grant available to spend on job-related training for between one and two years. However, the national evaluation of ND50+ found that take-up of the Training Grant has been low despite high levels of awareness, although take up has increased over time.<sup>84</sup> One of the primary reasons for this has been the perception by older people of the importance of training with many feeling that they are too old to train, too old to see much return on training and that they have the necessary skills for the job. Atkinson et al. (2003) found that although customers were positive about the training received, the effects on employment and income were modest and restricted to improvement in the current job, rather than allowing customers to move on to something better. Atkinson et al. (2003) concludes that the Training Grant has therefore had some impact on retention and progression, but there is no evidence that it acts as incentive for customers to move into work.

Older adults are eligible to access the Work Trials programme and evidence from the *Review of what works for over 50s*<sup>85</sup> suggests that Work Trials are particularly important for older customers. The report outlines that placements offer an opportunity to those who might not be considered by employers using conventional recruitment methods. They are of particular value for those people who have been out of work for some time and for those who are moving into work in occupations and sectors dissimilar from their previous work experience. Shorter trials of 3-5 days are preferred.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> ECOTEC (2001) study reported in Moss, N. and Arrowsmith, J. (2003), "A review of 'what works' for clients aged over 50", DWP Research Report 174.

<sup>83</sup> Quality and Performance Improvement Dissemination (2001), "Training older people", QPID study report 91, DfEE.

<sup>84</sup> Atkinson, J., Evans, C., Willison, R., Lain, D. and van Gent, M. (2003), "New Deal 50plus: Sustainability of Employment", DWP Research Report 142.

<sup>85</sup> Moss, N. and Arrowsmith, J. (2003), "A review of 'what works' for clients aged over 50", DWP Research Report 174.

<sup>86</sup> Moss, N. and Arrowsmith, J. (2003), "A review of 'what works' for clients aged over 50", DWP Research Report 174.

## In-Work Support

One of the main mechanisms of in-work support for the over 50s is the Employment Credit (EC) – now the 50 plus return to work element of the Working Tax Credit (WTC).

Frances and Thomas (2004)<sup>87</sup> report that there have been particular issues with the WTC for over 50s outlining that the previous EC system was simple and highly visible compared with the 50 plus return to work element of WTC which is more complex. Whilst data, at the time, on the tax credit was not available, anecdotal evidence from Jobcentre Plus staff and third parties outlined by the National Audit Office, suggests that the change has had a detrimental effect on participation in the programme.<sup>88</sup> Frances and Thomas (2004) find a mixed picture of the evidence from other research on Jobcentre Plus staff and customers' experiences of the new tax credits. Jobcentre Plus staff reported that whether new tax credits were discussed with customers depended on their views of customers' job-readiness, their confidence in discussing new tax credits and the length of time available for interview. ND50+ customers generally recalled discussion of new tax credits, but whether they played a role in their decisions to work depended on factors such as closeness to the labour market, the extent and quality of discussion with advisors about the tax credits and whether a better off calculation demonstrated that employment was worthwhile financially.

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<sup>87</sup> Frances, A. and Thomas, A. (2004), "Jobcentre Plus' delivery of New Tax Credit policy", DWP Research Report 220.

<sup>88</sup> National Audit Office (2004), "Tackling the Barriers to Employment of Older People", NAO.

## 5. Lone Parents

### Summary

Lone parents can experience the employment and skills system through a wide range of benefits and employment support programmes depending on their circumstances and needs. This section looks at the experiences of lone parents in terms of how they are engaged in the key employment support programme of New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) and Employment Zones (EZ) for Lone Parents; what the service delivery consists of; how services are delivered; and the experience of in-work support programmes.

Central to the key employment support programmes of NDLP and Employment Zones is the PA who guides lone parents through the steps to find and apply for jobs. Their role and advice and guidance lie at the heart of provision for lone parents.

As a result of the largely voluntary nature of NDLP and the complexities of family circumstances, recruitment and engagement of lone parents on to the programme has been historically low. WFIs have been introduced to bolster participation and whilst this has had some affect on take-up, engagement of lone parents is still relatively low compared to the large proportion of lone parents that say they would like to work. There is evidence that outreach has been particularly effective in engaging lone parents particularly those lone parents that are not able to access mainstream provision or who are not responding to existing New Deal recruitment mechanisms. It is not an effective mechanism for reaching large number of lone parents but is effective in engaging those who are hard to reach, both in terms of labour market and physical distance.

In terms of the experience of engaging in NDLP, particularly through the now compulsory WFI process, the most positive experiences come from those lone parents that are closest to the labour market and who have most recently been in work. The majority of those who view the experience negatively have not worked recently and/or have multiple barriers to working.

Evidence finds that the advice and guidance provided by NDLP is highly effective for lone parents with the NDLP programme raising the proportion of lone parents entering work. Reasons for this impact are associated with the increased awareness of benefits and understanding of tax credits brought about by the advice and guidance provided by NDLP.

As with young adults, the experience of EZ has been a positive one for lone parents and is viewed as an improvement on previous support received through Jobcentre Plus. Lone parents have reported that they particularly valued the intensity of support provided by their EZ advisor, the way in which the programme was embedded in their community and the use of child friendly delivery mechanisms. This is interesting following evaluation evidence that highlights many Jobcentre Plus PAs feeling that EZs were delivering nothing different from the support that they were able to provide lone parents. While this appears true of the content of the advice and guidance supplied, the context and delivery of such support in EZs appears significantly different.

Examining the support that is provided by NDLP, lone parents are particularly keen on the advice, clarification and advice they received about benefits and financial matters through their NDLP Advisor. The IWBC calculation is the most commonly discussed topic with advisors. The effectiveness of the calculations is mixed with Advisers reporting the use of IWBCs as effective in changing perceptions about the financial benefits of working. However, some issues in terms of the difficulties in the complexity of the calculations have been reported, particularly when trying to bring in the financial effect of a loss of passported benefits. The lack of inclusion of passported benefits into the calculations has been an issue also raised by lone parents.

In terms of training and skills provision through the NDLP programme, evidence suggests that there are issues with limited training options, a view held by both Jobcentre Plus staff and lone parents that these options are often not very 'aspirational' and that many courses were too short to up-skill people who had been removed from the labour market for an extended period of time. In common with young adults, evidence further suggests that those lone parents, who are looking for higher-level jobs requiring some specialist training, were poorly served by the NDLP programme. Difficulties around inflexibility in terms of times and places existed as did advisor knowledge of training opportunities.

Childcare, both in terms of pre-employment and in-work, is one of the most raised concerns of lone parents. The cost of childcare has been identified as a barrier to participation in learning, particularly for low-income households. There are a number of packages in addition to New Deal that offer support for childcare costs for those lone parents returning to education through further and higher education routes. However, the eligibility criteria make some lone parents unable to access the support offered. For those who do find support with childcare through programmes such as Care to Learn the experience and impact is overwhelmingly positive.

Childcare is still seen as unaffordable by many parents, and as outweighing the financial benefits of working. If a lone parent is working 16 or more hours a week and using approved childcare, there is potential entitlement to help with childcare costs through the Working Tax Credit (WTC). However, the entitlement criteria relating to the same maximum benefit irrespective of whether there are two or more children is a significant issue, particularly where there are three or more children in a family and the financial costs of paying for childcare far outweigh the benefits of working. Rules for the childcare element of WTC further means that provision of childcare must be with a registered childminder. Research into *Work and well-being over time: lone mothers and their children* found that sometimes mothers were paying for private informal care without the childcare element of WTC.

The move from benefits and into employment is a complex transition point and is an area of key concern for lone parents. Once in work evidence suggests that lone parents are particularly vulnerable to returning to unemployment or economic inactivity. Lone parents can fall into a cycle of vulnerability if problems such as a breakdown in childcare arrangements, ill health of a child, transport problems, debt crisis and/or benefit problems arise once in work. Previously the employment system has been loaded towards front-end or pre-employment support with little follow-up with clients to ensure sustained employment and is particularly in the case of NDLP. The EZ programme has offered more in the way of in-work support.

Up until recently in-work support has been scarce. However, the system is undergoing change with the addition of pilot programmes such as ERA, and wider developments such as in-work advisory support developed to tackle some of these issues offering both pre-employment and in-work support. Evaluation evidence is at an early stage and is currently limited to one and two year impacts. However, the first evaluation of one year impact of the ERA pilots found that despite early operational difficulties within the Jobcentre Plus districts', ERA had a number of positive effects on lone parents during the first year of follow-up. ERA was found to increase participants' receipt of post-employment services and training, increased their likelihood of working fulltime, increased their likelihood of combining training and work, increased their average earnings and reduced their use of benefits.

There are further issues generally within the system of in-work financial support in that it is complex and difficult to navigate. There is also evidence of some lack of awareness of eligibility for other in-work support benefits such as HB and CTB.

## Employment Support Offer

The key programme that operates across the UK to support people into work is New Deal of which lone parents can participate in NDLP, NDYP and ND25+ with NDLP being specifically focused on lone parents. There are a number of further employment initiatives across Great Britain that lone parents may be entitled to receive in addition to the New Deal programme of support such as Employment Zones for Lone Parents. Further policy developments that are being tested include the Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) programme<sup>89</sup>. Amongst the Devolved Administrations, additional services are being developed. For example, in Northern Ireland there are a number of new initiatives being piloted such as Pathways to Work for Lone Parents where lone parents can access provision from two main programmes: Voluntary Steps to Work and Voluntary Work Preparation Programme for Lone Parents (VWPLP).<sup>90</sup> Scotland has been running the Working for Parents Fund which has now been streamlined into the Fairer Scotland Fund (FSF) that provides support to lone parents in addition to New Deal. The current pre-employment and in-work support offer for lone parents is outlined in Box 1.

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<sup>89</sup> DWP (2007), "Experience of work and job retention among lone parents: An evidence review", DWP Working Paper 37, DWP.

<sup>90</sup> Deloitte MCS Ltd (2008), "Interim Evaluation: Employment Service Delivery Model, Steps to Work and Pathways to Work for Lone Parents projects", Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland.

## Box 1: Lone Parents Offer

- New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP): voluntary programme introduced in October 1998 to help lone parents overcome barriers to work and improve their chances of taking up paid employment.
- New Deal Plus for Lone Parents (ND+fLP) pilots: extension to NDLP programme including mandatory Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (QWFIs); Action Plans; Discovery Events; Childcare Chats and Tasters; Childcare Assist; Work Search Premium (WSP); In-Work Credit (IWC); In-Work Emergencies Fund (IWEF); access to Flexible Provision (for training); In-Work Support (IWS); and Jobpoints in Children's Centres.
- Six monthly Work Focused Interviews for lone parents with a youngest child aged 10 or under.
- Quarterly Work Focused Interviews for all lone parents in the last year before their child reaches the age where they may lose eligibility to Income Support and may move onto Jobseekers Allowance.
- Guaranteed Job Interview for every lone parent who is looking for and ready for work.
- Options and Choices events group sessions that will enable lone parents to understand how Jobcentre Plus and its partners can help them prepare for work and how the local labour market works.
- Work Trials giving lone parents (and other unemployed customers) the opportunity to try out a job for up to 6 weeks without having to give up benefit.
- In Work Credit (IWC) paid at £40 a week (£60 in London) for 52 weeks to lone parents leaving benefits for work of 16 hours or more. IWC is also available to couple parents in ND+fLP pilot districts throughout the country.
- In Work Emergency Discretionary Fund provides financial help to lone parents for the first 26 weeks of their employment, to overcome any unexpected financial barriers which might otherwise prevent them from remaining in their jobs.
- In Work Advisory Support from Jobcentre Plus Advisors for all lone parents in their first 26 weeks of employment to help resolve any difficulties, and direct individuals towards any support needed such as skills and training.
- Upfront Childcare Fund pilot in London provides financial support to lone parents to cover advance childcare costs such as registration fees, deposits and advance payments.
- In Work Retention pilot a two-year pilot to test the effectiveness of using IWC as an aid to job retention and progression. After a period of weekly payments to support the transition into work, lone parents will receive lump sum payments if they attend further meetings with a Personal Adviser.

Source: DWP, 2009<sup>91</sup>.

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<sup>91</sup> <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/welfare-reform/lone-parents/#helping>

Central to the key employment support programmes of NDLP and EZs is the PA who guides lone parents through the steps to find and apply for jobs. PAs offer practical advice and help about finding childcare and training as well as advice on how benefits will be affected when starting work and help on applying for any in work benefits or tax credits. The PA role and the series of interviews, meetings and advice they provide are the core of the service.

The following section examines participation by lone parents in NDLP and EZs. The subsequent sections outline lone parent's experiences of these various measures of support provided by the NDLP programme and as well as those of other employment and skills support mechanisms available for lone parents.

## Participation and Engagement in Employment Support Programmes

Participation by lone parents in employment support programmes such as NDLP and EZs is voluntary. Mandatory participation does not come into force until a lone parent moves from IS to JSA once their youngest child is aged 10 or over.<sup>92</sup> Low income lone parents are currently supported through the benefits system and are eligible to apply for either Income Support or Jobseekers Allowance (JSA). Lone parents are required to attend mandatory Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews (LPWFI) if they are claiming Income Support.

## New Deal for Lone Parents

When claiming Income Support lone parents are eligible to voluntarily access the NDLP programme. Once lone parents move onto JSA and have been claiming JSA for more than six months, they may be asked to join parts of the New Deal schemes. Lone parents who do not receive benefits but who want the support and advice offered by New Deal are also eligible.

As a result of the largely voluntary nature of NDLP, and the complexities of family circumstances, recruitment and engagement of lone parents on to employment support programmes has been historically low. Initiatives to encourage participation have taken a number of forms with varying degrees of success. Following the implementation of NDLP nationally in 1998, participation in the programme was either in response to a letter of invitation or by self referral or referral from another agency. The *New Deal for Lone Parents National Evaluation Second Synthesis Report*<sup>93</sup> found 4 per cent of lone parents claiming IS were participating in NDLP in May 1999 and only 7 per cent by May 2000.

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<sup>92</sup> From 25 October 2010 this age will reduce to seven or over but does not apply to parents are receiving Income Support for additional reasons such as: having children who are entitled to the middle-rate or highest-rate care component of Disability Living Allowance; being in receipt of Carer's Allowance; fostering and having a resident foster child or claiming Income Support because of health reasons.

<sup>93</sup> Evans M., Eyre J., Millar J. and Sarreet S. (2003), "New Deal for Lone Parents: Second Synthesis Report of the National Evaluation", DWP Research Report 163.

Following the poor rate of take-up, mandatory LPWFIs with Jobcentre Plus PAs were introduced nationally in 2001 for new and repeat IS claimants. These were extended in 2002 and 2004 to cover all existing claimants with children under five and included all lone parents on IS. The LPWFIs were set up in the main:

- to move lone parents on benefits closer to the labour market;
- to increase the numbers entering NDLP through direct referral to the programme;
- to reduce the numbers of lone parents on Income Support;
- and to increase the numbers of lone parents in work.

LPWFIs occur every six months for lone parents with a youngest child aged 10 or under and quarterly for all lone parents in the last year before their child reaches the age where they may lose eligibility to IS and may be moved onto JSA. LPWFIs are the only mandatory element of the employment support system for lone parents claiming benefit. Two evaluations of lone parent LPWFIs by Knight and White in 2003<sup>94</sup> and Knight and Lissenburg in 2005<sup>95</sup> have occurred involving the quantitative examination of administrative data. The analyses found that the LPWFIs substantially raised the rate of entry to NDLP.

The *New Deal for Lone Parents National Evaluation Second Synthesis Report*<sup>96</sup> reported 25 per cent to 30 per cent of lone parents went on join NDLP from LPWFIs. For those who expressed an interest in NDLP at the WFI, approximately 70 per cent subsequently join the programme. The alternative recruitment method, self-referral, led to fewer lone parents coming forward although around 90 per cent of those who self-referred subsequently joined the programme illustrating that those who self-referred were already engaged in the process of joining up.

Despite the mandatory nature of LPWFIs, ensuring participation requires a number of approaches. A smaller scale qualitative evaluation by Thomas and Jones (2003) of LPWFIs, found that there was a relatively high level of failure to attend first appointments or six month review meetings, although the vast majority of customers attended a second or third appointment. Advisors used a number of approaches such as telephoning to remind customers one week prior to their appointment; adapting notification letters to clarify key messages, including the consequences of failing to attend; and sending out letters by registered post, requiring proof of receipt to boost LPWFI up-take.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Knight, G. and White, M. (2003), "Evaluation of Lone Parent Personal Adviser Meetings: Interim findings from administrative data analysis", DWP Research Report 159.

<sup>95</sup> Knight, G. and Lissenburg, S. (2005), "Evaluation of the extension to Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews eligibility: administrative data analyses", DWP Research Report No 237.

<sup>96</sup> Evans M., Eyre J., Millar J. and Sarreet S. (2003), "New Deal for Lone Parents: Second Synthesis Report of the National Evaluation", DWP Research Report 163.

<sup>97</sup> Thomas A. & Jones G. (2003), "Lone Parent Personal Adviser Meetings: Qualitative evaluation and case studies on delivery of six monthly review meetings", DWP Report No. 178.

Interestingly, as outlined in the recent independent Gregg Review (2008)<sup>98</sup> on conditionality and support to DWP, whilst the aim of the WFI regime has been to improve take-up of support available through the New Deal programmes and has had success in increasing participation, engagement is still relatively low compared to the large proportion of each group that say they would like to work. The Review reports that this suggests that there are many people not accessing support that the evidence shows is effective in helping them back into work.

## Non-participation

There are a large number of lone parents who, until they are mandatorily obliged to, do not join the NDLP programme. Research by Lessof et al. (2003)<sup>99</sup>, as part of the wider national NDLP programme of evaluation research, examined the experience of participating in NDLP programme and reasons for non-participation through a large scale quantitative survey and interviews with customers. The research found that a large majority (65 per cent) of non-participants felt there was no specific reason that they had not joined the programme. For those who had reasons for their decision not to participate, these tended to be linked to the perceived inappropriateness of NDLP to their individual circumstances, such as their current need to provide childcare at home. A small minority of more highly qualified or recently employed non-participants were recorded as wanting to do things themselves and do not want NDLP's assistance. Only 20 per cent of non-participants actually said they had no interest in a future meeting with a PA at some point of time. Evans et al. (2003)<sup>100</sup> found that this emphasises how important timing and prioritisation of parenting are for the majority considering work. The survey by Lessof et al. (2003)<sup>101</sup> found that there does remain a small minority of non-participants who are found to have set their minds against participation and/or work and who at the same time do not have severe constraints on their ability to work.

## Outreach

There is evidence that outreach and non-traditional methods for recruiting lone parents onto NDLP and into WFIs is important and is taking place at a local level. A 2006 report by Thomas and Jones<sup>102</sup> finds that non traditional delivery methods, such as group information sessions and the use of outreach venues were two key areas where Jobcentre Plus offices have been attempting to innovate and improve their performance in WFI up-take. In outreach venues where WFIs had been delivered, fail-to-attend rates were said to be lower than at Jobcentre Plus offices and advisors reported that they achieved good NDLP and job outcomes. Lone parents were said to prefer the more relaxed and friendly environment of these venues, which often had good childcare or crèche facilities and they appeared to prefer the familiarity that these centres offered, which were often located within their local neighbourhoods.

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<sup>98</sup> Gregg P. (2008), "Realising Potential: A Vision for Personalised Conditionality and Support2, DWP.

<sup>99</sup> Lessof C., Miller M., Phillips M., Pickering K., Purdon S. and Hales J. (2003), "New Deal for Lone Parents Evaluation: Findings from the quantitative survey", DWP.

<sup>100</sup> Evans M., Eyre J., Millar J. and Sarreer S. (2003), "New Deal for Lone Parents: Second Synthesis Report of the National Evaluation", DWP Research Report 163.

<sup>101</sup> Lessof C., Miller M., Phillips M., Pickering K., Purdon S. and Hales J. (2003), "New Deal for Lone Parents Evaluation: Findings from the quantitative survey", DWP.

<sup>102</sup> Thomas A. & Jones G. (2006), "Work Focused Interviews and lone parent initiatives: further analysis of policies and pilots", DWP Research Report No 319.

In the early stages of NDLP, outreach events were used to raise awareness, market, and encourage lone parents to join the programme<sup>103</sup>. Innovative Pilots for lone parents that ran between spring 1999 and 2001 used outreach as a mechanism to reach lone parents who had not responded to existing NDLP approaches. In 2001 the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service was announced with the aim of increasing referrals to NDLP and the New Deal for Partners (NDP) programme. It was anticipated that customers would be lone parents and partners who are some distance from the labour market and living in spatially defined 'isolated communities'. Research by Yeandle and Pearson (2001)<sup>104</sup> found that outreach was an effective mechanism for attracting clients not readily accessible to mainstream provision and was a very effective way of caseloading lone parents onto NDLP.

The national *Evaluation of Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service*<sup>105</sup>, highlights that customers accessing the Outreach Service found the experience positive and that in the majority of cases, customer expectations were either met or exceeded. All customers interviewed said that initial contact with the Outreach Service had made them more likely to get involved with NDLP and NDP. Although the Lone Parents and Partners Outreach service was not found to provide an effective solution for engaging with large numbers of customers, it was effective in tackling negative preconceptions about Jobcentres, providing information around support available to enter work and increasing the confidence and motivation of participants amongst those that it did reach.

Yeandle and Pearson (2001)<sup>106</sup> found a further additional benefit from Outreach in that it increased the take up of training amongst isolated lone parents. Community-based delivery of training proved to be essential for lone parents in rural and sparsely populated areas with poor public transport links. Lone parents appreciated the opportunity to access training in local venues, and some participants said they would not have joined the programme had they needed to travel longer distances.

## Employment Zones for Lone Parents

EZs were introduced instead of New Deal in April 2000 in fifteen areas of the UK that were experiencing high concentrations of long-term unemployment. EZs originally targeted unemployed people aged 25 and over who had been claiming JSA for at least 12 months. Where EZs exist, participation is mandatory for these groups. EZs pool funds for training and provide Jobcentre Plus support and equivalent benefits in order to maximise flexibility and provide individuals with more say in the choices which affect their move into employment. The EZ scheme operates instead of and not in addition to New Deal where EZs are in operation.

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<sup>103</sup> Hirst A., Tarling R., Lefauchaux M., Rinne S., McGregor A., Glass A., Tu T. and Simm C. (2003), "Evaluation of Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service", DWP Working Age Research Report 179.

<sup>104</sup> Yeandle, S. and Pearson, S. (2001), "New Deal for Lone Parents: An Evaluation of the Innovative Pilots", DWP Working Age Report 89.

<sup>105</sup> Hirst A., Tarling R., Lefauchaux M., Rinne S., McGregor A., Glass A., Tu T. and Simm C. (2003), "Evaluation of Lone Parents and Partners Outreach Service", DWP.

<sup>106</sup> Yeandle, S. and Pearson, S. (2001), "New Deal for Lone Parents: An Evaluation of the Innovative Pilots", DWP Working Age Report 89.

In October 2003, lone parents in receipt of IS became eligible to join the EZ scheme. Participation in the scheme is voluntary for lone parents. At the point of a lone parent's first LPWFI and at subsequent WFIs, Jobcentre Plus advisors in EZ provider areas are advised to make lone parents aware that they may, if they wish, volunteer to participate in EZ provision. In addition, lone parents can volunteer to join the EZ at any time that suits them.

A longitudinal evaluation of this extension of the EZ scheme to lone parents was published by the DWP in 2005.<sup>107</sup> The evaluation found that many of the lone parents who volunteered for the EZ scheme had not previously participated in the NDLP programme and had chosen to take part because of the access the EZ brought to both financial help and intensive support. The outreach orientated nature of the scheme is that it is embedded within the community and the way that EZ service is provided using child friendly delivery was an important reason for lone parents joining EZs.

### Support and Training Provided by Employment Support Programmes

The NDLP and EZ programmes provide a number of support services for lone parents. This section examines lone parent's experiences of these various measures of support provided by the NDLP and EZ programme, as well as those of other employment and skills support mechanisms available for lone parents.

Advice and guidance lies at the heart of provision for lone parents, with interviews with Advisors being the principal form of delivery. In terms of the experience of compulsory LPWFI, a report by Thomas and Griffiths (2004)<sup>108</sup> using large scale survey and interviews to evaluate the delivery and impact of WFI meetings for lone parents, found one third of respondents reported that the WFIs had increased their motivation to find paid work and a further third found the interviews had made them feel more hopeful for the future. However, half of all customers said that it had made no difference to how they felt, and this was the response of two thirds of those not working or wishing to work. The analysis further highlights that the positive experiences of the WFIs were predominantly received from customers who were closest to the labour market and who had worked recently during the previous year<sup>109</sup>. Research by Brewer et al (2007)<sup>110</sup>, Hossain and Breen (2007)<sup>111</sup> and Ray et al. (2007)<sup>112</sup> find that WFI have been most successful with those closest to the labour market.

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<sup>107</sup> Griffiths R. & Jones G. (2005), "Evaluation of Single Provider Employment Zone Extensions to Young People, Lone Parents and Early Entrants", DWP Research Report No 228.

<sup>108</sup> Thomas A. & Griffiths R. (2004), "Integrated Findings from the Evaluation of the First 18 Months of Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews", DWP Report 184.

<sup>109</sup> Thomas A. & Griffiths R. (2004), "Integrated Findings from the Evaluation of the First 18 Months of Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews", DWP Report 184.

<sup>110</sup> Brewer, M., Browne, J., Crawford, C., and Knight, G., (2007), "The lone parent pilots after 12 to 24 months: an impact assessment of In-Work Credit, Work Search Premium, Extended Schools Childcare, Quarterly Work Focused Interviews and New Deal Plus for Lone Parents", DWP Research Report No.415.

<sup>111</sup> Hosain, M., and Breen, E., (2007), "New Deal Plus for Lone Parents Qualitative Evaluation", DWP Research Report No. 425.

<sup>112</sup> Ray, K., Vegeris, S., Brooks, S., Cambell-Barr, V., Hoggart, L., Mackinnon, K., and Shutes, I., (2007), "The Lone Parents Pilots: A qualitative evaluation of Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (12+), Work Search Premium and In Work Credit", DWP Research Report No. 423.

The majority who viewed the experience negatively had not worked at any time during the past year and/or had multiple barriers to working including health issues. Some customers were anxious about the mandatory nature of the meetings and concerned that they would be 'forced' into working when they did not wish to, or were unable to because of their circumstances. There were also a number of claimants who felt a WFI was inappropriate because of their specific caring responsibilities over and above looking after their children, such as having to care for sick or elderly parents, disabled children and children with behavioural problems. The survey also found that in terms of difficulties with the WFIs those for whom English is not their first language experienced greater problems with the WFI process than for those with English as their first language. Research by Joyce and Whiting (2006)<sup>113</sup> that examined the effect of sanctions on lone parents echoed these findings in relation to non-attendance finding that this was the consequence of either problems with understanding the invitation or because they felt that such a requirement was inappropriate to their circumstances given their health issues or the fact that they had young children to look after.

Once referred through the LPWFI or self-referred on to the NDLP programme, lone parents take part in an Initial Interview with a NDLP Advisor. These interviews with PAs are the key delivery mechanism for NDLP during which the PA develops an individually tailored package of advice and support designed to facilitate a move into employment.<sup>114</sup>

The majority of NDLP Initial Interviews take place in a Jobcentre. Whilst the NDLP programme is voluntary there is evidence that a proportion of lone parents attend Initial Interviews because they understand them to be compulsory. Research by Lessof et al. (2003)<sup>115</sup> as part of the NDLP national evaluation found that ten per cent of NDLP participants thought that participation in NDLP was compulsory with a further five per cent being unsure.

Evidence by Evans et al (2003)<sup>116</sup> finds that the advice and guidance provided by NDLP is highly effective for those lone parents who enter NDLP. The evaluation outlined that the impact of the programme has been to raise the proportion of lone parents entering work (of 16 hours or more) by 24 points, roughly doubling the exit rate for participants, with similarly large impacts on exits from IS. The evidence suggests that the reasons for the impact are associated with the increased awareness of benefits and understanding of tax credits brought about by the advice and guidance provided by NDLP. The impact of the advice and guidance delivered through PAs is dependent on the motivation and job readiness of the customer and the time and form of support provided by the PA.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Joyce, L. and Whiting, K. (2006), "Sanctions: Qualitative summary report on lone parent customers", DWP Working Paper No. 27.

<sup>114</sup> Hasluck C. and Green A. (2007), "What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions", DWP Research Report 407.

<sup>115</sup> Lessof C., Miller M., Phillips M., Pickering K., Purdon S. and Hales J. (2003), "New Deal for Lone Parents Evaluation: Findings from the quantitative survey", DWP.

<sup>116</sup> Evans M., Eyre J., Millar J. and Sarreet S. (2003), "New Deal for Lone Parents: Second Synthesis Report of the National Evaluation", DWP Research Report 163.

<sup>117</sup> Hasluck C. and Green A. (2007), "What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions", DWP Research Report 407.

In a quantitative survey of NDLP participants, lone parents rated NDLP PAs highly.<sup>118</sup> When asked what they thought of their NDLP PA 37 per cent felt their NDLP PA was very helpful, competent or good and one third had a lower, but still strong assessment, saying the PA was helpful, competent or good. Nearly two fifths of survey respondents praised their PAs for their friendliness, cheerfulness and understanding.

The vast majority of survey respondents also saw only one Advisor, and an even greater number said that this was their preferred arrangement. This is important for continuity of provision and is an issue that is highlighted in Chapter 5.

## Support with understanding benefits and In-Work Benefit calculations

Research into the NDLP programme by Holland (2004)<sup>119</sup> found that lone parents were particularly keen on the advice, clarification and help they received about benefits and financial matters through their NDLP Advisor, as many had expressed concerns about the complexity of the benefits system. As such, nearly all respondents to the survey research were highly positive about this part of their contact with NDLP. Being able to 'rehearse' their way through what might happen if they took employment and understanding what they might be entitled to if/when they went into work, including running an In Work Benefit Calculation (IWBC) and generally assessing financial options, were all aspects lone parents found important and valuable. The 2004 evaluation of lone parent WFIs by Thomas and Griffiths (2004)<sup>120</sup> found that there was a fairly widespread belief that leaving benefits for paid work carried risks and that there was a high chance of ending up worse off. However, these "myths", though frequently the result of actual or reported experiences in the past, were addressable by Advisors through the IWBC. The evaluation found that the majority of calculations showed that lone parents would be better off in work than claiming benefit. However, a worse-off result from a calculation had a strong negative impact on many lone parents and Advisors were reported as being sensitive to this possibility. Most tried to avoid doing a calculation in instances where they thought a negative result would be produced.

The 2003 national NDLP evaluation<sup>121</sup> highlighted that 85 per cent of lone parent customers received a better-off calculation and this was the single item most commonly discussed topic in their first interview with their NDLP Advisor. Help completing Tax Credit forms (47%) and help with other benefits advice (41 per cent) were the next two most discussed topics. Research by Yeo (2007)<sup>122</sup> into the experience of lone parents of work and job retention found that the use of IWBC was an effective way to change lone parents' perceptions about the financial benefits of work. Conducting an IWBCs enabled Advisors to reduce the level of fear in lone parents about the financial risks of moving off benefit and into work. There have been some issues reported with the complexity of calculating IWBC. Research by GHK

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<sup>118</sup> Lessof C., Miller M., Phillips M., Pickering K., Purdon S. and Hales J. (2003), "New Deal for Lone Parents Evaluation: Findings from the quantitative survey", DWP.

<sup>119</sup> Holland J. (2004), "Evaluation of the Extension to NDLP Eligibility", DWP.

<sup>120</sup> Thomas A. & Griffiths R. (2004), "Integrated Findings from the Evaluation of the First 18 Months of Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews", DWP Report 184.

<sup>121</sup> Evans M., Eyre J., Millar J. and Sarreer S. (2003), "New Deal for Lone Parents: Second Synthesis Report of the National Evaluation", DWP Research Report 163.

<sup>122</sup> Yeo A. (2007), "Experience of work and job retention among lone parents: An evidence review", DWP Working Paper 37.

(2001)<sup>123</sup> found that in some cases Advisors had found the calculations were complicated and slow to conduct accurately, particularly when trying to accurately calculate costs related to housing and Housing Benefit (HB). Advisor managers noted that considerable mentoring had been needed around conducting IWBC.

A small scale study by the Gingerbread Trust (2009)<sup>124</sup> of 34 lone parents and their experiences of the welfare system found that many of the lone parents interviewed had a considerable level of scepticism about the reliability of the 'better off' calculations. They were particularly concerned about whether the calculations took everything into account including the additional costs of work (such as travel, clothing and food), childcare costs and the loss of 'passported' services such as free school meals.

### Advisors Discretion Fund (ADF)

The Advisor Discretion Fund (ADF) is a fund of £300 per client that can be used to address the necessary steps towards finding work and removing barriers to work. It is available through the New Deal programmes, as well as to those who have been claiming JSA for six months without a break. Application of the fund is solely at the discretion of a PA who considers whether a person would be unable to start work without the specific barrier being removed. In the case of lone parents the fund is most often used towards the costs of work clothing, travel passes and childcare.<sup>125</sup>

A report by Ecotec (2003)<sup>126</sup> *Advisor Discretion Fund Evaluation: New Deal for Lone Parents*, examined the experience of the ADF with 40 lone parents and 98 claimants in total. Lone parents reported that the £300 award was stretched very thinly when having to address multiple issues of lone parents. This was compounded when support was required towards childcare, and even more so when lone parents had more than one child. Advance childcare costs could drain the 'ADF pot' leaving little in reserve to resolve other immediate barriers to work. Lone parents felt that the ADF helped to remove the immediate constraints to work making work a viable option by supporting them during the transitional period and enabling them to 'cope' until they were paid. There were many individual situations when the award of a small payment made all the difference to lone parents' ability to take the step from benefits into work, or make looking for work possible.

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<sup>123</sup> GHK (2001), "New Deal for Lone Parents: Case Studies on Delivery", DWP.

<sup>124</sup> Peacey V. (2009), "Signing on and stepping up? Single parents' experience of welfare reform", Gingerbread Trust.

<sup>125</sup> National Audit Office (2007), "Helping People from Workless Households into Work", NAO.

<sup>126</sup> Ecotec (2003), "Advisor Discretion Fund Evaluation: New Deal for Lone Parents", DWP Research Report 165.

## Skills Development, Training and Qualifications

NDLP, as with all New Deal programmes, offers information and advice but also allows lone parents to undertake skills development courses, training, work experience placements and qualifications to help them get back into work. Lone parents participating on the NDLP programme are able to access training provision available via Work Based Learning for Adults/Training for Work (WBLA)/(TfW); Jobcentre Plus programmes; training courses which have been approved as part of the process to purchase one-off provision; training where a Service Level Agreement is in place at both national and local levels; Work Trials; and periods of work experience. In addition, provided they are not mandated to join a New Deal programme, as a JSA recipient, they are also eligible to access other New Deal training options and specialist provision.<sup>127</sup>

Research by Lessof et al. (2003)<sup>128</sup> as part of the NDLP national evaluation found just under half of the lone parents surveyed discussed training at their initial NDLP interview and 27 per cent talked about specific courses. In the national evaluation of lone parent WFIs, Thomas and Griffiths (2004)<sup>129</sup> found that training was talked about at WFIs by 51 per cent of all respondents to the participant survey and most frequently with younger lone parents (aged between 25 and 34 years old). Discussions varied greatly in specificity, but in half of these discussions the help that could be provided to cover childcare costs while on a training course was included. Training was regarded as a means of changing direction, both by those who felt their qualifications and experience were out of date, and by parents who had (or whose children had) health problems that meant they had to change jobs. Thomas and Griffiths (2004) further found that PAs admitted that the likelihood of discussing training with a customer depended to a degree on the level of knowledge that they had about local training opportunities in any particular field.

Evidence from research by GHK (2001)<sup>130</sup> examining case studies of NDLP clients found that that take-up of training was affected by

- Client attitudes – many clients felt that they did not need training; some clients were not willing to travel in order to access available training
- PA attitudes and knowledge – some NDLP PAs are more proactive than others in suggesting training; some PAs had more knowledge of local training opportunities than others
- Availability and flexibility of training provision
- Availability and flexibility of childcare provision
- Length of funding for childcare – only one year of funding is available regardless of the length of the course

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<sup>127</sup> DWP (2008), "DWP Provider Guidance", DWP.

<sup>128</sup> Lessof C., Miller M., Phillips M., Pickering K., Purdon S. and Hales J. (2003), "New Deal for Lone Parents Evaluation: Findings from the quantitative survey", DWP.

<sup>129</sup> Thomas A. & Griffiths R. (2004), "Integrated Findings from the Evaluation of the First 18 Months of Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews", DWP Report 184.

<sup>130</sup> GHK (2001), "New Deal for Lone Parents: Case Studies on Delivery", DWP.

Whilst training is an element of the NDLP offer, NDLP itself is not seen as a route into training. Evidence from the *First Synthesis Report*<sup>131</sup> of the national evaluation of NDLP found that few participants entered into NDLP in order to undertake training. There was also a group of non-participants in NDLP who felt that NDLP could not help them at all with their training requirements. The national evaluation of New Deal Plus for Lone Parents found that managers in a number of Jobcentre Plus districts noted that training options were limited and were often not very 'aspirational', confining clients to low paid and low skilled jobs.<sup>132</sup> It was also noted that many courses were too short to up-skill people who had been removed from the labour market for an extended period of time. Evidence from the *New Deal for Lone Parents National Evaluation Second Synthesis Report*<sup>133</sup> found that those lone parents, who are looking for higher-level jobs requiring some specialist training, were poorly served by the NDLP programme. This echoes the findings for both young and older adults.

There has also been research suggesting that Advisors considered there to be a shortage of ESOL provision. In addition, clients reported that where such provision existed, it was frequently said to be inappropriately delivered, either in terms of the hours when it was run or in terms of some cultural insensitivity to specific requests (such as for all-female classes).<sup>134</sup>

A small scale study by the Gingerbread Trust (2009)<sup>135</sup> of 34 lone parents and their experiences of moving from IS to JSA, found that when interviewed as part of the JSA regime, many of the parents surveyed reported that training had barely been mentioned, that they had been offered courses that were unsuitable or that were already full. Lone parents with higher level qualifications often felt that there was nothing for them as they did not want basic skills courses or basic vocational training, and they did not think that there was anything else on offer for them. The report found that in many cases there was an information deficit with many parents not knowing the kinds of courses and training that might be available and so they did not know what they could ask for. In some cases parents felt that their advisors did not have sufficient knowledge of training and support and so they were not able to take up support that might have been useful for them.

Lone parents, as with all adults, can access the skills system outside of the employment support mechanisms of New Deal through a range of other systems such as Skills Accounts (England), Individual Learner Accounts (Scotland and Wales) and funding mechanisms such as Assembly Learning Grants (Wales), Training for Work (Scotland) and many discretionary college and university support funds, supplementary grants and local initiatives. There is little research on the experiences of lone parents within the wider adult learning skills system. The experience of the general adult population is outlined in the Skills chapter.

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<sup>131</sup> Evans, M., A. McKnight, and C. Namazie (2002), "New Deal for Lone Parents: First Synthesis Report of the National Evaluation", DWP.

<sup>132</sup> GHK Consulting (2007), "New Deal Plus for Lone Parents qualitative evaluation", DWP Research Report 426.

<sup>133</sup> Evans M., Eyre J., Millar J. and Sarreet S. (2003), "New Deal for Lone Parents: Second Synthesis Report of the National Evaluation", DWP Research Report 163.

<sup>134</sup> Thomas A. & Griffiths R. (2004), "Integrated Findings from the Evaluation of the First 18 Months of Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews", DWP Report 184.

<sup>135</sup> Peacey V. (2009), "Signing on and stepping up? Single parents' experience of welfare reform", Gingerbread Trust.

## Employment Zones

Review evidence by Hasluck and Green (2007)<sup>136</sup> highlights that evaluation evidence has found that many Jobcentre Plus PAs felt that EZs were delivering nothing different from the support that they were able to provide lone parents. While this appears true of the content of the advice and guidance supplied, the context and delivery of such support in EZs appears significantly different.

A longitudinal evaluation of this extension of the EZ scheme to lone parents by Griffiths and Jones (2005)<sup>137</sup> highlighted that the majority of lone parents described their experience of EZs in positive terms and as an improvement on previous support received from Jobcentre Plus. EZs were also felt by lone parents to have greater ability than Jobcentre Plus to help them find work through providing access to a greater number and wider range of job vacancies. Some of the lone parents interviewed for the research reported that they had not had the same level of service from their Jobcentre Plus PA as they had through their EZ advisor. Some felt that their Jobcentre Plus advisor had been unwilling or unable to help them to progress towards a longer term career goal and this contrasted against the level of support received from EZ. Many of the lone parents reported that they valued the intensity of support and the enthusiasm of EZ advisors in helping them get work and achieve their career goals. The evaluation reported that customer referral levels of lone parents to the EZ programmes were low. It also outlined that the complexity of the barriers facing lone parents were a key challenge for EZ Advisors who had expected these customers to be relatively easy to help, but many lone parents were reported to have complex needs and barriers with many far from job ready.

## Transition from Benefits and Credits

Moving from benefits and into employment is a key and complex transition point for lone parents where, when moving into employment of over 16 hours a week, some benefits are lost, others are reduced and new credits become available.

This transition point is an area of key concern for customers within the employment and skills system. A wide body of research highlights the experiences of customers at this point of transition and reports both perceived and real issues during this phase. Large scale survey research by Woodland et al (2003)<sup>138</sup> into the transition into work found whilst the top three concerns about leaving benefit were financial (such as not having enough money to live on and coping financially until the first pay day), between 35 per cent and 40 per cent of benefit recipients identified benefit-related issues as worrisome. The 2007 National Audit Office report on *Helping People from Workless Households into Work*<sup>139</sup> finds that there are particular concerns for customers about what would happen if their job did not work out.

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<sup>136</sup> Hasluck C. and Green A. (2007), "What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions", DWP Research Report 407.

<sup>137</sup> Griffiths R. & Jones G. (2005), "Evaluation of Single Provider Employment Zone Extensions to Young People, Lone Parents and Early Entrants", DWP Research Report No 228.

<sup>138</sup> Woodland et al., (2003), "Easing the transition into work (part 2 – client survey)", DWP Research Report 186.

<sup>139</sup> National Audit Office (2007), "Helping People from Workless Households into Work", NAO.

Among the perceived risks of moving from benefits into work, the most discouraging is the fear in relation to difficulties restarting on benefits or re-establishing entitlements if a job does not work out. Further qualitative research into the transition into work by Harries and Woodfield (2002)<sup>140</sup> found that particular issues for parents and primary carers was related to ensuring the stability of household finances and ensuring that dependants were not forced to 'go without' because of disruptions to income.

When moving into employment (more than 16 hour per week), some benefits such as Child Benefit remain intact, while other benefits that are income-related such as Child Tax Credit (CTC), Housing and Council Tax Benefit are affected at certain income thresholds. Research by Woodland et al (2003)<sup>141</sup> found that four-fifths of customers surveyed moving into work were worried about making the transition and felt that the continuation of benefits would help them deal with their worries. A similar proportion thought a continuation of Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit would help. When asked to choose between receiving a benefit run-on or a one-off grant, there was strong support for the former. Almost three-quarters (72 per cent of the respondents) said the benefit run-on would be preferable, irrespective of the type of worry they had.

## In-Work Credit and In-Work Emergency Fund

In-work Credit and Return-to-work Credit (RTWC) provide financial support to both lone parents and former recipients of Incapacity Benefit (now Employment and Support Allowance), who enter employment. IWC is available for lone parents who have claimed IS or JSA for at least one year. It is payable at a rate of £40 per week for up to 12 months in order to ease the transition into work, and to encourage lone parents to leave benefits for employment (of at least 16 hours a week). Payments cease after 12 months, or if the lone parent stops working (breaks in employment of less than five weeks will not lead to payments stopping), or if the lone parent claims an out-of-work benefit<sup>142</sup>.

IWC was rolled out nationally in 2008 following pilots from 2004. Given this relatively new status of IWC the long-term impacts are still unclear. The Social Market Foundation<sup>143</sup> report that some tentative conclusions can be drawn from the pilot studies that were undertaken. After 24 months it was found that the pilots had increased participation rates amongst lone parents in the sample by 7 per cent. Participation increased continuously during the pilot schemes, suggesting the impact of the scheme might be even more pronounced in the long-term.

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<sup>140</sup> Tim Harries T. & Woodfield K. (2002), "Easing the transition to work (part 1), A qualitative evaluation of transitional support for clients returning to employment", DWP Research Report No.175.

<sup>141</sup> Woodland et al., (2003), "Easing the transition into work (part 2 – client survey)", DWP Research Report 186.

<sup>142</sup> Brewer, M., Browne, J., Crawford, C., and Knight, G., (2007), "The lone parent pilots after 12 to 24 months: an impact assessment of In-Work Credit, Work Search Premium, Extended Schools Childcare, Quarterly Work Focused Interviews and New Deal Plus for Lone Parents", DWP Research Report No.415.

<sup>143</sup> Hosain M. and Breen E. (2007), "New Deal Plus for Lone Parents qualitative evaluation", DWP Research Report 426.

Evaluation research by Ray et al. (2007)<sup>144</sup> into Lone Parents Pilots and IWC finds that none of the lone parents interviewed left work after one year because the IWC ended. Although most parents interviewed said that the financial incentives of the IWC did not influence their decisions about work at all. The credit was welcomed simply as part of a broader range of financial support.

In terms of the experience of IWC, the evaluation found that nearly all those received the IWC were positive about the system. In terms of the amount of the IWC payments, lone parents were generally very appreciative and many respondents felt that IWC was 'a lot of money', especially after claiming benefits.<sup>145</sup> Respondents said that they liked IWC because it was extra income to put towards the additional expenses payable on starting work, for example bills such as rent and Council Tax, clothes and shoes for work, children's school dinners, and travel expenses.

The In-Work Emergency Fund (IWEF) was introduced to help lone parents meet the cost of emergencies during the first 60 days in employment and overcome issues that might otherwise make it difficult to remain in work. The purpose is to help lone parents remain in work rather than returning to a life on benefits. IWEF is used for a range of purposes, including coverage for delays in WTC payments and IWC, childcare costs, utility bills, issues with rent and transport issues. Emerging qualitative evidence from the New Deal Plus for Lone Parents pilots indicates that since the changed guidance, Advisors now view the IWEF as a useful element of provision, however, the long processing time when awards are of a greater value than £50 is contrary to the concept of an emergency fund.<sup>146</sup> The evaluation further found that a number of uncertainties and a lack of clarity remained around when and how the fund could be advertised and used. Several advisors also felt its criteria needed to be broadened and made more flexible to address the more multi-faceted problems that lone parents faced in the early weeks after returning to work<sup>147</sup>.

## Childcare

A lack of suitable or affordable childcare has been identified in much of this literature as a barrier to work and this includes the ability for lone parents to participate in pre-employment activities such as training.

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<sup>144</sup> Ray, K., Vegeris, S., Brooks, S., Cambell-Barr, V., Hoggart, L., Mackinnon, K., and Shutes, I., (2007), "The Lone Parents Pilots: A qualitative evaluation of Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (12+), Work Search Premium and In Work Credit", DWP Research Report No.423.

<sup>145</sup> Ray, K., Vegeris, S., Brooks, S., Cambell-Barr, V., Hoggart, L., Mackinnon, K., and Shutes, I., (2007), "The Lone Parents Pilots: A qualitative evaluation of Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (12+), Work Search Premium and In Work Credit", DWP Research Report No.423.

<sup>146</sup> Yeo A. (2007), "Experience of work and job retention among lone parents: An evidence review", DWP Working Paper 37.

<sup>147</sup> Thomas A. & Jones G. (2006), "Work Focused Interviews and lone parent initiatives: further analysis of policies and pilots", DWP Research Report No 319.

Support for the cost of childcare is available for lone parents at the pre-employment and in-work stage. The section below examines the experiences of lone parents with pre-employment childcare support and the subsequent examines that of in-work support.

Pre-employment support with childcare is viewed as essential to lone parents. Research by Lessof et al. (2003)<sup>148</sup>, as part of the NDLP national evaluation found childcare was discussed by 58 per cent of lone parents at their initial NDLP interview and 35% talked about costs of childcare.

Lessof et al. (2003)<sup>149</sup> further found, whilst yielding more positive responses than negative, both childcare and training were less highly rated forms of support than the others. However, these particular areas are most dependent on external factors, and may well reflect a lack of childcare and training opportunities in the area. There are also some restrictions on the types of training and the amount of childcare the NDLP is able to cover, which may have disappointed those with greater expectations. Assistance with the costs of childcare only apply if childcare is provided through approved delivery routes (such as registered childminders, nurseries, play-schemes, out-of-school clubs, preschools or playgroups). Childcare funding through the NDLP programme is also available for only a maximum of 52 weeks.

There are a number of packages in addition to New Deal that offer support for childcare costs for those lone parents returning to education and learning through further and higher education routes. However, the eligibility criteria mean many lone parents are unable to access the support offered. LSC funded childcare options operating in England for further education learning includes Care to Learn, Free Childcare for Training and Learning for Work, Sixth-Form College Childcare Scheme and Discretionary 20+ Childcare. Child Care Grants and Parents' Learning Allowance are also available for students with dependents who want to take up higher education courses. To be eligible for these two particular programme lone parents are required to be in full-time education making those wanting to study part-time (to fit in with family arrangements) ineligible.

The evaluation of the Care to Learn programme provides an example of the experiences of child care support option. The evaluation found that accessing funding support for childcare was very important in supporting young parents in learning.<sup>150</sup> Three quarters of young parents surveyed as part of the research felt they could not have gone on a course without the help of Care to Learn in paying for their childcare. Care to Learn reduced the proportion of young parents not in employment, education or training from 64 per cent before the course to 25 per cent after the course. To decrease this number even further, clearer communication, information and awareness might be needed or more advertising. Additionally, the application process could be made more straightforward. Although 92 per cent mentioned that it was easy, black African parents faced some difficulties.

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<sup>148</sup> Lessof C., Miller M., Phillips M., Pickering K., Purdon S. and Hales J. (2003), "New Deal for Lone Parents Evaluation: Findings from the quantitative survey", DWP.

<sup>149</sup> Lessof C., Miller M., Phillips M., Pickering K., Purdon S. and Hales J. (2003), "New Deal for Lone Parents Evaluation: Findings from the quantitative survey", DWP.

<sup>150</sup> Franceschelli M., Sims L. and Singler R. (2008), "Impact of Care to Learn: tracking the destinations of young parents funded in 2006/07", LSC.

This suggests that for the young parents who received Care to Learn the application process was manageable, but could be improved for some groups. Since only the views of young parents who succeeded in receiving Care to Learn funding are included, this research cannot explore problems that are preventing some young parents from applying.

## In-work childcare support

The most common reason for lone parents not taking up employment relates to caring responsibilities and the lack of affordable quality child care. Many lone parents deliberately choose to remain economically inactive in order to care for their children, and this decision is associated with the age and number of children in the household.<sup>151</sup> The national evaluation of the ERA pilots by Hoggart et al. (2006)<sup>152</sup> found that for lone parents, difficulties retaining employment centred on childcare responsibilities and the breakdown of care arrangements, as well as dissatisfaction with working conditions (such as contracted hours that made it hard to balance work and family life, and the cost and distance of travel to work).

Working Tax Credit (WTC) becomes available to all people working who have a low or modest family incomes. WTC also includes a childcare element. The childcare element of WTC is available to working lone parents (or couples where both adults are working or where one is working and the other partner is incapacitated, in hospital or prison) providing the lone parent is working 16 or more hours a week and using approved childcare. A report by the Childcare Trust (2007)<sup>153</sup> finds that lone parents encounter considerable difficulties with childcare when working or trying to enter the workforce. Lone parents identified that the need to work at least sixteen hours a week in order to claim WTC compounds the difficulties they face in finding suitable, affordable childcare. In many cases, lone parents need someone to collect and/or drop off their children to and from school or the childcare setting and this, together with the need to work 'atypical' hours in many jobs, increases childcare costs. Childcare is still seen as unaffordable by many parents, and as outweighing the financial benefits of working. Many lone parents want to take up work but are unlikely to do so.

The childcare element is calculated separately from the rest of the credit and is designed to cover up to 80% of registered childcare, up to a maximum of £175 a week for a single child or up to £300 per week for two or more children.<sup>154</sup> This criteria relating to the same maximum benefit irrespective of whether there are two or more children is a significant issue, particularly where there are three or more children in a family and the financial costs of paying for childcare far outweigh the benefits of working.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Hoggart L., Campbell-Barr V., Ray K. and Vegeris S. (2006), "Staying in work and moving up: Evidence from the UK Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) demonstration", DWP Research Report No 381.

<sup>152</sup> Hoggart L., Campbell-Barr V., Ray K. and Vegeris S. (2006), "Staying in work and moving up: Evidence from the UK Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) demonstration", DWP Research Report No 381.

<sup>153</sup> Childcare Trust (2007), "Listening to lone parents about childcare," Gingerbread Trust.

<sup>154</sup> Yeo A. (2007), "Experience of work and job retention among lone parents: An evidence review", DWP Working Paper 37.

<sup>155</sup> Daycare Trust (2007), "Listening to lone parents about childcare", Daycare Trust.

Rules for the childcare element of WTC further means that provision of childcare must be with a registered childminder. Research into *Work and well-being over time: lone mothers and their children* found that sometimes mothers were paying for private informal care without the childcare element of Working Tax Credit.

“I used to struggle with childcare when I first started working and that was due because around here, there’s not many registered childminders and you’ve got to be able to claim from working tax credit. You’ve got to have a registered childminder. So I was like having to pay private people to watch him.”<sup>156</sup>

Parents participating in the NDLP and New Deal for Partners can access additional support for childcare with the Childcare Assist scheme which provides help with childcare costs in the week before work starts. Research by the National Audit Office (2007)<sup>157</sup> has found that take-up of the scheme had been limited.

A further issue with the system of in-work financial support is that it is generally complex and difficult for individuals to navigate. In a small sample of claimants, a joint report by Community Links, Low Incomes Tax Reform Group and the Child Poverty Action Group<sup>158</sup> finds that:

“a system of financial support that is constantly changing as claimants’ circumstances alter ... makes it hard for people to make informed decisions about moving into paid employment or increasing their hours of work”.

Some of those interviewed could not understand their benefit and tax calculations and so did not know whether or not they were getting the right amount of award. They were however, expected to understand and notify HMRC if there were errors, some of which might result in overpayments. This particular group of claimants had different views on the helpfulness, clarity and knowledge of those staffing the customer service line and there were criticisms that they had found it difficult to get clear answers about the overpayment notices received from HMRC.

There is further evidence of low levels of awareness of other in-work benefits such as in-work housing benefit. The recent summary by DWP of estimates of income-related benefit take-up finds that there is some evidence to suggest that people assume they would not be eligible for Housing Benefit once they were working, and that this lack of awareness could have prevented some from claiming.<sup>159</sup> Further evidence from HMRC on Child Tax Credit and WTC found that in 2006–07, 81 per cent of families entitled to receive child tax credits took them up and only 57% of those entitled to receive working tax credits actually claimed them. This translates into 1.3m and 1.4m 'entitled non-recipients' respectively and £2.8bn of CTC and £3.5bn of WTC unclaimed.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Ridge T. and Millar J. (2008), “Work and well-being over time: lone mothers and their children”, DWP Research Report 536.

<sup>157</sup> National Audit Office (2007), “Helping People from Workless Households into Work”, NAO.

<sup>158</sup> Community Links, Low Incomes Tax Reform Group, Child Poverty Action Group (2007), “Interact: benefits, tax credits and moving into work”, Community Links, Low Incomes Tax Reform Group and Child Poverty Action Group.

<sup>159</sup> DWP (2009), “Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-Up in 2007-08”, DWP.

<sup>160</sup> HMRC Analysis Team (2009), “Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit Take-up rates 2006/07”, HMRC.

## In-Work Support

Once in work, it has been identified that lone parents are particularly vulnerable to returning to unemployment or economic inactivity. Research by Yeo (2007)<sup>161</sup> developed a 'cycles of vulnerability' model illustrating how a lone parent can fall into a cycle of vulnerability if problems such as a breakdown in childcare arrangements, ill health of a child, transport problems, debt crisis, benefit problems, arise once in work.

The first cycle is where lone parents in work who develop a problem that could, in the future, affect work performance if the situation deteriorates. Whether the issue will affect work performance will depend on whether a mechanism of support is available to alleviate the problems and whether the employer is willing and able to adjust working practices such as the consideration of flexible working arrangements. The second cycle is where lone parents in work have an issue affecting work performance (for example, being late to work due to childcare problems, over tiredness caused by child illness or transport problems). Falling into this cycle of vulnerability can occur when the first cycle is not dealt with. The third cycle of vulnerability is when lone parents in work develop issues that affect their attendance at work, often as a result if there is no support or changes in working practices. Yeo (2007)<sup>162</sup> reports that a lone parent descending into these cycles will risk eventual exit from the organisation, whether on a voluntarily or compulsory basis.

Previously the employment system has been loaded towards front-end or pre-employment support with little follow-up with clients to ensure sustained employment. Where in-work support has existed there has been little evidence relating to its effectiveness for lone parents.<sup>163</sup> Whilst NDLP provides very effective pre-work case management it was not designed to provide extensive in-work support.<sup>164</sup> An in-work advisor who has regular contact with the lone parent might be able to prevent minor situations snowballing which could in time result in a job exit. Where in-work support is available it relies on a lone parent going to a Jobcentre Plus office to access this support on their own initiative. The research suggests that Jobcentre Plus may not be best placed to provide such support and that there is a possible role for the voluntary or charitable sector and was a view that is highlighted by the 2007 National Audit Office report into *Helping Workless Households*.<sup>165</sup> Further evaluation research of the ERA programme also highlights that the New Deal programmes focuses on job placement but offers only limited in-work support to help customers retain and advance in their work.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Yeo A. (2007), "Experience of work and job retention among lone parents: An evidence review", DWP Working Paper 37.

<sup>162</sup> Yeo A. (2007), "Experience of work and job retention among lone parents: An evidence review", DWP Working Paper 37.

<sup>163</sup> Hasluck C. and Green A. (2007), "What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions", DWP Research Report 407.

<sup>164</sup> Yeo A. (2007), "Experience of work and job retention among lone parents: An evidence review", DWP Working Paper 37.

<sup>165</sup> National Audit Office (2007), "Helping People from Workless Households into Work", NAO.

<sup>166</sup> Dorsett R. Campbell-Barr V., Hamilton G., Hoggart L., Marsh S., Miller C., Phillips J., Ray K., Riccio J., Rich S. and Vegeris S. (2007), "Implementation and first-year impacts of the UK Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) demonstration", DWP Research Report No 412.

The national evaluation of Lone Parent Pilots (three pilot initiatives including Quarterly Work Focused Interviews, Work Search Premium and In Work Credit introduced in selected Jobcentre Plus) found that it was rare for working lone parents to receive information or advice from their advisors once they entered work. Overwhelmingly, they did not consult their lone parent advisor nor did their advisor contact them, apart from reminder letters or phone calls for payslips. If there was any in-work contact, this usually occurred during the early weeks of starting a job and, in almost all cases, it was initiated by the lone parent.<sup>167</sup>

Employment Zones offered more in the way of in-work support. The national evaluation of the extension of the EZ programme to lone parents found that within EZs, aftercare mainly consisted of out of hours contact and in-work financial support. One EZ contractor had created a new aftercare consultant post to offer dedicated in-work support during evenings and week-ends. Other EZs operated free telephone advisor methods and working practices helplines. EZ advisors also provide continuity of care into employment. Aftercare was felt to be particularly effective during the first few weeks of employment when most problems were seen to arise.<sup>168</sup>

In response to these issues a number of measures have been introduced. The ERA pilot programme was developed to tackle some of these issues offering both pre-employment and in-work support. ERA is aimed at adding to the existing pre-employment of the New Deal programme by adding a new set of financial incentives and job coaching following customers' entry into work. The ERA pilot programme began in 2003 in six Jobcentre Plus districts in England, Scotland and Wales.

The programme was aimed at three groups that were perceived to have particular difficulties getting and keeping full-time work or advancing to more secure and better-paid positions:

1. lone parents (mostly women) who receive Income Support and volunteer for the New Deal for Lone Parents programme;
2. longer-term unemployed people over the age of 25 (mostly men) who receive JSA and are mandated to enter the New Deal 25 Plus programme; and
3. lone parents who are already working part-time (between 16 and 29 hours a week) and are receiving Working Tax Credit (WTC).<sup>169</sup>

For the two New Deal groups, ERA begins with job placement and other pre-employment assistance, for up to nine months, and then (if they find work) the post-employment phase. Those on WTC enter the post-employment phase directly.

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<sup>167</sup> Policy Studies Institute (2007), "The Lone Parents Pilots: A qualitative evaluation of Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (12+), Work Search Premium and In Work Credit", DWP Research Report 423.

<sup>168</sup> Insite Research and Consulting (2005), "Evaluation of Single Provider Employment Zone Extensions to Young People, lone parents and Early Entrants - Interim Report", DWP Research Report 228.

<sup>169</sup> Dorsett R. Campbell-Barr V., Hamilton G., Hoggart L., Marsh S., Miller C., Phillips J., Ray K., Riccio J., Rich S. and Vegeris S.(2007), "Implementation and first-year impacts of the UK Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) demonstration", DWP Research Report No 412.

This phase is intended to last for up to two years. ERA also offers special cash incentives and other resources to promote these goals, including:

- an employment retention bonus of £400 three times a year for two years for staying in full-time work (at least 30 hours per week for 13 out of every 17 weeks);
- training tuition assistance (up to £1,000) and a bonus (also up to £1,000) for completing training while employed; and
- access to emergency payments to overcome short-term barriers to staying in work.

Customers assigned to the ERA programme each work with an Advancement Support Advisor (ASA) for a maximum of 33 months over both pre-employment and in-work periods. Whereas PAs work with out-of-work customers, helping them train and find work, ASAs continue to support customers after they entered work. ERA was designed so that in the pre-employment stage ASAs coach their ERA customers to consider the advancement opportunities of a job before taking it, and to try to identify work that is a good fit with their skills and interests.<sup>170</sup>

The first evaluation of one year impact of the ERA pilots<sup>171</sup> found that despite early operational difficulties within the Jobcentre Plus districts', ERA had a number of positive effects on lone parents during the first year of follow-up. ERA was found to increase participants' receipt of post-employment services and training, increased their likelihood of working fulltime, increased their likelihood of combining training and work, increased their average earnings and reduced their use of benefits.

Evidence from the further second year impact evaluation<sup>172</sup> shows the pattern of positive effects continued into the second year of follow-up. However, improvements have not yet led to 'better' jobs, as indicated, for example, by higher wages and better fringe benefits.

In terms of experience of the support provided through ERA, the evaluation found that customers in the ERA group who worked at some point within the two-year follow-up period received a substantial post-employment intervention from Jobcentre Plus. This intervention differed in both content and intensity from what they would have experienced had ERA not existed (as evidenced by comparisons with workers in the control group). However, the nature and quality of the support they received varied substantially, ranging from the simple processing of bonuses and perfunctory interactions to specialist advancement action planning.

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170 Dorsett R. Campbell-Barr V., Hamilton G., Hoggart L., Marsh S., Miller C., Phillips J., Ray K., Riccio J., Rich S. and Vegeris S.(2007), "Implementation and first-year impacts of the UK Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) demonstration", DWP Research Report 412.

<sup>171</sup> Dorsett R. Campbell-Barr V., Hamilton G., Hoggart L., Marsh S., Miller C., Phillips J., Ray K., Riccio J., Rich S. and Vegeris S.(2007), "Implementation and first-year impacts of the UK Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) demonstration", DWP Research Report 412.

<sup>172</sup> Riccio,J., Bewley, H., Campbell-Barr, V., Dorsett,R., Hamilton, G., Hoggart, L., Marsh, A., Miller, C., Ray, K., and Vegeris, S. (2008), "Implementation and second-year impacts for lone parents in the UK Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA) demonstration", DWP Research Report 489.

ERA Customers generally appreciated the support offered by advisors while in work. Over 60 per cent of participants who had any face-to-face or telephone contact with a particular staff member at Jobcentre Plus while employed said that they got 'a lot' of support from that person while they were working. Furthermore 80 per cent of those in-work and who received face to face or over the phone support from Jobcentre Plus rated the support as either "quite" or "very" helpful. Customers also tended to have consistent help from the same advisor and generally valued this highly. Around 70 per cent of the programme participants thought that their advisor had made "a lot" of effort to get to know them<sup>173</sup>.

Examining the experience of financial incentives offered by the programme, when interviewed 24 months after entering the study, most lone parents reported that whilst they knew about the employment retention bonus available through ERA, only one-third had received any of these bonus payments. This was largely because they did not meet the necessary conditions for the reward (sustaining full-time work for at least four months in a given payment period).

There was considerable variation in customers' views on the influence of the financial incentives. Around two fifths of those who had received a retention bonus thought it influenced their decision to work over 30 hours per week "a lot", but around one third said it had been no influence at all. Very similar findings were reported for customers' decision to stay working full time. Part of the explanation for these findings is the varied circumstances customers were in, for example for those that were happy in their current job or had no desire to work full-time because of family commitments or a desire to train the retention bonus held little relevance. By contrast some parents found the extra financial help enabled them to afford things they would not normally be able to and so this a motivating factor<sup>174</sup>.

As has been noted the ERA programme also offered financial incentives to pay for tuition fees and bonuses for completing training. The ERA evaluation showed that the programme did increase chances of undertaking training while in work but there was also a high degree of training in the control group. However, while take-up of training increased the take-up of the training related financial support was low. While most participants were aware of the financial support for fees and completion bonuses only 10 per cent of the NDLP recipients received fee support and 8 per cent received a completion bonus (the equivalent figures for the WTC group here higher at 27 and 23 per cent respectively). Again there was variation in opinions and circumstances, of those who received financial help with training around half thought it influenced their decision "a lot" while a quarter thought it had made no difference. As important to the financial support was the advice offer, furthermore many customers didn't think they were eligible for completion bonuses because their employer had paid for the course, there had been no course fees at all or they had arranged their training independently.

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

The evaluation has further found that ERA lead to an earnings impact with NDLP customers in earning £1,550 more, on average, than the control group in the one year follow up. Whilst the impact was less in the following year, the impact was still statistically significant. ERA had positive impacts on earnings largely because it increased the proportion of lone parents working full-time. ERA also increased the length of time that lone parents worked full-time, but more by accelerating entry into such jobs than by improving retention, which was already high, at least in the short term.

Further to ERA, additional new measures for in-work support for lone parents were outlined in the 2007 *In Work, Better Off Green Paper*.<sup>175</sup> Measures included In-Work Advisory Support (IWAS), In-Work Emergency Discretion Fund (IWEDF) and In-Work Credit Retention Pilots (IWRP). IWAS provides continued support and guidance from a PA for all lone parents who have moved into work in order to help resolve any difficulties and direct them towards other sources of potential support. IWEDF provides in work financial help to overcome unexpected financial barriers. IWRP is a two-year pilot to test the effectiveness of using In Work Credit as an aid to job retention and progression. After a period of weekly payments to support the transition into work, lone parents receive lump sum payments if they attend further meetings with a PA. Due to the recent nature of these interventions there is little current evidence outlining their effectiveness.

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<sup>175</sup> DWP (2007), "In work, better off: next steps to full employment", DWP.

## 6. Disabled People and people living with health conditions

### Summary

This section considers the journey and experiences through the employment and skills system of individuals with disabilities and/or health and work-limiting conditions. The primary programmes operating across the UK that focus on supporting these individuals into work are: New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP); Pathways to Work and Access to Work. Workstep is a further programme that operates across England, Scotland and Wales. This section looks at the experiences of these individuals in terms of how they are engaged in the key employment support programme

It is important to note that the types of support that were most valued by customers in this group are those that "empower" individuals to achieve positive job market outcomes. In other words, aside from receiving any substantive advice, customers believe that "intermediate inputs" that help them to feel confident and comfortable about operating within the job market are meaningful contributions to their journey towards sustainable employment.

Given this, the customer experience – the way in which the system is perceived and experienced by this group – is especially important. If a customer feels that the management of their case is sensitive to their personal circumstances, job market outcomes are more likely to be positive. If, on the other hand, this customer feels that their personal circumstances are not given due consideration, they are unlikely to engage properly with the system.

In terms of awareness of employment support programmes, it is those individuals who are closest to the job market who are most likely to be aware of labour market programme such as New Deal for Disabled People. Longer-term claimants are less likely to be aware of these voluntary programmes.

As with young adults, older adults and lone parents, individuals who have disabilities or work limiting illness report the positive effects of a personalised service and the importance of the advisor/customer relationship particularly in enabling positive long-term progress and effective referral mechanisms. It is important for representatives of the NDDP to interact in neutral and supportive ways with customers in order for them to engage properly with the employment and skills system. Further, this should be backed up with appropriate knowledge or the awareness to refer customers to specialist advisors.

The issue of job outcome targets and the effect on the delivery of support is an issue that is also highlighted for this customer group. The national evaluation of NDDP found that 72 per cent of working NDDP respondents felt that starting work was something they would have done anyway.

In terms of in-work support provision, whilst a design feature of NDDP, evidence suggests that not all Job Brokers provided adequate in-work support. Qualitative research of participants who were receiving in-work support reported that they generally did not receive an intensive service, and the priority Job Brokers gave to in-work support and the nature of the provision within their service profile varied.

There have been a number of further issues raised with the lack of in-work support. Lack of access is one issue with individuals only able to take-up the NDDP after-care programme if they had used a Job Broker. Lack of knowledge is a further issue with Jobcentre Plus staff appearing to have inadequate knowledge of programmes such as Pathways In Work Support (IWS). The issue of lack of time has also been raised with the effect of caseworkers being unable to help clients with the after-care aspects of their role, focusing on getting other people into work that are currently on their caseload. One solution to this problem has been to assign people to an overall case manager that supports customers through their entire journey in the employment and skills system.

One of the primary differences between Pathways IWS and NDDP after-care reported is that that Pathways IWS provided more in-depth support than NDDP after-care, including more intensive after-care support and access to sub-contracted specialist support services. NDDP was generally seen to provide more 'light touch' support.

Evidence suggests that certain groups gain significantly as a result of the Access to Work programme. For example, for people where alternative transport arrangements are not feasible, the provisions made by the Access to Work programme are particularly beneficial.

## **New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP)**

The NDDP is a voluntary programme of advice and practical support that helps people move from disability and health-related benefits into sustained employment. Individuals who are in receipt of benefits such as ESA, IB, Severe Disablement Allowance, IS, Disability Living Allowance and Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit are eligible to join the programme. NDDP is not available across all areas of the UK. Where NDDP is not available similar help and advice is provided by Pathways to Work providers.

NDDP is delivered by a national network of local Job Brokers comprising public, private and voluntary sector providers who supply participants with: (i) assistance in gaining skills and confidence; (ii) support to help customers find work more easily; and (iii) open vacancies<sup>176</sup>. More specifically, this can include careers guidance, the provision of access to voluntary work or work placements, soft skills training, job search support, help with applying for jobs, financial help and support and confidence building.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Pires C., Kazimirski A., Shaw A., Sainsbury R. and Meah A. (2006), "New Deal for Disabled People Evaluation: eligible population survey, wave three", DWP Research Report 324.

<sup>177</sup> Hasluck, C and Green, A. (2007), "What Works for Whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis", DWP Research Report No. 407.

NDDP has been the subject of an extensive and multi-method programme of evaluation. As part of the national evaluation, the *Survey of the Eligible Population*<sup>178</sup> found just over half of the eligible population were aware of NDDP and/or local Job Brokers. The overall take-up rate of NDDP for the year ending May 2006 was three per cent of the population flowing onto the qualifying benefits and registering within six months. The rate of take-up was higher in the Pathways to Work pilot areas and this is partly as a result of the mandatory work-focused interviews within Pathways to Work pilots. A similar result was seen with lone parents and the introduction of mandatory WFIs which raised rates of entry to NDLP. The survey further suggested that those individuals with qualifications, looking or expecting to work in the future and those who had work experience were more likely to be aware of NDDP and/or Job Brokers. Longer-term claimants with a mental health conditions were less likely to be aware of a local Job Broker.

Qualitative survey research with NDDP participants found that prior to coming into direct contact either with Job Brokers or registering for NDDP, awareness of NDDP was generally low.<sup>179</sup> Whilst some of those surveyed had not heard of NDDP at all, others were unable to distinguish it from other New Deal programmes and some had not thought that the programme was for them because of the use of the term 'disability', which many thought only applied to people with severe physical disabilities, and not those who were just 'sick' or in poor health. This view was echoed by Job Brokers who also felt that the use of the term 'disability' could have deterred some people from registering on the programme.<sup>180</sup>

## Personalisation

During the NDDP PA pilot stage, customers highlighted that the highly personalised approach was appreciated, with the following types of support being particularly helpful.<sup>181</sup>

- Increasing/maintaining clients' self-esteem, confidence, morale
- Providing reassurance and a sense of security
- Making people feel stronger and more empowered
- Widening horizons, suggesting and arranging new options
- Sharpening goals, focusing efforts
- Enabling people to achieve objectives
- Providing necessary advice and practical help
- Redirecting unrealistic aims
- Maintaining long-term commitment and support

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<sup>178</sup> Pires C., Kazimirski A., Shaw A., Sainsbury R. and Meah A. (2006), "New Deal for Disabled People Evaluation: eligible population survey, wave three", DWP Research Report 324.

<sup>179</sup> Corden, A., Harries, T., Hill, K., Kellard, K., Lewis, J., Sainsbury, R. and Thornton, P. (2003), "New Deal for Disabled People National Extension: Findings from the First Wave of Qualitative Research with Customers, Job Brokers and Jobcentre Plus Staff", DWP Research Report No. 169.

<sup>180</sup> Lewis, J., Corden, A., Dillon, L., Hill, K., Kellard, K., Sainsbury, R. and Thornton, P. (2005), "New Deal for Disabled People: An In-Depth Study of Job Broker Service Delivery", DWP Research Report. 246.

<sup>181</sup> Loumidis, J., Stafford, B., Youngs, R., Green, A., Arthur, S., Legard, R., Lessof, C., Lewis, J., Walker, R., Corden, A., Thornton, P. and Sainsbury, R. (2001), "Evaluation of the New Deal for Disabled People Personal Adviser Service Pilot, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 144.

It is fundamental to note that many of the types of support customers in this group felt to be important boosted their confidence to make progress towards finding sustainable employment, even though advice on particular work-related issues was not highly rated.<sup>182</sup> Customers believed that strong relationships with advisors and an ongoing positive relationship was one of the key determinants of long-term progress.<sup>183</sup>

Along these lines, some of the general findings of the NDDP included the fact that participants (especially those with a mental health conditions) tended to praise Job Broker staff for being courteous, friendly, enthusiastic and committed to working with disabled people. In addition, the majority of participants rated the discussions they had with Job Brokers on specific work-related issues as "helpful".<sup>184</sup> However, there was also a significant minority (23 per cent) of customers that rated the support provided by Job Brokers as being poor.

### Quality of support received

The same national evaluation research suggests that the quality of support received across the customer group was "suboptimal". Despite the importance of the types of intermediate support that help clients to build their confidence, it has been observed that Job Brokers deliver the NDDP with too great a focus on directly helping clients to achieve job market outcomes, though this is unsurprising as they are incentivised to do so through their funding structure. This has led Job Brokers to support "job ready" customers more than those that are hardest to reach. For instance, a sizeable majority (72 per cent) of working NDDP respondents felt that starting work was something they would have done at that time anyway.

Although the aggregate results of the evaluation show sizeable numbers returning to work, this overlooks the "additionality" aspect of programme evaluation, which highlights that the customers returning to work generally would have done so anyway with the hardest to reach still being under-serviced. A partial solution to this problem is to re-orient Job Brokers targets.<sup>185</sup> The *Third Synthesis Review* of the national programme of evaluation for NDDP summarised that:

"Whilst, formally, Job Brokers could not refuse to register anyone wishing to do so, some providers had strategies for ensuring that some people (for example, those that were too ill) did not register on the programme. There is some evidence that some Job Brokers were also 'creaming' those people who were more job ready in order to cope with increasing workloads and limited resources, or to maximise fee income. This practice by Job Brokers appears to have become more prevalent over time".<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Corden, A., Harries, T., Hill, K., Kellard, K., Lewis, J., Sainsbury, R. and Thornton, P. (2003), "New Deal for Disabled People National Extension: Findings from the First Wave of Qualitative Research with Customers, Job Brokers and Jobcentre Plus Staff", DWP Research Report 169.

<sup>183</sup> Lewis, J., Corden, A., Dillon, L., Hill, K., Kellard, K., Sainsbury, R. and Thornton, P. (2005), "New Deal for Disabled People: An In-Depth Study of Job Broker Service Delivery", DWP Research Report 246.

<sup>184</sup> Kazimirski, A., Adelmagn, L., Arch, J., Keenan, L., Legge, L., Shaw, A., Stafford, B., Taylor, R. and Tipping, S. (2005), "New Deal for Disabled People evaluation: Registrants' Survey - Merged Cohorts (Cohorts one and two, Waves one and two)", DWP Research Report 260.

<sup>185</sup> Lewis, J., Corden, A., Dillon, L., Hill, K., Kellard, K., Sainsbury, R. and Thornton, P. (2005), "New Deal for Disabled People: An In-Depth Study of Job Broker Service Delivery", DWP Research Report 246.

<sup>186</sup> Bruce Stafford B., Bell S., Kornfield R., Lam K., Orr L., Ashworth K., Adelman L., Davis A., Hartfree Y., Hill K. and Greenberg D. (2007). New Deal for Disabled People: Third synthesis report – key findings from the evaluation. DWP Research Report 430.

A similar issue was observed during the NDDP PA pilots. Customers that were not job ready were offered the opportunity to partake in some NDDP activity (e.g. training), after which PAs neglected to re-initiate contact with these customers in favour of supporting more job ready customers. This is detrimental to individuals' circumstances because neglected customers tend to engage in job search activities significantly less than those who have regular contact with the NDDP. Extended periods spent away from the employment and skills system or outside the job market cancel out any gains customers may have gained through previous inputs (such as training) from the NDDP.

## Referrals

At a basic level, referrals from Jobcentre Plus staff to Job Brokers is important for helping customers to access the services they need to return to work. Where Jobcentres are integrated with Job Broker services, the level of referrals clearly tends to be higher than otherwise.<sup>187</sup>

Referrals are also important to this customer group because in order for Jobcentre Plus staff and Job Brokers to build effective relationships with customers, they must be sensitive to customers' personal circumstances. This may often involve referring cases on to specialist advisors. For instance, initial entrants into the NDDP PA criticised advisors for failing to fully understand the consequences of conditions such as ME, brain injury and progressive muscle disease.<sup>188</sup> However, over time this improved as a larger proportion of late entrants into the NDDP PA did not make this observation due to a combination of PAs understanding of these issues improving<sup>189</sup> and referrals on to specialist advisors such as occupational psychologists or Incapacity Benefit Personal Advisers (IBPAs).<sup>190</sup> It was observed, for instance, that customers with mental health conditions valued referrals to community psychiatric services such as MIND.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Davis, A., Pound, E. and Stafford, B., "New Deal for Disabled People Extensions: examining the role and operation of new Job Brokers", DWP Research Report 384.

<sup>188</sup> Arthur, S., Corden, A., Green, A., Lewis, J., Loumidis, J., Sainsbury, R., Stafford, B., Thornton, P. and Walker, R. (1999), "New Deal for Disabled People: Early Implementation", DSS Research Report 106.

<sup>189</sup> See Loumidis, J., Sgtafford, B., Youngs, R., Green, A., Arthur, S., Legard, R., Lessof, C., Lewis, J., Walker, R., Corden, A., Thornton, P. and Sainsbury, R. (2001), "Evaluation of the New Deal for Disabled People Personal Adviser Service Pilot", DWP Research Report 144.

<sup>190</sup> Legge, K., Magadi, M., Phung V-H., Stafford, B., Hales, J., Hayllar, O., Nevill, C. and Wood, M., "New Deal for Disabled People: Survey of Registrants report of Cohort 3", DWP Research Report 369.

<sup>191</sup> Arthur, S., Corden, A., Green, A., Lewis, J., Loumidis, J., Sainsbury, R., Stafford, B., Thornton, P. and Walker, R. (1999), "New Deal for Disabled People: Early Implementation", DWP Research Report 106.

## Work-related discussions

Job Brokers must carefully tread the line between gaining information on customers' personal circumstances in order to be sensitive to their circumstances and prying too deeply when customers do not want this level of involvement (as a significant proportion of customers indicated). Successful Job Brokers tend to be those that have hired staff that can combine a sensitive approach with good advice.

With regard to the sensitivity issue, it is interesting to note that customers tended to be dissatisfied if initial work-related discussions led PAs involved in the NDDP PA pilots to dissuade customers from a career track they hoped to pursue. Furthermore, customers found that follow-up work-related discussions that preceded customers having dropped out of training courses or jobs were smoother if they were conducted in a non-judgmental or neutral way.<sup>192</sup> This suggests that customers value PAs and Job Brokers that played a sensitive/supportive (and hence empowering) role in their journey.

At the same time, however, it is important that customers gain a sense that these discussions are informative to ensure that they have gained value from them. On the one hand, for example, customers that interacted with occupational psychologists derived a great deal of value due to the "scope and relevance" of discussions.<sup>193</sup> On the other hand, there was a sense that discussions with PAs with little knowledge of issues such as housing benefits were ineffective.<sup>194</sup> Even where PAs did not possess some knowledge, customers appreciated it when they were given referrals to more appropriate contacts as above mentioned.

In sum, it is important for representatives of the NDDP to interact in neutral and supportive ways with customers in order for them to engage properly with the employment and skills system. Further, this should be backed up with appropriate knowledge or the awareness to refer customers to specialist advisors. At a more basic level, customers valued it when PAs and Job Brokers were available over the phone and returned messages, with close to one-third of participants in one study quoting a lack of contact or insufficient assistance as the reason for poor assessments of Job Brokers.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Loumidis, J., Stafford, B., Youngs, R., Green, A., Arthur, S., Legard, R., Lessof, C., Lewis, J., Walker, R., Corden, A., Thornton, P. and Sainsbury, R. (2001), "Evaluation of the New Deal for Disabled People Personal Adviser Service Pilot", DWP Research Report 144.

<sup>193</sup> Loumidis, J., Stafford, B., Youngs, R., Green, A., Arthur, S., Legard, R., Lessof, C., Lewis, J., Walker, R., Corden, A., Thornton, P. and Sainsbury, R. (2001), "Evaluation of the New Deal for Disabled People Personal Adviser Service Pilot", DWP Research Report 144.

<sup>194</sup> It was observed that some PAs made mistakes when carrying out calculations regarding the income consequences of work versus claiming benefits.

<sup>195</sup> Stafford, B. et al. (2007), "New Deal for Disabled People: Third synthesis report – key findings from the evaluation", DWP Research Report 430.

## Planning and progress in customer journeys

Customers displayed a lack of awareness of Action Plans that were meant to define their journeys into work. This was an important shortcoming insofar as customer confidence may benefit from the existence of milestones that allow them to feel a sense of achievement along their journey into work.

With regard to concrete content that could benefit customers during their journeys, it was observed that short courses had positive impacts on customers' sense of personal achievement and motivation to go on to the next stage of their journey. More generally, it is important for NDDP to support customers to progress at a rate at which participants in the programme are comfortable with. This is so as not to harm confidence levels, and matched with customers' expectations with respect to their abilities and beliefs about the value of training courses.<sup>196</sup>

One important barrier that appears to be widespread is poor organisation in terms of making special provision available to customers in a timely fashion in order to undertake training courses or work. For example, for those with spinal injuries, orthopaedic chairs that are promised did not arrive. More generally, it was found that a majority of people felt that Job Brokers' efforts to arrange special equipment for work were subpar.<sup>197</sup>

## Job search activities and work placements

The benefits of job market participation were particularly seen among people in the Permitted Work programme in which claimants of incapacity benefits are allowed to work up to 16 hours a week (with certain restrictions). The benefit of this programme is that it allows participants, who are often unsure about the type of work appropriate for them, to engage in a process of "trial and error".<sup>198</sup> In the context of a lack of knowledge of other provisions such as the "linking rules"<sup>199</sup>, this programme is especially important. Voluntary work has also seen some success among this customer group, partly due to the feeling of empowerment achieved in knowing that they are in control of the terms under which they work. In general, resolving uncertainty about work among customers that may have been unemployed for a long time is an important function of the employment and skills system, as some studies have shown that the economic benefits of work to the individual tend to be relatively modest<sup>200</sup>.

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<sup>196</sup> Lewis, J., Corden, A., Dillon, L., Hill, K., Kellard, K., Sainsbury, R. and Thornton, P. (2005), "New Deal for Disabled People: An In-Depth Study of Job Broker Service Delivery", DWP Research Report 246.

<sup>197</sup> Legge, K., Magadi, M., Phung V-H., Stafford, B., Hales, J., Hayllar, O., Nevill, C. and Wood, M., "New Deal for Disabled People: Survey of Registrants report of Cohort 3", DWP Research Report 369.

<sup>198</sup> This section draws mainly on Hudson et al. (2009), "People with mental health conditions and Pathways to Work", DWP Research Report 593.

<sup>199</sup> This allows people moving off an incapacity benefit into work or training to re-access any higher rates of benefit they previously received if their job does not work out and they need to re-claim.

<sup>200</sup> Greenberg, D. and Davis, A. (2007), "Evaluation of the New Deal for Disabled People: The cost and cost-benefit analyses", DWP Research Report 431.

## Pathways to Work<sup>201</sup>

Pathways to Work provides extra support to customers that have a health condition or a disability to assist with the move into work. Pathways is a broader series of interventions that was circulated in provider led areas. In provider led areas Pathways to Work supersedes NDDP. In Jobcentre Plus Pathways to Work provides easy access to NDDP. The Pathways to Work package of interventions is aimed at encouraging employment among people claiming incapacity benefits. The main elements of the programme offered are:

- Work-focused interviews (WFI): IB customers are required to take part in a series of WFIs, depending upon the length of their claim.
- Access to IB PAs, Disability Employment Advisors (DEAs) and Work Psychologists to advise and support people directly.
- The timing of the medical assessment process for new claims (the Personal Capability Assessment (PCA)) has been closely linked to the WFIs to allow for more rapid decision making around benefit eligibility and earlier access to capability reports from medical assessors.
- Choices package: easier access to existing programmes such as NDDP, Workstep, WorkPrep and Work-Based Learning for Adults. The package also included new work-focused condition management programmes (CMPs).
- Return To Work Credit (RTWC) of £40 per week for a maximum of 52 weeks available to those returning to, or finding, work of 16 hours or more, where their gross earnings are less than £15,000 a year.
- Advisors' Discretion Fund (ADF) enabling PAs to make awards of up to £300 per customer to support activities that can improve the likelihood of a person finding or taking up a job.
- Job Preparation Premium (JPP): financial incentive of £20 a week to encourage activity in preparation for a return to work. This is for existing customers who are required to take part in three WFIs and is time limited to 26 weeks and payable as long as work-related activity, agreed as part of an Action Plan, is undertaken.
- In Work Support (IWS): 'light touch' after-care support from an IWS advisor alongside sub-contracted specialist support services covering occupational health, mentoring, job-coaching, in-depth support (such as counselling) and financial and debt counselling services<sup>202</sup>.

A key objective of Pathways is to intervene early so as to reduce the incidence of prolonged benefit dependency.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> This section draws particularly on Hudson et al. (2009), "People with mental health conditions and Pathways to Work", DWP Research Report 593.

<sup>202</sup> Dixon J. and Warrener M. (2008), "Pathways to Work: Qualitative study of In-work support", DWP Research Report 478.

<sup>203</sup> Bewley H., Dorsett R. and Haile G. (2007), "The impact of Pathways to Work", DWP Research Report 435.

The final phase evaluation of the Pathways to Work published by the DWP in 2009 reported overall views about the usefulness of Pathways by customers varied.<sup>204</sup> Some customers interviewed felt that employers would perceive them as 'unemployable' and that Pathways offered little to combat this barrier. A number of people felt differently and reported that they had benefited from the Pathways programme and that the support from the Pathways provider staff had been influential in their move into paid work. The majority of those who had found paid employment reported that Pathways had made the journey to paid work easier, but that ultimately it was their own determination to work that was the most important determinant in finding work. Those who had found paid employment reported that they were able to fit around the effects of their health condition or caring responsibilities.

As opposed to the NDDP, the Pathways to Work programme is mandatory for some clients. This is beneficial to the goal of helping the hardest to reach back into work because it was observed with the NDDP that the most job ready customers ended up being the focus of the programme, leaving the hardest to reach behind. That being said, there are also risks to mandating individuals in this customer group to return to work when they are not fully prepared. These issues will be discussed below.

## Methods of contacting customers

Mandatory clients' first contact with the Pathways to Work programme is a letter that requests individuals to attend a WFI. Among people with mental health conditions, the most common response to this instruction was anxiety. This is not surprising given the structure and wording of the letter, which, after stating that an interview has been arranged on behalf of the client, makes the following comment regarding the requirement to attend:

Do I need to come to the Pathways to Work interview?

*Yes. It is important you attend and take part in the interview or give an acceptable reason why you are unable to attend. Unless you have a good reason for not attending or not taking part in this interview, the amount of your benefit may be reduced. If you find you cannot attend at the date and time the interview is booked you must contact us as soon as possible, so that alternative arrangements can be made. Our telephone number is at the top of this letter.*

There was a strong feeling among both clients and staff that the letter was inappropriate for people in this customer group, with many IBPAs noting that "the letters do frighten people".<sup>205</sup> Therefore, rather than initiating a process through which people journey towards becoming ready for work, the opposite effect could be achieved.

Some of the letter content was considered helpful. Individuals were informed that they could invite family or friends for support during interviews if they desired. Interestingly however, this had a mixed impact on customer experiences, as negative perceptions of the Pathways to Work programme held by family and friends tended to have a strong bearing on eventual customer outcomes.

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<sup>204</sup> Nice K., Davidson J. and Sainsbury R. (2009), "Provider-led Pathways: Experiences and views of early implementation", DWP Research Report 595.

<sup>205</sup> Barnes, H. and Hudson, M. (2006), "Pathways to Work - extension to some existing customers", DWP Research Report 323.

In response to problems with the standard Pathways letter, some caseworkers took the initiative by telephoning clients to introduce Pathways to Work and what is involved in a less intimidating and more reassuring way. This approach is echoed in other parts of the employment and skills system, such as the method by which Job Brokers aim to contact their clients.<sup>206</sup>

While these examples are encouraging, they are not standardised and therefore the majority of clients' journeys into work are negatively affected. Standardising phone calls may improve the customer experience. In the context of individuals with hearing problems and other issues with this form of communication, practical guidance is available on how best to engage with clients over the telephone to improve first contact, for instance, using text phones.<sup>207</sup>

With regard to the Pathways to Work programme, voluntary clients also experienced issues around the gateway for accessing these services. Some clients could have benefited from ongoing interactions with IB PAs or access to the CMP; however, these were not offered.

Studies observed more positive responses from clients regarding subsequent meetings with staff in comparison to initial contact. This is partly because clients become more comfortable with their caseworkers and can schedule meetings face-to-face. People with mental health conditions commented that a follow-up call or text from caseworkers a few days ahead of an appointment was helpful. More importantly, it was important for caseworkers to schedule meetings with sensitivity to clients' circumstances, e.g., to fit meetings around courses of treatment.<sup>208</sup> However, it was felt that given the importance associated with attendance of the first work focused interview, subsequent work focused interviews were delayed between six weeks and two months. These discontinuities in customers' journeys were perceived to be detrimental to the customer experience.<sup>209</sup>

Standard information provision activities (for instance, describing the economic impact of work versus benefits at the first WFI) were sometimes considered inappropriate. Customers indicated that they sometimes found this information more useful further down the journey into work. Likewise, other pieces of information should be provided in a timely fashion to suit the needs of customers.

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<sup>206</sup> Stafford, B with Ashworth, K., Davis, A., Hartfree, Y., Hill, K., Kellard, K., Legge, K., McDonald, S., Reyes De-Beaman, S., Aston, J., Atkinson, J., Davis, S., Evans, C., Lewis, J., O'Regan, J., Harries, T., Kazimirski, A., Pires, C., Shaw, A. and Woodward, C. (2004), "New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP): First synthesis report", DWP Research Report 199.

<sup>207</sup> ECOTEC (2007), "The use of Jobcentre Plus telephony and face-to-face first contact services by customers with specific communication barriers", DWP Research Report 446. DWP.

<sup>208</sup> However, the relatively positive views should not be overvalued as, in part, they are an artefact of "selection bias". For example, among voluntary clients, individuals that have had favourable first contact are likely to continue their journey on programmes such as Pathways to Work.

<sup>209</sup> Dorsett, R. "Pathways to Work for new and repeat incapacity benefits claimants: Evaluation synthesis report", DWP Research report 525.

The final phase of the Pathways to Work evaluation found that in some cases there was a lack of knowledge of service provision and experience in working with the disabled client group amongst provider staff.<sup>210</sup> The evaluation reported that some provider staff were not always sufficiently equipped with knowledge to meet all client needs and in some cases had felt it necessary to signpost clients to other sources of information.

Part of the customer journey into work involves the formulation of an Action Plan. However, it has been found that caseworkers tended to underutilise this tool by failing to use it as a collaborative document that clients and staff use to formulate journeys into work. Instead, caseworkers used Action Plans as a point of reference to jog their memory of clients. This issue was also observed with the NDDP.

Part of the Pathways to Work pilots included the introduction of the CMP, provided jointly between Jobcentre Plus and local National Health Service providers. It provided advice and information about a range of health conditions from health professionals in the form of either one-to-one or group sessions. Customers found this experience to be highly useful once they partook<sup>211</sup>, however customers faced some barriers in agreeing to initially take-up the service, suggesting that additional resources might be deployed to encourage this. The types of benefits associated with the programme that practitioners most frequently noted were improved confidence, self-esteem, physical appearance and stamina. As noted elsewhere in this chapter, these are important outcomes as far as the customer experience is concerned and form important intermediate inputs into customer journeys into work.<sup>212</sup>

Some weaknesses of the programme that were highlighted included the focus on newer customers and group sessions. IBPAs described how the most important benefits the CMP could be on the "hardest to reach", i.e., those that have been out of employment for the longest period of time/are the least ready for work. As such, it was believed that older IB customers should be targeted for additional assistance. In addition, it was felt that group sessions were not necessarily as good as one-to-one interactions between CMP practitioners and customers because customers were often reluctant to share personal issues and information in a group setting.

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<sup>210</sup> Nice K., Davidson J. and Sainsbury R. (2009), "Provider-led Pathways: Experiences and views of early implementation", DWP Research Report 595.

<sup>211</sup> Corden, A., Nice, K. and Sainsbury, R. (2005), "Incapacity Benefit Reforms Pilot: Findings from longitudinal panel of client", DWP Research Report 259.

<sup>212</sup> Barnes, H. and Hudson, M. (2006), "Pathways to Work – Qualitative Research on the Condition Management Programme", DWP Research Report 346.

## In-work Support

People may not achieve sustainable employment without adequate support once they move into work and there are a number of reasons why this might happen. In a research report to the Health and Safety Executive examining the processes and practices activities central to the successful job retention by employers, James et al. (2003)<sup>213</sup> develop a conceptual framework of the 'cycles of vulnerability' faced by ill, injured and disabled workers.<sup>214</sup> The model identified three potential cycles, or types, of vulnerability that can contribute to workers leaving their employment on a voluntary or compulsory basis. The first of these relates to workers who contract a condition that has the potential to affect their job performance in the future if the condition deteriorates. The second applies to the position of workers who while at work, have a disability or health condition that is affecting job performance. Finally, the third refers to workers whose disability or health condition is affecting their ability to attend work. The research identifies a number of in-work support processes and practices that would enable ill, injured and disabled workers to stay in-work including:

- Early and timely identification of vulnerable workers
- Provision of rehabilitation support
- Co-ordination and 'joined-up' action of rehabilitation support between all potentially relevant actors
- Access to worker representation
- Establishment of rehabilitation policy support frameworks
- Systematic action, including the provision of required training, to ensure that any laid down policy frameworks are implemented properly
- Adoption of mechanisms that enable any weaknesses in the content and operation of established policy frameworks to be identified and addressed

In-work support is important for customers aiming to achieve sustainable employment.<sup>215</sup> A key design feature of NDDP was that Job Brokers could provide in-work support to ease participants' transition into employment and address any concerns that might affect a participant's ability to sustain employment. Research by McDonald et al.(2004)<sup>216</sup> found that not all Job Brokers provided a wide range of in-work support. Qualitative research of participants who were receiving in-work support reported that they generally did not receive an intensive service, and the priority Job Brokers gave to in-work support within their service profile varied.<sup>217</sup> The survey research further found that the nature of the in-work support provided varied between Job Brokers. For those who lost contact with their Job Broker, many customers reflected that they could have benefitted through "after care" of this nature, but it was generally underprovided.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> James, P. Cunningham I. and Dibben P. (2003), "Job retention and vocational rehabilitation: The development and evaluation of a conceptual framework", Health and Safety Executive.

<sup>214</sup> This was adapted by Yeo (2007) for lone parents.

<sup>215</sup> Stafford, B et al. (2005), "NDDP: Second Synthesis Report – Interim Findings from the Evaluation", DWP Report 377.

<sup>216</sup> McDonald, S. Davis, A. and Stafford, B. (2004), "Report of the Survey of Job Brokers", DWP Research Report 197.

<sup>217</sup> Lewis, J., Corden, A., Dillon, L., Hill, K., Kellard, K., Sainsbury, R. and Thornton, P. (2005), "New Deal for Disabled People: An In-Depth Study of Job Broker Service Delivery", DWP Research Report 246.

<sup>218</sup> Lewis, J., Corden, A., Dillon, L., Hill, K., Kellard, K., Sainsbury, R. and Thornton, P. (2005), "New Deal for Disabled People: An In-Depth Study of Job Broker Service Delivery", DWP Research Report 246.

In terms of in-work support that has provided through the NDDP programme, a lack of access has been an issue. People were only able to take-up the NDDP after-care programme if they had used a Job Broker. Secondly, Jobcentre Plus staff appear to have inadequate knowledge of programmes such as Pathways In Work Support (IWS). Thirdly, caseworkers are short of time and therefore fail to help clients with the after-care aspects of their role, focusing on getting other people into work that are currently on their caseload. This last problem is particularly important, as there is a tendency for overloaded staff whose targets are narrowly focus to neglect client groups that need more support. It was observed by Dixon and Warrener (2008), for example, that referrals to post-employment support were more prevalent in sparsely populated areas, which are linked to the size of caseworkers' caseloads<sup>219</sup>.

In Work Support (IWS) is the after-care support offer through the Pathways to Work programme. The IWS services takes the form of an IWS advisor alongside sub-contracted specialist support services covering occupational health, mentoring, job-coaching, in-depth support such as counselling and financial and debt counselling services.

The Pathways IWS has been the subject of recent evaluation and the discussion that follows summarises the current evaluation work by Dixon and Warrener (2008) based on longitudinal interviews with 30 Pathways IWS customers and a number of IWS providers in four pilot areas.<sup>220</sup>

Pathways IWS customers generally felt satisfied with their contact with Pathways IWS advisors in terms of frequency and duration and all reported that they had been encouraged by their Pathways IWS advisor to make contact at other times if they wanted to. Interviewees reported being happy with the information they received and with the adviser, and in many cases described their advisers as being friendly and easy to talk to. IWS customers reflected on the real sense of contact arrangements being personalised and tailored to individual needs.

Interview respondents reported that one of the primary differences between Pathways IWS and NDDP after-care was that Pathways IWS provided more in-depth support than NDDP after-care, including more intensive after-care support and access to sub-contracted specialist support services. NDDP was generally seen to provide more 'light touch' support consisting primarily of telephone contact. However, for some customers, continuity of provision was important and some preferred getting after-care from their existing Job Broker.

The evaluation found that Pathways IWS was neither the only nor primary source of support for most customers with many maintaining and using the support of their NDDP Job Broker, IB PA and other Jobcentre Plus support, health professionals, voluntary and community organisations, supportive employers and colleagues and family and friends. However, for customers with mental health issues, low self-confidence and uneven work histories, Pathways IWS was commonly cited as a very (or most) important source of support.

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<sup>219</sup> Dixon J. and Warrener M. (2008), "Pathways to Work: Qualitative study of In-work support", DWP Research Report 478.

<sup>220</sup> Dixon J. and Warrener M. (2008), "Pathways to Work: Qualitative study of In-work support", DWP Research Report 478.

However, it appears that the customers who did receive the Pathways IWS offer were unaware of it before they entered work or at least were unclear on what the offer consisted of. Providers also reported fewer than expected referrals and put this down to advisor knowledge of services.

The above cited research was specifically aimed at IWS recipients while other research (Nice, Davidson and Sainsbury) found little evidence on in-work support being offered to clients. Instead, people explained that they were either uncertain about whether they could return to the provider for assistance, or felt that they did not want to return.

## Access to Work

The aim of the Access to Work programme is to increase the employment rate of disabled people and to close the gap between the employment rate of disabled people and the general population. Customers that have a disability or health condition may find that practical obstacles at work stop them from making the most of opportunities available to able-bodied people. Access to Work was designed to help customers and employers find solutions to these problems. Customers can gain assistance for the cost of travel to work, alterations to workplace premises, provision of a support worker and aids and equipment.

Evidence suggests that certain groups gain significantly as a result of the Access to Work programme. For example, for people where alternative transport arrangements are not feasible, the provisions made by the Access to Work programme are particularly beneficial. The evaluation of the Impact of Access to Work (Thornton and Corden, 2002) found that assistance with travel to work was essential to taking up a job. With no other options for travelling to work for most people, the expense of taxi fares meant that people could not otherwise afford to go to work.<sup>221</sup> The evaluation further found for those who had accessed a Support Worker through the Access to Work initiative indicated that this had been essential to enabling them to get into work and customers reported that getting any job would have been impossible without the help of their Support Worker. Where changes in individuals' health conditions would otherwise prevent them from working, alterations to workplace premises were reported as having been particularly important.

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<sup>221</sup> Thornton P. and Corden A (2002), "Evaluating the Impact of Access to Work: A Case Study Approach", DWP Working Age Report 134.

## Workstep

The Workstep programme helps those who find it difficult to retain work as a result of their disability. The programme also offers practical assistance to employers. The types of benefits individuals appear to yield from this programme include economic benefits, as well as social and personal development benefits, with individuals emphasising the importance of the latter. From customers' perspectives, the ideal package of support is highly personalised, involving the customer deciding the nature and level of support her or she would like.<sup>222</sup> The programme commonly helps people with job search and training activities, as well as important in-work support, such as the opening up of channels of communication between customer and employer, through which feedback on work is received and techniques on how to cope with job-related stress.

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<sup>222</sup> Meah, A. and Thornton, P. (2005), "Desirable outcomes of WORKSTEP: user and provider views", DWP Research Report 279.

# 7. Long-term Unemployed

## Summary

Adults who have been out of work and unemployed for long periods of time represent a diverse group of Jobcentre Plus customers. Some have been claiming JSA for a number of years and often face multiple barriers to moving back into work and are particularly disadvantaged in the labour market. There is a wide body of evidence examining the barriers to work this particular client group face. Evaluation research into the previous New Deal 25+ and the earlier New Deal for Long Term Unemployed programmes (see Legard et al, 2000, Molloy and Ritchie, 2000 and Winterbotham et al., 2001)<sup>223</sup> suggest a number of barriers including:

- lack of basic skills
- benefit reliance/financial difficulties
- drug dependency
- a history of offending
- poor confidence and low aspirations
- lack of motivation
- transport difficulties

This section examines the experience of the employment and skills system of individuals who are long-term unemployed.

The one-to-one adviser/customer relationship provided through the ND25+ programme is of key importance for ND25+ customers. Many customers have reported that the one-to-one contact with an advisor during Gateway was one of the best elements of the programme and distinguished it from other programmes they had experienced in the past, or from their regular Jobcentre experiences.

The experience of skills and training support is mixed with much dependent on the quality of the learning provider. However, in common with other customer groups there is a view that many of the course options are too basic with many being general and insufficiently tailored.

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<sup>223</sup> Legard, R., Molloy, D., Ritchie, J. and T. Saunders (2000), "New Deal for Long-term Unemployed People: Qualitative Work with Individuals, Stage 1", Employment Service Report ESR38.

Molloy, D. and J. Ritchie (2000), "New Deal for Long-term Unemployed People: Findings from a qualitative study amongst participants", Employment Service Report ESR60.

Winterbotham, M., Adams, L. and Hasluck, C. (2001), "Evaluation of New Deal for Long Term Unemployed People Enhanced National Programme", Employment Service ESR81.

Whilst there have only been a small number of evaluations of EZs, as with other customer groups there is a consistent positive message across a number of customer groups of their experience of EZs. Evaluations have consistently found that EZs have been more effective than ND25+ in terms of both customer satisfaction and also enabling customers to move into employment. The intensive and more individual support has been particularly helpful. Whilst some of the support offered through New Deal is the same as that offered through EZs, it is the one-to-one tailored EZ approach that makes the difference. It has also been noted that EZs had significantly increased the chances of participants gaining work compared to what would have been the case if ND25+ had been the programme operating in those areas. Increasing advisor's time, effort and expense in ensuring the best possible job match increases the likelihood that jobs will be sustained.

As the case with other customer groups such as lone parents, the employment support system, until the recent developments of ERA, measures outlined in the *In-Work, Better Off* Green Paper and the advent of Flexible New Deal, has not been pre-disposed to in-work support. Pilot pre-employment and in-work support programmes such as StepUp have had real impacts on job outcomes for those furthest away from the labour market. However, in contrast to lone parents the ERA programme was not as successful for this group.

## New Deal 25 Plus

The national ND25+ programme was launched in June 1998 providing employment support for long-term unemployed adults. The programme has since been superseded by the Flexible New Deal. The programme was targeted at JSA claimants with the aim of helping the long-term unemployed into jobs; improving their prospects of staying and progressing in employment; and increasing their long-term employability equipping long-term unemployed people with the skills they require to compete for future jobs, including work skills and experience, qualifications, improved motivation and self-confidence and job search skills<sup>224</sup>.

The ND25+ programme, as with other New Deal programmes, has undergone an evolution of changes including its move from New Deal for Long Term Unemployed to ND25+, the introduction of Enhanced Provision and Re-Engineered Provision and its current replacement with Flexible New Deal. Evaluations of the early stage of ND25+ highlighted a number of issues. Research by Hasluck (2000) summarises early findings and progress with ND25+.<sup>225</sup>

ND25+ provision is centred around the Advisory Interview Process (AIP) which involves a series of mandatory interviews with New Deal PAs. These were focused on improving employability, enhancing job search and, if possible, finding unsubsidised employment. During the AIP customers can voluntarily access a range of Opportunities including subsidised employment and full-time education. For those not finding work during the AIP stage and returning to JSA, a Follow-through stage was available on a voluntary basis consisting of a further series of interviews.

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<sup>224</sup> Wilkinson D. (2003), "New Deal for people aged 25 and over: A Synthesis Report", DWP Working Age Report 161.

<sup>225</sup> Hasluck, C. (2000), "The New Deal for Long-term Unemployed – A Summary of Progress", Employment Service Research Report ESR46.

Evidence has suggested that the quality and level of individually tailored advice, guidance and support was high but that the AIP process took too long and lacked intensity and pace. As the majority of customers were not expected to move to the Opportunities stage, it was also felt that the AIP process lacked any real purpose other than to secure a job placement. Outcomes for participants were mixed. Few customers progressed to take up the specific ND25+ Opportunities and many did not progress to Follow-through stage. The majority of participants in the ND25+ programme left after the mandatory AIP stage with the majority returning to job seeking or JSA.

The programme was enhanced in April 2000 with changes focusing on the AIP process (renamed 'Gateway') to improve the range of help on offer and intensify the process with an increased emphasis on supported job search and placement in unsubsidised jobs. The enhanced provision includes additional and more frequent interviews with New Deal PAs, improved assessment of client needs focusing particular on basic skills needs and identification of barriers to employment. Gateway opportunities were expanded to include externally contracted provision not previously available through ND25+, including soft skills and key skills courses.<sup>226</sup>

In April 2001, the programme was further extended to include a new Intensive Activity Period (IAP) as well as improvements to the Gateway and Follow-through elements of the programme. The IAP offered tailored, full-time, intensive support to enable customers to develop the skills and experience needed to obtain employment. Provision included Basic Employability Training (BET), work placements, work-focused training and help with motivation and 'soft' skills. The customer was expected to receive 13 weeks of assistance, although this could be extended up to 26 weeks. The Advisor Discretion Fund (ADF) became available at all stages of ND25+ and eligibility widened to accept participants who had been claiming JSA for 18 months (as opposed to 24 months previously), as well as new early entrants.<sup>227</sup>

Those who remained on JSA after the IAP entered the Follow-through part of the ND25+ programme that aimed at moving customers into employment using a series of weekly interviews over a six week period. These interviews involved intensive job search and access to Gateway-type provision. The period of provision was extendable to a total of 26 weeks.

Qualitative evaluation research with 127 ND25+ staff and 150 customers (Winterbotham et al, 2002)<sup>228</sup> found that overall customers reported their one-to-one sessions with advisors as being supportive and motivating. They also felt that someone was listening and working hard on their behalf. For many, the one-to-one contact with an advisor during Gateway was one of the best elements of their time on New Deal 25+ and distinguished it from other programmes they had experienced in the past, or from their regular Jobcentre experiences. These sessions were seen to have helped in improving the frequency and quality of job search activity, and in increasing their confidence and motivation.

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<sup>226</sup> Wilkinson D. (2003), "New Deal for people aged 25 and over: A Synthesis Report", DWP Working Age Report 161.

<sup>227</sup> Hasluck C. and Green A. (2007), "What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions", DWP Research Report 407.

<sup>228</sup> Winterbotham M., Adams L. and Kuechel A. (2002), "Evaluation of New Deal 25 Plus: Qualitative Interviews with ES Staff, Providers, Employers and Clients", DWP Working Age Research Report 127.

In general, views of the usefulness of the training or work experience they received was mixed with interviewees reporting either very positively or very negatively. This was largely determined by the quality of the provider. Those that were critical of the courses reported that the courses were too basic and too long. They also felt the courses were too general or insufficiently tailored. Interviewees reported that the training or work experience they had received through the programme had given them useful skills and boosted their confidence. Some customers particularly commented on the social aspects of the training provision in mixing with others in a similar situation to themselves or getting back into a working environment. Some participants were pleased to have gained a qualification or certificate.

Customers also felt that the ND25+ process had enabled them to become more confident in applying for jobs and at interview, and that it generally improved job search skills. In terms of job outcomes, not all customers felt that their involvement in the programme played any role in their getting a job. For those who had found work the majority reported that their involvement in ND25+ had played a central part in getting them work.

## Employment Zones

The small number of evaluations of EZs have consistently found that EZs have been more effective than ND25+ in terms of both customer satisfaction and also enabling customers to move into employment. Evaluation of EZs for all customer groups has found that in general customers have preferred the more informal and friendly atmosphere of EZs in comparison to Jobcentre Plus offices and have really found the intensive and more individual support helpful<sup>229</sup>. Further to this, evaluation research by Hales et al. (2003)<sup>230</sup> that surveyed long-term unemployed EZ customers found that EZs had significantly increased the chances of participants gaining work compared to what would have been the case if ND25+ had been the programme operating in those areas.

Research by Griffiths and Durkin (2007)<sup>231</sup> *Synthesising the evidence on Employment Zones* found that EZs out-perform ND25+ in terms of employment sustainability. The research found that increasing advisor time, effort and expense in ensuring the best possible job match increases the likelihood that jobs will be sustained. The greater propensity of ND25+ customers to sustain employment once in a job they want adds justification to the additional time and money EZs use as it is this level of time and effort that accounts for EZs' stronger out-performance of New Deal 25 Plus in respect of sustained jobs compared with job entries.

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<sup>229</sup> Griffiths R. & Jones G. (2005), "Evaluation of Single Provider Employment Zone Extensions to Young People, Lone Parents and Early Entrants", DWP Research Report 228.

Hales, J, Taylor, R., Mandy, W. and Miller, M. (2003), "Evaluation of Employment Zones: Report on a Cohort Survey of Long Term Unemployed People in the Zones and a Matched Set of comparison Areas", DWP Research Report 176.

<sup>230</sup> Hales, J, Taylor, R., Mandy, W. and Miller, M. (2003), "Evaluation of Employment Zones: Report on a Cohort Survey of Long Term Unemployed People in the Zones and a Matched Set of comparison Areas", DWP Research Report 176.

<sup>231</sup> Rita Griffiths R. and Durkin S. (2007), "Synthesising the evidence on Employment Zones", DWP Research Report 449. DWP.

The research also found that customers receiving support through EZs were very positive about the assistance they were given with job-search skills such as compiling a CV, interview techniques and assistance with application forms. This type of support is available through New Deal, however, New Deal programmes usually offer this support in the form of courses or classes rather than the one-to-one tailored sessions available with EZ. New Deal participants found some difficulty applying this 'general' advice they had received through New Deal to their specific circumstances in contrast to those who had received EZ support and could directly attributed the work carried out by the adviser on tasks such as putting together a focused CV to enabling them to secure work.

## Returning to Benefits

Cycles into and out of employment are a well documented issue within the benefits and employment system. There are many who complete employment programmes only to return to worklessness following an unsuccessful period of unsustained employment. Recent estimates based on administrative data on JSA claims suggests that some 40 per cent of claimants who find work reclaim JSA within six months.<sup>232</sup> The National Employment Panel's Working Group on New Deal 25+ found that participants have a one in three chance of returning to New Deal, even if they get a job on leaving.<sup>233</sup>

Research evidence by Wilkinson (2003)<sup>234</sup> suggests that longer duration entrants to ND25+ were more likely to return to JSA when they leave ND25+. A review of administrative data highlighted that 64 per cent of entrants with 5 or more years claim duration returned to JSA compared with 57 per cent (3-5 years claim duration), 51 per cent (2-3 years claim duration) and 30 per cent (less than 2 years claim duration). Long term JSA claimants prior to entering the programme were also much less likely to go into either subsidised or unsubsidised sustained employment. The research reported survey results with employers showing that employers did not strongly distinguish between 12, 18 or 24 months unemployment but did have concerns about longer durations. Employers identified concerns with lack of motivation, a criminal record, substance abuse, language problems and mental health problems.

This group of repeat claimants face a similar variety of barriers to those listed at the beginning of this chapter. In particular low skill level is a key risk factor for repeat spells as DWP research into this group found that 23 per cent had no qualifications. Furthermore customers themselves have identified this as a barrier with 37 per cent reporting that they didn't have the qualifications and experience to find the right work<sup>235</sup>.

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<sup>232</sup> Mulheirn I., Foley B., Menne V. and Prendergrast J. (2009), "Vicious Cycles, Sustained employment and welfare reform for the next decade", The Social Market Foundation, London.

<sup>233</sup> National Employment Panel Working Group (2004), "A New Deal for All: Report of the National Employment Panel's Working Group on New Deal 25 Plus".

<sup>234</sup> Wilkinson D. (2003), "New Deal for people aged 25 and over: A Synthesis Report", DWP Working Age Report 161.

<sup>235</sup> BMRB (2006), "Repeat Jobseekers Allowance spells", DWP Research Report 394.

Another, and connected, risk factor is the type of work that repeat claimants have access to. The majority (72 per cent) of respondents who had made three or more JSA claims said that the reason for the multiple claims was that they had not been able to find 'suitable' work. DWP's research found that of those who left benefits for work and then returned a third did do because a temporary job ended and a further 15 per cent were made redundant<sup>236</sup>.

As has been noted repeat claimants have also often been on programmes such as New Deal and even though these programmes have evidently not yet helped them find sustainable employment 67 per cent still found them useful<sup>237</sup>. But at the same time repeaters were as likely to agree as disagree that the Jobcentre had improved their chances of finding work<sup>238</sup>. In terms of education and training a third (31 per cent) had taken part in a course of some kind.

Some repeat claimants who had found a job through an Employment Zone but had lost it again shortly afterwards were distressed that they couldn't immediately return to the Employment Zone provider and instead would have to return to Jobcentre Plus and wait for 6 or 18 months to get this support again<sup>239</sup>.

## In-work support

As the case with other customer groups such as lone parents, the employment support system, until the recent developments of ERA, measures outlined in the *In-Work, Better Off* Green Paper and the advent of Flexible New Deal, has not been pre-disposed to in-work support. Review evidence by Hasluck and Green (2007) examining *What works for whom* finds that in terms of ND25+ provision there has been little routine provision for in-work support.<sup>240</sup>

As has been noted in the lone parent chapter the ERA programme also targeted people who had been on New Deal 25+ and offered in-work advice and support, financial incentives to stay in work and financial incentives to undertake training. However, the outcomes in terms of earnings and retention were not as positive for this group, at the end of the first two years 42.2 per cent of participants were in receipt of JSA and this was just 2.6 per cent lower than the control group. The ERA advisors found that this group (ND25+) was the most difficult to engage and qualitative evidence from participants suggested that this was because of a variety of reasons including: a lack of interest in advancement, the mandatory nature of ND25+, the lack of expectation of in-work support; an association of Jobcentre Plus with benefits claiming, which had negative connotations for many customers; an ethos of self reliance; and fewer administrative problems with in-work benefits (for example, claiming the childcare portion of WTC) that required advisory assistance, along with practical problems

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<sup>236</sup> BMRB (2006), "Repeat Jobseekers Allowance spells", DWP Research Report 394.

<sup>237</sup> BMRB (2006), "Repeat Jobseekers Allowance spells", DWP Research Report 394.

<sup>238</sup> BMRB (2006), "Repeat Jobseekers Allowance spells", DWP Research Report 394.

<sup>239</sup> Adams L. and Carter K. (2008), "Focus groups with New Deal and Employment Zone customers: Research to inform Flexible New Deal", DWP Research Report 522.

<sup>240</sup> Hasluck C. and Green A. (2007), "What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions", DWP Research Report 407.

such as working long hours. Among those who did not maintain contact with their advisor once they entered work the main reason was that they did not feel that they needed support. The ERA programme clearly increased the contact that customers had with Jobcentre Plus once in work but the quality and depth of these discussions varied significantly. Around half of the participants did not receive any help or advice on retention or advancement once they were in work and a quarter said that they did not want this support. However, customers who entered work and maintained contact spoke very positively about their relationship with their advisor.

In terms of the financial retention bonus only 31 per cent of the participants actually received a bonus, although this figure is skewed by the fact that many of the participants didn't enter work at all throughout the programme and so wouldn't be eligible. Of those who did work full-time at some point 70 per cent received a bonus. Customers varied in their views as to whether the bonus influenced them to work full-time. About half of customers who received a retention bonus said that it had "no influence at all" on their decision to work 30 hours or more per week, although almost a third (31 per cent) said that the bonus influenced their decision "a lot".

The financial support for training had even lower take-up with just 6 per cent of all customers receiving assistance with fees and an even lower 4 per cent received the training completion bonus. Advisors primarily put this down to a lukewarm response to the advancement agenda among recipients, but also problems with combining full-time work (especially shift-work) with training were an issue for many. Furthermore temporary work is difficult to combine with training, especially if it involves travel around the country.

The StepUP pilot was developed to trial a method of providing both a guaranteed job and support for up to 50 weeks. It was also designed to address the problematic group of customers who complete a spell on the programme and later become eligible for the programme a second (or even a third) time. In the period October 2001 to September 2003, a total of 35 per cent of all people starting NDYP were people returning to the programme, whilst on ND25+ a total of 32 per cent were returning.<sup>241</sup> The StepUP programme was launched in April 2002 with 20 pilots operating by December 2002. These pilots ran for two years and ended in 2004.<sup>242</sup>

The programme was available for claimants in 20 pilot areas who remained unemployed six months after completing their New Deal Option or Intensive Activity Period on ND25+. The StepUp programme of support for customers included support from a Jobcentre Plus PA, a Support Worker from the Managing Agent (delivering jobs to StepUP) and a workplace buddy.

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<sup>241</sup> Bivand P., Brooke B., Jenkins S. and Simmonds D. (2006), "Evaluation of StepUP Pilot: Final Report", DWP Research Report 337.

<sup>242</sup> Hasluck C. and Green A. (2007), "What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions", DWP Research Report 407.

The evaluation of StepUP found that the role of the independent Support Worker was critical in maximising retention within StepUP jobs.<sup>243</sup> StepUp Support Workers were generally positively viewed by customers. The programme produced a significant impact on job outcomes for the 30-49 age-group and had a real impact on job outcomes for those with lower initial levels of employability. The largest impact was for those whose subjective employability (jobsearch flexibility, attitudes towards work, confidence, etc.) was higher but whose objective employability (work history, basic skills and education, etc) was lowest. The evaluation also noted, however, that the programme insufficiently encouraged job search amongst StepUP participants and the intervention would have been more effective, particularly in job outcomes, if it had done so.<sup>244</sup> Reasons for the lack of jobsearch included the issue that undertaking jobsearch activity was not expected until 26 weeks into a StepUP employee's job. Many employees also believed they were going to be recruited by their StepUP Employer and some jobsearch provision was based on New Deal provision and employees felt that they had done it all before. Some Support Workers further felt that their high caseloads reduced their ability to give individualised jobsearch advice.

The role of EZ programmes in providing in-work support has been outlined in other sections of this report. However, in-work support (termed as 'aftercare') is a feature of the EZ programme. Aftercare from EZs mainly consists of 'out of working hours' contact and in-work financial support. Evaluation research has found that whilst in the first instance in-work support is provided through the EZ adviser, some EZs have also created aftercare consultants to offer dedicated in-work support during evenings and weekends while other EZs have operated free telephone helplines.<sup>245</sup> In terms of the effectiveness of EZ in-work support provision, support during the early stages of employment appear most effective as this is often when the majority of problems arise. Aftercare is usually limited to the first 13 weeks in employment, however, it has been reported that some EZs have been conducting experiments with in-work support beyond the 13 week point.

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<sup>243</sup> Bivand P., Brooke B., Jenkins S. and Simmonds D. (2006), "Evaluation of StepUP Pilot: Final Report", DWP Research Report 337.

<sup>244</sup> Hasluck C. and Green A. (2007), "What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions", DWP Research Report 407.

<sup>245</sup> Hasluck C. and Green A. (2007), "What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions", DWP Research Report 407.

## 8. Ex-offenders, Drugs and Alcohol Misuse and Homelessness

### Summary

This section focuses on the experiences of individuals who have had a history of offending, drug and/or alcohol misuse and homelessness. The extent of the research evaluating how this particular customer group experiences the employment and skills system, is limited to a small number of studies. Whilst the primary programmes of support are for offenders and ex-offenders, people recovering from alcohol and drug misuse are the Progress2work (P2w) and Progress2work-LinkUP (P2w-LinkUP) programmes, neither have been the subject of a national evaluation. The evidence evaluated in this section highlight the findings of these limited number of studies.

The experience of Jobcentre Plus amongst individuals who have had a history of offending, drug and/or alcohol misuse and homelessness, as with other customer groups, is mixed. Whilst some view their experience as a positive one, others point to a lack of personalised support particularly in enabling those who have a view on where they want to get to in terms of career and learning aspirations. There is also evidence that many individuals leaving prison are unaware of the employment support options that are available to them.

For those who engage through Jobcentre Plus, there is some evidence, as with other customer groups, of a focus by Jobcentre Plus Advisers on job outcome targets, getting customers into jobs regardless of their interests or circumstances. This lack of personalised support is in contrast to the provision of programmes such as Progress2work and Progress2work-LinkUP where there is evidence of real positive experiences of tailored support.

As with other customer groups, partnership working and effective referral mechanisms in general are central to ensuring the delivery of employment and skills support to client groups with complex needs such as offenders and drug misusers. For these customer groups effective referral mechanisms and partnerships are essential and the 'linchpin of everything'. Whilst it takes time to set up and embed partnership working, better formalised links between programmes improves referral mechanisms. The referral mechanisms from Jobcentre Plus to other support programmes such as Progress2work are not always consistent with evidence of Jobcentre Plus in some areas sending inappropriate customers.

Housing and homelessness is a significant issue for many individuals within this customer group and is one particular area where there is evidence of a lack of effective working partnerships and referral mechanisms. A reoccurring theme for providers of support programmes such as Progress2work was homelessness with providers describing how many of their client group are considered a low priority for many local councils who are trying to cope with waiting lists in a housing market characterised by a lack of affordable housing.

## Employment Support – Jobcentre Plus

For those coming out of prison, Jobcentre Plus is the primary initial employment support mechanism on offer. A recent qualitative longitudinal study of offenders immediately prior to and following their release from prison found mixed views of their experience of Jobcentre Plus.<sup>246</sup> Some interviewees were positive about their experiences, saying that staff were helpful, pleasant and treated them with respect. Others said that they had found Jobcentre Plus staff patronising, felt they did not care and found them to be unhelpful. The lack of care was an issue raised in particular by those interviewees who had preferences as to the kind of work they wanted to do.

“I want to go to college and do what I want to do...[The Jobcentre] can never do nothing for you like, they’ve always got like a cleaning job, or a job working in a hotel cleaning rooms. I’d rather go without than do that...They ain’t looking to get you into a career or nothing like that.”

A lack of awareness was found amongst ex-offenders who were claiming benefits of any specific employment support that they may be entitled to including immediate entry to New Deal. In those cases where Jobcentre Plus advisers knew that they had just been released from prison, most interviewees said they did not receive any additional advice or support. The interviewees also felt that Jobcentre Plus staff were focused on meeting targets and getting them into any job, regardless of their circumstances or interests. This contrasts with the very positive experiences of tailored support programmes such as Progress2work-LinkUP.

A key role for Jobcentre Plus Advisers is to provide information and the advice on available help and referral to specialist support services. The research by Hartfree et al. (2008)<sup>247</sup> found that Advisers felt that they did not have enough detailed knowledge of the different kinds of help people referred to P2w and P2w-LinkUP received, which made it difficult for them to assess whether or not a referral was appropriate. Jobcentre Plus Advisers raised several issues which they felt made delivering employment support to ex-prisoners more difficult:

- the advice given to ex-prisoners by advisers on disclosing their convictions on job application forms varied. Some advised ex-prisoners to be honest and to disclose their criminal record, while others did not feel confident giving advice on this issue;
- some advisers found ex-prisoners difficult to manage. For example, some had come across ex-prisoners trying to shock or scare them with accounts of their criminal backgrounds. They felt some ex-prisoners did this to discourage them from asking too many questions or pursuing job vacancies with them. Others reported that interviews with ex-prisoners could be more difficult because they were less willing to engage in conversation about their past, for example, discussing activities undertaken in prison, or discussing barriers to work.

<sup>246</sup> Hartfree Y., Dearden C. and Pound E. (2008), “High hopes: Supporting ex-prisoners in their lives after prison”, DWP Research Report 509.

<sup>247</sup> Hartfree Y., Dearden C. and Pound E. (2008), “High hopes: Supporting ex-prisoners in their lives after prison”, DWP Research Report 509.

Research into the Progress2work and Progress2work-LinkUP programmes by Dorsett et al. (2007)<sup>248</sup> found evidence of Jobcentre Plus Advisers taking insufficient care over referrals and sending inappropriate clients. P2w and P2w-LinkUP coordinators felt that advisers were in need of more information on the programmes and that there were inconsistency of experience of relationships with Jobcentre Plus around the country. Where P2w and P2w-LinkUP providers had named Jobcentre Plus adviser contacts this seemed to help relationships.

A qualitative study of 30 drug or alcohol users found that most had had experience with the DWP and its street-level services through contacts with Jobcentres and, in a few cases, New Deal providers.<sup>249</sup> Respondents thought of employment services only in very general terms and felt that, as long as employment services took account of the slow nature of recovery from addiction and any associated physical or psychological problems, substance users had few, if any, other requirements from employment services that would be unique to them. Respondents did have a number of suggestions for improving or setting up specific employment services including:

- improved understanding between substance users and Jobcentre staff;
- close involvement of treatment support service providers (also as a trust-building measure), and collaboration between them, employment services and employers;
- better information about and support for training and education, and financial support; practical support with job applications; and
- providing a 'half-way-house' of employment opportunities through sheltered or voluntary employment and step-wise (re)introduction to the primary labour market at different stages of recovery.

The research further highlighted that drug and alcohol support workers also felt the need for greater co-operation and collaboration between drug and alcohol treatment providers and employment service providers, with many advocating greater strategic co-ordination of service provision as no one organisation was capable of providing the full range of services that is typically required to rehabilitate substance users.<sup>250</sup>

As with P2w and P2w-LinkUP providers, the drug and alcohol support workers reported concerns over the ability, without training, for employment service staff to have the necessary depth of understanding of the personal and inter-personal barriers that former substance users face when they prepare to return to work. Some felt that Jobcentre staff could misjudge their clients' behaviour as 'laziness' and rejection of the work option when, in fact, their clients had withdrawn from much of social interaction and lacked the confidence to engage even in basic social activities.

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<sup>248</sup> Dorsett R., Hudson M. and McKinnon K. (2007), "Progress2work and Progress2work-LinkUP: an exploratory study to assess evaluation possibilities", DWP Research Report 464.

<sup>249</sup> Cebulla A., Heaver C., Smith N. and Sutton L. (2004), "Drug and alcohol use as barriers to employment: a review of the literature", DWP.

<sup>250</sup> Cebulla A., Heaver C., Smith N. and Sutton L. (2004), "Drug and alcohol use as barriers to employment: a review of the literature", DWP.

Education, Training and Employment (ETE) providers, in a small scale study by the Home Office (2006)<sup>251</sup> into drug intervention programmes, reported the importance of ensuring that potential referral agencies understand the needs of the client group and are familiar with eligibility criteria and the referral process, to maintain and maximise appropriate referrals. There was evidence that some ETE providers have used the expertise of DAT trainers to deliver drug and alcohol awareness training to Jobcentre Plus frontline staff, in order to assist the referral process and increase awareness of the client group.

## **Voluntary Specialist Support – Education, Training and Employment Provision**

In the same Home Office report (2006), ETE provision has been identified as a significant factor in supporting and sustaining the recovery and resettlement of former or stabilised drug misusers. Progress2work is the primary but not exclusive provider of ETE services for people recovering from illegal drug misuse. Progress2work-LinkUp is a further initiative for those who have a history of alcohol misuse, the homeless and ex-offenders; on final release, or; having served a recent custodial sentence (within the last 12 months) or; serving, a non custodial sentence under the supervision of the probation service. The aim of both these programmes is to help clients get back into training or employment.

There are a further wide-range of local ETE service providers that work through Drug Action Team (DAT) partnerships to source additional provision, particularly in relation to the delivery of 'soft skills' training, such as confidence building and motivational work for clients who are less stable and/or 'job-ready'. Employment-related assistance (such as training and job search skills) is a component of services provided by a number of drug treatment providers. It is also a component of the Drug Interventions Programme, where it links to provision for offenders – such as through Offender Learning and Skills programmes (OLASS) in England. The National Audit Office (2008)<sup>252</sup> surveyed prisoners and also undertook focus groups as part of an evaluation of OLASS. As they could only invite a relatively small number of prisoners to attend the focus groups, their views are not necessarily representative of the offender population as a whole. However, the report still provides some interesting insights. It seems that there is a need for consistency of courses and record transfer across establishments so that transfers between prisons and from prison to probation are less disruptive to offenders' learning and skill training. Also, course starts need to be better coordinated to transfers and release since about one third of the courses started were not completed because of transfers or release into the supervision of the Probation Service. The survey indicates that offenders have a high level of satisfaction with their overall learning experience, with 81 per cent indicating that they are either satisfied, very satisfied, or extremely satisfied. The large majority of those surveyed, 85 per cent, were also satisfied with the quality of teaching, and four in five believed that their course or training would help them get a job in the future.

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<sup>251</sup> Home Office (2006), "Promoting practice between DAT partnerships and Education, Training and Employment provision for Drug Interventions Programme clients", Home Office.

<sup>252</sup> National Audit Office, (2008), "Meeting needs? The Offenders' Learning and Skills Service", NAO.

A study by Dorsett et al (2007)<sup>253</sup> found providers who offered a range of provision beyond P2w and P2w-LinkUP often integrated this into support packages if it met a client need. Most providers also tend to draw on external services in order to put together packages of provision that meet client needs, signposting clients to other provision. A typical approach is for providers to deliver internal training on 'soft skills', for example, interview techniques and preparing a CV, but to make connections with local education establishments and training providers in order to meet other training needs.

As well as providing individualised help with training and job skills, P2w offers help with sorting out problems such as housing and debt. The programme is delivered in various ways and by a range of providers, some of which have contracts to supply provision in many different parts of the country. Some areas also provide P2w-LinkUP. Key elements of service provision include:

- mentoring
- behavioural issues support
- help to find stable housing
- providing advice on debt issues and money management
- advice on the declaration of convictions
- basic skills and vocational training
- work experience
- job search support
- in-work support

In-work support is seen as particularly important. It was regarded as essential to make clients feel safe and help them cope with the realities of the workplace. It was also seen as important if a client was unhappy in a job since they could be moved onto another job without simply dropping out of the current one and going back returning to square one.<sup>254</sup> The intermediate labour market, voluntary or part-time work were often seen as useful, if not important, interim stages during substance users' return to paid work. They were seen to offer less stressful and sometimes less demanding environments, in which former substance users could explore their job readiness and ability to hold down a job.<sup>255</sup>

There is little research evidence on the effect and experience of these specifically targeted programmes on the client groups as neither P2w nor P2w-LinkUP have been the subject of an evaluation. To date there has only been an exploratory study to consider evaluation possibilities, therefore information is limited.

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<sup>253</sup> Dorsett R., Hudson M. and McKinnon K. (2007), "Progress2work and Progress2work-LinkUP: an exploratory study to assess evaluation possibilities", DWP Research Report 464.

<sup>254</sup> Dorsett R., Hudson M. and McKinnon K. (2007), "Progress2work and Progress2work-LinkUP: an exploratory study to assess evaluation possibilities", DWP Research Report 464.

<sup>255</sup> Cebulla A., Heaver C., Smith N. and Sutton L. (2004), "Drug and alcohol use as barriers to employment: a review of the literature", DWP.

The study by Hartfree et al. (2008)<sup>256</sup> on supporting ex-prisoners in their lives after prison found P2w-LinkUP received client referrals from a range of organisations including prisons, Jobcentre Plus, probation services, alcohol agencies, homeless/housing agencies. The study found providers reported difficulties with this referral process as a high proportion of ex-prisoners referred to them failed to turn up for their initial meeting; and a significant proportion of prisoners who met with P2w-LinkUP in prison failed to re-contact the provider after their release. Drop out from P2w-LinkUP and a failure to sustain employment were also reported as common problems. A small scale study by the Home Office (2006)<sup>257</sup> into drug intervention programmes found that making appointments with clients wherever was most convenient, such as at community drug treatment services, community centres, cafes, etc, with the exception of home visits for health and safety reasons was important in engaging clients in the P2w programme. P2w workers found this flexibility helped maintain a physical and mental distance from Jobcentre Plus, which some clients preferred. This ensured that providers were not seen as part of the 'establishment'.

Providers of the P2w-LinkUP programme located in rural areas reported finding employment for clients was harder compared to providers based in urban areas. In the rural area where the local labour markets were not buoyant and job opportunities were limited, P2w-LinkUP staff placed more emphasis on the role of voluntary work as a link in to full-time employment.<sup>258</sup>

In the study by Hartfree et al. (2008), P2w-LinkUP providers pointed to several factors that made the programme successful:

- providing a 'through the gate' service and meeting with prisoners before release had several advantages – advisers could start investigating training, education or employment opportunities so that they were in place, in time for prisoners' release and reduced the occurrence of 'no shows' at the initial post-release appointment;
- the programme is voluntary – staff reported that this was a key selling point whereby clients did not have to worry about benefit sanctions if they dropped out; and
- the service is client led in that the pace and content of the programme is determined by what clients want to do. Staff reported that clients were often surprised that there was no set regime they had to follow.

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<sup>256</sup> Hartfree Y., Dearden C. and Pound E. (2008), "High hopes: Supporting ex-prisoners in their lives after prison", DWP Research Report 509.

<sup>257</sup> Home Office (2006), "Promoting practice between DAT partnerships and Education, Training and Employment provision for Drug Interventions Programme clients", Home Office.

<sup>258</sup> Hartfree Y., Dearden C. and Pound E. (2008), "High hopes: Supporting ex-prisoners in their lives after prison", DWP Research Report 509.

Research by Cebulla et al. (2004)<sup>259</sup> found that drug and alcohol support workers generally believed that P2w could be an important tool in helping to 'bridge the gap' between basic integration services provided for people not yet ready for work and the generalist services of Jobcentres targeted at all jobseekers. However, a need has also been identified for 'pre-P2w' provision as an essential factor in ETE delivery for clients who may benefit from more intensive motivational or 'hand-holding' support, such as accompanying clients to appointments and help with confidence building. These programmes can feed directly into initiatives such as P2w when the client is ready.<sup>260</sup>

## Partnership Working and Referral

Partnership working and effective referral mechanisms are viewed as central to ensuring the delivery of employment and skills support to client groups with complex needs such as offenders and drug and alcohol misusers.

The exploratory study by Dorsett et al. (2007)<sup>261</sup> into the Progress2work and Progress2work-LinkUP programmes found all providers emphasising the pivotal role of partnership working in addressing their clients' barriers, describing it as 'invaluable' or 'the linchpin of everything'. A report by the UK Drug Policy Commission on *Getting Problem Drug Users into Work*<sup>262</sup> found that a variety of interventions were often needed to get problem drug users 'job ready' which required the involvement of many different agencies. The Drug Policy Commission further highlighted that coordination of services was essential (particularly for very chaotic drug users who were a long way from the labour market where treatment agencies are likely to be most involved in the early stages, with increasing input from employment, skills and other reintegration services over time).

Providers and coordinators of P2w and P2w-LinkUP highlighted that it takes time to make these partnership connections with referral agencies, and embed provision in the area so that awareness of, and eligibility for, provision grows, and referrals take place smoothly.<sup>263</sup> Emphasis was placed on the importance of building trust with local agencies at an early stage. The small scale study by the Home Office (2006)<sup>264</sup> into drug intervention programmes found P2w providers, particularly those with a specialist recruitment background, recognised the need to establish links with key partners, such as DAT partnerships/CJITs, local training providers, probation services, the police, drug treatment services, and prison resettlement units, at the earliest opportunity. In order to seek buy-in and attract the right support to steer the project, these partners were engaged in ETE-specific steering groups, where they were able to assist in strategic and/or operational issues.

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<sup>259</sup> Cebulla A., Heaver C., Smith N. and Sutton L. (2004), "Drug and alcohol use as barriers to employment: a review of the literature", DWP.

<sup>260</sup> Home Office (2006), "Promoting practice between DAT partnerships and Education, Training and Employment provision for Drug Interventions Programme clients", Home Office.

<sup>261</sup> Dorsett R., Hudson M. and McKinnon K. (2007), "Progress2work and Progress2work-LinkUP: an exploratory study to assess evaluation possibilities", DWP Research Report 464.

<sup>262</sup> UK Drug Policy Commission (2008), "Working towards recovery: Getting problem drug users into jobs", UK Drug Policy Commission.

<sup>263</sup> Dorsett R., Hudson M. and McKinnon K. (2007), "Progress2work and Progress2work-LinkUP: an exploratory study to assess evaluation possibilities", DWP Research Report 464.

<sup>264</sup> Home Office (2006), "Promoting practice between DAT partnerships and Education, Training and Employment provision for Drug Interventions Programme clients", Home Office.

The issue of housing and the prevalence of homelessness amongst these particular groups is a significant issue. The availability of stable and supportive accommodation is argued by the UK Drug Policy Commission (2008) as a critical factor in the rehabilitation process and as a foundation to facilitate employment.

Research by Dorsett et al. (2007)<sup>265</sup> into the Progress2work and Progress2work-LinkUP programmes found a recurring theme was the challenges providers encountered with the homeless. Providers described how many of their client group are considered a low priority for many local councils who are trying to cope with waiting lists in a housing market characterised by a lack of affordable housing.

Research by Hartfree et al (2008)<sup>266</sup> of ex-prisoners found P2w-LinkUP providers felt that housing was a key barrier to employment, but was an area in which they had limited ability to intervene, other than referring clients to the appropriate agencies and waiting lists. Similarly, housing issues impacted on the work of drug/addiction agencies. Staff interviewed in the English and Welsh case study areas reported that finding accommodation for clients was a key problem. Difficulties mentioned were that:

- there were long waiting lists for social housing and their clients would be 'on the bottom of the pile' due to their criminal records and problems with substance misuse;
- it was reported that where accommodation was available it tended to be in areas with drug and crime problems which was not ideal for people trying to stay away from drugs; and
- in Wales, where ex-prisoners are a priority housing needs group, entitlement to LA accommodation required ex-prisoners to have either a relative living in the area or to have lived in the area previously. This was said to present a difficulty for those people leaving prison who wanted to make a fresh start in a new area.

The research also found some housing and homeless agencies reporting that they received very few, if any, referrals from prisons or probation officers. One agency which did receive referrals from prisons commented that these were often made too late in the final few weeks before a prisoner was due to be released. This did not give staff enough time to speak to referring officers at the prison to find out about the prisoner's background to enable them to offer appropriate accommodation. One of the main difficulties reported by housing/homeless agencies themselves in accessing accommodation for their clients and providing housing support were a lack of social housing stock to meet local demand and discrimination by social landlords. For interviewees leaving prison with no arrangements in place as to where they would live on release, this was their main concern and priority. They were clear that they did not feel they could start to think about looking for work until they had somewhere to live:

"I'm just being realistic about my situation, yeah. I'd love a job, but as I say I've not even got nowhere to plug an alarm clock in and things like that, and get a decent night's sleep at the moment."

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<sup>265</sup> Dorsett R., Hudson M. and McKinnon K. (2007), "Progress2work and Progress2work-LinkUP: an exploratory study to assess evaluation possibilities", DWP Research Report 464.

<sup>266</sup> Hartfree Y., Dearden C. and Pound E. (2008), "High hopes: Supporting ex-prisoners in their lives after prison", DWP Research Report 509.

# 9. Personalisation

## Summary

The employment and skills system has seen an increase in recent years in the use of active labour market policies focused on the labour market participation of unemployed people. At the heart of this strategy has been “personalisation”, which involves tailoring services to individual circumstances in order to increase their effectiveness.<sup>267</sup> This, in-turn, has seen a substantive increase in the nature and variety of customer experiences.

While previous chapters have discussed the customer experience in great depth with regard to particular programmes, the aim of this chapter is to analyse the customer experience through personalisation as a cross-cutting theme connecting these programmes. It analyses evaluation research to uncover the realities of the customer experience by assessing the practical administration, implementation and delivery of services.

The customer experiences of personalised services vary. On the one hand, a personalised service where an advisor’s time is spent matching an individual’s skills with a particular job adds value to a customer’s experience. On the other hand, more advisors need the right specialised knowledge and attitude in order to deliver effective personalised services. There is no doubt that a personalised service is more effective than the more mechanistic service, however, barriers are still in place which prevent the personalised service from working to its full potential. For example, performance targets can be detrimental for some customer groups especially those furthest from the labour market. Moreover, the financial cost of a one tailored service for the individual is higher than a service targeting broader groups.

## Overview of Personalised Services

Case management is the main way of delivering personalised services. Ideally, it involves staff within the employment and skills system providing extensive support to customers in order to deliver services that address individuals' specific needs. Staff meet individuals to discuss their career aspirations and options; develop a strategy for job search, exploring whether there is a need to undertake any training; and identify opportunities the employment and skills system can offer. As well as direct work-related considerations, PAs operating within Jobcentres take individuals through calculations of the trade-offs involved with entry into labour markets versus remaining on state benefits. In complex cases, this is particularly helpful as individuals receive a variety of payments that taper off at different rates in relation to hours worked and the wage rate they will be earning in work, and it is therefore worthwhile to know the exact monetary incentives customer face in making the decision to enter work.

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<sup>267</sup> More broadly, personalisation incorporates the concepts of “user-involvement” and “co-production”, however, this wider definition has not been applied to the employment and skills system as yet. See Stafford and Kellard (2007), “Reforming the public sector: personalised activation services in the UK”, available at: [http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/764/1/Chapter\\_6.pdf](http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/764/1/Chapter_6.pdf)

## Demand for personalised services

Demand exists for a more personalised service. In regard to employment programmes, findings from evaluation research conducted on EZ programmes provide an interesting case in point. The consistent messages from this work has been that intensive individual support is highly valued. Moreover, time spent by Advisers matching individuals' particular skills to opportunities helps to ensure better job matching and sustainable job market outcomes. In general, the amount of time spent by personal advisers was mentioned as a positive contribution to the customer experience as well as the overall level of flexibility provided, vis-à-vis programmes such as the NDYP (O'Connor et al, 2001; McDonald et al.2004; and Griffiths and Jones, 2005)<sup>268</sup>, ND50+ (Moss and Arrowsmith, 2003; TAEN, 2003),<sup>269</sup> and ND25+ (Winterbotham et al, 2002).<sup>270</sup>

With regard to skills programmes for example, people generally tend to be more responsive to options that involve tailored advice given by dedicated skills advisers. For instance, individuals who had spent time in a variety of temporary positions that are unsure about which sectors they would like to pursue for permanent work expressed a preference for personalised support. More generally, among a set of options put forward in the Leitch Review, there was a strong sense among customers that skills advisers could be the most suitable option through which to personalise programme choices to fit their aspirations and career goals.<sup>271</sup> These demands, particularly customer views of EZs, have helped to form the rationale for programmes such as the Flexible New Deal. However, the evidence considered below shows a mixed picture in relation to how personalised the employment and skills landscape is today.

## Information provision and choice

Lack of information provision is a key hindrance to personalising services on the basis of individual choices as people are not fully informed about their choice sets. Ideally, choice allows customers to decide which programmes are likely to be beneficial for their careers. This, in-turn, incentivises providers to offer better services because a failure to do so means low take-up rates, which, for private sector providers will translate into unsustainable levels of profitability. Over time, better courses should thrive and the customer experience should improve.

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<sup>268</sup> O'Connor, W., Ritchie, J. and Woodfield, K. (2001), "Experiences of New Deal: Qualitative Profiles of Young Participants," Employment Service.

McDonald, S., Davis, A. and Stafford, B. (2004), "Report of the Survey of Job Brokers", DWP Research Report 197.

Griffiths R. and Jones G. (2005), "Evaluation of Single Provider Employment Zone Extensions to Young People, Lone Parents and Early Entrants, Interim Report", DWP Research Report 228.

<sup>269</sup> Moss, N. and Arrowsmith, J. (2003), "A review of 'what works' for clients aged over 50", DWP Research Report 174.

Third Age Employment Network (2003), "Challenging Age: Information, Advice and Guidance for Older Age Groups", Department for Education and Skills.

<sup>270</sup> Winterbotham, M., Adams, L. and Kuechel, A. (2002), "Evaluation of New Deal 25 Plus: Qualitative Interviews with ES Staff, Providers, Employers and Clients", DWP Working Age Research Report 127.

<sup>271</sup> Carol Goldstone Associates & I.A.D.T. (2008), "A 'User Voice' study: Jobcentre Plus customers' perspective on DWP/DIUS strategy for skills", DWP Research Report 519.

At the aggregate level, however, there currently appears to be a lack of personalisation within the employment and skills system on the basis of customer choices, that is personalisation that is user-driven. As pointed out by the Public Administration Select Committee in 2008, it is entirely possible to have public services that are entirely personalised but do not have any direct input from the service user. If an advisor takes a view on what is best for individual customers and acts accordingly this is still a form of personalisation but choice, as described above, is absent from this system. If choice is absent it can no longer operate as a driver of performance because service providers lack the incentive to improve what exists when customers can choose to drop out of low quality programmes. One study suggests that personalised services provided to customers in the UK do not embody concepts of "user involvement" or "co-production" as can be found in other parts of the public sector or within the employment and skills system of other European countries.<sup>272</sup> Further to this, it is also the case that there is a 'systematic lack of user consultation about service design and delivery and few mechanisms for participants to express their views about the support they receive or to seek redress for poor performance'.<sup>273</sup>

Even where customers appear to be given choices nominally, studies that have collected customer views suggest they are not fully informed to make good choices. Disabled people, for example, often were unaware of the choices they could make to help them get back to work suggesting that staff were not personalising services for this customer group to the full extent possible under the NDDP.<sup>274</sup> However, interestingly, in a follow-up study, learning effects were found insofar as options available to customers were used more over time as a result of greater knowledge of available provisions. The authors of this study also found that 27% of these referrals came about as a result of requests made by customers.<sup>275</sup> This lends support to the view that customers should be made more aware of the types of personalised support available to them because the less well-informed may be missing out on services that they could benefit from.

These insights are supported from results of a study that conducted focus groups among participants of the New Deal.<sup>276</sup> It found that customers were unaware about their ability to contribute to action plans regarding their journey into work. In addition to this, the study showed that customers participating in the New Deal were less informed about their choices regarding service provision, for example, than customers involved within Employment Zones because they were given advice in groups as opposed to one-on-one sessions. There was a view shared by many in this study that plenty of help was available from advisors but that the customer had to be pro-active to find out about this help as opposed to just being presented with a menu of options. Furthermore some customers in multiple provider employment zones were unaware that they had a choice of provider. Where customers had a choice of EZ

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<sup>272</sup> Stafford and Kellard (2007), "Reforming the public sector: personalised activation services in the UK", available at: [http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/764/1/Chapter\\_6.pdf](http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/764/1/Chapter_6.pdf)

<sup>273</sup> Bennett, J. and Cooke, G. (eds), (2007), "It's All About You: Citizen-Centred Welfare", Institute for Public Policy Research.

<sup>274</sup> McDonald, S., Davis, A. and Stafford, B. (2004), "Report of the Survey of Job Brokers", Department for Work and Pensions Research Report 1997.

<sup>275</sup> Stafford, B. et al. (2007), "New Deal for Disabled People: Third synthesis report – key findings from the evaluation", DWP Research Report No. 430.

<sup>276</sup> Adams, L. and Carter, K. (2008), "Focus groups with New Deal and Employment Zone customers: Research to inform Flexible New Deal", DWP Research Report No. 522.

provider almost all customers interviewed were not aware that they had this choice and the majority had been assigned a provider by their Jobcentre Plus advisor. Customers were mixed as to their views on choice in this instance, some thought they would have felt empowered at having the choice while others said they would not have known how to choose<sup>277</sup>.

This lack of information provision limits the choice individuals have, which could be important to the overall quality of services they receive. Another barrier to exercising choice is mandatory participation in programmes, which could be another channel through which fully personalising services could be held back.

### **Voluntary versus mandatory participation**

The issue of information provision and choice also relates to the debate on the merits of voluntary versus mandatory participation in programmes. On the one hand, there is evidence to support the view that the take-up of personalised services should be made mandatory for certain groups that would otherwise fail to volunteer for them. For this reason, Gregg (2008) recommends that those customers who are eligible for "fast-tracking" on to a personalised service (i.e. allowing claimants to gain immediate access to the more personalised stage of JSA that normally starts at six months) should be provided it by default, rather than having to volunteer for inclusion.<sup>278</sup>

On the other hand, mandatory participation in programmes prevents customers from exercising choice, which leads to a number of issues where private service providers are used. The conditionality regime associated with benefits adds further complexity to personalisation. As has been noted, in a free market approach to public services users would leave poorly performing services and this would act as an incentive to providers. However, certain activities are mandatory so it is unclear under what circumstances claimants could leave provision. These are highlighted through the Jobseeker Mandatory Activity (JMA) pilots, discussed below.<sup>279</sup> However, programmes such as the NDYP and the ND25+ also consist of some form of mandatory participation, hence issues around this could be relevant for these programmes too.

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<sup>277</sup> Adams L. and Carter K. (2008), "Focus groups with New Deal and Employment Zone customers: Research to inform Flexible New Deal", DWP Research Report 522.

<sup>278</sup> Gregg, P. (2008), "Realising Potential: A Vision for Personalised Conditionality and Support", DWP.

<sup>279</sup> The JMA was piloted over a two-year period beginning in April 2006 with the intention of evaluating whether the provision of extra support to help Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants back into employment was effective.

Evidence shows that service delivery varies widely where individual participation is mandated.<sup>280</sup> One issue highlighted is the fact that providers are paid a flat fee per attendee, which has encouraged some providers to deliver courses to larger groups, despite guidance stipulating that there should be 12 participants per course. While some areas such as Staffordshire and Cumbria saw modest participant to tutor ratios in JMA pilots, ranging from 3.6:1 to 7.5:1, it was not uncommon to see ratios up to 18:1 in South London. This suggests that flat fee rates encourage the development of generic provision as opposed to personalised services.

A second issue is that little effort appears to have been made to separate classes on the basis of individual characteristics such as occupation or "distance from labour market". It was observed that groups often included former managers and civil servants alongside unskilled manual workers. Arguably, the needs of these two groups will be quite different. This finding was observed in other settings as well, including basic skills programmes tested in the light of findings from the Leitch Report<sup>281</sup> and through the Adult Learning Option<sup>282</sup>.

An interesting economic dynamic that may be operating here is that mandatory participation by customers permits providers to run larger classes with a more diverse mix of people. As customers do not have the choice to leave these programmes there is not a strong incentive to improve the services provided as there otherwise would be.

### Performance targets and length of customer journey

Studies suggest that in order to effectively personalise services for some customer groups, there must be an acknowledgment that they are hard to reach and therefore the amount of time it will take them to return to work is longer than what might normally be expected. A personalised service must be sensitive to this. However, this may be in conflict with targets that advisers face to get people back to work as quickly as possible. Indeed, evidence suggests that advisers do not presently match people with jobs that are suited to their skill sets. It was also found that some skilled workers felt that more attention from advisers was often geared towards suggesting customers take jobs below their skill level or below their salary in previous employment. These views conform with other views that suggest that customers perceive a risk of being poorly matched into a new job in order to meet targets. These issues were observed in a BMRB (2006) study, which found that over a third (35 per cent) of repeat jobseekers agreed that at the Jobcentre, people are pushed into things they don't want to do. This is particularly the case among groups such as those with caring responsibilities or those on ND25+.

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<sup>280</sup> Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (2009), "Qualitative evaluation of the Jobseeker Mandatory Activity (JMA)", DWP Research Report 553.

<sup>281</sup> Carol Goldstone Associates (2008), "A 'User Voice' study: Jobcentre Plus customers' perspective on DWP/DIUS strategy for skills", DWP Research Report 519.

<sup>282</sup> Hewitson, Coulter and Joyce "Qualitative Evaluation of the Adult Learning Option" – DWP Research Report 611.

Further, in a study conducted by the Centre for Research in Social Policy that collected the views on 30 drug and alcohol users, in-depth accounts were provided with regard to the barriers to work they faced.<sup>283</sup> Several interesting recommendations were made, particularly because of the consensus among participants. The general point was that the customer journey for people in this group is long-term and the system should take this into account. Specifically, it was observed by former drug users that it was important to understand when customers are truly ready to engage with the employment and skills system. For instance, if customers take-up employment and skills services too early, it could conflict with their rehabilitation. Some participants in the study therefore felt that experts could be helpful in determining whether someone is ready for work because they may be able to make a more accurate evaluation than the individual in question. In addition, they felt that inter-agency collaboration between the Jobcentre and substance support organisations would be helpful for understanding whether customers are genuinely ready to begin their journeys into work. These types of findings were also observed in the chapter on people with disabilities and people living with health conditions. As in the case of drug misusers, the customer journey into work for ex-offenders may be a long process with assessment required of customers' willingness to work and status in regard to personal issues such as drug dependency.<sup>284</sup>

These results show that there may be a trade-off between providing a more personalised service and targets set to achieve quick job market outcomes. On the one hand, these targets are important to encourage advisers to support a large number of people. On the other hand, there are risks attached to this type of target. Firstly, advisers may choose to support those that are most job-ready and arguably, therefore, less in need of support. Secondly, this may result in the neglect of harder to reach groups. And thirdly, there may be an emphasis on support services that are more immediately job-oriented over long-term types of support for people that are further away from returning to work, which might not be suitable for some people. If targets are going to be effectively employed, they must match the diverse objectives of a personalised regime.

### Continuity in the customer experience

It has been observed that staff do not manage to keep track of customers as they move through different parts of the employment and skills system. This is, in part, related to the issue of performance targets because advisers may be neglecting the less job-ready. A consequence of periods of lack of contact is that customers' job search activities fall (see Hasluck, 2002 in regard to young people; Gregg, 2008 in regard to ex-offenders, the homeless and drug misusers). A more personalised service therefore, where staff keep closer track of their customers' progress, could help to overcome this problem. An evaluation of EZs, for example, where unemployed people regularly saw the same adviser, resulted in customers finding employment very quickly – in some cases in as short a time as within two weeks of joining the programme (Adams and Carter, 2008).

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<sup>283</sup> Centre for Research in Social Policy (2004), "Drug and alcohol use as barriers to employment", Available at: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/wae-index.asp> [Accessed August 25, 2009].

<sup>284</sup> Hartfree, Y., Dearden, C. and Pound, E. (2008), "High hopes: Supporting ex-prisoners in their lives after prison", DWP Research Report No 509.

Further, it has been found that continued support post-employment is an important determinant of sustainable employment when customers find themselves unable to cope with the change in their circumstances (Green and Hasluck, 2009). These issues are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter on Referral Mechanisms.

## Attitudes of staff

In general, the customer experience is greatly affected by the attitudes of staff. In relation to personalised services in particular, one study observes the possibility of a "culture effect" in which advisors are used to operating on the basis of a strict set of rules that delimit customer rights and responsibilities. The introduction of personalised services is therefore difficult for staff to adapt to because of the requirement to shift towards more flexible modes of operation. The new JSA regime has recently been evaluated and includes a more flexible approach at the 6 month stage, the evaluation found that some advisors struggled with this approach and lacked the skills and confidence as they were used to a rigid target driven approach.<sup>285</sup>

For example, with regard to the New Deal 25+ there was a feeling among customers that PAs spent a disproportionately large amount of time during the first work-focused interview dealing with benefit claims, rather than work-related advice. As one participant in an IPPR (2009) study commented, "*It's all about filtering out the dishonest rather than helping the honest*". This, in-turn, set the tone for future interactions where the relationship between client and Adviser centred more around getting "any job" rather than suitable/sustainable employment.<sup>242</sup> This could reflect some attachment to old modes of operation among staff, which could be problematic in terms of achieving newer goals such as personalisation.

In the case of customer groups such as ex-offenders and drug users, this culture effect could be compounded because of generally poor attitudes towards these groups by staff. Drug users, for instance, felt that attitudes towards drug dependency among Jobcentre staff needed to improve in order to properly engage customers in determining their circumstances and helping them through their customer journey.<sup>286</sup> Ex-offenders felt that Jobcentre staff were focused on meeting targets and getting them into any job, regardless of their circumstances or interests and in some cases had suggested they apply for inappropriate job vacancies (this issue of performance targets is discussed below). This was in contrast to their experience of p2w-LinkUP, where they felt advisers looked at them as individuals, were very approachable and provided personally tailored help and support.<sup>287</sup> In sum, therefore, particular customer groups such as ex-offenders and drug users are likely to be particularly affected by staff attitudes due to the combined effect of general problems staff have with these customer groups and the culture effect outlined above.

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<sup>285</sup> Bellis, A., Aston, J. and Dewson, S. (2009), " Jobseekers Regime test site evaluation: Qualitative research", DWP Research Report No. 580.

<sup>286</sup> Centre for Research in Social Policy (2004), "Drug and alcohol use as barriers to employment".

<sup>287</sup> Hartfree, Y., Dearden, C. and Pound, E. (2008), "High hopes: Supporting ex-prisoners in their lives after prison", DWP Research Report No 509.

## Specialised advice

Criticisms have been made against PAs of the employment and skills system in regard to their inability to provide specialised advice. In general, a large proportion of customers participating in an IPPR study (2009) felt that advisers did not provide them with sufficient help, believing that advisers were only capable of helping them with a narrow set of issues.<sup>288</sup> More specifically, disabled people and people living with health conditions remarked that Job Broker staff did not have the relevant experience to deal with people with severe impairments or severe health needs (Corden et al., 2003:75).<sup>289</sup> Elsewhere some customers felt that Jobcentre Plus advisors didn't have enough sector specific knowledge whether it be sector specific opportunities, requirements or training options.<sup>290</sup>

## Personalised Learning

Learning is another area in which there has been a recent focus on personalisation. Over the last two years, the LSC's Learner Involvement Strategy (LIS) has required user involvement in a wide variety of programmes with the aim of increasing the level of feedback customers provide to providers, thereby contributing to the provision of a more tailored set of services.

Given the wide range of providers that this affects, the ways in which the programmes attempt to bring about user involvement differs widely. The evaluation of the LIS<sup>291</sup> found that one course, for instance, that specialises in professional business coaching involves a group-based session in which providers attempt to get "buy-in" from users. Another example is a training college in which a student parliament was established in which students were provided with a formal opportunity in which to meet and express their views to senior management of courses. A third, and particularly interesting example comes from a vocational learning college that has seen students become involved in the recruitment of teaching staff.

Learners believed user involvement was beneficial to them due to "increased confidence", an "improved ability to make informed choices" and an "enhanced overall learning experience". That being said, they did find it difficult to explain precisely why user involvement was helpful.

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<sup>288</sup> IPPR (2009), "Now it's Personal: Personal advisers and the new public service workforce".

<sup>289</sup> Corden, A., Harries, T., Hill, K., Kellard, K., Lewis, J., Sainsbury, R. and Thornton, P. (2003). *New Deal for Disabled People National Extension: Findings from the First Wave of Qualitative Research with Clients, Job Brokers and Jobcentre Plus Staff*. DWP Research Report W169. Sheffield: DWP.

<sup>290</sup> Adams, L. and Carter, K. (2008), "Focus groups with New Deal and Employment Zone customers: Research to inform Flexible New Deal", DWP Research Report 522.

<sup>291</sup> Learning and Skills Council (2009), "Evaluation of the Impact of the Learner Involvement Strategy (LIS): Year Two: Final Report", Learning and Skills Council.

One hypothesis is that when customers feel comfortable about speaking to staff they can provide feedback on course content and structure, thereby tailoring programmes to their needs and improving their customer experience. This is evidenced by customer views stating that their opinions appear to have an impact on service provisions. In particular, close to one-sixth of customers felt that teaching improved as a result of user involvement. Interestingly, customers felt that user involvement through learning programmes improved their thought processes in understanding the best methods through which they learn. These are valuable, transferrable skills.

One respondent stated:

*“Being asked questions about what works best for you makes you think more about your learning style, and helps you to develop your own set of learning techniques.”*

Additionally, improved choices by one cohort of customers may affect the quality of teaching received by future cohorts because providers are able to make improvements in their provision over time.

In sum, the Learner Involvement Strategy forms an interesting facet of personalisation through the use of "user involvement". It suggests that customers can benefit from being more closely involved in designing programmes they receive.

## **Barriers to Personalisation**

There are a number of barriers that exist which limit the effectiveness with which labour market programmes can be personalised. Staff might find themselves having to focus on contributing to targets and negotiating and cooperating with partners, while ensuring standards of cost-effectiveness and efficiency. These competing needs are difficult to manage, which affects the customer experience.

The resource commitment required to tailor services to individual needs is higher than that required to target broader groups. Economic barriers can therefore be a hindrance to personalisation. This is particularly the case for individuals requiring more complex types of support, i.e., those that are the hardest to reach. A consequence of limited resources is that staff could focus their energies on some groups at the expense of others.

In the context of high caseloads time pressures can see staff focusing on particular tasks such as the assessment of individuals against eligibility criteria for benefits. For instance, dealing with a customer's benefit claim might be seen as a necessary part of the interaction between customer and staff member, whereas focusing on personalised ways in which to find sustainable employment may only be covered if there is adequate time. One study, for instance, highlights that the number of mandatory elements of an interview preclude advisers from providing a personalised service<sup>292</sup>.

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<sup>292</sup> IPPR (2009), "Now it's Personal: Personal advisers and the new public service workforce".

Evaluations of Jobcentre Plus demonstrated the existence of these problems, particularly in early meetings with customers<sup>293</sup>, which can have knock-on effects, as users feel that initial meetings have defined a superficial relationship between themselves and staff. Another study, which surveyed PAs, noted that almost half of the respondents (47 per cent) did not feel that they had enough time with their customers, while more than one-fifth (23 per cent) of respondents felt that they were able to provide some customers with adequate time but only at the expense of other customers<sup>294</sup>.

To overcome this problem, staff must become adept at reallocating scarce resources between some tasks, such as the assessment of the eligibility of claimants, and new tasks related to personalisation. In particular, this may include splitting time between activities such as the assessment of whether claimants are eligible for benefits and providing support through more personalised services. OPSR (2002)<sup>295</sup> observe that:

*“Delivery organisations are required to balance their commitment to meeting the needs of service users with their responsibility to ensure compliance with eligibility rules, protect against fraud and deliver government policies”*

If staff incentives are not well-aligned with the objective of personalising services, the aggregate outcome could be detrimental for certain customer groups. This issue arises because a key target of staff is to achieve job entry for customers as quickly as possible, which could conflict with the aim of providing a more personalised service for customer groups that are less job-ready (i.e. who require support over longer periods of time before getting a job). Staff that are motivated to achieve job entry for customers as quickly as possible may therefore focus resources on the more job ready instead of those with the greatest need. In the aggregate, extra resources directed towards personalising services may therefore fail to create added-value as the job-ready may be receiving additional support they do not require and the harder to reach may be missing out on support valuable to them.

Interestingly, this effect may be exacerbated during periods when unemployment is high (e.g. during recessions), as the pool of job-ready customers increases and therefore staff have a larger pool of customers they can direct resources towards to meet their targets. The significant problem that this creates is to increase the stock of long-term unemployed as some overlooked customers may slip into ever longer periods of unemployment.

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<sup>293</sup> Kelleher, J., Youll, P., Nelson, A., Hadjivassiliou, K., Lyons, C. and Hills, J. (2002), "Delivering a work-focused service: Final findings from ONE case studies and staff research", DWP Research Report No 166, Leeds: CDS.

Osgood, J., Stone, V. and Thomas, A. (2002), "Delivering a work-focused service: Views and experiences of clients", DWP Research Report No 167, Leeds: CDS.

<sup>294</sup> IPPR (2009), "Now it's Personal: Personal advisers and the new public service workforce".

<sup>295</sup> OPSR (2002), "Principles of Customer Feedback and Ideal Framework for Research in Public Services", London: The Prime Minister's Office of Public Services Reform.

The new JSA regime includes a more flexible and personalised approach at the 6 month stage. However, when this new regime was tested many advisors found that flexibility was not compatible with the many targets and processes currently in place such as the Intervention Delivery Targets and the Advisory Activity Tool. Furthermore diaries tended to be booked up months in advance which eliminated the scope for short-term responsiveness<sup>296</sup>.

Staff may feel that they are better informed and qualified to instruct rather than include individuals in work-related decision-making, as this is the role they have traditionally held. The lack of openness of staff could see individuals failing to gain involvement in their journeys into work, which could lead to poorer customer experiences and labour market outcomes. An example of the contrast between different types of advisors can be found in the IES trials in England where some Jobcentre Plus staff felt that nextstep interventions were too responsive to customer need and not directional enough<sup>297</sup>.

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<sup>296</sup> Bellis, A., Aston, J. and Dewson, S. (2009), "Jobseekers Regime test site evaluation: Qualitative research", DWP Research Report No. 580.

<sup>297</sup> Levesley T., Francis R., Sissons P., Oakley J. And Johnson C. (2009), "Qualitative Evaluation of the Integrated Employment and Skills Trials: Implementation Report", DWP Research Report No 618 (2009).

# 10. Skills

## Summary

The individual experience of skills and training is quite diverse and can vary according to whether individuals are engaging from inside or outside the employment support system and their individual preferences and attitudes to learning. For example individuals who are in receipt of benefits are often obligated to take part in training under the New Deal if they want to maintain full benefits. People in work are generally not obliged to take part in training.

In general, learners are very satisfied with their Skills for Life courses. Satisfaction with teaching was particularly high with 85 per cent of basic skills learners reporting that their course was well taught and 84 per cent that the speed of teaching was about right. Three quarters of those surveyed felt that their course was well organized.

Jobcentre Plus aims to help people into work and an important part of the provided support is enabling people to develop the skills and qualifications needed to find and keep jobs. Customers' experience of Jobcentre Plus is very diverse, in part because the nature of the relationship will depend on their benefit. Evaluation evidence has reported some customers finding that Jobcentre Plus staff had not offered the advice they needed about training or the benefits of training, while others were not offered training to help them to improve their skills.

The IES agenda is attempting to mitigate this lack of advice. Current evaluation research has so far reported that customers have found the interaction with nextstep has been largely positive in terms of gaining confidence, motivation and an insight into what they can achieve. Customers interviewed as part of the evaluation responded positively about nextstep advisers, as well as the personalised service they received.

Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) services are an important part of the learning and skills system. People need to be aware of the existing training offers and also need support to choose the training that fits their needs. The most immediate benefits of receiving IAG take the form of helping users find and make best use of relevant information while increasing their awareness of learning and job opportunities most relevant to them is also an important benefit. IAG services increase an individual's self-confidence and encourage and support clients to engage in learning. Generally customers find IAG services helpful but, there seems to be scope for improvement related to more information about financial support for training, wider learning opportunities offered as well as more emphasis given to careers, job opportunities, the local labour market and the changing world of work.

In terms of basic skills learning, recent evaluation evidence has found that labour market outcomes such as employability and earnings, hardly increases as a result of basic skills training. However, employability is indirectly improved through improved self-esteem, health and employment commitment. While there is an association between poor literacy and numeracy skills and employment outcomes, what is not clear is that improving literacy and numeracy skills on their own has more than a limited direct effect on employment success.

Financial barriers play a crucial role in customers' decision to undertake training. Many learners, particularly older adults, believe that, they would be liable for course fees despite being aware that some courses were subsidised for unemployed people. Illustrating the impact of credit constraints, customers will often be unable to pay for travel, even when they can subsequently claim it back.

Some individuals in receipt of benefits perceive a lack of good training opportunities. In particular, some customers did not find training as part of New Deal courses useful. The main complaints related to poor quality of the courses, limited progress in terms of learning outcomes and the fact that the work placement options within New Deal had not led to permanent work. Furthermore individuals perceived eligibility barriers such as having to wait several months to become eligible for support via New Deal. In addition a lack of flexible training options was perceived by some with training geared around academic years and the resultant long waits seen as a particular barrier.

Train to Gain is an in-work support programme available across England. It is a service managed by the SFA that is designed to help employers improve the skills of their workforce. Generally, people are mainly informed by their employers about Train to Gain. Awareness of Train to Gain is far lower amongst those who were previously unemployed and there is a lack of crossover of this customer group and the Train to Gain cohort. The most recent evaluation of Train to Gain finds that just 2 per cent of the learner cohort had been unemployed in the year before their learning started.

## **Pre-Employment Support through Jobcentre Plus**

Jobcentre Plus aims to help people into work and an important part of the provided support is enabling people to develop the skills and qualifications needed to find and keep jobs. Customers' experiences of Jobcentre Plus are very diverse, in part because the nature of the relationship will depend on their benefit. The benefit a customer receives determines the frequency of visits to the Jobcentre Plus office, voluntary or mandatory participation in New Deals and access to a PA. The next section describes the rules for mandating and how customers perceive the access to basic and specific skill provision through Jobcentre Plus.

### **Access to provision**

Generally, Jobcentre Plus Advisers act as the referral gateway with responsibility for ensuring that customers are referred to provision appropriate to their needs. In practice, basic and specific skill training is available through the New Deal programmes and other programmes such as the Employability Skills Programme in England. People are generally eligible to take part in the New Deal after claiming JSA for 18 months or after 6 months if they are aged 18-24 after 12 months of FND<sup>298</sup>. Participation is mandatory. Lone parents and disabled people are exempt from mandatory participation, they can take part on a voluntary basis at any point in time.

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<sup>298</sup> These programmes are currently being replaced by the Flexible New Deal, participation in which is mandatory after 12 months on benefit.

Individuals receiving benefits including those accessing the support of New Deal programmes develop Action Plans with their PA mapping their existing levels of learning and skills. Action Plans should include details of job goals, learning and qualification outcomes and the help the participant will be given during their time on provision. It should set out clear and measurable objectives that can be used to measure progress. Based on the action plan, Jobcentre Plus customers can undertake skills development courses, training and work experience placements and qualifications to help them develop the skills needed to find work.

Advisers are instructed to screen customers for potential basic skills or language needs at their initial interview as well as at the six month restart interview, unless previously identified. Customers who are identified as having a potential need but are not eligible to enter New Deal, including those with language barriers, should then be referred to other provision.

Customers are also screened at their initial New Deal interview and should be referred for a basic skills independent assessment and where appropriate on to basic skills/English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) provision as part of their New Deal option. During the first stage of New Deal, so called 'Gateway', people meet a Jobcentre Plus adviser regularly to support them with advice on carers, applications and setting up an action plan.<sup>299</sup>

Despite the presence of well defined policy and process on screening described above recent research by DWP found that a proportion of customers were disappointed with the lack of focus on training and development as part of Work Focussed Interviews (WFIs)<sup>300</sup>. There were also concerns about issues around eligibility and lack of funding for training, these issues are discussed below.

## The customer experience

The customer experience of training opportunities depends mainly on five criteria:

- Advice
- Eligibility, Availability and Flexibility
- Financial Constraints
- Quality
- Employability and Qualifications

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<sup>299</sup> Provider Guidance, <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/supplying-dwp/what-we-buy/welfare-to-work-services/provider-guidance/>

<sup>300</sup> Hewitson, Coulter and Joyce "Qualitative Evaluation of the Adult Learning Option" – DWP Research Report 611.

<sup>300</sup> Hasluck, C. and Green A. E. ( 2007), "What works for whom? A review of evidence and meta-analysis for the Department for Work and Pensions", DWP Research Report No 407.

## Advice

In a study by Goldstone (2008)<sup>301</sup>, some customers found that staff had not been offered the advice they needed about benefits or programmes, while others were not offered training to help them to improve their skills. None of the people with disabilities or health issues in the study had received special help or advice from their local Jobcentre about how they could obtain training that met their specific needs. However, customers were positive about the concept of a skills advisor; this was the case for both those who had specific skills aspirations and those who were still undecided. In particular individuals thought that the skills advisor should be able to tell them about the skills they already have as well as those they may need. However, clients agreed that there is no point in having a skills advisor or advice on skills if the training is not available. This finding is echoed for the Skills Coaching programme where Hasluck, Bimrose et al (2006) found that Skills Coaching was popular with customers, but the lack of training options, long waits for course starts and lack of finance was not popular<sup>302</sup>. Furthermore some individuals dropped out of training provision as part of the Adult Learning Option as they hadn't received sufficient advice beforehand on the nature and, in particular, the intensity of the course.

One problem is the high turnover of Skills Coaches which lead to long waits between appointments while a new Skills Coach was appointed. Customers also reported broken appointments as the Skills Coach had left and the scheduled interview had not been cancelled. Such staff turnover affects the continuity of support and the consistency of advice.

It should be noted that the IES agenda is attempting to mitigate this lack of advice. Current evaluation research so far has reported that customers have found that the interaction with Nextstep has been largely positive in terms of gaining confidence, motivation and an insight into what they can achieve. Customers interviewed as part of the evaluation responded positively about nextstep advisers, as well as the personalised service they received.

Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) services are made available to people who need support to choose the training that fits their needs. The most immediate benefits of receiving IAG take the form of helping users find and make best use of relevant information while increasing their awareness of learning and job opportunities most relevant to them. IAG services increase an individual's self-confidence as identified by MTL (2007)<sup>303</sup> and encourage and support clients to engage in learning. Information, advice and guidance is particularly key for low skill groups as evidence from the National Adult Learners Survey finds that the lower qualified someone is the less well informed they are about local learning opportunities<sup>304</sup>.

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<sup>301</sup> Goldstone (2008), "A 'User Voice' study: Jobcentre Plus customers' perspective on DWP/DIUS strategy for skills", DWP Research Report 519.

<sup>302</sup> Hasluck, C., Bimrose, J., Barnes, S.-A., Brown, J., Marris, L., McGivern, G., Orton, M., and White, R. (2006), "Evaluation of Skills Coaching trials and Skills Passports. A synthesis of qualitative and quantitative evidence", DWP Research Report 391.

<sup>303</sup> MTL (2007), "The Impact of nextstep Adult Information and Advice Services National Analysis 2007 - Final Report", Milburn, Trinnaman and La Court, Learning and Skill Council.

<sup>304</sup> DCSF – National Adult Learning Survey (2005) – Table 4.4.

MTL (2007) examines the impact of IAG services provided by the LSC in England. They found that IAG is highly valued by the majority of users. However, there seems to be scope for improvement related to more information about financial support for training, wider learning opportunities offered as well as more emphasis given to careers, job opportunities, the local labour market and the changing world of work.

Granville (2007)<sup>305</sup> evaluated the perceptions of learners and potential learners to the provision of IAG in Scotland regarding funding. From a qualitative study involving focus groups and in-depth interview they conclude that there is very little awareness on the part of learners and potential learners of funding for training opportunities. However, it is not possible to quantify this finding as the study involved less than 100 people. The people interviewed mainly relied on word of mouth and other informal routes to access information. The key issue was that despite providing a helpful initial overview of options and possibilities, the range of IAG was not perceived as actually helping in understanding where their own personal circumstances placed them as regards to funding help.

### Eligibility, Availability and Flexibility

Goldstone (2008)<sup>306</sup> stressed that customers want training to be available quickly after the need is recognised, rather than having to wait until they have been unemployed for some time. People can generally only access training through the New Deal after having been unemployed for a certain period of time. Individuals feel that the longer they are unemployed the harder it generally becomes to find work as a long spell of unemployment is unattractive to employers. Hasluck, Bimrose et al (2006)<sup>307</sup> found that customers who received Skills Coaching as part of the pilot programme under the New Deal for Skills were more likely to be dissatisfied by the lack of suitable training provision and the long wait for provision. The great majority of Skills Coaches were also concerned about the existence of sufficient learning provision to which customers can be referred and several consider the lack of provision a major problem. The lack of training opportunities was also connected to the eligibility guidelines that state that only customers at Level 1 should be referred. Some advisors working on the Adult Learning Option struggled with the eligibility criteria attached to it and felt that they were too restrictive. Courses were restricted to level 2 for those without a level 2 and for those who had been on benefits for longer than 6 months, it was felt by some advisors that courses at level 1 and 3 would also benefit as would those who had been on benefit for less than 6 months<sup>308</sup>.

However, waiting periods are also due to the small range of starting dates for many courses and the adherence to academic years. If an individual decides to take part in a course that had already started, there may be a lengthy wait before the next course starts. In particular, missing the start of the academic year might in some cases mean a delay of up to a year.

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<sup>305</sup> Granville, S. and Campbell-Jack Diarmid (2007) "Evaluation of Information Advice and Guidance: Perceptions of Learners, Potential Learners and Intermediary Groups", George Street Research, Report for Scottish Executive Social Research.

<sup>306</sup> Goldstone (2008), "A 'User Voice' study: Jobcentre Plus customers' perspective on DWP/DIUS strategy for skills", DWP Research Report 519.

<sup>307</sup> Hasluck, C., Bimrose, J., Barnes, S.-A., Brown, J., Marris, L., McGivern, G., Orton, M., and White, R. (2006), "Evaluation of Skills Coaching trials and Skills Passports. A synthesis of qualitative and quantitative evidence", DWP Research Report 391.

<sup>308</sup> Hewitson, Coulter and Joyce "Qualitative Evaluation of the Adult Learning Option" – DWP Research Report 611.

According to Goldstone (2008), customers mentioned that increasing the range of starting dates would be a significant improvement. This finding is echoed by the Adult Learning Option evaluation where limited course start dates were found to result in long waits and/or the need for a fast decision if the course start was approaching. In some cases the long waits resulted in customers losing interest in the training<sup>309</sup>.

Hasluck, Bimrose et al (2006)<sup>310</sup> found that participants often expressed the wish for a range of course options in relation to the course duration, hours, type of training and learning pace of customers, again this was echoed by the Adult Learning Option evaluation<sup>311</sup>. Flexible training opportunities are particularly an issue for lone parents, carers and people with disabilities. Goldstone (2008) stresses that training that fits in with childcare responsibilities or the customer's personal circumstances, such as age or ethnicity is not necessarily available. Lone parents, for example, said that they need training that is built around school hours. Start and end times of courses must allow for travel between the two locations. Moreover, any course which continued during school holidays would be unfeasible for most lone parents. A course which could not meet these needs was likely to be rejected.

Another issue causing poor customer experiences related to the limited number of courses offered the small range of starting dates for many courses and the resulting long waiting list to get on a course. In addition to these logistical issues, the literature also notes that Skill Coaches were unable to refer customers to suitable learning provision in some cases as no funding was available. Skills Coaches expressed the point that it is difficult to keep customers motivated to learn when there was no funding, a lack of training provision or a long waiting list to get on a course.

Some of the customers with disabilities or health issues complain that their needs were not considered in training schedules (Goldstone (2008)). Due to their condition, they were often unable to spend a full day in a classroom. Similarly, travel could be quite difficult for these customers. They would not accept training unless it was flexible enough to meet their individual needs.

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<sup>309</sup> Hewitson, Coulter and Joyce "Qualitative Evaluation of the Adult Learning Option" – DWP Research Report 611.

<sup>310</sup> Hasluck, C., Bimrose, J., Barnes, S.-A., Brown, J., Marris, L., McGivern, G., Orton, M., and White, R. (2006), "Evaluation of Skills Coaching trials and Skills Passports. A synthesis of qualitative and quantitative evidence", DWP Research Report 391.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid.

## Financial Constraints

Goldstone (2008) and Joyce et al (2005)<sup>312</sup> point out that financial barriers play a crucial role in customers' decision to undertake training. Goldstone (2008) found that many learners, particularly older adults, believed that, they would be liable for course fees despite being aware that some courses were subsidised for unemployed people. Goldstone (2008) finds that some customers would be unable to contribute even modest amounts to course fees. Other anticipated costs, including course requirements (books or equipment), travel, food and childcare, were also of concern to customers when considering whether or not training may suit them. Illustrating the impact of credit constraints, customers will often be unable to pay for travel, even when they can subsequently claim it back.

Participating customers in the Adult Learning Option that completed their Level 2 qualification were enthusiastic about training and suggested that the childcare and travel incentives included as part of the programme enabled them to take-up and maintain training. The training allowance received in addition to their benefit payments was viewed as a 'bonus'.<sup>313</sup>

## Quality

Some individuals in receipt of benefits perceive a lack of good training opportunities (Goldstone, 2008).<sup>314</sup> In particular, people often did not find New Deal courses useful. The main complaints related to poor quality of the courses, limited progress in terms of learning outcomes and the fact that the work placement options within New Deal had not led to permanent work.

Participants in the Adult Learning Option generally found their training to be both demanding, as courses were condensed into shorter time periods, but rewarding. Participants thought they gained both soft and hard skills, improved the employment chances and particularly valued the practical and work experience elements to their courses<sup>315</sup>. But similarly to the Skill Coaching trials there was a desire for a greater range of courses, more flexible start dates and options around studying part-time.

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<sup>312</sup> Joyce, L., Durham, L., Williams, M., and White, C. (2005), Evaluation of basic skills mandatory training pilot: synthesis report, DWP Research Report 385. DWP.

<sup>313</sup> Hewitson, Coulter and Joyce "Qualitative Evaluation of the Adult Learning Option" – DWP Research Report 611.

<sup>314</sup> Goldstone (2008), "A 'User Voice' study: Jobcentre Plus customers' perspective on DWP/DIUS strategy for skills", DWP Research Report 519.

<sup>315</sup> Hewitson, Coulter and Joyce "Qualitative Evaluation of the Adult Learning Option" – DWP Research Report 611.

ECOTEC (2003)<sup>316</sup> found that those clients who dropped out of provision did so because they did not feel that their training helped or that it was not sufficiently tailored to meet their needs. Some people who dropped out of training were those who would benefit from it most. Joyce et al (2005)<sup>317</sup> point out that the low learning path and poor motivation in some courses and the wide ability range within each class was deemed problematic in mandatory courses. In addition, it was found that a productive learning atmosphere was limited in some courses by disruptive and aggressive behaviour of students. Goldstone (2008) stresses those customers' attitudes to participating in the available programmes vary from very enthusiastic to highly sceptical or actively unwilling. Many customers believe that compulsory courses will breed resentment and that the efforts of those who want to learn may be disrupted by those who are attending under duress. Attitudes to training are often still shaped by experiences at school and, importantly, on Jobcentre Plus training programmes. Those who have experienced poor learning environments are more likely to reject further training and perceive it as a waste of time, in particular as it has not achieved its stated aim of gaining work.

The reaction and attitude of individuals in receipt of benefits toward mandatory training differs across studies. The general rule is that people have to take part in the New Deal after having been on benefit for a certain period of time. The New Deal includes mandatory basic skills programmes since the introduction of the National Basic Skills programme in April 2001. Joyce et al (2005)<sup>318</sup> found that some customers express resistance when evaluating the basic skills mandatory training pilot although customers in general seem to accept the mandatory nature of training. They were generally aware and understood that in order to claim benefits they would be expected, under the rules of Jobcentre Plus, to engage in certain activities, such as training. Participants sometimes believe courses are compulsory although it is actually not the case. Irving, Webster and Slater (2002)<sup>319</sup> noted that the majority of clients in the eight-week Short Intensive Basic Skills Provision Programme thought that they had to attend an independent assessment (IA) and basic skills provision otherwise they would lose their benefits. A small group of clients knew that the training was not compulsory, but thought that it was in their best interests to go along with their adviser's wishes. However, the mandatory nature of a course does not seem to motivate the more resistant customers as stated by Joyce et al (2005).

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<sup>316</sup> ECOTEC (2003), *Longitudinal study of basic skills client outcomes*, DWP Working Age Report 167. DWP.

<sup>317</sup> Joyce, L., Durham, L., Williams, M., and White, C. (2005), "Evaluation of basic skills mandatory training pilot: synthesis report", DWP Research Report 385.

<sup>318</sup> Joyce, L., Durham, L., Williams, M., and White, C. (2005), "Evaluation of basic skills mandatory training pilot: synthesis report", DWP Research Report 385.

<sup>319</sup> Irving, Webster and Slater (2002), "The Effectiveness of Jobcentre Plus Contracted Basic Skills Provision", DWP Working Age Report 148.

## Employability and Qualifications

The customer experience of changes in employability as a result of training is very interesting as the central aim of training and learning in this context is improving the job market prospects of benefit receivers. A particular issue in this context is how the job market prospects of people change after basic skill training. There is little solid evidence on the economic impact of basic skill training in the UK. Vorhaus (2009)<sup>320</sup> identifies a number of research studies supporting the view that the acquisition and improvement of basic skills has a positive impact on wages and employability, however, he points out that there is a lack of research evidence for the UK showing that adults who improve their numeracy and literacy earn more and are more likely to be employed.

The Skills for Life programme in England offers basic and language skill training to people of working age. Meadows et al. (2009)<sup>321</sup>, in a longitudinal three year evaluation of Skills for Life learners, finds that there are no major economic benefits of improved basic skills on employability. However, many of the outcomes of training might be associated with improvements in employability in the longer term, particularly outcomes related to work motivation, self-esteem and health. The authors concluded that for people with low basic skills, the path to improved employment only starts with basic skills courses and has to be continued with vocational and academic courses. The Skills for Life courses are an effective springboard onto this path, since participation in education and training is increased and building up employment-related qualifications and skills is encouraged.

The survey of Skills for Life learners found that participants had multiple reasons for enrolling on Skills for Life courses. The most common of these were employment or for their own satisfaction. Almost half were participating in a course in order to move on to a further course and nearly one quarter were learning in order to be able to help their children. In terms of satisfaction with their Skills for Life courses, learners were in general very satisfied. Satisfaction with teaching was particularly high with 85 per cent of basic skills learners reporting that their course was well taught and 84 per cent that the speed of teaching was about right. Three quarters of those surveyed felt that their course was well organized.

When asked about the best and least good aspects of the course, respondents reflected that their experience of their Skills for Life tutors has been particularly positive. Respondents felt their tutors treated them like an adult, rather than a child which helped to disassociate negative memories of schooling with adult learning. Respondents further found the nature of their tutors to be “friendly”, “nice” and “kind”; that individual support from tutors was available when needed; and that tutors provided good, clear teaching; and encouragement to progress to further courses. Many participants described how their former negative attitudes towards formal learning had been completely changed by their tutor’s respectful and encouraging approach.

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<sup>320</sup> Vorhaus, J.(2009), “The impact of Adult Basic Skills, Basic Skills Bulletin”, Issue 76, September 2009.

<sup>321</sup> Meadows, P., Metcalf, H., Rolfe, H. and Dhudwar, A. (2009), “Evaluation of the Impact of Skills for Life Learning: Longitudinal Survey of Adult Learners on College-based Literacy and Numeracy Courses”, Final Report.

The perception of improved employability as a consequence of basic skill training varies significantly among participants. Some individuals in receipt of benefits readily identified their poor basic skills as forming a barrier to further training and employment, and were appreciative of the opportunity to refresh their skills (Irving, Webster and Slater (2002) and Goldstone (2008)).

If individuals in receipt of benefits doubt that they can improve their employment chances then training is perceived as a waste of time. This is particularly the case for people obliged to engage in repeated basic skills training since they have not been able to find a job after the first course (Goldstone (2008)) Nevertheless, Irving, Webster and Slater (2002), Bivand et al (2006) and Hasluck, Bimrose et al. (2006) find that wider benefits for participants of basic skill provision are very noticeable in relation to confidence, motivation and self-esteem. According to Irving, Webster and Slater (2002), the wider benefits that clients gained from training encouraged some of them to attend further courses. ECOTEC (2003) show that confidence particularly improves as a result of received progression or tangible outcomes such as a job or a qualification. Hasluck, Bimrose et al (2006) find that the Skills Coaches that were provided under the New Deal for Skills boosted confidence and motivation and raised aspirations in most cases.

Customers who took part in the Adult Learning Option studied at level 2 and of those who found work overwhelming described how they had achieved a better job than any held prior to the training. However, some customers found that their level 2 qualification was still not enough to secure a job in their desired profession; this was a surprise to many<sup>322</sup>. The programme found evidence that a shift to level 3 is what is really needed in some cases; this perhaps sheds light on the lack of improvements in employment chances following basic skills provision.

Work preparation courses are generally considered to be especially useful. Goldstone (2008) finds that those courses are especially valued where participants had been helped to prepare a CV, something that many of them were ill prepared to do on their own. The Skills Passport was designed as a pilot scheme of the New Deal for Skills to provide a record of learning and achievement for customers. Hasluck, Bimrose et al (2006) illustrated that customers' opinions were divided about the Skills Passport. Most people found it was valuable and improved their confidence, especially in relation to the construction of a CV. Creating a record of skills and achievements was valued less by people who did not like to revisit their past work experiences or who thought that their past was a poor guide to what they aspired to in the future. However, critics of the Skills Passport tended to be the more experienced and better qualified customers who felt the Skills Passport was too basic or constraining. Some believed the Skills Passport would not be useful to employers. Furthermore, besides basic skills, Goldstone (2008) identifies IT and computing as the area that was most frequently identified as needing development. Using a computer was seldom a problem for the younger clients; however, older people, especially in the 40+ age group, were sometimes lacking basic computer skills, which was a key requirement for many jobs, especially those which were office based. However, Hasluck, Bimrose et al (2006) found that customers sometimes wanted skills and training for which there was little demand in the local job market.

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<sup>322</sup> Hewitson, Coulter and Joyce "Qualitative Evaluation of the Adult Learning Option" – DWP Research Report 611.

Goldstone (2008) finds that basic skills training was generally most favourably perceived by young customers whereas the provision of Skills Accounts under the New Deal for Skills was of interest to older customers. Age is the factor that most clearly differentiated the views of Jobcentre Plus customers towards training. This is partly due to the variations in the type of programmes and the access to training that are currently available to younger people, but attitudes to further education also vary with age. As people move towards retirement, they see less incentives for investing in training compared to younger people. Many customers under 25 perceived the access to free training as positive, whereas the 25 plus age group felt that they had fewer opportunities to access free training. The disconnect between policy on fee remission and knowledge of fee remission amongst potential learners is a key issue for some customer groups, particularly older adults.

It has to be kept in mind that those in receipt of benefits who are lacking basic skills often have learning difficulties, disabilities, face language barriers or multiple barriers to learning. Interventions such as the New Deal have been criticised for not accommodating the unsettled lifestyles and fragile health status of some participants (Dean (2003)<sup>323</sup> or **Kemp (2005)**<sup>324</sup>). Dean (2003) found that the role of Personal Advisers was appreciated, but not the limited options to which they gave access. Customers seemed to follow either of two strategies, self-assertion or self-development. The people with a self-assertion strategy would rather take work in the informal economy or in unstable and exploitative labour markets than endure the Job Centre. People using the self-development strategy were more compliant and would try to build up human capital. Finding work was especially difficult for individuals with particular problems such as drug addiction or a prison record (Elan Consulting (2008)<sup>325</sup>). For these groups, training would not necessarily lead to employment.

## In-work support

The National Audit Office (2007)<sup>326</sup> points out that there is a need for programmes to be developed to help people stay in work as low qualified and low skilled people are much less likely to receive training from their employers. Moreover, better integration is needed between pre-work and in-work support for skills. Low-skilled jobseekers need not only help to find work, but they also need assistance to improve their skills so that they can stay in work. Thus, pre-employment provision should be linked with in-work support for skills to help customers get into work quickly while continuing to improve their skills. The National Audit Office (2007) finds that lone parents particularly tend to have low paid and low skilled jobs offering few opportunities for progression.

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<sup>323</sup> Dean (2003), "A Different Deal? Welfare to Work for People with Multiple Problems and Needs", The Economic and Social Research Council.

<sup>324</sup> **Kemp, P. A and Neale, J., (2005)**, "Employability and problem drug users", *Critical Social Policy* 2005; 25; 28.

<sup>325</sup> Elan Consulting (2008), "An evaluation of the NICS pilot essential skills programme", Government Skills Sector Skills Council.

<sup>326</sup> National Audit Office (2007), "Sustainable employment: supporting people to stay in work and advance", NAO.

Train to Gain is an in-work support programme available across England. It is a service that is designed to help employers improve the skills of their workforce. Generally, people are mainly informed by their employers about Train to Gain, 54 per cent of learners entering the programme had first heard of Train to Gain through their employers although 17 per cent had heard of it from television advertisements.

Awareness of Train to Gain is far lower amongst those who were previously unemployed and there is a lack of crossover of this customer group and the Train to Gain cohort. The most recent evaluation of Train to Gain finds that just 2 per cent of the learner cohort had been unemployed in the year before their learning started.<sup>327</sup>

Employees seem to be motivated to take part in train to gain through an expected gain in qualifications and increasing skills in contrast to short term tangible goals such as promotion and pay rises as shown by LSC (2009)<sup>328</sup>. Thus, learners in the Train to Gain programme appear to have a longer time horizon concerning benefits from training than people outside the active labour force. Unemployed people tend to evaluate the benefit of training mainly on the criteria of whether it led to a job. However, both groups stress the importance of qualifications.

The expectations of participants in Train to Gain can be summarized as follows:

- 90 per cent of learners expected to gain 'a qualification'
- 87 per cent wanted to gain skills that would help with a future job or employer
- 83 per cent aimed at gaining skills that would help with their current job
- 83 per cent wanted to learn something new

However, although learners have rather long term goals, one of the most important support factors of training is "understanding how to use tasks from your work as evidence for your qualification". Regular discussions with tutors is another important support factor for learners.

Learners' expectations prior to embarking on training are mirrored by the perceived outcomes of those who had completed their qualification, as they are focusing on personal achievements and increased skill levels. The fact that expectations are met quite closely is connected to the detailed information, discussions and pre-entry assessment provided prior to embarking on training. Considering the fact that expectations have been closely met, it is not surprising that satisfaction levels among learners are high and have remained at a relatively high level throughout the evaluation. Between 90 and 96 per cent of learners have been satisfied with the quality of teaching and with the training overall in the two waves.

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<sup>327</sup> Learning and Skill Council (2009), "Train to Gain Wave 4 Evaluation: Data annex", LSC.

<sup>328</sup> Learning and Skill Council (2009), "Train to Gain Learner Evaluation: Report from Wave 4 research", LSC.

Learners seem to be quite motivated as 83 per cent study in their free time since they are not given any study leave. Only 13 per cent had been allowed some paid study leave, and 4 per cent allowed unpaid study leave. Part-time workers seem to be less well supported than their full-time counterparts. Paid study leave is least common for part-time workers where only 6 per cent of people working less than 16 hours per week were given paid study leave by their employer.

## Learning Worker Project

This programme was implemented in Wales in September 2002 and ceased in March 2005. During that time the Learning Worker Project (LWP) funded free learning (up to a Level 3 qualification) for almost 1,800 workers in 300 organisations in the Llanelli area. The objective of LWP was to raise the demand for learning amongst the employed workforce. It was set up as a pilot initiative to see what would happen if learning was made available free of charge.<sup>329</sup>

The evaluation research found that two positive outcomes of the pilot included a change in attitude towards training by almost half of the surveyed employers and enhanced skills, job satisfaction and confidence reported by learners. The benefits perceived by Level 1 learners related to confidence building and increased job satisfaction. Learners aiming at Level 2 and 3 qualifications mainly perceived the benefits in relation to possible promotion, or finding a new, higher income job.

An important reason why many people could be encouraged to participate in training who had not previously considered additional training has been the idea of bringing learning to the worker and keeping this learning outside of the classroom. Over a third of the LWP learners had not taken part in any learning prior to LWP since leaving full time education. The main reason given was a lack of time. However, it seemed that a lack of time could have been an excuse for low confidence or motivation to engage in training. Important lessons can be learnt from this in relation to future policies and initiatives that target hard to reach individuals within the workforce.

Interestingly, very little participation in basic skills learning was undertaken within LWP. This might indicate that such learning needs may not have been picked up during recruitment processes. In particular as the lack of independent pre-learning needs assessment processes does cause some concern relating to the degree to which some of the learning outcomes pursued were of optimum relevancy to the learner and/or the employer.

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<sup>329</sup> Arad Consulting et al. (2005), "Learning Worker Project Evaluation: Final Report", Arad Consulting Ltd and the European Institute of Education and Social Policy, prepared for the Welsh Assembly Government.

Another interesting finding (but difficult to measure) is that one of the real barriers to training for workers is the relatively low value attributed by many employers to formal qualifications. This finding appears contradictory to findings presented earlier in this chapter. Unemployed people and participants in Train to Gain attach substantial importance to qualifications with the major reason being the assumption that they matter to employers. However, the low importance attached to qualifications might be specific to the region where the pilot was undertaken.

Almost a half of the employers surveyed claimed that their attitudes towards training had changed as a direct consequence of their involvement in LWP. However, four in five of these employers still thought that training is an actual cost rather than a net investment. The direct cost of training played a crucial role in decisions on whether or not to provide training. This indicates limitations to the sustainability of training provision if charges were introduced.

In summary, a quarter of the employers surveyed would be prepared to support the same level and quantity of learning activities even if the costs had remained. For the remaining 75 per cent the direct costs would limit the amount of learning that they would support. 28 per cent of employers would be discouraged from supporting any kind of learning. Therefore, workforce development learning remains particularly cost sensitive.

# 11. Conclusion

This review has considered available research evidence that details the individual's experience of the employment and skills system, in order to understand individual satisfaction levels and highlight particular problems people may have with services they receive. This section considers the strength of the evidence presented, and draws conclusions, where available, for policy making and practise. A factor that will be considered and woven through the conclusion is whether the delivery systems support customers to maximise their participation in and the outcomes they achieve from employment and skills services. This determines how ambitious and aspirational the employment and skills system is for customers and how well the employment and skills system strive to improve services for all customers.

## Satisfaction with the Benefits System and Jobcentre Plus

The Review reported that individuals' overall level of satisfaction with the employment and skills system was generally high. While this observation was frequently made, there is reason to be cautious in drawing positive conclusions. It is very difficult due to the broad nature of 'satisfaction' as to what specifically customers are referring to. In the case of Jobcentre Plus, results from the 2007 Customer Satisfaction Survey highlights that 80 per cent of Jobcentre Plus customers stated that they were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the service they had received. What this does not say is whether this satisfaction was to do with receiving timely benefit payments or with the broader support offered by Jobcentre Plus. Indeed, one of the primary issues with Jobcentre Plus on the part of the view of the customer has been the more mechanised feel of the support offered from Jobcentre Plus in comparison to the more personalised and tailored support offered through other programmes.

In describing satisfaction, the one consistent determinant was a good relationship with a Personal Advisor and, in-turn, the provision of tailored advice. This finding was consistent across several customer groups, including: both young and old adults, lone parents and disabled people and people living with health conditions. This relationship was particularly relevant for the most disadvantaged and furthest away from the job market within these groups. In delivering the employment and skills service it is imperative that PAs attitude, knowledge and skills are at a level that motivates customer ambition and aspiration.

## Young People

The journey for young adults through the employment and skills system is changing with the introduction of the new Jobseekers Regime and FND replacing the current NDYP and EZ programmes. The relationship between the customer and the New Deal PA is, as with all customer groups, important for a positive experience and is particularly pivotal for those young adults who are furthest from the labour market. Young adults have perceived the elements of work experience and placements of employment support programmes positively and are keen to have the opportunity to gain work experience and optimistic about the effect of these activities on their future employability. Perhaps a negative aspect of NDYP has been the lack of routine in-work support provision. Furthermore, there is evidence of churn within

the system with almost half of young people returning. The lack of in work support and the high level of churn within the system suggests that the delivery system does not motivate young people's ambition and aspirations.

## Older People

Evidence suggests that participants of ND50+ have largely viewed the programme positively. Those customers that did not find their experience of ND50+ a positive one were those who began the programme with less than average confidence both within themselves and the programme itself. One of the real success factors for the ND50+ programme has been the customer-advisor relationship and the maintenance of the ongoing support phase (caseloading) of the programme. The training and skills dimension of the ND50+ has led to a number of issues for older adults. Many older adults feel that they are too old to train, too old to see a return on training and consider themselves to already have the necessary skills for the job. This highlights how the system is ineffective in supporting and empowering older adults to improve skill levels to secure sustainable employment.

## Lone Parents

Engagement of lone parents on the programme NDLP has been historically low and although the introduction of WFIs has had some effect on take-up, engagement of lone parents is still relatively low compared to the large proportion of lone parents that say they would like to work. Evidence suggests that the advice and guidance provided by NDLP is highly effective for lone parents with the NDLP programme raising the proportion of lone parents entering work. As with young adults, the experience of EZ has been a positive one for lone parents and is viewed as an improvement on previous support received through Jobcentre Plus. However, in terms of training and skills provision through the NDLP programme, evidence suggests that there are issues with limited training options, a view by both JCP staff and lone parents that these options are not very 'aspirational' and that many courses were too short to up-skill people who had been removed from the labour market for an extended period of time. An important aspect of the experience for lone parents is childcare. The eligibility criteria make many lone parents unable to access the support offered, however, for those who do find support with childcare through programmes such as Care to Learn the experience and impact is overwhelmingly positive.

## Disabled and People living with health conditions

As with young adults, older adults, and lone parents, individuals who have disabilities or work limiting illness report the positive effects of a personalised service and the importance of the advisor/customer relationship- particularly in enabling positive long-term progress and effective referral mechanisms. In terms of in work support provision, whilst a design feature of NDDP, evidence suggests that not all Job Brokers provided adequate in-work support. Lack of knowledge with JCP staff is identified as a concern with Jobcentre Plus staff appearing to have inadequate knowledge of programmes such as Pathways In Work Support (IWS). The quality of service delivered by Pathway IWS compared to NDDP is high and improves the service delivered to disabled people through more in-depth support.

## Long-term Unemployed

The programme provided for the long-term unemployed are ND25+ and the Employment Zone (EZ) programmes. Evaluations have consistently found that EZs have been more effective than ND25+ in terms of both customer satisfaction, and also enabling customers to move into employment. Whilst some of the support offered through New Deal is the same as that offered through EZs, it is the one to one tailored EZ approach that makes the difference. The EZ programmes motivate customer ambition and aspiration by increasing advisor's time, effort and expense in ensuring the best possible job match which increases the likelihood that jobs will be sustained.

## Ex- offenders, Drugs and Alcohol Misuse and Homelessness

For those who have had a history of offending, drug and/or alcohol misuse and homelessness, engaging through Jobcentre Plus, there is evidence that Jobcentre Plus advisors focus on job outcome targets, getting customers into jobs regardless of their interests or circumstances. This lack of personalised support is in contrast to the provision of programmes such as Progress2Work, and Progress2Work Linkup where there is evidence of real positive experiences of tailored support. Housing and homelessness is a significant issue for many individuals within this customer group and is one particular area where there is evidence of a lack of effective working partnerships and referral mechanisms. There needs to be a drive to improve the services for homeless people as this client group is considered low priority by many local councils.

## Delivering a Personalised Service

Academic studies that have reviewed the level of tailored (or personalised) advice within the employment and skills system in the UK have found that it takes place, so far, at a relatively low level in relation to other European countries. Specifically, while individuals are provided with tailored advice, there is less emphasis on user involvement than elsewhere, which appears to have had interesting consequences for the customer experience.

Demand for personalised services amongst customer groups is high and the better able a PA is to match provision to the individual need of the customer, the better the results are in terms of both customer satisfaction and outcomes. Positivity in the customer journey increases the more personalised services become. The nature of the provision from Jobcentre Plus is criticised for not being tailored in comparison to the New Deal programmes and even more so in comparison to Employment Zones. The personalised and flexible nature of the support delivered through the EZ programme has been a real positive aspect to the programme. Evaluation evidence that highlights many Jobcentre Plus PAs feeling that EZs were delivering nothing different from the support that they were able to provide lone parents. While this appears true of the content of the advice and guidance supplied, the context and delivery of such support in EZs appears significantly different.

There are a number of reasons why Jobcentre Plus Advisors are less well viewed than New Deal and EZ Advisors. Jobcentre Plus Advisors are more constrained by having to deliver certain programmes. These are linked to performance and job outcomes targets which constrain the ability to deliver a more personalised service. Advisors have performance targets relating to the number of people moved into paid work, which was observed to be in conflict with helping people that are less job-ready. Various studies reported evidence of “cream skimming” or case loading whereby some individuals are excluded. This is a significant issue because targets appear to create “deadweight” through Advisors’ incentive to help those that perhaps need less support (i.e. the more job-ready). Time pressures are a further issue and one that has been identified by Jobcentre Plus staff with evidence suggesting that many feel they do not have enough time with customers and can only provide the time needed at the expense of other customers.

One of the knock-on effects of these pressures has been that in some areas customers have felt that they are being forced into taking jobs or going onto programmes that they do not want to do. There will be little motivation, ambition and aspiration if customers feel forced into participation or feel that they are being directed towards provision that does not meet their needs. Therefore, the individual capabilities and attitudes of advisors and the techniques they use have an important impact on the effectiveness of interventions. A drive toward a more personalised service with support for PAs will improve the quality of the service for all.

## Skills

The evidence suggests that some customers did not find training as part of New Deal courses useful. The main complaints related to poor quality of the courses, limited progress in terms of learning outcomes and the fact that the work placement options within New Deal had not led to permanent work. Furthermore, individuals perceived eligibility barriers such as having to wait 6 or 18 months to become eligible for support via New Deal. Some advisors working with the Adult Learning Option struggled with the eligibility criteria attached to it and felt that they were too restrictive. Courses were restricted to level 2 for those without a level 2 and for those who had been on benefits for longer than 6 months. In addition a lack of flexible training options was perceived by some with training geared around academic years and the resultant long waits seen as a particular barrier. One example of this is the Adult Learning Option evaluation where limited course start dates were found to result in long waits. In some cases the long waits resulted in customers losing interest in the training. Furthermore, individuals who received Skills Coaching as part of the pilot programme under the New Deal for Skills were more likely to be dissatisfied by the lack of suitable training provision and the long wait for provision. The level of dissatisfaction about training courses increased the more informed the individual became about the training courses that were available to them.

The customer experience of changes in employability as a result of training is very interesting as the central aim of training and learning in the context of benefit receivers is to improve their job market prospects. The evidence suggests that there are no major economic benefits of improved basic skills on employability. If individuals in receipt of benefits doubt that they can improve their employment chances then training is perceived as a waste of time. This is particularly the case for people obliged to engage in repeated basic skills training since they have not been able to find a job after the first course. Basic skills training was generally most favourably perceived by young customers whereas the provision of Skills Accounts under the New Deal for Skills was of interest to older customers. Age is the factor that most clearly differentiated the views of Jobcentre Plus customers toward training.

The individual experience of training also varies depending on whether individuals are engaging from inside or outside the employment support system or their individual preferences and attitudes to learning. For example, individuals who are in receipt of benefits are often obliged to take part in training under the New Deal if they want to maintain full benefits. People in work are generally not obliged to take part in training. This review suggests that the New Deal courses do not support individuals to improve skill levels to secure sustainable employment with the ability to progress.

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