

Local Learning and Skills Councils and Jobcentre Plus: Review of Framework Agreements

Executive Summary—March 2004



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Learning+Skills Council

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Local Learning and Skills Councils and Jobcentre Plus: Review of Framework Agreements – March 2004

Introduction

1 In 2002, Jobcentre Plus and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) developed a Framework Agreement for Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) services to support planning and delivery arrangements between local Learning and Skills Councils (local LSCs), Information Advice and Guidance Partnerships (IAG Partnerships) and Jobcentre Plus.

2 Framework Agreements supported the need to take a more strategic view of IAG services and to work in partnership to achieve more coherent services to customers across the full range of IAG provision.

3 Many local LSCs and Jobcentre Plus Districts, working with their IAG Partnerships, went on to develop more comprehensive local agreements intended to support more 'joined-up' IAG services for customers and to formalise, in some instances, the good practice that already existed.

Aims and Methodology

4 The LSC and Jobcentre Plus have recently carried out a review of how Framework Agreements are working at a local level. The specific aims were to:

- > review the impact of the Framework Agreements on working relationships between the LSC, IAG Partnerships and Jobcentre Plus
- > identify any benefits for customers and staff

- > gather information to help establish some key principles for working together effectively; and
- > identify good practice case studies to contribute to a LSC *Working Together with Jobcentre Plus* publication in spring 2004.

5 A questionnaire produced jointly by the LSC and Jobcentre Plus was sent to the 47 local LSCs and 71 Jobcentre Plus Districts in England.

6 Replies were received from: 23 Jobcentre Plus Districts (32 per cent response), 20 LSC and IAG Partnerships (43 per cent response), plus one written on behalf of all three partners. Of the 44 responses, 36 had local Framework Agreements in place.

Summary of Key Messages from the Survey

Communications

7 Encouragingly, the overwhelming majority of the LSC and IAG Partnerships and Jobcentre Plus Districts that responded felt that there had been a positive impact on communications between the IAG Partnership and Jobcentre Plus.

8 Most Jobcentre Plus Districts and LSC and IAG Partnerships felt that effective two-way communication has been achieved at all levels of service, including at management and local office level. Jobcentre Plus felt there had been slightly less impact on staff dealing directly with customers.

9 In communications between the LSC and Jobcentre Plus, most satisfaction is felt with the communication achieved at management level than at other levels of service.

Joint planning

10 There was a rather mixed response to how positive the impact of the Framework had been on joint planning between the LSC and Jobcentre Plus. This might be because currently, for some, joint planning takes place at the level of the IAG Partnership rather than between the LSC and Jobcentre Plus.

11 Some local LSCs and IAG Partnerships are working with more than one Jobcentre Plus District and there are one or two examples reported where Jobcentre Plus Districts are demonstrating different levels of interest and engagement. This could lead to uneven service provision for customers depending on where they live.

Impact on staff and customers

12 Two-thirds of LSC and IAG Partnerships, but slightly less than half of the Jobcentre Plus respondents felt that the Framework Agreements had made a positive difference to IAG Partnership staff working directly with customers.

13 Over half of LSC and IAG Partnerships and two-thirds of Jobcentre Plus Districts felt that having a joint Framework Agreement had had a positive impact on the overall quality of IAG service delivery. This did not mean that for some good relationships and joint working did not exist, but that the Framework Agreement had not been the only 'driver' for improvement.

14 For LSC and IAG Partnerships, the greatest difference in the quality of service to the customer has been in improved staff

awareness and competence, while Jobcentre Plus has noticed the greatest improvement in making IAG services more visible to its customers.

15 Less confidence was expressed about improvements to identifying and addressing gaps in learning provision.

Impact on entry into learning and/or work

16 IAG Partnerships and Jobcentre Plus are required to follow up clients but this does not extend to tracking the outcome of referrals between Jobcentre Plus and IAG Partnership services. It was too early to say, for most areas, whether referrals between services were making a difference to outcomes into learning and/or work.

17 One Jobcentre Plus District identified that 25 per cent of 'job entries' are as a result of an IAG Partnership intervention. One LSC suggested a need to develop shared targets and objectives so that there is a good basis for further joint working.

IAG Partnerships as 'intermediary' organisations

18 Ten Jobcentre Plus Districts in the survey have formalised the referral process by recognising their IAG Partnership as an 'intermediary'. IAG Partnership providers are recognised as non-contracted partners who assist Jobcentre Plus customers with services that enhance their chances of obtaining employment.

Referral

19 Under half (42 per cent) of respondents felt that the Framework Agreement had led to a greater number of referrals to IAG Partnership services and 25 per cent felt they had not. A third of responses were missing here, suggesting that some LSC and IAG Partnerships (and to a lesser extent

Jobcentre Plus Districts) do not know what is happening in relation to referrals *from* Jobcentre Plus *to* IAG Partnerships. Similarly, almost half of the responses were missing when we asked about any increase in referrals *to* Jobcentre Plus *from* IAG Partnership services. At present, IAG Partnerships are not required to count referrals to Jobcentre Plus offices, which would help to explain the missing and unknown data.

20 Seven of the ten Jobcentre Plus Districts reporting an increase in referrals to IAG Partnerships were in areas where the IAG Partnership had become an intermediary organisation.

In a recent survey of 2,181 previous users of information and advice services, 15 per cent (338) originally heard of the service through Jobcentre Plus. Of these, 14 per cent had no formal qualifications and 16 per cent had yet to achieve a Level 2 qualification, 9 per cent were employed, 6 per cent were already engaged in learning and 30 per cent were unemployed. (Impact of Adult Information, Advice and Guidance Services, Milburn Trinnaman, La Court, 2003).

Meeting targets

21 Just over a third of respondents reported that the implementation of the Framework Agreement had contributed to meeting specific targets. Six of the eight Jobcentre Plus Districts that stated that the Framework had contributed to meeting specific targets.

Management information and data protection

22 Only six LSC and IAG Partnerships felt that there had been some positive impact on the sharing of management information (MI). Eleven Jobcentre Plus Districts felt there had been a more positive impact.

23 Examples of MI being shared included:

- > MI produced by the IAG Partnership (performance, targets, referrals, information and advice outputs)
- > broad labour market information
- > number of referrals as part of client tracking
- > information on inward investment and recruitment
- > information on redundancies
- > changes to benefit regulations
- > information on job entries from Jobcentre Plus; and
- > IAG membership details.

24 Nine respondents reported that there had been issues arising from the management of data protection, in particular, the sharing of information on individual client details.

25 Some areas reported that once the IAG Partnership became recognised as an intermediary organisation, this had helped Jobcentre Plus to be able to share information with IAG Partnerships more easily.

26 Different areas have considered similar data protection issues and seem to have come to different conclusions about what their obligations are under the *Data Protection Act*.

Strategic planning and actions for delivery

27 The Framework Agreement is seen as both a strategic and planning document and also as a pragmatic tool to identify joint working and actions between IAG Partnership coordinators, IAG providers and Jobcentre Plus local office staff.

Benefits of Working Together through the Framework Agreement

General staff awareness and communications

28 The following benefits were mentioned as being realised through the Framework Agreement in relation to communications:

- > active promotion of IAG in meetings and through literature exchange
- > a six-monthly IAG Partnership outreach newsletter specifically for Jobcentre Plus staff
- > provision of IAG resources, training and information sharing and networking
- > IAG outreach advisers attending Jobcentre Plus communication meetings; and
- > a new IAG directory to be launched in all local Jobcentre Plus offices in the district.

Delivery of information advice and guidance services

29 The following benefits were mentioned as being realised through the Framework Agreement in relation to the delivery of IAG services:

- > IAG presence in main Jobcentre Plus offices
- > greater acceptance of IAG and outreach workers in Jobcentre Plus offices
- > good links with the Jobsbus in areas without a Jobcentre Plus office
- > Jobcentre Plus staff having portable IAG Partnership IT equipment to use with customers; and
- > joint working on local area redundancies.

Quality of service

30 The following benefits were mentioned as being realised through the Framework Agreement in relation to the quality of IAG services:

- > joint training and development of IAG and Jobcentre Plus staff
- > better joint understanding of IAG Partnership and Jobcentre Plus provision
- > Jobcentre Plus contracted providers attending IAG Network training; and
- > Jobcentre Plus contracted providers joining the IAG Partnership and working towards accreditation in the **matrix** Standard for information, advice and guidance (the **matrix** Standard).

Intermediary and referral arrangements

31 The following benefits were mentioned as being realised through the Framework Agreement in relation to intermediary and referral arrangements:

- > intermediaries ensuring effective referrals and feedback mechanisms
- > better knowledge of Jobcentre Plus services and referral processes; and
- > benchmarking of referrals to use as a basis for measuring improvement.

Contribution to meeting targets

32 The following benefits were mentioned as being realised through the Framework Agreement in relation to meeting targets:

- > contribution to IAG Partnership targets for information and advice sessions by Jobcentre Plus

- > contribution to job entry targets for Jobcentre Plus where IAG Partnerships are formally recognised as intermediaries; and
- > IAG partners raising awareness of Jobcentre Plus services among the hard-to-reach groups in the local communities.

Recommendations

Improved quality of service for the customer

33 Local LSCs, IAG Partnerships and Jobcentre Plus should do more work on defining, sharing and using local labour market supply and demand intelligence to ensure gaps are effectively identified and addressed at local level.

Joint planning between local LSCs and Jobcentre Plus

34 Local LSCs will wish to take a more active approach to joint planning to meet the need for more coherent and consistent IAG services to customers across the whole range of IAG provision. Arrangements for LSC-convened strategic boards for IAG, to include Jobcentre Plus representation, should draw on the outcomes of LSC Strategic Area Reviews that relate to IAG for adults and support closer working between local LSCs and Jobcentre Plus in the future.

Ensuring consistent levels of service delivery

35 Direction should be given at a national level on how Jobcentre Plus should be engaging with their LSC and IAG Partnership to avoid uneven levels of service provision to customers.

Referrals and IAG Partnerships as intermediary organisation

36 There should be further investigation of the effectiveness of current arrangements for referral between IAG Partnership and Jobcentre Plus services, including looking at any barriers to putting referral and/or intermediary arrangements in place and how these might be overcome.

37 There should be an examination of the potential benefits and implications of IAG Partnerships becoming formally recognised as intermediaries, including any additional resource implications for IAG providers in carrying out the follow-up of clients to meet Jobcentre Plus requirements.

38 A better understanding is needed of the extent to which IAG providers are supporting clients to use the range of Jobcentre Plus services and vice versa. Currently, the monitoring of referrals is only required by Jobcentre Plus when the IAG Partnership is recognised as an intermediary organisation.

39 Tracking of learning and work *outcomes* arising from referrals between Jobcentre Plus to IAG Partnership services should take place in order to gain a true measure of impact from a customer and cost/benefit perspective. This would also show the impact of referrals on Jobcentre Plus job entry targets.

Managing data protection

40 More detailed consideration should be given to Jobcentre Plus Districts and LSC areas that have worked successfully together on the management of data protection.

41 A clear national direction is needed about the type and level of information that it is possible to share between IAG Partnerships, local LSCs and Jobcentre Plus.

Distinguishing between strategic planning and delivery or action plans

42 There needs to be a clearer distinction between the different levels of strategic planning and delivery relationships of the local LSCs, IAG Partnerships and Jobcentre Plus.

43 The LSC and Jobcentre Plus already agree a broad Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to cover all areas of joint interest. One suggestion is to include more detail on IAG as an annex to the general MOU (covering all IAG provision), with a more detailed local delivery or action plan for joint work being produced.

44 There should be arrangements for strategic boards for IAG convened and chaired by the LSC and to include senior Jobcentre Plus representation. This could facilitate local joint planning and present the opportunity for a strategic Framework Agreement and separate action or delivery plan to be produced on behalf of the strategic board.

Working Together

45 The outcomes of this report, together with some more detailed case study work, will contribute to the production of a *Working Together* document that identifies principles and best practice. This is due for publication in spring 2004.

46 A copy of the full report is available on the LSC website on lsc.gov.uk or by e-mailing rob.barnes@jobcentreplus.gov.uk.

Notes

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