

# London Employment Provision

Qualitative experiences of  
employment support

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**January 2015**

# Contents

- Executive Summary ..... 3**
- 1 Introduction ..... 7**
- 2 Context ..... 13**
- 3 Employment support in London ..... 21**
- 4 Case studies..... 31**
- 5 Future of Support ..... 39**

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This research was commissioned by London Councils. London Councils represents the 32 London boroughs and the City of London.

The overarching aim of this research was to explore individuals' experiences of employment support in London and to more fully understand their labour market barriers, in order to identify how future support can better meet their needs. The two key objectives to this research were to:

- Understand the needs of workless Londoners and the mechanisms by which these needs can/should be met;
- Identify the most appropriate level, i.e. national or local, at which these needs can/should be met in terms of design and delivery of employment support.

A particular focus for this research was 'the needs of people with complex dependencies'. In the context of this project we have taken this to mean individuals with multiple barriers to work.

To meet these objectives the research comprised a two-stage methodology. The first stage involved secondary analysis of existing evidence on local and national employment programmes. The second stage involved primary research with workless (or formerly workless) Londoners to understand their barriers to work and their experiences of different forms of employment support.

As this was a small-scale qualitative study the experiences summarised in this report may not be representative of the wider population experiencing employment support. Nevertheless the report offers an in-depth insight into the experiences of a small group of people with a range of personal circumstances and situations.

## Key findings

A review of the evidence base indicates that employment support which is flexible, personalised and integrated with other support, is best suited to serve the needs of people with multiple barriers to employment.

From the perspective of research participants with multiple barriers a key feature of quality employment support is an adviser who is friendly and approachable, who speaks positively about their chances of finding employment and who understands

their personal circumstances. These are the characteristics which research participants associate with dignity and fairness and are also the fundamentals of good customer service.

These characteristics can be found in advisers across different forms of employment support, including mainstream support. However in the experience of research participants in this study, it is more commonly associated with smaller, local programmes which are voluntary and have lower customer caseloads.

In terms of personalisation of support, this research has been able to identify a number of examples of good practice in providing personalised employment support for people with multiple barriers to work. Research participants experienced a form of 'job brokerage' support which saw advisers matching jobseekers to find vacancies, helping them to complete application forms, to gain work experience and to succeed at interviews. This kind of support tended to have been delivered by local programmes, to a greater extent than in mandatory, mainstream programmes.

There is not a great deal of evaluation evidence which compares the effectiveness of local and national employment provision, and finding ways of evaluating certain measures in isolation is challenging.

There is some evidence to suggest that locally delivered services are well placed to provide personalised support; drawing upon local knowledge and partnerships, and the ability to cater to specific local labour market contexts. Delivering employment services through familiar community settings can also be an effective way of engaging people in overcoming personal and external barriers and to work. In London there is clear intent to build the capacity to commission and deliver quality employment support, as expressed in the London Growth Deal.

Local provision can be effective; there is also the possibility that national programmes delivered locally can harness the same local advantages. However, some examples suggest that national programmes can be less flexible when delivered at the local level, and so ensuring genuine flexibility for local service delivery is a key factor in meeting the needs of good provision.

## **Conclusions**

### **Dignity and respect**

One thing that was common across participants in this research was their desire to be treated with respect and as an individual rather than just another client. Examples are found across all forms of employment support but should be found

across all advisers and experienced as a matter of course. Treating individuals with dignity and fairness represents basic, good customer service. The size of caseloads and whether support is delivered in a mandatory or voluntary environment will affect the relationship that an adviser builds with the customer.

### **Personalised support**

It is clear that workless people in London are not a homogenous group. As a result, effective employment support must be sufficiently flexible to address individuals' personal circumstances, skills, experience, aspirations and needs. In theory mainstream services are providing flexible, personalised employment support. However the views of jobseekers in this research suggest that Jobcentre Plus and the Work Programme may not currently be offering this type of tailored support.

The research identified examples of good practice in 'job brokerage' support which saw advisers proactively matching jobseekers to vacancies, and advocating with employers on behalf of their clients. Effective job brokerage often involves employer engagement staff working alongside employment advisers to 'sell' individuals to potential employers and to shortlist suitable candidates for vacancies.

Employment support must also empower individuals with the skills to help themselves. Approaches that focus on building up networks and social capital are likely to be most effective.

### **Integrated support**

Evidence suggests that interagency collaboration and partnership work supports the delivery of personalised employment support. To deliver integrated support through nationally-commissioned programmes, the evidence suggests a need to resolve issues of inflexibility in devolution and to allow greater scope for local influence in specifications and tender evaluation. Similarly locally-commissioned employment support must address issues relating to the complexity created by multiple partners, fragmentation of support and conflicting local agendas. Strong local leadership and working across localities to create a more streamlined, coherent offer will be important.

In a recent report on the commissioning of support for people with disabilities the idea of joint commissioning at 'the most appropriate level' is proposed. Within a national framework, central and local government and partners could work together to agree the most appropriate ways to commission support within geographical areas. To deliver truly integrated services for the benefit of service users and employers, local authority involvement is key.

## Recommendations

These conclusions lead to a set of recommendations, some of which can, and should, be immediately addressed but others will require longer-term changes:

| What   | How   |
|--|---|
| <b>Treating individuals with dignity and respect</b> | A minimum level of customer service should be an expectation of all employment support; to be developed with customer input and monitored through customer feedback.  |
|  | Commissioners should consider the trade-offs between adviser caseloads, personalised support and cost-effective provision.  |
|  | Learning from the Work Programme around 'procedural personalisation' <sup>1</sup> should be disseminated and built into other mandatory programmes.   |
| <b>Delivering personalised support</b>               | To meet the needs of those with multiple barriers to work, employment support must be flexible and personalised, in reflection of the diversity and complexity of individual circumstances. This should include one-to-one support with specific job applications and interviews, and the chance to undertake placements in jobs and sectors of interest. |
|  | Review the factors which are working against the delivery of personalised support in mainstream employment services and which should be addressed in future commissioning rounds.   |
|  | Greater job brokerage for those who need it most, including sourcing bespoke vacancies and supported applications, delivered by employer engagement staff, working closely with advisers.   |
| <b>Delivering integrated support</b>                 | Employment support should look to build the social capital and networks of individuals with complex needs, using approaches such as mentoring.  |
|  | Integrated support, which addresses multiple issues, is essential to provide personalised support for those with the most complex needs. Local authority involvement in this is essential.  |
|  | Central and local government, and their partners, work together to agree the most appropriate ways to commission integrated support within geographical areas.  |

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<sup>1</sup> Identified by the Work Programme Evaluation see Newton, B et al (2013) and meaning that there is an emphasis on building up personal and respectful relationships between advisers and individuals, and making use of tools such as assessment and action planning.

# 1 Introduction

## About London Councils

- 1.1** This research was commissioned by London Councils. London Councils represents the 32 London boroughs and the City of London. It is a cross-party organisation that works on behalf of all of its member authorities regardless of political persuasion.
- 1.2** London Councils makes the case to government, the Mayor and others to get the best deal for Londoners and to ensure that member authorities have the resources, freedoms and powers to do the best possible job for their residents and local businesses. London Councils acts as a catalyst for effective sharing among boroughs – be that ideas, good practice, people, resources, or policies and new approaches.

## About Inclusion

- 1.3** This research was conducted by the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (*Inclusion*). *Inclusion* exists to promote opportunity for all in work and skills, focusing especially on disadvantaged people and communities.
- 1.4** *Inclusion* delivers independent research and develops new employment and skills policy. As experts in social and economic research, we work consistently to challenge and support policy and decision makers. *Inclusion* provides a one-stop shop for UK labour market statistics and analysis and is the market leader in welfare, employment and skills events.

## About this research

- 1.5** Workless people face a range of barriers to entering employment. The nature and extent of these barriers vary by individual or group. The key to successful employment support is recognising the diversity of unemployed individuals and providing support that is flexible enough to address a range of often complex needs.
- 1.6** In 2013 London Councils identified that in London £8 out of every £10 spent on unemployment provision went to projects which were carried out in

accordance with national guidelines<sup>2</sup>, such as the Work Programme, DWP European Social Fund Families Programme and Youth Contract. However there has been on-going discussion as to whether programmes designed at the national level can offer the flexibility to meet the diverse needs of individuals and local communities.<sup>3</sup>

**1.7** The London Councils report considers that the key to improved performance lies in local support delivered by alliances of boroughs, local third sector organisations, employers and job centres. Local authorities are perceived to be in a strong position to identify the best solutions for helping people into work, as they have already established relations with local developers and employers, and their knowledge of the local community enables them to identify gaps in skills supply and demand. Many also commission their own successful programmes of support, for example Newham 'Workplace' has helped get more than 20,000 people into work since it began, with over 5,000 people helped into jobs in 2011/12 and 2012/13.<sup>4</sup> Helping Londoners into sustained employment is one of the three key priorities of the London Growth Deal.<sup>5</sup>

**1.8** There has already been analysis comparing the performance of national and local employment programmes for groups with complex needs (although direct comparisons can be difficult). This project aimed to look at personal user experiences of such programmes in London from a qualitative perspective. Qualitative research provides a richer analysis of how employment support is experienced in terms of whether support:

- Was personalised to an individual's circumstances;
- Treated people with dignity and fairness
- Moved people closer to or into employment.

**1.9** The overarching aim of this research project was to explore individuals' experiences of employment support to date and to better understand their labour market barriers, in order to identify how future support can better meet their needs. The two key objectives to this research were to:

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<sup>2</sup> London Councils (2013) *Getting London Working: A ten point plan to improve employment support*

<sup>3</sup> London Councils (2013) *London's Skills Challenge: Meeting London's Skills Gap*

<sup>4</sup> London Borough of Newham (nd)

<http://www.newham.gov.uk/Documents/Council%20and%20Democracy/MakingResilienceHappenupdateondelivery.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Cabinet Office and DPMO (2014) *London: Growth Deal 2014*



- Understand the needs of workless Londoners and the mechanisms by which these needs can/should be met;
- Identify the most appropriate level, i.e. national or local, at which these needs can/should be met in terms of design and delivery of employment support.

**1.10** A particular focus for this research was ‘the needs of people with complex dependencies’<sup>6</sup>. In the context of this project we have taken this to mean individuals with multiple barriers to work.

## Methodology

**1.11** To meet these aims and objectives the research comprised a two-stage methodology. The first stage involved secondary analysis of existing evidence on local and national employment programmes. The second stage involved primary research with workless (or formerly workless) Londoners to understand their barriers to work and their experiences of different forms of employment support.

### Stage one - desk research

**1.12** The first stage of this research involved a desk review of the existing evidence base on the design and delivery of employment programmes at national and local level. The evidence review sought to synthesise learning from previous employment programmes to draw out the extent to which programmes successfully met participants’ needs, not only in terms of their outcomes but in terms of their experiences and personal journey.

**1.13** A second element of the desk research aimed to identify 8-10 ‘target groups’ of people who may be disadvantaged in the labour market, from which we would recruit case study interviews. To ensure that the interviews captured a range of experiences of both (a) worklessness and (b) employment support, it was important to recruit participants with a variety of personal circumstances and characteristics. The purpose of this exercise was not to try to find a ‘representative case’ of experiences for any particular target group, rather the intention was to maximise the level of diversity possible within a small-scale qualitative research project such as this one.

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<sup>6</sup> London Councils (2014) *Invitation to Quote for Research and Consultancy Services - London Employment Support: Qualitative Research*

**1.14** To identify the target groups below we took three approaches to: (1) analyse statistics on characteristics of worklessness in London; (2) derive an overview of employment provision in London by group targeted; (3) consider any other groups which may be of interest but which would be 'hidden' in statistics and/or not supported by existing provision.

**1.15** The resulting target groups for stage two recruitment were:

- Individuals with mental health conditions
- Individuals with physical health conditions
- Young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) aged 16-24
- Older people aged 50+
- Pakistani and Bangladeshi women
- Carers
- Lone parents
- Very long-term unemployed individuals
- Individuals supported by the Troubled Families programme<sup>7</sup>
- Vulnerable individuals (i.e. ex-offender, homeless, substance misuse)

## **Stage two - case study interviews**

**1.16** *Inclusion* recruited 16 research participants for the case study interviews, across the 10 target groups. The target groups were not mutually exclusive and interviewees fell into more than one of these groups. As such, these individuals had multiple barriers to work which is the proxy of 'people with complex dependencies' that has been adopted for this project.

**1.17** Research participants were recruited via organisations offering employment support across a range of London boroughs.<sup>8</sup> Interviews typically lasted one hour and were conducted face-to-face. Interviews covered the challenges that participants had experienced in seeking work, their experiences of employment

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<sup>7</sup> The Troubled Families programme is a UK Government scheme with the aim of helping troubled families to turn their lives around.

<sup>8</sup> We were unable to recruit participants directly through Jobcentre Plus or Work Programme providers due to DWP restrictions.

support in London and the type of support they felt would be required to enable them to find work.

**1.18** Following interviews participants were asked if they would be willing to repeat a similar interview on film and for their permission to re-contact. They were also asked for their consent for their stories to be written up as pen portraits (see chapter four). Five research participants took part in filmed interviews and eight interviews were written up as pen portraits. These were selected on the basis of their consent, availability (for filming) and on the basis of the interview data being sufficiently detailed as to be informative.

## Scope of the report

**1.19** For a number of reasons the experiences summarised in this report, and recorded in pen portraits and films, may not be representative of the wider population experiencing employment support.

**1.20** Firstly, participants were recruited primarily through local employment support providers. Given the subject of the research, it may have been in the interests of such providers to select research participants who had positive experiences to report. Secondly, in some instances individuals will enter local support after they have been through mainstream provision (without deriving a job outcome). Therefore these individuals may be more likely to have negative experiences of mainstream support than others. Finally, it is important to consider that many local programmes are voluntary and mainstream programmes are often mandatory, which may affect participants' perceptions and experiences.

**1.21** Nevertheless the report offers an in-depth insight into the experiences of a small group of people with a range of personal circumstances and situations. The fact that many common themes emerge across such a diverse group suggests that these findings have wider relevance to the debate about how employment support should be delivered and commissioned for people with complex needs.

## Content

**1.22** The following chapter, Chapter 2, sets out the key findings from the desk research exploring how people's barriers to work can be complex, what therefore employment support should comprise, and the extent to which national and local programmes can offer that type of support.

**1.23** Chapter 3 summarises findings from the qualitative research in relation to the types of support they experienced and the extent to which employment support met participants' needs in terms of: providing personalised support, treating them in a fair and dignified manner, moving them closer or into employment.

**1.24** Chapter 4 goes on to consider the future of employment provision in relation to best practice in supporting individuals with complex dependencies. Some conclusions around how this support may be best commissioned and delivered, are also drawn from research findings.

## 2 Context

### Introduction

**2.1** This chapter outlines the context for the research in terms of the existing evidence on employment support for those with complex and multiple barriers. The chapter sets out what is meant by complex dependencies (for the purposes of this report) and the key principles underlying effective support. It goes on to analyse the available evidence to ask whether national or local programmes can best offer support for this group.

### Complex dependencies

**2.2** Individuals with complex dependencies are not a homogenous group. Factors which can prevent someone from entering sustained employment or lead to employer discrimination are varied and multiple. Barriers to employment can be personal and external and are often a complex interplay of both. For instance: an applicant's age, ethnic identity, gender identity, mental or physical impairment, childcare needs, housing/ benefits status, local employment context, history of offending, previous employment experience, level of qualifications, and language can all result in instances of discrimination and exclusion from the labour market.

**2.3** Many jobseekers also experience a range of external factors which impact on their ability to find work. These include unsupportive working environments and difficulties which arise from moving off benefits and into insecure or precarious employment contracts. External factors also manifest themselves differently across different geographies. For example in rural areas access to appropriate public transport can be particularly problematic, in others local labour markets demand may not match the skills of the local workforce. In London 15 per cent of all business establishments reported a skills gap in 2011.<sup>9</sup> London also has high childcare costs which affect incentives to work for parents. The cost of all types of early years provision in the capital is 28 per cent more expensive than in any other region<sup>10</sup>.

**2.4** For the purpose of this report, people with complex dependencies are therefore considered to be those with multiple barriers to work.

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<sup>9</sup> UKCES (2014) Employer Skills Survey

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/News/london>

## What works for people with multiple barriers?

**2.5** Research and evaluation is able to identify 'good practice' examples of what works in tackling worklessness but it is widely understood that there is no single model of effective intervention. Three key points regarding employment and skills interventions should be considered:

- **Workless people are heterogeneous.** People who are out of work vary significantly in terms of their personal characteristics and barriers to employment, the interplay of those barriers and their attitudes and motivations. Considering the diverse and multiple characteristics that can affect an individual's labour market prospects, is essential to understanding what interventions might work. This is particularly pertinent when thinking about those with challenging barriers to the labour market.
- **Programme and intervention impacts are hard to isolate.** Whilst the literature tends to categorise different types of active labour market policy, much provision forms 'packages' of different interventions together. These can work in combination rather than as discrete elements of support, so isolating the impact of any single measure is challenging.<sup>11</sup> Differing economic circumstances at the micro and macro level, displacement and deadweight all contribute to the challenge of evaluation. 'What works' may be about getting the mix right, rather than one key intervention.
- **The evidence base is diverse.** The overall evidence on the effectiveness of many interventions is mixed at best. This makes it hard to say conclusively 'what works' for whom. However concluding that, in general, impacts of programmes are mixed is not the same as concluding that specifically all programmes will deliver mixed results.<sup>12</sup> The fact that most types of employment and skills intervention have been found to work in some instances but not in others highlights the importance of exploring how interventions are implemented, who they are aimed at, and the labour market contexts in which they operate effectively.

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11 Green, A and Hasluck, C. (2009). *Action to Reduce Worklessness: What Works?* Local Economy 24:28

12 Wilson, T. 2013 (2013) *Youth Unemployment: Review of Training for Young People with Low Qualifications*. Department for Business, Innovation & Skills.

## Key features of effective interventions

- 2.6** Policy literature on employment programmes often implies that employment is the final goal for someone with multiple barriers to work, rather than viewing **employment as a stage in the individual's journey**. This is particularly important for people with complex needs who are further from the labour market. Although employment should not be the sole focus of support for people with complex and multiple barriers to work, it has been found that a key determinant of the success of any work-related intervention is a strong focus on employment.<sup>13</sup>
- 2.7** Alongside this, the literature emphasises that an **integrated approach** is necessary to ensure that multiple barriers can be dealt with in a co-ordinated and effective way. Evidence suggests that interventions which address housing, health, childcare and substance misuse issues as well as employment needs are 'more effective than those which address work in isolation'.<sup>14</sup> The involvement of local government, responsible for delivering many of these services, may be useful in this respect.
- 2.8** Programmes **tailored to individual need** are at the heart of effective employment provision. The employment adviser is central to the personalisation agenda. Evaluations of national programmes, from the New Deal to the Work Programme show how important the adviser is to the experience of the customer; with qualitative research highlighting the importance of the 'human touch' aspect of the adviser role.<sup>15</sup> These evaluations note that the effectiveness of the adviser role can be compromised when 'workloads and targets of advisers impact on the amount of time they can devote to each individual'.<sup>16</sup>
- 2.9** Intensive personal support has been found to be most useful to the most disadvantaged, closely linked to integrated support where multiple issues are addressed. The Working Neighbourhoods Pilot found accessible and seamless support was necessary to enable individuals to overcome barriers.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>14</sup> Meadows P. (2008) *Local initiatives to help people find and keep paid work*. JRF Policy briefing.

<sup>15</sup> Knight et al. (2005) *Incapacity Benefit reforms – the Personal Adviser role and practices: Stage Two*. HMSO: London

<sup>16</sup> Green, A and Hasluck, C. (2009) *Ibid*

<sup>17</sup> Dewson, S et al (2007) *Evaluation of the Working Neighbourhoods Pilot Final Evaluation*, DWP Research Report 441

**2.10** In community locations **outreach work is important**, particularly to facilitate initial engagement for workless individuals furthest from the labour market.<sup>18</sup> Whilst employment focused services have been evidenced to be successful, in the first instance outreach does not have to be employment focused, but should begin to move the individual closer to a point where the prospect of employment can be introduced. Working with and through trusted and credible organisations based in the community is one of the more effective ways of promoting employment and enterprise within deprived areas.<sup>19</sup>

## **Commissioning personalised employment support**

**2.11** The DWP has continued a strong 'centralised' approach to localism. Local flexibility given to Jobcentres is constrained by national targets and intended only to complement mainstream activity. Joint working is largely restricted to provision for people ineligible for or poorly served by existing programmes. Greater flexibility has been extended only through centrally-commissioned payment-by-results programmes delivered by prime providers. Ministers appear sceptical about the capacity of local partnerships to design and commission employment services and the DWP is particularly concerned that national 'work first' priorities should not be undermined by divergent local priorities and/or capabilities.

**2.12** The case for greater devolution has increased, however, given the scale and complexity of tackling worklessness, the challenges of implementing Universal Credit (UC), and the critical contribution of integrated employment and skills provision in enabling city-regions to drive economic growth and local residents to access better quality employment.<sup>20</sup>

**2.13** This section considers examples of local and national employment provision, to identify the main considerations which must be made when commissioning personalised support. It establishes some key tensions and differences between delivery at the local and national level, and draws on recent literature to suggest ways in which employment provision should be commissioned and delivered.

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<sup>18</sup> Green, A and Hasluck, C. (2009) *Ibid*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>20</sup> Finn, D (forthcoming) Welfare to Work Devolution, Centre for Economic & Social Inclusion



## Local partnerships

- 2.14** A review for the London Development Agency found that interagency, collaboration and partnership work is a crucial in creating a personalised approach to employment support. This involves meeting needs holistically by a range of appropriate organisations, rather than relying on one to deliver sole support to an individual. The most successful interventions know their clients, know their local employers, and have good relationships with other relevant agencies who can meet the needs they are unable to address directly. Most positive outcomes flow from following these principles.<sup>21</sup>
- 2.15** There is evidence to suggest that 'multi-agency partnership working appears to be more effective where it is based on established relationships, which are more likely to be found at a local level'.<sup>22</sup> In addition, voluntary and community groups are well placed to make use of informal networks.<sup>23</sup>
- 2.16** There is also evidence to suggest that a drive towards localisation moves delivery decisions closer to the individual, thereby enabling greater personalisation. Evaluation studies consistently show that a sense of ownership and influence by the local community is associated with more successful projects. Using familiar community-based services can ensure that individuals feel more comfortable and potentially improve their sense of aspiration and motivation.<sup>24</sup>
- 2.17** One of the key conditions for successful localisation is that issues of conflicting accountability are resolved and that management structures for joint working are clear. Local authorities are not homogeneous and local solutions can face challenges from community frictions and conflict between constituencies, agencies, and groups.<sup>25</sup>
- 2.18** It is not uncommon for there to be multiple partnerships operating within an area, and this can pose resource difficulties for employers, for members of the community and for smaller organisations. One study found that the South East and Yorkshire and Humber regions each had over 300 partnerships working in their areas.<sup>26</sup> A recent study commissioned by the Local Government Association found that local authorities' leadership position within their towns,

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<sup>21</sup> Meadows P. (2006) *What works with tackling worklessness?*, London Development Agency

<sup>22</sup> Meadows P. (2008) *Ibid*

<sup>23</sup> Green, A and Hasluck, C. (2009). *Ibid*

<sup>24</sup> Meadows P. (2008) *Ibid*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>26</sup> McDonald, K. (2003) *Sustaining Networks*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation

cities and regions, combined with their localised knowledge, enabled them to forge partnerships, map provision, identify local needs and gaps and to build referral networks.<sup>27</sup>

## National support delivered locally

**2.19** The evidence presented above suggests that there are advantages associated with a local approach, including knowledge of local employers and partner agencies, access to existing networks of support and increased community ownership and participation. A national programme delivered locally could theoretically benefit from partnership working in the same way.

**2.20** However, personalisation can only be successful where there is sufficient flexibility for organisations to adapt and adjust in accordance with need. There is some evidence to suggest that national programmes constrain the development of truly flexible local solutions.<sup>28</sup> One example of this relates to the City Strategy Pathfinders; a national employment programme delivered in selected locations across the UK. In this instance, during the programme's inception 'flexibilities and freedoms' were promoted and encouraged but, one year into the programme, pathfinders reported that the DWP had not provided the flexibility needed to enable the localisation of employment programmes.

**2.21** Similarly there is also some evidence to suggest that the national employment programme, the Work Programme, can be inflexible, with funds limited to a payment-by-results criteria and relatively high caseloads (see paragraph 2.8). This can have the effect of limiting personalisation to a set menu of options for the individual, particularly for those with multiple barriers to work.<sup>29</sup>

## Local labour markets

**2.22** Spatial concentrations of worklessness pose particular challenges for employment programmes. The types of job, competition for jobs and kinds of people without work vary between areas meaning that a local understanding of the context in which a programme is operating is essential. Competition for

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<sup>27</sup> Rolfe, H et al (2015) *Local authority schemes supporting people towards work*, Local Government Association

<sup>28</sup> Crighton, M et al (2009) *Tensions in localising welfare to work to Britain's cities*

<sup>29</sup> Riley T (2014) *Fit for Purpose? Fixing the Work Programme Funding Model for ESA claimants*, Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion

jobs is often higher in cities, particularly London. Consequently, some have argued that solutions must be local in order to be as successful as possible.<sup>30</sup>

- 2.23** There have been some attempts to develop local programmes that target those areas with particularly weak labour markets. For example the 'Action Teams for Jobs' initiative ran from 2000 to 2006, initially in three areas but expanding to cover 65 areas by its close. The evaluation suggested that outreach, flexibility and partnership working were key strengths, and that Action Teams were on the whole engaging more disadvantaged residents and proving successful in supporting them into work.<sup>31</sup>
- 2.24** However current government policy, and in particular the Work Programme, has been designed in such a way that investment in disadvantaged areas is actually lower than for more prosperous areas. This is a consequence of the fact that the national 'payment by results' model for the Work Programme does not vary according to local labour markets. Organisations are paid predominantly for the job outcomes that they achieve, and analysis of Work Programme performance by *Inclusion* has demonstrated that Work Programme job outcomes are lower in areas where local unemployment rates are higher. Therefore providers receive less funding for participants that live in weaker labour markets, and more for those that live in more prosperous areas. This gearing of funding is arguably exactly opposite to how employment programmes should be designed.
- 2.25** The diverse nature of local labour markets may also present a counter argument against the devolution of employment programmes. Regionally, since the present government took office, employment growth has been more concentrated in London, the East of England and, to a lesser extent, the South East. Regions which have not increased their employment rates in recent years include: the North West and the Midlands. Differences between local authorities within regions are often larger than those between regions.<sup>32</sup> These regional and local differences are important to consider in relation to commissioning at national or local level, as some regions and local authorities may perform better than others. This is the case now with nationally-commissioned support but with national programmes there is the scope to vary funding by area – should that be desirable. With greater local commissioning there would need to be consideration and negotiation around devolution of funding in line with

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<sup>30</sup> Meadows P (2008) Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Casebourne, J., Davis, S. and Page, R. (2006) Review of Action Teams for Jobs, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report No 328

<sup>32</sup> Wilson, T and Bivand, P (2014) Equitable full employment: delivering a jobs recovery for all

regional and local differences which could potentially become very complex and contentious. In addition, the extent to which commissioners are comfortable with regional and local disparities in provision and support quality is a policy question which has not yet been adequately addressed.

## Conclusions

**2.26** This brief review of the available evidence indicates that employment support which is flexible, holistic, employment-focused and personalised is best suited to serve the needs of people with multiple barriers to employment. There is some evidence to suggest that locally delivered services are well placed to provide this kind of support; drawing upon local knowledge and partnerships, and the ability to cater to specific local labour market contexts. Delivering employment services through familiar community settings can also be an effective way of engaging people in overcoming personal and external barriers and to work.

**2.27** However, regional differences and differences between local authorities could mean that some programmes would perform better than others. In London there is clear intent to build the capacity to commission and deliver quality employment support, as expressed in the London Growth Deal. There is not a great deal of evidence which compares the effectiveness of local and national employment provision, and finding ways of evaluating certain measures in isolation is challenging. Local provision can be effective: there is also the possibility that national programmes delivered locally can harness the same local advantages. However, some examples suggest that national programmes can be less flexible when delivered at the local level, and so ensuring genuine flexibility for local service delivery is a key factor in delivering good provision.

## 3 Employment support in London

### Introduction

- 3.1** This chapter reports findings from sixteen qualitative interviews with workless (or formerly workless) people in London. It summarises research participants' views on the types of support they had received, the extent to which the support was personalised and addressed their barriers to work, and whether they felt that they had been treated with fairness and dignity.
- 3.2** It is important to note that (as discussed in paragraph 1.20) participants' views may be affected by the way in they were recruited to the research, their journey through mainstream (national) to local support, and whether the support they received was mandatory or voluntary.

### Forms of support

#### Overview

- 3.3** The majority of research participants in this study (13 out of 16) had received employment support through Jobcentre Plus which is a national organisation with local offices. Jobcentre advisers typically have face-to-face contact every one to two weeks with Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants, and every six months with claimants of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Income Support for lone parents. Attending Jobcentre Plus interviews and undertaking certain activities such as applying for jobs and attending training courses are a condition of receiving benefit payments. If these activities are not undertaken Jobcentre Plus staff can refer claimants for 'sanctions' which are reductions in benefit payments for a specified duration.<sup>33</sup>
- 3.4** A small number of research participants had experience of the Work Programme which is a national programme delivered by a regional network of 'prime providers', each of which has a supply chain of regional and/or local sub-contractors. Every adult who has been claiming JSA for 12 months or longer is mandated onto the Work Programme. People with particular challenges to finding work, for example disabled people, people with physical and mental health problems, and ex-offenders, are referred to the programme earlier. Young people aged 18-24 are referred to the Work Programme at nine months on a mandatory basis. Work Programme providers have a high degree

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<sup>33</sup> National Audit Office (2013) *Responding to changes in jobcentres*

of flexibility over the support that they deliver to claimants and prime providers are paid almost entirely for results, which are defined as sustained job outcomes. The longer a claimant stays in work, the more providers are paid. The Work Programme supports a wide range of individuals (including JSA and some ESA claimants) and payments are higher for helping those who are further from the labour market into sustained work.<sup>34</sup> Work Programme providers can also refer claimants for sanctions if they fail to undertake activity prescribed by the Work Programme adviser.

- 3.5** In this chapter the term 'mainstream employment support' has been used to cover both Jobcentre Plus and Work Programme support. Differences between the two have been drawn out where relevant.
- 3.6** Three research participants had no experience of mainstream employment support. Two wanted to work but were claiming ESA for some time and were not eligible for mainstream employment support. Another was unemployed but not claiming benefits and so not eligible for employment support.
- 3.7** Two research participants had experience of support for Troubled Families (see paragraph 1.15). This programme is led by local authorities with the aim of: getting children back into school; reducing youth crime and anti-social behaviour; putting adults on a path back to work. This is expected overall to reduce the long-term cost in public spending on services such as health, benefits and criminal justice.
- 3.8** All research participants had experienced employment support from voluntary and community sector organisations or social enterprises (VCSE), which were often funded through local authorities or through the European Social Fund. In the main, research participants had been motivated to find and access this support themselves but in a small number of cases they had been referred to the VCSE organisation by Jobcentre Plus. This kind of support was voluntary and participants chose to engage with it.

## Interventions

- 3.9** Overall the interventions that research participants had received were similar across the forms of support described above. However there were differences between forms of support in the intensity and amount of time that advisers spent with individuals.

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<sup>34</sup> DWP (2010) *The Work Programme*

- 3.10** Research participants who had been supported by Jobcentre Plus reported having received help with CVs and job search as standard. Participants also reported having been referred to a wide range of training courses which included basic IT skills, adult literacy and numeracy, personal development, and customer service. Participants also mentioned receiving better-off in work calculations and one had received a grant for clothes and travel expenses when they entered work.
- 3.11** Research participants who were supported by Work Programme providers also reported having had similar support in terms of CV and job search support, help to complete application forms and a variety of work-related training. They had also had access to temporary job opportunities, for example during the Olympics.
- 3.12** Support from local VCSE or public sector organisations again offered a similar range of interventions including CV writing, job search and training courses. The only real differences between forms of support appeared to be in the amount of time spent on these activities. More time was spent on individuals than in mainstream support and to greater depth.
- 3.13** An example which was cited by many research participants, was the time devoted to interview preparation through local support. Interview performance was a key barrier for many research participants and they welcomed more intensive support of this type. Participants described how they had been advised on the kinds of questions to expect and how to prepare for these and told that they needed to research the company beforehand to demonstrate their interest and suitability for the role. In addition to these tips they also highlighted the value of mock interviews with their adviser.

*"Face-to-face, like, they pretended that they are managers and they would ask me the questions... so wherever I was wrong they kept notes and then they told me that you have to, you know, emphasise on this part of your interview and stuff."* (Lone parent, female, age 39)

- 3.14** It is likely that Jobcentre Plus would refer to other local organisations for more intensive support such as interview skills training. However research participants appeared to draw value from the fact that this support was provided by their own adviser, with whom they had a relationship and whose feedback they trusted. That trusted relationship may be particularly important for vulnerable groups with low confidence. This also applied to support with completing applications forms, as general advice on making a successful

application was perceived to be less valuable that help to complete a form for a specific role.

**3.15** One intervention that is available across all forms of support, but which research participants had more commonly accessed through local VCSE organisations, was work experience. Just under half of research participants had undertaken work experience – usually around 4 weeks – in the role or sector in which they were seeking employment. Work experience was perceived to have been very positive in increasing participants’ employment chances. This is discussed further in paragraph 3.34 below.

## **Personalisation of support**

**3.16** The research also explored the extent to which research participants felt that the support they received was personalised to their specific needs. The first evaluation report on the Work Programme identified two different types of personalisation. The first of these is ‘procedural’ personalisation, in that there is an emphasis on building up personal and respectful relationships between advisers and individuals, and making use of tools such as assessment and action planning, which involve some personalisation. The other is ‘substantive’ personalisation which relates to individuals experiencing significantly different, possibly specialised, services tailored to their needs and designed to address their personal barriers to work.<sup>35</sup>

### **Procedural personalisation**

**3.17** Many research participants spoke of the value of advisers’ getting to know them ‘as a person’. This included one-to-one discussions to understand the research participants’ strengths and weaknesses, what they wanted to gain from the support and how best to put that into practice.

**3.18** Having an understanding of research participants’ personal circumstances was also associated with concern for the factors which affected their ability to find work or to do job search. For example research participants with mental health conditions felt that it was important for advisers to take these circumstances into account when setting out expectations for job search and employment.

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<sup>35</sup> Newton, B et al (2012) *Work Programme Evaluation: Findings from the first phase of qualitative research on programme delivery*, DWP Research Report



*"They are compassionate at the same time because they understand the issues around mental health so they won't be pressurising, pushing to anything. It's very positive."* (Female, age 32, bipolar disorder)

**3.19** Where research participants reported negative experiences of procedural personalisation this tended to be associated with mainstream employment support. A small number described how they felt that the provision of employment support was more of a 'tick-box exercise'.

*"You're trying to speak to an adviser to help you, probably with a job search or something, and you just feel like you get passed around to like ten different people. You really do feel like a number and I think that's why it was such an effort to go in there..."* (Female, age 21, NEET)

**3.20** However it is also important to note that within certain forms of support there was variation in the way that research participants were treated. One example of this was a research participant who had been supported by Jobcentre Plus but felt that that adviser had no real understanding of his personal circumstances and needs. However the same participant reported a positive experience of support from a Jobcentre Plus adviser seconded into the Local Authority as part of the Troubled Families programme.

**3.21** This suggests that low levels of personalisation is less a characteristic of Jobcentre Plus per se but rather is to do with the environment and the mandatory job search regime. In addition this research participant noted that in Jobcentre Plus appointment times were too short to provide quality job search support. In contrast, the Troubled Families adviser at the Local Authority was able to spend an hour per session doing job search and discussing needs. As discussed at paragraph 2.6, adviser caseloads can impact on their ability to provide personalised support. The average JSA caseload is around 140 claimants per Jobcentre Plus Adviser and the ratio of Disability Employment Advisers to ESA claimants requiring some level of employment support is over 600 to one.<sup>36</sup>

## **Substantive personalisation**

**3.22** A number of research participants reported that local employment and skills providers had found them work experience opportunities which were tailored to their areas of interest. This was perceived to have helped participants to

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<sup>36</sup> House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee (2014) *The role of Jobcentre Plus in the reformed welfare system: Second report of the 2013-14 session*

confirm that the job was something that they wanted to do, to understand how workplaces were set up, and to make valuable contacts in the sector.

*"It's a big step because I now know what I want to do... I want to work in youth work, definitely. I'm not going back. And for once I found a job that I enjoy and I've gained training for it so I've got something to fall back on."*  
(Female, age 21, NEET)

**3.23** Where research participants had specific barriers which required additional support, such as an offending background or disabilities, this was met by partnership working with specialist organisations. A good example of this was joint working between a local authority employment programme and the local mental health team. While the employment adviser was able to identify potential job opportunities, the mental health support worker could then advise of their suitability in relation to the participant's health condition.

**3.24** There were a further few examples of employment support taking an integrated approach and dealing with other, non-work issues (which could impact on employment chances). One research participant, a female lone parent with four children and claiming carer's allowance, was given a better-off in work calculation which identified that cheaper accommodation may be required and the adviser supported the participant to find it. The adviser also provided advice on how to find suitable childcare. Similarly one research participant found themselves homeless and the employment provider referred them to a hostel and helped with housing applications. Examples of specialist and/or holistic support tended to have been provided by local-level VCSE organisations.

**3.25** Research participants highlighted the importance of employment advisers taking the time to 'job match' their skills to specific vacancies and taking into account personal circumstances. For example one participant was advised by a local employment and skills provider to focus on public sector roles on the basis that they might offer more flexibility around her caring responsibilities. Proactive job matching was seen to be a long-term investment for the support organisation as it would ensure that their customers sustain employment rather than dropping out of an unsuitable job and returning for further help in future.

*"There's no point in sending me to go and clean the streets if, you know, I'm not going to stay there or it has no interest in me because in the next few months I guarantee I'll be back at the Jobcentre again – it's a loop. Do you know what I mean?"* (Female, age 21, NEET)

**3.26** There has been a clear policy move towards job retention with Work Programme providers rewarded for sustained job outcomes of a minimum 13 and 26 weeks (depending on claimant group) up to two years. The introduction of Universal Credit takes this a step further, requiring Jobcentre Plus to support individuals not only to sustain but to progress in work.

**3.27** This evidence of job matching contrasted with experiences which some participants described of mainstream programmes, in which they felt pressured to take any job regardless of its suitability for them and/or their suitability for it.

*"I felt like they wanted to do it so they could get something out of me. They would tell me, 'do you want to do a postman's job?' I'd be like, 'no I want to do this'...Well they should focus on actually finding you the job that you want to do instead of pushing you to gain employment."* (Male, age 20, ex-offender)

*"I was told that I should take any job, so that's other pressure, and I need to go anywhere. So I was treated as if I was a single person, without a child with special needs, that's how I was treated."* (Female, age 52, lone parent, carer)

## **Dignity and fairness**

**3.28** The research explored how participants were treated by advisers across the various forms of support. For many research participants there was a high level of crossover between their views on the level of personalisation and their treatment by advisers. This suggests that being treated as an individual and receiving personalised support is a key component of dignity and fairness.

**3.29** Friendly and approachable staff were found across all forms of support including the Work Programme and Jobcentre Plus. This quality was felt to be strongly related to individual personalities rather than to any organisation or form of support. However participants did note that an informal manner was less easy to achieve in the more structured (and time-pressured) Jobcentre Plus environment. In addition, a number of research participants noted that mandatory activity, with threat of sanctions for non-compliance, affected their relationships with advisers providing those forms of support.

**3.30** The best advisers were perceived to speak to research participants in a respectful way and to listen to their wants and needs. Some instances of perceived rudeness or coldness were reported; these tended to be associated with mainstream programmes where large volumes of customers were being seen and where time was limited.

*"They have statistics to supply so understanding goes out the window. I think they become desensitised to what really happens in people's circumstances."* (Female, age 52, lone parent, carer)

**3.31** Research participants reported that they appreciated advisers who were approachable. A number of research participants mentioned a preference for a more informal approach. This is likely to be important for those with low confidence as more formal environments may be intimidating and off-putting. The ability of an adviser to build a rapport with an individual is also important in encouraging them to open up and be honest about barriers to work.

*"It's a good atmosphere because as long as you're doing what you have to do, you can still talk and you can still, like, make a few jokes here and there. It's not just a... 100 per cent focus and no talking and it's quite a good atmosphere. Like, it's a nice place to come."* (Male, age 19, NEET, on the Work Programme)

**3.32** A number of research participants highlighted the importance of having an adviser who was positive about their prospects of finding work and who believed in them. This was felt to have made a significant difference to their confidence and motivation. For example, one young participant was introduced by his local employment and skills provider to positive role models who also had offending backgrounds but who had successfully found work.

*"They told me and they showed me that prison, it wouldn't block you at all. They assured me and gave me examples...like of previous candidates that have been in prison, previous candidates that have no experience whatsoever and they're working at higher levels. You understand? So they give you motivation and that."* (Male, age 20, ex-offender)

## **Effectiveness of support**

**3.33** This research project does not attempt to compare quantitative data on the outcomes achieved by various forms of support. That is outside the remit of the brief. However the research did ask research participants about the perceived effectiveness of the support that they had received in terms of its success in moving them into or closer to work.

**3.34** Four research participants were in work at the time of interview. One of these had achieved a permanent role at the company which had given him work experience. Another had gained so much confidence from her work experience placement that she had applied for a role she did not think she had a chance of

getting and had succeeded. The other two participants had received personalised support from local VCSE organisations to complete application forms and prepare for interviews, for the roles they ultimately entered.

*"[I found work] through [the provider]'s help on actually teaching me how to fill out these forms, because apparently it takes someone with a PhD to fill out these application forms. It has to be done in a specific way and Steve has pointed out to me how it should be done, how it should be laid out, what goes in what box, how to answer a certain question."* (Female, age 52, lone parent, carer)

**3.35** Where research participants had not found work, a number felt that they were much closer to work as a result of the work experience that they had gained. Work experience was significant for participants in two ways. The first was the skills that they had gained which meant that they could better compete with other, more experienced candidates.

*"Like I said, finding a job, you know, admin work, I can say I've dealt with computers, I've answered the phone, I can do, you know, customer service, and reception, so, yes, that will be quite good. It shows I have training and they can give me reference after a job."* (Female, 24, physical disability)

**3.36** The second was the increased levels of confidence that research participants expressed in their own employment chances.

*"I'll be able to put it down on my CV and it looks really good what I've done... It's got me a lot of interviews where, before, you would probably just get turned down or whatever. And I can go to an interview not worrying about if I don't have the experience."* (Male, age 19, NEET)

**3.37** Surprisingly few research participants mentioned providers' links with local employers or knowledge of the local labour market as a significant factor affecting the quality and/or effectiveness of the support. Although, the fact that a number had undertaken work placements with local employers, facilitated by their employment provider, suggests this was an important element in aiding a transition to work.

**3.38** However a number of participants, particularly those who perceived employer discrimination on the grounds of age or disability, mentioned that they would like their employment provider to advocate for them with employers. This would include highlighting their strengths and suitability for the role, as well as supporting the employer to make any adjustments or provide training that would enable the participant to do the job.

## Conclusions

**3.39** From the perspective of research participants with multiple barriers a key feature of quality employment support is an adviser who is friendly and approachable, who speaks positively about their chances of finding employment and who understands their personal circumstances. These are the characteristics which research participants associate with dignity and fairness and are also the fundamentals of good customer service.

**3.40** These characteristics can be found in advisers across different forms of employment support, including mainstream support. However this type of relationship is strongly related to the time and resources which advisers have to spend with their clients. Therefore, in the experience of research participants in this study it is more commonly associated with smaller, local programmes which have lower customer caseloads, as one participant acknowledges:

*"I suppose Jobcentre Plus is big. It's massive. Do you know what I mean? There's so many people under that one umbrella that they have got to help and they have no choice... It's easy to miss things or miss people, like they get through the cracks easier and it certainly becomes like a routine... Whereas as [VCS organisation] is a small organisation and it's just like the private schools. Do you know what I mean? You'll get more care because there's less pupils in the class."* (Female, age 21, NEET)

**3.41** In terms of personalised support needs, research participants describe a form of 'job brokerage' which sees advisers matching jobseekers to find vacancies, helping them to complete application forms, to gain work experience and to succeed at interviews. In theory this type of support is available across all forms of employment provision i.e. national/local, voluntary/mandatory. However, this research found that levels of substantive personalisation in mainstream support were limited.

## 4 Case studies

**4.1** This chapter describes in more detail some of the research participants' experiences of employment support in London. Each case study covers the participants' personal circumstances, the barriers they have experienced in seeking work, the support they have received to find employment and any outcomes that they have achieved. All names have been changed to protect participants' anonymity.

### Kamila

**4.2** Kamila has a variety of qualifications and experience of working in a range of different sectors including teaching, care work, and library administration. She has however struggled to find work in recent years due to certain barriers she faces as someone with a mental health diagnosis. Following hospitalisation in 2010, Kamila increasingly felt that employers discriminated against her because of her mental health. Side effects from her medication make it difficult for her to commit to a full working day and she feels that the lack of part-time opportunities further limit her job prospects. A physical condition makes it hard for her to stand for long periods of time, and health problems in her family living abroad have made it difficult for her to commit to permanent contracts. Her condition is triggered by stressful working environments so she has required specialised employment advice to find ways of avoiding this. The barriers which she faces have left her feeling unmotivated and unsure about where to direct her job search efforts.

**4.3** Over the last 9 months Kamila has received employment support from a mental health foundation trust and an employment programme run by a council sponsored local social enterprise/regeneration company. She has found this interagency support highly effective in providing focused mental health support (through her local NHS Trust) alongside bespoke professional advice, which is also sensitive to her mental health needs, delivered by the local social enterprise. Through these organisations she receives help with: job searches, personalised job matches, job applications, compiling and handing out CVs and organising further training according to her interests. Her two advisers are responsive to her situation and do not pressurise her into work, but instead seek out opportunities which meet her needs; providing caring and supportive relationships which help Kamila to develop motivation and enthusiasm.

**4.4** As a result of this support Kamila has been able to find work through her own job searches and succeed in interviews after coaching and mock interviews

with her employment programme adviser. She has also received valuable in-work support from her employment programme adviser who offers professional and personalised advice. In addition to this Kamila has begun an accredited art course with the hope of embarking on a foundation art degree in the future as a means of broadening her employment prospects and pursuing her interests.

- 4.5** Overall Kamila is positive about the support she has received and says it has helped to keep her 'healthy and sane' whilst broadening her job search. She thinks that the joined up approach of the mental health trust and local employment programme works well, but would like to see more time allotted for initial assessments to determine service users' interests and aspirations. She has found the ongoing regular support through e-mail, telephone and face to face meetings particularly beneficial in bringing her closer to the labour market.

## **Rupi**

- 4.6** Rupi is a single mother of two, who has recently found work after being unemployed for five years during a period of domestic abuse from her former partner. The abuse isolated her socially and economically, causing a severe loss of confidence when it came to finding work again. With no immediate support network of family or friends it was a struggle for Rupi to overcome her personal barriers to work such as: fear of the outside world and a lack of qualifications and recent work experience resulting in gaps in her CV. Most important for Rupi was finding ways of rebuilding her confidence in order to feel ready to work again.
- 4.7** Initially Rupi sought help from a national employment and benefits provider who responded to her situation by offering training courses in IT and employability. Rupi did not feel however that the courses brought her closer to her goal of finding work, and found that the national provision that she was offered lacked the personalised approach that she needed in order to prepare herself for work. Rupi describes feeling pressurised by staff to find work that wasn't suited to her, whilst receiving little or no practical support in interview techniques, confidence building or creating a CV. Rupi recounts not feeling listened to or respected by staff during this particularly vulnerable period in her life, and expresses concern about others in her position going through the same process.
- 4.8** As she lacked IT skills and a support network it was particularly difficult for Rupi to access information about alternative support services. Eventually she did find a service which met her needs through a local employment and skills provider. Here a support worker worked closely with her to identify her needs



and employment aims. She received interview training, help with writing, printing and handing out CVs, as well as job ideas, job matches and work experience.

*"They treated me with respect, which everyone needs. It doesn't matter if they're unemployed. You have to respect them. They're human beings, as well. People have lots of other problems, you know."*

**4.9** Rupi was able to improve her interview skills and eventually find work as a sales associate for a major retailer, a job which she feels is well matched to her. Since starting her new job Rupi has progressed quickly within the company. Re-joining the labour market has allowed Rupi to learn new things and develop her skills through in-work training programmes. She reports an improvement in her confidence levels and a desire to share her experiences with other women struggling to find work, as this is something she would have found useful in her journey towards employment.

**4.10** In the future Rupi would like to see more personalised support for women like her who are at risk of becoming isolated, vulnerable and workless. She envisions this kind of service would be delivered from centres in the community, like the local employment and skills provider which helped her, and demonstrated their ability to provide caring and focused support for individuals with complex needs. Confidence-building workshops, more readily available service information, in-depth interview coaching (including role play exercises) and local in-work support are amongst some of the things that Rupi believes are essential in enabling people like her to develop themselves and move towards suitable employment opportunities.

## **Tanya**

**4.11** Tanya is 61 years old and worked as a legal secretary until 2008 when she became unemployed and started to claim jobseekers allowance. Her long-term worklessness has left her feeling lost, confused and frustrated about the lack of jobs available to her. She faces multiple barriers to finding employment, which she feels prevent her from becoming financially independent and feeling fulfilled. She describes the high pressure to find work, yet feels she is often discriminated against because of her age. Though she has a great deal of experience from her previous years of work she feels she lacks up to date experience and IT skills which make it difficult for her to find work in a competitive market.

**4.12** To find help in overcoming these barriers to work Tanya signed up to a national employment and skills provider through whom she was given training in adult literacy, numeracy, personal development, and customer service. She also received IT training but found that she could not easily access computers on which to practice and develop her skills. What she found particularly useful about the training courses was the opportunity to get out and meet others in a similar position to herself. She did however find that the staff at this centre were unfriendly and stressed by the demands of working for a national provider:

*"To me, it's like you're a figure, you're a number. It's not that they care for you, personally."*

**4.13** Tanya has also sought work through a private employment agency, but was offered sporadic work outside of her local area through them. The employment support offered by the agency was not consistent and eventually she found that the most effective support came from a local employment and skills provider. Here she was offered regular information about jobs that were relevant to her background as well as CV support, voluntary work experience, training and the opportunity to practice her IT skills. She also expresses that she felt most comfortable in this environment, which provided flexible support with friendly, welcoming and approachable staff.

**4.14** Overall she feels that the local provider's support has helped her to move closer to the labour market through providing her with work experience and the chance to improve her IT skills.

**4.15** Tanya feels she has pursued all possible avenues of support, but still has yet to find work. Ultimately she would like to find a role which is suited to her experience or an employer who is willing to offer training. She also thinks that in-work support would be vital for building confidence and supporting long-term unemployed people to adjust to the demands of a new job. She would like to see more flexible provision from national providers which enable jobseekers to practice and develop their IT skills at their centres.

## Joseph

**4.16** Joseph is 46 years old and is married with two children. He identifies as Black African British, and has been unemployed for two years since losing his licence as a taxi driver. Joseph has a physical impairment which he does not feel affects his ability to work but worries that employers will discriminate against him because of it, and has experienced a loss of confidence as a result. The

cost of renewing his taxi licence poses a further barrier to him pursuing the kind of work he knows is well suited to him and that he enjoys. Joseph is also interested in pursuing care work with the local council.

**4.17** Joseph initially sought help to find work from a national employment and benefits provider. Through this agency he was not granted financial support, but continued to sign on each week for a month. He was told by an adviser that he couldn't work as a carer because of his impairment which made him feel uncomfortable, 'down' and not listened to. He did not feel that the interaction he had at the national provider moved him closer to the labour market, which he describes was partly due to their lack of awareness about disability.

**4.18** Joseph was then sign-posted by his local council to a local social enterprise/regeneration company which has provided him with employment support. Through this service he has gained CV advice, and feels his adviser has re-built his confidence through encouraging him to pursue the work that interests him.

*"The most beneficial is that she's given me very, confidence in myself, you know, telling me don't worry, I can get a job. When somebody starts telling you that it's giving you encouragement, it's giving you some kind of power, belief that don't worry, you are going to get a job, which is very, very welcome, honestly."*

**4.19** He feels he has been treated with care and understanding for his impairment. He has also discussed with his adviser the possibility of employment with the council which she has agreed to explore with him through utilising the social enterprise's local networks. Joseph is still looking for work, but feels confident that the local support he is getting will lead him closer to his goal.

**4.20** Of key importance for Joseph is feeling listened to and encouraged. He would like to see more joined-up services which can secure job trials and job matches and also advocate for him at the interview process to ensure he is not unfairly discriminated against. He thinks his local authority has a big role to play in providing this kind of support, and if his trust had not been so greatly eroded by his previous experiences, he would like to see this coming from them too. Eventually Joseph hopes to set an example to others in his position by re-joining the labour market and overcoming the barriers he currently faces.

## Amina

**4.21** Amina moved to the UK from Pakistan in 2003 and, after the break down of her relationship, had to give up her work to care for her young daughter. In the last two years she has been actively seeking work and has recently secured a position as a customer service assistant for a bank. The key barriers Amina faced on her journey to re-joining the labour market were: finding affordable and local childcare, a lack of part-time jobs, difficulties with online applications and a sense of isolation and confusion following the end of her relationship; *'there was no stepping stone which I could see'*.

**4.22** Amina was in need of emotional as well as practical support which she found through a local employment and skills provider. Here she was given an adviser who worked closely with her to overcome her difficulties with writing online applications, updating her CV, and exploring childcare and housing options. They helped her to prepare for the interview for her current job and have continued to provide emotional and practical support two months into her employment. She describes the support as:

*"Someone who was looking after me as family do, like, you know, mums and brothers and sisters; they ask you, how's your work? How are you coping? Are you, you know... what about childcare? Stuff like that, so they keep asking me on and off, and really make me feel good."*

**4.23** The flexibility of support received through her local provider contrasted quite dramatically with that which she experienced through the mandatory support from a national provider. Though Amina attended two different national centres and found one much better and more personalised than the other, overall she felt that the focus was solely on employment, and not holistic enough for someone like herself facing multiple obstacles. She recounts that after expressing to one adviser about how her stress levels were affecting her ability to find work, she was threatened with an end to her benefits, causing her to contemplate ending her life at this very precarious and vulnerable time.

**4.24** Though entering work has presented Amina with a new set of difficulties (such as paying her rent and securing her housing situation). She feels much happier to be working as she is learning things, interacting with people and getting out of the house.

**4.25** She is now in need of housing advice and support which she hopes will come from her local council. The local employment and skills provider continues to support her with these struggles, but she would like to be given more intensive

advice and guidance at a time when she and her daughter are at risk of losing their home.

## Stewart

**4.26** Stewart is 21 and has been out of work for seven months. He lives at home with his mother and has previously worked in retail and as a delivery person. His last job was a zero-hour contract which he left, due to lack of hours. Stewart finds it stressful when employers don't respond to his applications or give feedback as to why his applications or interviews are unsuccessful. He feels that he lacks some experience and knowledge which can be a disadvantage, in what he perceives as a highly competitive labour market. He also finds that his lack of interview skills and confidence are a further barrier to employment, and has subsequently sought help in these areas.

**4.27** In the last few years Stewart has been receiving support from a national employment and skills provider. They helped him to secure a Level 2 customer service qualification which allowed him to move into his previous position as a delivery person. In the last seven months he has been receiving consistent support from this agency, where he has been given an adviser who he finds; *"friendly, helpful and easy to talk to"*. His adviser referred him to a national charity which specialises in employment in the hospitality, leisure and tourism sectors. Through this referral Stewart has received more support to improve his interview skills, CV and experience through basic training courses. He has also been offered a 2-week work placement in a hotel where he will be able to trial a range of different roles.

**4.28** Stewart finds the support staff at the charity friendly and approachable, with industry knowledge and trustworthy advice. He has found the partnership working between the national provider and the charity particularly beneficial but feels their joint interview training could be improved with more realistic one-to-one mock interviews. In Stewart's view, the support and training received through the national charity has been helpful in moving him closer to the labour market.

**4.29** Stewart is about to start his work placement and is positive about what it might bring him. He has increased confidence about interviews and has expanded his skillset through various training opportunities provided by both the national provider and employment charity.

**4.30** Additional forms of support that Stewart would have found useful from the national provider include: help with gathering feedback from employers about

unsuccessful applications, and having the opportunity to attain a Level 3 customer services qualification. Generally he would like to have had more one-to-one support from his advisers at the charity, especially regarding interview techniques, which he feels he is still developing.

## 5 Future of Support

### Introduction

**5.1** This chapter attempts to draw together the evidence presented in this report into some high level conclusions about the future of support for people with multiple barriers to work, or complex needs. This research project, although small scale, has something to add to the wider debates about how employment support should be delivered and commissioned for this group.

**5.2** The first objective for this study was to understand the needs of workless Londoners and the mechanisms by which these needs can/should be met. The second was to identify the most appropriate level, to design and deliver employment support in order to meet the needs of workless Londoners. This section therefore considers how employment provision should be commissioned to facilitate the delivery of support in line with the best practice identified in this research.

**5.3** Whoever commissions services, they must be evidence-based, well-designed, appropriately funded, well managed and effectively joined-up.

### Dignity and respect

**5.4** One thing that was common across participants in this research was their desire to be treated with respect and as an individual rather than just another client. The findings include descriptions of support characterised by a rapport between advisers and customers, which is built on a genuine concern for customers' aspirations and personal circumstances. Examples are found across all forms of employment support but should be found across all advisers and experienced as a matter of course. As noted above, treating individuals with dignity and fairness represents basic, good customer service.

**5.5** In this research, one of the participants spoke positively of being treated with respect and feeling valued by the support that they had received from Catalyst Housing which offers a jobs and skills project, in partnership with Ealing Council and using the European Social Fund. This project offers one-to-one support with job search and CV writing, a Skills for Life qualification (Maths, English and IT), work placements in local companies and contact with local employers.

**Recommendation:** A minimum level of customer service should be an expectation of all employment support; to be developed with customer input and monitored through customer feedback.

- 5.6** There are a number of factors which will affect the ability of employment services deliver the 'human touch' element of the adviser role. The first of these is the size of advisers' caseloads and the time they have to spend with individuals. Reducing caseloads may be an option, where there is a cost-effective case for it. Secondly it is important to note that relationships between advisers and customers will differ between voluntary and mandatory programmes. In general informal, friendly support tended to be provided by voluntary advisers that were working with smaller case loads. However this research identified examples of advisers creating an informal, friendly environment within mandatory programmes, within the Work Programme in particular.

**Recommendation:** Commissioners should consider the trade-offs between adviser caseloads, personalised support and cost-effective provision.

**Recommendation:** Learning from the Work Programme around 'procedural personalisation' should be disseminated and built into other mandatory programmes.

## Personalised support

- 5.7** It is clear that workless people in London are not a homogenous group. Evidence from this and other research shows that people who are out of work vary significantly in terms of their personal characteristics and barriers to employment, the interplay of those barriers and their attitudes and motivations. There is a consensus that, as a result, effective employment support must be sufficiently flexible to address individuals' personal circumstances, skills, experience, aspirations and needs.
- 5.8** This research has been able to identify a number of examples of good practice in providing personalised employment support for people with multiple barriers to work. This included one-to-one discussions to understand the participants' experiences and expectations, support with specific job applications and interviews, and the chance to undertake placements in jobs and sectors of interest. Where participants had found work, this kind of support was cited as having made the difference to them.
- 5.9** In this research, Redbridge CVS was noted to have provided a research participant with tailored job alerts and work experience in their offices to use



the skills provided through one of their IT training courses. Redbridge CVS Employment and Skills delivers job brokerage, job-search support, work placements/trials, signposting, training, information, advice and guidance across a number of London boroughs.

**Recommendation:** To meet the needs of those with multiple barriers to work, employment support must be flexible and personalised, in reflection of the diversity and complexity of individual circumstances. This should include one-to-one support with specific job applications and interviews, and the chance to undertake placements in jobs and sectors of interest.

**5.10** What is striking is that the kind of personalised support that is described by research participants is not an innovative concept. In fact, in theory, it is exactly what mainstream employment support services are already doing. However the views of jobseekers in this research suggest that Jobcentre Plus may not currently be offering this type of tailored support. The policy intent was for the Work Programme to provide personalised support in a way that Jobcentre Plus is not fully able, or intended, to provide. Yet in practice, it appears that the Work Programme also currently operates as a generalist programme which does not fully cater for groups with complex needs.<sup>37</sup>

**5.11** One of the organisations featured in this research, Groundwork London, was reported by a research participant to have provided personalised support, to have helped her to complete application forms and to have provided interview training preparation. She credited her adviser with helping her to move into work. In other parts of the country, Groundwork delivers as a Work Programme sub-contractor.

**Recommendation:** Review the factors which are working against the delivery of personalised support in mainstream employment services and which should be addressed in future commissioning rounds.

## Job brokerage

**5.12** The research identified examples of good practice in 'job brokerage' support which sees advisers proactively matching jobseekers to vacancies, and advocating with employers on behalf of their clients. This advocacy role was specifically cited as something that research participants with disabilities would welcome. This is akin to the approach taken by recruitment agents and head hunters in the wider labour market.

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<sup>37</sup> Foster, S et al (2014) *Employment support for unemployed older people*, Age UK

**5.13** Some of the most successful employment programmes feature employer engagement staff working alongside employment advisers to understand clients' strengths and weaknesses and aspirations. This enables employer-facing staff to talk to employers about specific individuals and to source job opportunities that meet individuals' needs. In return, employers receive a shortlist of candidates that are suitable and motivated for the role, which both speeds up the process and reduces the cost of recruitment.<sup>38</sup>

**5.14** In this research, The Springboard Charity was reported to have sought out work experience and job opportunities for the research participant in his chosen field, which later led to employment. The Springboard Charity provides specialist careers advice and guidance, skills development, preparation for work and pre-employment training, work experience, employment support and mentoring.

**Recommendation:** Greater job brokerage for those who need it most, including sourcing bespoke vacancies and supported applications, delivered by employer engagement staff, working closely with advisers.

**5.15** Findings from this research support a wider evidence base which suggests that mainstream employment provision currently relies on the ability of jobseekers to conduct their own job search. This is part of a trajectory towards greater self-sufficiency, and potentially empowerment, which sees jobseekers making and managing claims online and being responsible for managing their own budgets with direct benefit payments into their bank accounts.

**5.16** Therefore whilst intensive job brokerage type support will be beneficial for those with complex needs, given the direction of travel, employment support must also empower individuals with the skills to help themselves. Approaches which focus on building up networks and social capital are likely to be most effective. This would include job clubs, volunteering, work experience and mentoring.

**Recommendation:** Alongside job brokerage, employment support should look to build the social capital and networks of individuals with complex needs, using approaches such as mentoring.

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<sup>38</sup> See for example Riley, T et al (2013) *Evaluation of South West Workways*

## Integrated support

**5.17** Finally there were a number of examples of integrated approaches to employment support identified within this research. One of the best was joint working between a local employment provider and mental health trust to support an individual with bipolar disorder to move closer to work. Wider evidence has found that interagency, collaboration and partnership work is a crucial in creating a personalised approach to employment support.

**5.18** In this research, Paddington Development Trust (PDT) was identified as having offered an integrated approach to supporting participants with the support they need to find work but also to address wider issues which may affect their ability to enter and remain in work. PDT Westworks delivers a jobs and skills programme in partnership with Triborough, Westminster Council, and ESF, ERDF and London Councils.

**Recommendation:** Integrated support which addresses multiple issues is essential to provide personalised support for those with the most complex needs.

**5.19** To deliver integrated support through nationally-commissioned programmes, the evidence suggests a need to resolve issues of inflexibility in devolution and to allow greater scope for local influence in specifications and tender evaluation. Similarly locally-commissioned employment support must address the issues identified in the evidence review, relating to the complexity created by multiple partners, fragmentation of support and conflicting local agendas. Strong local leadership and working across localities to create a more streamlined, coherent offer will be important.

**5.20** In a recent report on the commissioning of support for people with disabilities the idea of joint commissioning at 'the most appropriate level' is proposed.<sup>39</sup> This report suggests that a single commissioning model (for example that everything is commissioned by local government or central government) may not be appropriate. Rather, it proposes a clear national framework within which provision is then commissioned in the most appropriate way.

**5.21** Such a national framework is important to ensure that there is a clear and single system of support, even if the design and commissioning approach will vary between areas. Within this framework, central and local government and

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<sup>39</sup> Purvis, A et al (2014) Fit for Purpose: Transforming employment support for disabled people and those with health conditions, Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion

partners could work together to agree the most appropriate ways to commission support within geographical areas. In some cases, local areas will take the lead in commissioning – with central government pooling or transferring its funding and local commissioners rolling in local funds. In others, central government would take the lead, with local partners commissioning complementary services and working to align support locally. In still others, there may be models of co-commissioning or pooled budgets. Whichever model is used, to deliver truly integrated services for the benefit of service users and employers, local authority involvement is crucial.

**Recommendation:** Central and local government, and their partners, work together to agree the most appropriate ways to commission support within geographical areas.