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European Social Fund:

Good practice in helping disabled people back to work

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Vocational Rehabilitation Consultants Ltd

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European Social Fund: Good practice in helping disabled people back to work

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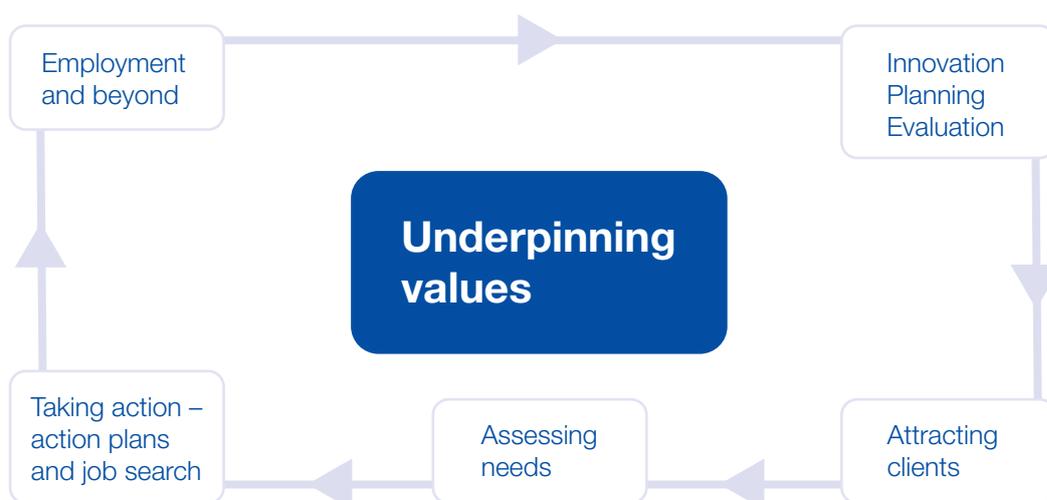
Summary

This good practice guide is designed to help project providers, Co-financing Organisations and policy makers help disabled people and those with long-term health conditions get back to work – one of the key aims of the European Social Fund programme in England.

The guidance was developed in partnership with a range of stakeholders. Project providers from the Objective 3 and EQUAL programmes in England were invited to describe their projects using the 'steps' outlined below. They did so initially via a template provided on the ESF website, and some 39 projects responded. The projects provided a substantial amount of useful information which was analysed by the consultants commissioned by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the EQUAL Support Unit. The consultants identified practical action that projects had taken to achieve their goals and improve the quality of their services, and incorporated information about their activities into the guidance.

The guidance is structured according to the main steps through which an ESF participant may pass on the journey from worklessness towards employment. Case studies supplied by the projects participating in the development of the guidance are included in each of the key steps described below:

Structure of the guide



This summary section highlights some of the key themes and issues covered by the guide.

Underpinning values

The underpinning values discussed in the good practice guide include:

- respect – for legislation, clients, partners and employers;
- accessibility – in physical and social terms; and
- flexibility – in project design and partnership arrangements.

Innovation, planning and evaluation

Innovation

Most innovative projects are the result of extensive discussion and research. Sometimes innovation comes from a successful idea from a different or related project.

When innovating, projects need to:

- review previous work locally and elsewhere, build on previous experience;
- gather evidence of project designs, methods and approaches; and
- innovate throughout the project and build success on many small changes.

Planning

When planning projects it is important to:

- know the client group or work with those who do;
- discuss with clients and their representative groups before and while preparing the project;
- work with partners from the earliest point, designing the project so that it is complementary to mainstream services; and
- use a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis to plan.

For example, the Next Choice project for disabled clients makes use of the Working Link's office hub in Birmingham. Participants practise interviews in an 'employer room', in an interview environment – so becoming much more relaxed and confident at real interviews.

Evaluation

The guidance suggests that projects should:

- include evaluation in the project design;
- involve the participants of the project in the evaluation; and
- share information with other key partners to help enhance or inform future activities.

The Tomorrow's People Trust launched Pathways to Employment for incapacity benefit claimants, lone parents and people with few or no qualifications. It identified a gap in part of London in provision aimed at promoting self-esteem and self-awareness. The research enabled a previously missing element of support to be introduced into the local area.

Attracting clients

An effective policy on confidentiality and disclosure of disability and well-trained staff are essential from the outset.

When joining a project, people who are disabled may choose to disclose their disability or to keep it private. There is no obligation on disabled people to disclose their disability at any stage.

The guidance encourages projects to:

- discuss a person's needs as part of the initial assessment stage (as well as their ongoing needs during later assessments); and
- explain why questions about disability and other personal characteristics are being asked in the first place. Disclosure should be encouraged – but if an individual does not wish to disclose, then that right should be respected.

Projects should have a plan to attract and recruit clients – including employers!

Activities could include:

- visiting organisations;
- mailing presentations;
- encouraging word of mouth referrals;
- using publicity in appropriate venues – public libraries, day centres etc;
- using local media and mailshots (with care); and
- engaging with employers by sector or location, using established contacts where possible.

Projects should remember that:

- recruitment is made easier if projects emphasise the ways in which their overall design is tailored to the clients;
- suitable locations and times for project work are important;
- long working days can tax the stamina of people who are not yet used to 'normal' working hours, and may need to be adjusted;
- for many with caring responsibilities or those whose condition needs active management, part-time attendance with flexible hours can be essential; and
- the induction and introductory period is a sensitive time for clients. Having family, carers and friends with them at the interview can be helpful.

First Based Skills at Canterbury College is a project working with the Shaw Trust. Shaw Trust mentors and trainers provide promotional presentations to Jobcentre Plus, Primary Care Trusts, and a range of other agencies likely to deal with potential clients. The Shaw Trust maintains close links with referral agencies and provides mailshots to GPs and other initial points of access.

Assessing needs

The guidance explains:

- the importance of early assessment;
- the need for different structures for assessment according to the nature of the project's client group;
- how informal assessments can help put clients at their ease by relating the assessment to a goal such as a job;
- the role of trials and tasters to get more detail and accuracy in assessing skills;
- the importance of ongoing assessment;
- the importance of discussing arrangements with the client, with carers and family, to get agreement;
- using specialist technical or clinical assessments to underpin the 'whole person' vocational assessment; and
- using information from other organisations, with permission and ensuring that confidentiality and consent procedures are in place as appropriate.

Planning and taking action

All participant action plans should be agreed and recognise the participants' abilities, talents and individuality. Employers should be involved in the plans wherever possible.

When taking action to help participants, projects need to consider:

- making activities interesting and relevant to the clients;
- the need for flexible and tailored activities to help meet clients needs;
- whether the venue is right for the group in terms of facilities;
- offering personal mentoring or support to clients;
- providing regular contact with a trusted person;
- meeting the needs of employers – work with them from the outset and provide employers with an after care service; and
- reviewing clients' progress regularly, using procedures that the clients can engage with.

The North East Chamber of Commerce's project emphasises review and ownership of plans. Guidance is given and objectives are formulated to form the action plan. The action plan contains job search skills objectives to enable the participant to broaden their search for work. Objectives are reviewed every four weeks and appointments are available for the client with specialist agencies where needed. The project and the participant are jointly responsible for the action plan.

Job search

Projects should:

- show any justification for delays to job search activities;
- consider using the place-then-train model for projects;
- provide evidence in clients' assessments for any delay in job search;
- provide training in job search strategies and application skills;
- consider setting up a job search centre;
- build or share in a job-brokering or employment team;
- consider specialising by sector, by skill or by location;
- use all available routes and sources for jobs; and
- celebrate success! – develop a good reputation locally.

The Employability Project of the Percy Headley Foundation in Tyne and Wear found that there was a need for an intermediary to help broker employment opportunities for their disabled participants. An employability planning group was set up and a local employers' network was run in partnership with the Employers Forum on Disability. The project organised monthly events for disabled people, at which employees, employers and disabled people already involved in work placements discussed their roles and experiences. The presentations gave all clients an informed insight into the opportunities that were available.

In work help and beyond

Employers

Projects should:

- treat employers as customers, offer advice and support and nurture good relationships at all levels;
- make sure the job is done to their satisfaction and be available after work has started to offer help and advice; and
- evaluate results to guide future action.

Adaptations

Projects should consider:

- offering basic advice on adjustments, and checking to see if they have been successful – but referring to specialists for professional and legal advice as appropriate;
- knowing and advising on the basics of the Disability Discrimination Act – but referring to specialists for professional and legal advice as appropriate;
- using Access to Work and work with Disability Employment Advisors; and
- developing and supporting graduated return to work plans.

The Visage project in Kent aims to help people with visual impairments. It offers advice to clients about accessible equipment and software, and the project's rehabilitation team carries out workplace assessments when requested to do so by organisations involved with employment issues.

Job coaches and mentoring

Projects should offer support to encourage stable employment for those who move into work, for example by:

- using specialist trained staff or support workers;
- adjusting the personal support according to the client's capacity; and
- developing 'natural' supports among work colleagues and family or carers.

Preparation for work

Projects should:

- prepare clients and employers for working together;
- prepare the client and the workplace; and
- follow up to check that the employee is doing well.

1. Introduction

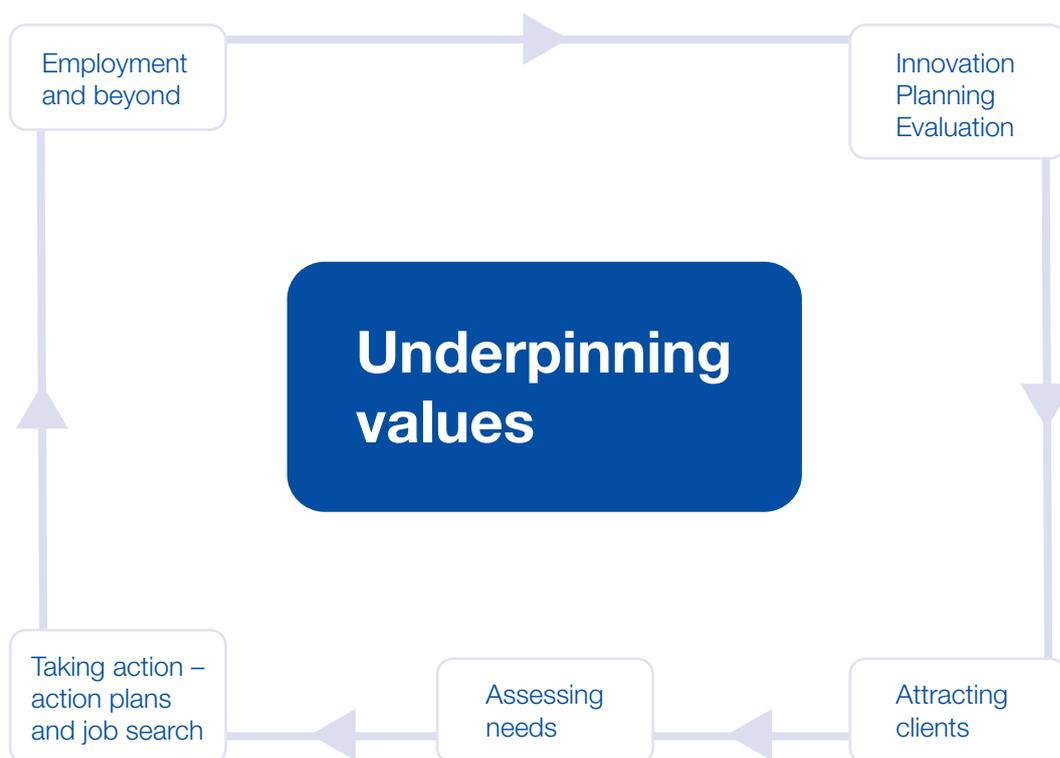
Who this guide is for

This guide is intended for Co-financing Organisations (CFOs) and project promoters who are planning and running projects funded by the European Social Fund. The guide should also be of interest to other Government Departments, public bodies, projects and organisations which are developing strategies or projects to support the employment of disabled people.

A structured approach

To establish a framework for assessing good practice and providing and explaining guidelines, we have adopted a model of the 'steps' through which a project and project client may pass on the journey from worklessness. The guidance is structured according to these main steps:

Structure of the guide



Using the guide

CFOs will be able to use this guide to help them:

- develop their ESF plans;
- develop their links and discussions with disability organisations that can assist in planning their ESF programmes;
- support discussions around tender and contract agreement;
- monitor and support projects during their life; and
- review projects and programmes.

Projects will find the guide useful in:

- building partnerships to prepare projects and apply to ESF or other funds;
- preparing project plans and designs;
- discussing project plans with CFOs;
- running projects from inception to closure; and
- reviewing their work and planning further activities.

Readers will find it useful to read whichever section of the guide they find helpful, picking appropriate elements wherever they are found. Most of the guidance notes will stand alone, or can be applied in combination. However, the chapters on assessing needs and taking action have much in common; therefore readers may want to review both of these sections together.

Terminology

In this report we have adopted the convention that individuals who are beneficiaries or participants of ESF or EQUAL projects are called 'clients'. Employers who are beneficiaries are called 'employers' or 'customers'. We hope this will avoid possible confusion in the use of 'beneficiary', which can refer to individuals and to employers.

Limitations of the guide

In developing the guide, we have taken evidence from a large number of projects, and reviewed other guidance on disability and on employment. We have consulted with the stakeholder group, and revised our guidance in the light of comments from them and from the projects we consulted. We have not studied the employment outcomes of the contributing projects, nor attempted to evaluate measures of 'distance travelled' or 'soft outcomes', subjects which are covered in other sources¹.

This guide is about what good practice is. It does not provide detail on how to implement good practice, for which there are many invaluable texts, sources, training courses and organisations to help projects and project staff. This guide does not replace any of them, and we commend projects to study their own field of work in more detail than we can offer here.

Nonetheless, we are confident that the guidance, incorporating practical advice from a wide range of sources, will be of value, both to enhance the experience of disabled people in projects, and to enhance the effectiveness of projects in providing a service to them.

Disability and ESF projects

The European Social Fund gives priority to several groups of participants, among them disabled people. ESF (and other programmes) may support projects designed solely for disabled people, or for unemployed people among whom there will be disabled applicants. Some projects may be led by employers or will have a substantial input from employers in their design and delivery. Whichever applies, no project should reject an application from a disabled person on account of their disability, as this is likely to amount to direct discrimination, which cannot be justified in law. On the other hand, positive discrimination in support of disabled people is permitted, subject to the other requirements of employment law, and such positive steps to help people are part of good practice. All projects, whether or not they set out to provide services solely to disabled people, will need to welcome and accommodate clients with disabilities by providing accessible and, if necessary, adapted services.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) applies to ESF (and other) projects. The Disability Discrimination Act protects disabled people. The Act sets out the circumstances in which a person is 'disabled'. It says a person is disabled if they have:

- a mental or physical impairment;
- this has an adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities;
- the adverse effect is substantial; or
- the adverse effect is long-term (meaning it has lasted for 12 months, or is likely to last for more than 12 months or for the rest of their life).

In judging whether a person is disabled, it is important to work out exactly how they are affected by their impairment. For the DDA, disability is defined by what a person cannot do, or finds difficult, rather than what they can do².

This definition, based on impairment, is helpful for projects and employers who need to comply. In assessing how best to support a person into work, projects need to be aware of the DDA definition, and also how to assess clients' positive talents and abilities. This is described more in Chapter 5 – Assessing Needs.

The Disability Equality Duty (DED) aims to promote disability equality across the public sector. The DED sets out what public authorities must have due regard to in order to promote equality of opportunity. Most public authorities are also covered by specific duties, and must:

- publish a Disability Equality Scheme (including within it an Action Plan);
- involve disabled people in producing the Scheme and Action Plan;
- demonstrate they have taken actions in the Scheme and achieved appropriate outcomes;
- report on progress; and
- review and revise the Scheme³.

Background

The evaluation of the European Social Fund (ESF) in England in 2005 recommended that good practice in Objective 3 support to disabled people be investigated in more detail. The aim was to inform current and future policy on economic inactivity and so encourage those on incapacity benefit to obtain employment.

In response to this, and extending the scope to include EQUAL, the Department for Work and Pensions European Social Fund Division commissioned a project to identify and publish disability good practice, to ensure experience from the 2000–2006 Programme is available to inform the 2007–2013 Programme.

The audience for the good practice material was seen as being primarily ESF Co-financing Organisations (such as DWP/Jobcentre Plus and the Learning and Skills Council – LSC) that award ESF funding and providers that deliver ESF projects. The material will also be of interest to DWP policy divisions, ESF partners, disability organisations, devolved administrations, the European Commission and other Member States.

ESF and EQUAL stand alongside domestic DWP/Jobcentre Plus and LSC provision, and this guide to good practice will help to identify practice and innovation that can complement and add value to ‘mainstream’ programmes.

What is good practice?

Without the establishment of benchmarks and robust arrangements for evaluation, views about whether practice is ‘good’ are essentially subjective. Good practice aims to remove all kinds of barriers to work, to provide a range of effective supports and activities, and to empower and involve clients. In this draft, we have adopted a pragmatic approach and have judged the value of good practice by four key measures:

- how it has contributed to the delivery of successful outcomes which have empowered disabled clients to develop confidence, skills and knowledge that will enable them to develop in their own lives and in their careers;
- how it has contributed to enhanced results for a specially disadvantaged group, or a difficult measure or theme;
- how well it might be recognised and endorsed by the stakeholder group and by clients, and be adopted in future by other projects; and
- how it contributes to domestic Jobcentre Plus and LSC provision.

We have also included examples and concepts that have been tested in practice within ESF or EQUAL projects, and which can therefore be taken up by others in their own projects.

Methodology

The approach, endorsed in discussions with stakeholders, was to invite project providers to describe their projects using the 'steps' outlined above. They did so initially via a template provided on the ESF website, and some 39 projects responded, providing a very substantial body of material. Although the brief was for 'disability projects' to respond, in fact a number responded who had no specific disability focus. Their contributions proved very useful, and illustrated the important point that disability employment projects are not contained in well-defined boundaries. At least one of these 'non-disability projects' had helped more disabled people than several of the smaller projects serving only disabled people.

This material was then analysed to identify practical action that projects had taken to achieve their goals and improve the quality of their services. These were grouped initially into approximately 150 policies or actions. They were in turn grouped into the 'steps', and into broader concepts, and a draft guide was produced by the project team.

A short survey of current literature revealed a few documents of relevance to this project, and these were included in a textual review to confirm the findings of the review of projects. There was no point of dissension between that review and the project survey.

Telephone discussion then took place with all the available projects, resulting in 27 more detailed reviews of the key issues for projects, and analysis of the important learning points for future projects. Case studies were drawn from the material provided and used to illustrate the text.

This text was then offered for review and criticism to the stakeholder group and, after a further review, to the originating projects to confirm the accuracy of the material and interpretation. Further revisions completed the work.

2. Underpinning values

Most examples of good practice fit more or less readily into the steps towards employment, plus innovation. Some stand out as relevant for all the steps, and are consequently not easily categorised. They are nonetheless important, and inform all other aspects of work with clients.

Compliance with the DDA and the Disability Equality Duty

The DDA and DED have been mentioned above. ESF projects are intended to help individuals who are excluded or at risk of exclusion from work. No project can exclude disabled people from its services. All will be expected to make reasonable adjustments so that their service is accessible to disabled people. This should include active promotion of the service so that any disabled person who wishes may join an appropriate course or project. Many barriers to work are not the direct result of a disability, but are created by organisations who do not make their policies and practices accessible to disabled people and who do not work to the social model of disability, so expertise in helping to overcome them should be available to all individuals.

Accessibility calls for projects that are physically and socially accessible and that are welcoming for clients. Documents, communications and all kinds of materials should be provided in a variety of formats so that they are accessible to all disabled people.

The First Step Into Work project at Voluntary Action Leicester provides a service for people who have a learning disability wanting to enter employment. Through their previous experience they recognised that potential clients may experience literacy problems due to their learning disability thus causing a barrier to project participation. In order to resolve this, project literature and leaflets were produced in an accessible format using easy words and symbols. Along with this all project promotional materials were assessed by a steering group of people with learning disabilities.

The Sanctuary project, working with asylum seekers who are suffering the psychological affects of depression, anxiety, and trauma caused by the departure from their country of origin and establishing themselves in a new country, has developed a drop-in service approach that links legal advice and therapeutic services. There is a team of counsellors who have a range of languages (Arabic, French, Sorani, Shona, Turkish, Kurdish, Farsi, Urdu, Punjabi, and Somali). There is a separate room for women and children. A group of volunteers make lunch, so all attendees have a meal whilst waiting. The service is friendly and independent and in a warm environment.

Respect for people

Respect for the people with which a project works is vital. It is the foundation of trusting relationships, which in turn leads to confidence in working together. Respect will be exemplified by treating your clients and employers as partners, valuing their opinions, acknowledging their skills and experiences, and listening to and acting on their needs.

For some clients, particularly those least used to working with employment-directed agencies, this will be a new and positive experience, and projects which go out of their way to understand and to accommodate clients' needs will be the ones who are most successful in helping them to move forward.

Other customers, such as employers, may have very different priorities from project clients. These priorities should also be respected, and understood, to enable and support a positive relationship with future employees.

Understand the client group

Another aspect of respect is shown in the decision to work with a specific group of disabled people, or with several groups of people with different disabilities or health conditions. Providing services to just one group allows for specialisation and the development of expertise. In practice, projects have tended to show a modest degree of specialisation. For example, it has proved helpful for projects to develop the unique skills to support clients with learning difficulties or severe and enduring mental health problems. Other projects have been able to develop a range of services specific to people with sensory impairments and a case can be made for many special projects. Specialisation allows projects to develop sensitive, effective services for clients. Specialist organisations of disabled people have successfully teamed up with partners offering general services in joint projects.

The Retail Skills Network – West project has specialised in the Sales and Customer Service sector. It has engaged employers to understand their needs in order to provide accurately targeted training for employees and opportunities for unemployed people to take part in retail skills training.

Shared values and project plans

Many projects include co-operative networks of organisations, often in formal or structured partnerships. Successful partnerships spend time establishing strong bonds. Having a common goal of winning the project funding may be a sound reason for coming together, but should only be a beginning. A genuinely shared vision and goals are essential to successful co-operation. This requires trusting relationships cemented with clear understanding about the roles and the responsibilities of each partner, the rules by which the partnership will operate. These should be written and agreed, with contracts or service level agreements where appropriate. Action plans for development of the partnership, and financial agreements and procedures need to be clear from the earliest moment.

Most projects find themselves working alongside mainstream agencies such as Jobcentre Plus, Local Authorities, housing providers and so forth. Relationships with these agencies can be very productive, so they should be involved at the design stage of projects if at all possible. But projects do well to retain a separate identity and relationship with their clients, and often need to keep that relationship going after clients move into mainstream services.

Projects that stand out have taken time to establish their partnerships, and have found ways to prepare in advance of the start date. They review their achievements throughout the project, and introduce change in carefully planned ways. Sometimes this is to adopt a successful practice from elsewhere. Sometimes it is to compensate for a weakness in the original plan, or for changes in circumstances. Embracing change is important to projects and helps them respond to the needs of their clients.

Underpinning values at a glance

Underpinning values	Co-financing Organisations	Projects
Respect	<p>Applicants should comply with the Disability Discrimination Act⁴ (DDA) and the Disability Equality Duty⁵ (DED) and accept disabled people as clients. Contracts coming from public sector bodies must comply with the DED. (www.dotheduty.org)</p> <p>CFOs will wish to consult disabled people in drawing up plans for ESF projects.</p> <p>CFOs should use and encourage a social model of disability which recognises that people with impairments are disabled by the physical and social barriers that they encounter.</p>	<p>Comply with the DDA and the DED, and promote projects to disabled people. (www.dotheduty.org)</p> <p>Consult your clients, listen to their expertise and wishes and act upon them to improve the quality of project delivery.</p> <p>Review progress and adapt projects to clients' needs.</p> <p>Projects should build their services around a social model which recognises that people with impairments are disabled by the physical and social barriers that they encounter.</p>
Accessibility	All projects should be accessible to disabled people.	Accessibility includes physical, social and intellectual issues.
Employment	Applicants should have clear and working links with employers where relevant.	Value and respect employers' business needs.
Partnerships	Partnership roles and functions should be clearly set out.	<p>Share ideals and goals among all partners.</p> <p>Have clear partnership roles and functions.</p>
Mainstreaming	Is the relationship with mainstream agencies clear and co-operative?	Have clear but flexible working relationships with mainstream agencies.

3. Innovation, planning, management and evaluation

Innovation by ESF and EQUAL projects is a significant contribution that can be made to enhance services generally. As long as there are groups who suffer disadvantage in accessing work, innovation will be needed.

Not surprisingly, there is little evidence of the ‘revolutionary idea’ as a source of inspiration and innovation. Those who have developed projects with novel approaches have done so through long experience, discussion, research and study. Most innovations are manageable changes that make important differences to outcomes.

Ideas from other projects

Occasionally, innovation comes when a successful idea from a different but related field is brought into the disability arena. Innovative projects often have connections and partnerships with projects in other fields of work.

The Next Choice project for disabled clients makes use of the Working Links’ office hub in Birmingham. By providing an employer room, clients grow used to an interview environment and can feel more relaxed at real interviews. This innovation for disabled clients was already in use for other groups.

Knowing the client group, working with partners

Knowing the client group is essential. Disabilities are diverse, with significant differences of need between various groups. For example, people with learning difficulties have different support and developmental needs from, say, those with sensory impairments. Innovative projects have close knowledge and experience of their clients. The result is that the implementation of projects is closely tailored to client’s needs.

CFOs will want to discuss their strategies for ESF before they finalise specifications and invite tenders. Discussion can be local, regional or with the national disability organisations. Discussions with projects that have experience of ESF and disability can be very helpful, showing what has worked in the past, illustrating the kinds of partnerships that are effective, and the methods that work.

It is always sensible and indeed good practice to discuss project ideas with prospective clients, employers, and organisations for disabled people during the planning stage. This is an effective way to create partnerships with other organisations, and those who do it report that they lead to more successful projects. Such discussions can enhance all aspects of a project – from the means to get in touch with clients, to the location of services, the involvement of service users, and the relationships with the local community and with public services.

Some projects are run by disabled people, and they of course have the best information on their needs and can be well placed to develop sensitive and appropriate projects.

Few projects work in isolation. Recruitment of clients is often done in concert with other groups; assessments may span several facilities; and action plans may be delivered by various organisations. At the end of the process, there is an employer whose needs should be considered in the project design and innovation stage. Time spent on visiting and making links with partners is rarely wasted. Discussions can create sound ideas and effective structures for co-operation, and resolve issues of detail. The administrative and financial arrangements can be worked out and contingency plans laid down. Partnerships can unify stages of work with clients, simplifying referral procedures and reducing drop-out rates.

Havering College of Further and Higher Education 'On your Marks' project linked in with Havering Association for Disabled people (HAD) to deliver a course structured around their requirements. Havering College already have an extensive provision to deliver basic skills. This was coupled with HAD and enabled them to develop opportunities open to the community and specifically designed for disabled clients. Clients also had the opportunity to gain work experience as part of the course and many have accessed this. Havering College has used their flexibility and expertise to bring education to clients, delivering it on-site according to their needs.

Gathering evidence

Project promoters need to gather evidence of the need for their project, and use any sources of information that are available. There is a great deal of information and research material that can contribute to good project design. Gathering evidence before the start of a project helps promoters to test their ideas and to adopt successful approaches from elsewhere. Sources of information include publications, academic studies, specialist media reports, brochures and booklets from specialist sources (such as the Employers' Forum on Disability, the Disability Rights Commission, or from specialist Disability Charities and organisations of disabled people), websites of other projects and specialist tools and information available via the web or in publications. Information from closely-related fields, such as education, can also be helpful. The Department for Work and Pensions maintains a useful archive of research material.⁶

The London College of Beauty Therapy (LCBT) gathered evidence that a lack of basic skills and a higher than average incidence of dyslexia are the key issues to poor employability. This was further validated by evidence showing that 37% of LCBT's current students self declared with mild dyslexia. Gathering this evidence led to the innovation of linking a specific disability to a specific employment outcome via training and support services.

Well planned projects that innovate pay close attention to previous work and projects, and review the local provision early on. Visiting local services can be very helpful, and discussing future plans can lead to worthwhile innovations. Sometimes important learning comes from allied but different fields, such as education or careers guidance.

The Tomorrow's People Trust launched Pathways to Employment for incapacity benefit claimants, lone parents and people with low levels of qualifications. After reviewing other programmes and practices in London, and speaking to the client groups. They found that there was duplication of some services, but no provider was offering self-esteem and awareness courses. Their innovation was to introduce a previously-missing element into the local area.

In reviewing past and current projects, the use of a SWOT analysis has been seen to be helpful, provided the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats are used as guides to inform action and not merely recorded and playing no part in developing planning.

Research, development and piloting

A research, development and inception phase was part of the format for EQUAL, and can usefully be included in all projects. This approach allows a project team to make contacts and partnerships that work well; to develop links to client organisations, to establish good practices and suitable locations, to prepare publicity and communications, and to develop ideas into effective practice. Projects might, for example, try a new partnership, introduce a new technique, or engage clients in a new way. They can use the early phase to develop their practice, and should find that the end results are better.

Wherever possible, projects should have a preliminary phase during which the project design can be developed. This provides a practical foundation for later work, and can contribute to ongoing evaluation and refinement of services during a project's life. Projects are also sometimes used to pilot activity that is intended to be taken up in the mainstream, and can usefully learn from work that is carried out in the mainstream or other services.

Innovation does not end at the design stage. Many projects experience quite significant changes through their lifetime. For example, a particular recruitment route may not be available as was planned, or a course turns out to be less popular than expected. Innovation and changes to how projects and partnerships operate often continue throughout.

Engaging staff and clients

Project staff are the closest to clients, and their experience can be valuable for developing new ideas, before, during and after the life of the project. Making time for staff to be involved at all stages is both a source of inspiration and a check on the viability of concepts.

Creating employment opportunities for clients who have been excluded from the economy, and often excluded from learning as well, are a challenge to staff. Case conferences team reviews and similar approaches can help tap their invaluable knowledge and experience in the preparation of projects throughout.

The engagement of the project team and the motivation of the individuals can be an important factor in innovation.

Clients have the first-hand experience of unemployment and disadvantage, and of their own circumstances. Their input is immensely useful at all stages. Engaging them directly in project design, talking to them during and after the project provides the best information. They can be engaged person to person, or through groups or more structured consultations such as questionnaires, and through their organisations and social networks. When disabled people help run projects it is easier to engage with disabled clients, because they understand the issues and barriers better, and can inspire confidence in the project.

Using technical change

In a few cases, innovation in technical equipment, adaptations and buildings is important. This is not often reported by projects, but in some instances can make a valuable difference. Staying in touch with technical advances is always desirable, and where special equipment or methods are to be used it is essential to have expert knowledge available.

Visage, a project of the Kent Association for the Blind, was conceived by recognising the needs of clients and the wider benefits that computers gave to the wider community. It was helped in part by the advances in the field of screen magnification and speech recognition, and improved software compatibility. Visage was able to use technical developments as a spur to innovation in the training of clients.

Working with employers

Projects for disabled people have much in common with those for other disadvantaged client groups. One of the common factors is of course the goal of employment, and projects with good employer relations stand out for the clarity of purpose and the positive influence on project design. Many projects prepare clients for further activity that will eventually lead to employment, but have no direct employer contact themselves. Even these will do well to stay in touch with employers or with the services that clients go on to use. Such contact may provide valuable labour market information and guidance on employers' needs. If the exchange of information includes any information about clients, the guidance on disclosure will need to be carefully followed to ensure confidentiality.

Retail Skills Network – West is a project of the College of North West London. It used the Skillsmart Retail Location Model, in conjunction with Town Centre Managers, to undertake 'mystery shopping'. This allowed employer liaison staff to build relationships with 400 small and medium-sized enterprises.

The Mystery Shop was conducted by a professional agency from outside the area, and detailed information was fed back confidentially to each retailer. This innovative approach to engaging small employers illustrates how the design of a project can be influenced by the goal of employment and close contact with employers.

Evaluation

Evaluation gathers information and assesses the effects of projects. Both qualitative and quantitative evaluation can take place at any stage, but the methods to be used need to be decided early and the research results may be one of the project's objectives.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of an intervention may be informal or more rigorous, even approaching the standards required for research. The evaluation of projects may have many purposes, and each evaluation should be designed for the specific purpose for which it is required and for the stakeholders involved.

The Ensuring Positive Futures project operates a range of services to support people living with HIV into employment, and to advise employers, ensuring they understand the issues and implement sound employment policies. The project provides a safe testing ground for health and stamina, in a gym and on allotments.

The project has carried out careful evaluation of clients' progress, and has evidence of improved well-being on physical, psychological and social level for all participants. A total of 55 clients engaged in the project. All were measured to demonstrate an improvement in health evidenced by increased T cell counts and reduced viral load.

All clients indicated improvement on a self assessment scale of soft outcomes such as; improved physical and psychological well-being, increased self-confidence, improved motivation to maintain well-being.

For a short 'educational course', the purpose of evaluation might be to assist organisers in planning improvements for the next time it is held. The systematic collection of participants' opinions using a questionnaire may be all that is required. However, for other outcomes, for example job entry, a well-designed audit process may be informative in terms of efficiency and cost-effectiveness and will be useful to a wider audience and so inform future projects.

Planning, innovation, and evaluation at a glance

Planning, innovation, management and evaluation	Co-financing Organisations	Projects
Preparation	Applicants should show how they will engage with the client group and how they will develop and initiate the project.	<p>Know the client group or work with those who do.</p> <p>Discuss with clients and their representative groups before and while preparing the project.</p> <p>Work with partners from the earliest point.</p> <p>Use a SWOT analysis to plan.</p> <p>Prepare the administrative arrangements in advance and simplify referral procedures.</p>
Capacity and targeted services	<p>Encourage leadership by users and balanced partnerships and consortia. For large contracts partners may form supply-chains to ensure provision of specialist services.</p> <p>Applicants should show how they will develop and initiate the project, support staff and apply specialist knowledge.</p> <p>Applicants should have good working relationships with mainstream services.</p>	<p>Include a development and initiation phase.</p> <p>Empower and support project staff.</p> <p>Keep abreast of technical change, have expertise available.</p> <p>Design the project as complementary and adding value to mainstream services.</p>
Innovation	<p>Projects should show evidence of need and sound reasoning for their approach.</p> <p>Projects may develop or pilot new approaches for wider use later.</p> <p>Projects may need to adapt to evolving circumstances.</p>	<p>Review previous work locally and elsewhere; build on previous experience.</p> <p>Gather evidence of project designs, methods and approaches.</p> <p>Innovate throughout the project and build success on many small changes.</p>
Evaluation	CFOs should evaluate the projects they support, and encourage evaluation by projects.	<p>Include evaluation in the project design.</p> <p>Involve the clients of the project in the evaluation.</p> <p>Share information to enhance future work.</p>

4. Attracting clients

Disclosure, confidentiality and consent

When joining a project, people who are disabled may choose to disclose their disability or to keep it private. Although there is no obligation on disabled people to disclose their disability at any stage, projects are encouraged to:

- discuss a person's needs as part of the initial assessment stage (as well as their ongoing needs during later assessments); and
- explain why questions about disability and other personal characteristics are being asked in the first place.

When projects are asking participants to complete their individual records at the recruitment stage, the project should explain that the information is being asked primarily to ensure that the project can identify the individual's needs. The project should also explain that certain questions are being asked in relation to personal characteristics to help demonstrate that the programme is targeting appropriate participants for support – and that this information will be aggregated and presented in statistical terms and will be completely anonymised. Obviously if, after this explanation, a person does not wish to disclose their disability then that right not to disclose should be respected.

Confidentiality of information before and after disclosure is an absolute necessity, and needs to be handled carefully in situations where clients' progress may be helped by sharing information on impairments. The rule will be to act with explicit permission and to always presume in favour of confidentiality.

If there is any doubt about a client's ability to make decisions, to disclose, or to participate in a voluntary and meaningful way, expert guidance should be sought. Untrained or inexperienced staff will find it hard to reach good judgements.

CFOs will want to discuss with disability organisations how they advise projects on issues of disclosure, confidentiality and consent. Projects will need to work with CFOs and partners to develop a culture in which disabled people feel safe to disclose their impairment and to discuss it openly. This is particularly important for people with mental health problems.

Using contacts and organisational links

Reaching out to clients is one of the hardest tasks facing any project, and one of the most important. Projects are best placed when they already have a client group with whom they have valued and regular contact. Organisations of disabled people, and disability specific organisations, especially local branches, are able to recruit for projects from among their membership, or through families and acquaintances of members. Colleges have student rolls which can provide a sound basis for launching additional work with their students. Some organisations have good links with employers, and see employers as beneficiaries of their projects. Such links, through trade associations, sector training providers, Chambers of Commerce and the like, are invaluable.

Since 1998 Voluntary Action Leicester has been managing a volunteering project for people with learning disabilities and is now supporting them to move into paid work through the ESF First Step Into Work project. At the point of tender they had a waiting list of 20 people interested in finding employment.

Many projects do not have such direct links to groups of clients, or are venturing to support a client group that is new to them. For them, the most effective recruitment is through partnership, and maintaining close community links. A good working relationship with organisations that have access to clients is the first step to effective recruitment. Visits to Jobcentres, surgeries, day centres, Social Services establishments, schools, Connexions centres and all kinds of community facilities are important. They need to be followed up with agreement on how to work together for at least the duration of the project. Ideally, this will happen in the pre-bid stage of the project, and be fully developed before or during the inception phase.

Some projects have relied heavily on a single source of referrals – usually an organisation with established contacts. While this has been effective, it is helpful to retain flexibility in the referral procedures and arrangements, as it can be difficult to forecast success in a rapidly changing environment. A robust referral partnership is one that is both well worked out in practice, and has several possible routes to choose from. CFOs will want to encourage projects to have alternative recruitment strategies in place from early in the life of the project.

Balanced Futures, a project run by Scout Enterprises, was initially contractually dependent on Jobcentre Plus for referral of clients. As the programme progressed, however, they were allowed to recruit directly (but still under the control of Jobcentre Plus). This was achieved by concentrating efforts in areas where people with mental health problems were highly represented e.g. Day Centres, Mental Health Forums and Neighbourhood Projects.

Balanced Futures offered a three way interview involving their own Adviser, the referral agency and the potential beneficiary. This enabled rapport to be built prior to actually joining the programme. There was an opportunity for both the client and the referral agency to clarify what the programme was about and what would be available to them. It was rare for a potential client to decide they did not want to join the programme once they had met with staff, largely because they recognised that this was a programme where they would be listened to and their particular needs and aspirations heeded.

Working in the community

These means of contacting clients may of course reach people who are already well-served by existing services. Reaching those who are isolated from all services can be challenging, and will take time.

Being in the community is the most important first step. Taking a roadshow to local shopping centres, to community venues, to estates and schools is a good approach but needs to be followed up quickly with practical action. Roadshows can be as bold as a

specially fitted-out bus that tours around and offers tasters or even the whole project. More often they use a modest stand that can be taken to various locations and can be used in the open at shopping centres. Such stands may be able to recruit direct to the project, but serve just as well to heighten visibility, build a good reputation and spread information. As far as possible, local people and local partners should be present on the stand; and there must be people who can answer questions with authority. Staff for such a stand or tour bus should have at least some basic training in disability awareness and disability equality.

A roadshow cannot be everywhere, and is demanding of time and effort. To continue to be visible posters, newsletters and leaflets should be available wherever potential clients may be found. This may be on the newsagent's small ads window, in GP surgeries, in Jobcentre Plus offices, in Social Services waiting areas and so forth. But active involvement is always more effective than passive publicity. Some projects get agreement to recruit personally in Jobcentres, and a supportive GP can be a valuable referral partner.

First Base Skills at Canterbury College is a project working with the Shaw Trust. To ensure those agencies in a position to promote the service are well-informed Shaw Trust mentors and trainers provide promotional presentations and information guidance to Jobcentre Plus, Primary Care Trusts, Probationary Service, Drug and Alcohol Units and any agency or service that will have contact with potential clients. In partnership with agencies and service providers, marketing leaflets and posters are distributed to stakeholders who are able to promote the course. The Shaw Trust maintains a close link with referral agencies and provides information on the nature of the project. Mail shots to GPs and other initial access points prove useful, and success story flyers give actual written and pictorial evidence to both referral agent and client.

The more visibility a project has in the community, the greater its chance of success. Mail shots have been used by some, with modest success. A presence in the local media can help, though simple advertising is of limited value and appeal. It is better to have good quality copy regularly in a very local paper than a one-off costly insert that has a limited lifespan. Websites are popular with projects, but there is little evidence on how effective they are in reaching and recruiting people who may not be actively looking for a particular programme and those without access to information technology. Always use a variety of media as some will be more accessible to disabled people than others.

Drop-ins and open days

Closely related to the roadshow, is the drop-in or open day. These allow potential clients, family, friends, carers and relatives to see for themselves. The open day should offer a detailed practical look at everything a project has to offer, with plenty of time for questions and exploration. Effective use of the open day includes a chance to try out the services, and willing clients will be able to sign up there and then. It is hospitable, and attractive too, to offer lunch or light refreshments. Projects should reassure clients that the drop-in service is properly insured and that attendance and involvement in the project itself are voluntary.

To build positively on clients' reluctance to get caught up in an unknown project, some projects have extended the concept of the open day to the 'open week' or 'open module'.

Here clients effectively take their first steps in a project but without making any commitment, or signing-up until the end of the taster period.

Puissance, a project by Staffordshire Social Care and Health, provided a ‘taster’ event, making it clear that clients who did not like it could drop out. The project was confident that once included, people would want to stay, and this proved to be the case. They enjoyed a very low non-completion rate. This was a way of enhancing a scheme that had been set up previously but had not been able to recruit the clients it sought.

Reputation

Reputation and word of mouth recommendations are however the strongest boost to any project’s credibility. A good reputation, built before the project begins, is the best of all. Failing that, and when a project is new to an area, the quality of relationships built with local organisations can create important credibility and provide independent recommendation to hesitant clients. Successful organisations and projects will also make good use of testimonials and case studies to offer evidence for their work and identification with the client group.

Projects tailored to client’s needs

Recruitment is made easier if projects emphasise the ways in which their overall design is tailored to the clients. Suitable locations and times for project work are essential. Big institutional buildings may initially be threatening to some clients who would happily attend the same project in a local community hall. Long working days tax the stamina of people who are not yet used to ‘normal’ working hours, and should be adjusted. For many with caring responsibilities or those whose condition needs active management, part-time attendance with flexible hours can be essential.

The induction and introductory period is a sensitive time for clients. Having family, carers and friends with them at the interview is helpful. It is also very helpful for staff to have awareness and experience of the client groups so that individuals may be met with understanding and empathy.

Projects that tailor services to individual needs will help recruitment, as well as delivering a service better fitted to individual client’s developmental needs. ESF and EQUAL also provide free services, and clients need to know that they will not be out of pocket right from the outset.

The Creative Leadership Project run by SCA Community Care Services began with a number of road shows across the region. Publicity material was circulated using a database developed from an earlier project and linking with organisations across the region. It stressed that the programme would be tailored to individual needs both in terms of content and the modes of learning offered, and that it would generally be made available at a location and time to suit them. Where travel was required expenses would be paid.

Employers

Recruiting employers to assist in projects requires a similar approach, but focussed on their specific needs and organisations. Providing services to a local area, or to a specific industry sector, will influence how employers are approached. Using established networks is the best starting point. Chambers of Commerce and Business Links can be useful avenues. Colleges and training establishments often have excellent sectoral links from specific courses, which can lead to excellent working relationships. As well as using personal and organisational connections, specific events to inform employers can help.

Like clients, employers want to know that their needs will be met. To recruit them, projects can show that the service will be tailored to their need – perhaps offering training for vacancies identified in advance, or helping develop recruitment practices and offering advice on adaptations and disability at work. Larger employers may have vacancies that occur regularly, and would be willing to give interview guarantees and job trials in exchange for tailored training and a smooth recruitment process. Smaller employers often find it difficult to make time for staff development and will join projects that are designed with their sector of work in mind. Generally, employers like projects that offer well-trained workers without advance commitments to employment. Such projects open up employment opportunities and help shape activities to known needs.

Attracting clients at a glance

Attracting clients	Co-financing Organisations	Projects
<p>Confidentiality</p>	<p>When asking participants to complete personal records, the project should explain that the information is to help identify the individual's needs. The project should also explain that questions on personal characteristics will help demonstrate that the programme is targeting appropriate participants and that this information will be aggregated in statistical terms and will be completely anonymised.</p> <p>Applicants should have an effective policy on confidentiality and disclosure of disability which recognises the right of individuals to disclose or keep private any impairment that they may have, subject to legislative requirements.</p>	<p>When asking participants to complete personal records, the project should explain that the information is to help identify the individual's needs. The project should also explain that questions on personal characteristics will help demonstrate that the programme is targeting appropriate participants and that this information will be aggregated in statistical terms and will be completely anonymised.</p> <p>An effective policy on confidentiality and disclosure of disability and well-trained staff are essential from the outset. Clients of projects should be able to disclose or keep private any impairment as they wish, subject to legislative requirements.</p>

Attracting clients	Co-financing Organisations	Projects
Recruitment	Projects should have a well worked out plan to attract and recruit clients, including employers where appropriate.	<p>Visit organisations, make presentations.</p> <p>Use methods of promotion that are accessible to disabled people, remembering that disabled people may also be in the provider organisations.</p> <p>Use word of mouth.</p> <p>Leave posters, leaflets, newsletters.</p> <p>Use mail shots and local media with care.</p> <p>Recruit employers early, by locality or sector, using established contacts and communication channels.</p>
Reputation	Applicants should show that they have active experience, contacts and expertise with the relevant client group.	<p>Use existing client groups, links and partnerships.</p> <p>Use testimonials and case studies.</p> <p>Project staff should be familiar with the client group.</p>
Induction events	Applicants may want to include induction periods of various lengths, and engage progressively with clients, their families or carers/supporters if appropriate.	<p>Run drop-ins, open days and taster events.</p> <p>Include family and carers.</p> <p>Emphasise the good points of your project: flexibility, individual tailoring, free services.</p> <p>Have a sensitive and approachable induction period.</p>

5. Assessing needs

Early assessment

Although clients learn a lot about projects during their recruitment, and projects learn about the clients too, there should always be an individual initial assessment at the beginning of their time with the project. This will establish a good working relationship, and will set out the goals and evaluate the barriers to those goals. It will be an opportunity to recognise personal talents and limits, and confirm what the project can and cannot offer. Careful discussion will help establish what supports or adaptations are needed. It provides a sound basis for planning the client's programme and the project activity, and prevents projects and clients wasting time on inappropriate activities. An early assessment is an efficient and effective way to begin the delivery of services.

All projects should be accessible and accept disabled people. But that does not mean that every project should provide every kind of special support for all disabled people. The initial assessment should give a very good indication of the kinds of specialist support that a client needs to achieve their goals. If the project is unable to meet the need, being geared to providing some other service, or lacking in expertise to do a good job, it is better for the client to be advised and helped to find a service that suits them better. Clearly this should never be an excuse to exclude a disabled person nor to avoid making a reasonable adjustment to a programme. It can only be allowed as a genuine attempt to find the best possible outcome for the client. The client's own wishes will be of the greatest importance in the decision on how to proceed.

Structure of assessments

How assessments are structured depends a great deal on the nature of the project. Some projects offer only one service – a training programme for example – and the assessment may take the form of an initial assessment and guidance interview, which will check the client's skills, knowledge, interests, aspirations and achievements, to confirm that the course really does suit their needs and to offer alternatives to those who are not suited.

Most projects offer a range of options and services, and can tailor the pace, style and type of service to the client. Their assessments therefore need to be detailed and more wide ranging. A full assessment of this kind will cover at least:

- personal circumstances, including:
 - abilities, skills and stamina;
 - previous learning, education and qualifications;
 - previous work experience or expertise;
 - aspirations;
 - confidence;
 - learning ability;
 - health and medication including regular attendances for treatment etc;
 - any restrictions caused by the client's disability;

- social circumstances, for example:
 - family and support networks, including childcare and family responsibilities;
 - the living, housing and travelling environment;
- pay, income and legal issues, for example:
 - financial advice about income, benefit regulations including benefits available to employers and to people in training and in work;
 - any pension or insurance payments;
- the type of work that will be the goal of the programme, for example:
 - ability to achieve and cope with work or other goals;
 - job and workplace adaptations that may be needed;
 - preparation and training that may be needed;
 - job search strategies and support;
 - barriers to achieving the goal;
- what is possible, what is out of reach at the moment, and how much time might be needed;
- whether the project is the right next step;
- how to proceed.

Assessments like these have several names – person-centred planning or holistic assessment are two common ones. Such assessments rely on the full involvement of the client. The assessment becomes a shared activity between the project staff and the client. This shared approach can help lead to agreed results. An assessment with this scope is quite demanding of staff, and they will need coaching and supervision as they develop their skills.

Assessment procedures

Assessments that are informal help clients to feel at ease, allowing staff to gather comprehensive information in a relaxed and non-challenging way. Spending time at this stage will be rewarded with good relationships, mutual understanding and will lead to effective action.

The use of formal assessment procedures to support clients is less frequent. Training Needs Analysis, Skills Inventories, Adult Directions and sometimes psychometric tests are used. In these cases, the expertise of the assessor is important. Working with people who have learning difficulties is significantly different from working with those who have mobility problems. Assessments need staff who are familiar with the specific needs of the client group, and who are able to evaluate fairly and positively without inappropriate judgements of capacity or incapacity. For clients with profound disabilities, specialist or clinical assessments may be essential as a foundation for vocational assessments in the project.

Quality assessments

Recognising clients' talents is important. Talents may lie in specific work skills – such as literacy or craft skills. They may lie in character or temperament, which can be vital to feeling good and doing well in work that calls for specific social interactions. They may be found in work and life habits, such as the tendency to think big but leave tasks unfinished, or its opposite – the determination to finish one thing well before starting another. Talents that match the job, or match what the project has to offer are at the heart of a successful partnership between employee and employer, or between project and client.

Recognising barriers to employment, to training or to progress through the project is also important. If there were no barriers to employment, a client could compete equally with other potential employees in the market for work. A good assessment recognises barriers, helps establish the right course of action and adjusts programmes to individual needs. This means using talents to the full, and working around or removing barriers to progress.

By looking at the individual and working with them over a period of time the Camden Society's Quality to Work project was able to find out more about their aspirations, goals and concerns. People with learning disabilities are often heavily influenced by those around them, from family, support workers and carers. Often the aspirations of the individual come into conflict with these external influences. Employment can cause many different conflicts. The goals of the person often are seen as unrealistic, or would create a negative impact on their other activities, such as day services. Taking time with clients, the project can help them overcome these influences and support them towards their own individual goal and help them address any possible problems in a positive way. Confidence building is a major part of any employment support service and often it is seen as a limited outcome. However without the time spent helping clients to achieve this outcome there could be no progression toward employment.

Nearly all assessments are carried out one-to-one, and usually in private. A few find that working in groups using goal-setting workshops, or directed discussions, can be helpful. Where family, carers or support services are prominent, the assessment can usefully include them, as family and carers' lives will be changed by the client's journey towards work. Clients' confidence may also be boosted by having family or carers with them.

Carers' and families' support will be helpful, but carers can also have a limiting effect on clients' aspirations and achievements. This is all the more reason for the carer to play a part in the assessment, to understand the possibilities and eventually to become an ally in the development process. Reaching such across-the-board agreement is an important milestone.

Bedfordshire County Councils' Supported Apprenticeship Project completes a vocational profile for each client. Parents or carers have input at the first meeting with the client.

Profiling or 'discovery' can be led by the client. The outcome from profiling is an understanding of the person, what their aspirations and dreams are, an understanding of their skills and their support needs. This is achieved through spending time with the person in a range of settings, listening to them and asking open questions that help them to develop their thinking about what they wish to achieve. Individuals who have had no experience of work may use work 'taster' sessions in a variety of employment settings, to get a clearer understanding. College tutors provide an assessment of the person's academic abilities and social skills within a college setting. Work with the individuals and their support network is an ongoing process to 'discover' more, and plans are monitored and reviewed.

The common barriers encountered are that many people with learning difficulties are in transitional stages because of the reorganisation of services. This has meant moving into less supported environments and being offered new freedoms which they have found difficult to cope with. Other barriers include the fear of losing or changing benefits, managing home and work responsibilities with minimal support, unrealistic expectations from parents or individuals, accessing training matched to people's abilities, and double funding issues.

Sometimes a definite assessment is not possible in one discussion. Trial periods, 'tasters' and preparatory work can help to reach an accurate view of the possibilities. This works best where there is a choice of activities in a project and where it is connected to alternative provision for onward referral of clients.

Some groups need appropriate styles of assessments. Naturally, all assessments need to be carried out in the client's preferred language, for example a language that is not English, or in British Sign Language. Using suitable material to discuss issues can be important for groups who find interviews unfamiliar or difficult. People with some learning difficulties find it hard to connect to the flow of a structured assessment conversation, and may respond more easily to ideas presented in pictures. A suitable accessible location is essential.

Surrey County Council's About Us project develops life-skill and employment training for people with learning disabilities. When a new group joins the project, one of the About Us staff will discuss ability levels within the group and their preferred method of working. This will give an indication of the learning units needed. Staff will then visit the group, chatting to each person to sign them up and learn more about them. This information is put into their individual portfolio. At this stage, the group will decide on which unit(s) they would like to undertake. Any special requirements for the units can be explored at this point. Draft learning materials are prepared for the group and sent to the staff member to check they are appropriate. For learners with limited communication, it can be very tricky to establish their personal preferences and interests. Often they will say 'yes' to most questions to please the assessor. To overcome this, a set of initial assessment pictures has been prepared to help with selection and to clarify people's responses. Each learner has their own barriers to overcome, but working closely with the staff member helps to cater for these. Because the project is designed and delivered in-house, it is able to work with these barriers to help remove them.

Shared assessments

Working with other organisations means that any assessments they have undertaken can be available to supplement information gathered in the project. For example, a specialist and detailed educational assessment from a college, or even from a different specialist from the project, may be a valuable addition to a personal plan.

The client's permission must be given before assessments are shared. Information of a medical nature requires the client's informed consent in advance. A confidentiality policy and consent procedure is essential before any information can be shared with other organisations and people.

It is sensible for there to be a single person who co-ordinates and synthesizes the assessment information and relationships. Some call this a 'lead mentor', others a 'case manager', or 'personal tutor'. This person will be involved in every stage of assessment and the client's journey. They need to have a close and trusting relationship with the client, and to be available at the client's request.

In work income calculations

Uncertainty over benefit payment income and in-work income is often an issue for people returning to work. After a long absence from work, or where skills are new or undeveloped, high pay cannot always be expected. Part-time working is a good starting point for many, but in the long-term may result in reduced income compared to full-time work. In these circumstances, a reduction in benefits can outweigh the gains in self-esteem and social contact that work can bring. Assessments that include in-work income calculations for the client and family are really helpful. Few projects will have the expertise to carry out such calculations, and any who offer advice will need to be sure that they are exempt or qualified under the Financial Services Act. In practice good assessments of in-work income can be obtained from the relevant Jobcentre Plus staff or from Citizen's Advice Bureaux (CABs). The CABs may not be able to undertake large numbers of assessments, and their agreement should be obtained before projects commit their services⁷.

Specific job goals

Wherever possible, an assessment should include consideration of a specific job, and if possible a specific employer. This adds accuracy and detail to the evaluation of a person's skills and talents and any barriers to work. Sometimes the assessment needs to go through a preliminary phase to agree the job goal, which is then reviewed in more detail to establish precise barriers to that specific kind of work.

Barnett College's LEAP project supports people seeking to work in the health and social care sectors. Their assessment ensures each client identifies their own career or learning path. LEAP works towards level 3 vocational qualifications, so a key objective is ensuring clients are in work placements that deliver the competency requirements of their qualification. Clients start with a diagnostic assessment to ensure they are working with (to) the correct qualification, are able to complete their qualification, have ongoing support, advice and guidance updates. Towards the end of their learning they are given opportunities to progress into a higher level post or to further learning. Each client undertakes an exit interview to identify further training needs, to offer referrals to complementary projects, to discuss with their employers, and book them onto new courses. Clients progress to employment with Strategic Health Authorities.

In many cases, projects cannot bring forward a specific job, and are helping clients to take their first steps towards work, which may be to related services such as New Deal or Jobcentre Plus. A view of the next step is important. Preparation for, say, a New Deal programme or a college course means getting ready for a major life change, so the assessment needs to be done with the relevant goal in mind.

Ongoing assessment

Assessment will be an ongoing activity throughout the client's stay in the project. The initial assessment will often have areas of uncertainty which can be resolved at later stages. Clients' steps towards work should be reviewed and recorded in ongoing assessments. Personal achievements and setbacks may call for changes to plans. Continuous assessment will identify the changes, and will encourage clients to recognise their achievements, building their confidence. It provides projects with important information on soft outcomes and 'distance travelled' by clients.

Assessment is a foundation on which future progress rests. Aside from the specific approach adopted by individual projects, the assessment rests on two core beliefs that underpin each project:

Every person who wishes to, can work.
Each person is unique.

Assessment at a glance

Assessment	Co-financing Organisations	Projects
Procedures	Contract specifications should include early assessment and ongoing review.	Every project should have an assessment procedure that involves clients. Some assessments may take place over an extended time period.
Methods	Applicants should be able to show how the assessment will relate to a job or other goals for the individual in constructing an action plan .	Recognise talents and be specific, assess against a job or other goal, set goals and review them as part of an assessment and identify barriers to the goal. Use trials and tasters to get detail and accuracy. Include in-work and benefit financial calculations where possible. Work 1:1 and, where appropriate and agreed with the client, with carers and family, to get agreement.
Sharing information	Applicants should have an effective confidentiality policy. Applicants may want to make use of specialist assessments for matters outside their project's scope of practice, and to share information among project partners. Assessments should be ongoing throughout the clients time in the project.	Use specialist technical or clinical assessments to underpin the 'whole person' vocational assessment. Use information from other organisations, with permission: confidentiality and consent procedures must be in place. Some assessments may take place over an extended time period.
Quality	Projects should show that staff will be trained and knowledgeable about disability and employment. There should be continuous contact with the client.	Have a lead member of staff as 'case manager' or 'tutor'. Train staff in assessment: staff should be reasonably familiar with the specific nature of the client's disability and any adjustments they need to enable full participation.

6. Taking action – including job search

Personal action plans

All that has been said about assessment is relevant to personal action plans as well. Plans set out what is to be done to achieve the goal agreed in an assessment. It is quite usual for plans to be made at the same time as assessments, and often by the same team or individuals. Plans are the essential outcome of assessments, and like them should be reviewed throughout the project.

Purpose and economy in plans

Plans should have a definite goal for each client. It is ethically important for projects to prepare plans that include goals that lie beyond the project's activity. For example, progression to a new training course with another provider could be a goal, as could entry to self-sustaining employment. The plan is best when it is prepared with the participation of the 'receiving' organisation. Where there is no employer or other organisation at the outset, the project can review plans as clients progress, refining the objectives progressively.

Some projects in ESF and EQUAL offer a single focussed intervention, for example a literacy class, working in isolation from other measures. These projects will only offer the option to attend or to go to an alternative provision. In such situations, there should be a wider assessment to confirm that the project is an appropriate component of a client's plan before they join.

Many projects offer a wide range of services, or work through collaborating organisations. These will need to use plans to select and to co-ordinate action between services and partners. They will of course have the goal in mind, and this will help avoid the all-too-easy assumption – usually unfounded – that more services are better than fewer. Plans should show economy of effective action, directed towards a definite goal.

Good plans are clear about making use of clients' talents. They refer to the barriers to progress, and propose action that is relevant to removing or working round those barriers. It should be clear from the plan how this will be achieved.

Individual ownership

Plans need to be based on individual needs identified in the assessment. They should also be 'owned' by clients, whose enthusiastic involvement is often a sign that the plan is well founded. Confidence in the assessment, the plan and the action that flow from it, and a good working relationship of trust and respect between staff and clients, will all help ensure success.

On some projects, action plans are formulated as contracts between the project and the client, with appropriate responsibilities and obligations on both sides. This needs to be done with some sensitivity, to create the right balance between obligation and responsibility and mutuality, but can be a useful framework for purposeful action.

Living plans

Plans by their nature change as events unfold. Many projects build continuous assessment into their work, giving priority to monitoring and adjusting action. The 'living plan' approach encourages clients' continuing involvement, and allows uncertainties to be handled positively. Only rarely, and with clear reasons, should changes be needed to the goal of the plan. When this does happen, a reassessment is usually necessary.

Clients can contribute to reviews, increase their sense of control and measure their own progress by keeping logbooks. Using appropriate methods to monitor and record progress can empower and motivate clients.

The North East Chamber of Commerce's project emphasises review and ownership of plans. Guidance is given and objectives are formulated to form the Action Plan. The Action Plan contains job search skills objectives to enable the client to broaden their search for work. Increasing confidence may also be an objective. Objectives are reviewed every four weeks. Appointments are available for the client with specialist agencies at the appropriate stage and when the client feels advice is needed. Responsibility for the Action Plan is joint between the project and the client at the outset but is encouraged to lie with the client to promote achievement and self-responsibility.

Objectives

Plans are not just lists of things to do. They also need objectives: the tangible achievements that will carry clients towards their goals and that result from the actions taken. Objectives must be realistic targets for the client to achieve, and for the project to provide. They will help project staff to focus on what matters. Successful plans use objectives that are accurate and relevant, and the 'SMART' acronym helps in judging their value:

Specific – what exactly is to be done, by whom and how?

Measurable – what measurable result will show that the objective has been reached? This might be a qualification, or a behaviour, or a length of time. Measuring objectives means that progress can be monitored and changes introduced when they are needed. For clients, knowing that they are making headway can be enormously liberating. The more concrete the measure the better: for example, 'Feeling more confident' would be a less reliable measure than 'Able to come to classes on my own'.

Achievable – can this actually be done in the time and with the resources available? This often means taking manageable small steps instead of risking failure on large changes in a short time. It also confirms that the project is able to deliver the result.

Relevant – will this lead to the desired results? Cross-referencing between objectives and talents, barriers and actions ensures that projects are delivering what helps the client, and not simply what they have available.

Time-bound – when will this be accomplished? Difficult change is easy to postpone, so having definite time limits for small achievable objectives keeps the momentum going. Without the time limits clients may become trapped in activities that are not helping them to progress. Clients should be able to reach their goals in the timescale of the project.

Supporting Work Experience for Living & Learning (SWELL) is run by Worcestershire County Council. The project aims to provide high-quality work experience as a step towards employment. This is achieved through Individual Learning Plans, and initial assessment issues addressed in ILPs are specific to the planned placement:

- Employer's name, location, nature of business. If the placement is not confirmed at this time, then the type of employment (e.g. retail, manufacturing etc);
- Work experience, planned start and end dates, frequency of attendance, length of day;
- Support measures, e.g. travel, personal protective equipment, job coach role (if applicable), level of visits, monitoring;
- Targets: academic, personal, social, workplace skills;
- Contribution to record of achievement;
- Commitment to participation;
- Aims and objectives of the placement;
- Information on relevant industrial sector;
- Expectations in the workplace (attendance, behaviour etc);
- Role and responsibility of the employer;
- Appraisal of situations that might arise.

Few projects can offer everything that all clients need. Referral to external specialists is the norm rather than the exception, even with a widespread partnership. Examples include ergonomic reviews of workplaces, or training to prepare for an unusual job. Some projects have successfully built active databases of the other services and specialist providers that they have used, and this has begun to build active co-operation and good use of facilities.

The Supported Apprenticeship Project of Bedfordshire County Council has a focussed Action Plan that includes referral to specialist agencies. Action plans are completed as part of the profiling process, but are regularly reviewed. They reflect the client's stage of development. The Action Plan is broken down into SMART objectives. It addresses preparation for work objectives which can include: travel training, personal presentation, commitment to and an understanding of the world of work, and timekeeping.

The project recognises that clients may need specialist support to enable them to reach the targets identified in their Action Plan. The project refers individuals to other agencies such as Workstep, psychologists, advocacy groups, and to specialist services such as For Autism, the Benefit Agency, Jobcentre Plus, and Welfare Rights and training courses (for example a Basic Food Hygiene Certificate).

Training staff in assessment and guidance will help in producing plans that are effective. Some projects have used the Initial Assessment and Guidance level 3 qualification, but other methods will also be useful.

Personal action plans at a glance

Personal Action Plans	Co-financing Organisations	Projects
Purpose and economy	<p>Applicants should usually show that the purpose of the project is to support clients towards goals beyond, or after, the time in the project.</p> <p>Projects should only embark on plans and action that meets the needs of clients.</p>	<p>Every plan should work towards a goal.</p> <p>Use plans to work efficiently, using the minimum necessary interventions.</p>
Ownership	<p>Project plan procedures should include agreement by clients and by employers (or other 'recipients').</p>	<p>Plans recognise clients' talents and individuality.</p> <p>Plans should be agreed by clients.</p> <p>Involve the employer (or other post-project 'recipients') where possible.</p>
Living plans	<p>Clients' plans should be reviewed and updated.</p>	<p>Use plans to co-ordinate services and specialists.</p> <p>Review progress often.</p>
Objectives	<p>Plans should follow SMART principles, using measures linked to the project's overall objectives.</p>	<p>Plans connect work-barriers and client and project resources to action.</p> <p>Use SMART objectives.</p> <p>Measure 'soft' outcomes and distance travelled.</p>

The range of activities offered by projects is very wide. All of them essentially are designed to help clients to move towards work, and so have a common goal.

Engaging activity

Projects which offer popular and motivational activities are effective. Far from offering a 'sugar coating on a bitter pill', they are able to build enthusiasm, and to empower clients to succeed in new areas of life.

The Balanced Futures Project from Scout Enterprises is intended to respond to the needs of individuals rather than having a clearly defined agenda that everyone has to follow. It has set up walking groups to encourage physical activity and to promote social inclusion and interaction. A support group was formed in Gloucestershire for clients and facilitated by staff. Stress management sessions have been held for clients for whom it was appropriate. The project has been successful because there is flexibility to address whatever might be holding up a client's progress. For example, they have helped a number of clients to resolve housing problems which, once solved, allowed the clients to consider employment options.

Surrey County Council's Gateways IT project provided access to digital cameras and those proved invaluable for 'About Us' learners. Over 70% of the learners are unable to read or write, so photographs and pictures are a key method of communicating. Each learner had their own record with pictorial worksheets and photographic evidence of their activities, which helped as both a communication and a memory.

The personal tutor or mentor

Ideally a single personal tutor, mentor or case manager will still be closely involved with each client. If possible it should be the same person who led the assessment. They should be trained on the DDA and disability equality. The personal mentor is not necessarily bound to deliver all the project services, but should be very closely linked to all those who do, and should have a co-ordinating role, with access to information and to people, and regular contact with the client.

How regular contact should be is much debated. Once a week seems a fair standard if there are no other teaching or development responsibilities. Some projects feel comfortable with once a month as long as clients are settled in their current role. The frequency of contact tends to reduce as confidence and capability increase, and is usually planned to reduce to zero once the client is stable in work.

Case managers, mentors or tutors can find themselves making complicated judgements. They are emotionally close to their clients in a bond of mutual trust, but have to stay detached. They may have to negotiate activities – perhaps care regimes or educational programmes – that lie outside their own competence. So support for them is necessary. Projects should have case reviews or case conferences regularly. Ideally these reviews will be multi-disciplinary, and focussed on the action plan and reviews. Each review should result in a recommendation for action, and case managers should emerge feeling supported and encouraged.

Working Links' Next Choice project in Birmingham provides: support mechanisms designed to help people into work; diagnosis of needs; support of a personal consultant; constant care whilst in and out of work; mentoring support; a combination of one-to-one sessions and group workshops; and solutions to employment barriers.

The Action Plan is reviewed on a one-to-one basis every two weeks. The project has used a distance travelled tool to gauge progress. The consultant works with the client to overcome some of the more practical barriers, such as lack of appropriate clothing, health and safety training, lack of tools or funding for travel, and the project can pay for such items. As the Action Plan is a living document, it is updated and amended and signed by both the consultant and the client.

Action and help where it is needed

Just as assessments will have reviewed many aspects of clients' lives, so action is more effective when help is available for any problem that occurs. A housing issue – perhaps rent arrears, or a need to move house – can have a big impact on attendance, concentration and performance. Projects which help across the board can be more effective than those that take a very narrow view of their remit. Helping clients in areas outside the project's main focus does not necessarily mean diverting resources. Often other agencies are able to help, and alerting them, co-ordinating with them, and adjusting the client's programme may be all that is needed. It is important for the project to know about the other agencies in the area, and to be willing to work with them.

Co-ordination of services enables projects to offer more than one event or action at one time. Simultaneous or parallel working can help to keep up the pace of progress, and can make goals achievable in a shorter time. The strands of activity need to be compatible so that the client is not overloaded, and this should be agreed between the client, mentor / case manager and service providers.

Adjusting to clients' needs

Rigid procedures are likely to be unfamiliar to clients who have been out of work for a long time. An informal project style is often welcome and welcoming, and less likely to create barriers. Within that friendly framework, it is possible to teach the disciplines for work, using direct teaching methods and open evaluation.

Training should be tailored to clients' needs. As a minimum it should be adapted to any shared needs – as for example when offering training to visually impaired people. Preferably it should be adapted to each individual as far as is practical. This may mean adjusting the pace of work, the hours of attendance, or the content of projects, as well as the media and means of action. The location of a project delivery can be vital. City centre business locations are quite intimidating to some clients, though attractive to others. The venue, group size, facilities and leadership style can all be adjusted to encourage participation and success. This will have been planned at the inception of the project, but as experience builds it may be necessary to adapt the original plan.

The Canto project in Northampton and Rushden negotiates a programme appropriate to the individual needs of the young person. In certain cases a programme of two half days was needed to start the learning process, building up by half days at two to three week intervals. These half days could be mornings, afternoons or mid-morning to mid-afternoons. This flexibility was a valuable tool to engage those learners who had become established into a culture of inactivity.

Standards

Clients and employers welcome the use of recognised standards. Both see it as a reflection of the project's commitment to quality, and this will be realised in better results. Working to standards such as Investors in People, NVQs, Initial Assessment and Guidance level 3 and so forth can be a problem for smaller projects that do not have the infrastructure in place beforehand. One way to overcome this is to work with partners who do. Larger organisations that can install standards are often glad of the highly focussed expertise of smaller and community-based projects.

Employment targets

Employers can participate in projects. Where this happens action is simplified, plans are more detailed and more purposeful. The ideal is for employers to be treated as customers. Each employer would have a nominated case manager or 'account manager'. Training services might be delivered at the employer's premises. The project should free the employer from all but the essential administration. Employers might benefit from a review of their recruitment needs while projects and training courses are in preparation. Where clients are being prepared for 'employability', discussions with employers can help define what that means in the local labour market.

Failing such close contact, projects which have employment targets should be able to work alongside employment agencies and Jobcentre Plus to target vacancies and make contact with employers. Many projects have developed Job Broking or Employment Teams to ensure their contact with employers is positive. These teams can create opportunities for tailored training and work preparation.

The Employability project of the Percy Hedley Foundation in Tyne and Wear aimed to improve the vocational experience of disabled learners. They found that there was a need for an intermediary to broker employment opportunities. The project's Employability Manager initiated an Employability Planning Group and an employers' network run in partnership with the Employers Forum on Disability.

The project organised monthly events for disabled people, at which employees, employers and disabled people already involved in work placements discussed their work roles. The presentations gave clients an informed insight into the opportunities that were available.

Taking action at a glance

Taking action	Co-financing Organisations	Projects
Engaging activity	Projects should show how they intend to engage clients throughout their time on the project.	Make activity fun and relevant to the clients. Be flexible and informal. Choose the right venue, group, facilities and style.
Personal mentors	Projects should provide continuity of personal contact for clients.	Offer personal mentoring or support to clients. Provide continuous contact with a trusted person.
Action where it is needed	Projects should be aware of the range of support the clients may need, and be able to engage the appropriate organisations.	Help clients with any issues, even those outside your remit – use other agencies to help. Encourage simultaneous actions where possible.
Adjusting to clients needs	Projects should show how they will review progress with clients and adjust activity to suit their needs.	Review clients' progress regularly, using procedures that the clients can engage with. Tailor activities to clients.
Standards	Where agreed or accredited standards exist they should be used if possible.	Work to standards, using partners if need be.
Employment targets	Where possible and relevant, applicants should show how they will engage employers early. Projects should be able to source jobs using appropriate agencies and methods. Employers should be supported whilst and after recruiting a disabled employee.	Employers are customers – work with them from the outset Use Employment Teams to scour the market for jobs Provide employers with an (after) care service.

Job search

Job search is at the heart of ESF and EQUAL programmes. It overlaps with taking action, and the practical steps in taking action therefore also apply to job search. For most projects, getting a job is the definite goal, even if it will be realised sometime after the client has left the project.

Early job search

In many cases, projects will do well to adopt the place-then-train model of operation, with job search being the first (or at least early) rather than the last activity. This approach has been shown to be more effective than the train-then-place approach for very many, but not all, clients. A good motto to bear in mind is that 'if you want a job, it is a good idea to start by looking for one'. Delays to the start of job search need to be justified by evidence in the client's assessments.

Job search skills and resources

Lack of job-search and application skills are barriers to employment that seriously disadvantage long-term unemployed people. Projects will do well therefore, to offer training in job search strategies, and training in how to apply and compete for work. Many clients see a job as inflexible, and so do not think about how they could do it with reasonable adjustments. They also do not know how to promote themselves to employers as capable of doing the job if they need reasonable adjustments to do it. Projects should help clients to work through these issues and to develop their negotiation and self-promotion skills.

Training in job search involves a number of strategies. Clients should be able to locate vacancies and obtain details, using personal contacts, agencies, Jobcentres, the internet, newspapers and specialist trade press, and by direct canvassing. They need to be able to prepare themselves with information about the employer, and an understanding of the demands and conditions of the work they wish to do.

Their application forms and telephone calls should be informative, informed, appropriate and sincere. At interview any nervousness should be balanced by candour, and their presentation should be appropriate to the industry and role they propose to enter. They need to have decided whether to disclose a disability. Their preparation will have made them robust in the face of failure, and should also stay with them so that they can go on to move to another job under their own efforts in due course. Some people will need long preparation to reach this goal of expert self-presentation.

In principle, job search skills can be taught almost anywhere, with the minimum of resources. In practice some successful projects have invested in job search centres, equipped with training facilities, databases, newspapers, computers, telephones and stationery. Clients are able to come and use the centre in their own time or under planned guidance. As well as encouraging systematic job search, this combats the sense of isolation that many people feel when they begin their search for work. A well run centre will be bright, welcoming, encouraging, accessible, positive and successful. Whether or not a project has a job search centre, it should have access to similar facilities, and staff should be equipped to teach and to help clients in this area.

Working Links' Next Choice project provides clients with free access to CyberZones, which are networked to the internet, to search for job opportunities, to research for job interviews, to prepare CVs and job application letters, or to attend IT familiarisation workshops. Audio and video can be used to record and review clients' performance during mock interviews.

Equipment such as photocopiers, fax, printers, telephones and a well-stocked stationery supply are available. Local and national press and publications are in stock with a thorough collection of up-to-date publications.

The project has provided an informal environment for consultants, clients and employers. It allows clients to relax and develop new inter-personal skills and makes job search more of an enjoyable and social experience.

Job broking or employment teams

The need for a specialist job search team has been mentioned in the section on taking action. Job broking or employment teams are effective in finding vacancies and preparing employers and clients. These teams may take on the task of teaching job search skills. But their main focus is on support for the employer and on vacancies. They will cast their net wide, using all the recruitment routes available, and spending time with employers building contacts. Having built a portfolio of co-operating employers, they will be in a position to help clients into work, and to develop the project's services. Work placements can be encouraged through the team, and support for clients in work can be extended to helping work colleagues and supervisors to take over when the time comes for the project to withdraw.

Some projects have had outstanding success by specialising in certain industrial sectors. This allows them to gain very detailed knowledge, and to provide targeted services. This can lead to a position of preferred supplier for vacancies, or to agreements for guaranteed interviews. Others specialise in small and local employers, and have provided help to improve their businesses. Still others specialise in a skill that is in high demand in their geographical area, and are able to build relationships with a number of larger employers in several sectors.

The London College of Beauty Therapy (LCBT) works with young women with learning difficulties and / or disabilities to overcome barriers to obtaining employment in the beauty therapy, retail and hair sectors.

LCBT has extensive contacts in the sector and created links with employers and referral agencies to maximise the success of the project. LCBT is the Centre of Vocational Excellence for Beauty Therapy, Beauty Retail and Holistic Care and has developed links with a number of household names. Consequently the project is able to call upon a wide range of knowledge, technical expertise and experience to ensure that its services and training provision meet the needs of employers.

LCBT also works with the Royal National Institute for the Blind and Royal National Institute for the Deaf and other organisations to ensure that staff are trained and able to teach and assess learners with disabilities.

Employment agencies

Projects funded via Jobcentre Plus may give priority to Jobcentres as a source of vacancies, and many projects report very positive results from this link. Private employment agencies can help fill specialist vacancies as well as help with general recruitment. A high proportion of jobs are filled by personal contact too, so job search strategies should, whenever possible make use of all these approaches.

Celebration

Finally, but not least, celebrate success. For the employer and the client, getting a job is a big step, and marks a significant change and achievement. Celebration is called for, and will build the project's spirits for new successes. As always, the client should be at the centre, and their wishes respected.

Job search at a glance

Job search	Co-financing Organisations	Projects
Early job search	Project designs should show justification for delays to job-search activities.	Consider using the place-then-train model for projects. Delay to job search should be supported by evidence in clients' assessments.
Skills and resources	Applicants should show that they have the ability to support clients' job search with suitable training and resources.	Train in job search strategies and application skills. Consider setting up a job search centre.
Employment teams and employment agencies	Partnerships may be useful in allowing projects to improve their access to the labour market. Projects may want to specialise in employment sectors or approaches to recruitment and placing.	Build or share in a job broking or employment team. Consider specialising by sector, by skill or by location. Use all available routes and sources for jobs.
Celebration	Projects that celebrate successful placing develop a good reputation and become attractive to clients and employers.	Celebrate success.

7. Employment and beyond

In work support

Clients in need of prolonged personal support at work will usually be those with quite severe intellectual impairments or severe and enduring mental health problems, but there are no clear cut boundaries or simple indicators to distinguish those in need.

Job coaches and mentors

For clients who need special support, job coaches and mentors, buddies or support workers should be available. Such staff are also able to help employers adapt recruitment methods to make them more inclusive for disabled people. They should be aware of the DDA at work, and able to advise employers positively about how to make work accessible and productive. In advance of the placement they help the client to prepare for work, and help the employer to receive the new worker by guiding colleagues, reviewing and adjusting work, and establishing routines and tasks at work. They usually accompany the client to work at first, for a more or less lengthy period of induction and training. As the client becomes more able to cope and to work reliably, the job coach will usually withdraw, leaving work colleagues to provide continuing help, often with active support from carers or family.

For the majority of clients, support is limited in time and scope. The minimum support from the project should be by regular contact by telephone. Some projects have had good results with after-work support groups. In any event, the 'natural support' of people in the workplace is valuable for ongoing stability of the client in work. Projects can help work colleagues understand how to offer support. How much support, and for how long, depends on the employer and workplace circumstances as well as on the individual.

This is a specialist area of work, and staff should be supported to have or obtain qualifications. Staff who are new to this work should have suitable supervision and support.

Adaptations

The majority of disabled people however are able to work without ongoing support and without adaptations to the job or to the workplace. Where some adaptation is needed, the project should be able to offer effective and authoritative advice on adjustments of workload, work tasks, or the work environment. It is worth emphasising that significant adjustments are only needed occasionally, but even minor adaptations can make the difference between success and failure in work. When giving guidance on technical and job adaptations, projects should also be aware of, and able to use, the Access to Work fund, working alongside Disability Employment Advisors in Jobcentre Plus.

The Visage Project in Kent for visually impaired people offers advice to clients and their employers about accessible equipment and software, and the project's rehabilitation team will carry out workplace assessments when requested to do so by organisations involved with employment issues.

Preparation for work

All clients should be well prepared for work. The new employee should be able to provide the skill and stamina to carry out the work (as adjusted) well. Advice on workplace culture, rules and behaviour should be made available to clients. Health and safety issues must be covered. Contractual duties and rights should be understood and followed. Clients on low incomes should know about and be helped to claim any in-work benefits. This preparation should be followed by a period when client and employer stay in contact with the project to deal with any difficulties that arise. It is important to remember that health and safety concerns should never be used as a reason to discriminate. Projects should provide advice to employers about how they can manage any perceived health and safety risks by making reasonable adjustments. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Disability Rights Commission (DRC) have issued a joint statement on this issue. For further details please see the following web page: www.hse.gov.uk/aboutus/diversity/jointstatement.htm

For a proportion of clients, a sudden entry to full-time work may be more than they can manage. The change can place heavy demands on personal resilience. To have to relearn tasks, to establish working relationships, to change personal routines, and to maintain productivity through a long day is asking a lot of anyone, and too much from some individuals whose capacity may be reduced by anxiety, stress, pain, or sleeplessness. For them a graduated return to work, with progressive increases in hours and duties can be a most effective form of support. This concept is new to many employers, who will need advice before, and support during, the graduated period. However it would be unusual that the graduated return period does not have a conclusion which is unsupported full-time work, and that should be the goal wherever possible.

The Supported Apprenticeship Project of Bedfordshire County Council is working with Adults with Learning Disabilities and has developed a package of employer and client support. All clients are supported by a job coach when they start work. During the time the client is being coached, the employment support co-ordinator has the opportunity to identify natural supports within the workplace and further develop working relationships with the employer and employees within the company. Co-workers have the opportunity to observe and copy the job coach/client relationship. The duration of job coach support is determined by the needs of the client and the complexity of their job. The withdrawal of job coaching support is done in agreement with the employee and employer; perhaps on a phased basis. Feedback from both employer and client is sought regularly through formal monitoring and review meetings, informal drop-in meetings and phone calls. Employers are provided with mobile phone numbers for support workers if they feel they need additional support.

Through the monitoring and review process further training needs can often be identified. Employers may have in-house training that clients can take advantage of, or the project may look at college training that meets the need. Any shortfalls in performance can be identified and a further period of job coaching put in if necessary. The project also asks for feedback on 'soft outcomes'.

Employers

In every case there is a need to have a good working relationship between the project and the employer. Employers are customers of the service. They are the ultimate end-user, and their business needs must be met for a stable working relationship to exist with the client and with the project. The project should therefore be ready to evaluate results from the employers' perspective, to maintain a dialogue and to adjust programmes where called for.

Such good relationships extend from work colleagues around the employed client, to senior staff responsible for supervision and policy. Where good relations exist, even quite intensive interventions such as personal mentoring or job carving may be quite acceptable to the employer.

In-work support at a glance

In-work support	Co-financing Organisations	Projects
Job coaches and mentoring	Applicants should show how they will offer support to encourage stable employment for those who move into work. Projects may specialise in mentoring or job coaching, and staff should be trained.	Use specialist trained staff or support workers. Adjust the personal support according to the client's capacity. Develop 'natural' supports among work colleagues and family or carers.
Adaptations	Applicants should be able to show that they have the capacity to advise on workplace adjustments, using specialist services, referring to qualified advisors if necessary. Projects should be competent to develop graduated return to work plans for clients and employers.	Give advice on adjustments, and check that they have been successful. Know and advise on the basics of the Disability Discrimination Act, referring to specialists for complex or unusual situations. You should consider taking legal/professional advice when considering adjustments and DDA requirements, or to signpost customers to such advice. Use Access to Work and work with Disability Employment Advisors. Develop and support graduated return to work plans.
Preparation for work	Projects should be able to support the transition from unemployment to employment.	Prepare clients and employers for working together. Prepare the client and the workplace. Follow up to check that the employee is doing well.
Employers	Applicants that intend to place clients in work should be able to show how they will manage employer relations and provide support to employers.	Treat employers as customers, offer advice and support and nurture good relationships at all levels. Make sure the job is done to their satisfaction and be available after work has started to offer help and advice. Evaluate results to guide future action.

Notes

¹ Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled: A Methodology for Developing a Guidance Document, Richard Lloyd and Fionn O'Sullivan, Department for Work and Pensions 2003

² Adapted from Disability Rights Commission, <http://www.drc.org.uk> May 2007

³ Adapted from the Disability Rights Commission, www.dotheduty.org May 2007

⁴ The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Amendment) Regulations 2003 came into force in Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) on 1 October 2004

⁵ The Disability Equality Duty came into force on 4 December 2006

⁶ <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/> May 2007

⁷ The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 applies to certain types of financial advice and restricts who may legally offer advice relating to such matters

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