

Evaluation of Support for the Very Long-Term Unemployed Trailblazer

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Introduction

This report presents findings from an evaluation of the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP's) Support for the Very Long-Term Unemployed (SVLTU) trailblazer, a six-month¹ scheme designed to test potential support strands for claimants who remain on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) after completing the Work Programme. The trailblazer was designed as a Randomised Control Trial and participation in each strand was mandatory. SVLTU consisted of the following two treatment groups and one control group:

- **Community Action Programme (CAP):** a six-month work placement complemented by provider-led supported jobsearch. Providers were contracted by DWP to source placements for claimants which delivered a community benefit;
- **Ongoing Case Management (OCM):** a more intensive offer of flexible and personalised adviser-based support, as well as a set of standard activities, delivered by Jobcentre Plus through increased adviser interventions for six months;
- **the control group (standard Jobcentre Plus Offer (JCPO)):** Fortnightly Jobsearch Reviews plus additional appointments with advisers based on advisers' discretion and access to a menu of back-to-work support.

DWP commissioned NatCen Social Research to evaluate the trailblazer to compare hard and soft outcomes of the strands, describe the support provided, understand operational delivery issues and gather feedback from claimants about allocation to,

¹ Participants remained on each strand for six months. The trailblazer ran for nine months to allow a three month cohort of customers to enter the programme.

and participation in, the schemes. The evaluation methods included a survey of claimants and qualitative research among claimants, Jobcentre Plus staff, contracted providers and work placement hosts.

Description of trailblazer support

OCM generally offered a more intensive, tailored and active kind of support compared to claimants' previous interactions with Jobcentre Plus, as well as continuity of support from a single adviser. Since starting OCM, 66 per cent of participants reported that they had more frequent contact with their Personal Adviser (PA) and 43 per cent had met with their PA once a week (compared to six per cent of the control group). A quarter of OCM participants reported more personalised support on OCM. A third of OCM participants, however, reported no difference in their support from Jobcentre Plus since the start of the programme.

Around half of CAP placements were with charities and a further third served the local community or environment. Analysis of placements where full details were available indicate that the community benefit criteria were being met. Around half the placements were in the 'elementary' occupations (e.g. cleaner, shop-worker or warehouse operator), and just over a third were in 'customer service' occupations.

Around 60 per cent of claimants who started CAP reported that they had been on a work placement. Evidence from provider staff suggested that some CAP participants were difficult to place, which may help explain this lower than expected placement

rate. This may be a result of participants being allocated to CAP on the basis of random allocation rather than suitability for the programme. The majority of participants who were not placed said they had been looking for and applying for work while on CAP (77 per cent). These participants were more likely to have been out of work longer, have lower qualifications and/or have a criminal record, compared with participants who were placed. Participants who were placed were more likely to have also received jobsearch help from their CAP provider.

Impacts on employment and benefit receipt

Fifteen to 18 per cent in each programme strand had entered paid employment, become self-employed or were waiting to start work at the time of the survey, six to seven months after starting on the trailblazer. These job outcomes did not vary significantly between programme strands, nor did the types of jobs entered, take-home pay and hours worked.

For participants on OCM, those who reported receiving more personalised support to their individual needs were significantly more likely to be in work at the end of the programme. However, for CAP participants, neither attending a placement nor receiving jobsearch support were significantly associated with a job outcome around the end of the programme.

The majority of participants reported being in receipt of JSA at the time of the survey. DWP statistics published alongside this report found statistically significantly lower levels of benefit receipt for both CAP and OCM participants compared to the control group about six months after starting the programme.

It is possible that a different pattern will emerge in the months following programme completion. DWP are planning to publish administrative data on job outcomes in 2013, which will provide a longer-term picture of the job outcomes of all trailblazer participants.

Impacts on soft outcomes

Participants on OCM were more likely to feel the programme had helped them to overcome their barriers to work and to get closer to work, compared to the control group. When asked what it was about the programme that had helped them to feel closer to work, a higher percentage of OCM and the control group attributed the change to support and encouragement from their adviser (39 per cent and 36 per cent respectively), compared with CAP (25 per cent), while a higher percentage of participants on CAP (43 per cent) than on the other strands attributed it to an increase in confidence (34 per cent of OCM and 30 per cent of the control group).

CAP participants' experiences on their placements can help explain their increased confidence: 76 per cent felt they had gained satisfaction from being in a routine while on their placement and 69 per cent cited a sense of achievement. CAP participants were however critical of their placements where they felt these had been hastily arranged with little regard for their needs and work aspirations and where there was a lack of continuity in the supervision they received by the placement host. There were also participants who objected to placements on principle as they did not want to 'work for free'.

CAP participants who had not been on a placement were the least likely to feel the programme had helped them overcome their barriers. In all strands, the groups who were less likely to feel the programme had helped them included men, owner-occupiers and people with mental health problems.

Participants on CAP placements and OCM were more likely than those in the control group to say that the programme had impacted positively on their motivation to work and had raised their work related ambitions. CAP participants who had attended work placements were on average more likely to report lower levels of anxiety compared with other participants.

Staff views on achieving positive outcomes

Qualitative interviews with staff involved in the delivery of OCM and CAP identified a range of ways in which each strand lent itself to achieving positive outcomes (such as increased motivation and an increase in work related activity) for participants.

Two aspects of OCM were seen to accelerate favourable outcomes for participants: the intensive case management approach and the tailored approach to delivering support. The intensive approach was characterised by participants having more frequent meetings with the same adviser throughout the six-month programme. This approach enabled advisers to understand each participant's needs and barriers better and to tailor support around these needs. Advisers' capacity to personalise support was facilitated by increased flexibility and discretion in relation to the timing and ordering of chosen support options. Increased flexibility and time also enabled advisers to develop new support options that were specifically tailored to OCM participants. Advisers thought mandating customers to work related activity or appointments worked well where they were able to apply discretion about which participants needed mandating.

The work experience element appeared to be the real strength of the CAP strand in achieving positive outcomes for participants. Placements helped increase participants' motivation to work, employability and wellbeing. Providers and placement hosts felt that the six-month placement length was seen to imitate real jobs well, providing participants with viable work experience for their CVs as well as up to date references.

OCM and CAP staff were enthusiastic about the programme strands having helped participants move closer towards work (including seemingly harder to help participants). However, although the programme achieved a range of softer outcomes, the capacity of both strands to achieve job outcomes within the timeframe were viewed as being limited

by the length of the trailblazer and the adverse economic climate. Interviews with staff also suggest that each of the SVLTU strands met slightly different needs with OCM benefitting claimants with complex and multiple barriers and CAP helping claimants whose main barriers were around a lack of recent work experience or motivation.

Implementation lessons for CAP

Provider and Jobcentre Plus staff felt that some of the participants referred to CAP were unsuitable for placement hosts, and were therefore difficult to place. These participants included people who had severe restrictions on work they could do due to past criminal convictions, or who placement hosts did not want because of their failure to engage with the placement. This may be because claimants were referred on the basis of random assignment to each programme strand rather than suitability criteria. Staff also felt there needed to be clearer responsibility and procedures for what happened in cases where participants who could not be placed were caught in 'limbo' between providers and Jobcentre Plus offices.

There was a widespread view that the three month period from award of contract to referral to CAP was not long enough to engage placement hosts due to multiple factors effectively delaying the process. Better profiling of the number of placements needed and a better flow, or 'staggering', of referrals would also help ease the placement process.

The 15-day timescale for placements could generally be met where there was an even flow of referrals but could lead to unsuitable placements and the need subsequently to find alternative placements without any extension in the time. 30 days to set-up a placement was considered more realistic.

Hosts and some providers felt that there needed to be greater discretion about the circumstances under which a referral to the Decision Making Activity (DMA) team, responsible for imposing benefit sanctions, should be made. Providers were sometimes reluctant to refer because they regarded some participants

as unsuitable for CAP or because of an unsuitable placement, which was not seen as the fault of the participant. Other infringements such as failure to complete the required number of hours were seen as minor and not worth a referral.

Conclusions

Evidence from this evaluation suggests that while there was no significant difference in job outcomes at around the end of the programme, the OCM and CAP trailblazer strands were successful in achieving soft outcomes such as increases in motivation, confidence, jobseeking behaviour and a positive change in attitudes towards work. These softer impacts may yet translate into job outcomes and sign off from JSA. On the basis of these findings we recommend that very long term claimants are assessed in terms of their support needs and that claimants with most severe and persistent barriers are provided with tailored and intensive support from Jobcentre Plus advisers and if deemed appropriate an element of protracted work experience that is relevant to their skills and career interests.

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The full report of these research findings is published by the Department for Work and Pensions (ISBN 978 1 909532 04 5. Research Report 824. December 2012).

You can download the full report free from: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

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