

Introduction to Vocational Rehabilitation – Policies, Practices and Skills.

By Dr Clive Langman

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Introduction

This text seeks to provide an overview of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) practice, aimed at both students and practitioners with an interest in supporting people back to work and improving their sense of health and well-being.

Dr Langman held a senior position within the Employment Rehabilitation Service, UK Department of Employment, before chairing a private sector employment and disability company. He is a visiting lecturer at City University and a member of the Vocational Rehabilitation Association's Professional Development Committee.

Structure of the Book

The book has 345 pages and is divided into three parts:

Part 1

This covers the policy context of VR in the UK and the development of national standards relating to VR. It also provides the legal background to the employment of people with health conditions and disabilities.

Part 2

This looks at models of VR practice and the nature of developing services in both the public and private sectors.

Part 3

This details the knowledge and skills required to provide a VR service, including consideration of the multidisciplinary processes and stages involved.

Themes

In exploring the issue of sickness absence, Dr Langman notes that key drivers for the public sector are the reduction in the numbers of sickness benefit claimants, the cost of worklessness and issues of social exclusion. For the private sector, key drivers include reducing the costs of sickness and absenteeism and reducing the cost of claims for loss of earnings and insurance.

The section about the historical development of VR practice provides much of interest. One of the key themes is the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and National Health Service (NHS) approaches to VR.

Another theme covered is the policy-driven marginalisation of specialist disability services within JCP from the mid 1990's as a way of actively encouraging the private sector into the field.

There is also coverage of the NHS funding of VR services, particularly for clients with mental health issues or long term neurological conditions and the emergence of private sector VR services funded by insurance companies whose focus is on job retention and/or early return to work.

Good use is made of case law and precedent arising from Employment Appeal Tribunals, which highlights issues of disability related discrimination in the workplace. This will provide a useful resource for HR personnel and provide helpful background knowledge to Work Psychologists and other VR practitioners in understanding what constitutes reasonable adjustments in job retention interventions.

In this well-referenced book, Dr Langman draws on international research to help inform the debate about effective VR policy, design and intervention. He regrets the demise of the joint Jobcentre Plus (JCP)/NHS Condition Management Programmes and questions whether private sector companies, driven by profit or the need to trigger payment targets, are going to employ the same level of expertise or spend as much time on the more difficult to place clients.

There is a chapter dedicated to the JCP disability service, which details the historical and current elements of provision including the services of the Disability Employment Advisers (DEA's) and Work Psychologists (WP's), Access to Work (ATW), Residential Training Colleges (RTC's), the Work Programme and Work Choice.

The development of parallel VR services in the NHS is also detailed, with an account of the introduction of the "fit note" and the National Service Frameworks (NSF's), which include VR elements – for example, people with long term neurological conditions now have their vocational needs considered as a routine part of their rehabilitation.

An interesting account is offered of how the historical separation of return-to-work services offered by the employment and medical sectors has contributed to a mutual and stereotypical distrust between them. Typically, JCP staff are perceived as not understanding medical conditions and lacking professional training and clinically trained staff perceived as not understanding the labour market and having unrealistic expectations.

In the sections relating to the VR process, issues of vocational counselling, advocacy, assessment, rehabilitation, job development and placing are explored in detail, with a useful resource of checklists, approaches and considerations to take into account when working with clients.

Conclusions

This accessible, comprehensive and well-researched book is recommended reading for VR practitioners, Work Psychologists, Students, Human Resources and Occupational Health staff, as well as those involved in providing policy advice in VR service development.

Dave Trevitt is a Senior Work Psychologist in the Department for Work and Pension's (DWP) Jobcentre Plus Southern England Group.
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