



Evaluation of Jobcentre Plus Support for Schools programme – Pathfinder evaluation

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Background and aims

Plans for Jobcentre Plus advisers to work within schools delivering 'high quality and impartial careers advice' were formalised within the 2015 Summer Budget. The demand-led provision, rolled out in ten pathfinder districts between February and July 2016, intended to support schools in engaging young people (aged 12-18) identified as being at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) or who face potential disadvantage in the labour market (for example, due to their ethnicity or to a health/disability issue).

The pathfinder programme involved establishing at least one full-time equivalent Jobcentre Plus Programme Adviser in each area to work within schools to provide students with information on traineeships and apprenticeships, accessing work experience, the local labour market and soft skills that employers expect. Following the pathfinder soft launch, a national roll-out of the programme is planned to take place across England between November 2016 and March 2017.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned Kantar Public to conduct a qualitative evaluation of the Jobcentre Plus Support for Schools programme, covering both the pathfinder and national roll-out. The overarching aim of the pathfinder evaluation was to inform the design, delivery and operation

of the national roll-out of the Jobcentre Plus Support for Schools programme.

Specific objectives for this stage of the evaluation were to:

- explore demand for the support offered through the programme, and the best use of resource to meet this demand;
- explore the nature and scope of support wanted by schools;
- identify ways in which the service level of support delivered to schools can be improved; and
- provide guidance about best practice on effective delivery between Jobcentre Plus, intermediaries, schools and employers.

Methodology

The pathfinder evaluation involved a qualitative case study approach, focusing on six of the ten pathfinder districts. This approach sought to generate a depth of insight into how the programme was being delivered and the perceived value of the support provided, by drawing on perspectives of all parties involved in the programme. Each case study therefore involved qualitative depth interviews with key stakeholders, including:

- Local Jobcentre Plus adviser.
- Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and Enterprise Adviser Network (EAN) staff.

- Careers leads from participating and non-participating schools.
- Participating employers.

Districts were selected following a review of available management information about each of the Pathfinder districts. The districts chosen were selected to ensure coverage across a range of key variables:

- Nature of relationship with LEP/EAN.
- Number of schools contacted to date.
- Number of activities delivered to date.
- Geographical location.

A total of 43 participants were interviewed and participants were recruited through the Jobcentre Plus Support for Schools Programme Co-ordinator contacts in each district.

Key findings

Context of pre-programme activity

Prior to the Support for Schools programme, participants described generally limited experience or knowledge of previous Jobcentre Plus activity in schools. This meant that networks with schools and demand for support had to be built from scratch. Prior to the programme starting there was no national resource for Jobcentre Plus districts to work with schools.

Demand for the programme

Once school careers leads became aware of the programme, demand for the Jobcentre Plus Support for Schools programme was high, with drivers of demand tending to outweigh inhibitors. Overall, ensuring a clear understanding of the programme was a key factor in establishing demand.

Schools were enthusiastic about the support that was on offer, and were keen to build this into lesson plans either in the same term that the support was offered, or as part of future plans. Several non-participating school careers leads

also spoke about their intention to make use of the programme in the next academic year.

Five key drivers of this demand for the programme were identified across interviews with Jobcentre Plus advisers and school leads – specifically:

- Jobcentre Plus’s local labour market expertise;
- Jobcentre Plus’s employer networks;
- the need for in-depth, tailored careers support;
- the need for exposure to non-academic paths; and
- knowledge that the programme is free.

In the districts where take-up of the programme had been slowest, this was typically due to a lack of awareness or capacity, rather than explicit lack of demand. With a few exceptions, non-participating schools in these districts generally remained enthusiastic about the programme. Across all districts there were non-participating schools that were keen to engage with the programme in the future.

For those non-participating schools where there was a genuine absence of demand, this was driven by either a perceived absence of need, an assumption that the programme will be expensive, or misunderstanding of the programmes’ aims.

Partnership working

Jobcentre Plus advisers’ relationship with their primary local partner (generally the EAN/LEP) was the primary factor affecting the way in which the Support for Schools programme was provided to schools – resulting in three different models of delivery:

- close collaboration between Jobcentre Plus and EAN/LEP;
- EAN/LEP leading on developing relationships with schools; or
- Jobcentre Plus staff approaching schools through other means.

The relationship with the local LEP/EAN was the partnership that most influenced the implementation of the Support for Schools programme within districts. In general, partnerships between Jobcentre Plus and LEP/EAN were perceived to have developed positively. In some districts there had initially been misunderstandings about the remit and purpose of the Support for Schools programme. However, most districts had come to a point where LEP/EAN and Jobcentre Plus staff had clarity about each other's roles and responsibilities.

In districts where the local LEP/EAN was less well established (or not present), Jobcentre Plus advisers also made use of other local partner organisations including the National Careers Service, and local authority children's services (e.g. Troubled Families/Looked After Children teams).

Relationships with employers and other partners were more consistent across the pathfinder case studies.

Relationships with schools

Methods of selecting schools to participate in the programme varied, with a range of more or less targeted approaches. Across the districts, there were three main approaches to selection of schools – targeting schools that best met the programme criteria, taking a geographical approach to plan workloads, and using a blanket approach to contact all schools within the district.

Following the selection process, there was more consistent use of channels to engage schools, including face-to-face networking, email, phone calls and third-party networking.

The interventions delivered to schools varied considerably, reflecting the demand-led nature of the programme. The offer was not dictated by the programme leads, but instead discussed and developed via initial discussions with schools. The demand-led nature of the programme meant that Jobcentre Plus staff were open to

suggestions and requests from schools about what support would be most useful rather than beginning with a clearly defined offer.

Experiences of programme delivery

A variety of demand-led support was provided to schools. Examples of support included facilitating work experience placements, employer visits to schools, careers fairs, pupils visiting employers, providing apprenticeship guidance, and delivering skills workshops.

Schools found participation in the programme to be a positive experience. The programme added value to their careers curriculum and filled gaps in schools' provision as it was flexible and demand led.

Conclusions and key learning for national rollout

Overall, the Support for Schools programme has been well-received by schools and other stakeholders. Once they become aware and properly understand the offer, there is high demand from schools, who value the flexible and tailored approach of the programme, as well as the skills, experience and employer networks provided by Jobcentre Plus. Opportunities to learn from and improve the programme centre on ensuring clarity about the offer to stakeholders, and offering further tailoring of support and follow-up for students.

Key recommendations for a national rollout were focused on communication, intervention and implementation. It is recommended:

- There is clear early cooperation between LEP/EAN and other local partners and face-to-face communication with schools where possible.
- There is a need to give consideration to how resource is deployed to meet the programme's objectives, and to share learnings across districts about how resource can be best prioritised.

- There should be additional training to support Jobcentre Plus advisers.
- Learnings are shared across districts and programmes.
- The programme is tailored to support local school needs, drawing on existing careers networks.

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The full report of these research findings is published by the Department for Work and Pensions (ISBN 978 1 911003 52 6. Research Report 932. December 2016).

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