



# Supervised Jobsearch Pilots evaluation

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## Background

The Supervised Jobsearch Pilots (SJP) trial was one of two trials of intensive job seeking skills support designed to facilitate effective full-time job-seeking. The other trial is the Intensive Activity Programme (IAP) which is the subject of a separate evaluation report<sup>1</sup>. The SJP ran from October 2014 until March 2015 as a randomised controlled trial allowing comparison between SJP participants and a control group receiving business as usual support. The intention of the trial was to test whether supporting and supervising job-search activity made claimants' job search more effective, and increased their likelihood of moving off benefit and into work. Claimants were referred to the pilots by Jobcentre Plus and were required to attend a local provider centre for up to 35 hours per week for 13 weeks, unless they stopped receiving Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) during this time.

The pilots were match funded by the 2007 – 2013 England and Gibraltar European Social Fund Convergence, Competitiveness and Employment Programme. They were delivered by contracted providers through a service fee model. Performance managers worked closely with providers throughout the pilots to resolve any issues that arose during delivery.

## Evaluation

The pilots sought to test the impact of a prolonged period of supervised job-search activity with two groups of claimants: those who had been claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for less than a year (pre-Work Programme pilot) and those who had completed two years on the Work Programme and still not found employment (post-Work Programme pilot). According to the model, claimants need the requisite job-search skills, approach and attitude towards job search and employment to successfully gain employment. Therefore, the aims of the evaluation were to:

- Measure the extent that the pilots move participants closer to work, into work and off benefit.
- Provide details on claimant experience of the support.
- Assess the effectiveness of the model and to suggest improvements.
- Provide lessons learnt to inform any national roll-out and future design of employment programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> The findings from the IAP are being published separately and can be found at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/intensive-activity-programme-trial-evaluation](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intensive-activity-programme-trial-evaluation)

To address these aims, the evaluation comprised of two core elements:

1. An externally commissioned project of quantitative and qualitative research with claimants, provider staff and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) strategy and programme leads. This was conducted by the Learning and Work Institute in partnership with BMG Research.
2. An internally undertaken quantitative impact analysis, including movement off-benefit, movement into employment and an assessment of value for money.

Full reports on the findings of each of these elements, and their methodologies, have been published separately alongside this summary.

## Key findings

The impact assessment shows that those in the intervention group did spend less time on benefit and more time in employment than the control group. For the pre-Work Programme (pre-WP) pilot, it is estimated that, per participant, SJP led to an average of 10 ( $\pm 11$ ) fewer days spent on DWP primary benefits and an average 5 ( $\pm 9$ ) more days spent in employment. For the post-Work Programme (post-WP) pilot, it is estimated that participants have spent 19 ( $\pm 11$ ) fewer days on DWP benefits and 6 ( $\pm 7$ ) more days in employment. These figures are based on the sum of the central estimates of the daily impacts, measured from the point at which a difference between the intervention and control group emerges. We chose not to measure from when the daily impacts were statistically significant with a 95% degree of confidence as, in our view, this would provide an unduly conservative measure of the overall impact.

A cost-benefit analysis, using the standard DWP framework, has been undertaken based on the positive impacts summarised in the previous paragraph. This shows that the return to the Exchequer of reduced benefit expenditure and increased tax returns are, by a significant margin, insufficient to compensate for the relatively large costs of running the programme.

Around half of participants surveyed (52 per cent) reported that the pilots helped equip them, a lot or a little, for coping with the routine of going to work. Pilot participation was found to have a positive impact on respondents' confidence in: their job-search skills; their ability to do well in job interviews; coping with rejections and knock-backs; and being ready for work. This suggests that SJP did, in part, meet its aim of improving the effectiveness of claimants' job search.

The evaluation found evidence that the pilot model was not always delivered in line with the service specification set out in DWP contracts with providers. Although the specification offered no guarantee of actual volumes and timing, providers reported some difficulties with the flow of referrals over the life of the pilots. Frontline staff reported negative consequences of this including overcrowding; lack of desks and resources; and insufficient staffing to maintain the minimum staffing ratio required in the service specification. To some extent this compromised the testing of the pilot model, and should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings.

## Detailed findings

### Overall experiences of the trial

In terms of pilot experience, both waves of the claimant survey had a fairly even spread of responses, from very positive to very negative. Although there was a broad range of experiences and views, overall participant satisfaction with pilot involvement was generally low. Participants with lower skills and/or who were further from the labour market; participants with children; and younger participants were more positive about the pilots. Participants with health conditions and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) participants were less positive<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> No differences in off-benefit and employment outcomes for sub-groups were detected in the impact assessment, but the sample sizes of these groups were small. This would require any differences to be reasonably large before we can be confident that they are not due to random variation.

The qualitative findings suggest that experiences of the pilots were commonly underpinned by the level of one-to-one support and the relationship with provider advisers. Some participants felt the support they received was good. There was also some evidence of strong interpersonal relationships forming between participants and advisers, with positive one-to-one support being provided. By contrast, some participants suggested they received little or no one-to-one or personalised support.

Overall, in the quantitative survey, the majority of participants agreed that staff on the pilots understood their particular circumstances while just over half of participants felt that they received about the right amount of support.

In the qualitative interviews participants and provider staff offered numerous suggestions for improvements to the pilot model. Participants suggested there was a need for more personalised and intensive one-to-one support from advisers, and for access to employers, including the facilitation of work experience and placements.

Providers generally agreed that job search was a key activity; however, they universally suggested a need for greater flexibility in the delivery of support. Some proposed the need to include skills-based training, intensive literacy and numeracy support and, in particular, work-based placements and direct participant engagement with employers.

## **Characteristics of participants**

The impact assessment showed SJP participants were more likely to be male than female, and this applied particularly to the post-WP group (76 per cent of whom were male). Post-WP participants were also more likely to be aged 50 or over (26 per cent compared to 16 per cent). Three in ten were recorded as disabled as defined in the Disability Discrimination Act of 1995. Around one fifth were from a black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) group. No significant differences were found in either pilot between the intervention and control groups other than in the post-WP group where the intervention group reported a

lower prevalence of disability<sup>3</sup>. These participant characteristics are broadly reflected in the externally commissioned survey.

Participants reported a range of barriers to work, including a perceived lack of available jobs, personal characteristics such as health issues and barriers related to their work experience and skills. Some of the reported barriers to employment were also put forward by provider staff as examples of barriers to successful engagement with the pilots.

## **Pilot delivery**

In line with the specification for the pilots, a consistent picture emerged from provider interviews when describing the model of delivery. For many claimants this was a seven-hour day, five-day working week in an office-based setting for the duration of the pilots, or in line with Jobcentre Plus agreed work-search hours. Providers viewed the parallel with the usual working week positively.

## **Referral, induction and action planning**

A number of participants described their positive expectations of the pilots based on the information they were given by Jobcentre Plus staff at the point of referral. In other cases, however, some participants reported that they were given limited information. This could lead to misunderstandings at the start of the pilots, with some participants unaware of the commitment required.

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<sup>3</sup> The lack of identified difference between the intervention (SJP) and control groups may be due to small sample sizes. We have made many different comparisons of various characteristics so it is not unexpected for one comparison to appear to be statistically significant through chance alone. Significance testing was at the 5% level, with no correction for multiple tests.

Participant first impressions tended to be determined by the extent to which they received a one-to-one introduction to the pilots. Participants who described meeting advisers face-to-face during their initial visit tended to describe their experience positively. This appeared to influence participants' overall experience of the pilots.

## **Core elements of delivery model**

There were a wide range of provider and participant views on the 'core' elements of the pilot model. Some elements were generally well received, such as the workplace environment, with opportunities for increased social interaction; and one-to-one support from advisers. Other elements, in particular the amount of time prescribed to job-search activity, were generally felt to be less successful.

Attending the pilot site alongside their peers was identified as a key benefit by many participants. Access to computers and telephones was generally well regarded by participants and some also reported that pilot attendance had developed their knowledge and experience of job-searching resources.

However, the overwhelming sentiment expressed by participants and providers was that too much time was spent on individual job search. Both participants and providers felt that the content of the pilots was narrow, focusing almost entirely on individual job search, and did not require 35 hours per week or a 13 week duration.

## **Non-core elements of delivery model**

There was scope within the pilot model for other activities and some group-based sessions. This included activities specified in the delivery model, such as careers advice and group activities to develop team working and problem solving, and non-specified activities, such as training and skills provision, employer engagement, and motivation and confidence building activities.

In the Wave 1 survey, 45 per cent of pilot participants said they had help or training on using the internet or computers, and 32 per cent on numeracy or literacy. 28 per cent had counselling or mentoring and 27 per cent had visited a workplace. A consistent proportion of respondents who said they had received non-core support said that the activities had been very or fairly helpful (80 per cent or above).

## **Pilot attendance**

Attendance on the pilots was mandatory, and failure to participate without good reason would lead to a benefit sanction. The Wave 1 claimant survey found that half of survey respondents said that they had missed at least 'a little bit' of time on the pilots, with one in ten saying that they missed 'most' or 'some' of the time. The impact assessment found that around 16 per cent of the pre-WP pilot intervention group and 17 per cent of the post-WP pilot intervention group incurred a sanction during the pilot period. This was compared to 7 per cent and 6 per cent of the pre- and post-WP control groups<sup>4</sup>, respectively.

When asked if they would have attended the pilots voluntarily, some participants indicated they would. Some however also suggested that, had they not been at risk of receiving a benefit sanction, they would not have attended the full duration.

## **Intermediate outcomes**

The quantitative findings suggest that the pilots had a positive impact on job-search intensity, increasing the number of applications that people made. There was also some evidence from the qualitative interviews that the requirement to spend prolonged periods of time dedicated to on-line job searching increased the depth of job-search activity. Otherwise, however, the pilots appear not to have had an impact on

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<sup>4</sup> As these figures cover different types of Jobseeker's Allowance claimant and time periods these figures are not comparable with any other measure of sanctions rates.



job-search activity and the overriding view from the qualitative research was that attendance on the pilots added little to participants' existing knowledge and ability of how to look for jobs.

Pilot participation was found to have a positive impact on respondents' confidence in their job-search skills. At the second wave of the survey, treatment sample respondents expressed greater levels of confidence than control sample respondents, specifically in relation to skills being up-to-date and having the skills and knowledge to look for work successfully. In the qualitative interviews, participants described key areas in which they improved their skills: learning the importance of tailoring job applications to the role; the need to 'sell yourself'; and understanding the level of competition for jobs.

There were also positive findings from the quantitative survey regarding the impact the pilots made on self-confidence and motivation. At Wave 2, treatment sample respondents expressed greater levels of confidence in relation to: doing well in job interviews; coping with rejections and knock-backs; and being ready for work.

By contrast, some qualitative participants reported that pilot involvement had no influence on their motivation as they consistently felt motivated to find work. Others felt that the pilots had in fact worsened their confidence and self-esteem.

## **Benefit and work outcomes**

Within the timeframe of the quantitative survey, there was no evidence of an impact on employment rates resulting from SJP, with no statistical difference found in the proportion of SJP and control respondents who were in employment at the second wave of the survey<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Claimants were interviewed around 3 months apart, though at Wave 1 claimants had already started on SJP so the survey is not a strict before and after measure of participation, and is based on claimants' reports of their employment status at a specific point in time.

Despite this, the impact assessment – which takes a much longer timeframe and compares intervention and control outcomes for all trial participants – did find an impact of SJP both for the pre- and post-WP pilots.

For the pre-WP pilot, it is estimated that, per participant, SJP led to an average of 10 ( $\pm 11$ ) fewer days spent on DWP primary benefits and an average 5 ( $\pm 9$ ) more days spent in employment. Owing to low samples sizes there is a large degree of uncertainty in our measured impacts when they are expressed in terms of additional days off benefit. However, we are confident that SJP is leading to changes in participants' behaviours<sup>6</sup>.

For the post-WP pilot, it is estimated that participants have spent 19 ( $\pm 11$ ) fewer days on DWP benefits and 6 ( $\pm 7$ ) more days in employment<sup>7</sup>. A 38-day impact upon Jobseeker's Allowance has been offset by an opposite impact of 18 more days on Employment and Support Allowance. This reflects findings from the quantitative survey which found that nearly a third of post-WP participants who reported leaving the pilots early did so because of health problems.

When exploring why participants had failed to secure employment, the qualitative findings identified key factors that were unrelated to job search. These included time spent out of work; perceived age-related barriers; lack of relevant skills and qualifications; and a lack of suitable employment available locally. It is also important to consider that SJP was aimed at claimants who had difficulties in finding work, with many reporting that they had not worked for at least five years.

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<sup>6</sup> This is because there is a period of time, that coincides with the timing of SJP, where the point in time differences in benefit receipt (but not the differences in employment rates) are statistically significant.

<sup>7</sup> Our comments on the point in time impacts in the footnote above apply here also, except the differences in the employment rates are, for a time, also statistically significant in the post-WP pilot. The post-WP pilot impact has so far not reduced to zero, but we expect further increases to be only very marginal.

A cost-benefit analysis, using the standard DWP framework, has been undertaken based on the positive impacts summarised above. This shows that the return to the Exchequer of reduced benefit expenditure and increased tax returns are, by a significant margin, insufficient to compensate for the relatively large costs of running the programme.

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The full report of these research findings is published by the Department for Work and Pensions (ISBN 978 1 911003 42 7. Research Report 928. July 2016).

You can download the full report free from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions/about/research#research-publications>

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