



# Evaluation of the Department for Work and Pensions European Social Fund Support for Families with Multiple Problems

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## Summary

This summary presents the key findings and recommendations of an evaluation of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) European Social Fund (ESF) Support for Families with Multiple Problems. It is not an evaluation of the separate Troubled Families programme, led by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Research to inform the evaluation of the DWP ESF provision was undertaken between July 2013 and September 2014. A survey of individuals benefiting from support was undertaken between January and March 2014, while the main phase of qualitative fieldwork to inform the evaluation was undertaken between March and July 2014. The aim of the evaluation was to provide evidence of the effectiveness of the ESF Families provision and detail practical lessons for current and future provision. The study involved:

- In-depth qualitative research as part of case study visits to the 12 Contract Package Areas (CPAs) across England where the provision is being delivered.
- A representative survey of 1,240 participants receiving support.
- A review of available Management Information (MI) for the provision.

## Key findings – Operation and delivery of the provision

### Overview

The ESF Families provision faced several early implementation challenges. However, by the time of the fieldwork evidence suggested that it was functioning effectively with the support provided leading to positive outcomes. The provision typically supported individuals rather than offering ‘whole family’ support in the truest sense. However, this support often had positive, albeit indirect, effects on wider family contexts. There was significant evidence that the ESF Families provision was working well just as it came to the end of its funding period. While positive, this indicates that relatively innovative provision of this type takes time to become fully embedded, and for implementation issues to be addressed, before reaching an effective ‘steady state’.

### Implementation challenges

An initial lack of referrals from local authorities (LAs), at first the sole referral route, was a significant early challenge. In response, effective actions were taken to increase volumes on the provision through widening the referral mechanism to include a ‘secondary referral route’. This enabled delivery providers to source their own referrals, in addition to those received

from LAs, and proved to be a key turning point in the provision's functioning. Using Jobcentre Plus to signpost individuals for support was also important in increasing the numbers accessing help. As a result of these actions, numbers receiving support increased and referral mechanisms were widely reported to be working well by the time of the research.

The initial payment model for the provision also caused some early difficulties. The main issue concerned insufficient cash-flow into the provision due to providers having difficulty achieving the required trigger for payments – that is, participants completing three sets of activity or 'progress measures'. This was successfully addressed by enabling payments for completion of individual measures, added to an interim payment once individuals were on the provision for a set period. Allied to increased numbers receiving support, this made delivery more viable for providers and helped to stabilise supply chains and delivery structures.

Also related to implementation challenges, the nature and extent of linkages to the cross-departmental Troubled Families programme, led by DCLG, varied across the areas visited. In a number of instances, linkages between the programmes were positive, both at strategic and operational levels.

## **Delivery infrastructure**

Effective delivery relationships between providers and Jobcentre Plus, and between prime contractors and their supply chains, were apparent in most contexts. The following common elements characterised such relationships:

- Open and honest communication between partners.
- Willingness on the part of prime contractors to facilitate the sharing of good practice amongst their delivery partners.
- Responsiveness to issues faced by the supply chain, and a constructive approach to performance management on the part of the prime contractor.

In some areas, relationships between LAs and providers were an exception to the mainly positive delivery relationships apparent. These relationships were reported to be affected by the initial implementation challenges noted. However, there were also cases where LA – provider relationships worked well. Common factors here involved:

- The personal commitment of LA staff with a role in relation to the provision.
- Supportive senior management within the LAs concerned who were willing to engage strategically and operationally with the provision.
- A focus on building relationships and trust with LAs on the part of providers.

## **Support offered to those engaging with the provision**

The delivery of effective support to those engaged was evident across much of the provision reviewed. Several aspects were central to this. These included:

- The use of a dedicated key-worker able to offer tailored, formal and informal, ongoing and 'wraparound' support.
- The availability of a wide, flexible menu of activity and support for those engaged.
- Combining group work with one-to-one support depending on context and need.
- Addressing multiple barriers to work in combination, often in an intensive manner.

While the offer of tailored, flexible and intensive support was one of the strongest positive themes to emerge, expansion in key worker caseloads was seen as having the potential to affect this. Equally, although the provision was mainly delivering the type of support anticipated, there were exceptions. In some cases providers viewed themselves as delivering standard employability support to individuals, rather than provision tackling entrenched, difficult to address

barriers within families. This appeared to influence the nature of support in a more generic direction based on the provision of standardised courses around, for example, employability skills, as opposed to the tailored, intensive, wide ranging support more commonly apparent.

## Key findings – Outcomes of the provision

The support offered was well received by the majority of participants. Around four-fifths of respondents to the participant survey were either 'very satisfied' or 'fairly satisfied' with their provider and support. The survey and case study evidence also showed that the provision met many of its intended outcomes in many instances. The following were all common outcomes, albeit to varying degrees:

- Improved health and wellbeing, both at individual and family levels.
- Reduced problems with debt, both in respect of individuals and households.
- The resolution of housing issues.
- Improved family relationships and reduced conflict.
- Reduced social and economic isolation.
- Increased work-related activity, and individuals moving closer to and into work.

Looking at these in more detail, the survey indicated that most participants benefited in terms of their **individual and/or family health and wellbeing**. Qualitative interviews with participants also provided a number of examples of how support led to improved wellbeing for them or their families, whilst also contributing to improved individual health or condition management.

The provision also had significant positive effects in terms of **individual and family stability and security**. These encompassed more general effects on family relationships and dynamics,

along with more specific outcomes relating to debt and housing. Indirect and interrelated effects in this area were common. Typically these related to improved confidence, which meant that individuals were better able to manage family issues and to address particular difficulties at home.

Positive outcomes in terms of **reducing social isolation** were some of the strongest to emerge. The role of the support in helping individuals to overcome barriers to community engagement was widely seen as one of its key strengths. For many participants, reduced social isolation was clearly a key positive outcome. Evidence relating to effects on economic isolation was less clear, though in some cases the provision is likely to have had a positive effect in this area – particularly through a focus on activities around money management.

Evidence on **employment-related outcomes** was slightly more mixed. The survey data and qualitative participant interviews indicated that the provision did lead to positive outcomes in terms of progression towards work. While the same is true of entering and sustaining employment, this was less consistently evident, particularly in relation to the Management Information available for the provision to the end of July 2014. This showed that sustained job outcomes (at 13 or 26 weeks depending on benefit type) were achieved for 5 per cent of those attaching to the programme. However, this figure rose over the remainder of the provision's lifetime as more job entries were converted into job outcomes. As such, by the end of the programme, 11.8 per cent of participants who had started by February 2014 had achieved a sustained job outcome within 18 months.

Finally, the evidence reviewed suggested that significant **added value** could be ascribed to the ESF Families provision. This rested on:

- The holistic and 'wraparound' support offered, particularly in respect of the dedicated key worker role.

- The flexibility, intensity and range of support the provision is able to offer.
- The relative distinctiveness of the provision compared to other employability programmes.

## Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings, the evidence points towards the following recommendations:

1. The success of the provision in supporting individuals to move closer to work through flexible, intensive, interventions indicates that there may be an important place for such approaches in addressing entrenched worklessness. Examining the potential to develop similar provision for this purpose is thus recommended.
2. The evidence suggests that future provision should take note of the central role and importance of key workers and their ability to offer ongoing, 'wraparound' support to participants. Future programmes might, for example, ensure that this role is a part of their design, bearing in mind the need for adequate resources to facilitate the type of intensive support it involves.
3. The interrelated nature of barriers faced by individuals with multiple problems points towards the importance of developing provision for this client group that adopts a wide focus. This could be designed to tackle and address issues such as debt and family stability alongside, and integrated with, employability support.
4. Where novel forms of outcome-based payments are used, where possible these might usefully be piloted at a small scale first to identify unintended or unexpected consequences that may lessen the effectiveness of interventions. The evidence indicates that such approaches should be closely monitored and be flexible enough to be adjusted as required.
5. When procuring future provision of this type, the evidence points to the importance of ensuring that prime contractors and supply chains are truly geared up for providing the type and intensity of support required. This may involve considering organisations with less of a background in standard employability or welfare-to-work provision, and/or ensuring that such organisations have a place in supply chains.

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