



Jobcentre Plus Support for Schools: qualitative national roll-out evaluation report

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Background and aims

Plans for Jobcentre Plus advisers to work within schools were announced in the 2015 Summer Budget. The stated aim of this activity was to contribute towards the delivery of high quality and impartial careers advice, specifically to help schools engage young people (aged 12-18) identified as being at risk of becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) or facing potential disadvantage in the labour market (for example, due to their ethnicity or to a health/disability issue). Provision was to be carried out at the request of schools, linked to local labour markets and designed to complement existing provision.

The Jobcentre Plus Support for Schools programme was trialled in ten pathfinder districts between February and July 2016, before rolling-out nationally across England in November 2016. The stated aims of the programme were the same at both stages: to facilitate more effective transitions from school into work, training or further study, by providing students with information on vocational routes into employment, including traineeships and apprenticeships, access to work experience, guidance on local labour market and training around the soft skills expected by employers (such as teamworking, punctuality, etc.).

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned Kantar Public to conduct a qualitative evaluation of the Jobcentre Plus

Support for Schools programme. This research progressed across two phases: an initial phase evaluating the pathfinder, for which findings were published in December 2016¹, and a second phase evaluating the national roll-out, which is covered in this report.

Methodology

This evaluation utilised a qualitative case study approach, focusing on the delivery of the Jobcentre Plus Support for Schools programme in nine case study districts, four of which had been involved during the pathfinder stage. This approach sought to generate broad 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 in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including:

- local Jobcentre Plus advisers;
- representatives from the Careers Enterprise Company and other national and local partner organisations;
- careers leads from participating and non-participating schools;
- students from participating schools; and
- participating employers.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-jobcentre-plus-support-for-schools-programme-pathfinder-evaluation>

Key findings

Overview of programme implementation

Overall, it was clear that the Jobcentre Plus Support for Schools programme has been well-received by schools and other stakeholders. It was seen to take a flexible, school-led approach to provision that has allowed a range of different schools to fill gaps in their provision relating to post-school pathways. This was seen to differentiate the programme from other national providers. The programme was seen as positive in engaging with students from a wide range of schools. Feedback was particularly valued where more tailored support was delivered to students at risk of becoming NEET.

Demand for the programme

Demand for the programme has been led by the flexibility of the offer; the perceived expertise of Jobcentre Plus schools advisers in relation to local labour market opportunities and links to local employers; the credibility of Jobcentre Plus schools advisers among students; the programme's focus on non-academic pathways and the fact that it was available for free. Although demand for the programme could initially be slow to build in districts, as the programme became more established (for example, in districts involved since the pathfinder stage), factors driving demand seemed to outweigh inhibitors, raising questions regarding how the programme will continue to meet demand as awareness grows.

Engaging with schools

Jobcentre Plus advisers used a variety of approaches to engage with schools, including face-to-face networking, direct contact and partner referrals. Most marketing and outreach activity was focused on schools with a high proportion of students at risk of becoming NEET, but word of mouth was also an important source of referrals and schools across the spectrum

were applying for and receiving support via the programme. Support was led by school needs and covered a wide range of activities including: skills workshops; local labour market information; employer visits to schools; work experience placements; and links to apprenticeship or traineeship opportunities. Support fell into broad categories: more general support that was delivered to larger groups of students of varying abilities, which was appreciated by schools as it helped to meet their needs but was not considered by teachers to have much effect on student outcomes; and more targeted support that was focused on smaller groups of students and could take place over several sessions, which was more limited in reach but was felt to have a greater effect on student outcomes. This latter form of provision was also felt to provide the greatest differentiation from support already available from other national providers.

Partnership working

Stakeholders typically saw the overall landscape for careers provision to schools as a crowded space, which could be overwhelming for all of those operating in the area. A number of different models of partnership working emerged across the research, including those that were more collaborative and those that were more neutral or antagonistic. Overall, organisations seemed to work more effectively together where there was an organisation taking responsibility for coordinating provision, where there was a clear differentiation between providers in terms of role, and where organisations were actively combining resources.

Employer involvement

The extent of employer involvement varied somewhat across case study districts depending on the extent to which Jobcentre Plus schools advisers had pre-existing links with local businesses. The most common employer activities were school visits and the provision of limited work placements. More occasionally, school advisers were able to offer

work placements that were more integrated with training or work skill courses, or direct links to apprenticeship or traineeship opportunities, which were seen to be more impactful interventions.

Experiences of programme delivery

Jobcentre Plus schools advisers were largely positive about their involvement in the programme, but felt they could work more effectively if provided with greater resources or training opportunities. School leads participating in the programme were also positive about the support received, especially those working with students at risk of becoming NEET, for whom they felt the programme provided a service not available elsewhere. Students themselves typically spoke positively about the programme, particularly those who had received more targeted support. Employers were generally positive about involvement as they saw it as a chance to meet their own community outreach goals.

Recommendations

Given the success of the programme, demand is likely to continue to grow as word of mouth builds and schools are able to plan support into

their activities. There will therefore be a need to either increase resources or target resources on more specific groups. At the moment, the programme seems to be most differentiated from other provision among students at risk of becoming NEET, and concentrating the programme more clearly on this group is likely to have the greatest impact. This will also help to more clearly define the programme for partners, which is likely to aid effective coordination of provision.

A variety of learnings also emerges relating to delivery. The programme should maintain its flexible and consultative approach, which is highly valued by schools. At the same time, it should aim to create more effective means of sharing best practice across districts in order to increase efficiency and drive effective working. The programme should also aim to develop a bank of marketing materials to help communicate and raise the status of the programme among partners. Finally, additional classroom training would help to build the confidence of Jobcentre Plus schools advisers and further raise the quality of delivery.

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The full report of these research findings is published by the Department for Work and Pensions (ISBN 978 1 911003 99 1. Research Report 954. March 2018).

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