

**New Deal for Disabled People National  
Extension: Findings From the First Wave  
of Qualitative Research with Clients, Job  
Brokers and Jobcentre Plus Staff**

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# **Disclaimer**

The views in this report are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department for Work and Pensions.

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Disclaimer

Acknowledgements

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# Abbreviations and Acronyms

BA	Benefits Agency
CLAIT	Computer Literacy and Information Technology
DEA	Disability Employment Adviser
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DSS	Department of Social Security
ES	Employment Service
IBIS	A computerised system used to calculate if clients would be 'better off' in work.
LMS	Labour Market System. A computerised system used by Jobcentre Plus which includes information on job vacancies notified to Jobcentre Plus offices
NDDP	New Deal for Disabled People



# Expanded Executive Summary

The New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) was introduced in 1998 and 1999 as a series of pilots designed to evaluate services based on the use of personal advisers to help disabled people move into or stay in paid employment. The pilots were wound up in 2001 and superseded by what is known as the 'national extension' of NDDP, the aim of which is to 'support and test innovative ways of helping people on Incapacity Benefits move from economic inactivity into sustained employment' (DSS, ES, DfEE research specification, April, 2001). Services under the national extension are provided by a network of around 60 'Job Broker' organisations including voluntary and other not-for-profit bodies, commercial companies, government agencies and other public sector organisations. This report presents findings from a first wave of qualitative research carried out in 2002 which forms part of a larger programme of work aimed at providing the Department for Work and Pensions with a comprehensive evaluation of the NDDP extension.

The overall aim of the qualitative research is to explore the organisation, operation and impacts of the Job Broker service from the perspective of all key stakeholders, including users and providers of Job Broker services, and staff of Jobcentre Plus offices. Specifically, the research was designed to produce data on the following:

- factors affecting participation in the Job Broker programme
- clients' understanding and experiences of NDDP
- the role and operation of Job Brokers
- the role and operation of the Jobcentre Plus staff who can provide people with information about Job Broker services.

A research design was adopted that aimed to gather data using a range of qualitative research techniques from key actors associated with 18 Job Broker services operating in 15 specific geographical areas. The first wave of data collection was carried out in the Summer/Autumn of 2002; a second wave is planned for 2003.

The report is organised into three main parts. Part I (Chapters 2 to 5) presents findings from the Job Broker and Jobcentre Plus staff research. In Part II (Chapters 6 to 9), the client perspective is presented. Part III (Chapter 10) provides an overall summary of the emerging issues.

## **Part I      Job Broker and Jobcentre Staff perspectives**

### **Chapter 2    The structure and organisation of the service delivery**

In some organisations job broking was run as a completely separate service, in others it was integrated to varying degrees with other activities. There were also different staffing arrangements, with staff dedicated to the Job Broker contract or combining it with other activities, and working individually with the client throughout the use of the service or having more specialist roles. Most Job Brokers were based within the areas they served and as well as their own offices used Jobcentres and community-based venues. Being based outside the local area raised some challenges. Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) and other Jobcentre Plus staff perceived importance for clients in the location of the Job Broker's office. Two services operated primarily by telephone and felt this had some positive features but DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff expressed little enthusiasm for the idea. If caseloads grew to levels thought to be too high this could inhibit Job Brokers' ability to sustain contact with all clients. Some services were beginning to make more active decisions about whom they registered, based on the likely timescale of clients moving into work. Some were also beginning to prioritise clients who were closer to work within their caseloads.

### **Chapter 3 Access to the Job Broker service**

People mainly learned of Job Broker services from letters sent out by the Department for Work and Pensions, from Job Brokers' own publicity and from DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff. In the latter case, what people were told about the service depended on staff's assessments of their needs and readiness for work; what staff knew and felt about local Job Broker services, and the requirement to offer people an impartial choice. There were some examples of collaborative working, information exchange and expertise sharing between Job Brokers and between Job Brokers and DEAs, but poor communication and misunderstandings sometimes inhibited the latter and competition was sometimes a barrier to the former.

### **Chapter 4 The Job Broker funding structure and contractual targets**

The principle of outcome funding found support among some Job Broker managers, who felt that it could promote greater creativity in service design and promotion. However there was a widespread feeling amongst managers that payment levels were too low and targets too high given the amount of time and support that clients needed, and some felt that their organisations were carrying too much of a financial risk. In some cases this led to a targeting of more 'job ready' clients, reductions in services, reductions in staffing levels or withdrawal from the Job Broker contract. The one Job Broker service that had managed to generate a financial surplus invested this in improvements to services for clients. It was suggested that levels of payment should be increased, that payments should be made for interim steps in the process of moving to work and that there should be financial support for the early period in the life of a new service. DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff had mixed views on the funding arrangements.

### **Chapter 5 The impacts of Job Broking**

Job broking had expanded organisations' activities and led to the introduction of new ways of working, but the fact that most organisations had to subsidise the service was seen as a negative impact. DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff who had good working relationships with Job Brokers perceived some positive impacts for their own work. However, there was more emphasis on negative impacts for themselves including reduction in job satisfaction. Job Brokers' expectations had not been met in areas such as the feasibility of contract targets and the Department's role in marketing, information sharing, and preparation of Jobcentre Plus staff. Job Broker staff felt that the service provision available to disabled people had been enhanced by the more flexible and individually tailored nature of job broking, although there was little evidence of further new service development being stimulated beyond the Job Broker organisations themselves. While they saw some differences in the ways in which services were delivered, DEAs felt that they and the Job Brokers offered similar service components and that they could provide just as good services as Job Brokers, with more staff and funding.

## **Part II Clients' perspectives**

### **Chapter 6 Engaging with the Job Broker service**

Clients generally found out about the Job Broker service either through the Department for Work and Pensions (for example, through a mailshot, contact with the helpline or from Jobcentre Plus staff, including DEAs), from Job Broker advertising or from a professional who referred them to the service. Levels of awareness and understanding of NDDP were low before contact with the Job Broker. Staff and some clients did not associate themselves with the term 'disabled'. Reasons for people's initial

approach to a Job Broker included the desire to work, dissatisfaction with inactivity and previous unsuccessful job search. People seldom made an informed choice about which Job Broker to register with and any selection was often based on limited information about which Job Brokers they could approach, and the service they offered. Those who had been directed to a specific Job Broker were less likely to be aware that the service could be provided by different organisations. Clients' reactions to the initial contact with Job Brokers were usually positive, particularly in terms of the environment and staff. However there were mixed opinions about the services offered and the pace of the service and about whether Job Brokers were sufficiently proactive in the process of finding work. Clients were not always aware that they had registered for NDDP, and in some cases were unaware that they had registered for any programme, and had not understood the implications of the registration process. Deregistrations were sometimes initiated by clients and sometimes by Job Broker staff, however deregistration procedures could prove problematic for either party, particularly for clients who had attempted to move from one Job Broker to another. The evidence from the client interviews suggests that dissatisfaction with a particular Job Broker organisation tended to result in an exit from the entire NDDP programme.

## **Chapter 7 Clients' experiences of the Job Broker service**

Clients generally found the Job Broker organisation and staff to be accessible, welcoming and friendly, particularly when they had been able to develop a one-to-one relationship with their adviser, although over time there were some who experienced difficulty in remaining in contact with the service. Some clients had found the vocational advice from Job Brokers to be useful, whilst others had been disappointed that there had not been more direction from their adviser. Some clients reported favourably on training and work placements received through the Job Broker service, but others raised issues related to the usefulness and appropriateness of such activities. Difficulties with low confidence or low self-esteem were reported to be widespread amongst clients in this study; and the Job Broker had often been instrumental in raising client confidence and motivation through working on a one-to-one basis as well as through encouraging participation in group Job Broker activities (such as training). A key requirement amongst clients was for help and support with job search. Whilst there was evidence of such support being adequately provided, there were also issues raised by clients about insufficient or inappropriate support. Initially high confidence and motivation towards work was not sustained amongst some clients, as work did not materialise and contact with the Job Broker tailed off. Clients' expectations that Job Brokers would 'mediate' or develop links with employers were often not met, and this was a key area that clients thought could be improved.

## **Chapter 8 Clients' experiences of work**

Clients who had entered employment since NDDP registration were from a range of backgrounds, and had varying work histories and different health conditions and impairments. High levels of motivation towards work were evident amongst this group, many had been actively job seeking before registration and a few had secured employment before contacting the Job Broker. Employment was varied (in terms of type of work, hours employer size and sector type) and had generally not required Job Broker training though sometimes reflected clients' previous experience or pre-NDDP training. Clients were generally in one of three groups: in relatively stable work; in work that appeared to be precarious; and no longer in work. Reasons for leaving or changing employment and motivations to continue working were often influenced by clients' current work experiences. This included levels of satisfaction with, and the suitability of, a job (which was usually assessed with reference to their health status). Where clients had received more intense support prior to job entry, they were more likely to have kept in touch, or expected to resume contact, with their Job Broker in the future. This was often the case for

those in Permitted Work.<sup>1</sup> Those who were experiencing problems relating to their current employment tended to have received less intensive pre-employment support.

## **Chapter 9 Clients' outcomes and the impact of participation in NDDP**

Clients who remained active with the Job Broker service by the time of the research interviews were undertaking job search activity, participating in training or receiving regular contact or one-to-one support from their adviser. Clients in the latter group tended to have the most significant labour market barriers whilst others in this group appeared to be making significant moves towards work. Sometimes activity or involvement with the Job Broker service was 'in limbo' as clients waited for the Job Broker to resume contact. Others were continuing to job search in the expectation that they would contact their Job Broker adviser if they needed to. In some cases, however, clients were considering leaving the service. Clients who were no longer in contact with the Job Broker generally remained committed to finding work. This included those who had never become fully engaged with the service beyond registration, and had only ever received a very limited service, as well as people who were no longer in touch with the service because of dissatisfaction with either the service or the Job Broker organisation. Other clients within this group were no longer in touch with the Job Broker organisations because they were no longer considering work. The final group of clients were those who had found work since registering for the Job Broker service. Here, the Job Broker had played one of three roles: supporting the client in their job search activity and job applications; providing in-work or transitionary support for clients who had already found work; and either very limited or no recognisable role at all.

## **Part III The emerging issues**

### **Chapter 10 The emerging issues**

The final chapter reflects on findings from this first phase of qualitative research, and concentrates discussion on emerging issues: effects of NDDP funding arrangements; take-up and choice for clients; managing clients' expectations; developing relations between Job Brokers and Jobcentre Plus staff including DEAs; working with employers; adding to existing services and gaps in service.

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<sup>1</sup> Permitted Work (which replaced therapeutic work in April 2002) allows people on Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance, National Insurance Credits or Income Support because of illness or disability to work for earnings of up to and including £20.00 a week for an unlimited period, or less than 16 hours a week, on average, with earnings up to and including £67.50 a week for a 26 week period. The period can be extended for another 26 weeks if a Job Broker, Personal Adviser or Disability Employment Adviser agrees that it will help someone towards work of 16 or more hours a week.

# 1 Introduction

The New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) was introduced in 1998 and 1999 by the Department for Work and Pensions (the Department) as a series of pilots designed to evaluate services based on the use of personal advisers to help disabled people move into or stay in paid employment (Loumidis *et al.*, 2001). The pilots were wound up in 2001 and superseded by what is known as the '*national extension*' of NDDP, the aim of which is to '*support and test innovative ways of helping people on Incapacity Benefits move from economic inactivity into sustained employment*' (DSS, ES, DfEE research specification, April, 2001).

The main features of the NDDP extension are:

- It is voluntary. There is no compulsion for potential clients to participate and no sanctions are imposed on those who choose not to take part or who subsequently drop out.
- Its target population is people on one of a number of Incapacity Benefits (including Disability Living Allowance) or National Insurance credits who, because of disability, impairment or long-term health condition have been out of the paid labour force for an extended period, or are working fewer than 16 hours a week.
- It is delivered through individual Job Broker organisations, and not exclusively through existing government agencies. Organisations awarded contracts include voluntary and other not-for-profit bodies, commercial companies, and public sector organisations.<sup>2</sup>
- It aims to offer potential clients a choice of Job Brokers. Job Brokers had begun operating in all local authority areas by January 2002, and most areas were covered by at least two Job Broker services; some were covered by six or seven.
- Funding for Job Brokers from government is outcome related. (This aspect of NDDP is discussed in more detail below.)

The NDDP extension began officially in July 2001 though some Job Broker services started operations later over a period of months up to September. The Department also awarded further contracts in 2002 to extend coverage of Job Broker services in some areas where coverage was limited. The number of organisations providing Job Broker services has therefore varied, but in early 2003 stood at around 60. The national extension is due to run until March 2004.

This report presents findings from a first wave of qualitative research carried out in 2002 which forms part of a larger programme of work aimed at providing the Department with a comprehensive evaluation of the NDDP extension. This programme of work includes:

- surveys of the eligible population of benefit recipients
- surveys of people registered with a Job Broker organisation
- survey of Job Brokers
- qualitative in-depth studies of the experience of Job Broker services from the perspectives of key actors (reported here)
- qualitative work with employers (reported separately in Aston *et al.*, 2003).

The original research design included an impact analysis and cost benefit analysis based on random assignment techniques, but this element of the design was removed in December 2001. Alternative methods for analysing impact are currently being considered. A planned survey of employers is also being reconsidered.

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<sup>2</sup> The NDDP website contains a list of all Job Broker organisations. See <http://www.newdeal.gov.uk/english/unempdisabled/>

## **1.1 Aims and objectives of the qualitative research**

The overall aim of the qualitative research was to explore the organisation, operation and impacts of the Job Broker service from the perspective of all key stakeholders, including users and providers of Job Broker services, and staff of Jobcentre Plus offices.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, the research was designed to produce data on the following:

- factors affecting participation in the Job Broker programme
- clients' understanding and experiences of NDDP
- the role and operation of Job Brokers
- the role and operation of the Jobcentre Plus staff who can provide people with information about Job Broker services.

Specific research questions agreed in discussion between the research team and the Department included:

- What do key players (clients, employers, providers) want/need from the Job Broker service?
- How do clients become participants in the NDDP extension?
- What services are provided, how and why? What do Job Brokers do in practice?
- What are the outcomes (for all the key players) and how are these achieved?
- What does the service add to existing provision?
- What can we learn in terms of 'good' or 'effective' practice?
- How do services and their impacts change over time, and why?

## **1.2 Research design and methods**

A research design was adopted that aimed to gather data using a range of qualitative research techniques from key actors associated with 18 Job Broker services operating in 15 specific geographical areas.<sup>4</sup> Data collection was planned in two waves (the Summer/Autumn of 2002 and 2003). The selection of Job Brokers was made to ensure diversity in a number of important characteristics:

- size of Job Broker service area (based on the number of local authority areas covered by Job Broker)
- type of organisation (public, private, or voluntary)
- previous experience of providing employment-related services for disabled people and main types of activities
- geographical location (including some areas covered by more than one of the Job Brokers in the study)
- principal mode of delivery (to ensure inclusion of telephone-based services).

As Chapter 2 describes in more detail, most of the Job Broker services included in the study were part of an existing parent organisation, others comprised partnerships of existing organisations, and one was established specifically to provide Job Brokering services.

The research design comprised early site visits to the selected Job Broker organisations to familiarise researchers with their structure and organisation, staffing arrangements, and working practices, and

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<sup>3</sup> Initial plans also included employers as key stakeholders. However the timing of the separate qualitative work with employers and the submission to The Department of the research report (Aston *et al.*, 2003) suggested that their inclusion would not generate new findings, and would have created unnecessary burdens on employers as research subjects.

<sup>4</sup> Two Job Broker organisations mainly provided their services by telephone and were not so closely defined in terms of their geographical coverage. Two other Job Broker services were specifically chosen because they covered the same geographical area.

later extensive fieldwork visits to collect data from the key actors. In the main fieldwork data were collected using individual depth and group discussions and observations of Job Broker-client interactions.

In each of the study areas the aim was to carry out the following:

- depth interviews with five clients registered with the Job Broker service
- depth interview with a Job Broker manager
- a group discussion with front line Job Broker staff
- a group discussion with Jobcentre Plus staff who can provide information about Job Broker services to potential clients
- depth interview with a Jobcentre Plus Disability Employment Adviser (DEA)
- observations of a small number of interactions between Job Brokers and clients.

### **1.2.1 Interviews with clients of Job Brokers**

The aim was to select people who had contacted a Job Broker at least three months before a research interview in order to increase the chances of including people who had had multiple contacts with the Job Broker and who would be in work. The June 2002 database of Job Broker clients held by the Department was used as a sampling population.

Potential research participants were selected to achieve diversity in the following characteristics:

- age
- sex
- main type of disabling or health condition
- whether in the '*stock*' or '*flow*' of claimants<sup>5</sup>
- employment status (in work or out of work).

Letters were sent to all potential interviewees offering them the option of opting out of the research. Those who did not opt-out were contacted by a member of the research consortium and agreement to take part in a research interview sought. Interviews were arranged in convenient locations for the respondents, usually their own home. Interviews typically lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The focus of the interviews was on how people learned about the Job Broker service, their views and experiences of making contact, registering and working with their chosen Job Broker, and the outcomes of their involvement. Information was also collected about the respondent's personal and household circumstances, health and employment background.

### **1.2.2 Interviews with Job Broker managers and front line staff**

The aim was to interview in each Job Broker organisation a group of front line staff who have direct dealings with clients, and someone with immediate managerial responsibility for them. Managers were asked to suggest potential participants for the group discussion so that there was a range of experience and backgrounds represented.

Interviews with managers covered strategic issues behind involvement in NDDP and integration within the parent organisation's activities, implementation and organisation at strategic level,

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<sup>5</sup> People already in receipt of a qualifying benefit in September 2001 are defined as the '*stock*' of recipients for the purposes of the NDDP extension. People who began their period of receipt after then are defined as '*flow*'. This distinction is also used in the surveys of the eligible population and Job Broker registrants.

## **NDDP National Extension: Findings from the First Wave of Qualitative Research with Clients, Job Brokers and Jobcentre Plus Staff**

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resources supporting Job Broker activity, changes to the service being delivered, views about overall impacts, and lessons about what supports or hinders effective operation.

Group discussions with front line staff focused on the organisation of the Job Broker service at local level, working with clients and employers, exploring what works for whom, and what helps or hinders achievement of positive outcomes, and views about the impact of their work.

### **1.2.3 Interviews with Jobcentre Plus staff**

Staff in Jobcentre Plus offices carry out a number of different roles relevant to the Job Broker service. Some act as new claims advisers while some are designated as NDDP advisers (a role often combined with other duties). Specialist Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) are also part of Jobcentre Plus. As described further in Chapter 2, they can provide information about Job Broker services to potential clients but do not act as a referral service.

The aim was to hold a group discussion with Jobcentre Plus staff (excluding DEAs) from a number of offices within the catchment area of the Job Broker who come into contact with benefit claimants and recipients who might be potential clients of the Job Broker service. Jobcentre Plus Managers were asked through the Department channels to help identify staff who could contribute to the group. This method of recruitment led to the inclusion of a range of staff with wide differences in experience of NDDP. The Jobcentre Plus offices covered in this study included '*Pathfinder*' offices in which new benefit claimants were required to attend a mandatory work-focused interview with a Personal Adviser, and non-Pathfinder offices where no such requirement was placed on new claimants or existing recipients although a voluntary gateway to NDDP services was available.

DEAs were recruited differently. Each Job Broker organisation was asked to complete a pro forma listing the names and addresses of all the DEAs with whom the Job Broker had had contact and to give an indication of the nature of that contact. The aim was to generate a study group of DEAs across all 18 Job Broker services that included some who had had some form of general contact with the Job Broker (for example, around marketing activity), some who were known to have suggested potential NDDP clients, and some who had arranged disability services for one of their clients. This method worked reasonably well.

The group discussions and interviews with DEAs focused on understanding how Jobcentre Plus staff influenced Incapacity Benefits recipients' participation in NDDP, understanding ways in which Jobcentre Plus staff worked with Job Brokers, staff views on what Job Brokers added to existing provision and how they had influenced their own practices, and views about good practice and lessons for the future.

### **1.2.4 Observations of Job Broker-client interactions**

In order to enhance understanding of the way in which Job Broker staff work with their clients and potential clients, a number of observations of interactions between them (usually face-to-face meetings) were carried out. Care was taken to obtain consent from the client. Key aspects of the interaction were noted and after each observation the client and the Job Broker were asked separately for their assessment of the meeting. Information gathered was used to enhance the research team's understanding of the interactions between clients and Job Brokers, and separate findings are not presented in this report.



### 1.3 A note on funding

As mentioned earlier Job Broker organisations receive funding from central government based on the results they achieve. At the start of the NDDP national extension in July 2001 the basic structure of funding was as follows:

- a modest first payment for each client registered
- a larger second payment when a client entered paid work
- a final payment when the client's employment reached 26 weeks.

The levels of payment varied among Job Broker services, depending on their bids and contracts with the Department. Some Job Broker organisations had also negotiated a variation to these basic funding arrangements which provided payments for intermediate activity, such as drawing up action plans with clients (this was known as '*variant funding*' and is discussed further in Chapter 4). The Department also arranged to provide what was known as '*advance funding*' for some Job Brokers intended to help with cash flow. Under these arrangements Job Brokers were given payments, in the form of a loan, to fund some aspect of the service, such as marketing, that required them to make outgoings before they had received any income from job entry payments.

### 1.4 A note on the use of terms

In the course of the study different ways of referring to people who registered with Job Brokers (or who might be eligible to register) were used by the various groups of research participants. References were made for example, to '*clients*' and to '*customers*'. The same people could also be referred to as '*claimants*' or '*recipients*' in some circumstances. In writing this report there has been a need therefore to ensure that the terms used are consistently understood, and therefore we have adopted the following approach.

The terms '*client*' and '*potential client*' solely to refer to people's relationship (or possible future relationship) with a Job Broker organisation. In their relations with Jobcentre Plus staff (including DEAs) people are referred to as '*customers*' (where this term is used by the staff themselves in the research interviews), '*claimants*' (referring to people in the process of making a claim) or '*recipients*' (to denote people in receipt of a social security benefit).

The authors acknowledge that some people to whom these terms refer might not recognise themselves or even disagree with the term.

### 1.5 Structure of the report

The remainder of this report is divided into two main parts. In the first part (Chapters 2 - 5) findings are presented on the organisation and delivery of Job Broker services drawing principally on data from the management and staff of Job Broker organisations, and staff working in Jobcentre Plus offices. In the second part (Chapters 6 - 9) there is a focus on the views and experiences of Job Broker clients and how Job Brokers have contributed to helping them.

Chapter 2 looks at the way in which the Job Broker service is structured within the 18 Job Broker organisations selected for in-depth study. Chapter 3 presents the views of Job Broker staff and Jobcentre Plus staff about how potential clients are helped to reach the service, and how Job Broker services fit into and alongside the wider framework of existing provision. Chapter 4 explores views and experiences of the funding arrangements that apply to the NDDP national extension, including their perceived impact on service delivery and outcomes. Chapter 5 explores perceptions about the effects of delivering Job Broker services for the organisations involved in the in-depth study, for Jobcentre Plus staff, and for disabled people more generally.

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In the second part of the report focuses on clients and how Job Broker organisations have contributed to moving them nearer or into paid work. Chapter 6 explores people's awareness of the New Deal for Disabled People and Job Broker services, how they choose and establish contact with a Job Broker, and early experiences of clients and Job Brokers up to the point when they formally register. Chapter 7 presents findings on the experience of clients and Job Brokers working together, including early processes of assessment and agreeing job goals, through periods of training, work placement or other activities, to job searching and starting employment. Chapter 8 examines people's experience of working, including its suitability and impact on health and finances. Chapter 9 presents findings on Job Broker clients' overall assessment of the Job Broker organisations, in particular the services provided, and the outcomes achieved for them. The chapter identifies what aspects of Job Broker services have been effective for clients and what unmet needs remain.

The final chapter, draws on the preceding chapters to address the original research questions and in particular to identify what is working well within the Job Broker service from the perspectives of the key actors, and what appear to be models of good practice. The chapter also identifies concerns and issues that still need to be addressed as the Job Broker service continues to change and develop.

In the report we use quotations in italics to illustrate the language used by people who took part in the interviews and discussions.

## 2 The structure and organisation of service delivery

### Key points

- There were different models for integrating the Job Broker service with the wider organisation's other activities: in some it was run as a completely separate service, in others integrated to varying degrees with other activities.
- Some organisations had staff who worked only on the Job Broker service; others had mixed staffing arrangements. Dedicated staff arrangements were felt useful for ensuring a focus on the Job Broker service and building momentum and expertise. Mixed arrangements were felt to be helpful in preventing the service being marginalised, providing more balanced roles for staff and for team work.
- There were also different combinations of specialist staffing roles (focusing for example on initial client work, employer liaison, job searching or in-work support) and generic staffing roles (where the same adviser worked with the client throughout the use of the service). Again, both were seen to have positive and negative features.
- Most Job Brokers were based within the areas they served and as well as their own offices used Jobcentres and community-based venues. Being based outside the local area raised some challenges. Two services operated primarily by telephone and felt this was beneficial to clients in various ways, but there was some scepticism about telephone services among other Job Broker services and among DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff.
- Jobcentre Plus staff including DEAs perceived importance for clients in the location of the Job Broker's office, and saw both advantages and disadvantages in arrangements made for Job Brokers to meet clients in Jobcentre premises.
- Caseloads for many Job Brokers had grown to levels which they thought to be too high, inhibiting their ability to sustain contact with all clients. Some Job Brokers were beginning to make decisions about whom they registered based on the likelihood and likely timescale of clients moving into work. Some were also beginning to prioritise helping clients who were closer to work within their caseloads.

This chapter looks at the way in which the Job Broker service is structured within the 18 Job Broker organisations selected for the in-depth study. It draws predominantly on data from interviews and group discussions with service managers and front line staff, but also draws on the perspectives of Jobcentre Plus staff including DEAs. Section 2.1 looks at the parent organisations within which the service was based, and section 2.2 at their reasons for bidding for the Job Broker contract. Sections 2.3 and 2.4 look at how the service is integrated within the activities of parent organisations, and at different staffing arrangements. Differences in the scale of operation and the location and venues used are described in Sections 2.5 and 2.6. Section 2.7 looks at how decisions are made about the allocation of resources, at registration and in Job Brokers' work with clients.

### 2.1 The nature of the parent organisations

As noted in Chapter 1, the Job Broker organisations chosen for in-depth study were selected to be as diverse as possible. They included voluntary, public and private sector organisations, and organisations working in partnerships or consortia to deliver the Job Broker service. The selected Job

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Brokers were also varied in the nature of the other activities of the wider organisation. These other activities included:

- Department for Work and Pensions disability services: Work Preparation and WORKSTEP.
- other Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Education and Skills programmes: other New Deals; Employment Zones; Work Based Learning for Adults; Programme Centres, Modern Apprenticeships, Connexions.
- other employment or training related activities such as supported employment schemes, workplace assessments, careers advice, training courses, placement schemes, employment opportunities within the organisation. These were often provided for or funded by local authorities, social services and health trusts.
- non-employment activities such as a Health Action Zone, care homes or other specialist accommodation, housing projects and youth projects.

This range of other activities meant that there were differences among Job Brokers in how far they were already specialists in working with disabled people and/or supporting people in moving into or towards work.

Having an existing specialism in disability services was seen as helpful because it meant that organisations already had skilled and trained staff and knew the local set-up well with, for example, existing contacts with government, with Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) and with other local service providers. Where disabled people were a new client group, staff sometimes felt their early expectations of clients had been wrong. They had been surprised by the diversity of Job Broker clients in terms of the range of conditions and their experiences of work, by how far some people were from the labour market and the amount and type of support they would need to move towards work, by the fact that it was not always clear that work was a realistic goal for clients, and by the importance and complexity of financial considerations, particularly the benefits and tax credits systems. Having an existing expertise in employment-related services was also seen as helpful, particularly if it meant that an organisation already had good contacts with employers.

Among DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff perceptions of parent organisations, in terms of client groups served and likely commitment to helping people move into work, were influenced by previous working relations with them (for Work Preparation, WORKSTEP or skills and training provision). Some had personal contacts with ex-colleagues who had moved from Disability Services to provider organisations. However, some Jobcentre Plus staff only discovered in the group discussion undertaken as part of the in-depth study that a well-known local provider was now a Job Broker.

DEAs commented positively on job broking organisations that understood the needs of disabled people, brought expertise in meeting their employment-related needs, understood the full range of specialist programmes and services they might benefit from, and could communicate well with other organisations providing services. Local labour market knowledge, extensive employer contacts and readiness to intervene with employers on behalf of people perceived as being '*treated unfairly*' were also seen as helpful. Job broking organisations employing ex-DEAs were seen as particularly well equipped.

## **2.2 Reasons for bidding for the Job Broker contract**

It was not always possible to discuss the organisations' reasons for bidding for Job Broker contracts: in some cases the staff interviewed had joined the organisation or moved into their post after the contracting process, or had not been involved in discussions about whether to bid and were not aware

of the reasons behind the decision. Where it was possible to discuss this, the reasons for participating were varied.

For some organisations, job broking was essentially a service already being provided by the organisation and bidding for the contract was a way of making it more widely available. In others, job broking was a '*logical extension*' of existing services to an adjacent area of activity, or to a new client group. Some organisations saw it as filling a '*gap*' between existing services, and in one case there had been an expectation that clients using existing services would form the bulk of demand for the new Job Broker activity. More broadly, there was seen to be synergy between the aims of the Job Broker service and organisations' own philosophy, aims or ethos, and the Job Broker service was seen as a way of fulfilling the organisation's objectives of expanding employment opportunities for disabled people.

The Job Broker service had generally been seen as a potentially important funding stream, and in some cases there had been an expectation of it contributing to profits, although this was generally not described as a key reason for bidding. As Chapter 4 describes, these expectations had generally not been fulfilled. Finally, in one organisation it was thought that contracting for the Job Broker service had been a strong personal interest or 'mission' for one particular senior member of staff. When they had left the organisation the Job Broker service, which was not performing as expected financially, had lacked a champion.

One view among Jobcentre Plus staff who took part in group discussions was that some long established providers went on serving their particular client group in their traditional way, so that the Job Broker service was just a new name for what they were already doing. The fact that the job broking contract provided an additional funding stream for some large parent organisations could lead to some suspicion that Job Brokers with various contracts and business ventures could be slotting new clients into whichever service suited the provider best, regardless of the client's needs. There was some suspicion among DEAs that Job Brokers new to disability employment services only saw the NDDP as a way of contributing to profits.

## **2.3      Integration and organisation of the Job Broker services**

Among the Job Brokers, there were different ways of organising the Job Broker service and different models for its integration with the organisation's other activities. This is now looked at in relation to both services and staffing.

### **2.3.1    Service organisation**

There were differences between the organisations in whether the Job Broker service was running as a separate function within the organisation, or whether it was essentially woven into its existing activities. There were four different models here:

- the Job Broker service run as a completely separate activity, with no integration with other existing services. Staff working on other services might be seen as a source of advice or contacts, and Job Broker clients might have previously been users of other services or might deregister from the Job Broker service and instead use another one. But Job Broker clients were provided with a separate service and no use was made of other services within the organisation.
- the Job Broker service run as a separate activity but with some use of other services run by the organisation. For example, Job Broker clients might attend training courses, groups or workshops which were already operating within the organisation, or might use placement schemes, job search

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services or have access to information about vacancies which were also available to clients using other services.

- the Job Broker service completely integrated within the organisation's other activities. Here, no new services or provision were set up under the Job Broker contract: the Job Broker contract was essentially seen as a source of clients for existing services, nothing distinctive was provided within it and it was thought that staff would often not be aware of Job Broker clients as a distinct group at all.
- the Job Broker service as the sole activity of the organisation, so that there were no other services or activities offered. There might however be an intention to set up other services or activities in the future.

These different ways of organising the Job Broker service were seen by Job Broker staff to have different advantages and disadvantages, discussed further below, but none appeared to be clearly most or least favourable. However, DEAs could be critical of large organisations with many contracts if they encountered staff who were unaware of the NDDP contract, and where the organisation appeared to give priority to waiting list clients on more lucrative contracts. Provider organisations offering Job Broking alongside a wide range of activities and services could also attract criticism from other Jobcentre Plus staff, who felt it would be better to focus on achieving higher standards in fewer activities.

### **2.3.2 Staffing organisation: dedicated and mixed staffing**

There were also differences in how far the Job Broker services had separate staffing arrangements, or shared staff with other services. In some organisations, the Job Broker service had dedicated front line adviser staff who worked solely on the Job Broker service. Other staff, such as managers, administrative staff and marketing staff generally worked on other contracts alongside the Job Broker service. Elsewhere, some or all of the front line adviser staff divided their time between the Job Broker service and other services or contracts.

Again, there were perceived benefits to both ways of organising the service, and neither seemed to be clearly more advantageous. Having dedicated Job Broker staff was seen as helpful in ensuring that staff could focus on the Job Broker contract, making it their priority, and building an efficient, effective and streamlined service. It was also helpful in building momentum and energy, and ensuring that the Job Broker service was not marginalised or seen as a 'bolt on' activity. The Job Broker contract was sometimes seen as requiring a different approach from an organisation's other activities: a more innovative, creative and flexible approach, requiring lateral thinking and problem solving skills, allowing Job Brokers more autonomy, but also with a focus on outcomes, targets and financial viability. It was also seen as a very complex area of work which required wide-ranging technical expertise, because of the varied needs of clients, the complexity of the benefits and tax credits system, or the procedures associated with the contract itself. Having staff work uniquely on job broking was thought to help their acquisition of the necessary skills and technical knowledge. Finally, it was also felt to enable staff to take on specialist roles within the Job Broker service, an issue discussed further below.

Having staff who work on other services or contracts as well as job broking was also seen as advantageous, however. Some organisations chose this model of staffing because they felt the Job Broker contract was particularly demanding on staff, because of the range and extent of requirements of clients (particularly if they were seen as further from work than non-Job Broker clients), or because of the nature of the Job Broker contract (with an emphasis on outcomes which were seen as difficult to achieve, at least quickly, and a focus on financial targets). Some organisations had found that staff could become demoralised if they worked only on the Job Broker service, and that a balance of work

was helpful to job satisfaction and self esteem. A further perceived advantage of mixed staffing was that it gave the Job Broker contract a stronger presence across the organisation, with less danger of staff working on it becoming marginalised. Finally, where demand for the Job Broker service had not built up at the rate expected having staff who were able to work across two or more contracts or services was seen to enable flexibility in meeting changing levels of demand.

There had been changes in the way the Job Broker service was staffed since its set up, and more changes were planned, with examples of organisations moving from having staff work on other contracts to dedicated staffing, and vice versa, in both cases the change being seen as positive by staff and by managers.

Underlying these decisions was a common concern about the danger of the Job Broker service and its staff becoming isolated within the organisation. A number of factors appeared to contribute to this. Two are alluded to above: the experience of some organisations that Job Broker clients' requirements were more substantial and more difficult to meet than those of other service users, and a feeling that the Job Broker contract, with its emphasis on targets and outcomes which were difficult to meet, was a particularly demanding one. As a result staff were felt to have become demoralised, and it was sometimes said that the Job Broker contract was not particularly well regarded by other parts of the organisation. In some organisations, this concern about potential isolation was also underpinned by the fact that the nature of the service provided under the Job Broker contract was quite different from its other activities, or that the Job Broker service focused on a narrow section of the organisation's client base. Finally, if the Job Broker service was only a small part of the organisation's work, in terms of staff complement or contribution to income, this could also lead to concerns about it becoming marginalised.

These concerns influenced decisions about staffing set-up and were addressed in other ways too. Regular team meetings were valued particularly by staff, and there had been initiatives to build links with other services where staff worked only on job broking, through for example cross-service team meetings and work shadowing. One organisation, described below, had moved to a model where all front line staff worked on job broking as well as on other contracts, and this was felt to have been very positive in encouraging cross-fertilisation, joint approaches to problem solving, and providing energy and impetus to the job broking service.

### **2.3.3 Staffing organisation: generic and specialist roles**

A further aspect of the organisation of staffing on the job broking services was the extent to which Job Broker front line staff had generic roles (working with the same clients throughout their contact with the service), or specialist roles. Again, each was seen to have advantages, and again changes had been made or were contemplated, although in all cases this involved moving from generic to specialist roles and not vice versa.

Working with clients throughout their use of the service was primarily seen as valuable in helping to build relationships between staff and clients. Job Brokers felt that many clients were, at least initially, anxious or unconfident about approaching the organisation. A generic role meant they could build a relationship gradually and gain a more in-depth understanding of the person and their requirements. The client did not have to repeat information about themselves, and could be sure that information given in confidence was not passed on. Advisers valued generic roles as giving more autonomy and flexibility. In services covering large geographic areas, cases were allocated on a geographic basis and having generic staff roles was therefore inevitable.

The breadth of knowledge and competencies required to be a Job Broker meant that this way of working was also seen as demanding, although many Job Brokers enjoyed the challenge. In some services individual staff had developed particular areas of expertise within generic roles – for example leading on benefits, training or other local provision, or liaison with employers. Team meetings and

opportunities for informal discussion were seen as very important where staff worked individually with clients.

Where staff were organised around specialist roles, these were quite varied and included initial meetings and information gathering up to the development of an action plan; work preparation work up to the point when job searching began; making arrangements for training, placements and permitted work; job search support; liaison with employers; in-work contact and support and the collection of evidence of job outcomes. Where there were specialist roles, staff recognised that it could be more difficult to build relationships with clients. However, this way of working was valued in allowing advisers to build an expertise in their area of work and strengthen the service provided. It was also thought to help to build a sense of teamwork, and to enable staff to think together about how to address any difficult issues that arose with clients.

## **2.4 Models of operation**

Across the 18 Job Brokers five organisational models were identified, of which the first two were most common:

- dedicated service provision: the Job Broker service was run as a separate service within the organisation, generally with little use of other services within the organisation, and with front line staff who were all working uniquely on the Job Broker contract.
- mixed service provision: some or all of the staff working on the Job Broker contract also worked on other services, and Job Broker clients could use services which were provided as part of other contracts. The extent of cross-use of service varied from using some resources or activities to a great deal of overlap with little or no service provision being unique to job broking clients.
- integrated service provision: this was a variant of the mixed model operated by just one Job Broker within the group studied. Here, all front line staff within the organisation worked on the Job Broker contract, but all combined it with other activities and none worked uniquely on job broking.
- unique service provision: here, the Job Broker contract was, at the time of the in-depth study fieldwork, the only service provided by the organisation which had been set up specifically as a quite separate operating centre for this purpose. All staff therefore worked uniquely on job broking, although there were plans to diversify and establish more income-generating activities.
- marginalised service provision: this was essentially a variant of both the dedicated and the mixed models. Here, the Job Broker service had evolved as a small and marginalised activity within the organisation, provided either by a single member of staff or by a group who spent a low, and decreasing, proportion of their time on job broking. There was little integration between the Job Broker service and other activities, and the profile of job broking within the local organisation as a whole was described as low. At the time of this research two of these organisations were withdrawing from job broking, one of them after adopting the model as a way of initiating that withdrawal.

There were advantages and disadvantages to each of the models, with the exception of marginalised service provision, and organisations had moved between them. The dedicated model was seen to be a focused and efficient way of working allowing people to build expertise and experience. The mixed model was seen as preventing isolation and facilitating job satisfaction by providing variation to the demanding Job Broker contract. Moving to the integrated model had, as noted above, been seen as a positive step which had increased the presence and energy behind job broking. Staff and managers



operating the unique service provision model felt that it had been advantageous for the team to throw all their energies into developing the Job Broker service and to have job broking as their sole focus.

## **2.5      Scale of operation**

The number of front line staff working in adviser functions within organisations varied from one (in organisations which were part of consortia – the total staffing complement within the consortium as a whole was much larger) to around 17. Size reflected the size of the geographic areas or populations covered, and whether staff worked full or part time on job broking. Larger teams were felt to be useful to establish local presence and build momentum, and because they meant that specialist roles could be adopted; smaller staff complement was felt to produce a cohesive, focused and team-based approach to working. All the organisations also involved other members of staff in the Job Broker team: administrative support, marketing support, IT support as well as management. Most organisations had found that client numbers had initially grown much more slowly than anticipated. There had been some over capacity in the early period of operation, but most had started with small teams that had grown as demand increased. One however had found demand had been much higher than expected, with staff feeling stretched from the early days of operation.

At the time of the research individual advisers' case loads varied considerably, from below 15 where advisers spent relatively little of their time on the Job Broker contract, to 70-100 for full-time Job Brokers. This top level was felt to be far too high, and meant that Job Brokers were not sustaining contact with sometimes around half of their case load. Expanding the staff complement to what was seen as more realistic levels given case loads was difficult for several organisations because of the relatively low level of income generated by the Job Broker contract, and indeed in two organisations staff size had been halved, in one case as a prelude to withdrawing from the Job Broker contract. There were also reports of vacant posts and further staff shortages because of long-term sick leave.

Jobcentre Plus staff generally had little understanding of the scale of operation of individual Job Brokers. Comments were made in group discussions that some services appeared not to have enough staff to deal with all the people who contacted them, and that clients were easily discouraged by being asked to wait or not being followed up. DEAs were critical of organisations that did not appear to have sufficient staff to answer telephone calls. They, and reportedly people trying to contact or already registered with Job Brokers, were frustrated by unanswered calls.

## **2.6      Location of service delivery**

### **2.6.1      Service base**

The Job Brokers chosen for in-depth study were very varied in the geographical area they covered, some covering just one or a few local authorities, others larger areas or regions, and some with national coverage. Some had just one office within what could sometimes be a sizeable area; others had several. The selection of organisations deliberately included two which operated by telephone, with advisers working from a central office and thus not having a physically accessible location in most of the areas they served.

Job Brokers seemed to face some challenges if they were based outside the areas they served or served large areas, particularly if they did so from a single base. For advisers, it meant that they could spend substantial amounts of time travelling and had to limit the days on which they were available to visit some areas. Allocating cases on a geographical basis helped here. But having less strong or no physical presences in areas also seemed to make it harder to build contacts with other local providers, with Jobcentre Plus offices and DEAs, and with employers. Some organisations without a strong

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presence in (all) their areas seemed to have overcome these difficulties, particularly if they had a longstanding expertise in disability and work and had made good contacts over the years. Among Job Brokers serving smaller areas and with a strong local presence, there were also examples of organisations with relatively sparse local contacts, again particularly if they were new to disability and/or employment. And there were also other reasons for Job Brokers not forging strong links with providers, Jobcentre Plus or local employers, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 7.

Those DEAs who expressed a view on service base felt that people were more attracted to an organisation with a local address than to an outside organisation even when it was explained that local visits could be arranged. There were views that national and non-local telephone numbers and addresses were off-putting to people who expected a service with local knowledge. DEAs could be faced with a dilemma when they felt job broking services in easy reach were of poorer quality than those further away from where people lived, as at the time of the interviews they were expected not to show any preference for one Job Broker rather than another when telling customers about Job Brokers. There were advantages to DEAs of local services in that it was easier to collaborate with Job Brokers.

### **2.6.2 Venues**

A wide range of venues were used by organisations who met with clients (two Job Brokers in the in-depth study provided a telephone service only). Most organisations saw at least some clients at the organisation's own offices (of which some had several in the local area) and felt this helped clients to get a sense of the organisation and of its facilities. Features of their own venues which were described positively were a central location, transport accessibility, disability access and co-location with other service providers. Occasionally staff pointed to ways in which their own premises were not fully accessible. However, there was also generally a strong emphasis on taking the service out to clients and using community-based venues. Jobcentre Plus offices were often mentioned here. They were valued as being familiar to clients and giving access to job vacancies, but some organisations tried to avoid using them because of connotations of benefit entitlement monitoring. Other locally based venues used were community centres, town halls, libraries, careers service offices, cafes, pubs and YMCAs.

Visiting people in their own homes was seen as problematic because of safety. Where organisations were prepared to do home visits, staff worked in pairs or restricted their availability. Some organisations expected clients to demonstrate that they were able to travel and to leave their home as an indication of their readiness to start thinking about work.

Jobcentre Plus staff who took part in group discussions attached importance to the location of the Job Broker's office; believing that some people liked to call in to an office, and preferred somewhere relatively close to home. Easy access by public transport or town centre offices were thought to be attractive, and a permanent local venue had an added advantage for people who might want to make unscheduled visits. Few had visited a Job Broker office themselves, but when staff had visited and observed cramped conditions, and narrow or steep staircases, this made a strong negative impact. Those DEAs who had visited seldom mentioned physical accessibility. One DEA contrasted visits to two Job Brokers, commenting positively on ground floor access and good signage as opposed to a lift difficult for wheel-chair access and a confusing bell entry system.

Many DEAs reported that Job Brokers held interviews in local Jobcentre Plus offices. Where these were not in place there was some frustration with the 'rule', as they saw it, that those Job Brokers who had expressed interest in holding jobcentre interviews could not be invited in unless others covering the area were also invited. DEAs and some other Jobcentre Plus staff saw advantages in having a Job Broker presence in Jobcentre Plus offices. They could point people to the Job Broker's desk or room, or make appointments easily for them. This could be especially helpful if the main Job Broker office was not easily accessible. DEAs thought clients possibly were more willing to meet Job Brokers in a

familiar environment. Some other Jobcentre Plus staff, on the other hand, thought it was an advantage when Job Brokers were located in separate premises, emphasising that the organisations were separate and avoiding some of the stigmatisation thought to attach to visiting the jobcentre. In towns or cities with several Jobcentre Plus offices, some sites were better than others for the Job Broker presence. It was important to consider which groups of clients visited particular offices and the distance from the town centre or bus station. Again, if people visiting a jobcentre knew there was a Job Broker presence in the office they could be dissatisfied about having to use a telephone call centre to make contact.

### **2.6.3 Telephone services**

As noted above, the selection of organisations deliberately included two that operated by telephone. These Job Brokers saw a number of advantages to this. They felt it made the service very accessible to clients – important to those with mobility impairments but of general value since people could keep in regular contact and get in touch at any time, without waiting for an appointment. They felt it was a more informal way of getting in touch, less intimidating to clients particularly at their first approach. They also felt it was likely to feel safer to clients who were concerned about jeopardising their benefit entitlement. Finally, it was said that it meant advisers did not focus on the disability and were not drawn into making their own judgements about a client's capability based on a visible impairment.

There were some concerns among advisers or their managers that there was a danger of ending up in long and repetitive telephone conversations with clients which might not occur with face-to-face contact, and that it could be harder to distinguish between those who were going to be able to make effective use of the Job Broker service and those who were not. Advisers from non-telephone services were sometimes quite sceptical about them – in part drawing on what they had been told by clients who had deregistered from a telephone service. They felt that it would be more difficult to build rapport and to develop an in-depth understanding of the client, their circumstances and their requirements, and that observing demeanour and body language were important. Representatives from telephone services, however, felt they had been able to develop in-depth relationships with their clients and, whilst they acknowledged that a telephone service would not be the preference of all clients, they felt it was important to offer the choice.

DEAs had limited awareness of the centrally based telephone services, and contacts with their representatives were uncommon. Not all the other Jobcentre Plus staff knew that some Job Brokers operated mainly through a telephone service, although in areas where there was no Job Broker office or presence within easy reach, staff said that job broking was effectively a telephone service anyway. There were some misunderstandings of how they operated. A few DEAs assumed that local representatives visited clients. Some other Jobcentre Plus staff thought that Job Brokers made home visits, if people did not want to telephone and could not visit an office, but some staff who had tried to arrange this for clients had been unsuccessful.

There was little enthusiasm among either DEAs or other Jobcentre Plus staff for the idea of giving personalised advice only by telephone. DEAs saw some advantages to both clients and DEAs in being able to rely on immediate telephone contact (a problem reported in relation to some job broking services) and it was felt that professional people and those who did not wish to be seen seeking services might see advantages in this mode of contact. Perceived disadvantages related mainly to the 'impersonal' contact, staff and DEAs generally assuming that people liked face-to-face contact. One DEA view was that people with mental health conditions needed a calming environment hard to induce over the telephone and another that the mode of contact would not be helpful in building the confidence of people who lacked it.

Some other Jobcentre Plus staff had observed what happened when people in the Jobcentre Plus offices were encouraged to use the office telephone to contact other staff or employers. It appeared that it was often people who needed most help who found it hardest to talk on the telephone. Some people with symptoms of depression or anxiety purposely avoided using the telephone. Some

unemployed people, it was believed, could not afford to have a private telephone. Deaf people are among those who do not want a telephone service, staff said, and a personal adviser's own enquiries showed that not all Job Broker organisations had Minicomms.

Jobcentre Plus staff thought it would be hard for Job Brokers to build rapport on the telephone. DEAs felt they themselves would be uncomfortable conducting interviews by telephone: in face-to-face meetings they could 'read' people's reactions, judge their answers, get a better response, and on their own premises build up trust. One DEA went as far as saying they would not tell people about a telephone service as they could not see how appropriate support could be offered over the phone. The local labour knowledge of centralised services was questioned. Within the telephone services, it was acknowledged that it could be difficult to operate without much knowledge of local labour markets, or of travel provision, and there was scepticism about telephone services on these grounds among other Job Brokers.

## **2.7 Allocation of resources: decisions about registration and contact**

In line with their contractual obligations there was an emphasis amongst the Job Brokers on making their service available to anyone eligible who wanted to use it and on meeting the needs of all clients. However, staff also thought it was important to ensure that the service was going to be able to give people the help they wanted, and not create unrealistic expectations. As caseloads grew and funding became strained, there were more concerns about working effectively and helping clients to progress. As a result, within a broad aspiration of open access to which almost all the organisations subscribed, there were some differences in practice in whom the service was made available to and in how cases were prioritised.

### **2.7.1 Registration**

There were different approaches to registration. At one end of the spectrum were organisations where the representatives we interviewed stressed that they did not do any selection at the registration stage. They sought to ensure that the client was registering voluntarily and that they wanted to work or to move towards work. But these organisations were happy to register clients who they felt were a long way from being job ready, and even if the adviser had some doubts as to whether open employment would be a likely outcome of their involvement with the service. Advisers might not register potential clients if it emerged in their initial contact that they were too ill at the moment to contemplate moving towards work or were awaiting serious medical treatment, and they might also consider when another internal service was more appropriate (such as WORKSTEP) depending on the client's needs, but these circumstances arose rarely.

For some, there was a strong personal or organisational antipathy to the idea of selection: all potential clients were felt to have the right to use the service. It was understood that the service had to be made available to people who wanted to use it, and that organisations had no option to refuse people under the terms of their contracts with the Department. Staff also pointed out that it is very difficult to know, at the initial meeting with a client, how likely it is that they will find work. Open access was also prompted by low levels of registration compared to contractual target levels, or because registration fees were important for funding the service. This worried advisers if they felt that they were not, in reality, likely to be able to work with everyone they registered, or if they were discouraged by managers from giving them the in-depth support they felt they needed (see further below).

Although some organisations adhered very firmly to open access, there were also some examples of changing decision-making practices around registration. As well as differences between organisations, there seemed to be some inconsistency in practices *within* organisations – differences

between individual advisers, between managers and advisers, between advisers and staff who had initial contact with potential clients, and indeed individual advisers sometimes gave inconsistent accounts of their own practices. In one organisation a two-stage assessment process had been developed, the first based on Job Brokers' contact with the client and the second, used if there was some doubt about suitability, involving a form completed by the client. But the process was not used routinely and, elsewhere, approaches had not been formalised.

Decisions about whether to register a client were influenced by judgements about the likelihood of the client moving into work and the likely timescale for this. Some advisers considered whether work was a realistic goal: one manager said that instructions from the Department were that people should not be registered if they were felt to have no chance of finding work, although this was seen as a very difficult judgement to make. Staff also talked about assessing whether clients were likely to become job ready within a fixed period of time (6 months in one organisation, 6-12 months in another), or whether clients wanted to be working in the near future. One adviser, for example, had decided not to register someone who was depressed and who felt that they would not be able to start work yet. People might also not be registered if their work goal involved a longer training course (around six months or more), although it was clear that some Job Brokers would register a client in these circumstances.

Advisers might also not register a client if they felt they needed a higher level of support than was available through job broking, referring them to another internal service, to an external service such as WORKSTEP, or to a specialist organisation for example where people had more serious mental health conditions. If they doubted whether open employment was a realistic goal, they sometimes '*gently discouraged*' the client from registering by, for example, suggesting they think about voluntary work instead of paid work, suggesting they talk to their doctor before they come back, suggesting they approach other Job Brokers before deciding, or commenting on how difficult it might be for them to find work. Finally, one adviser had not registered someone who wanted to be self-employed; another had turned away someone who had been charged with a serious violent crime.

Where potential clients were not registered, advisers stressed that they would try to recommend an alternative course of action - another internal programme or service, another organisation which could provide non-work activities or training, specialist mental health services, or DEAs. Some tried to keep in touch, or encouraged the client to return when they felt ready to. However, advisers sometimes found it hard not to register someone if they had no alternative suggestions to make.

The timing of registration was sometimes carefully managed. It was sometimes the organisation's policy not to register people at the first meeting - they felt it was better to give people time to think about whether they wanted to register. Other advisers used discretion to decide when to register someone, delaying if they felt some doubt about how clear work was as goal for the client, or about how realistic it was. So some would put the onus on the client to show some '*commitment*' by coming back, or by subsequently sending in the registration form. Some advisers talked about occasionally asking the client to do some other preparatory task before they registered. One organisation had a long waiting list for initial appointments, and felt that this had deterred less motivated people from making contact.

One organisation had found that large numbers of potential clients were being encouraged by mental health services to register, but were later deregistering - it was thought because they did not want to work towards employment. It was felt that the services were using the Job Broker as another '*activity*' for clients for whom open employment was not realistic. The organisation therefore sometimes contacted the referring professional to discuss the potential client's circumstances and goals and whether another service might be more appropriate. Finally, some organisations had adjusted their marketing and outreach work to move away from organisations which referred less job ready clients. Job Broker staff also referred to other Job Broker organisations who were understood to do more active selection of clients, or to promote the service in ways which targeted only people who were already very close to work.

There was isolated criticism from DEAs of an organisation (not one of the 18 organisations studied in-depth) seeming to register people who sent in a card expressing an interest in joining, and of an organisation (again not studied in-depth) that required applicants to complete a complex and potentially off-putting form by post prior to first interview. There were some reports from the few DEAs in touch with people who had contacted Job Brokers of organisations that kept clients waiting, did not contact them again and did not respond to telephone calls. Whether this was attributable to being over-stretched or a form of rationing is a matter for speculation. There is little to add here from the other Jobcentre Plus staff who rarely had direct experience at this level.

### **2.7.2 Intensity of contact**

Advisers generally stressed that the amount of contact they had with different clients was extremely varied. Some had moved into work within a matter of days; in other cases advisers were still working with clients who had got in touch in the very early weeks of the Job Broker service, six or more months earlier. The amount and frequency of contact was often determined by the client. Advisers were reluctant to risk putting pressure clients who were not themselves initiating or responding to contact, and they sometimes found it difficult to make time to initiate contact themselves. The level of contact might also change during the course of people's use of the Job Broker service. In the early days the adviser might be more proactive both in carrying out tasks and in contacting the client; as time went on they encouraged clients to take over the reins, and had a number of strategies for encouraging clients to '*take responsibility*'. With the exception of one adviser who said they rarely saw clients more than three times, there were no fixed limits on the duration or level of contact.

However, advisers also talked about prioritising clients who were closer to work and spending more time with them. Clients who were closer to work, and particularly those who were actively job searching, were likely to be in touch more often or to be contacted more often by advisers, to keep abreast of a changing situation. By contrast, advisers described '*inactive*' cases where the client had not initiated contact for some time, had missed several appointments suggesting they no longer wanted to use the service, had taken a break from contact because of ill-health or another activity such as training, or more occasionally where the adviser was beginning to run out of suggestions and ideas.

In some organisations more formal systems for prioritising 'close to work' clients were in place or were being considered. The precise arrangements varied, but organisations were considering or implementing ways of identifying clients who were closest to work and providing more in-depth support to them. Some were also 'banding' clients based on their perceived proximity to work and focusing on those in some groups only. The precise arrangements varied but involved identifying two, three or four levels of support needs or proximity to work, and focusing on those who were '*almost job ready*', those who needed relatively little beyond job search support, or those likely to be in work within a month, or within two months. There seemed generally not to be very fixed or formalised ways of identifying client needs, and working definitions of job readiness seemed fairly fluid, with some apparent differences of emphasis among advisers working in the same organisation.

The treatment of other clients varied. Some advisers continued to work with them (although sometimes very much less so, relying on these clients to initiate contact); others tried to signpost them to another service or an activity such as training or voluntary work. One organisation was working only with clients who were thought likely to be in work within eight weeks.

Again, there were different approaches to prioritising clients among advisers within the same Job Broker organisation, and sometimes differences between staff and managers. In some cases approaches to prioritising introduced by managers were met by disquiet from advisers, who were very concerned that people's needs were not being met, that personal and organisational standards were compromised, and that false expectations were created when such clients were registered.

## 3 Access to the Job Broker service

### Key points

- The main ways in which Job Brokers said that clients heard about their services were from the Department for Work and Pensions mailshots to eligible claimants, from DEAs, from health-care professionals and social workers and from Job Broker publicity.
- Job Brokers were disappointed with the Department for Work and Pensions national promotion of the Job Broker service. They employed their own direct and indirect forms of promotion to potential clients, and views varied as to their success.
- Some Job Brokers made special efforts to market their service to DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff. However, levels of understanding of Job Broker provision among these groups varied widely.
- Within Jobcentre Plus, what people were told about Job Brokers in gateway interviews, work focussed interviews or interviews with DEAs depended on assessments made by staff about people's need for support, readiness for work, and their own views on local Job Broker services.
- DEAs had mixed views on offering an impartial choice of Job Broker services, and some would like to tell people which Job Broker service was most appropriate for them and why.
- Some Job Broker staff and DEAs reported collaborative working relationships, sharing general information and expertise and working together in the interests of individual '*shared*' clients. This way of working grew from initiatives taken on both sides, and could be encouraged by previous good relationships between providers and staff in Jobcentre Plus.
- Such working relationships were sometimes inhibited by a perceived lack of Job Broker feedback to DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff about clients they had told about Job Brokers; by low levels of direct contact between staff in Jobcentre Plus and Job Brokers, and by misunderstandings and poor communication about roles.

This chapter presents views of Job Broker staff and Jobcentre Plus staff about ways in which potential users are helped to reach the service, and how Job Broker services fit into and alongside the wider framework of existing provision. The chapter begins by looking at the promotion of services by the Department for Work and Pensions (3.1) and then at services' own marketing approaches to potential clients (3.2). The next two sections explain how Job Brokers promoted themselves to staff in Jobcentre Plus offices including DEAs, how such staff learnt about Job Broking and local Job Brokers and what they knew (3.3), and what they told people about the service (3.4). Job Brokers' descriptions of other routes by which people reached their service are discussed next (3.5), and the final sections of the chapter look at relationships between Job Brokers and DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff (3.6), and links between Job Brokers and other local service providers (3.7).

### 3.1 Job Brokers' views of the Department for Work and Pensions promotion of the Job Broker scheme

Promotion of the Job Broker scheme by the Department for Work and Pensions comprised three elements: national publicity, direct mail-shots to eligible benefit claimants and awareness-raising and training amongst Jobcentre Plus staff. Some Job Brokers reported that they had relied on the Department for Work and Pensions promotional campaigns to generate the majority of their clients,

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whilst others said that they had anticipated receiving most of their business from people who had heard of their service directly from DEAs or Jobcentre advisers.

Job Broker staff felt that the national publicity fell short of what they had been led to expect and that as a result general public awareness of job broking was low. They said that this had had an adverse effect on their work with employers and clients - with both groups remaining confused about the nature of job broking. There was a view that more national advertising and publicity would encourage more clients to use the service.

Job Brokers reported that people had been prompted to enquire about the service by the letters that had been sent out by the Department for Work and Pensions. These had sometimes had a very marked impact on enquiries – particularly a letter sent in March 2002 that had referred specifically to the new Permitted Work rules and highlighted Job Brokers as organisations that could provide more information. For some Job Brokers the mail-shots resulted in more enquiries than they could cope with, and they would have liked advance warning so they were prepared for the sudden increase in enquiries. One Job Broker manager reported that the team had had to drop all other client work for a number of weeks in order to deal with the interest created by a mail-shot. For another, the problem was exacerbated because they had run their own marketing campaign at the same time.

There were criticisms of the mail-shots however, of the letters announcing the job broking scheme and of those publicising changes to the Permitted Work rules (which also mentioned job broking). Job Brokers reported that both letters could be misleading to clients. They felt that some people who approached them after receiving the first of these letters had thought participation in the Job Broker scheme was obligatory. They also felt the letter led to an expectation that Job Brokers had details of lots of vacancies that would be appropriate for them. Job Brokers reported that some recipients of the second (Permitted Work) letter had thought that it was compulsory to visit the Job Broker, and again that some clients thought Job Brokers would have extensive details of suitable part-time jobs. According to Job Brokers many recipients of the Permitted Work letter believed that the Job Broker service and Permitted Work were synonymous, while others believed that Permitted Work could only be accessed via a Job Broker. Job Brokers reported that as a result of the two mail-shots they had received numerous enquiries from people who were not ready to think about return to work and who had only made contact because they thought they had to.

### **3.2 Job Brokers' marketing approaches**

Two issues faced Job Brokers in the promotion of their services - how to brand it in a way that gave an accurate impression of the service, and what forms of promotion to employ.

#### **3.2.1 Branding the service**

The question of branding was influenced by three factors: levels of public recognition of the terms 'NDDP' and 'Job Broker', clients' understandings of and reactions to these terms and recognition of the local Job Broker organisations' own brands.

Job Brokers felt that levels of public recognition of the names 'NDDP' and 'Job Broker' were low due the lack of national publicity by the Department for Work and Pensions. Furthermore, they reported that these terms were sometimes confusing for clients and potential clients and felt that:

- the term '*Job Broker*' could suggest to clients that Job Brokers had lists of jobs that they could offer clients
- the inclusion of the term '*New Deal*' in NDDP caused the scheme to be confused with other New Deal programmes



- the use of the term '*Disabled*' deterred some eligible people from registering because they considered themselves to be '*sick*' and not '*disabled*' (and were perhaps concerned about stigma associated with the latter term).

Job Brokers adapted their publicity accordingly. Many used their own brand name, for example the name of their organisation, rather than NDDP, and where the Job Broker logo was used in publicity it was kept inconspicuous.

### **3.2.2 Forms of promotion**

Job Brokers employed both direct and indirect marketing techniques.

Direct methods included advertisements in local newspapers and on local radio; the distribution of leaflets to households, GP surgeries, post offices, libraries, supermarkets, and community centres, and attendance at local fairs and disability events.

One indirect method was the development of referral routes from organisations that themselves had direct contact with potential clients (for example, disability charities, local authority social services departments and local NHS services). This method was considered successful at generating referrals. However, some Job Brokers felt there was a tendency amongst some agencies to view Job Brokers as simply another therapeutic activity for clients and to refer people for whom paid work would not be a reasonable expectation. Job Brokers responded to this difficulty either by being more selective about which agencies they promoted themselves to or by helping them become better informed about the purpose of the Job Broker scheme. Similarly, promotional contact with organisations such as Community Mental Health Teams and the Probation Service was reduced if it was felt that referrals from these organisations included too many people who were a long way from work or who presented staff with too many challenges.

Another indirect method of promotion was word of mouth. Two approaches were used. In one case, talks were given to local organisations (for example, Women's Institutes and Rotary Clubs) in order that members of those organisations would talk about the service to friends and relatives who might be eligible to register with Job Brokers. In the other, clients themselves were encouraged to tell other people about the Job Broker service. The assumption was that individuals were more likely to be influenced by their own personal circle of contacts than by staff of government agencies, service providers or printed material.

Views as to the success of these promotional methods varied. Newspaper advertisements were said by some managers to have attracted significant numbers of new enquiries, whereas others said that they had not yielded significant results (and nor had advertisements on local radio and in disability magazines). Staff evaluations of the various leafleting techniques varied. Word-of-mouth techniques, however, were seen as successful by both of the managers who specifically mentioned them and the development of referral routes was generally considered to be a worthwhile method to employ. In one area, managers reported that a number of Job Brokers were joining forces to mount Job Broker '*road shows*' that could be taken around the community (though it was too early for them to know the impact of these).

Managers described a number of specific difficulties with the promotion of their Job Broker services. Firstly, some Job Brokers had relied on national promotion of Job Broking by the Department for Work and Pensions and had therefore not allocated sufficient budget for their own promotional activity. Secondly, although a number of managers had assigned responsibility for promotion to particular team members, few of these staff had significant marketing training or expertise, and such expertise remained rare amongst Job Broker staff. Thirdly, some Job Brokers felt that they were insufficiently familiar with the kind of people who claimed Incapacity Benefits to be able to design their promotional activity in a targeted way. A final difficulty concerned the need to maintain a

balance in how the service was described and what claims were made for it. It was felt that publicity needed to send a positive message about the possibility of getting work, but that it was hard to do so without raising the expectations of those for whom work might not be a realistic goal, or implying it would be easier to enter employment than it actually was.

Even when promotional methods were successful, Job Brokers tempered them at times when staff were under pressure because of increased numbers of potential clients enquiring about the service and because of growing caseloads.

### **3.3 Equipping Jobcentre Plus staff to promote Job Brokers**

Staff in Jobcentre Plus offices including DEAs had an important role in telling people about the services, and it was expected that there would be a number of routes to Job Brokers via contact with staff in Jobcentre Plus. Key issues here were levels of awareness and understanding among such staff. This section looks first at how Job Brokers promoted themselves to Jobcentre Plus staff, and then at levels of knowledge among such staff and how much they knew about Job Brokers serving their local areas.

#### **3.3.1 Marketing to Jobcentres, DEAs and Benefits Agency staff<sup>6</sup>**

Some Job Brokers already had working relationships with DEAs, other Jobcentre Plus staff and social security staff. Where these contacts did not already exist, some Job Brokers made special efforts to market their Job Broker services to these groups. Commonly this involved face-to-face contact with staff. There was a feeling that this would make the strongest and most lasting impression and was most likely to promote recall and to generate trust. Hence Job Brokers described '*floor-walking*' Jobcentres, being '*in-and-out of Jobcentres every day*' and doing some of their work at desks in Jobcentres. They also set up liaison meetings and spoke at or regularly attended Jobcentre Plus meetings. Job Brokers felt that these personal approaches helped them establish a presence in Jobcentre Plus and BA offices and to become more trusted by Jobcentre Plus staff. This was confirmed by DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff, who criticised Job Brokers who '*never showed their face*' or who had only come to see them when their service was first set up - they said that they had better relationships with those who more frequently called in to their offices.

#### **3.3.2 How DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff learnt about Job Broker services**

##### **DEAs**

DEAs built up a picture of Job Broker functions from a combination of sources over time: from Jobcentre Plus supervisors and mentors; regional or district meetings; organised events and meetings involving Job Brokers; Job Broker brochures; presentations from Job Brokers; meeting Job Brokers at their premises or at the jobcentre; and contacts with job broking organisations that provided other disability employment services. Job Broker brochures mostly did not offer enough detail of what Job Brokers actually did, and some DEAs misunderstood the focus of one service because of the name. Face-to-face meetings and presentations from Job Brokers were valued if Job Brokers were good at explaining their services and how they worked with clients, and if DEAs saw opportunities for joint working for the benefit of their customers. Some DEAs would have liked initial briefings that explained in detail what Job Brokers were expected to do.

Those DEAs with responsibility for 'gateway' interviews (see 3.4.2) or for managing DEAs had generally been proactive in arranging meetings with most of the Job Brokers serving their area, though

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<sup>6</sup> As now part of the Jobcentre Plus Service.

not with the telephone services. DEAs new to the area or role had visited locally based Job Broker organisations to find out what they and their parent organisations did, and where the Job Broker service was also keen to meet the DEA such contacts led to valued relationships. Where DEAs already had close working relationships with the parent organisations they often had heard about Job Broker services from them. Apparently some Work Preparation providers had not taken the opportunity to tell DEAs about their Job Broker services. Not all approaches to Job Brokers on the part of DEAs were successful, and there was some criticism of organisations thought not to appreciate the importance of working with a DEA.

There were some reports of Job Broker organisations based in the DEA's catchment area having made the first contact. Approaches from Job Brokers based outside were rare, and could appear to be motivated by Job Brokers' wishes to make use of the DEA or disability services rather than to promote their Job Broker services. However, where the Job Broker took the trouble to book an appointment with the DEA to explain what they could offer and hand over brochures this was appreciated, and there was some feeling that other Job Brokers should have adopted similar good practices. Obtaining leaflets from Job Brokers was not always successful. Some DEAs, especially those who saw the NDDP as marginal to their role, did not try to get hold of leaflets. Jobcentre Plus systems for providing DEAs with leaflets sometimes filled the gaps.

#### **Other Jobcentre Plus staff**

There was a wide range of awareness and understanding of Job Broker services among Jobcentre Plus staff who took part in the group discussions. Those who had almost no such knowledge were people mainly engaged on reception duties. Other staff who had heard of Job Brokers said they knew that services were available to help disabled people who wanted to work, but they did not expect to have detailed knowledge themselves of such services. This was perceived more as the responsibility of the DEA. The most knowledgeable staff were people who conducted NDDP gateway interviews or compulsory work-focussed interviews, or worked in specific action teams.

Those staff that knew anything about Job Brokers reported sources of information similar to the DEAs'. Some staff mentioned their office lists of Job Broker organisations serving the area, with contact names and telephone numbers, which both served as information for themselves and could be passed to people who might be interested. DEAs were themselves an important source of information. In several offices it was the DEA who had given an initial talk about Job Broker services, and was identified as the person who updated the office lists and was available to answer any queries from staff.

Jobcentre Plus staff who took part in the group discussions had seldom had an opportunity to visit a Job Broker office, but some would have liked to. Those who had visited an office said this had been useful in learning more about the service. When requests for visits had been unsuccessful, staff were critical in the same way as reported by DEAs. Staff who had met Job Brokers at office presentations said that this had been a helpful introduction to the service.

When Job Brokers came into Jobcentres to use premises for interviews with clients or to replenish stocks of leaflets this could provide an opportunity for staff to gain more knowledge, as reported later.

### **3.3.3 Levels of understanding of local Job Broker provision amongst DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff**

#### **DEAs**

Given the patchwork of information sources described above, differing responsibilities and a range of experiences over time it is not surprising that levels of understanding of Job Broker provision varied widely when DEAs were interviewed in autumn 2002. It should be remembered here that DEAs were selected for interview to represent differing degrees of contact with the study organisations.

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At one extreme, the names of Job Brokers were mostly known, though there were some gaps and recall problems, but there was no understanding of what they actually did or of what distinguished their NDDP contractual activities from other Jobcentre Plus services the organisation delivered. At the other extreme, DEAs had high levels of knowledge of almost all Job Brokers covering their catchment areas. This was especially true of DEAs in two study areas who worked across wide geographical areas where Job Brokers were existing disability employment service providers and a highly collaborative relationship was already in place. In between the two poles lay those DEAs who had a good understanding of one, or occasionally two, locally based services.

### **Other Jobcentre Plus staff**

In most of the group discussions at least one member of staff knew the names of one or more Job Broker organisations, which served people in their local area, and some mentioned the name of a national telephone service. As they shared their knowledge there were surprises for some people who had not realised that organisations known already as local providers also offered job broking services. The general picture was one of rather little knowledge beyond the names of Job Broker organisations and the areas served. If there was little contact with a Job Broker and no feedback about what happened to people whom they told about the service then it could be hard to learn more about what Job Brokers actually did.

Given the range of responsibilities of the staff who took part in the discussions, and the fact that mandatory work focussed interviews were relatively new, it may not be surprising that some knew relatively little about Job Brokers. Some made the point that they did not need to know more about Job Brokers to do their job. Staff who were best informed about the local provision were people conducting work-focused interviews, especially if good contacts had been established, and visits and presentations had taken place in both directions. In these situations, Jobcentre Plus staff had named contacts in each of the services on their office list, and knew something about the differences between them, for example which service specialised in serving people with mental health conditions.

### **3.4 How clients were told about Job Brokers by DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff**

It is useful here to remind readers of the different roles of staff interviewed, in relation to NDDP. Jobcentre Plus staff taking part in the discussions came from offices at different stages of internal development and reorganisation. Some staff worked in Jobcentre Plus offices with a well-developed Pathfinder model and compulsory work focused interviews with people making new claims for Incapacity Benefits. Others worked in non-Pathfinder offices, where the gateway to the NDDP for people making new claims for Incapacity Benefit was at different stages of administrative development and implementation, in terms of identification of staff with specific responsibility as NDDP gateway receptionists and advisers. As a result, people's routes through the Jobcentre and the personnel who might discuss Job Brokers with them were rather different, according to which office they visited or where they directed their enquiries. Our findings do not provide a comprehensive overview of Jobcentre administration, in respect of advising people about Job Brokers. Rather, findings highlight those issues which staff considered important when they thought about how people in touch with their own office might be put in contact with a Job Broker.

DEAs working in Pathfinder offices normally saw existing Incapacity Benefits recipients, because *new* claimants took part in work-focused interviews with personal advisers. Some DEAs in non-Pathfinder offices were NDDP gateway advisers. People receiving a gateway interview had come forward in response to a letter from the Department for Work and Pensions inviting them to find out more about the NDDP. If the gateway adviser thought such people ready to take up work they might be told about suitable jobs, and registration with a Job Broker would not feature highly in the interview. In a few offices a staff member other than the DEA taking part in the study had some responsibility for seeing prospective Job Broker clients. Here DEAs had talked to fewer people about the NDDP than

expected. In one office the arrangement did not work well and some enquiries were still being referred to the DEA. Longer-term benefit recipients were not offered a gateway interview, and enquirers at Jobcentres normally saw a DEA.

### **3.4.1 Direct enquiries**

Jobcentre Plus staff in some offices said that people making general enquiries to their offices about NDDP or phoning in response to mail shots, for example about Permitted Work, were directed straight to the DEA. In offices with a formally identified NDDP gateway, people making *new claims* who appeared eligible for a gateway interview were offered an appointment with an NDDP gateway adviser (in some Jobcentre Plus offices this was the DEA). Longer-term Incapacity Benefit recipients not eligible for this interview were sent information by post about Job Brokers, including the office list and Job Brokers' own promotional leaflets. What was sent out at this stage could depend on which leaflets happened to be in stock in the office at the time. Direct enquiries could be very few, however. Staff in some non-Pathfinder offices said that it was unusual for Incapacity Benefits claimants to visit or get in touch.

All DEAs knew some people who had received a letter from the Department for Work and Pensions, and some small surges in response to mail shots had been observed. They thought that people contacting a Jobcentre in response to a Department for Work and Pensions letter on the whole did not mention the NDDP. DEAs typically said that receptionists automatically booked an appointment with a DEA for somebody asking generally about work and who mentioned a health condition or disability. While most DEAs appeared content with this system there were some concerns about the low level of knowledge among Jobcentre staff of Incapacity Benefits recipients and the NDDP. Not all DEAs offered an appointment to people enquiring about the NDDP. One preferred to telephone to explain that information would arrive by post, thus avoiding reserving an appointment *'just to give out a leaflet'*.

### **3.4.2 Telling people about Job Brokers**

Jobcentre Plus staff work in different ways and have different responsibilities in respect of identifying people eligible for NDDP and discussing Job Brokers with those eligible. This section reports how staff decided which people to tell about Job Brokers.

#### **Gateway interviews**

Staff conducting NDDP gateway interviews might spend up to one hour discussing options and services available. People were reported often to be anxious about losing benefits, and some emphasised their need for retraining or help in regaining confidence. Staff explained how Job Broker services might help, and gave lists and sometimes Job Brokers' own material. In order to meet office targets for getting *'NDDP customers'* into work, some of those given information about Job Brokers were also put forward for job vacancies at this stage.

Not all Jobcentre Plus staff in the group discussions who were designated as NDDP advisers felt equipped to advise Incapacity Benefits claimants about employment. Some felt they needed to understand more about working with disabled people. Some felt they did not yet have the full range of knowledge about financial situations of disabled people.

#### **Work focused interviews**

At compulsory work focused interviews with people who would be eligible for NDDP and could use Job Brokers Jobcentre Plus staff aimed to assess people's levels of interest in and readiness for work. They found few people currently thinking about returning to work, and an even smaller number ready for work. Staff felt that many people seemed not ready for this interview. Their current focus was on their financial situation and perceived need for benefits, or their health and the impact of their

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condition. Some had been recently diagnosed, or were undergoing investigation or treatment. Some staff felt that people who had a job to return to when they were well did not need a work focused interview anyway. Staff had the option to defer an interview, but a better solution, they felt, would be to have the interview later in the claiming period, when benefit entitlements had been decided and people's health condition was more stable.

Staff had to decide how far to discuss NDDP services and Job Brokers, and there were different approaches here. In some Jobcentre Plus offices they sometimes decided to refer people who clearly needed extra support to the DEA. This happened especially where staff had been told by Job Brokers that they only wanted people close to being job ready. It seemed important not to risk the possibility that a negative experience would discourage a person. Others who might be steered towards DEAs rather than Job Brokers included people already involved with a DEA, and people who were uncertain about what work they could do or wanted to do. In other Jobcentre Plus offices staff said that their instructions were to promote Job Brokers ahead of DEA services, with Job Brokers taking responsibility for deciding whether their service was appropriate or not for individual people. DEAs were believed to be hard pressed, and it could be several weeks after an application for an appointment before the DEA got in touch.

Some staff said they might not try to discuss Job Brokers with people who expected to return to their job, people recently bereaved or people who appeared very ill. Others, however, said that they gave information to all, on the basis that people could keep the information until they needed it. Trying to do what seemed best for individual people could lead to some staff 'bending the rules' as they saw it, by working with some people until they seemed more ready to hear about Job Brokers. They might offer support by telephone, and keep in touch with progress, then invite the customer for another interview, although they believed this was not how they were supposed to work.

Some staff conducting compulsory work focused interviews said they felt inadequately trained to deal with some people with mental health conditions.

### **Other interactions in the Jobcentres**

Apart from the compulsory work focussed interviews, and discussions formally identified as NDDP gateway interviews, various other interactions in the Jobcentres might lead to identification of people as entitled to NDDP services and potential users of Job Broker services.

New claims advisers and New Deal advisers (Jobseeker's Allowance 18-24; 25+; 50+; lone parent) said they all met Jobseeker's Allowance claimants who described themselves as disabled or having a health condition. Such people might be offered an opportunity to speak to a DEA, who was considered the best person to talk to them about services that might be appropriate. People often did not want to be labelled as 'disabled' however, and declined the opportunity to meet a DEA. Other people who did not want to meet a DEA were people who were appealing against failing a Personal Capability Assessment, who did not want to be seen as in any way interested in work. Some staff believed that fear of the stigmatisation attached to 'disability' meant that some people failed to get the medical certification that entitled them to sickness or Incapacity Benefit, and were thus not entitled to the kind of help available through NDDP. Some also observed that many people with learning disabilities claiming Jobseeker's Allowance might be helped by NDDP type services, but did not have qualifying benefits. There was a general view that only the most '*obviously disabled*' people were referred to a DEA, and more people would benefit from the specialist help available from DEAs and NDDP services than were currently referred or entitled.

### **DEAs**

DEAs said they knew that the Department for Work and Pensions expected them to tell new customers on qualifying benefits about Job Broker services. Not everyone meeting a DEA got to hear about Job Broker services however. There were several influences here.

DEAs are used to assessing needs and making judgements on appropriate services for their customers. One DEA explained that it *'never crosses my mind'* to tell clients about Job Broker services when certain that another service such as Work Preparation would meet their needs. Such judgements were influenced by beliefs that Job Broker services helped only 'job ready' people and that Work Preparation would help those with low confidence or stamina.

There was reluctance to tell people about Job Brokers if DEAs were dissatisfied with the services they provided. In one study area Job Brokers were criticised for neglecting clients, leading to people feeling let down or angry which rebounded on DEAs. Here DEAs said they often directed people to Work Preparation providers instead, knowing they would provide feedback to DEAs and a good service. Work Preparation provision was preferred as it allowed DEAs more control over what happened to clients.

Those DEAs with least involvement with the NDDP did not routinely raise the Job Broker option, and worked with clients themselves, although a DEA might tell a client about Job Broker services if they could offer something the DEA could not provide.

The system of awarding 'points' to DEAs for placings of disabled people (to help towards meeting the Jobcentre Plus performance targets) was thought to be an incentive not to tell people about Job Brokers if they seemed ready for work. However, an opposing view was that Job Brokers could help DEAs to meet targets, but only if NDDP clients had been properly 'marked' on the Jobcentre Plus system so that the Jobcentre could claim credit for job entries.

Finally, there was one example of a misunderstanding restricting who was told about Job Broker services, where a DEA would only talk with people about Job Broking if they showed a letter from the Department for Work and Pensions, which was taken as a sign of pre-selection for the scheme.

### **3.4.3 Information and choice of Job Broker**

In the group discussions with Jobcentre Plus staff, those with responsibility for discussing Job Brokers with people who might use the service said they typically gave them the office list of Job Brokers serving the area. In one Pathfinder office the term 'disabled' had been taken out of the heading on this list because so many people disliked this label. Some staff preferred giving out the Job Brokers' own promotional leaflets, which were written to convey positive messages. There were problems here, however. It could be hard to maintain good supplies. If the Jobcentre did not have a *'full set'* of leaflets staff were wary about appearing to promote one service ahead of others. The full set was not always considered helpful, however, if this contained some relatively modest leaflets alongside glossy, sophisticated marketing brochures.

Jobcentre Plus staff who took part in the discussions emphasised that getting in touch with a Job Broker was voluntary, and people made their own choice of service. Staff might promote the services in general terms, suggesting that Job Brokers might have more time than Jobcentre Plus staff, or might be able to provide additional or different kinds of help. Some felt frustrated not to be able to give more information about services, knowing very little themselves about what the Job Brokers did, and in any case having a firm instruction to remain impartial. Their experience was that while many people just looked first for the nearest or most accessible service, others wanted more information and some guidance to help them choose.

Those staff who did know something about the Job Brokers on their list said they often found ways to steer people towards 'good choices'. Explaining that a Job Broker offered a specialist service to a particular client group was generally considered acceptable. Other more subtle approaches included pointing to Job Brokers who were available to meet clients on Jobcentre premises or in community centres, or mentioning Job Brokers who might help clients financially. Some advisers, however,

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thought it was a sensible approach to remain impartial. Knowing that a particular Job Broker had been helpful in one situation was no guarantee that this would happen for other clients.

DEAs said they also gave out lists of Job Brokers and leaflets available. They talked in depth about issues arising in relation to their guidance about remaining impartial and leaving the choice to the individual. It is important to understand here that this rule did not apply to other programmes with a choice of provider, and that DEAs were accustomed to selecting the most appropriate provider in consultation with the customer. There were some feelings that choice did not empower more vulnerable people who might worry about how the Job Broker would treat them, and that it would be easier for people not to have a choice especially when there were many organisations to select from. There were also some concerns that without advice people might choose poor quality Job Brokers and so lose their enthusiasm for work.

Some of those DEAs who scrupulously followed the guidance commented that they were not in any case in a position to advise people as they lacked detailed knowledge of what Job Brokers could offer. Advising people on the basis of limited information might lead to them registering with a Job Broker that did not meet their needs, disappointing them and calling into question the credibility of the DEA. Unusually, one DEA commented that limited knowledge was not a bad thing, as people would then have an unbiased choice. DEAs who followed the rules were often uncomfortable with not being allowed to explain more about Job Broker services and sometimes said they felt '*foolish*' when people asked for more information. It was commented that some people complained that DEAs were not doing their job properly if they just handed out leaflets.

Perhaps the most important perceived consequence of offering an impartial choice was that people left the meeting and took no further action, though DEAs pointed out that it was hard to conclude this for certain as they rarely had feedback on who had registered with a Job Broker.

Some DEAs had changed their practice subtly, for example by indicating which services had local bases, did business by phone or made visits to the area. Other subtle strategies for influencing choices including pointing to those Job Brokers that had '*bothered*' to provide the DEA with their literature, commenting on Job Brokers that had given a good service in the past, and mentioning Job Broker services thought more or less likely to meet the person's needs. During the course of the research the guidance was revised, and in one area DEAs knew that the Department for Work and Pensions expected them to tell customers which Job Broker service was most appropriate for them and why. This change was welcomed. Elsewhere, some DEAs had been unofficially directing people towards particular providers, especially those that could meet training needs, believing that their duty as a DEA was to help people to access services that could help them best. On the rare occasions when someone expressed an interest in a particular Job Broker the DEA might offer to book an appointment for them, and people generally welcomed the offer.

In addition to choice among Job Broker providers, there was the issue of offering a choice between registering with a Job Broker and being supported by the DEA. Some DEAs believed it was legitimate to tell people about their services and offer a choice. Others indicated that they were acting inappropriately by handing out their own leaflets or '*selling*' their services in other ways, and mentioned devices such as explaining that they were '*obliged to*' tell people about Job Brokers. In one area it was reported that guidance had changed so that DEAs were allowed to promote their own services and not just those of Job Brokers. Often DEAs said that they told people that the choice lay between staying with the DEA and registering with a Job Broker, though they might leave the door open to people who wished to return to the DEA after exploring what Job Brokers could offer. Occasionally, DEAs explained a third choice, where the DEA and Job Broker would work hand in hand to provide a combination of support, reflecting the partnership approach describe above.

The DEA service was felt more appropriate for some people. It was sometimes felt that coming into the Jobcentre to see a DEA was a '*big step*' especially for long-term unemployed people and those



with psychiatric problems who found it hard to meet new people, and that people often preferred to stay where they felt more secure and with someone with whom they had begun to build a relationship. Indeed some DEAs chose not to tell *'unstable'* people about the Job Broker services. There were some examples of DEAs steering less compliant or harder to help customers towards Job Broker services rather than encouraging them to consider staying with the DEA but this practice was not widespread. *'Sending'* people who needed intensive support to Job Brokers was considered counter-productive, as they would only be referred back to the DEA for specialist services, unless Job Brokers had their own supported employment services. DEAs generally were motivated to see that the customer got the service that suited them best.

#### 3.4.4 Observations by Jobcentre Plus staff on client responses

Jobcentre Plus staff who took part in group discussions observed a wide range of response among people to whom they explained Job Broker services. Little interest was expressed by some people with newly diagnosed illness, or depressed by bereavement. People taking part in work focused interviews could seem overwhelmed by all the new information about benefits and services they had been offered. However, people who were ready to hear about opportunities for returning to work could be immediately interested. Some liked the idea that the service was not part of the Jobcentre. Discovering, in some local areas, that all initial contacts must be made by telephone put some people off. One person with a hearing impairment had been angry about this, and an appointment was made with a DEA instead.

While some DEAs said most people seemed interested and went off saying they would phone Job Brokers, more DEAs had the impression that people mostly took the leaflets away and did nothing. They sometimes said people did not react or ask questions when told about the Job Broker services. Initial interest sometimes evaporated when people thought about the financial consequences, especially when they were thinking of part-time work. People seemed to be attracted by Permitted Work but those on income support could be put off the idea when they found out how receipt of housing benefit would be affected.

In group discussions Jobcentre Plus staff sometimes observed what influenced the choices people made between Job Brokers. People were often mainly interested in which service was nearest. People with mental health conditions sometimes liked the idea that a Job Broker had specialist expertise, and staff would be able to talk to them. In one local area people liked the idea that one Job Broker had close historical links with the Department for Work and Pensions (in contrast to those to whom the independence of services was attractive).

DEAs said they might offer to ring a Job Broker if interest was expressed, and they sometimes observed that people preferred the DEA to make the call. In one Pathfinder Jobcentre Plus, staff were happy to make the initial telephone call to the Job Broker, once the client had decided which one, but in other offices staff were not encouraged by supervisors to do this. Some staff had recently started to ask clients' permission to get in touch with them again later, to see whether they were in touch with a Job Broker and whether they were getting help. This was felt important, in order to maintain confidence in services to which clients were being referred, but there was some concern that this was not strictly their responsibility. DEAs often said they were concerned that people *'go away and get lost'* and were interested in knowing what if anything they had decided. They rarely felt they had the capacity to follow up people, though this did sometimes happen, but they could be cautious about doing so in case they acquired more customers than they could deal with. Some certainly hoped it would be possible to give people a ring, informally.

### **3.4.5 Job Brokers' perspectives**

Some of the Job Brokers in the sample described DEAs as their main source of Job Broker clients but others were getting few or no enquiries via DEAs.

Some Job Brokers criticised DEAs' ways of referring clients. They reported that clients told them that they had found it unhelpful when DEAs had just given them a list of Job Brokers without any explanation of what the scheme was about. (Some Job Brokers seemed not to be aware that DEAs had been instructed to take this approach for reasons of impartiality.) There were also concerns that DEAs had contributed to unrealistic expectations on the part of clients about what the Job Broker service could do, where clients said that they had been told by DEAs that Job Brokers would find them jobs or give them money. As a result, they said, clients came to Job Brokers either with expectations that could not be met or with no clear idea of what services Job Brokers could offer them.

Some of the above criticisms may reflect poor relationships or lack of contact with DEAs. This is discussed further in Section 3.6.

## **3.5 Clients' routes to Job Brokers**

When Job Brokers considered the main ways in which people found out about them, some perceived DEAs or Jobcentre Plus staff to be their main source of clients. Others described the Department for Work and Pensions letter about permitted work and the NDDP helpline that it mentioned as the most important route to their service. Job Brokers' own direct marketing activities or learning about the service from family or friends were sometimes thought more successful.

Not all Job Brokers however knew how their clients found out about them or the proportion of clients who came via any particular route.

By contrast, some Job Brokers had taken strategic decisions to target particular sources of potential clients. For example, deciding to focus on a particular disability group by encouraging providers already in touch with that group to refer people to the Job Broker was reported to have been so successful that few efforts were needed to promote a service in any other directions. Demand from the target group was described as '*almost overwhelming*'. In other cases Job Brokers gained all or most of their registrations by checking general enquiries that the organisation received (to see if any of them were eligible for Job Broking) or by encouraging existing clients on to the Job Broker scheme if they had not found work after completing the organisation's own employment training.

## **3.6 Relationships between Job Brokers and Jobcentre Plus staff**

Relationships between Job Brokers and Jobcentre Plus based staff, including DEAs, are important in the Job Broker scheme - both with regard to the referral of clients to Job Brokers and with regard to Job Brokers gaining access to Jobcentre Plus services for their clients. These relationships are discussed here at some length, from the perspective of both Job Broker staff and of DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff.

**Job Brokers' comments**

A number of Job Brokers reported having very good working relations with Jobcentre Plus staff, DEAs and former Benefits Agency staff - including Action Teams.<sup>7</sup> Such relationships were characterised by the sharing of expertise and information and frequently involved an exchange of office visits. Joint working on particular cases was also mentioned. This involved advisers and other staff meeting a client together, or meeting a client separately but then discussing their case with each other on other occasions.

One factor underlying successful relationships with BA staff, DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff was previous or on-going relationships over other contracts. A number of Job Broker staff mentioned that these had made communication easier for them in the Job Broker scheme. Another factor that was mentioned was the knowledge that DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff could '*share client outcomes*' with Job Brokers. They were referring here to the arrangement whereby the same job entry or retained job could earn points for a DEA/Jobcentre Plus (which would contribute towards their annual targets) and could also earn the Job Broker an outcome payment. This gave each side an incentive for supporting the other in work with clients that they had in common.

Job Brokers felt that DEAs, other Jobcentre Plus staff and Job Brokers all benefited from good relations with each other. The DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff benefited from the extra resource provided by Job Brokers, which helped them achieve positive outcomes for their clients and reach their points targets. Job Brokers, on the other hand, were able to refer to their colleagues with questions on benefits and to access on behalf of their clients Jobcentre Plus services such as the Job Introduction Scheme, Work Preparation, WORKSTEP and Access to Work. A few Job Brokers said they took care to respect DEAs' '*sensitivities*', for example, by making sure that DEAs were kept involved in the cases of clients that they had referred and that they were kept informed about their progress.

However Job Brokers also reported a number of barriers to good relationships. One was low awareness or poor understanding of Job Broking (see above). Job Broker staff felt that in some cases this led to initial hostility by DEAs who, Job Brokers assumed, thought that Job Broking threatened their specialist role. Job Brokers also felt that the requirement on DEAs to be impartial towards the various local Job Brokers discouraged closer links. Some Job Brokers felt that it put them at a disadvantage to come from the private sector or not have worked in disability services before.

Some Job Broker managers explained that there were large numbers of DEAs in their area and that they did not have the resources to establish links with all of them. In these cases new DEA relationships were only developed when the needs of a client demanded it, and Job Broker staff initially relied for referrals on DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff whom they already knew from other contracts. The Job Broker with the largest catchment area was additionally hampered by its physical distance from most DEAs. The consequent difficulty of arranging face-to-face meetings was considered a significant disadvantage by the manager.

In general though, relations between Job Brokers and BA staff, DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff were said to have improved with time, particularly those relationships that had not existed previous to the Job Broker scheme. This was put down to the need to build trust and to establish a better mutual understanding of roles.

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<sup>7</sup> Action Teams offer targeted help in areas of high unemployment for people who find it difficult to get work because of where they live, their employment record or personal circumstances, or because of discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin. They also work with local employers to break down any prejudice against their clients; offer in-work support; and encourage employers to consider family-friendly hours or align shift patterns to help them to recruit and retain staff.

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### **DEAs' comments**

A sub-group of DEAs talked about partnership, collaboration and mutual interest. Some saw the NDDP as a joint enterprise, a partnership of Jobcentre Plus staff and Job Broker services to meet clients' needs to the full. There were examples of DEAs and staff of Job Broker organisations working as a team, bringing their differing experiences, combining resources and meeting to discuss clients' progress to get the best outcomes for mutual clients. This type of collaboration usually occurred with existing providers of other disability employment services. Here DEAs sometimes found it hard to recall whether the clients in question were using the Job Broker service or another of the provider's services. DEAs, especially those new to the role, also spoke of wider exchanges of information and advice as of mutual benefit to DEA and the Job Broker organisation they were working with. The DEA might up-date the organisation on Jobcentre Plus developments or access the Labour Market System on their behalf, and the organisation staff might brief the DEA on community-based opportunities or indirectly inform the DEA's practice. Trust and openness were valued highly in these types of relationships, and it was said that it took time to develop trust with Job Broker organisations new to the disability employment field. Attempts to create collaborative relationships with Job Brokers were not all successful, and some DEAs saw a continuing need for feedback on outcomes for clients and less duplication of effort.

DEAs sometimes described more *ad hoc* and arms-length working where Job Brokers occasionally approached the DEA to process requests for disability services for a client and the DEA contacted the Job Broker to take advantage of something the Job Broker could offer, typically funding. There was not necessarily two-way traffic here. These DEAs did not particularly want to establish a 'relationship' with those Job Brokers, although some did work collaboratively with other Job Brokers. We might characterise this way of working as self-interested.

An example was given of an entirely one-way relationship with no perceived benefits to the DEA. A Job Broker new to the field had sought out the DEA for expertise on the employment and benefits system and the DEA went on to give quite regular advice on how to meet individual clients' needs.

Finally, a few DEAs spoke of antagonism, competition or suspicion. Antagonistic feelings arose where Job Brokers were perceived '*to have their own agenda*', to not appreciate the importance of working with a DEA and to provide poor services. Lack of feedback on outcomes for clients, annoyance that DEAs got no credit from Jobcentre Plus for their input along with some resentment that Job Brokers were paid for the outcomes, and irritation when clients were immediately referred back for disability services contributed to such feelings.

Some DEAs called for detailed information on what Job Brokers were supposed to do in order to keep a check on whether the Job Broker services were meeting the Department for Work and Pensions expectations of them. Competitive attitudes of Job Brokers were viewed negatively where Job Brokers worked near DEAs and seemed to be wary of telling them too much about their operation. While in this situation competition amongst the providers had some positive effects in encouraging DEAs to promote their services more, lack of trust got in the way of working together for the benefit of the client. Generally, initial feelings of suspicion had mostly dispersed. DEAs who had been fearful that the Job Broker services would put them out of a job had come to realise that Job Brokers could not operate successfully without their back up, though there were still some feelings that Job Brokers were '*chipping away*' at the DEA role and that the Department '*didn't really want DEAs*'.

Regardless of their working relations with Job Brokers, DEAs were committed to '*putting the client first*'. People DEAs had seen who went to Job Brokers were regarded as '*our customers too*'. So, DEAs might look out for job opportunities for people registered with Job Brokers, though this could be frustrating if the DEA was not kept up-to-date with the person's requirements.

### **Other Jobcentre Plus staff**

Most of the Jobcentre Plus staff taking part in the group discussions had little experience of working directly with Job Brokers. Their only direct contacts had been meeting Job Brokers at office presentations or telephoning for more leaflets. Some observed Job Brokers coming into Jobcentre Plus premises to conduct interviews with their clients or to replenish stocks of literature. There was general approval for such Job Broker presence, even among staff for whom this was the limit of any direct relationship with the service. Seeing a Job Broker working with clients helped to maintain staff confidence in the service.

Those Jobcentre staff who did feel they had more of a relationship with the services worked in offices where Job Brokers made themselves accessible, for example by establishing named contacts for Jobcentre staff and/or coming into offices and taking time to speak to staff or answer queries. This built confidence and trust, which could be passed on to people when DEAs told them about Job Brokers.

## **3.7 Job Brokers' links with other services**

Job Brokers exist within a network of other services provided by Jobcentres, training providers, voluntary sector groups, fellow Job Brokers and others. This section explores the extent to which Job Brokers tapped into these services to help their clients back into work. It also explores the nature of any collaboration with these organisations, the reasons for this and the impact.

### **3.7.1 Relationships between Job Brokers**

The Job Broker programme was designed to offer participants a choice of providers by enabling more than one Job Broker to operate in any one area. This section explores managers' and advisers' views on the effects of this element of the design on the services in the study and their comments on how they relate to fellow Job Brokers.

In many cases Job Brokers reported working in collaboration with each other, particularly around promotion of the Job Broker scheme and the sharing of good practice. Some managers also spoke of recommending other Job Broker organisations to their clients if they felt that they were more suitable for their needs. Advisers and managers also reported that meeting with other Job Broker staff provided them with moral support and advice when their service was facing difficulties that others shared. Some Job Brokers said that they had attended Job Broker meetings arranged locally or by the Department for Work and Pensions, and that they had found these useful.

However, some managers felt that their services were in competition with other Job Brokers. Some felt positively about this, talked of '*friendly competition*' and felt that it encouraged services to improve and develop. In contrast, others said that competition discouraged the sharing of good practice.

Such '*unhelpful*' competition was said to be fostered by a number of different factors. One of these was a perception that there were not enough potential clients in the locality to make all the Job Brokers financially viable. Another was unease with the promotional tactics other Job Brokers were perceived to be using, such as '*creaming*' (targeting more job-ready people) or '*poaching*' (promoting their service to people who were already registered with another Job Broker). A final factor was a suspicion amongst some managers that Job Brokers from the private sector would have an overriding profit motive and that this would be detrimental to clients.

### **3.7.2 Referring potential clients to other services**

Job Brokers sometimes referred people who approached them to other voluntary sector or public sector agencies. Some staff explained that they did this because they felt that their service was not appropriate for particular individuals, but it also (as discussed in Chapter 2) reflected different approaches to prioritising clients in response to the funding arrangements. However the ability to 'sign-post' people to other services required knowledge of who the local providers were and what services they provided. This was not available to all Job Brokers (as discussed in Section 3.7.3).

Some Job Broker managers had referral agreements with other services. For example, one referred enquirers to a homelessness project if the need for shelter was the person's primary requirement, and received referrals from the project when people had found housing provision and were ready to look for work.

### **3.7.3 Different approaches to providing services for clients**

Once a Job Broker had registered a client under the Job Broking scheme there were three different approaches to service provision:

1. Provision of all services by Job Broker staff
2. The use of services from other organisations to complement those provided by Job Broker staff
3. Collaboration with other organisations over individual cases.

The first of these approaches tended to be followed by Job Brokers that were part of organisations that could offer Job Broker clients services that they already provided under other contracts (for example Programme Centres contracts). Some managers reported that they had planned to deliver their service in this way but that they had had to adopt a different approach when they found that their organisation's existing services were not suitable for Job Broker clients.

Job Brokers taking the second approach sought to harness the services of other local providers in order to complement their own services and those of their parent organisation. Some of these services were funded by central or local government (such as Work Preparation) but others involved a fee. Where services were not free, Job Brokers sometimes felt that they could not themselves fund the external service, which could mean that the client would not receive it.) 'Payment in kind' was an alternative way of paying for external services, with, for example, access to training courses being exchanged for in-work support. Although sometimes described as straightforward, access to services provided through Jobcentre Plus could also be problematic. Difficulties mentioned included DEAs disagreeing with Job Brokers about whether a service was appropriate for a client; delays and lack of responsiveness, and confusion amongst advisers over whether schemes could be accessed directly or whether the involvement of the DEA was essential. Furthermore, there was some confusion amongst Job Broker staff about whether clients had to de-register from NDDP in order to access some Jobcentre Plus schemes, and a concern that the Job Broker would not get an outcome payment if a person did get a job after deregistering under such circumstances.

In order to be able to harness external resources in the way just described there had to be appropriate services in the local area, and in some areas this was said not to be the case. In addition, Job Brokers needed to know what services were available in clients' localities and also needed to have good contacts with the providers of those services. This knowledge and contact was harder to establish for Job Brokers who were new to the public sector, who might not already have working relationships with appropriate local providers and who might also not be familiar with the types of provision that were available. Providers with a large catchment area also faced difficulties, needing to amass a greater amount of information to be able to respond to the needs of clients from across their areas. They also needed to establish and maintain a larger network of relationships with organisations that

could provide relevant services. Advisers in one such Job Broker service said that they suggested to clients that they contact their local DEA in order to be better able to access local services.

For all Job Brokers, building new relationships with local providers took time, and there was a feeling amongst some that they could not spend enough time to do this properly.

A third way of providing services for clients was to work together with other providers of services to the client, such as DEAs or Community Mental Health Teams. This approach was said to have the advantages of fostering better collaboration and understanding between Job Brokers and other disability-related services and giving advisers a better overview of the support and services a client was receiving.





## 4 The funding structure and contractual targets

### Key points

- The principle of outcome funding found support among some Job Broker managers who commented that it could encourage more creativity in service design and promotion.
- However, they perceived problems in the particular funding structure and payment levels in the Job Broker scheme, and some managers felt their organisations were carrying too much of a financial risk.
- Job Brokers generally felt that clients needed more time and support to move into employment than had been anticipated. As a result payment levels were generally seen as insufficient and contract targets unachievably high.
- The impact of failures to meet targets depended on the circumstances of individual Job Broker services and their motives for service provision. In some cases financial shortfalls had no direct impact on service provision. In others, they led to the targeting of the more 'job-ready' clients; reduction in services; reduction in staffing levels, or withdrawal altogether from the Job Broker contract.
- The one Job Broker service which had managed to generate a financial surplus from the Job Broker contract was investing this in improvements to services offered to clients.
- It was suggested that the funding structure should provide higher levels of payment, payment for more interim outcomes and support for start-up and early costs.
- DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff had mixed views on the funding arrangements. In the absence of information about what Job Brokers did, concerns about negative effects could arise easily.

This chapter looks at the funding and contractual arrangements under which the Job Broker service is delivered. It begins by looking at performance against the contractual targets, at how these targets were negotiated and renegotiated (4.1), and at some of the problems Job Brokers encountered with the provision of evidence of outcomes (4.2). This is followed by the main two parts of this chapter, both of which concern the impact of the funding structure on Job Broker services. The first of these looks at the factors that influenced the impact of the funding structure on individual Job Broker services (4.3) and the second and final section considers what the various impacts were reported to be (4.4).

### 4.1 Performance against contractual targets

Brokers' contracts contain targets for numbers of registrations, numbers of job entries and numbers of jobs sustained for six months. These are arrived at through a process of negotiation between Job Brokers and the Department contract managers. As well as being contractually obliged to meet these targets, some Job Broker staff mentioned that they were also motivated to do so by the desire to have their contracts extended and/or to preserve the reputation of their organisation with the Department.

Of the three targets mentioned above, Job Broker managers most frequently reported meeting (or nearly meeting) that for registrations of new clients (although the build up of potential clients coming forward was generally slower than they expected, and overall numbers were also lower than had been anticipated - see Chapter 3). As Chapter 2 identified, managers reported that many clients needed

more support than they had expected. As a result, Job Brokers sometimes felt that caseloads were unfeasibly high and that they were unable to provide the support needed by all clients. Building up registrations to meet registration targets could therefore leave Job Brokers with more clients than they could adequately support.

All but one of the managers interviewed reported that they had fallen short of their agreed targets for job entries and sustained jobs. With the benefit of hindsight, they thought that these targets had been based upon underestimates of the time and resources needed by clients. One manager, for example, spoke of having initially allowed three to four months to get each client back into work but found that it actually took six to eight months on average. As a result the targets seemed unachievable to many managers.

Some managers felt that the types of clients their service attracted was relevant to how easy or difficult it was for them to meet targets for job entries and sustained jobs. There was a view, for example, that people with acute mental health conditions or with complex social needs could need more time and support than other clients. Managers of services targeting or attracting significant numbers of such clients felt this made it harder for them to meet targets. By contrast, another Job Broker service was felt by its manager to have established a reputation for helping people over the financial barriers of the return to work and had therefore begun to attract clients who had already found a job. The nature of the catchment area was said to influence the client base. A manager in an area where unemployment was low and the number of unfilled vacancies high felt that it was predominantly people who needed more help (for example, because of having less work experience or lower skills levels, or because of their health condition or impairment) who would use the service.

There was a widespread view amongst Job Broker staff in the study that the clients for the Job Broker programme required more support to move to work than did clients of other back-to-work programmes. Some managers had been surprised by this and felt that they had not known enough about the profile of Incapacity Benefits claimants to be able to predict the level of support that they needed. In contrast, another manager said that the organisation's close understanding of the likely support needs of Incapacity Benefits claimants had been very helpful, leading to promotional strategies that it was felt would help to achieve a balance between clients who would need more and less support. There was little direct discussion of targets for sustained work, reflecting the stage in the scheme at which fieldwork was carried out.

Some managers described having re-negotiated their targets and said that the Department had been very supportive about this. In one case, however, a manager thought that even their new, lower registrations target would be hard to achieve. In another case, a re-negotiation resulted in targets early in the contract being reduced but later targets being increased. Although this had eased the immediate pressure, the manager was concerned that pressure in later months would be even higher than it had been.

## **4.2 Providing evidence of outcomes**

Evidence of job outcomes needs to be provided by Job Brokers to secure payments from the Department. Finding out whether or not clients had got a job, and providing the necessary evidence, was often an area of difficulty. Staff said that clients who found a job independently of the Job Broker did not always inform them of this and that clients more generally were sometimes reluctant to provide proof of job entry or sustained employment. Staff gave three main explanations for this:

- There was a view that some clients felt that their period of unemployment had been a difficult time in their lives, and that in consequence they were reluctant to maintain contact with Job Brokers once they had found work.

- Staff also mentioned some clients' preference for their employer not to know about their condition (or about their involvement with a disability service) because of a fear of an associated stigma. This, they said, made clients reluctant to ask their employers for a letter confirming their employment. Some staff appeared to believe that such a letter was necessary for them to claim an outcome. In reality the rules for claiming outcomes do not require such a letter if any two of the following can be provided: a pay advice, a signed declaration by the client or a contract of employment. It is not clear whether staff were not aware of these alternatives or if clients were sometimes unable to provide them.
- Another factor that was mentioned was the nature of the broker-client relationship. Some clients might not provide the evidence required in spite of being told of the financial implications for the service because they did not feel that the Job Broker had played a significant enough role in their return to work to justify payment.

Brokers attempted to deal with the problem of evidence collection in different ways: signing clients up to action plans that included a promise to provide the evidence; offering financial incentives for the provision of evidence or (as a last resort) approaching employers directly even without the client's permission. These responses to the problem met with varying success. One manager felt the high quality of the team's relationships with clients helped in encouraging clients to provide the necessary evidence.

There was a feeling amongst Job Broker staff that it was unfair to make them responsible for providing evidence, and a sense that it compromised their relationship with their clients. Some said that it was humiliating to them to have to approach employers for evidence when there was no other means of getting it. A recurrent feeling was that the Department should be able to identify through benefit records clients who had started work.

### **4.3 Factors influencing the impact of the funding structure on Job Broker services**

Most Job Broker managers reported that they had not managed to meet their contractual targets. However, the impact of this on the service they provided varied and seemed to be related to the following factors:

- the financial objectives of participation in Job Broking
- other sources of financial support
- levels of awareness of the funding structure.

#### **4.3.1 Financial objectives**

Some Job Broker managers said that profit had been one of the motivations for their organisation's involvement in Job Broking. In such cases an early failure to meet targets tended to prompt re-evaluation of the organisation's commitment to the scheme. Not only were the actual financial losses an issue, but one manager also spoke about the opportunity costs associated with the Job Broker contract - staff and managers who were tied up with Job Broking could have been generating a profit on other contracts.

Particularly in the not-for-profit sector, some organisations had intended merely to break even on their Job Broking contracts. In such cases the consequences of not meeting targets were sometimes less acute than they were where profits had been the goal. However financial shortfalls still had to be met, which left Job Brokers dependent on financial support from elsewhere in the organisation (or from external sources, see below) - and the continued receipt of this support was sometimes dependent on the perceived long-term financial viability of the contract. In organisations where the long-term

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viability had been questioned, resources had been withdrawn from Job Broking, in the form of redundancies, staff transfers or withdrawal from the Job Broking contract. This happened particularly in cases where Job Broking was considered to be outside the core business of the organisation or where it had not integrated as well with other contracts as had been expected.

Whether the goal was described as being to break even or to make a profit, the failure to meet targets could impact on staff in a personal way. Job Broker staff spoke of feeling stressed by the pressure to improve performance or of being harshly judged by senior managers and colleagues who they thought were less aware of the difficulties of working on the Job Broking contract.

Managers in a third group of organisations felt that the priority given to non-financial objectives meant their organisations were willing to cover financial shortfalls in the Job Broker contract. For example some charities already working with disabled clients viewed the primary aim of delivering the Job Broker scheme as being to enhance the service they were able to provide to their client group. Outcome payments were seen as an important contribution to the costs of doing so, but organisations saw the extension of service as being valuable even if it was not fully funded by the Job Broker scheme. Shortfalls were covered by other income from charitable trusts, private sector grants or other contracts. This did not mean that organisations were necessarily content with the situation, but there seemed greater confidence that internal support for the contract would be sustained.

### **4.3.2 Other sources of finance**

Only one of the managers in the study said that their service was funded entirely by income from Job Broking.<sup>8</sup>

One way of covering the income gap experienced by the other Job Brokers was to cross-subsidise Job Broking from other parts of the organisation - either in terms of revenue, office accommodation or the payment of management salaries and overheads. However, the willingness to do this varied with the importance accorded to financial outcomes (as against human outcomes), and according to the sustainability of such a subsidy for the organisation as a whole.

Organisations had also accessed external funding to support the Job Broker service, particularly European Social Fund (ESF) funding but also funding from local government and other sources. One manager felt that knowledge of such funding sources was essential to success on the Job Broking contract, and this was an area in which organisations from outside the public/not-for-profit sectors felt at a disadvantage. Where such grants were dependent on matched funding from Job Broking (as was the case for some ESF grants), low outcome levels reduced not only Job Broking income but also that from the external source.

Another means of support was the Department itself, which offered Job Brokers with charitable status a form of loan known as '*Advance Funding*' (see Section 1.5). Those who took this up reported that it helped ease cash-flow problems. One Job Broker had received start-up funding from the Department in exchange for lower outcome payments.

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that this study did not include any detailed examination of Job Broker services' finances.

### 4.3.3 Awareness of the funding structure and contractual targets

All Job Broker managers understood how funding was structured around registration, job entry payments and sustained work payments, and most knew the precise sums due at each point. They also were generally aware of contractual targets and of the team's performance against them. The extent to which this influenced their management of the contract varied. Some described organisational pressures to meet targets and match expenditure with income; for others the pressures seemed less evident.

Advisers were less consistently aware of the Job Broker funding structure than were their managers. Most were aware that the funding was structured around registration, job payments and sustained work payments although there was sometimes some confusion, for example, a reference being made to an outcome payment for jobs sustained for 12 months. There seemed less knowledge of the precise level of payment, and less too of the precise level of contractual targets although there was more often a general understanding that they were not being met. Some, but not all, teams had targets, either individually or at a team level, which were generally for job placements. These caused some advisers to feel under stress. Others viewed targets more as guidelines, and did not think that not meeting them would have any negative consequences for them as individuals. A final group knew nothing or little about targets, at either a contract or a team or individual level. In part these mixed levels of awareness were an intentional result of managers' attitudes towards contractual targets. Some of those managers who were under pressure to meet their targets devised formal methods of communicating this to advisers and encouraged them to be more target-focused. Others feared that being aware of targets might make staff less client-focused, and would restrict their freedom to offer clients the support they needed. One manager expressed the belief that staff might feel that they had done enough once they had reached their target and that targets might therefore limit productivity.

An additional influencing factor was the extent to which staff working on the Job Broking contract had information about finances. Sometimes individuals who managed the operational side of the contract also managed the financial side, but in other cases these responsibilities were split. In either case, there was a choice as to how much information to pass on to operational managers or advisers. Some passed on this information more than others, depending in part on the extent to which the service was cushioned from immediate financial pressures by other sources of funding (see above).

Among DEAs there was fairly general awareness that Job Broker services were paid for each job entry achieved by their clients, but rather less expressed knowledge of registration payments. DEAs rarely mentioned sustained employment payments (indeed, in-work support was seldom mentioned). Those other Jobcentre Plus staff who had thought about Job Broker funding generally also knew that payments were made for job placements. Some knew about registration payments (sometimes called 'up-front funding') but payments for sustained employment were mentioned by only a few people with particular interest in the funding.

In group discussions Jobcentre Plus staff with experience of working with large parent provider organisations said that different Job Brokers had access to other funding streams. It was believed that some parent organisations pooled funding from different contracts and then used resources according to profitability or requirements of each project. In one Jobcentre group there was a general belief that a local Job Broker had access to a '*discretionary fund*', enabling them to spend relatively large amounts of money on particular clients, and sometimes to give money directly to clients as an incentive. (It is evident from interviews with Job Broker staff that some services do give such incentive payments.)

## **4.4 Impact of the funding structure**

### **4.4.1 Impact on service provision**

Managers reported a number of ways in which the funding structure impacted directly on the range and quality of services provided. The following examples were mentioned:

- Constraints on the provision of in-house training and funding for external training.
- The exclusion of work placements from the options offered to clients (because these did not attract outcome payments and because they were felt to delay a client's finding paid employment).
- A reluctance to encourage clients to look for voluntary work or to continue support for clients once they began voluntary work (for the same reasons as those given above with regard to work placements).
- The use of less rigorous vocational guidance techniques (possibly resulting, it was felt, in less effective job-matching).
- A reduced ability to offer to help clients with the costs of the transition into work.

Financial pressures also meant that spending on publicity was constrained (which was seen to exacerbate problems of low registration figures).

Provision was also affected indirectly by staffing levels. Some organisations minimised the risk inherent in the outcome-funded system by starting with fewer staff than they would have done otherwise. Plans for expansion were then delayed if performance was lower than expected and the money for expansion not available. As Chapter 2 noted, caseloads for many advisers were at levels where they felt it was impossible to sustain regular contact with all clients. Where financial difficulties led to staff being moved off the contract, there were concerns that this interrupted the continuity of service for the clients they had been working with and put additional pressure on those staff who remained.

The funding arrangements had also sometimes encouraged organisations to seek out and access services that were provided elsewhere, particularly those that were government funded. For example, some services used Access to Work to fund in-work support and one used the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme. Others were planning to investigate or make more use of such services, but there was some doubt about whether this was seen as appropriate by the Department.

On the other hand, where targets were met this could lead the Job Broker service into a cycle of success. The one manager whose Job Broker service had succeeded in generating financial surpluses from the contract explained that this had left the organisation with greater freedom to offer clients financial support - for example, funding for professional training, contributions towards start-up costs in self-employment and payment for back-to-work transitional costs. The availability of this financial support became known in the local area and this was thought to attract clients for whom financial hurdles were the main or only barrier to work.

### **4.4.2 Impact on the registration/prioritisation of clients**

Job Brokers' strategies and practice around registration of clients and the allocation of resources within services have been discussed in Chapter 2. This chapter, however, explores in more detail the influence of considerations relating to the funding structure in particular.

As already mentioned in Chapter 2, there was a tendency in the early months of operation for Job Brokers to seek to register as many clients as possible and, in some cases, always to try to register them at the first meeting. Financial considerations were described as an influencing factor in both cases, with managers wanting to maximise the income generated by registrations. One manager took the view that all clients who had an initial meeting should be registered, since the registration fee was required to cover the costs of the first meeting. However, these practices were sometimes replaced by a more cautious approach given the amount of staff time that could be required to support each client.

Financial factors also influenced the kind of clients that Job Brokers tried to attract to their service and decisions about resource allocation - although only for some Job Brokers. It was noted in Chapter 2 that some services sought to achieve a balance in their client group between less 'job-ready' and more 'job-ready' clients and prioritised the allocation of resources to those considered more 'job-ready'. Financial considerations were one factor behind these practices (although see Chapter 2 for others that were mentioned). More job ready clients were seen as important both because they required less support and because they were likely to move into work sooner, generating job outcome payments.

Amongst DEAs awareness of the funding structure led to the widespread view that Job Broker services were meant for the more job-ready clients, there being *'no point'* in working with people likely to need help over a lengthy period. This perception in turn influenced DEAs' practices when they were able to exercise some judgement in deciding who might benefit from Job Broker services (as discussed in Chapter 2). Other Jobcentre Plus staff had less knowledge than DEAs about how Job Brokers worked, but some reported that staff from particular Job Broking organisations had said they preferred to see only clients who were job ready or close to job ready. Their experience of working with one such Job Broker suggested to them that some clients were being rushed into work and that people who needed more support were not being offered this.

#### **4.4.3    Comments from Jobcentre Plus staff on the impact of the funding structure**

DEAs and other Jobcentre staff expressed two main concerns regarding the impact of outcome funding on Job Brokers' service provision:

- DEAs suggested that limited up-front monies and slow income streams restricted the services Job Brokers could provide to meet clients' needs fully. Training was one such gap that was frequently mentioned. (However, where occasionally Job Broker organisations did appear to have ready funds, DEAs were keen to tap into them to benefit their clients, for example to access training for which the DEA could not pay.)
- It could appear to some DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff that Job Brokers were sometimes being paid for work with clients mostly done by Jobcentre Plus staff including DEAs - for example help and support with job search. In one Jobcentre some staff believed that a study group Job Broker left registration forms for Jobcentre staff to help clients fill in and send off, and that it was possible for the Job Broker to get outcome payments without seeing the client.

Furthermore, the payment arrangements could lead easily to suspicions, for example among Jobcentre Plus staff who noticed that some clients placed in jobs in business ventures run by Job Brokers' parent organisations left those jobs after a few months.

Jobcentre Plus staff who took part in discussions also saw possible disadvantages where parent organisations made decisions based on pooled funding from different contracts, and staff worked across projects. Staff were concerned that if other contracts proved more profitable than Job Broking, interest in and commitment to Job Broking might wane. Another possibility was that if parent organisations felt financially squeezed by other contracts there might be a lack of resources to recruit and train staff able to provide high quality job broking.

In addition to concerns of this kind, in one group of Jobcentre Plus staff there was some surprise that outcome-related funding had apparently not stimulated a more proactive response from Job Brokers in building contacts with Jobcentre Plus staff who might be a source of clients.

There was some small support among DEAs for financial incentives as a motivator to Job Brokers to help *all* clients into work. Other Jobcentre Plus staff who saw advantages in the outcome payment arrangement told clients about it. They explained that Job Brokers would try hard to get clients into work because their funding depended on it.

#### **4.4.4 Views about the funding structure**

None of the Job Broker staff argued against the principle of outcome funding. Indeed, some managers felt it had been a positive influence on efficiency and effectiveness with, for example, decisions about whether to fund training based more clearly based on an assessment of its likely role in helping a client to move into work. Another service had introduced group sessions for some activities that had previously involved one-to-one meetings and reported that this saved staff time and was preferred by clients. Outcome funding also, in some cases, prompted feelings of greater financial freedom. One manager, for example, felt more able buy in external services for clients or to provide them with direct financial support if this was likely to lead to a return to work and bring a financial reward for the organisation. However although some managers responded positively to the concept of outcome funding, there were also those who felt uncomfortable about having to make stark choices between client needs and financial considerations.

A recurrent view among Job Broker staff was that the amounts paid for outcomes were too small and did not reflect the cost of working with Job Broker clients. Some felt that levels of funding compared very unfavourably with the NDDP Personal Adviser Service pilots and with other similar programmes such as Work Preparation.

There was also a strong feeling that too much of the funding was dependent on outcomes and that Job Brokers therefore carried an unfair proportion of the financial risk and burden and effectively subsidised the Government - which they felt was inappropriate. One manager described the funding situation as '*absolutely dire*'. Another described it as '*a terrible, terrible financial drain*'.

A recurrent view was that there should be more funding for intermediate outcomes such as training, voluntary work, Permitted Work or '*soft outcomes*' such as improved client confidence. Those on the variant funding structure (which included payment at the stage of the creation of action plans) certainly found it advantageous.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, one manager suggested that different Job Brokers specialise in different client groups and that funding structures should vary according to the nature of the group. Thus Job Brokers working with less 'job-ready' clients might be paid for each stage of their clients' journey to employment, whereas those working exclusively with more 'job-ready' clients would receive the bulk of their payments for job-entry and sustained employment outcomes.

Some Job Broker staff also suggested that the funding structure was too heavily biased in favour of paid and full-time work. They felt that full-time paid work was not appropriate for many clients; that it was not always what clients wanted and that the new Permitted Work regulations were encouraging more clients to opt for part-time work. However the funding structure gave them an incentive to try to persuade their clients into full-time paid work, regardless of need or preference. Part-time and full-time job outcomes, they said, took the same amount of time and effort and so should be paid the same

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<sup>9</sup> The funding structure of the WORKSTEP was offered as one good example. Under WORKSTEP, payments are made for key milestones: approval of a development plan, job start, progression to an unsupported job and sustained employment of 26 weeks in an unsupported job. In, addition there are on-going monthly payments during the period between job start and progression to an unsupported job.



outcome fee. Voluntary work too, they felt, should be recognised as a valid outcome, as should jobs of under eight hours per week.

Start-up funding was also mentioned. This, some managers said, would help cover costs in the early stages of contracts, before payments for job entries started to come through, and would ensure the prompt receipt of any ‘matched funding’ that had been applied for (e.g. from the European Social Fund).

A call for more, and more up-front, funding that would enable Job Brokers to better meet a client’s needs was implicit in DEAs’ concerns about the impact of the funding structure. Financial rewards for intermediate outcomes might be helpful, such as taking up voluntary work. One suggestion was that payment linked to evidence that particular service components were being supplied would offer more control of service quality. Other suggestions for change by DEAs and other Jobcentre staff mainly revolved round improving DEA and Jobcentre resources rather than reforming the Job Broker funding structure.



## 5 The impacts of Job Broking

### Key points

- Positive impacts for the Job Broker service parent organisations were felt to be an expansion of their activities and the introduction of new ways of working. Negative impacts related to the funding regime, and the fact that most of the study organisations had had to subsidise the service internally.
- DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff who had good working relationships with Job Brokers perceived enhanced knowledge and expertise as positive impacts on their own work. However, there was more mention of negative impacts for themselves including reduction in job satisfaction.
- Job Brokers' expectations had not been met in areas such as the feasibility of meeting contract targets and the level of support from the Department in terms of marketing, publicity, information sharing, and preparation of Jobcentre Plus staff. The services were, themselves, continuing to change and to learn from their own experiences, and planning changes for the future.
- Job Broker staff felt that the service provision available to disabled people had been enhanced by the more flexible and individually tailored nature of job broking. The organisations were building new links with other providers and felt this was expanding service provision, although there was little evidence of NDDP national extension stimulating new service development beyond the Job Broker organisations themselves.
- While they sometimes saw differences in working styles between DEAs and Job Brokers, DEAs saw little evidence of innovation in service components. There were strong feelings among DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff that Jobcentre Plus could provide the same service as Job Brokers if more resources and staff were allocated.

This chapter explores perceptions of the effects of delivering the Job Broker service for the organisations involved in the in-depth study (Section 5.1) and for Jobcentre Plus staff including DEAs (Section 5.2). It also looks more broadly at how far expectations, aims and aspirations are being met, from the perspective of both Job Broker services and Jobcentre Plus staff (Section 5.3). Finally it looks at those groups' perceptions of how the Job Broker services have impacted more generally on the service provision that is available to disabled people who want to move towards work (Section 5.4).

### 5.1 Impacts on the parent organisation

Providing the service had had a range of impacts, mostly viewed as positive, for the organisations themselves. First, it was felt to have brought about an expansion of the organisation's activities, by generating a new income stream or source of funding, by widening the operation of the organisation, or by expanding its workforce. It was felt to have led to more engagement with other organisations and providers, and to have raised the profile of the parent organisation generally. Some organisation representatives talked about it having raised awareness of disability within the organisation as a whole, particularly if this was a new area of operation, and to have led to the acquisition of new skills and knowledge.

The second area of impacts related to ways of working. Here, people felt that the particular features of the Job Broker contract - the emphasis on outcomes and targets - had led to a more focused way of working with more attention to *'moving people on'* and helping clients to achieve changes and results.

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The service was described as having been '*a catalyst*' for more efficient practices and uses of resources, with more focus on training, management systems and staff development. It was also sometimes felt that the demands of job broking contracts had stimulated more creative approaches to work, a willingness to experiment with different ways of working, a broader outlook and a more flexible and '*fresher*' approach to working. Where the Job Broker contract was being operated by a number of different areas or offices, it had sometimes led to better communication within the wider organisation, with more discussion of experiences or difficulties and more sharing of good practice.

The perceived negative effects related to the funding regime. As Chapter 4 described, most of the Job Brokers in the study had had to subsidise the Job Broker service internally from other funds. Although some felt that the service had become self-funding, or would do so at some point during the pilot period, not all believed it would. There were also concerns that the Job Broker contract had diverted resources away from other areas of operation. Although as Chapter 4 describes, the profile of financial aspects of the contract varied between organisations, operating under acute financial pressures had been demoralising for staff and managers. Where funding arrangements meant that there had been changes to the level or nature of service given, or where they had led to different approaches to prioritising cases, there were often concerns about organisational or personal standards of practice being compromised.

In more extreme cases where the Job Broker service had become marginalised within the organisation, staff felt that they were inadequately supported by the organisation in terms of training, scope for team work or peer support, supervision, management and access to knowledge and information. Elsewhere, however, although they felt the job was very pressured and demanding, staff emphasised the job satisfaction they gained from their work. They felt they provided a worthwhile and high quality service, and spoke positively about the challenges of the job. They found it very rewarding to see changes in people's self-confidence and lives and to see individual clients move into or towards work, particularly if they had overcome significant barriers to do so.

There was a feeling among those Jobcentre Plus staff who had contacts with Job Brokers that some services had not been prepared for the numbers of people who would approach them and the kind of help they would need. As a result, some services appeared to be understaffed, and some Job Brokers insufficiently trained. It was observed that taking on the NDDP contract had somewhat diverted one provider's resources away from Work Preparation. Staff who knew that some Job Broker services on their office lists had withdrawn suggested that this might be due to the funding mechanism.

### **5.2 Impacts for Jobcentre Plus staff**

In the group discussions with Jobcentre Plus staff those who had positive views about the impact on their own work were people who had developed satisfactory working relationships with particular Job Brokers. Some staff spoke about now having access to professionals with a wealth of local experience and knowledge that they were prepared to share. Mentioned here was detailed knowledge about local employers and welfare rights issues. One view was that the Job Broker service had enabled new ways of working, with staff from different organisations working closely together to the benefit of clients. This view was unusual, and came from a person working within a particular pilot initiative. Generally, staff spoke in more negative terms about the impact on their own work of Job Broker services.

There was some disappointment and frustration among staff doing work focussed interviews that their role in steering people quickly towards Job Brokers meant that they were not doing the kind of work they had expected and felt they should be doing. They wanted to work more directly themselves with disabled people and people with health conditions. Being just '*a middleman*' or constantly just '*referring people on*' was demoralising, reduced job satisfaction and gave no opportunity for their own skills development. There was also some concern and unease among advisers that they might be referring people to inadequate services, and thus not helping people but in some cases even doing

them harm. This feeling arose largely from knowing so little about the outcomes for people who used Job Broker services, which is discussed in more detail in the following section. Hearing that some Job Brokers had withdrawn tended to reduce confidence in the overall service.

Some Jobcentre Plus staff who took part in discussions reflected on the impact of the Job Broker service on the DEA service, and one view was that what had once been a good service had been continuously eroded by contracting out arrangements, of which the Job Brokers were the latest example.

DEAs spoke of positive and negative consequences for them and their practice. The positive impacts were satisfaction from working closely with Job Brokers *'to do the best for the customer'* and enhanced professional knowledge and expertise through collaborating with experienced providers of disability employment services. There was less job satisfaction where there was no feedback from Job Brokers on what was happening to clients, and DEAs commented on the lack of control they had over Job Broker services compared with other Department for Work and Pensions contracted services. It was demoralising when Job Brokers gave the impression that they did not need DEAs and seemed to be taking over parts of the DEA role. Some DEAs felt the variety of their work was diminishing, with more office-based administrative tasks. There was some indignation that the Department had chosen to invest in Job Brokers rather than in DEAs, especially amongst DEAs who could see little new in what Job Brokers were doing.

DEAs generally took on board the extra demands of telling people about Job Broker services and working with Job Brokers, though difficulties might have arisen if more people had come forward. Where the DEA was struggling to cope with large numbers of people, extra resources in the shape of Job Brokers were welcomed but poor communications with Job Brokers caused extra work in one in-depth study area as DEAs had to *'chase'* Job Brokers to find out what was happening to clients. DEAs were generally happy to arrange access to Jobcentre Plus services and do all the paperwork involved if they had a role in deciding what was best for the Job Broker client, but there was resentment of Job Brokers suspected of trying to save money by using disability services.

There was also some frustration that Job Brokers received outcome payments where DEAs felt they had done the bulk of the work on arranging access to services or searched for jobs. Jobcentre Plus had systems to allow DEAs or their offices to claim credit towards performance targets but those DEAs keen to have their input recognised found the systems did not work well, leading to further frustration. Such feelings were shared by other Jobcentre Plus advisers who spent time working with customers before referring them to Job Brokers.

DEAs rarely spoke about any impact on their practice of working in a competitive environment. In a study area where there were large numbers of Job Broker registrations there was a view that competition had encouraged DEAs to be more pro-active.

## **5.3      How far are expectations, aims and aspirations being met?**

### **5.3.1    Job Broker perspectives**

It was not always easy to get a sense of whether the aims and aspirations of organisations delivering the Job Broker service had been met. Aims and aspirations were not always clear to organisational representatives or easily articulated in the fieldwork, and services were still thought to be at a relatively early stage of evolution at the time of the in-depth study fieldwork.

A key area where expectations had not been met, and which had impacted on the services' ability to meet their own aspirations, was the funding and contractual arrangements. It was widely felt that the

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assumptions on which bids had been made were unrealistic, resulting in targets for registrations and job outcomes which were unachievable and levels of payment which were unfair and unviable. Many organisations had expected that the take-up of job broking would have been much higher, believing that there was a high level of latent demand and an existing potential clientele, ready and willing to come forward to use the service. There had also been different expectations in terms of the job readiness of potential clients and the level of support that they would need from the services. There was some resentment of the Department here, and information given to potential bidders was felt to have underpinned these unrealistic expectations.

There was, as Chapter 4 outlined, a widespread view that the funding arrangements need to be changed by both increasing payment levels and introducing payments for what were seen as highly important intermediate outcomes. The way in which the risk and onus of the funding regime had fallen on Job Brokers was recurrently seen as unfair. In response to these pressures, two study organisations had withdrawn or were withdrawing from job broking at the time of the fieldwork: another had radically reduced staffing levels and others were reorienting their service to focus more on targets and outcomes. Representatives of smaller organisations sometimes highlighted the particular challenges they had faced, with limited other resources to draw on, but emphasised the valuable role that small organisations, with more community links and generally '*closer to the ground*' can play in delivering Job Broker services. Some people wanted more clarity from the Department about who the target group for Job Brokers services was in terms of 'job readiness'. But overall, it was felt that the funding regime suggested that the Department's understanding of the nature of the client group, and the steps involved if they are to move into work, is flawed.

There were other ways in which it was felt that the framework within which the NDDP national extension operates was less than ideal, and where the structural support for the policy was less than had been expected. First, it was felt that the benefits system continues to act to discourage people from moving into work. The system was seen as highly complicated, making it difficult for claimants - and Job Brokers - to access clear and accurate information about the consequences of changes in work status. There was frustration where Job Brokers felt that different parts of the system - the Benefits Agency, the Inland Revenue - give inconsistent advice. The Permitted Work rules were thought to be unnecessarily complicated, and frustratingly more rigid for people on Income Support compared with Incapacity Benefit in terms of what can be earned before benefits are affected. Procedures such as the reassessment of Disability Living Allowance where people move into work were thought to discourage people from taking that step. There was also a perception that Jobcentre Plus remains too focused on conditionality and fraud, both in terms of its procedures and in terms of staff attitudes, and does not operate to encourage or enable claimants to move into work.

There was some frustration that Jobcentre Plus staff had not been better prepared for the introduction of job broking. Job Broker staff had been surprised to have to give basic information about the NDDP national extension and the Job Broker services to Jobcentre Plus staff and felt that this lack of preparation had contributed to what they perceived as a sometimes awkward reception by DEAs and other staff. It was felt that better preparation would have supported better referral routes from DEAs and Jobcentre Plus, and easier access by Job Brokers to Jobcentre Plus services.

Job Broker representatives were also surprised, as Chapter 3 noted, that there had not been more publicity and a national advertising or promotional campaign to support the Job Broker services. The promotional support was compared unfavourably with the support - and the perceived priority and profile - given to other New Deal programmes. The branding of NDDP was also thought to be unfortunate and there were calls for it to be rethought.

There were different views about the quality of support provided by the Department once the Job Broker contracts had begun. Relationships with the contract managers assigned to each Job Broker were generally seen as positive and helpful. However, some people had found other Department for Work and Pensions managers less responsive or flexible than they had expected where Job Brokers had identified problems (such as with the collection of outcome evidence, or targets and funding more

generally), or where they had looked for advice about, for example, how ‘job ready’ prospective clients were expected to be. Some also felt that the system was overly bureaucratic and found the paperwork time consuming and unhelpful. It was felt that the Department representatives could have played a more proactive role in bringing Job Brokers together to share learning or to try to resolve problematic issues together. There were calls for more shared information about performance levels, about successful ways of working, and about ‘best practice’.

Finally, in terms of preparation and support for the Job Broker services, there was a view that the policy needs to be supported by wider initiatives to raise disability awareness, particularly among employers, and to address unhelpful employer perceptions and practices. It was also recurrently said that subsidies should be available to employers who recruit Job Broker services, and their absence was sometimes felt to say something about the relative priority of NDDP compared with other New Deal programmes.

Job Brokers, then, felt that they were trying to deliver a service within a somewhat unsupportive environment. They also emphasised that the service they provide is developing, and that they were continuing to learn from their own experiences. In many cases, the organisation and structure of teams was changing as described in Chapter 2. At the same time, teams were expanding their knowledge of, for example, local provision, the benefits system, how to work effectively with Jobcentre Plus staff, and how to engage employers. But the funding levels and arrangements, and their implications for case loads, levels of service provision and among some Job Brokers a growing focus on people who were closer to work, were felt to constrain the ability of staff to provide a high quality service to all those eligible to use it.

### **5.3.2    Jobcentre Plus staff perspectives**

Whether the Job Broker service is meeting aims and expectations can be explored in the data from DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff by looking for any evidence that the service is meeting the policy aim of the NDDP national extension ‘to help Incapacity Benefits claimants move into and achieve sustainable work’.

The problem here for Jobcentre Plus staff including DEAs was that they had so little information about what happened to the people whom they told about the service. Considerable dissatisfaction was expressed about this. It meant that advisers had no examples to offer of good outcomes (*‘success stories’*) to interest and encourage people. When customers asked staff how people got on when they used a Job Broker, it was unsatisfactory to have to say they did not know.

Having no feedback about individual customers also led to some unease among Jobcentre Plus advisers. There was no way of knowing if people who were not making progress with the Job Broker would like the offer of an alternative service or different kind of help. There was concern that some customers might *‘get left behind’* and discouraged, thus *‘wasting’* the work done by Jobcentre Plus staff in motivating a customer. This situation was contrasted with what happened when there was a good relationship with a DEA - feedback and discussion about individual customers and possible consideration of other options.

In some Jobcentre Plus offices staff had recently begun to receive lists of names compiled by the Department for Work and Pensions of clients who had been in touch with a Job Broker, and in some offices lists of those people who had registered. Such lists could be puzzling and raise suspicions if advisers found few names of their own customers. Some DEAs had lists of names of Job Broker clients who had entered work but these were found unwieldy and did not give individual stories.

In group discussions some Jobcentre Plus staff said they were asking customers in advance for permission to get in touch again to see what had happened. Some advisers were finding this helpful, but observed that they had no time allowed for such work.

As a result of lack of information, Jobcentre Plus staff who took part in group discussions had little evidence of which services worked or for which people. Against this background, any negative experiences made a strong impression on staff. They spoke about people told to phone the Job Broker back in two months when the service was less busy; people who had been refused a home visit; and others who said the service did not return telephone calls. They were also critical when people they had encouraged to go to a Job Broker were referred back to the Jobcentre for access to training, and then required to return to the Job Broker for more help. Staff appeared to have heard of relatively few people who had got jobs after going to a Job Broker, although one adviser mentioned a client with mental health conditions who appeared to be getting the right kind of help.

Some DEAs amongst those who had collaborative relationships with Job Brokers reported good feedback from the Job Broker about who had registered and started work and how people were faring generally. Other DEAs said they would like to get such reports directly from Job Brokers. There was little interest expressed in whether people had sustained work, reflecting the finding reported in Chapter 4 that sustained jobs were rarely mentioned as a feature of the funding system.

DEAs' views on who benefits from Job Broker services were influenced by what they knew about services. For example, awareness of a specialist provider for people with severe mental health conditions led a DEA to think the Job Broker service was aimed at people who need a long period of preparation for work. Where it was hard to distinguish Work Preparation and Job Broker services it was sometimes assumed that people who needed intensive one-to-one input would be best served. There was, however, a fairly widespread view that Job Broker services benefited people who were close to being 'job ready', characterised by one DEA as people for whom workplace adjustments can be easily made, have a fair idea of what work they can do and have not been sick for long. This was sometimes seen as opposite to what had been expected, given how much Jobcentre Plus could offer people in the situation described, but DEAs who knew about the funding regime believed that Job Brokers would prefer clients who could move into work quite quickly.

## **5.4 Impact on service provision to disabled people**

A final issue is how the Job Broker services affect the nature and range of provision available to disabled people. Again, this was an area where it was sometimes difficult to get clear insights from organisational representatives if they did not have a detailed knowledge of existing provision. However, job broking was felt to have added to existing provision in two ways.

First, there was a view among Job Broker organisations that job broking did clearly add to what was already available by providing a different type of support. Here, the features of job broking that were stressed were the very flexible, personal, individualised and tailored nature of provision; the level of support that was available; the range of areas of help that could be accessed through Job Brokers; and the willingness of Job Brokers to engage with wider aspects of people's lives to help them to move towards work, rather than focusing more narrowly on the immediate stages of preparation for work. These aspects of their work were felt to contribute to job broking as a unique and different type of support. Some staff cited as evidence of this the fact that their clients had frequently used other services without success - Jobcentre Plus services, other government initiatives or services provided by disability organisations - and were able to make more substantial progress through working with Job Brokers.

Even if the nature of the service provided under job broking contracts was not felt to be so clearly differentiated from other existing provision, Job Broker organisations felt the NDDP had brought services to clients who would previously not have been aware of them, or not have been willing to use them. This for example was the view in organisations which had not set up new services under the Job Broker contract but had seen the range of clients using their services expand. The Job Broker service was felt to be available or accessible to clients who had not previously been using existing provision -



for example, people who would not have been willing to use services provided by Jobcentre Plus, nor services provided by disability organisations if they did not see themselves as disabled. Although take-up was lower than expected and there was disappointment at how the service was marketed by the Department (see Chapter 3), there was nevertheless a view that marketing and information campaigns had made people aware of the Job Broker service who would not have known about existing provision. More generally, even if it was not seen as a radically different service from what already existed, the Job Broker service was seen as another option available to clients.

Although job broking was sometimes felt to be a new type of service, there was relatively little evidence that it had stimulated new types of services outside the organisations delivering it. Job Brokers worked, to varying degrees, with other services and providers (see Chapter 3) and thus made other types of support available to Job Broker clients. This sometimes included services with whom the organisation had previously not had any contact, and there was a perception that new or additional services were being made available to disabled people who want to move towards work, so that the overall service provision had been enhanced. But there were few examples of new services being set up or of changes in existing provision beyond Job Broker organisations, as a result of Job Broker activity. In one case, organisations which referred clients were being encouraged to do more work to prepare clients for using the Job Broker service, particularly around vocational directions. The funding arrangements meant that the Job Broker organisation's detailed approach to vocational profiling had had to be scaled down for Job Broker clients, and other organisations were being encouraged to do more preparatory work before referring clients instead. But there were few instances of job broking stimulating new service development in this way.

Looking at the impact on service provision as perceived by Jobcentre Plus staff, DEAs generally had more detailed knowledge than other Jobcentre Plus staff about how Job Brokers worked with their clients. DEAs saw some differences between the DEA and Job Broker services in how they were delivered. Job Brokers were considered better placed to offer continuity whereas DEAs had to draw on external services. This was thought to be important to people needing to develop confidence and those who had found it hard to take the first step of approaching a service. The relaxed and informal set-up observed in some Job Broker services was sometimes contrasted with more busy Jobcentre Plus offices and was thought to help in building relationships with clients. There were thought to be fewer constraints on Job Brokers on where they delivered their services, and examples were given of Job Brokers meeting people in community settings, making home visits and accompanying clients to interviews. Job Brokers were sometimes seen as having slightly more time than DEAs to work with clients who were almost 'job ready'. Here DEAs might not have time to work up CVs, for example, but it was often pointed out that Jobcentre Plus could access contracted services for support such as this. It was also noted that Job Brokers sometimes worked more closely with clients, ensuring they were clean and well dressed for an interview for example. Not all DEAs could see any differences in the way the two services were delivered, however, and it was sometimes said that styles of working with clients were very similar.

Turning to service components, many DEAs saw no differences between what they and Job Brokers were able to draw on. Although there was rather little awareness of it, support on the job was mentioned as adding value to the range of services and DEAs sometimes admitted that they were not proactive in providing support to people who had taken up work. In one study area Job Brokers were felt to have advantages over DEAs in having financial incentives to offer clients, such as grants to tide people over when they first took up a job, substantial lump sum grants for older people and travel expenses for college courses. DEAs often wished they had access to such funds. There were strong views that Job Brokers had less to offer than DEAs and needed to supplement their resources with Jobcentre Plus provisions.

There were some criticisms of Job Broker staff who appeared not to have good links with the wide range of community services that experienced DEAs drew upon, such as community mental health services, debt counsellors and mainstream organisations with funds. A Job Broker service attached to a social services department was thought to solve debt and care problems more easily than other Job

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Brokers. On the other hand, some Job Broker services specialising in employment services for disabled people seemed better placed than DEAs to access a wide range of supports. Access to different training organisations was often raised here.

It was often commented that Job Brokers had not turned out to be *'innovative'*. DEAs rarely could see anything new in what Job Brokers did. It was suggested that lack of funds prevented this, though often DEAs could not see what else Job Brokers could do. DEAs who did identify innovation focused on the value of *ad hoc* funds to purchase things for clients.

Many DEAs expressed strong views that the Job Brokers were merely *'duplicating'* what disability services and Jobcentre Plus mainstream provision offered. Some felt that they could provide just as good services within current resources but there was a much more widespread view that more staff and discretionary funds needed to be put in place to equal or surpass what Job Broker services provided. At the level of work with individuals, there was some evidence of duplication of effort. For example, some DEAs looked out for jobs suitable for people registered with Job Brokers although they did not know whether Job Brokers were covering similar ground. In one instance, a DEA did not know that a Job Broker was supporting the same person simultaneously. People sometimes were assessed both by the Job Broker and the DEA when referred for Work Preparation.

However, having two organisations working on the client's behalf was sometimes seen as an advantage to the person, if they offered different things that could be packaged together to meet the person's needs. Funds were mentioned again here. Making such complementary services work for the client needed better mutual understanding of DEA and Job Broker activities and a willingness on both sides to collaborate. In one study area it was explained that no Job Broker had taken up Jobcentre Plus's offer of using an intensive job matching service.

DEAs did see some advantages in additional employment service providers. A Job Broker service could be another avenue when DEAs felt unable to help people, for example if another service was unwilling to carry on seeing them or the DEA had run out of ideas on how to help them, and could ease the DEAs' workload and possibly give more time to working with clients. Positive comments were that people *'need different ways to go'*, that the Job Brokers services were *'another opportunity'* and provided *'more choice'* for clients. Job Broker services that advertised their services and reached out to the community helped to make people more aware of opportunities and raised the profile of employment services generally.

When thinking about how employment services for disabled people might develop, DEAs expressed strong views that there was *'no point'* in Job Broker services, and that Jobcentre Plus could provide the same service in-house if more staff and resources were allocated. Some looked forward to the new Jobcentre Plus specialist disability advisor role. It was suggested that rather than have more services that duplicated what Jobcentre Plus could do, the way forward was *'alternative'* programmes that filled a real gap in provision. Mentioned here were different services for people with mental health conditions moving towards work, programmes dealing with social skills, literacy and numeracy, and programmes for confidence, self-esteem and social behaviour.

Other Jobcentre Plus staff generally had less detailed knowledge of how Job Brokers worked than DEAs. What they did know, along with general beliefs and assumptions, led to some sharp differences of opinion about what Job Brokers contributed to overall provision. Some staff saw only unnecessary duplication of services which Jobcentre Plus staff and DEAs could do well. They spoke about the likely negative effects of *'constantly referring people on'*, pointing to the need for people to make new contacts, the need to build trust and rapport with new advisers, and the extra time, trouble and journeys. Such problems were increased when people were *'sent back'* to Jobcentre Plus when found not to be job ready. The likely impact they believed, would be loss of interest and commitment, reduction of take-up of services and missed opportunities to benefit from help.

Some of those Jobcentre Plus staff who were critical said that the risk of '*cherry picking*' was high in the external job broking service, which did not appear to be subject to close monitoring or control. Internal services were more accountable, and standards of provision were more easily monitored and maintained. Concerns were expressed about the quality of service of some Job Brokers. The possibility of withdrawal of services was an added disadvantage. Effects would be disruption for clients who had started to use those services, reduction in opportunities for other potential clients, and general undermining of confidence.

The opposite views were put forward, however. In a Pathfinder office advisers felt that external Job Brokers could provide a more individualised service, with greater flexibility to meet needs of different clients, and more specialist provision. Other advantages perceived were that Job Brokers would have more time to spend with clients than DEAs or other Jobcentre Plus staff, and access to a greater range of support services. There was a belief that some Job Brokers had more money to spend on clients and some Job Brokers could offer more continuity of staffing than Jobcentre Plus. The separation of the service from Jobcentre Plus was known to be an attraction for some customers, and Job Brokers could provide a more comfortable and welcoming environment.

Those staff who had negative overall views agreed that such factors might seem advantages, but argued that they would disappear with additional investment in DEA services and advisory services within Jobcentre Plus. They argued for example that Job Brokers had more time for clients than DEAs because DEAs were under resourced. As explained earlier, some staff had strong feelings about the perceived erosion of in-house advisory services, and loss of expertise and accountability. Some Jobcentre Plus staff said that their views about development of Job Broker services might be less negative if they had feedback and saw evidence of good practice among Job Brokers in terms of client progress.



## 6 Engaging with the Job Broker service

### Key Points

- Clients found out about the Job Broker service either through the Department for Work and Pensions (mailshot, helpline, Jobcentre Plus or DEA), from Job Broker advertising or from professionals who referred them to the service.
- Levels of awareness and understanding of NDDP were low before contact with a Job Broker. Job Broker staff felt that clients sometimes had unrealistic expectations of the service.
- Reasons for people's initial approach to a Job Broker included the desire to work, dissatisfaction with inactivity and previous unsuccessful job search.
- People seldom made an informed choice about which Job Broker to register with. Choices tended to be based on limited information about which Job Brokers they could approach and the service they offered.
- Clients' reactions to the initial contact with Job Brokers were usually positive, particularly in terms of the environment and staff. However, there were mixed opinions about the services offered and the pace of service and about whether the Job Brokers were sufficiently proactive.
- Clients were not always aware that they had registered for the NDDP programme, or had not understood the implications of the registration process.
- De-registrations were sometimes initiated by clients and sometimes by Job Broker staff. De-registration procedures could prove problematic for either party and there were difficulties where people approached a new Job Broker without having de-registered from a previous one. The evidence from the client interviews suggests that dissatisfaction with a particular Job Broker service organisation tended to result in an exit from the entire NDDP programme.

This chapter explores clients' awareness of, route to, and early experiences of NDDP. It begins by considering how clients first found out about the Job Broker service (Section 6.1), and the extent of their prior awareness of the service (Section 6.2). Peoples' initial reaction to NDDP and the motivations that led them to approach a Job Broker are examined in Section 6.3. Section 6.4 explores how clients went about 'choosing' a Job Broker, and impressions of their initial contact with the Job Broker are covered in Section 6.5. Respondents' understanding of the registration process is discussed in Section 6.6.

### 6.1 Finding out about the Job Broker service

Clients generally found out about the Job Broker service in one of two ways: via communication with the Department for Work and Pensions or Jobcentre Plus, or communication directly from a Job Broker.

#### 6.1.1 Finding out about the Job Broker service through the Department for Work and Pensions

The Department for Work and Pensions has several ways of informing their customers about New Deal for Disabled People and the Job Broker service. These include mailshots to eligible customers,

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providing information through the NDDP website and telephone helpline, and providing information through local Jobcentre Plus office staff.

### **Mailshots to Eligible Customers**

Some clients recalled receiving a letter or leaflet in the post from the Department which provided information about NDDP and/or changes to the Permitted Work rules, details of local Job Brokers and a telephone helpline number. These clients often mentioned that the letter had been about Permitted Work or discussed aspects of Permitted Work in relation to the letter.<sup>10</sup> Clients described how from their receipt of a letter, they either made direct contact with a Job Broker if details had been provided, or contacted the NDDP helpline. People in this group were generally thinking about part-time (often Permitted) work, either due to health limitations, or because they did not want to lose benefit. Some had been away from the labour market for long periods, and although several had been applying for jobs, others were only prompted to think about work as an option upon receipt of the letter. Many were thus unclear about the way forward and required advice on work direction or training.

### **NDDP helpline and NDDP website**

Most people who had contacted the NDDP helpline or used the NDDP website had done so in response to communication from the Department. There were mixed reports about the helpline; some found that it was not as informative as they had hoped, but most were given or sent details of Job Brokers in their area. Only a few clients had used the NDDP website as a source of further information, several of whom had a professional background in computing.

### **Jobcentre Plus local office**

Clients who had found out about the Job Broker service by visiting their local Jobcentre Plus office were either already actively job searching, were starting to think about looking for work or were seeking information about the types of help available. Occasionally clients had visited their local Jobcentre Plus office to make enquiries about funding opportunities for a specific training course or business venture. Only a small number of respondents had approached Jobcentre Plus specifically to enquire about the NDDP programme. Although some of the in-depth study Job Brokers were in Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder areas, very few clients reported attending a mandatory work focused interview at a Jobcentre Plus office.

Clients described differing experiences in the extent of help and information provided by Jobcentre staff, including DEAs. Some were given lists of Job Brokers and their contact details, whereas others were given more detailed information about the NDDP programme and individual Job Broker provision. A few clients described being directed towards the services of a specific Job Broker, and occasionally a DEA or other Jobcentre Plus staff member had arranged an appointment on behalf of the client. A few clients also described being introduced directly to a Job Broker adviser who had access to an office in the Jobcentre premises.

It is evident that, amongst the research group, any national strategy to create a general awareness of NDDP and the Job Broker service was less successful than raising awareness through mailshots to customers or via contacts with local Jobcentre Plus staff. Indeed, one client, who had contacted a Job Broker following a friend's recommendation, thought it '*mysterious*' that the service was not publicised and would have joined earlier had she known.

### **6.1.2 Finding out about the Service through Job Brokers**

The other group of clients had found out about the Job Broker service through direct contact with a Job Broker. Such contact generally occurred in response to advertising or marketing by a Job Broker organisation, or via a referral from a professional.

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<sup>10</sup> It should be noted that the salience of Permitted Work amongst clients may be linked to when the sample was drawn from the registration database, which coincided with the distribution of the Permitted Work letter.

**Job Broker advertising**

Some clients had responded to local Job Broker advertising in newspapers, posters and leaflets, which focused on the services the organisation was able to provide to help people with health conditions or an impairment to move into work (rather than any specific promotion of the NDDP programme). Several reported that they had received a letter directly from the Job Broker organisation, and a few were already aware of the organisation because of previous contacts (for example, as a training provider). Clients who responded to Job Broker advertising appeared to be a mixture of those who were relatively close to the labour market and had been actively applying for jobs, and others who had perhaps been considering work, but had not yet taken any action. In both cases clients' health record and age (for those over age 50), were perceived as factors preventing success in job searching, or as barriers to beginning a job search.

**Direct referrals**

Some clients, particularly those with mental health conditions, had been referred or directed towards a specific Job Broker (often a mental health specialist) by a professional such as a community psychiatric nurse, psychiatrist, occupational therapist or social worker. In some cases the professional had arranged an appointment on behalf of the client or accompanied the client on the initial visit to the Job Broker. These clients had generally been away from the labour market for some time or had limited work histories and none appear to have been actively job searching before they were referred to a Job Broker, although a few were clearly enthusiastic about a possible move into work. Many had experienced severe mental health conditions and although work was generally recognised as potentially beneficial and thus a longer-term objective, participation in NDDP was seen in terms of the next step in their recovery, with several feeling that they were not yet ready to work at this stage.

Job Brokers' views on the different ways that clients found out about the Job Broker services are described in Sections 3.1 and 3.2.

**6.2 Prior awareness of the New Deal for Disabled People Programme**

Prior to coming into direct contact with the Job Broker service or registering for the programme, clients generally had low awareness about NDDP. Some had not heard of the programme at all, whilst others did not distinguish it from other New Deal programmes, or had not thought the programme of relevance to them because of the association with '*disability*' - a term which for some was not salient to their own individual circumstances. For the latter group, clients typically thought that it only applied to people with severe physical disabilities, and not those who were just '*sick*' or in poor health.

It follows, therefore, that clients were often unaware of the link between NDDP and the organisations that delivered the Job Broker service. This was particularly the case for those clients who came into contact with the service directly via a Job Broker organisation. However, most were aware that the scheme was associated with the government, and that it was a voluntary scheme designed to assist people with health conditions or impairments to find work. However, they tended to discuss the programme in terms of the services they were or had been receiving from the Job Broker organisation or individual staff rather than NDDP.

**6.3 Motivations, expectations and concerns**

Clients were asked about their motivations to find out more about the Job Broker service, as well as their initial expectations in terms of what the service would provide, and any early concerns they may have had about participating in the programme.

### **6.3.1 Motivations**

For most clients, one of the main motivating factors was the desire to find work, and the hope that the Job Broker service would give them this opportunity. Some were already actively jobseeking but had made little progress in finding work themselves, despite making applications and being invited to interviews, and had become rather demoralised after repeated rejections. There were also some reports of having used Jobcentre Plus services in the past with limited success. These clients generally felt ready to enter employment and were keen to move into work fairly quickly. They saw the Job Broker service as an additional or alternative source of help in their job seeking activities and a way of improving their chances of entry into employment, for example, by giving advice on how to present a health condition to a prospective employer, or generally being used to dealing with people with impairments and thus be more empathetic and understanding of their position. The Job Broker service was also welcomed as a last hope in their attempts to find work and clients were often optimistic about the service at this stage, which was described by one as *'the light at the end of the tunnel'*.

Others were at an early stage in their return to work plan and saw the Job Broker service as an avenue worth exploring. These clients were less likely to have been actively job searching, though were in the process of thinking about a possible return to work. This group included clients who were attracted by the prospect of moving towards work within a supportive environment, particularly if they had been out of the labour market for lengthy periods, were unclear on their vocational direction or lacked confidence. Some of these clients had heard about the service through the Permitted Work letter (see Section 6.1), and motivation was discussed in terms of the perceived benefits of Permitted Work including remaining in receipt of benefit whilst working.

Another group of clients were those who were not initially actively looking for or considering work. These clients felt that they had nothing to lose by exploring further, one described contacting Job Brokers as 'a test to see ... if anybody could help'. For other clients the motivation was driven by dissatisfaction with their current inactivity, including being 'bored' at home. In these cases they saw the Job Broker service as a mixture of a route to employment and as a form of activity to occupy their day, having become frustrated after being away from the labour market for some time because of their health condition. Some said that they were not ready to move into employment due to health limitations. Within this group, there were examples of clients making further enquiries to check on the legitimacy of the scheme and whether they would be eligible.

The influence or encouragement of others, such as parents or partners, was also reported as a contributory factor in contacting a Job Broker. This related particularly to clients with mental health conditions such as anxiety or depression where it was thought that participation may be beneficial for the clients' well being. Clients' mothers had occasionally played an active role in initiating contact with the Job Broker, usually where clients were living with their parent(s), had limited work experience or more severe health conditions or impairments. Other clients mentioned that a health professional had influenced their decision, or suggested to them that work would be beneficial for their recovery or well-being. The benefits of participation in the scheme, rather than a work outcome, were also emphasised to be *'doing something during the day'*, or interacting with other people. Clients in this group were more likely to have experienced severe health conditions (particularly mental health), and may not have been thinking about work at the time of contacting a Job Broker (a few were unsure of their potential to move into work at all), but had engaged with the service under the guidance of a health professional.

## **6.4 Expectations**

At this early stage, clients had relatively little information about the Job Broker service, and often had few expectations, other than a general perception that the Job Broker would help them find work. There was, however, some variation in the way in which clients perceived this might occur. One



expectation was that there would be help in identifying jobs, and advice and practical help with job searching, particularly for those who had only just begun to think about moving towards work and were not sure where to start. Several had thought that the service would be similar to an employment agency, that there would be lists of vacancies and that the Job Broker would have employer contacts. This perception did not appear to be restricted to a particular group of clients, but was more likely to relate to how the service had been promoted by others. For example, one client reported being told by a Disability Employment Adviser that the Job Broker would have a database of companies. Although the term '*Job Broker*' was not widely used amongst clients, it was mentioned that the term contributed to the impression of a proactive job finding or '*brokering*' service.

Another expectation amongst some was that the Job Broker would find work for the clients, or would contact employers on their behalf; to 'break the ice' by presenting the client's situation more effectively than they could themselves. This expectation was evident amongst those who were already actively job searching as well as those who had yet to begin any job search activity. For those already job searching, it was hoped that a Job Broker could act as a necessary gateway to an employer, which otherwise may not have been open for them. For those who had not yet commenced their search for work, a lack of confidence or prolonged absence from the labour market had led to concerns about approaching a prospective employer, so anticipated that a Job Broker would be able to have an intermediary function.

A third expectation was the provision of work or job search related support and advice, for example help with applications, CVs, interview techniques, and occasionally confidence building. This form of support was seen as potentially helpful by clients at various different stages of job readiness. This included those who were perhaps some distance from the labour market, had little experience of applying for jobs or were starting from scratch, as well as clients who were ready to work, had been actively job searching and wanted to improve their skills or more specific advice, for example on interview techniques or how to adjust a CV to their current circumstances.

There were also examples of clients who anticipated that the service would provide training opportunities. This was generally clients who were just starting to think about moving back into work, but their health condition often meant that they were unable to return to the type of work that they had undertaken in the past.

Where mentioned, clients had differing views about the pace of the service, which tended to reflect the range of peoples' backgrounds in terms of their readiness to move into work. Those who were already actively job searching often expected to move straight into employment, as did some others who had not yet started job searching but felt ready to take up employment at that stage. However others felt that the Job Broker service would be a way of 'easing them gently' into work, some of these had been away from the labour market for long periods or were not sure about how they would cope with working. Because of the programme focus on helping people with disability or health conditions, some clients thought that the Job Broker organisation would be supportive and empathetic to their health situation (for example, in comparison to Jobcentre Plus). This appeared to be particularly salient amongst those with more severe health conditions (particularly mental health) or limited work histories.

From their general experience of implementing the service, Job Broker staff talked about the expectations that people seemed to have had when they first contacted them. They felt that people were generally not very well informed about job broking when they first came to their service, and that they often seemed to have learnt little about it from their DEAs, the professionals or other sources from whom they had found out about the scheme.

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Some people, Job Brokers reported, came to them with no fixed expectations at all, and others knew that they would receive help getting back into work but did not know exactly how this would happen. Others, however, were said to have had expectations that Job Brokers could not meet, including:

- that Job Brokers were like recruitment agencies and would have to hand lists of suitable jobs and employers
- that they would be found a job instantly
- that Job Brokers would be able to *'tell them'* what kind of work they were able to do, or that the Job Broker would act as a careers service
- that Job Brokers would be able to provide or fund certain types of training
- that Job Brokers would be able to offer financial support.

Advisers from telephone Job Brokers said that people contracting their service for the first time were not always aware that they were a telephone service and had been expecting to be offered a face-to-face service.

Clients' expectations were said to be at times expressed quite forcibly by clients, with some being *'demanding'* and advisers sometimes finding them difficult to deal with. In contrast, Job Brokers said that other clients approached them with quite low expectations of what the service could do for them, as typified by the phrase *'I know you can't help me'*.

### **6.3.3 Concerns about participating in the Job Broker service**

Any concerns that clients may have had about participation in the Job Broker service related to general worries about moving into work, as well as some more specific issues relating to taking part in the NDDP programme.

#### **Concerns about moving into work**

Most clients had some concerns about moving back to work. Many of these are similar to those reported by people without health conditions or disabilities who have been away from the labour market for lengthy periods, and are well rehearsed elsewhere (see Shaw et al; 1997, amongst others). They include, for example, anxieties about eroding or outdated skills, lack of recent employment experience, being financially better off in work, and adjusting to the workplace environment. For some, these worries exacerbated any lack of confidence about their ability to *'market'* themselves to potential employers, to *'fit in'* with co-workers, and to be able to actually do the work that the job could entail. All of these issues could have affected their motivation to work, particularly given that issues relating to confidence were mentioned by many clients in this research.

However, there were a number of specific anxieties raised which were related to clients' health condition or impairment. The major concern for many clients was discrimination from employers. For some this was based on previous experience whilst for others it was more about how potential employers would react if they knew about their health condition or disability. These concerns arose particularly among clients with mental health conditions (for example, depression or schizophrenia), those whose health could vary or fluctuate significantly from one day to another (for example, severe asthma and arthritis), and those with potentially life threatening conditions (such as heart problems). There was a general belief that employers had a lack of understanding about the implications of employing someone with health conditions, or had incorrect preconceptions. These concerns sometimes led to a hope that Job Brokers would make initial contact with employers - *'paving the way'*, and help them understand about certain health conditions, or allay any apprehensions. Older people, (those aged around 50 and over) also reported fears about age discrimination from employers, which coupled with discrimination because of their health condition or disability placed them at an even further disadvantage.

Other concerns about returning to work which were related to peoples' impairment or health condition included worried about being able to access appropriate support in work (for example, work place adaptations) and worries about aggravating an existing health condition. A few also felt that their health condition might limit them to more mundane or routine work which would not be sufficiently challenging or rewarding (these clients tended to have been in relatively well-paid senior positions prior to the onset of their health condition).

### **Concerns about participating in the Job Broker service**

Although clients' early reaction was on the whole positive, there were a few initial concerns about participating in the Job Broker service. These were generally in response to receipt of the letter from the Department and focussed on concerns about the affect on benefit receipt, either by participation in the programme, or if they started Permitted Work. Although it was generally understood that the scheme was voluntary, there were a few worries that the programme could force them into work and that they would lose their benefit receipt. These clients had often been away from the labour market and in receipt of benefit for some time and had not been actively seeking work at the time they had become aware of NDDP. Other apprehensions related to previous negative experience of participation in other government schemes, or scepticism regarding 'New Deals' generally. A few clients with mental health conditions were uncertain as to whether the scheme applied to them. For example, a client was unsure whether depression was classed as a disability and another expressed surprise *'when I got the letter saying I was disabled I didn't really feel that I was disabled, this is not permanent'*.

Job Brokers felt that many people who made initial inquiries about their services thought that the Department for Work and Pensions was making participation compulsory and that they might lose their benefits if they did not participate. Staff said that they reassured clients about the voluntary nature of the Job Broker programme early on in their contact with them. Those clients who had only approached them because of their belief that it was compulsory and who had no desire to find work, Job Broker staff said, usually decided at this point that they did not want to participate in the programme.

## **6.4 Choosing and accessing a Job Broker**

In theory prospective NDDP registrants should select a Job Broker from several operating in their locality. However from the research interviews it was evident that the choice of Job Broker was often based on limited information. The decision-making process and level of choice was usually, though not always, linked to the way in which clients had found out about the Job Broker service. Those who had become aware of NDDP as a programme, for example through communication from the Department, were more likely to know that the service could be provided by various organisations. This was not necessarily the case for those who had been alerted to one particular Job Broker organisation. However, for most clients in this sample, making an informed choice about which Job Broker to register with was somewhat artificial, as it was often based on limited (if any) information about what Job Brokers were available, and the service they offered.

### **Job Broker choice made on no information**

Most clients only recalled having information about one Job Broker operating in their area, when they decided to get in touch with the service. They may have responded to Job Broker's own marketing and had approached the organisation directly. Others may have been directed towards a particular Job Broker by a health professional or social worker, or had an appointment made on their behalf (and thus were generally not ready to move directly into work - see Section 6.1.2). Some recalled that the information provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (either by letter, NDDP helpline, DEAs or other Jobcentre Plus staff) had provided details of just one Job Broker in their area. In some of these cases Jobcentre Plus staff had made appointments for the client with a particular Job Broker, and a few had been introduced directly to a Job Broker who had an outreach service at the Jobcentre Plus office.

**Job Broker choice made on limited information**

Within this group, clients recalled only having obtained limited information about other Job Brokers in the area, and reported that they did not base their choice of Job Broker on any knowledge about the services different organisations provided. Most commonly, clients chose the nearest Job Broker from a list of telephone numbers or addresses provided from the Department, and others were not contacted. This included some telephone based Job Brokers who had been chosen from clients' perception of their location rather than an awareness of their method of service delivery. Once an approach was made, Job Brokers could offer to meet a client in another location, typically a local Jobcentre. However from the information recalled by clients, they were not generally aware of this before embarking on their choice and tended to assume that an address listed was where they would have to travel to meet a Job Broker.

Sometimes options were limited to just one Job Broker for practical reasons, invariably because of the location of the Job Broker. Some were considered by clients to be too far away or inaccessible; several clients said that the selected Job Broker was the only one in their area, others being in distant towns - one example was over 40 miles away. Accessibility was also limited for some clients living in more rural areas. For example one respondent who did not drive could only access one Job Broker and this was via a two hour bus journey. Another client, with limited vision, felt her choice was narrowed as one of the two Job Brokers offered only provided their service by telephone and post.

Occasionally clients reported that they had made efforts to gather information before selecting a Job Broker, but with limited success. Some clients said that Job Brokers had provided little information over the phone, but had instead encouraged a visit to the premises. This might have deterred some clients, particularly if their health condition or impairment limited their mobility or they had other transport difficulties. There were also examples of clients who had specifically wanted funding for training but were turned away by Job Brokers, who said that they were not able provide the resources. In one case, a client recalled being told by a Job Broker that she could not arrange a visit to them if she already had an appointment with another Job Broker.

**Job Broker choice made on detailed information**

A minority of respondents had made an apparently active and informed choice, through 'shopping around' (mainly by telephone) and choosing the Job Broker they considered most appropriate. Clients occasionally reported that they had visited the premises of several Job Brokers before making a decision to register. Others said that they had selected the Job Broker they felt would be most suitable from Job Broker marketing, internet searches or information in local printed material. Those who telephoned were able to discount Job Brokers who were not forthcoming with information, considered unprofessional or did not have the appropriate disability focus, thereby being left with '*an easy choice*', sometimes just one. These clients generally identified a specific needs from the Job Broker, including support to move into employment, Permitted Work, voluntary work, training, or as a source of funding and saw employment as a long-term, if not immediate goal. Some, though not all, had been actively job searching before approaching a Job Broker.

**Job Brokers' reflections on how clients' choose a Job Broker**

Job Brokers' perceived that people often did not know that they had a choice of Job Broker and that when they did know, they were not able to make an informed choice because of a lack of information.

Where there was no evidence of a real choice having been made, some advisers said that they explained to individuals in their initial meeting that they had a choice of Job Broker and that there were other providers in the area. However this was sometimes seen to make little impact, with clients not wanting '*the rigmarole of introducing themselves and telling everyone their life story over and over again*' and therefore registering with the first Job Broker they met.

## 6.5 Experiences of initial contact

Clients reflected on their first impressions and how they felt about the service at this early stage. However, as might be expected, not all respondents were able to clearly recall their experiences by the times of the research interview.

### 6.5.1 First contacts with a Job Broker

#### The initial enquiry

Generally, clients had telephoned the Job Broker and an appointment was made for a face-to-face meeting, though as mentioned earlier, for some this first meeting had already been arranged by an intermediary such as a health professional or social worker, a DEA or other Jobcentre Plus staff. The exceptions were clients who had registered with telephone based Job Brokers where all communication was by telephone and/or post.

The content of the initial telephone call was often not recounted in detail but usually involved a brief exchange of details and the arrangement of a follow up face-to-face interview. A few described being given a '*basic outline*' of the service, and had discussed their health and work aspirations at this stage. Occasionally literature had been sent through the post. Clients who contacted a telephone based Job Broker had more lengthy conversations that covered the respondents' health, employment history, what type of work they would like, and information about how the service operated and what they could offer the client.

Job Broker staff described varying practices with regard to the handling of enquiries about the service. One group of Job Brokers had allocated particular non-adviser staff to receive all new calls. This could be a service provided nationally for a number of Job Brokers from the same parent organisation, a service provided by one organisation for all the members of a Job Broker partnership (see Chapter 2) or a service provided within a Job Broker by, for example, a team secretary. In a second group of Job Brokers, advisers themselves dealt with enquiries.

From the Job Brokers' perspective, one purpose of these first phone calls was to establish a person's eligibility and their appropriateness for the Job Broker scheme - both in terms of their benefits and whether they were perceived as moving towards work. As well as this, the content of these first phone calls generally involved the telling people about the service, the collection of personal details from the caller and, if necessary, reassurance that the scheme was voluntary. In some Job Broker services, however, an adviser would phone back the caller (within a target time of between three days and a week), and these discussions would be conducted in this second conversation. Furthermore, staff were aware of the limits to what they could effectively communicate in this first conversation - especially if the caller seemed uncertain or unconfident about using the service - and therefore varied what they said according to how much they felt individuals already knew or were taking in at this stage.

Where both the Job Broker staff member and the person making the enquiry decided that the service was appropriate, a face-to-face meeting would usually be set up (though not, of course, in the case of the telephone services). The amount of time that passed between the first enquiry and the first meeting was usually about a week. In one case however, a standard waiting period of a month had been introduced due to high levels of demand, and there was some concern that this caused a loss of confidence and enthusiasm for the scheme, and that as a result some people did not turn up for their appointments.

#### The first meeting

The first meeting with a Job Broker was usually the point at which most clients found out more about the service and what it could offer. Most were by appointment and generally took place at a Job Broker premises, although several had been arranged at local Jobcentre Plus offices and a few had

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happened *'on the spot'* when a client was visiting the office. A few clients mentioned being offered a choice of venue including a local MIND centre, a café and a few home visits. Occasionally a partner, parent, or support worker such as occupational therapist or social worker accompanied clients. The depth and duration of meetings varied, from 15 minutes to two hours, and some described having more than one introductory meeting.

Not all clients were able to recall in detail what had been discussed at their initial meeting with a Job Broker, but it was generally described as a two way discussion with an adviser, with outline information being given about what the service could provide, and clients providing some information about themselves. Some interviews were very in-depth covering a wide range of work-related, health and personal issues, and others were described as more of a *'getting to know you'* session. Where clients did not have a clear work direction, or were still some distance from moving into work, interviews could be at a slower pace, and follow up appointments arranged for more in-depth discussions.

Clients generally reported that the interviews covered their work history, experiences and skills, as well as the type of work wanted. Where clients had already been job searching or were ready to move into work they had sometimes started to actively work with the Job Broker during this first interview, for example being shown how to use the internet or Jobcentre Plus system for job search or beginning to construct a CV. Discussions about the type of work wanted were also mentioned. In some cases the Job Broker input was thought to be positive, such as coming up with suggestions that the client had not previously considered. However, there also appeared to be occasions where clients felt that they were not encouraged to explore new ideas or new areas of work. The financial aspect of work was discussed occasionally, including the effect on benefits, Permitted Work (particularly where contact had been made specifically in response to a Permitted Work letter) and advice on tax credits.

Clients' health was often discussed, and particularly how it impacted on employment. This appeared to be expected by clients who generally were aware that this was a programme directed towards people with health conditions. Indeed one client was surprised when his health had not been explored in detail.

Some clients described how Job Brokers had said that they would take the lead in finding a job for clients. However in a few cases the Job Broker had explicitly emphasised the clients' responsibility in the process by stressing that moving into employment was to be a joint effort, a *'partnership'* between the Job Broker and client, hence the expectation was that the client would actively look for work, with the Job Broker's support. This emphasis on client responsibility received a mixed reception, both disappointment that the Job Broker did not take a more proactive role, and acceptance that this form of self-help would be beneficial. The different levels of pro-activity in Job Broker/client relationship did not appear to be directly linked to the client's background.

Clients were generally told about some of the services Job Brokers provided, which could include help with job searching, matching clients to jobs, contacting employers on behalf of clients, providing support at interviews and in some cases training or work placements (clients' views of these services are discussed in Chapter 7). Sometimes, the extent to which these were discussed appeared to vary according to the circumstances of individual clients, for example a client who already had a job mentioned that the Job Broker interview focused predominantly on financial assistance, and the availability of in work support, whereas a CLAIT training course was offered to a client who wanted to move into clerical work. Those who responded to the Permitted Work letter were more likely to discuss the opportunities and financial implications of this kind of employment.

However, it also appeared that the discussion of services was dictated by what was available from the Job Broker. This may not have always addressed clients' needs. Here, clients reported that the outline of the service provision emphasised Job Broker training courses or workshop options, rather than discussions about moving towards open employment. Whilst this was acceptable to those clients who did not want to move into work immediately, or had wanted training or work experience, others who

were keen to enter employment were disappointed at this lack of focus on job searching, which was seen as slowing up their move into work.

Conversely other clients who were looking for training opportunities or advice on accessing training sometimes felt that these needs were not addressed during their interviews as not all Job Brokers offered training. For example one client felt that his Job Broker's emphasis on CV completion, not only did not match his perceived training needs, but gave him the impression that the adviser was not listening to what he was saying.

There were also reports of clients feeling unclear about the Job Broker service following this initial contact. This was generally where they had been given inadequate (or too much) and inappropriate information or the service had not been clearly explained in relation to their specific needs. One example which illustrates this point is of a client who only had one brief interview and so found it difficult to describe or discuss the Job Broker service because he did not fully '*understand what [Job Broker X] can do*' for him. This could result in clients being less enthusiastic to make further contact with the Job Broker. A related criticism raised was when it was not made clear to clients exactly how the Job Broker process worked; for example where arrangements were left open that the Job Broker would try to find work for a client, though no mention of how or when this might happen. The absence of a definite follow-up plan could result in no further contact with the Job Broker organisation. This was particularly frustrating for clients who were keen to work.

Registration generally, though not always, took place at the first interview and is discussed in Section 6.6. Follow up appointments, or arrangements to begin a Job Broker course or placement were made in some cases. Other clients described a drop-in arrangement, and in other cases it was left that either the client or Job Broker would get in touch for example if a job came up, or that the client would take some action such as to send their CV to the Job Broker.

Job Brokers themselves saw the first meeting with a client as setting the tone for the whole broker-client relationship and felt it was critical to get this right. Some described trying to encourage the client by setting an informal tone and making sure clients felt they were being listened to, '*so that the person is aware that they count as an individual; that they matter*'.

First meetings also had some more substantive objectives. These included finding out about the client (described by one adviser as a '*massive information collection exercise*'), the discussion of financial issues, descriptions of what the service had to offer (and of the responsibilities of the client), registration, assessment, action planning and discussions of career directions and clients' aspirations. Advisers tailored the precise content and balance of meetings for each individual.

It was recognised, however, that there was a danger of trying to convey too much information and fill in too many forms during the first meeting with a client. Advisers were therefore flexible about what they did and did not cover and sometimes carried topics over to follow-up meetings.

Most Job Broker advisers confirmed that arrangements for this follow-up contact were usually made during the first meeting. Advisers in some Job Brokers, however, left it for people themselves to get back in touch and make the next appointment, feeling that this would give them the chance to reconsider their involvement in the scheme and that it would be a sign of their commitment to the process if they did come back.

### **6.5.2 Reactions to initial contact with a Job Broker**

Clients' reaction to their initial Job Broker contact was on the whole positive. Early impressions related to the initial encounter to the Job Broker organisation, as well as early reactions to the service itself (detailed discussion of clients' experience of different elements of the service is presented in Chapter 7).

### **Reactions to the initial encounter with the Job Broker**

Most respondents gave positive accounts of their first contacts with the Job Broker. The environment of the initial meeting appeared to be a key factor for many clients who appreciated Job Brokers with relaxed and welcoming atmosphere that were not too officious and resulting in more of a 'chat'. This was important as sometimes clients had been nervous before appointments, but most had subsequently been put at ease, and a few were pleasantly surprised by the informality of the meeting. Some clients had felt reassured when they saw that the Job Broker dealt with others like themselves, a few mentioned other people (clients and staff) with impairments and another who was concerned about her age (55) was pleased to see other clients were older than herself.

This initial contact with the Job Broker appeared to be a positive and morale lifting experience for some respondents, particularly when NDDP contact had come at a time when they had needed a boost or for those who had welcomed it as their last hope. This included those who had been out of the labour market for some time, were unsure how they could move forwards or perhaps felt unconfident about job searching alone, as well as clients who had been job searching without success and had become disheartened about the likelihood of ever moving back into work. In these cases, the discussions with advisers was encouraging, and led to them feeling that they were not '*on the scrap heap*'.

The attitude of staff was repeatedly praised, sometimes in spite of concerns about the Job Broker service itself. Staff were generally found to be friendly, approachable, helpful and '*genuinely trying to help people*'. Clients appreciated speaking to staff who were used to dealing with disability issues, and who understood their situation and did not make them feel '*discarded*'. In only a few cases did clients have less than positive views of the staff they had dealt with at this initial meeting, primarily with regard to where they felt that the adviser was not particularly enthusiastic, not sympathetic to someone's health needs or not listening or taking in what a client was saying, for example with regard to the type of work wanted.

### **Early Reactions to the service**

From this initial contact, generally the service seemed like a '*good idea*' and some were very enthusiastic at this early stage, even describing it as '*the greatest thing since sliced bread*'. This was particularly so if a client had been actively looking for some kind of help or had previous disappointments using Jobcentre Plus services. The support of another person to assist them was also important '*I left the meeting thinking brilliant, I've got two people on my case now helping me out*'. This was particularly important for those who had had difficulty finding work themselves, or had not worked for quite some time and found the prospect of job searching on their own rather daunting. Several of these clients had mental health conditions such as depression and knowing that someone '*was interested*' in them was valued. At this stage, there was a degree of optimism and confidence that using the Job Broker service would help clients into employment. Initial concerns, such as potential impact on benefit receipt, were generally allayed by the adviser, and others expressed confidence in advisers' skills, knowledge and ability to help them.

Nevertheless, some early reservations were expressed with regard to the service. These were formed when, from the information provided at the first interview, clients perceived the pace of the service to be slow. A few clients were disappointed at the length of time before a follow up appointment could be scheduled (up to four months in one case). Others felt that it would take longer than they had anticipated to enter employment using the Job Broker - this was particularly pertinent to clients who had wanted a job straight away, and had seen the service as one which could accelerate their moves to work. Others were disappointed where it had become clear that expected elements of the service were not available (details about clients' views of aspects of the Job Broker service are presented in Chapter 7).



## 6.6 Registering for NDDP

Registration with the New Deal for Disabled People programme is an important part of participation, as it indicates firstly that clients are signing up to receive services, support and advice to help them with their transition towards work, and secondly that clients who register with one Job Broker are not able to secure services from another Job Broker until they have de-registered from the first one. This section describes clients' understanding of registration, and, where relevant, experiences of de-registration.

Of those who were able to recall registering for Job Broker services, the majority had done so during their first meeting, although others had been given some time to consider it, either by being sent the forms through the post, or having a second more detailed meeting to discuss it further. Clients registered with telephone based Job Brokers were sent registration forms and information through the post, usually following initial telephone contact during which details about the client and Job Broker service were exchanged (one client used the post in all contacts). Completed registration forms were returned to the Job Broker.

Reasons for registering with the Job Broker varied and generally related to clients' first impressions of the organisation or service. Some had actively selected the Job Broker and were impressed with their service, whilst others had approached just one Job Broker, but thought that the service would be helpful. Others felt that it would be worth a try and had '*nothing to lose*' by registering. Most clients had no prior awareness of the Job Broker that they had subsequently registered with. However, there were a few examples of clients who had been in contact with the Job Broker organisation for some time prior to registration, and had already received services or training from the Job Broker. A few clients mentioned being given a choice of schemes by a Job Broker, one was between NDDP and the New Deal 50+. Another Job Broker offered a choice of training courses of different duration, although enrolment on only one particular course would result in NDDP registration, clients were not aware of the link to NDDP.

There were generally three levels of reported understanding amongst clients (based on their recall at the time of the research interview) about the registration (and de-registration) process: full awareness; limited awareness and no awareness.

- **Full awareness of NDDP registration**

In this group, clients said that they were fully aware that they were 'registering' to take part in the Job Broker service. These clients often had prior knowledge of NDDP from previous correspondence from the Department for Work and Pensions (for example, a letter about Permitted Work letter or contact with the NDDP helpline, website or Jobcentre Plus). Some had chosen the particular Job Broker from a list and were therefore aware that other organisations offered the NDDP service, and a few had had contacts with other Job Brokers. Other clients had approached the Job Broker through alternative routes, such as a referral or Job Broker marketing and were perhaps not as aware of the NDDP programme or other Job Brokers. In these cases the Job Broker had explained the NDDP system, the existence of other organisations, and that they may only register with one at a time.

- **Limited awareness of registration**

The second group reported that they were aware that they had registered onto a scheme, but it was evident during the research interview that they were not clear that this was NDDP, indeed some clients were unaware that they had registered for NDDP until they were contacted by the research team. This was more often amongst those whose route led directly to a particular Job Broker, rather than those who were given the options to select between organisations. Often these clients tended to talk about '*signing up*' with the organisation, rather than a particular programme. Several respondents felt that they were enrolling onto a particular course run by the Job Broker, rather than for a more general service. Other clients remembered completing paperwork or forms being filled in, but thought that the Job Broker was taking down their details, sometimes in relation to a funding application, or to allow

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the Job Broker to liaise with a mental health team, rather than being clear that this was a registration process.

- **No awareness of registration**

When interviewed, clients in this group had no recollection or awareness of a registration process and did not recall signing any paperwork. These clients had generally approached the Job Broker organisation around the time of recorded registration. Some had subsequently received services from the Job Broker whereas others had not proceeded beyond the initial contact.

A few respondents differed from others in that they had already had dealings with the Job Broker they were registered with, but generally were unaware of any connection to NDDP or even had no current active involvement with the Job Broker organisation or had not received any service from the Job Broker organisation that was recognisable as an NDDP service. Others had been previously actively involved with the organisation and receiving work-related services for between one and three years. However they had no recollection of registering onto NDDP and did not recall signing anything around the time of the reported registration. One commented that *'I think that it must be the centre that has registered me because I did not know about it'*. Furthermore, the services received from these organisations had been consistent throughout the period, with no noticeable change pre and post registration.

- **Understanding de-registration**

To fully understand the implications of NDDP registration, an awareness of the existence of other Job Brokers, and of the de-registration process is necessary. In theory, clients who were not receiving the service they perceived they needed could de-register from one Job Broker organisation and register with another. The evidence from this research, however, suggests that when clients were dissatisfied for whatever reason, they rarely sought out the services of another Job Broker, but tended to leave the NDDP programme entirely.

In a few cases, however, clients had expressed dissatisfaction with the Job Broker with which they were registered, but were planning to contact another Job Broker organisation. These clients had sometimes already made initial enquiries about other Job Brokers in the area, although on occasion they had run into difficulties with de-registering and re-registering elsewhere. One example includes a client who had tried to register with another Job Broker but had been advised that she needed to de-register herself from the first Job Broker, which she felt uncomfortable about; another was in the process of trying to de-register with a telephone based Job Broker but felt *'stuck'* as was experiencing problems obtaining documents from the original Job Broker. These clients had often experienced a less than satisfactory service, for example a four month wait between appointments or the Job Broker not sending out forms or returning calls. However the process of de-registration appeared to be a lengthy one with the responsibility appearing to be balanced towards the client.

Of respondents who had successfully re-registered with a second Job Broker, there were reported administrative complications with paperwork. In several cases the process had been dealt with by the *'new'* Job Broker and in one case had been instrumented by a social worker, which had been helpful for one client with anxiety and depression who did not cope well with stressful situations.

### **6.6.1 Job Brokers' perspective on registration**

Different Job Brokers said that they registered clients at different times and in different ways. Although some registered clients in the first meeting, others felt that this would make that meeting too long or busy and therefore postponed it to the second meeting. One Job Broker asked clients to register before their first meeting, sending the form out to them when they made their initial enquiry and adding them to the waiting list to see an adviser once they had received the completed form. Clients registering with the two telephone-based Job Brokers were sent forms following the initial telephone contact. Other Job Brokers completed the forms for clients in their presence in the first

meeting but then gave them to clients to take away, asking them to send it back if and when they decided that they wanted to use the service.

Advisers explained registration to prospective clients in different ways. Some explained that registration was the key that enabled them to work with an individual, while others emphasised that it was a form of commitment on the part of the Job Broker and the person to work together towards finding work. People were also told that they had the option of deregistering and, if they wished, finding a different Job Broker. It was not always clear, however, how carefully staff explained these matters to people and whether they made it clear that they had to deregister if they wished to change Job Brokers. Some advisers said that some of their own clients might not know that they were registered, while others described people coming to them who did not know that they were already registered with another Job Broker and who were surprised to find that they had to de-register before the new Job Broker could work with them.

Numbers of de-registrations varied between Job Broker services from very few to perhaps 50 per year. Some of these were said to be due to clients becoming too ill to continue with the scheme and another reason given was registration with another scheme that was incompatible with Job Broking. De-registration also occurred where staff decided that they were not able to give the support a person needed, or where a client opted for long-term training that postponed any possibility of a return to work. Some Job Brokers said that they de-registered clients automatically if they failed to turn up to a number of appointments and did not respond to letters. In such circumstances it was said to be impossible to get the client to sign the de-registration form, and Job Brokers contacted the Department for Work and Pensions for permission to forgo this part of the procedure.

Another reason for de-registration was a desire by the client to change Job Brokers. Some Job Broker managers said that they were content for clients to de-register if it meant that they would receive a more suitable service elsewhere), but some advisers did not always suggest de-registration to clients under these circumstances, leaving the possibility that they would not be aware of the need for it and might approach another Job Broker without first de-registration with the first.

Job Brokers' understanding of - and certainty about - the significance of registration and de-registration varied. For example, some Job Broker staff seemed to believe that registration of a person committed them to actually getting the person into work, and that failure to do so would have a negative effect on the evaluation of the Job Broker or could be seen as letting down the client. Hence unless or until these staff were fairly sure of a person's ability to return to employment they did not register them. Similarly, some Job Broker staff seemed to feel that registration implied the Job Broker actively working with a client and that clients should be de-registered if they were not working with the Job Broker because of being on long-term training or having been referred back to a health service professional. Other Job Brokers, however, did not de-register clients in these circumstances.

Financial considerations were a further influence on Job Brokers' perceptions and behaviours around registration. These are dealt with fully in Chapters 2 and 4.



## 7 Experiences of the Job Broker service

### Key Points

- Clients generally found the Job Broker organisation and staff to be accessible, welcoming and friendly, particularly when they had been able to develop a one-to-one relationship with their adviser, although over time there were some who experienced difficulty in remaining in contact with the service.
- Some clients had found the vocational advice from Job Brokers to be useful, whilst others had been disappointed that there had not been more direction from their adviser, and there was some evidence from clients of low awareness of any kind of action or progress planning.
- A common concern of clients was the impact working might have on their current benefit status. This concern was not always fully addressed through the Job Broker service.
- Some clients reported favourably on training and work placements received through the Job Broker service, but others raised issues related to the usefulness and appropriateness of such activities.
- Reported difficulties with low confidence or low self-esteem was widespread amongst clients in this study; and the Job Broker had often been instrumental in raising client confidence and motivation through working on a one-to-one basis as well as through encouraging participation in group Job Broker activities (such as training). However, initially high confidence and motivation towards work was not sustained amongst some clients, as work did not materialise and contact with the Job Broker tailed off.
- A key requirement amongst clients was for help and support with job search. Whilst there was evidence of such support being adequately provided, there were also issues raised by clients about insufficient or inappropriate support (for example, limited job matching).
- Clients' expectations that Job Brokers would 'mediate' or develop links with employers were often not met, and was a key area that clients thought could be improved.

This chapter explores clients' experience of the Job Broker service as they prepare for work. These are complemented by the experiences and views of Job Brokers themselves, drawn from focus groups with advisers and interviews with managers. The client interviews were carried out up to six months after the clients in the sample had first registered with the selected Job Brokers so most had had a significant period in which to undertake work related activities or move into work.

The chapter begins by describing clients' overall views on the Job Broker environment and staff (Section 6.1). The frequency of contact between clients and Job Broker advisers is discussed in Section 6.2 followed by a description of clients' work aspirations, and any work guidance they received from the Job Broker (Section 6.3). The provision of financial advice and support from Job Brokers is discussed in Section 6.4. The next two sections examine clients' experience of work preparation, training and work placements (Section 6.5) and addressing confidence and motivation through the Job Broker service (Section 6.6). Job search strategies and the role of Job Brokers is presented in Section 6.7 and the final section explores the interaction between Job Brokers and employers (Section 6.8).

## **7.1 Clients' views on the Job Broker organisation, setting and staff**

Clients' views on the Job Broker organisation, setting and staff may have an influence on whether and how clients access services provided through Job Brokers. Clients were sometimes unsure about the type of organisations that Job Brokers were, and were unclear about whether an organisation was voluntary, statutory or private. For a few, this lack of clarity led them to question why an organisation would become a Job Broker, how committed they were to providing services for people with impairments or health conditions to get back into work, and how they received funding to do so (most clients were unaware of the funding regime for Job Brokers). This was particularly the case amongst those clients who were dissatisfied with the service and support they had received from the Job Broker. Furthermore, a few clients had been unable to make a clear distinction between the services offered by a Job Broker and those offered through a local Jobcentre Plus office or Disability Employment Adviser, or a high street employment agency.

### **7.1.1 Job Broker environment and location**

Overall, clients who had visited Job Broker offices were fairly positive about the setting and environment, and welcomed the opportunity to talk to others who were using the service, but also to have the chance to discuss matters in private with their adviser. Whilst most appeared generally happy with the office environment, there were some remarks about offices being particularly small and cramped.

In general, premises were found to be fairly accessible, in terms of their central location and provision of local parking if clients were a car user. However, some experienced difficulties in getting to the Job Broker premises. Reasons for this included Job Broker offices being located away from the centre of a town, not on a public transport route, or requiring some considerable travel time. For clients with anxiety problems or mobility restrictions, travel journeys could be particularly difficult. For respondents who were reliant on public transport, the journey could be time consuming and sometimes costly (some clients received assistance from Job Brokers towards travel costs, but others did not). However, any difficulties reported with physical access to the Job Broker did not appear to contribute significantly to diminishing contact between clients and their Job Broker.

Clients occasionally received home visits from their adviser. Those who were some distance away from the local Job Broker office particularly welcomed this. Although this service had not been offered to all clients, others had been able to arrange to meet their Job Broker adviser at the local Jobcentre Plus office (or in some other suitable location). Whilst most found this arrangement beneficial, a few would have preferred to meet elsewhere, ideally in a non-government location or at their own home.

Clients who were registered with organisations offering a mainly telephone based service often expressed a desire for a local outlet to visit advisers face-to-face, where they could also benefit from local knowledge of the area and labour market, which was felt to be lacking amongst some telephone based advisers. However, other clients felt that a telephone service suited their needs and overall satisfaction was often linked, not only to the style of delivery, but to the extent of regular contact, the actual service provided and the quality of the relationship with an adviser. For example, clients who had experienced frequent telephone calls, received lists of vacancies and information in the post and dealt with a specific adviser expressed higher levels of satisfaction and confidence in the service than others who were disappointed and frustrated with the irregular contact or lack of support. Clients were not always aware that this was a more unusual style of delivery, and that other Job Brokers operated on a face-to-face basis.

### **7.1.2 Job Broker staff**

Overall, clients spoke positively about the Job Broker staff, despite some clients expressing dissatisfaction or disappointment with the service itself. They felt that staff were courteous, friendly and enthusiastic, as well as committed to working with disabled people. Respondents who were registered with organisations who had specialist staff - notably those with mental health experience - were particularly encouraged by their understanding. Positive views of staff were also evident where a client had built up a working relationship with a named adviser over time. In these cases, clients felt that the adviser understood their needs and circumstances, and that they could approach the adviser informally or on an ad hoc basis to discuss matters that arose (both employment and non-employment related). Even some of those who were no longer in touch with the service because of relatively negative reasons had usually been fairly happy with the staff within the organisation.

However, difficulties had been experienced when advisers had left the Job Broker organisation, or had been off because of illness. There were also some criticisms about the lack of relevant experience of some staff, particularly in dealing with clients with severe impairments or severe health needs, and dealing with clients from a professional or highly skilled background. The importance of continuity of staff was evident, in that those who had dealt with several different members of staff within the same Job Broker appeared more likely to have expressed dissatisfaction.

## **7.2 Frequency of contact with Job Brokers**

Clients reported some difficulties with the frequency, regularity and continuity of contact with their Job Broker. There were examples of contact declining or ending completely and the client being unsure of why this was (see Chapter 8). In a few cases the client had failed to attend appointments (usually because of a period of poor health), but the Job Broker appeared not to have attempted to recontact the client. This resulted in clients being unsure about whether to pursue the contact or not.

From the perspective of the Job Broker staff, the length of the gap between meetings depended on factors such as the stage in the client's progress towards work, job application deadlines, the size of tasks to be done by the client and the availability of the adviser. According to advisers, there was commonly a lapse of between two and four weeks between one meeting and the next, and clients would sometimes telephone them in-between scheduled meetings with specific and detailed queries – for example, about application forms or CVs.

However not all Job Brokers advisers scheduled a follow-up meeting after the initial contact with a potential client. Some relied on the person to recontact them and confirm that they wanted to work with the Job Broker. This they could do either by telephoning or by sending in a registration form that would already have been completed for them. This, managers felt, gave clients the chance to reflect on what was said in the first meeting before deciding whether they wanted to register with that Job Broker, register with a different Job Broker or not register at all. If people telephoned to request it then second appointments were made and registrations completed. As a result, the managers said, people who did register were more likely to have made a real and active choice and would therefore be more committed to working with the Job Broker. When people did not initiate further contact after their first meeting Job Broker practice varied, but often Job Broker staff would telephone them to check whether they were still interested.

Advisers in one telephone Job Broker became so busy that they never or rarely contacted clients themselves, and waited for clients to contact them. They felt that as a result, clients using the service were more proactive.

### **7.3 Discussing work aspirations and goals with Job Brokers**

Amongst the client sample, there was generally a strong desire to re-enter employment. This was driven by several factors, including improving self-worth, financial reward and independence, enhancing self-esteem and confidence. Some people had already begun making steps towards work prior to registering for the Job Broker service. This included training at local colleges or training providers, as well as actively job searching and applying for jobs.

Clients also highlighted the importance of work to alleviate boredom, to '*get out of the house*' and rebuild social networks. Clients also highlighted the importance of being in work to '*fit in*' to society. Some discussed the central role of work in family activity - a '*work ethic*' - and wanting to improve living standards for themselves and their families. For those who had had a relatively stable employment history prior to the onset of their health condition or disability, there was a desire to return to the '*way of life*' previously experienced, particularly if their health had stabilised or improved.

Clients tended to be relatively clear about their capabilities in terms of the general type of work they were (or were not) able to do (such as avoiding heavy lifting) and the hours they could work (which was often restricted by their health condition or medication needs). However, at the point of initial contact with the Job Broker many were less clear on the actual jobs which could be available to them and wanted some vocational guidance. This was particularly so for clients for whom the onset or deterioration of a health condition meant that they were no longer able to do their '*usual*' work, as well as for those who had either never worked (including some younger clients), or had a very fragmented work history (particularly those with limited education and skills). The Job Broker intervention had thus been particularly useful for some in helping them to determine the type of work that would be best suited to them. This was explored through detailed one to one discussions about clients' work history as well as their personal background (such as caring for dependants) which could be translated into work relevant skills. In these circumstances, the guidance received from Job Brokers encouraged them to explore avenues that they would not have previously considered.

However, others reported having relatively limited vocational discussions with their adviser. Where people had hoped the Job Broker would assist them in identifying appropriate types of work, they were disappointed if this did not happen. This included both clients who were relatively close to the labour market in terms of skills as well as others who appeared to be some distance away. There were also examples of Job Brokers suggesting employment that clients felt would be unsuitable for them, for example because of difficulties in travelling to the job, unsuitable hours (such as night shifts or full time only) or the nature of the work (such as prolonged standing). In these cases, it was perceived that the Job Broker had not fully understood clients' needs.

Others did, however, have clear ideas about the type of work they wanted. This could be to return to the type of work which they had done previously, and which they had the training or skills to do, or to do some other type of work which they knew would be within their capabilities. These clients were more likely to have moved into employment by the time of the research interview, or to have planned a route to employment, or to have identified appropriate courses or training (and in some cases seeking assistance from the Job Broker to access or pay for appropriate training).

A few people interviewed did not appear to be in a position to, or want to, work at the time they first came into contact with NDDP. Such clients included those who had been 'referred' to a Job Broker organisation by a health professional, or had been encouraged to contact the organisation by a carer or parent. In these cases, any work-related discussions had been relatively limited.

Providing some kind of career or vocational guidance was generally seen by Job Brokers as a key part of their role, and important in helping clients to move into and stay in work.



Guidance about employment was delivered in the following different ways:

- Formal assessment and vocational profiling. This approach was used by Job Brokers where they had developed it in their other work with client groups. It was described as a structured approach, involving discussions with clients about their interests, likes and activities, and exploring life histories and networks of support. For one Job Broker it also involved visiting clients at home. Other Job Brokers used detailed forms that were completed by clients. These approaches were seen as very valuable but potentially time consuming. One Job Broker had developed a reduced version of their usual approach for the job broking contract, because of funding constraints, which was felt to be less effective than their full approach.
- Less formal discussions with clients. These involved discussions with clients about their job preferences, previous work experience, interests, skills and qualifications - and then discussing with them their ideas, needs and aspirations. According to one manager, the aim was to find the 'spark' that would enthuse a person about a particular form of employment. Some found it useful to discuss hobbies or non-work interests that might generate ideas, and some advisers encouraged clients to look through newspaper advertisements to help identify possible areas of interest.
- Adult Directions. Several Job Brokers mentioned a computer package called *Adult Directions*, which prompts users for information about themselves and then suggests possible avenues for jobs. This was thought to be useful for broadening the horizons of clients whose aspirations were limited by low self-esteem or by a lack of knowledge of what jobs existed. By listing key tasks and skill/qualification requirements for specific jobs, it could also give people a more realistic idea of the kinds of work they could and could not do.
- Professional careers service advisers. Advisers also encouraged clients to use the Careers Service. Some had formed relationships with other specialist careers advisers or services. One manager had recently established an arrangement for referring clients to professional careers advisers and advisers from another Job Broker said that they had suggested to their managers that a professional careers adviser be recruited to their team. For others the use of Careers Service advisers was established practice and in one case vocational guidance formed a standard part of a 12 week long pre-vocational course that NDDP clients attended. On the other hand, one adviser was deterred from referring to careers advisers because they charged for their services.

Some advisers felt that the identification of appropriate vocational directions was best left to develop over a period of time. They revisited the subject in a number of meetings and reported that clients often 'raised their sight' once they had spoken to them a few times. However, an alternative view was that it was helpful for clients to have specific job goals as early in the process as possible so that they had something clear to aim at from the start.

Although many clients were felt to be unconfident and to lack self-esteem when they first came to Job Brokers, others - Job Broker staff felt - had unrealistically high ambitions, wanting to pursue jobs which the Job Broker felt would be inconsistent with a client's skills, qualifications, work experience or impairment. In such cases advisers tried to discourage the client by prompting them to think about other jobs, or by going through person specifications for jobs to point out what was required. One manager stressed that it was important to let clients learn for themselves what they could and could not do - that advisers should not try to force this process, but should make sure that they were there to help the client rethink things when they were ready to do so.

- **Skills assessment**

As providers of NDDP, Job Brokers are contracted to 'screen' clients for basic skills prior to job entry. Clients generally did not recall undertaking any formal kind of assessment (such as basic skills) through the Job Broker. However, not all Job Brokers did formal basic skills assessments. Some advisers spoke of doing informal screening during initial meetings with clients (for example by finding out about their qualifications, asking them to read the registration form and sign their name, or sending

them written materials in advance of the first meeting), and only following this up with a full and formal assessment if they deemed it necessary. Others did more formal assessments, although this was sometimes left until the second meeting. There was doubt amongst Job Broker staff about the appropriateness of basic skills assessments for the NDDP programme. There were concerns that it would be damaging to a client's confidence if the assessment exposed a skills lack, that clients would be reluctant to take up basic skills training, that it was a big a significant challenge for people to learn to read or write in adulthood which should be undertaken separately from NDDP. One adviser said that she had no such training to offer. One staff team said that they were not yet trained to do basic skills assessments and were expecting training to begin soon.

- **Action or progress planning**

Very few clients recalled any formal action plan or progress plan being drawn up. Job Brokers themselves widely reported using written plans, and indeed the two that were on the *variant* funding regime had to complete them and notify the Department in order to claim the associated outcome payments. Some saw these as quite formal, placing a large emphasis on involving the client in their development, asking them to sign it, and reviewing them in their work with clients. Others had more informal approaches and seemed to give them a lower profile in their work with clients. There was some concern that it could be discouraging for clients if they were not achieving the goals they had set themselves. Nevertheless the evidence from clients is that some were unclear about the steps they and the Job Broker should or would take after meetings, which may suggest a need to enhance clients' awareness and involvement in the development and review of their action plan.

## **7.4 The provision of financial support and advice from Job Brokers**

As might be expected, a widespread concern of clients was the impact working might have on their current benefit status. In particular, there were worries about being financially worse off in work, about difficulties in reclaiming benefits should the employment not work out, and about income from employment being less reliable (in terms of regularity of payment and fluctuations in amount) than benefits. There was also some uncertainty about which benefits clients would continue to receive in work and which they may lose. These concerns were particularly salient for single householders who had no other form of financial support, for those with dependants, or for those who lived with partners who were also economically inactive. Loss of benefit for many was one of the '*biggest worries*'. There were also anxieties about whether they would be able to reclaim their benefits should a job not work out. Some people raised these issues with Job Brokers, and received varying amounts of advice and information. Clients reported that some Job Brokers were able to provide very detailed information and support, including advising about Disabled Person's Tax Credit (and assisting with applying), resolving Housing Benefit difficulties, and arranging for an individual to transfer to New Deal for 50+, which would enable them to be financially better off through payment of the Employment Credit.

Some of clients' concerns about loss of benefit through working or difficulties reclaiming should a job not work out were addressed through information provided about Permitted Work. Some people had found out about Permitted Work from letters sent to them from the Department for Work and Pensions, or from initial meetings with Job Brokers (for some, finding out more about Permitted Work was a primary reason for contacting the Job Broker). Awareness was therefore generally fairly high with regard to the 16 hour limit, and some were also aware of the earnings limit. The reassurance provided by Job Brokers that Permitted Work would enable them to work for up to 12 months without loss of benefit opened up new opportunities to work for some clients (experiences of Permitted Work are discussed further in Chapter 8). This was particularly the case for those who had lacked confidence about working, or who had been economically inactive for a significant length of time. Advisers too reported that information they gave clients about benefits and credits often eased their concerns considerably. This included not only Permitted Work, but also Disabled Person's Tax Credit and the 52-week linking rule for Incapacity Benefit.

However, others reported that their Job Broker adviser had limited knowledge about benefits, preferring to refer them elsewhere or leaving it to be discussed at a later interview (which did not always appear to have happened). Few clients reported receiving better-off calculations from their Job Broker. Some clients already had a clear idea of how much they needed to earn to ensure that they were better off in work (the 'reservation wage' typically being from £200 per week and above, depending on household circumstances) but if they did not, having detailed information about the income they might expect in work could be very important to them.

Despite the financial concerns that many clients had about moving into employment, not all clients reported being offered, or discussing, financial advice with the Job Broker. For some this may have been because they were still some distance away from moving into work so any such discussions were perceived (by either the client or the Job Broker) as somewhat premature. A few others were unaware that Job Brokers could offer such assistance, or preferred to seek advice elsewhere (for example, from a Disability Employment Adviser, the Citizen's Advice Bureau, or tax credit advice from the Inland Revenue).

However, it was apparent that for some, worries about being financially worse off in work remained a considerable barrier to moving into employment, and one that had not yet been fully addressed by the Job Broker service.

From the Job Broker perspective, it was evident that there were differing practices among advisers regarding how much financial advice they gave clients. Not all advisers felt that it was their role to give '*financial advice*'. Although some saw it as a key part of the Job Broker function, for others it was clearly the domain of Jobcentre Plus staff and Disability Employment Advisers. Job Broker advisers often felt very anxious about this area. They did not feel confident in their own understanding of benefits and tax credits and that they were afraid of giving '*bad*' advice.

Some but not all Job Brokers had access to the IBIS<sup>11</sup> software system (in some cases it was anticipated that they would have access, or they had the software but had not yet training in using it). However, advisers were often hesitant to use it, feeling that it was very easy to make a mistake and get an inaccurate result, that it was not user friendly and that it was difficult to obtain all the financial details that IBIS required. Some advisers instead relied on getting information or advice from external resources for clients, including the Tax Credit Helpline, various council departments, the Benefits Helpline and individual Jobcentre Plus staff. They reported sometimes getting inconsistent information from such sources, and this too caused much concern. Even when they had the support of such sources, they qualified the information they gave to clients with a recommendation to have it checked elsewhere; or they gave advice about benefit rules as they applied generally without trying to relate them to the case of the particular client.

Financial advice was generally seen as a '*dangerous area to get involved in*' or '*a minefield*'. Some staff were '*not willing to put [their] neck[s] on the line*' and others were '*not allowed*' by management to give financial advice. Where advisers did not want, or were not able or allowed, to give advice themselves, they encouraged clients to go to Jobcentre Plus staff, Disability Employment Advisers, the Citizens' Advice Bureau or - in one case - to a Welfare Benefits Advice team within the same organisation as the Job Broker.

Some advisers made a distinction between telling clients what benefits and credits were available and giving individualised financial advice, and felt more comfortable with the former role than the latter. The former was more often described as being a part of the service, and was said by some advisers to be the best or most important element of the service. However according to one Job Broker, information about benefits and credits was very hard to communicate clearly and often had to be repeated before it was fully understood by clients.

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<sup>11</sup> To provide 'better-off' calculations.

## **7.5 Undertaking training and work placements through NDDP**

Some clients had been offered, or had received training whilst registered for Job Broker services. As noted above, some people had already undertaken a vocational course prior to registering for NDDP. Others had undertaken some training in the early stages of registration with the Job Broker. This was typically some kind of basic computing or Information Technology skills course, offered either at the Job Broker's premises or arranged locally through the Job Broker. In some cases clients had received help in accessing or paying for specialist training which clients had either not been able to access themselves, or had not considered as an option. Examples of such training included bookkeeping, a machine operative's course, and a care work course leading to an SVQ Level 2 qualification.

There were mixed views about the usefulness, appropriateness and quality of training received through the Job Broker organisation. Whilst clients reported learning potentially valuable skills, for example, in computing, there were concerns that the training run by Job Brokers did not always result in a formally recognised certificate that could be transferred to a client's CV and thus 'marketed' to potential employers. A second criticism related to clients' expectations about the purpose of the training. Clients had sometimes expected or anticipated that the training would lead directly on to employment, by equipping them with a specific skill that certain employers required, and when this had not materialised, felt no better off (in terms of 'employability' skills) than they had prior to the training. People also commented unfavourably on the slow pace of teaching, being left to work 'alone' without the support of a tutor, having to wait for several weeks for places to become available, and a lack of follow-up contact from the Job Broker once the training period had ended. However, others had found that their skills had been enhanced, and that this had led to increased confidence and motivation to continue on the path to employment.

For some clients, however, training had not been discussed or, if it had been, had not materialised. This was very frustrating for some clients who had wanted training, some of whom subsequently accessed appropriate courses. Others had at some point considered training, but the courses they had been informed of by their Job Broker had been too basic, or they were advised by the Job Broker that their benefit could be affected.

However, not all clients had wanted training from the NDDP programme. This was because they saw no need, or because they had already done training and now wanted to be working instead, or because they perceived they were too old to begin training - *'who's going to train a 56 year old man? to do what?'*.

Clients were also asked about the opportunity to undertake (unpaid) work placements whilst registered for NDDP. Some clients did not recall having been offered, or sought, the opportunity to undertake unpaid work placements or work experience, but reported that they would have found this beneficial and would have been willing to undertake it to get some experience and to see whether the work or environment suited them. This was particularly the case for clients who had been out of work for some time and recognised that they may need time to adjust to the workplace before beginning paid work. Voluntary work was also suggested by some, but not all, Job Brokers as an opportunity to gain some work experience. As a result, a few were undertaking voluntary work at the time of the research interview, and were finding the experience beneficial. Others, however, had not considered voluntary work as an option, and it did not appear to have been raised or discussed during the course of their contacts with their Job Broker adviser.

Some of the Job Broker organisations operated their own businesses (for example, in manufacturing). These provided employment or work placements for some NDDP clients and in effect operated as supported employment or intermediate labour market environments. Clients reported that they generally found the experience useful in the short-term to increase their confidence and social skills, but that they had expectations that they would move on to paid employment. For most, however, this had not been the case. In these situations, particularly where placements were unpaid, clients had

occasionally raised concerns about the appropriateness of effectively using ‘unpaid’ workers in such environment, for example, if they felt that the work was providing goods or services for which the organisation was receiving financial reward. A few clients also undertook short periods of voluntary work experience in the Job Broker premises (for example, office work), which they found more useful, as it provided what they perceived as ‘real’ work experience.

### **The Job Broker perspective**

Job Brokers generally recognised that training could be an important part of the service for clients: for developing general work skills (such as IT skills), skills for a specific occupation, or more generally to boost confidence and make people aware of their own capabilities.

However, there was some diversity in whether and how much Job Brokers provided training or helped clients to access external training. Some provided in-house training (either existing training that was available to other client groups or training developed specifically for the job broking contract). This could be fairly extensive and sometimes formed a central element of the job broking service. It included short vocational courses such as first aid and food hygiene, as well as longer vocational training in areas such as horticulture, and pre-vocational or work preparation training in anxiety management, interview skills and I.T.

Job Brokers also helped clients to access external training, either referring them to sources such as local colleges, other adult learning centres or the national telephone helpline Learn Direct, or making contact with these organisations themselves on the client’s behalf. The extent to which different Job Broker organisations did so seemed to vary considerably.

A number of factors appeared to constrain the amount of emphasis that was placed on either providing training or helping clients to access it. First, there were different views about what role training should play in NDDP and how far the service was intended for people who wanted to do particularly long training courses. There were also differences between the organisations in how far training was part of their service beyond the Job Broker contract. One manager said that the reason that his service did not offer any in-house training was that they were ‘*not a training organisation*’ and did not have a history of providing training. There were also different views about whether it was appropriate for clients to attend training courses that might lead to employment in the long-term but would be unlikely to do so in the short-term. The manager of one Job Broker said that most of its clients did not need further training (because they were already sufficiently trained).

Many managers and advisers said that the difficulties arising from the funding arrangements (see Chapter 4) meant that there was not enough money in job broking for them to be able to pay for training. Some Job Brokers would pay for cheaper courses only, some would only pay a proportion of external training costs, and others made no contribution, or focused their attention on finding free courses.

A final factor that could constrain the use of training was the availability of suitable - which sometimes meant free - courses in the local area.

There were also differences between Job Brokers in how much use they appeared to make of placements and voluntary work. Most Job Broker staff saw placements as a means of helping clients find out whether a particular job suited them, build confidence and develop new skills, and as a chance to get either a job or a recommendation for future potential employers. Indeed for a number of Job Brokers (mainly those with a history of using them in other contracts) placements were at the heart of their job broking strategy and provided the key means by which they sought to help clients move towards work.

However, there was also some doubt about whether work placements and voluntary work were an appropriate part of the service. There was concern that they were not what clients should be working to as final outcomes and that placements could delay them from finding paid work. The funding

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arrangements were also a constraint, since they did not attract an outcome payment in their own right but could nevertheless take as much or more of an adviser's time as entries into employment. They were therefore not always promoted or even made available at all - or were offered only if there was the possibility of a paid job at the end. One adviser said that she had offered placements when she first started working on the NDDP contract but then stopped - even though placements had helped several of her clients to get back into paid work - when her efforts to reach her registration targets left her with too heavy a caseload to allow time for arranging placements. There was also some concern about insurance issues connected with placements, which led some Job Brokers to use intermediary organisations to arrange placements.

The manager of one Job Broker would have liked his advisers to be able to set up placements, but said that they were unable to do so because they lacked close enough contacts with employers. Others referred clients to Disability Employment Advisers for WORKPREP schemes in order to provide them with work experience opportunities. One Job Broker manager said that he had not initially offered placements at all, but had recently become aware of their benefits for those clients whose major barrier to work was a lack of work experience. He was therefore in the process of making them available to his team's existing clients.

### **7.6 Addressing confidence and motivation**

As part of employment preparation, Job Brokers may work with clients to enhance their motivation, self-esteem, morale and confidence. Such development may occur through one to one sessions with Job Broker advisers, as well as through more structured group work with other clients. Reported difficulties with low confidence or self-esteem was widespread amongst clients in this study. As mentioned earlier, clients often attributed this to significant periods away from work because of their health condition or disability (including the associated impact on family or household circumstances) or because of apprehension about how potential employers would respond to someone with a health condition (particularly mental health issues). For some, this was recognised as major barrier in their returning to work, and one which they hoped would be addressed through the NDDP service.

For many, participation in NDDP activities per se was instrumental in increasing motivation and morale. This was particularly so for those who had not been involved in any work or related activities for some time, and was largely attributed to the positive one to one relationship that had developed with their adviser within the Job Broker organisation. Clients who had built up an ongoing individual relationship with an adviser were more likely to report increased self-confidence and self-worth than those who had not had regular contact, or had seen different advisers on different occasions. For the former, the Job Broker had worked with them over time to identify their work-related skills, and had opened up new possibilities with regard to the type of work they may be able to do. Advisers had also become familiar with clients' personal circumstances, and could provide support beyond that which was specifically work related. Clients (including those who had limited work history, and some older clients) reported that the Job Broker had given them renewed optimism that they could work again.

Others reported increased well-being and confidence in attending activities arranged by or through the Job Broker. There were examples from clients of being '*given a purpose*', of having regular activity outside of the home, in an environment within which they felt at ease and which increased their confidence. This experience was generally reported by clients who had been out of work for some time, and had not actively sought work prior to entry into the NDDP programme. Such increased confidence could extend into other aspects of clients' lives, for example, feeling more confident to go out alone, or to build up social contacts, all of which may bring them closer to the labour market.

However, a significant proportion of clients reported that although their confidence and enthusiasm had initially been high during their early involvement with the Job Broker, this had subsequently declined. This occurred for two main reasons. The first was that despite assurances, and according to clients themselves in some cases, considerable efforts from the Job Broker, they had not been

successful in obtaining work. The second reason was dwindling contact with the Job Broker. In some cases, staff shortages within the Job Broker organisation meant that clients had to wait some time for follow-up appointments, in some cases appointments were cancelled or rescheduled by the Job Broker, and in other cases contact appeared to diminish without any apparent reason. This declining contact could lead to a loss of momentum, enthusiasm and anxiety amongst a few that Job Brokers were *'losing interest'* in them. This was the experience particularly of clients who had experienced mental health conditions. However, in some of these cases it appeared to be the client that had decreased or severed the contact, often because of difficulties in their personal lives or some other (non-NDDP) related factor. In other cases, clients' health conditions had placed severe limitations on the kinds of work they were able to do, and either the clients themselves perceived that the Job Broker service could not overcome or address these limitations, or the Job Broker had advised them that it would be very difficult to find them employment that would fit around their sometimes frequent or disruptive intense medical needs. This included clients for whom the severity of their health conditions fluctuated significantly from one day to another and clients who required regular intensive medical intervention or treatment (such as spells in hospital). In a few cases, clients reported that they felt *less* confident and motivated now than they had prior to involvement in the NDDP programme, which again can be linked to hopes and expectations of work initially being high at the outset, but with little actual progress made.

Job Broker managers and advisers themselves were very aware of the problem of low self-esteem amongst clients. Responses to this varied, with some providing more structured and formal support than others did.

An approach adopted by many was to try to ensure that their manner of working with clients was as encouraging as possible, with an emphasis on forming a supportive relationship with clients, putting them at their ease, and encouraging them to see their skills and experiences positively. Some had tailored the way they worked in order to build client confidence. For example (as mentioned elsewhere) this was the reason why one organisation did not emphasise action plans and why another employed more group-based activities after noticing that these seemed to boost clients' confidence.

A second approach (usually adopted alongside that described above) was to include in the NDDP programme elements that aimed specifically at helping client confidence and self-esteem. Examples included:

- bringing in a consultant to design a training package for advisers to use
- employing a drama therapist for one morning per week (paid for by grant funding)
- setting up a social group for clients
- including anxiety management and confidence training as part of more general job preparation training packages.

Implicit in many advisers' comments was a distinction between general confidence building and help or advice with specific non work-related issues. The former was generally considered to be a legitimate part of an adviser's role; the latter, however, was usually not. Advisers might be willing to listen to clients when they talked about other problems (such as relationship difficulties, emotional problems and problems with housing) and to take them into account when planning how to work with them, but they normally avoided trying to help solve these problems and gave clients details of sources of specialist help instead. However, there seemed to be differences between advisers, sometimes within the same service, in where they felt it appropriate to draw the line, and managers sometimes wanted their staff to spend less time discussing wider problems with clients. For some this was a difficult area that could lead to distress and pressure - both where they did engage with people's wider problems and where they did not.

## **7.7 Job search support**

A primary expectation from clients participating in New Deal for Disabled People was that the programme would provide assistance with searching for employment. This included assistance with finding suitable job vacancies, CV preparation and job application form completion, and advice and support for job interviews. Clients naturally varied in the extent to which they required support for these activities, but there was also considerable variation in the extent to which they received the support they perceived was needed.

### **7.7.1 Accessing job vacancies**

#### **The client perspective**

Many clients reported requiring assistance with job search techniques. Some clients needed relatively intensive help with job search strategies. This included help in identifying possible suitable jobs in local newspapers, and identifying other sources of information about job vacancies. This was particularly the case for younger clients who had limited work experience (some of whom had never worked), as well as for clients who had been away from the labour market for some time. The Job Broker had sometimes provided fairly intensive support, including searching through local newspapers together to identify possible opportunities. Other clients who had more employment and job search experience, or who had specialist skills or qualifications (such as teaching or management) reported needing more specialist help with searching for and accessing job vacancies that were particularly appropriate or suitable to their circumstances, but these clients reported that such specialist help was rarely received. Clients did, however, find it useful to be able to use Job Broker premises to access the Internet to conduct online job searches or to telephone potential employers.

Some clients recalled receiving lists of vacancies from Job Brokers through the post or being notified of vacancies by telephone. Whilst this was generally appreciated, occasionally the usefulness was questioned. The vacancies were often those that had already appeared, and been seen by clients, in local newspapers and were sometimes unsuitable because they did not fit in with the type and duration of work that the client was able to do. Occasionally this was in spite of the client being fairly specific to their adviser about the kinds of work they were looking for or able to do. However, there were a few examples of Job Brokers encouraging clients to apply for jobs that they would not previously have had the confidence to apply for, sometimes with some success.

Some clients believed that Job Brokers had access to additional job vacancies not available through usual outlets through their perceived '*contacts*' with employers. They had hoped that they would be receiving list of possible jobs from Job Brokers, but this did not often materialise. Clients were surprised at this, as their initial expectation was that Job Brokers had established contacts with employers and access to networks of job vacancies.

Nevertheless, there were some reports of Job Brokers having direct and immediate access to the latest vacancies through their links to Jobcentre Plus, employment agencies and local employers, thus giving a '*head start*'. Local knowledge of the labour market and local contacts with employers was thought to be a key role for Job Brokers. People who were registered with a national or telephone service based Job Broker, sometimes considered it a disadvantage that the organisations lacked the local knowledge of employers and local vacancies.

Other clients, particularly those with specialist skills or experience, had also hoped that the Job Broker would be able to offer a job-matching service or active promotion of individual clients, whereby they would forward the clients' CV to potential employers should a suitable vacancy arise. In addition, others had expected Job Brokers to re-contact them when they found a suitable job for them. In both of these cases, this did not appear to have occurred, leading to some disappointment for the clients.



**The Job Broker perspective**

Advisers generally approached the issue of job vacancies in two ways: by identifying vacancies themselves and bringing them to clients' attention, and by supporting clients in doing their own job search. In most Job Brokers advisers did both, although there seemed to be some differences between organisations in the balance between the two approaches. It was also sometimes said that the balance of activity should shift over time, so that initially the adviser might be doing or leading much of the job searching but the client was expected to take more responsibility as time went on. A client's own job search activity was also sometimes seen as a sign of their commitment to find a job and of their job-readiness - it could therefore prompt advisers themselves to put more effort into job search for that client.

When advisers engaged in job search activity on behalf of the client they looked in local papers and on the Internet, approached employers who might be able to offer the kind of jobs the client was looking for, accessed jobs on the Jobcentre Plus database, or asked services based in Jobcentre Plus to do job searches for them. A few also had in readiness databases of employers and/or jobs, which they then tried to match with clients.

However, Job Broker staff experienced some difficulties with these approaches. Job searching on behalf of clients was generally found to be very time consuming, especially as caseloads grew, and it was therefore an activity that became squeezed when advisers were short of time. Making direct approaches to employers could be particularly time consuming and with low direct returns (see below). There were also differences between Job Brokers in how far advisers felt that they had direct access to the Jobcentre Plus vacancies database. Some said that they did have direct access, some said that they were sent extracts from it, but others reported that they had no access at all unless they went to a Jobcentre Plus office and accessed the Job Points themselves. One explanation might be a lack of awareness of the availability of the database on the Internet. There were reports that there had sometimes been difficulties when Job Brokers had approached Jobcentre Plus staff for more information: staff had sometimes refused or been reluctant to give information, or it had transpired that jobs were reserved for clients on other New Deal programmes. Adviser teams also felt at a disadvantage if they were dealing with clients from an area that they did not know very well and that was not local to them. In such cases they tended to put more onus on the client to find vacancies.

The second approach was to encourage and equip clients to carry out job search themselves. Here, advisers told clients about sources of vacancies and gave them advice about how to use them. Some ran regular job clubs or drop-in sessions that clients were encouraged to use to find out about vacancies and for help with applying. Others reviewed progress in meetings with clients - although there seemed to be variation in how structured this was. One adviser asked clients to bring to each meeting examples of jobs they had applied for or enquired into; another checked *'every now and again'* on clients' progress with job search. Others said that they asked clients to let them know of any jobs that they applied for so that they could offer their help.

There were differences of opinion between about when to begin the job search. Some advisers began searching for vacancies immediately they started to work with a client, but others preferred to wait until they knew clients better and until the clients themselves were more prepared for the application process and for work itself.

**7.7.2 Preparing CVs and job applications**

Many clients reported needing help in compiling or updating their CV. Clients who had not been in work or related activities for some time because of their health conditions could be apprehensive about how to present significant gaps in their employment history. Some clients had received help from their adviser in identifying 'transferable' skills such as those gained through periods of voluntary work. Others needed support about how to structure a CV, and how to use appropriate grammar and layout. Most had received CV help through one to one sessions with their adviser, although a few had

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participated in a job search workshop organised through the Job Broker and some Job Brokers said that they offered regular help and advice through job clubs, Job Programmes or drop-in sessions. One Job Broker expected all clients to attend a weekly session that covered CVs, application forms and other job related skills. Clients were generally pleased with the support they received. However, there were a few criticisms with regard to suggesting inappropriate amendments to CVs. An example of this is a Job Broker suggesting changes to a clients' CV which then made the client look over qualified for the kind of job that he was limited to because of his health conditions.

The preparation of a CV was seen by some advisers and managers as a key means of building clients' self-confidence as well as a means of providing them with a useful tool for job applications. They said that it could reveal to clients that they had skills that were relevant to the work-place when they had thought they had few or none. For this reason some advisers prioritised the preparation of CVs ahead of other client work, so as to boost clients' confidence as soon as possible. Some Job Brokers used standard formats for their CVs while others preferred to tailor them to the particular client and types of jobs they were pursuing.

Clients also reported seeking assistance from their adviser to complete application forms. In some cases the Job Broker had offered to complete the application form for them, or assist them to fill it out. This offer was particularly valued for those who had poor literacy skills, or whose impairment or illness made it difficult for them to write. Others had found it difficult to formulate responses to specific questions on the application forms, and had approached their adviser for assistance.

### **7.7.3 Support for job interviews**

A requirement of some clients was for their adviser to accompany them at a job interview, especially if they had little recent work experience. Nevertheless, other clients clearly felt that it would be inappropriate for the Job Broker to accompany them to a job interview, preferring not to draw attention to their involvement with the NDDP service or Job Broker support. This was often amidst concerns that this might affect a potential employer's perception of their ability to do the job.

Advisers generally seemed to give advice on how to behave in, and prepare for, interviews, and mock interviews were also sometimes offered. Some (but not all) groups of advisers in the study also offered to accompany clients to job interviews, and there was one example of this being done routinely. One adviser mentioned doing the preparatory research for clients - on the company and the nature of the job.

Some clients who had applied unsuccessfully for a number of jobs felt that they would have benefited from knowing why an application or interview was unsuccessful, and saw it as a possible adviser role to contact the potential employer to gather feedback. However, there was no evidence of such a service from any of the clients in the study, but it was mentioned by one Job Broker manager in the study.

## **7.8 Job Broker interaction with employers**

Clients had often expected that Job Brokers would have developed links with employers. It was anticipated that this would include: direct access to new vacancies that arose; acting as a 'broker' between clients and potential employers to open up new opportunities for both parties; *'breaking the ice'* by making initial introductions on behalf of clients, and raising awareness with employers about the implications and realities of employing someone who has had an impairment or health condition. Furthermore, a few clients had hoped that the involvement of a 'recognised' organisation could be more influential, in terms of encouraging employers to take on disabled people, than any individual effort. More often than not, however, clients were surprised and disappointed that this was not the

case. Indeed, jobs that clients in the sample had found had generally not been secured through any direct intervention of the Job Broker with the employer. Rather, the role of the Job Broker had been instrumental in providing assistance with job search techniques, with the application form, or with advising and supporting the client through the interview process.

Many clients thus felt that the service needed to strengthen links with prospective employers, and this emerged from the research findings as a major area on which clients thought that the service could be improved. As mentioned earlier in this report, a frequent concern amongst clients was discrimination on the part of employers, and reluctance to employ (or in some cases even interview) someone who was known to have an impairment or health condition. Clients often expected Job Brokers to have developed substantial links with local employers in the area who were willing and able to accept clients through the programme into employment.

From the research carried out with Job Brokers, it was evident that there was a great deal of variation generally in the ways Job Broker staff engaged with employers in the search for jobs (dealings with employers once a client was in work are dealt with in Chapter 8). Five types of approach emerged.

#### 1. No contact with the employer

Here, advisers would provide support to the client in looking for work, but applications for jobs would be made directly by the client and the adviser had no contact with the employer. This was thought to be appropriate in two different circumstances. The first was where the Job Broker office was located a long distance from employers and advisers considered it impossible to have any meaningful contact with them. The second was where advisers thought that clients preferred them not to have any contact with the employer, because they did not want a potential employer to know that they had received the support of a specialised disability agency.

#### 2. Offer of contact in support of an individual

Here, advisers made an offer of support to employers at the time of the application for a job (for example, some Job Brokers sent a the covering letter with clients' application forms or CVs). Advisers could then respond to any request for involvement from the employer, but would not initiate them themselves. Such involvement typically involved speaking to the employer about the client's skills and experience and, if necessary, their impairment and telling them about the in-work support that could be available to the client or the employer.

#### 3. Approaching employers about specific clients

Here, advisers approached employers about specific clients in order to explore whether there might be suitable vacancies for them, approaching employers or types of employers that were of particular interest to the client.

Some Job Brokers provided their advisers with access to a database of employers - either one that had already been developed by the organisation outside the job broking contract or one that had been set up specifically - and others were planning to set up something similar. However, this was felt to be a very time-consuming activity, and there were concerns that such databases would quickly become out of date.

There were different views about these direct approaches to employers. Some advisers felt comfortable with the process and found it effective. Others felt unconfident about 'cold calling' and felt that it was very time consuming and had a low success rate - partly, they felt, because some employers were being bombarded with requests for placements and jobs from numerous different schemes and agencies. Time for this activity was often reduced, advisers said, when their caseloads increased and they often said that their attempts had fallen off recently, or that this was an activity they would ideally be putting more time into.

In one Job Broker, problems of cold calling were avoided by accompanying Jobcentre Plus marketing teams on their visits to employers. This, the manager said, gave his team an *'entrée'* into companies, and a relationship with one or two managers that they could usefully build on.

- **Developing on-going relationships with employers**

The fourth approach was to develop close reciprocal relationships with a small number of employers, with the Job Broker gaining a better understanding of the organisation and its needs and demonstrating that the Job Broker service could help them with their recruitment needs. Some Job Brokers had developed successful relationships that involved, for example, the employer coming to the Job Broker first when they had vacancies, becoming a *'preferred provider'* of job candidates, or training clients to match employers' needs and pre-screening clients who wanted to apply for vacancies with that employer. Such relationships were thought to improve Job Brokers' chances of successfully putting several clients forward for vacancies. These approaches involved large local employers and ones already known to be *'disability friendly'* (e.g. part of the Two Ticks scheme). Job broker staff generally felt that it often took a lot of work to overcome employers' reluctance to recruit a disabled person, but that once a successful appointment had been made the same employer would frequently employ more than one client.

There were however some concerns about this approach. It was felt it could result in advisers *'funneling'* clients into jobs that did not necessarily suit the clients' needs, and other approaches described above were seen as more *'client-led'*. And again, this approach was felt to be potentially very time consuming.

- **General marketing and liaison**

Finally, Job Broker staff also described general networking and marketing activities, for example going to meetings of local employer groups or making presentations to individual employers.

Few Job Brokers focused solely on just one of these approaches. They might for example use the first approach for clients who wanted to keep their relationship with the Job Broker private, but use more direct approaches (where appropriate) with other clients. Furthermore, the second and third types of approach could sometimes lead to an on-going, more in-depth relationship with an employer.

Job brokers' tactics also changed over time, as they learned what worked and what did not and as the amount of time available for working with employers changed. The emphasis on the different approaches described above therefore fluctuated. Some had recently developed specialist roles within the team for employer liaison. In addition, if organisations did not already have relationships with employers prior to joining the broking scheme, it took them a long time to establish them. Some organisations felt this lent an advantage to Job Brokers that had existing employer contacts (for example, from WORKPREP contracts) or whose staff had brought contacts with them from previous jobs.

## **7.9 In-work support services**

A key element of the New Deal for Disabled People service is the provision of in-work support to clients to ease the transition into employment and to address any issues or concerns that may affect client's ability to remain in work. However, for clients who had not (yet) entered work, the provision of in-work support from their Job Broker was not a highly salient issue. Nevertheless, a few clients suggested that they may be reluctant to seek post-employment support from a Job Broker if they were experiencing difficulties as to admit that something had *'gone wrong'* was thought *'a bit embarrassing'*, and whether contact is actually made may depend on the nature of the relationship built with a Job Broker before entry into employment.

Clients who had entered employment were generally aware that the Job Broker was able to support them once they were in work. However, most did not discuss specific types of in-work support that could be provided through their Job Broker, but tended to discuss more general support in terms of ongoing access to and contact from the Job Broker. Job Broker advisers stressed that the support they provided varied greatly, depending on the requirements and circumstances of individual clients. Most of the services largely dealt with this aspect of provision by making contact with clients (usually at their home) in the early days of a new job to check all was well and to encourage the client to get in touch if they encountered problems. They also made further contact at later points - monthly, six-weekly, at three or six months etc, although some services were anticipating staying in touch with clients beyond six months, particularly if that was an integral part of their service to non-Job Broker clients.

Advisers felt it was often appropriate to leave it to the client to raise any difficulties, and they felt that there was actually relatively little requirement among clients for a more proactive approach. Some services had expected to do more - one, for example, had been ready to bring in another organisation to do regular workplace visits but found this was not necessary - and several advisers reported that they had actually never been contacted by a client after they had started work. Nevertheless they felt that *'just being there'* could provide important reassurance to clients, even if clients never felt they needed to get in touch. Other Job Broker advisers described the higher levels of involvement available, than those reported by most of the research group who had experienced work, and some services placed more emphasis on in-work support, particularly where this was a key aspect of their non-NDDP work. Here the type of support offered included:

- direct contact: visiting employers to discuss the client's employment needs or to check on safety, the appropriateness of the environment and wider attitudes to the disabled employee; regular review meetings with the employee and/or employer, provided by Job Brokers or by another organisation; talking with employers or helping clients to negotiate with them where they had encountered problems, or providing a lot of support where clients had contacted advisers frequently. One Job Broker organisation was funding access to a telephone counselling service for clients and passed on the number to people who moved into work.
- job coaching: to support clients on the journey or on the first day, to help the client with learning or carrying out the tasks required, and to aid their socialisation with other employees.
- providing or financing equipment or other support such as an interpreter, and arranging funds for travel to work.

Access to Work was sometimes used to fund these initiatives although levels of use were quite varied - one service made very extensive use, some had made little or none but were planning to find out more. None of the respondents who had experienced work explicitly mentioned using Access to Work (see Chapter 8). Two organisations, both with extensive experience of providing workplace support, stressed the importance of focusing support on the employer rather than the employee, mobilizing experience and existing strategies and systems within the organisation, rather than focusing on the employee.



## 8 Experiences of work

### Key Points

- Clients who had entered employment had a wide range of backgrounds (in terms of age, health status and work history), and often had high levels of motivation towards work. Types of employment and employer were varied but jobs had generally not required Job Broker training.
- Clients who had experienced work since registration were generally in one of three groups: in relatively stable work; in work that appeared to be precarious; or no longer in work.
- Clients' reasons for leaving or changing employment and motivations about their careers (including employment progression) were often influenced by their current work experiences in terms of levels of satisfaction with, and the suitability of, a job. Suitability of a job was usually assessed in terms of their health status.
- Clients were more likely to have kept in touch, or expect to resume contact with their Job Broker in the future, where they had received more intense support prior to job entry, which was typically the case for those in Permitted Work.

The client sample was purposively selected to include the experiences of people who had entered paid employment since registering for NDDP. Data on job entries from the NDDP database were used to inform the sample selection. However, as there was a necessary time lag between initial sample selection, recruitment and interview, some clients had subsequently moved into or out of work and a few others had moved on to a different job in the intervening months. Therefore, all clients included in this section of the report had experiences of employment since registering for NDDP, but not all were in work (or in the same job) by the time of the interview.

This chapter first describes the type of work experienced by clients since registering for the Job Broker service (Section 8.1). Clients' views on how stable they felt in their jobs is described in Section 8.2 and Section 8.3 examines some of the factors that supported or undermined clients remaining in work. (The specific role of the Job Broker service for clients who got work is discussed in Chapter 9.)

### 8.1 The type of work undertaken by clients

Clients who had experienced work were from a wide range of backgrounds and did not appear to be untypical of the sample as a whole. Their age ranged from early 20s to early 60s and they had a wide range of different physical and mental impairments and health conditions. Their work histories also varied considerably. Nevertheless, most had been away from the labour market for at least a year prior to registration, albeit sometimes with an extended period of paid work prior to the onset of their illness or impairment.

This group generally had high levels of motivation towards work. Many had been actively looking for work before registering with NDDP, some had made numerous job applications, and had attended interviews. Occasionally clients had secured employment before contact with the Job Broker. The financial advantage of paid employment was stressed by some clients in this group, and several mentioned the desire to leave benefit. However a recurring theme was that work was more than a financial necessity, and positive aspects were often emphasised such as independence, contact with others, and the need to *'keep occupied'*.

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Although clients did not always have a clear idea about the type of work they were seeking, clients had generally found employment in their preferred type of work. In only a few cases did clients' pre-registration wishes not correspond with subsequent work experience.

The work undertaken was wide ranging, for example, security work, driving, domestic work, retail, and administrative roles. However professional or managerial work was rarely in evidence despite instances of this kind of work in several clients' previous work histories. The various types of employers that were identified included private and public sector organisations, large and small employers, and occasionally Job Brokers themselves. There were no clients who had obtained self-employment amongst this sample. The number of hours clients worked ranged from less than eight to over 50 a week, although those working less than 16 hours per week were generally engaged in Permitted Work.

In some cases, the type of work undertaken reflected clients' previous types of employment, for example driving or administrative roles. However, in other cases clients reported that their health condition or impairment might mean that they had had to change the type of employment that they had usually, or previously, done. This was particularly relevant to clients with physical conditions where past employment involved lifting or heavy manual work.

Where a job had required specific skills, clients either drew on their previous work experiences, or had already undertaken relevant training or education before registering with a Job Broker. This included, for example, a client who had completed a degree since the onset of their health condition, and had then secured a job in a related field with the support of the Job Broker.

In other cases, jobs did not require specialist training or previous experience and were typically taken by clients who had limited or intermittent experience of work or who had been out of the labour market for some time. This was also the case for those whose state of health was such that they had only recently considered the possibility of paid employment and were easing themselves gently back into work.

- **Experiences of Permitted Work**

Permitted Work, which is subject to earning restrictions, generally involved more unskilled work often associated with part-time work, for example cleaning or working in a cafe. For most, though not all, clients in Permitted Work the Job Broker had had a significant role in its arrangement. This included providing support with finding and arranging suitable work, helping with applications or assisting with converting voluntary employment into Permitted Work. Some of these clients had not been actively job seeking before their involvement in the Job Broker service, and it was often seen as a 'safe' way of trying out work with the security of knowing that there would be no loss of benefit if the experience did not work out. For a few, remaining on benefits was a major concern, rather than using Permitted Work to progress in the labour market. This was particularly so for clients who had been out of the labour market for some time (up to nine years) or who were cautious about moving into employment because of the possible adverse effect of employment on their health. For others, however, the possibility of using Permitted Work as a stepping stone into permanent employment was evident.

Some clients who were aware that Permitted Work was time limited were maintaining contact with the Job Broker to plan activities once the period for Permitted Work had expired. This concern was also echoed in the research undertaken with the Job Brokers themselves. In one case a Job Broker was actively job searching on behalf of a client who was in a six month Permitted Work job, and another was being helped with an application for a training course. Other clients who were not in touch with the Job Broker during their Permitted Work period intended to resume contact in the future, regarding possible moves into alternative employment.



## 8.2 Employment stability

Because this wave of research with clients was conducted less than six months after the clients' registration it is too early to explore any longer-term issues relating to job retention or sustainable employment. However it is possible to explore how stable people felt in their jobs and to identify reasons why work may have ended for some clients. Clients who had experienced work since registration were generally in one of three groups: clients who felt that they were relatively stable in their employment; clients who described being in precarious work; and clients who were no longer in work by the time of the research interview.

### **In stable employment**

When interviewed, these clients reported being content in their jobs and intended to remain in their current position. They felt that the employment suited them in terms of both their health and social needs (see Section 8.3). Positive experiences were associated with relatively high levels of support from their Job Broker in obtaining work. Within this group, there were also clients who were relatively happy with their current position, but also viewed the employment as part of a longer-term plan to progress or advance in the labour market (issues relating to progression are discussed in Section 8.3).

### **In precarious employment**

Within this group were clients with some concerns about certain aspects of their work which raised some doubts amongst them as to whether the employment would be sustained. These concerns generally related to the adverse affect of employment on clients' health, or the financial implications of working. Possible remedial courses of action raised by clients included searching for a different job (a few were in their second job since entering employment), accessing training, or continuing in their current position despite the difficulties. Returning to benefit was rarely mentioned. Other examples included clients who were employed on a temporary or seasonal basis, sometimes with the hope that it would lead to a permanent position. There was little evidence amongst this group of clients being in touch with, or seeking out support from their Job Broker adviser, although some reported that they might contact them at a later date when a situation deteriorated or further employment was in jeopardy.

### **No longer in employment**

Clients in this group were no longer working by the time of the research interview. Reasons for employment ending, according to the clients, were primarily associated with health, and included stopping working because of surgery or having to go on sick leave and unlikely to return to the job because had involved particularly strenuous activities. In addition, in one case a client had been made redundant. Whether Job Broker intervention could have assisted the retention of employment in these cases is unclear. However, it was evident that clients who had developed a close relationship with their Job Broker reported that they were currently, or were more likely to, continue to use their Job Broker for future support.

## 8.3 Factors supporting or undermining work

Clients who had moved into employment raised a number of issues relating to work which may affect the likelihood of them remaining in the job, progressing to other employment, or re-entering economic inactivity. Factors which may have either a positive or negative impact included level of satisfaction with employment, suitability of a job (particularly in relation to their health status), the financial impact of working and whether the employment had the potential for progression.

### **8.3.1 Levels of satisfaction**

Most clients said that they were satisfied with their current position and some were very positive: *'the best part-time job I've ever worked in my life'*. Whilst clients often associated this with satisfaction with the job itself, they also related it to feelings of independence and being able to have contact with others as well as giving a *'morale boost'*, which contributed to their general well being. Some clients who had had mental health conditions or who had been out of work for a considerable length of time in particular emphasised the positive aspect of getting out and meeting people through their work, sometimes even when other elements of the job were said to be less than ideal. Clients who appeared most enthusiastic about their jobs often reported that they were likely to remain in their current position for the foreseeable future, for some of the older age group this was thought to be until retirement.

### **8.3.2 Suitability**

Being in a job that suited clients' needs could play an important role in the likelihood of that job being sustained, or sustainable. What made a job 'suitable' varied. Clients related suitability to the job fitting in with other commitments such as caring responsibilities, whilst to some the location of a workplace was significant. The latter included a job being within walking distance of home, or work being accessible (and affordable) by public transport.

Finding work that fitted in with clients' health needs was also said to be important, and as mentioned earlier was an issue that could affect the type of work taken. Clients were often very aware of their health needs and limitations and had chosen jobs accordingly (not always with Job Broker involvement). Clients with physical or mobility difficulties had felt the need to find work that was less physically demanding than their previous employment had been. For others, especially those with heart or mental health conditions, being in a job where they were not under physical or emotional pressure was stressed by clients as important (hence the suitability for some of Permitted Work, which could ease the transition back into employment).

Clients who were in jobs that suited their health needs generally reported being relatively stable in their current position. However, suitability was not necessarily linked to intrinsic satisfaction with the job itself, as several clients reported that although their job suited their needs, they were looking to move to other, for example, more 'interesting' employment in the longer-term.

However, the adverse effect of a job on health was a factor which caused a few clients to reconsider their positions. Examples include a client with severe back pain who was finding it increasingly difficult to cope with her job which involved light manual work, and a few cases of jobs causing stress for clients who had heart problems or depression and anxiety. In these instances, clients had been keen to move into work, sometimes because of financial pressure, and had returned to occupations in a familiar sector (often with limited, if any, Job Broker intervention). Occasionally, these were 'second' jobs (about which the Job Broker had not been consulted) and in one case a job had been taken against the advice of a Job Broker. Some clients had recognised that they may now need to change the type of work they had undertaken. However, discussions to this effect had rarely taken place with their Job Broker, although some intended to make contact if a situation deteriorated and the threat to job sustainability was more imminent.

Interviews with Job Broker advisers indicated that although sometimes they were aware of clients who had lost or changed jobs and who had not got in touch with them, they did not want to breach confidentiality by making a more overt approach to the employee at work or to the employer.

### 8.3.3 Financial issues

As mentioned earlier, for many clients financial reward was not the only motivating factor for (returning to) work. However, the financial benefits of working were particularly salient to some clients, and there were examples of clients taking a job that they perceived was less than ideal, for financial necessity. For others, freedom from financial pressure due to an increased disposable income was an important aspect of the move into employment, which included not having to '*worry about the money now*'. Several clients had been advised about tax credits by the Job Broker and occasionally clients had been given grants upon job entry to cover transitional costs (such as a clothing grant).

Financial matters once in work were only occasionally mentioned as a source of worry. Clients who expressed this concern included those who were working part-time, or who had responsibility for dependants. For example, one client was '*finding it really hard*' to manage on part-time earnings, even with tax credits, and another client had encountered problems when her Incapacity Benefit was stopped when she had temporarily worked more than the number of hours allowed under the Permitted Work rules. There were few examples of clients who were experiencing such difficulties seeking help or advice from the Job Broker.

Clients who emphasised the positive financial benefit of entering employment generally reported being stable in their current employment, and often expressed their intention to remain in a particular job. However the few clients who mentioned financial difficulties also reported negative aspects of their jobs relating to its suitability in terms of health, and perhaps were potentially in a more precarious position in terms of employment retention.

### 8.3.4 Advancement

Some clients anticipated progressing further, either in the longer or shorter term, and saw their current employment as a '*stepping stone*' or '*something to start going up the ladder*'. Future options they were considering included progression within the current workplace, increasing the number of hours worked, accessing training or a moving into employment with more money and/or prospects. Some also recognised that once in work, they would become more '*marketable*' to employers.

For clients who had been out of work for some time and were less confident about working, the first job was viewed as a way to ease the transition into the labour market. Such clients were usually not job searching whilst employed, and were not in contact with their Job Broker adviser, but were considering their future plans. However, this was notably different for those who had maintained regular contact with the Job Broker both before and after employment. This particularly related to those in Permitted Work who were more inclined to be using, or contemplating the use of, the Job Broker service for further support, undoubtedly due to the time limit nature of Permitted Work.

Where moves from current employment were being considered, clients who had more positive experiences (see Sections 8.3), tended to discuss a move in terms of progression, for example, promotion or training for a profession with better prospects. For others who had had more negative experiences, for example where a job was adversely affecting health, the motivation to change jobs was more likely to be to secure a position more suited to their current needs.



## 9 Clients' progress and the impact of participation in NDDP

### Key Points

Clients who remained active with the Job Broker service by the time of the research interviews were undertaking job search activity, participating in training or receiving regular contact or one-to-one support from their adviser. Clients in the latter group tended to have the most significant labour market barriers whilst others in this group appeared to be making significant moves towards work.

- Clients whose activity or involvement with the Job Broker service were sometimes 'in limbo' waiting for the Job Broker to resume contact, or were continuing to job search in the expectation that they would contact their adviser if they needed to. In some cases, however, clients were considering leaving the service.
- Clients who were no longer in contact with the Job Broker generally remained committed to finding work. This included those who had never become fully engaged with the service beyond registration, and had only ever received a very limited service, as well as people who were no longer in touch with the service because of dissatisfaction with either the service or the Job Broker organisation. Other clients within this group were no longer in touch with the Job Broker organisations because they were no longer considering work.
- The final group of clients were those who had found work since registering for the Job Broker service. Here, the Job Broker had played one of three roles: supporting the client in their job search activity and job applications; providing in-work or transitional support for clients who had already found work; and either very limited or no recognisable role at all.

This chapter draws on findings from the client interviews, presented in earlier chapters, to explore the extent to which clients' participation in the Job Broker service influenced, or had an impact on, their activity at the time of the research interview, particularly in terms of their movement towards, and in some cases into, work.

By the time of the research interviews, clients could be identified (with a few exceptions) as being in one of a number of categories, insofar as progress towards work and their activity or involvement in the Job Broker service is concerned:

- remaining actively involved with the Job Broker service (Section 8.1)
- still registered with the Job Broker, but with declining activity and/or contact (Section 8.2)
- no Job Broker activity but still not in employment (Section 8.3)
- in work (Section 8.4)

Clients in this latter group included those who reported finding work as a direct consequence of involvement in the NDDP programme, as well as those who had obtained work independently of the Job Broker service. Very few of these clients had remained in contact with the Job Broker organisation.

Using this broad four-fold typology, this final chapter explores the role and significance of the Job Broker service in facilitating clients' progression, as defined above. This includes identifying the extent to which clients were able to 'move forward' towards work, as well as whether and how the Job Broker service facilitated, accelerated (or even hindered) clients' moves into employment, and what aspects of clients' reported needs appear not to have been met by the Job Broker service.

## **9.1 Clients who remained actively involved with the Job Broker service**

By the time of the research interview, some six months after initial registration, some clients were still actively engaged in the Job Broker service, but had not entered work. There were three broad patterns of activity within this group: undertaking regular job search activity (Section 8.1.1); undertaking training (Section 8.1.2); or regular one-to-one contact and support from the Job Broker adviser (Section 8.1.3). Whilst these three activities were not mutually exclusive or exhaustive, there were some patterns in terms of the types of clients that were undertaking each of the three activities.

### **9.1.1 Actively job searching**

Within the first category - those whose activity was predominantly concentrated around actively job searching - clients tended either to have made significant progress towards work, or to have been relatively work ready prior to registering for the Job Broker service. These clients were often relatively optimistic about their likelihood of obtaining work in the not too distant future. Their health may have improved significantly, or they may have already undertaken training or work experience to update their skills. Often, they had had a relatively short period away from work, and were already fairly adept at job searching and applying for jobs. Many had developed a defined strategy or approach towards work, but had experienced difficulties in establishing links with employers, which is where the adviser was, on occasion, able to offer assistance. Advisers could also offer encouragement and guidance to such clients, which could boost clients' confidence in their job search activity.

The consequences of increased confidence often meant their motivation to work had also increased, and their job search activity had intensified (or at the least, did not appear to have declined). Job Broker encouragement could also mean that clients applied for jobs that they would not otherwise have considered.

### **9.1.2 Undertaking training**

The second category - those who were undertaking training- typically included clients who had been (or in some cases still were) some distance from the labour market due to outdated or insufficient employment related skills and a lack of recent employment experience. Training being undertaken was typically related to computing and information technology, and was delivered by the Job Broker organisation, or at a local college (arranged by the Job Broker). Some people in this group, particularly younger clients, had never worked, or had a very fragmented or disjointed work history. For example, one young person with mental health conditions had only ever had a very short spell of work and another client with special needs had never been in paid employment. The benefits of attending a group based activity, with other clients, could also enhance their confidence about being in a social environment. This appeared to be particularly the case for clients for whom activity prior to registration in NDDP was predominantly home based. Some felt that they would be able to move into work fairly soon, although others recognised that it may *'take ages'* until they felt sufficiently equipped to be able to work.

### **9.1.3 Ongoing one-to-one support from advisers**

Within the third activity category - those who were receiving ongoing one-to-one contact and support from their adviser - clients tended to have the most significant labour market barriers, including issues relating to confidence, self-esteem and mental health conditions. Some required considerable direction from Job Brokers. This included, for example, identifying appropriate job search techniques or the type of work that might be suitable for them, determining the nature and extent of contact that they would have with the Job Broker, and prescribing the action or activity that was expected from the

client. They typically received fairly intensive and ongoing support and direction from the adviser, and in a few cases this served a counselling function as well as an employment advice and support function. These clients highlighted the value of having someone who understood their circumstances and needs, and was able to work with them to help them identify their strengths and address any potential weaknesses. However, the extent to which these clients had made significant steps towards work is difficult to determine, as most still appeared (to the research team) to be some relative distance from the labour market. With some exceptions, clients in this group had made relatively few (if any) job applications and tended to see work as an ideal longer-term goal rather than something that would or could happen relatively quickly.

As might be expected, clients who were still 'active' within the Job Broker service were generally satisfied with the service and support they had received. They reported that the experience of participating in the Job Broker service had generally been beneficial, despite having not (yet) secured employment. This included feeling more confident as a consequence of participating in the Job Broker service. In some cases, clients associated this with developing a one to one relationship with the Job Broker adviser, who had worked with them to identify their strengths and to provide encouragement, enabling clients to develop a job search strategy.

## **9.2 Clients who remained registered with the Job Broker, but with limited activity**

Within this group, there remained some contact with the Job Broker organisation, but this appeared to declining, or in some cases 'in limbo'. This included clients who were waiting for the Job Broker to contact them as well as clients who were expecting to contact the Job Broker when they need to.

- **clients who were waiting for the Job Broker to contact them**

Included here are those who had fairly ad hoc contact with the Job Broker, such as the Job Broker contacting the client occasionally to see how they were '*getting on*', or telephoning the client if a suitable vacancy was advertised. Other examples included those who were waiting for a place to become available on a course, as well as having completed a course and now waiting for the Job Broker to contact them to discuss the next course of action. Other clients were '*in limbo*' and were unsure about when the next contact with their adviser would be, and whether any action was expected (either on the clients' or advisers' side). These clients may have benefited from having some kind of explicit action or progress plan.

- **clients who were expected to contact the Job Broker when they needed to**

Clients in this group reported that they anticipated contacting the Job Broker when they had seen a job they wanted to apply for. Some in this group also said that they were considering whether the Job Broker was actually able to offer them the kind of support they wanted (one, for example, was considering changing to another Job Broker) as they were dissatisfied with the relative passivity on the part of the Job Broker.

## **9.3 Clients who were no longer in contact with the Job Broker, but were not in work**

There were broadly three groups of clients within this category. The first was those that had never become fully engaged with the service beyond registration, and had thus never received any services through NDDP other than perhaps an initial interview or telephone conversation (Section 8.3.1). For most people in this group, work remained a goal. The second group included those for whom contact had ended because of dissatisfaction with the service or the Job Broker organisation, most of whom were still committed to finding work (Section 8.3.2). The third group comprised clients who were no

longer in touch with the Job Broker organisations because they were no longer considering work (Section 8.3.3).

### **9.3.1 Clients who had never fully engaged with the Job Broker service**

Broadly speaking, these clients had never fully engaged with the Job Broker service for two main reasons. The first was that, following the initial contact and/or registration, for some reason unknown to the client the Job Broker did not initiate further contact with the client. At the extreme, this led the clients to questions about whether they were *'unsuitable'* for the Job Broker service, as well as having doubts about whether the Job Broker was actually *'interested'* in the client. In other cases, follow-up appointments had been cancelled or postponed (for example, due to staff sickness or absence), or there had been a significant wait between appointments, at which point clients felt that the service was not helpful to them so had ceased further contact.

The second explanation related to clients who had been making initial enquiries, but for personal or domestic reasons did not plan to use the service at the current time (although they may have returned to the service at a later date). Examples include hospitalisation, or requiring significant further recovery from an accident before being able to consider work.

There were also examples of clients who perceived at a very early stage of contact that the service offered by the Job Broker was not appropriate to their needs, for example by not offering training, or by being only offered help with job search activity. As mentioned elsewhere, these clients did not generally approach other Job Broker organisations.

### **9.3.2 Clients whose contact with the Job Broker service was unsatisfactory and so had ceased**

There were four main reasons why clients in this group were no longer in contact with the Job Broker organisation with which they had registered:

- concerns about the pace and intensity of the service
- difficulties with the frequency, continuity and regularity of contact with Job Broker advisers
- clients not accessing the services they wanted
- Job Brokers offering inadequate specialist help and support (for people with certain impairments).

Some clients who were no longer in touch with the Job Broker service continued to job search and make other efforts to move towards employment, whereas others were consequentially no longer seeking to move back to work (or at least, not at the time of the research interview). Very few had actually deregistered from the Job Broker or had subsequently approached other Job Brokers (see Chapter 6 for further information on deregistration).

- **Inappropriate pace and intensity of the service**

Some clients had thought that the pace and intensity of the service could be increased, and that progression was sometimes unduly slow. Examples given by clients included the time taking to arrange meetings, having to wait too long between appointments (up to four months), waiting a significant length of time to access a course, courses being run over too long a time period (that is, for a couple of hours on one day a week, rather than on several days a week), and ineffective job search strategies.

There were also reports of waiting a significant length of time for the Job Broker to develop or amend CVs, as well as feeling they were ready to move into work immediately but the pace of the service had been too slow. For example, one man who was relatively well skilled with a solid work history had been given an unpaid work placement at a supported employment factory, so had found alternative



paid employment without any Job Broker intervention. He believed that he had gained little from the experience, but had lost valuable time when he could have been earning.

Clients who expressed this view were mostly those who appeared to the research team to be relatively 'job ready' and enthusiastic to return to work in the not too distant future, and perhaps with access to the appropriate support and services could move back to work with relative speed and ease.

- **Difficulties with the frequency, continuity and regularity of contact with Job Broker advisers**

Some clients had experienced difficulties with the frequency, regularity and continuity of contact with their Job Broker. As reported above, there were examples of contact declining or ending completely and the client being unsure of why this was. Sometimes this had occurred after a series of contacts. In a few cases the clients recalled failing to attend appointments (usually because of a period of poor health), but the Job Broker appeared not to have attempted to recontact the client. This resulted in clients being unsure about whether to pursue the contact or not, as well as difficulties in maintaining confidence and optimism during the lengthy gaps between appointments. An example of this includes a client who had failed to keep an appointment with the Job Broker, and although still wished to remain in contact with them, felt unsure and embarrassed about recontacting the Job Broker for fear of being rejected. This scenario was also experienced by other clients (typically those with mental health conditions), one of whom commented that what he needed was an adviser to 'keep' him heading towards his goals, rather than leaving him to progress towards work alone, which invariably meant that the momentum was lost.

- **Clients not accessing the services they wanted**

Some clients who had ceased contact with their Job Broker had done so because they had not accessed the full support or services they needed. These clients tended not to be in touch with the Job Broker organisation by the time of the research interview, and some of them had only had a few contacts at the outset. Some of their needs could be fairly rudimentary such as help with interview techniques, with completing job applications and compiling CVs. In some cases clients may have not received a service because it was not offered by the Job Broker. However, there were also cases where the client's need for a service (such as help with a CV) potentially could have been met by the Job Broker, but had not. In other examples, clients were unable to distinguish how services differed from those already available through existing providers, including the local Jobcentre Plus. Some clients had actually received support from elsewhere whilst registered with the Job Broker including from a New Deal 50+ adviser, a Disability Employment Adviser, a local Action Team and another local organisation offering support to people moving into work.

Another client need that did not appear to be met was for the Job Broker to act as 'mediator' between clients and employers. Examples of clients who expressed this need included people who had been looking for work prior to registering for NDDP, but with limited success. This encompassed skilled workers, graduates, managers and other professionals, many of whom had had a solid and progressive work history until the onset of their health condition or disability and so were relatively close (in terms of labour market skills) to the job market. Most of these already had experience in searching for and applying for jobs and compiling CVs, but reported facing significant difficulties in making links with employers who would consider someone with an impairment or health condition. In some cases, getting in touch with a Job Broker was simply one element of their job search strategy, so they appeared to be relatively ambivalent towards not having accessed any suitable help from the Job Broker. However, for others this lack of linkage between them, the Job Broker and a prospective employer was a disappointing set back.

Other examples include clients who had really wanted help with job search or advice on vocational direction, but were steered towards Job Broker workshops or training courses that did not address these needs. Inappropriate or unnecessary guidance with interview techniques or CV preparation was also cited. This perceived mismatch between services clients had needed, and those they actually received, led to disillusionment and discontinuation of contact with the Job Broker.

Why these unmet needs occurred is unclear, but appears to suggest that firstly clients were unaware the service was available and thus had not raised it, and secondly that the Job Broker adviser had not fully explored clients' specific needs and thus had not explored the full range of support or services that were potentially available. Alternatively, advisers might have had a very different assessment of the clients' needs and decided that they could provide little, or no, help but had not explicitly terminated contact with the client.

- **Job Brokers offering inadequate specialist help and support**

Another reason for no longer being in touch with the Job Broker service was related to those with certain specific impairments or health conditions who had registered with a 'generalist' Job Broker. Examples here included sight and hearing impairments, and mental health conditions. For clients with sensory impairments, difficulties encountered related to problems in accessing the service itself (for example a client with visual impairments having difficulty in finding the office, and reading Job Broker material); and difficulties in communication (for example, a hearing impaired client feeling isolated because of difficulties in understanding what was going on around her in the Job Broker premises, and difficulties in making herself understood). For those with mental health difficulties, this could relate to advisers showing apparent lack of understanding about the nature and variability of the impairment. To illustrate this point, one client who suffered from mental health conditions recounted being dismissed from work experience by the Job Broker. This had been a considerable '*set back*' to the client, who felt that the Job Broker organisation had not fully understood the nature of the respondent's illness or the consequences of such actions on the clients' well-being. Nevertheless, there were a number of clients with mental health conditions who did *not* register with a 'specialist' Job Broker, but appeared to be positive about the experience, and felt that their adviser had understood their circumstances.

Clients who reported these kinds of difficulties tended to be no longer in contact with the service by the time of the research interview although a few had either taken a different route towards work (for example, attending college or undertaking voluntary work).

Amongst those who were no longer in touch with the Job Broker organisation, there was a relatively large proportion who found the experience of participating in the Job Broker service had had a negative impact. More often than not, this was related to initially having very high hopes of finding work through the service, as discussed above. This was particularly so for those who appeared, to the research team, to be less job ready, or were some distance away from the labour market. Some now reported feeling particularly disillusioned, and were concerned that if the Job Broker service had not been able to help them, then there were few other options available to them. This feeling was acute amongst those clients where it appeared that the Job Broker had broken off contact with the client. Here, clients said that they had assumed that the Job Broker could not help them any more (in a few cases, it was reported that the Job Broker themselves had advised the client that they did not have anything for them). These experiences had '*dented*' clients' confidence. Often, the arrival of support in the form of New Deal for Disabled People had come at a time when other avenues had already been explored, and clients felt that the Job Broker service offered '*at last*' some real help, only for them to feel later than they had been led on a '*wild goose chase*'.

### **9.3.3 Those who had suspended contact with the Job Broker because they were not considering work**

There were a few clients who said that they were unable to work, either at the time of registration or at the time of the research interview. Reasons for this included having only recently left hospital, recovering from an accident, undergoing intensive medical treatment or taking medication with considerable side effects (for example, extreme drowsiness), or some other personal or domestic situation that had arisen making it impossible for the client to work at that time. Very occasionally, clients had been unaware that they had registered for NDDP but had been in touch with another

division or part of the organisation already, or had been referred by a health professional to the organisation generally (rather than specifically to NDDP) apparently as part of their recovery process, but had become registered for the service. In other cases, people reported making contact with the Job Broker to explore whether they may be useful at a later date should their situation change.

## 9.4 Clients who were in work

For those clients who had experienced work since registering for NDDP, the length of time between registration and job entry was sometimes very short - on occasion within a matter of weeks - or clients had already secured employment before contact with the Job Broker. In some cases, these employment 'outcomes' can be explained by involvement in the Job Broker service, whereas in others they are only partly attributable, if at all, to participation in the NDDP programme. Thus, the Job Broker played one of three roles: supporting the client in their job search activity and job applications (Section 8.4.1); providing in-work or transitional support for clients who had already found work (Section 8.4.2); and either very limited or no recognisable role at all (Section 8.4.3).

### 9.4.1 Supporting clients to find a job

Clients in this group reported significant levels of Job Broker support which was often seen as instrumental in finding work. Some Job Brokers had identified a job whilst job searching on behalf of, or with, the client and had occasionally liaised directly with the potential employer on behalf of the client, for example arranged an interview or discussed a client's situation (although the extent of discussions regarding a client's health were unclear). Other clients had identified potential employment themselves, but had received significant support from Job Brokers in securing the job. Support included general encouragement and confidence building, application form completion and guidance on interview techniques.

Clients whose Job Broker had played a more proactive role in identifying a job were less likely to have been applying for jobs immediately before they made contact with the Job Broker. In some cases clients reported that the Job Broker had been instrumental in them obtaining work, for example, by arranging for a transfer to New Deal for 50+ (with the payment of an Employment Credit), or by providing encouragement and support to try new avenues and consider new options. Some of these clients had been out of work for a considerable length of time and although they may have previously worked in a skilled or professional job, often had outdated or limited employment-related skills. The unanimous feeling amongst this group was that without the Job Broker service and support it was unlikely they would have found work at all but would perhaps have remained '*at home trying to make my mind up what to do*'.

Those who had found their own jobs were more likely to have been actively job searching immediately before NDDP registration, including visiting the local Jobcentre Plus office and making job applications. However, the support clients received suggests that the Job Broker may have accelerated clients' transition into work. Some felt that they *might* have moved into work without any Job Broker involvement, but the regular contact with the Job Broker seemed important to many. To illustrate this, one client felt that without the Job Brokers support he would not have been mentally ready to take a job and another commented that the adviser kept his '*spirits up*'.

Generally speaking, clients did not appear to require any intensive or continued in-work support, as they felt the need to be not '*too dependant on them*'. This attitude was reflected by Job Broker advisers, who felt that it was appropriate for the service to begin to withdraw once a client was in work so they did not become dependant on the adviser. Where clients did remain in contact with the Job Broker once in work, this was usually because regular contact had been previously evident. Follow-up meeting could take place to discuss the implications of work, often in relation to advice

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about in-work benefits, tax credits, New Deal 50+ or to arrange an appointment with a Disability Employment Adviser. Occasionally clients visited their adviser, perhaps to discuss activity beyond Permitted Work. Job Brokers could also visit clients in their workplace, although this tended to be limited to discuss job search to progress on to further employment.

### **9.4.2 Providing support for clients who had already found work**

In other cases, the Job Broker adviser's role was focussed predominantly on assisting clients who had already secured employment, either before contacting the Job Broker, or around the time of registration. Advice was typically financial, including informing a client about the Disabled Person's Tax Credits, which they had not been aware of, or providing financial assistance to pay for work clothes or to cover rent which was considered '*a great help*'. An application for Permitted Work was made with one client, which would enable her to receive payment for the job she was already doing on a voluntary basis. Generally these clients had only one or two meetings with the Job Broker, but were aware that future support was available from the Job Broker if necessary.

### **9.4.3 Very limited or no Job Broker involvement in job entry**

A further group of clients reported finding work through their own efforts, for example via Jobcentre Plus or through local newspapers or existing contacts, and without any apparent intervention or support from the Job Broker. High levels of motivation towards work were evident amongst this group. Most were actively job searching when they registered with the Job Broker and some had only a few meetings with the Job Broker. This was either because the client had found work very soon after registration, or because no follow-up contacts were made by the Job Broker or client. In the latter cases, clients had felt at a relatively early stage of contact that the service was unlikely to help them, and so they continued to job search without Job Broker involvement.

Despite this group of clients having received a very limited service, a few reported finding the contact useful, for example in providing advice on Disabled Person's Tax Credit and Permitted Work rules. However, post-employment contact was not generally contemplated amongst this group, mainly because a relationship had not been established between the client and the adviser, or because the relationship or service received had been less than satisfactory. Others also felt that because they were in work, they were no longer '*on the books*' of the Job Broker, so it would be inappropriate to contact them in their current situation.

## 10 The emerging issues

This report is based on fieldwork carried out between 12 and 15 months after the first Job Broker contracts were awarded. The purpose of the qualitative research components of the overall evaluation is to explore the organisation, operation and impacts of the Job Broker service from the perspectives of key stakeholders. It is not to reach overall conclusions about the 'success' or otherwise of the NDDP national extension.

Chapter 1 sets out the principal questions that the qualitative work would address over the course of the research. Reflecting on these questions at this stage has raised a number of emerging issues that appear to warrant some consideration and which could contribute to thinking about the structure and delivery of the NDDP for the remainder of the current period of its operation to March 2004. Some issues relate to structural concerns, such as the funding arrangements for NDDP and the social security benefit system, and others deal with more operational matters, such as attracting clients and dealing with the documentary requirements of the scheme.

Summaries of the main points from each chapter of the report are presented at the head of each chapter and in synopsis in the Executive Summary. This final chapter concentrates on a discussion of the following emerging issues:

- effects of the NDDP funding arrangements
- take up and choice
- managing clients' expectations
- developing relations between Job Brokers and Jobcentre Plus
- working with employers
- adding to existing services
- gaps in the service.

### 10.1 Funding

Detailed financial information was not collected as part of the qualitative research. Nevertheless Job Broker managers and advisers, who had varying degrees of financial responsibility for job broking activities, had views and perspectives about the funding arrangements and their effects.

The principle of outcome funding found support among some Job Broker managers who commented that it could encourage more creativity in service design and promotion. There had been a wide variation in the effects of the outcome funding regime. Managers reported that how they responded to the funding regime depended partly on the relationship between the Job Broker operation and the parent organisation. In some cases, the funding arrangements had to be integrated with wider financial structures. This had given some Job Broker services a financial cushion, at least temporarily, that removed immediate concerns about covering initial and ongoing outlays. Some Job Broker organisations were prepared to experience some level of financial loss in operating Job Broker services. For other Job Brokers, cash flow problems had been experienced.

Job Brokers received different levels of funding. There was a widespread perception that the overall levels of funding were too low and that the time taken for clients to enter work and to reach sustained employment could contribute to financial difficulties. There was a feeling that the funding arrangements created unfair financial risks for some Job Broker organisations, who were required to use sometimes considerable amounts of their resources to help clients move towards work, but with no guarantee that they would be able to recoup that expenditure through outcome payments.

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The need to generate income and maintain cash flow had had a number of effects on Job Broker operations in their first year, including on:

- **Client access** - some Job Brokers had had to rethink their original ‘open to all’ policy of registering clients, and were encouraging registrations mainly from people who were job ready. This process of ‘creaming’ has been identified as a serious potential disadvantage of outcome related funding (Corden and Thornton, 2002).
- **Components of service** - some Job Brokers felt restricted in their ability to offer financial support to attend external training. Other Brokers were reviewing and changing their deployment of resources (for example making choices between taking on more clients or developing relations with employers).
- **Service delivery** - reductions in staffing levels had been made by some Job Brokers.
- **Service quality** - high client caseloads had had the effect of reducing service to clients, for example in the frequency and number of contacts.

The funding arrangements could also create adverse effects on working relations between Job Brokers and Jobcentre Plus staff. Some resentment and suspicion among Jobcentre Plus staff about easy gains, particularly when they had had some input to a successful outcome, may or may not be well-founded but is difficult to address. Increasing understanding between the different organisations about what their work actually involves might be a first step.

Some Job Brokers experienced difficulties in obtaining confirmation from clients and employers about job entries, information that is needed for claiming outcome payments from the Department (see Section 4.2). This is clearly an important issue that requires a long-term solution and needs careful consideration by policy makers and Job Brokers.

## **10.2 Take up and choice**

### **10.2.1 Take up**

Job Brokers’ experiences of the numbers of people coming forward to register with them varied. Slow take up and the characteristics of the people coming forward (such as length of time out of the labour market, and long term mental health conditions) were unexpected by some Job Brokers and they were critical that the expectations created by the Department for Work and Pensions in pre-contract negotiations had not been realised. Job Brokers had generally found the early national publicity for NDDP and the Job Broker service, organised by the Department, disappointing. However, each Job Broker had used a number of different direct and indirect promotional activities (including local newspaper and radio advertising), which had varying degrees of response. The series of mailshots from Jobcentre Plus, one of which included information about the Permitted Work rules, generated interest from potential clients. In general, although take up had been slow there had been surges in interest following the Permitted Work letter and some local publicity campaigns.

The survey of the eligible population (Woodward *et al.*, 2003) shows that despite the range of national and local publicity initiatives around half of the survey sample had not heard of NDDP or a Job Broker service in their area. It may be the case therefore that the latent demand that some Job Brokers expected to be unlocked by NDDP (see Chapter 5) remains largely latent, and that attempts to reach them need to be repeated and new ways developed. The name ‘New Deal for Disabled People’ was felt to be inappropriate and unhelpful by people who did not recognise themselves as ‘disabled’. (In the eligible population survey around half of the sample said that NDDP ‘wasn’t for me’.)

From discussions with Job Broker staff and Jobcentre Plus staff a number of early lessons emerged:

- Targeted publicity, for example to local organisations, could be a good potential source of clients.
- Word of mouth was recognised as a powerful and effective means of spreading positive messages about Job Broker services; some Job Brokers were thinking about how to promote this.
- Close working between Jobcentre Plus staff (including DEAs) and Job Brokers could promote the supply of suitable clients.
- Gateway and work focused interviews were recognised as having potential for promoting Job Broker services, but the timing of these was critical.

### **10.2.2 Choosing a Job Broker**

From the first wave of fieldwork it is apparent that one of the central features of the NDDP extension, the provision of a choice of Job Brokers to potential clients, was not working as intended. For a person to be able to exercise choice there needs to be a good information environment for them and for people advising them. The evidence from the qualitative research so far is that this did not exist for many potential clients or for DEAs and other staff in Jobcentre Plus offices.

Where a client's route to a Job Broker was direct, for example in response to advertising or a referral from a health professional, there was usually no awareness that other Job Brokers operated in the same area. Furthermore, where some choice had been exercised, this was rarely on the basis of information about the components of Job Brokers' services but on other considerations, such as ease of access to the Job Broker's premises. Only a few of the clients interviewed had found out about different Job Broker services by telephoning or visiting before making their decision.

Some DEAs and other staff in Jobcentre Plus offices reported that they felt inhibited by the requirement to offer to people only impartial information about Job Broker services and not actively to advise them. New guidance has relaxed this requirement.

One of the aims of the Job Broker scheme was that people should be able to exercise a choice of Job Broker best suited to their needs and aspirations. It is not possible from this research to conclude that some of the people interviewed would have received a better service from a different Job Broker. However, there were clients in the study group who were dissatisfied with some aspect of a Job Broker's service (see Chapter 7), and a few instances of people approaching a second Job Broker (and being happier with the new service) which suggests that some clients are possibly mismatched to their Job Broker.

More thought needs to be given to promoting choice for potential clients. National advertising and mailshots from Jobcentre Plus, more imaginative use of the NDDP Helpline (to make it more informative) and promoting greater use of the website appear to be possible vehicles for this. However, local advertising and publicity from individual Job Brokers working in a commercially competitive environment, does not lend itself to promoting choice, as it is not in the interests of a Job Broker to advertise the services of another.

## **10.3 Meeting clients' expectations**

Across all Job Brokers clients in the study group expressed a wide range of positive comments about the staff and services of Job Brokers and high levels of satisfaction with their progress towards work.

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Where dissatisfaction was expressed this was caused by their expectations about the service provided, the pace of progress, or outcomes not being met.

As shown in Chapter 6, potential clients approached the Job Broker service with a range of aspirations, and different expectations about the way in which the service would help them. Some had clear ideas about the outcome they wanted to achieve. Their aim was to get into work, they knew what work they wanted to do, and usually wanted to start as soon as possible. Others had less clear aims, and may even have been undecided about whether paid work would be suitable for them. Some people approached the service with ideas about the inputs they wanted a Job Broker to provide for them, such as training, help with CV preparation or with job searching. Others had little idea about what inputs they needed and little knowledge about what Job Brokers could offer. Clients' aims and expectations were not fixed but developed in the course of working with a Job Broker. Some people reassessed their original aims in respect of work, and some people's plans changed with changes in their personal or family circumstances after making contact with a Job Broker.

The Job Broker service, as a whole, has emerged as highly heterogeneous. Job Brokers differed in terms of their main target populations, their methods of dealing with clients, the range of direct and external services they could arrange for clients, their organisation and wider funding, and the specialisation of staff. Whether the expectations of those who use the service can be met depends on the match between what is on offer and how it is delivered within a heterogeneous service and the expectations of individual clients.

Where people have been disappointed, this has been related both to structural issues such as the components and methods of delivery of the services and support, and to substantive issues such as the appropriateness or quality of services and the way they were delivered. Structural aspects rooted in the design of a Job Broker service may be largely outside the control of the Job Broker advisers themselves, but are a focus for attention from providers and policy makers. Aspects relating to the substance of the help or advice received by clients, such as the types and quality of training offered, and the frequency of contact may be more amenable to adjustments made within the individual services.

Whatever the aims of the clients in respect of paid work and the inputs of the Job Broker service, whether clients' aims are met depends also on external factors such as the labour market and the behaviour of employers. This part of the research has not focused on the views and experiences of employers, but findings from other parts of the evaluation are of key importance here.

Improving the match between clients' expectations and the Job Broker service, and reducing the risk that potential clients may not get the service most suited to them, perhaps requires more effort to be made to inform potential clients fully about what working with a Job Broker entails, what is on offer and what is expected of them. Publicity material is one means. However, more opportunities for ensuring understanding probably occur in the early stages of contact between clients and Job Broker advisers, and in contacts with Jobcentre Plus staff including DEAs. Job Brokers themselves also have responsibilities for assessing the potential match between what they can offer and what individuals want or expect to receive. This is an area in which we can expect continuing development and change, in a changing environment of disability awareness and anti-discrimination measures.

### **10.4 Developing relations between Job Brokers and Jobcentre Plus**

At the time the fieldwork for this research was carried there was very mixed evidence about collaboration between Job Brokers and Jobcentre Plus staff.

Job Brokers reported that the Jobcentre Plus route to their services had produced fewer than expected potential clients. Apart from in Pathfinder offices few Incapacity Benefit recipients or new claimants routinely come into direct contact with Jobcentre Plus staff, other than those who deal voluntarily with



DEAs. It is to be expected that this will change when compulsory work focused interviews with new claimants are introduced nationally. Further, the relaxation of the restrictive rules initially placed on Jobcentre Plus staff about giving advice to potential clients about individual Job Brokers (introduced after the period of fieldwork for this study) can be expected to increase the flow of clients.

From the accounts of Jobcentre Plus staff and Job Broker staff it appears that there were advantages for both parties and for potential clients of close working relations. The research evidence so far suggests that where trust and confidence existed and where communications were open and frequent, then there was more likelihood of people receiving the appropriate level and type of help for them.

There is clearly scope for developing further cooperative working between Job Brokers and Jobcentre Plus staff. Particularly appreciated by DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff were a supply of up to date information about services, feedback about individual clients directed to the Job Broker service, and working jointly with 'shared' clients. Working together with a client could bring both rewards, in terms of 'points' for Jobcentre Plus office staff and outcome payments for Job Brokers. As mentioned earlier in relation to funding, building trust and understanding is a way forward. However, it is not clear which organisation should take the initiative here. Some thought therefore needs to be given to ways of stimulating and encouraging greater contact between Job Brokers and Jobcentre Plus.

## **10.5 Working with employers**

Establishing relations with and working with employers was seen as a major area for development by Job Brokers themselves and by clients (many of whom were disappointed that Job Brokers had not developed stronger links and contacts with employers). Some Job Brokers had or were planning to appoint specialist staff within the service to work with employers. As mentioned earlier Job Brokers were having to address issues about the use of limited resources, for example whether to invest in time to promote individual clients to employers (which had a limited success rate) or to develop relations with employers.

Opportunities were being taken to develop relations with specific employers (sometimes with help from Jobcentre Plus marketing teams) but this was tempered by a desire not to alienate employers who, Job Brokers felt, were often inundated with requests from diverse agencies and organisations. Particularly valued by some Job Brokers was reaching an agreement with employers whereby they get early notification of imminent vacancies. There were concerns among other Job Brokers however that this approach was not sufficiently client-led. Evidence of Job Brokers providing in work support to clients or working jointly with employers to promote job retention and sustainability was very limited in this study.

Developing productive working arrangements with employers had been an aspect of the Job Broker service that Job Brokers were giving increasing attention to, but only after the core aspects (such as setting up premises, staffing, recruiting clients) had been satisfactorily established. (This had been the same pattern of development as in the NDDP Personal Adviser pilots, Loumidis *et al.*, 2001.) It is expected that working with employers (in promoting job entries and contributing to sustained employment) will have become more developed by the time a second wave of fieldwork is undertaken.

## **10.6 Adding to existing services**

The prevailing view among Job Broker staff was that services available to disabled people had been increased and enhanced by the flexible and individually tailored nature of job broking. Job Broker organisations were also beginning to establish new relations with other providers and there was a feeling that this further added to service provision. Job Brokers also felt they were providing a different quality of service, free from the bureaucratic constraints of Jobcentre Plus and importantly

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free from any association with the benefit system or government more generally, and that this attracted people who would not have approached statutory services.

The introduction of Job Broker services can be interpreted in different ways (as described in detail in Chapter 5). For some, this was seen as adding to existing services, certainly in the sense of adding to the *quantity* of services available if not in the sense of adding much to the *range* of services. There was recognition among some DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff that Job Brokers might have contacts with some external organisations and resources that they had not developed or established themselves, which could complement what they could do for people. They also recognised that Job Brokers could have expertise in specialist areas of disability that it was not possible for them, working as generalists, to acquire.

There were conflicting views about the extent to which Job Brokers had introduced or been the catalyst for new services. There was little evidence from the research so far to suggest that the NDDP extension had generated *innovation* in services provided by Job Brokers. Job Broker staff appeared to work in similar ways to Jobcentre Plus offices (particularly DEAs) such as providing one-to-one support, vocational guidance, and facilitating training or work experience. The key point for many DEAs and other Jobcentre Plus staff was that they felt they could provide what Job Brokers were providing if they had sufficient resources of staff and money.

It will become clearer after the next wave of fieldwork whether the Job Broker scheme has stimulated new and effective ways of helping people move into paid work, or whether it is providing mostly a duplication of services already available through Jobcentre Plus.

### **10.7 Gaps in the service**

The research design for his study was not intended to identify gaps in the coverage of Job Broker services in the areas visited.

What some clients identified as a shortcoming in the service they were using was not necessarily experienced in the same way by other clients. However, it is possible to identify some aspects of service that were mentioned more than others, including help for people with specific needs and requirements, provision of financial advice, and help with job searching and dealing with employers. These are explored further below. One aspect of job broking that was rarely reported by either Job Broker staff or clients was the provision of in work support to clients who had made the move into paid employment. It is difficult to assess whether this constitutes a gap in provision or whether it is partly a reflection of timing of the research. In work support is also discussed further below.

#### **10.7.1 Specific needs and requirements**

The study included clients with hearing and visual impairments and with mental health conditions who had experienced difficulties because the Job Broker service they were dealing with had not anticipated or responded adequately to their specific needs. Problems included physical access, communication and understanding the effects of particular health conditions. For some clients the difficulties had led them to cease contact with the Job Broker.

Although it is almost a truism, it is worth repeating that people eligible for the New Deal for Disabled People exhibit a wide range in their type of health condition or impairment and its effects. To prevent the effective exclusion of groups of potential clients therefore careful attention needs to be paid by Job Brokers to anticipating and minimising all possible barriers to their involvement.

Some people also had specific needs in the type of training or job search they required. Clients in the study who made criticisms of their Job Broker in this respect included people with professional or technical employment histories, and those wanting to pursue an uncommon career path. Job Brokers perhaps need to think about how to develop ways of responding to these types of client.

### **10.7.2 Financial information**

Financial difficulties constitute one of the principal barriers for people wanting to move into employment. Many clients wanted financial advice and information, particularly about benefits and tax credits. In some cases, for example when a job opportunity presents itself, financial advice might be needed quickly. Job Brokers varied in the extent to which they saw it as their responsibility to provide financial advice directly, had access to financial information or advice packages within their wider organisation, or could access external sources of help, such as Jobcentre Plus offices or Citizens Advice Bureaux. Some thought they did not have sufficient expertise and felt unconfident about offering financial advice. To meet their clients' needs and expectations Job Brokers need to ensure that their staff can at least access financial advice if not provide it themselves.

### **10.7.3 Job searching and the transition to work**

One of the more common negative comments from clients was that Job Brokers did not provide sufficient help with job searching. Some clients wanted and expected Job Brokers to have at hand or generate for them lists of suitable vacancies, contribute substantially to preparing applications and mediate with employers on their behalf. Job Brokers differed in the approach they took to helping clients with job searching. Some had taken the view that it was in the interests of clients to take the lead role; others provided lists of vacancies obtained through Jobcentre Plus offices. Whatever the approach taken, it is important that clients have clear information about what role they will be expected to take so that misunderstandings and dissatisfaction can be avoided.

### **10.7.4 In work support**

At the time of interview relatively few people in the study group had had experience of working following their period of contact with a Job Broker. However, most of those who had moved into work had little, and sometimes no, contact with their Job Broker since starting work. It is possible that the provision of in work support is an aspect of the service that will develop further after Job Brokers have become more experienced in helping people into work, and after more clients find jobs (similar to the way in which working with employers is developing later than other service elements). However, some Job Broker staff appeared to adopt a fairly arms length approach to contacting clients in work, offering them the opportunity of making contact if any form of help is needed. Some based this approach on their experience that many people did not want to maintain contact once they had entered employment.

From the accounts of people in the study group who did *not* approach their Job Broker when they had experienced some difficulties with a job or with their finances, there is a suggestion that some might have benefited from further help or guidance. The second wave of qualitative fieldwork will allow this aspect of job broking to be explored further.

## **10.8 Concluding comments**

As mentioned earlier it is too early to attempt to draw conclusions about the performance of the Job Broker service as a whole or the extent to which it is meeting the expectations of policy makers.

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Many of the Job Brokers involved in the research still considered themselves to be in a settling in period and assessing the lessons from early experiences, or to be in a period of further development having reviewed their activities. Some have made the decision to withdraw from the provision of Job Broker services, however.

What is clear is that despite the variations in the types of organisations providing Job Broker services and in the actual services available, there was a generally high level of satisfaction expressed by many clients across all Job Brokers. In particular, the number of positive comments about Job Broker advisers themselves in respect of their enthusiasm, commitment and support provided was striking.

The huge variety in the characteristics of potential clients for Job Broker services and in their expectations and aspirations has already been mentioned. It is hard to envisage therefore one organisation that could satisfy the demands of every client. The challenge for the individual Job Broker services is to respond to such variation as best it can, and the challenge for government is to provide the environment (especially funding) that allows Job Brokers to provide a flexible and responsive service, and to ensure that there is a range of services from which potential clients can make a reasonable choice.

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## **Annex A Programmes**

### **WORKSTEP**

WORKSTEP replaced the Supported Employment Programme in April 2001. Currently the programme supports around 22,500 disabled employees in mainstream employment and in factories and businesses established to employ disabled people. WORKSTEP is aimed at disabled people who have more complex barriers to finding and keeping work but who, with the right support, can work effectively and develop in their job. WORKSTEP has the objective to encourage progression into unsupported employment where appropriate for the individual.

### **WORK PREPARATION**

Work Preparation is an individually tailored programme designed to help people with health conditions or disabilities return to work following a period of sickness or unemployment. It can also help people who are at risk of losing their job because of their disability by helping them to overcome difficulties that are affecting their work.

Work Preparation aims to help people overcome obstacles that are preventing them from finding suitable employment, and to give individuals a chance to "test the water" after a prolonged period out of work. Suitable work placements are found for an individual to experience work in a real environment and to meet an individual's particular needs. Work Preparation can also provide in-house courses in personal development and confidence building. The programme may last from a few days to 13 weeks, six weeks being the average length.

### **EMPLOYMENT ZONES**

Employment Zones began operating from April 2000 and continued until March 2003. They were set up to tackle problems faced by areas where long-term unemployment is particularly high and persistent. Employment Zones aimed to deliver innovative solutions to these problems, focusing firmly on individuals and their needs and were designed to help long-term unemployed people over a 2 year period, across 15 Zones.

Employment Zones were run by Delivery Agents, who came from the public, private or voluntary sector (or a combination of these). They worked with participants to make them job ready by developing an Action Plan which will set out the steps that should be followed to increase their employability. Participants were expected to follow their action plan and undertake these activities which will help them get and keep work e.g. education or training, work experience or help in becoming self-employed.

### **WORK BASED LEARNING FOR ADULTS**

Work Based Learning for Adults (in England – there are similar programmes in Scotland and Wales) is a voluntary training programme aimed mainly at people aged 25 and over who have been unemployed for six months or more and are claiming certain benefits. Certain groups, including disabled people, are eligible for immediate access to the programme. There are four elements.

- Basic Employability Training for people with severe literacy and numeracy problems. Provision for up to 26 weeks includes development of motivational and other soft skills; literacy, numeracy and communication skills; and job focused occupational training and work placements.

- Short Job Focused Training for largely job ready people who lack specific work-related or soft skills required by local employers. Provision for up to six weeks, usually of 30 hours per week, is a mix of developing and refreshing occupational or work-related skills, work placement, and support with job search activities.
- Longer Occupational Training to help gain or up-date occupational skills needed to fill local skill shortages. Provision for between seven and 52 weeks (average 14 weeks) is an individually tailored mix of study for qualifications, work placement, support to develop soft skills, basic skills training and job search. Clients attend for a minimum of 21 hours per week.
- Self-employment Preparation. Stage 1 is advice and information. Stage 2 includes further one-to-one support, production of a business plan and a four-week short course normally attended one day per week. Stage 3 allows for up to 13 weeks test trading while retaining benefits. Training in bookkeeping, cash flow, marketing and VAT is available.