

Department for Work and Pensions

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WORKSTEP evaluation case studies: Exploring the design, delivery and performance of the WORKSTEP Programme

Ann Purvis, James Lowrey and Lynn Dobbs

A report of research carried out by the Centre for Public Policy, Northumbria University on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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List of abbreviations

ALI	Adult Learning Inspectorate
BASE	British Association for Supported Employment
DEA	Disability Employment Adviser
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
Estyn	HM Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales.
ESF	European Social Fund
FAM	Financial Appraisal Monitoring
FSG	Factory Support Grant
IB	Incapacity Benefits
IBPA	Incapacity Benefit Personal Adviser
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
MI	Management Information
NAO	National Audit Office
NDDP	New Deal for Disabled People
OGC	Office of Government Commerce
ODR	Organisational Design Review

RLSB	Royal London Society for the Blind
RNIB	Royal National Institute for the Blind.
SEP	Supported Employment Programme
SLA	Service Level Agreements
SPRU	Social Policy Research Unit
SPS	Sheltered Placement Scheme
SEPACS	Supported Employment Programme Advice and Consultancy Service

Summary

WORKSTEP is part of a broad range of programmes and schemes funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which aim to help disabled people find and retain work. These programmes are managed by Jobcentre Plus, an executive agency of the DWP, and delivered by a range of organisations in the public, private and not for profit sector.

WORKSTEP is a supported employment programme, aimed at disabled people facing the most significant or complex barriers to finding and keeping a job, who with the right support can work effectively. During 2004/05, around 27,000 disabled people were supported through the Programme by around 200 provider organisations. Supported employees on WORKSTEP work either in jobs in the open labour market, via supported placements, or within supported businesses, established to employ disabled people. WORKSTEP aims to help people progress to unsupported employment where this is the right option for them.

DWP contracted the Centre for Public Policy, Northumbria University, to undertake a programme evaluation via a series of case studies aiming to examine the design, delivery and performance of the WORKSTEP Programme. Fieldwork was carried out over a period of ten months (February – November 2005) via a series of 17 main case studies based around WORKSTEP provider organisations.

Case study findings

The evaluation highlighted numerous examples of supported employees' lives being transformed by the opportunity to work and by being given assistance to sustain this and progress within it. WORKSTEP clearly provides invaluable support to many people who would be unlikely to find and sustain employment via any other route.

Overall, supported employees were very positive about their involvement with the Programme and many highlighted numerous personal and social benefits, in addition to the financial rewards they derive from their work. These benefits link back to issues identified as desirable outcomes of participation in the Programme in

previous DWP research¹, and suggest that generally, WORKSTEP is meeting the requirements of those it aims to support.

The positive outcomes for many supported employees are, to a large extent, due to the commitment of staff within providers, and the supportive cultures found within many of these organisations. The evaluation highlighted this to be one of the most striking features of WORKSTEP Programme delivery. The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) Chief Inspector also highlighted this in their Annual Report for 2004-05.

'The dedication and enthusiasm of staff continues to be a great asset to WORKSTEP.'

Prior to WORKSTEP, disability employment programmes were underpinned by a principle of compensating for the limited productivity levels of supported employees. WORKSTEP offered a radical shift in focus, concentrating on providing the right kinds of development so that individuals can reach their full potential and, where appropriate, work in mainstream employment. Key changes introduced included:

- changed eligibility criteria including a requirement to work 16 hours or more (under the previous programme the minimum was eight hours);
- output-related funding arrangements for service providers and an aim to decrease dependence on wage subsidies to employers;
- an emphasis on more individually tailored support for supported employees via tailored development plans;
- introduction of Quality Standards for WORKSTEP providers.

These changes were significant and presented a considerable challenge for providers, which the majority have responded to in a positive way. There has been significant progress in many areas, most notably the introduction of quality standards and the development of the support available. However, some of the modernisation objectives for WORKSTEP remain to be fully achieved and the evaluation has also highlighted potential areas for improvement in the management and design of the Programme to enhance overall quality and effectiveness.

Whilst WORKSTEP is a relatively small programme, it encompasses a very complex series of management arrangements and delivery structures that have evolved over a considerable period of time. WORKSTEP management arrangements encompass three systems for the management of relationships between Jobcentre Plus and providers, i.e. Remploy, nationally contracted providers and regionally contracted

¹ Meah and Thornton (2005), *Desirable Outcomes of WORKSTEP: user and provider views*, DWP.

providers. The Programme is also characterised by differences in the method by which WORKSTEP support is delivered and the type of provider organisation i.e.:

- service delivery method:
 - supported businesses²;
 - supported placements;
 - a combination of a supported business and supported placements;
- type of provider organisation:
 - local authority;
 - voluntary/not for profit sector;
 - Remploy;
 - private sector.

The fundamental differences in these arrangements are so significant that it can be difficult to regard provision as a single Programme, however, the variety of providers and delivery models offers a very flexible approach to service delivery which is a key strength of current provision.

The differences in the management arrangements for the Programme may be more problematic. The number of systems in place for the management of WORKSTEP provision, including Remploy, does not facilitate a consistent system for monitoring delivery or managing service development. There are also issues regarding the current funding structures, including the differences in the funding of WORKSTEP provision (including Remploy), which does not facilitate a consistent system for rewarding providers or offer significant incentives for the progression of supported employees.

Overall the disparity in both the funding and management arrangements has led to the sense of a *'lack of a level playing field'* within WORKSTEP provision. In addition, it presents significant difficulties when attempting any systematic review of the Programme, and the comparison of provider performance is problematic. The lack of fundamental management information on supported employees, providers and Programme performance is also a significant weakness. Performance targets are lacking and require development, including a measure of in-work development for supported employees.

The evaluation also identified issues with regards to current Programme design including a lack of clarity in the current eligibility criteria and fit with other disability employment programmes.

² The WORKSTEP Handbook for Providers states that to qualify as a supported business, the provider must ensure that at least 50 per cent of employees are *'people with disabilities who have been assessed as eligible for entry to WORKSTEP'*.

Main recommendations

Maintain commitment of staff and flexibility of provision

Any development of WORKSTEP should safeguard the strengths identified within Programme delivery, to ensure a personalised service to meet the needs of individual supported employees. In particular, the flexibility and range of support that is available to supported employees, and the personal commitment of provider staff should be maintained.

Clarify eligibility criteria and strengthen gatekeeping

It would be helpful to clarify the exact nature of the customer group, which the Programme is aimed at, and to ensure greater consistency in some of the eligibility criteria between WORKSTEP and other programmes. Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) have a crucial role to play in ensuring that customers are both eligible and suitable for WORKSTEP support. The training, guidance, and support available to them should ensure that they have a clear understanding of all disability programmes and can refer customers to the most appropriate level of support.

The retention and self-referral routes onto the Programme need to be more closely monitored. Adequate mechanisms and resources should be available to ensure that those referred to WORKSTEP are eligible and suitable, and 'cherry picking' of easier to help supported employees does not occur.

Review programme design and rationalise provision

There are some clear overlaps in provision and it is recommended that the rationalisation of all current disability employment programmes is considered. This could offer a flexible modular approach, which should provide a more coherent service to disabled people seeking work, and better value for money in the management of provision. Such an approach could offer a number of components, including:

- pre-work support for those who are not job ready, such as that which is currently delivered by Work Preparation and WORKSTEP;
- help for the job ready to find and secure work;
- short- to medium-term support for those who require initial assistance when they commence work, with a strong emphasis on progression into open employment;
- longer-term support for those requiring it, recognising that within this group there will be some who are unable to progress to open employment.

Ideally, providers could be contracted to provide a range of these services to ensure a seamless service to supported employees. Some of the current requirements regarding minimum hours worked, contract length and self-employment should be reviewed as part of any move to a new model of Provision.

Review management arrangements

There are a number of areas for consideration with regards to the development of current management arrangements. These recommendations are based on the arrangements in place with the existing Programme, although they should also be considered as part of any wider review of disability employment programmes.

Strengthen leadership and accountability

Clear leadership and direction for the Programme appeared limited, and lines of accountability for Programme performance and development are ambiguous. Clarification of responsibilities within this area should be considered to facilitate the successful implementation of any future change or improvement plans. Better information for supported employees and their employers should also be developed to give details of the Programme, the types of support available and how to raise any concerns about provision.

Harmonise management arrangements

The harmonisation of Programme arrangements should be considered for the future, in particular arrangements for monitoring performance, and the production of comparable performance information. The regional model for contracting and management arrangements appears to offer the most robust model for monitoring delivery and matching provision with local needs. The development of a model, which would ensure national provision is appropriately linked into locally based systems, may offer a positive way forward.

Review funding structures

A number of concerns with the current funding structure have been highlighted and consideration should be given to the review and development of this area. This may include development of a system which would offer appropriate levels of payment to providers for all aspects of the work they carry out with supported employees, such as pre-employment work if required. There should also be some critical review of ongoing monthly payments where little activity occurs, such as for the long-term support for 'low maintenance' supported employees, and consideration of incentives for progression of supported employees.

Improve management information and performance measurement

The implementation of effective systems to capture, analyse and report Programme management information is a priority, and it would be helpful to incorporate the development of common performance measures for all Providers. Measurement of Programme quality and 'in programme' performance should also be considered, including further development and piloting of a tool to measure in work progression, (distance travelled towards open employment).

Continued role for the functions supported businesses provide and review placement provision

It is recommended that an ongoing role for the functions that some supported businesses provide within WORKSTEP Provision is acknowledged, and opportunities to build on best practise in this area could be developed.

Two distinct approaches to the provision of supported placements have developed via an 'employment agency' and a more individualised approach. More evidence on the nature and effectiveness of the two approaches would be helpful to assess their relative benefits, although it can be acknowledged that the agency approach of developing service level agreements with large employers would not be suitable for every locality.

1 Introduction

WORKSTEP is part of a broad range of programmes and schemes funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which aim to help disabled people find and retain work. These programmes are managed by Jobcentre Plus, an executive agency of the DWP, and delivered by a range of organisations in the public, private and not for profit sector. The largest provider of WORKSTEP is Remploy, which operates as a company limited by guarantee and is a non-departmental government body.

WORKSTEP is a supported employment programme, aimed at disabled people facing the most significant or complex barriers to finding and keeping a job, who with the right support can work effectively. During 2004/05 around 27,000 disabled people were supported through the Programme by around 200 provider organisations. Supported employees on WORKSTEP work either in jobs in the open labour market, via supported placements, or within supported businesses, established to employ disabled people. WORKSTEP aims to help people progress to unsupported employment where this is the right option for them.

DWP contracted the Centre for Public Policy, Northumbria University, to carry out two linked research projects focusing on the WORKSTEP Programme. The first of these projects was to undertake a programme evaluation via a series of case studies to examine programme design along with the delivery and performance of WORKSTEP. The second project focused on Programme Modernisation Funding in order to evaluate the delivery of the funding and the nature and impact of activities and investments arising from it.

1.1 Structure of the report

This report presents the findings arising from the case studies with Chapter 2 aiming to offer some background to supported employment in Britain and the context within which WORKSTEP is currently operating. It also offers details of the research aims and methodology for this evaluation. Chapter 3 reviews the design of WORKSTEP, in particular issues regarding Programme eligibility and where it fits with other disability employment programmes. Chapter 4 goes on to examine

Programme management and contracting structures, with Chapter 5 and 6 focusing on Programme delivery. Chapter 5 reviews entry to the Programme and the support delivered by WORKSTEP Providers, with Chapter 6 offering some analysis of the different models of service delivery and types of provider organisation.

In order to offer pertinent conclusions and recommendations within the individual areas of review (Programme design, management and delivery), these are highlighted at the end of the relevant chapters. These conclusions are then reiterated in Chapter 7 to offer an overview of the evaluation conclusions and recommendations for the Programme as a whole.

2 Background and context

2.1 An overview of supported employment programmes

Although WORKSTEP was introduced in April 2001, it is a successor to a longstanding series of 'supported employment' programmes for disabled people. It is helpful to appreciate this context in order to understand the complexities of provision within the current Programme. The RLSB/RNIB publication 'Supported Employment: towards a national view'³ offers a useful summary of the development of service provision prior to WORKSTEP.

It describes how supported employment within Britain dates back to the late 18th and early 19th century, with charity-funded home working welfare schemes for the blind. Provision was further developed in the early part of the 20th century, with workshops offering employment to disabled ex-servicemen, although they were still regarded as welfare-based rather than commercial employment. The development of such workshops for the blind led to a statutory duty being given to Local Authorities to provide supported employment for people with a visual impairment.

Later development was also a result of post-war requirements, and the recognition that supported workshops could develop on an industrial scale. The Tomlinson Committee report of 1943 articulated the idea of supported employment as a combination of welfare and 'real work' with the aim of rehabilitation. Thus, following training and the experience of work in a supported environment, it was hoped that entry into mainstream employment would be possible for the majority of wartime disabled people.

These views were embodied in the Disabled Persons (Employment) Act of 1944, which gave powers for the public funding of supported employment. This covered provision via local authorities, the voluntary sector and Remploy, a public body set up for this purpose.

³ Yates, E. (1998), *Supported Employment – towards a national view*. Royal London Society for the Blind, Royal National Institute for the Blind.

Thus, the Tomlinson Committee and the 1944 Act set up the basis for current supported employment provision. By building on existing arrangements it cemented a tripartite structure, local authorities, voluntary sector and Remploy, rather than introducing a unified approach. It also sought to apply the concept of supported employment as 'work' oriented onto the more welfare-based provision of local authorities and the voluntary sector, although in practice the concept of supported employment remained closely associated with welfare and therapy.

Subsequent reviews aimed to further develop provision along these lines, with the 1958 Disabled Persons (Employment) Act transferring responsibility from the Ministry of Health to the Ministry of Labour. The concept of 'progression' was also articulated more clearly during the 1960s. This described a staged approach to rehabilitation offering employment training in a supported workplace, followed by further experience and training in a sheltered group or 'enclave' within the 'open' workplace, which would hopefully lead to mainstream employment.

Support for such enclaves became Government policy in the early 1970s, and whilst they did offer an alternative to working within supported factories, they continued to limit the options open to disabled workers, and did not fully integrate disabled workers into mainstream employment. In an attempt to address this, the Sheltered Placement Scheme was introduced in 1985. Whilst this was fundamentally an enclave scheme it broadened the types of work for which placements were available.

More recently the Sheltered Placement scheme was replaced by the Supported Employment Programme (SEP) in 1994, which amalgamated supported placements with supported workshops aiming to provide more consistency and flexibility in provision.

2.2 Introduction of WORKSTEP

In April 2001, a number of key changes were made to SEP, aimed at further modernising service provision, and the Programme was re-launched as WORKSTEP. The changes included:

- changed eligibility criteria including a requirement to work 16 hours or more (under SEP the minimum requirement was eight hours);
- output-related funding arrangements for service providers and an aim to decrease dependence on wage subsidies to employers;
- an emphasis on more individually tailored support for supported employees via tailored development plans;
- introduction of Quality Standards for WORKSTEP providers.

WORKSTEP still aims to provide substantial long-term assistance for those who need it and aims to target disabled people with more complex needs. Thus, although

there is an increased emphasis on progression and output funding, providers are expected to continue to support people with a range of needs, including those with the greatest support needs.

However despite these numerous developments, WORKSTEP provision has maintained a significant degree of diversity within its delivery structures, i.e:

- the method by which WORKSTEP support is delivered:
 - supported businesses;
 - supported placements;
 - a combination of a supported business and supported placements,
- the type of provider organisation:
 - local authority;
 - voluntary/not for profit sector;
 - Remploy;
 - private sector.

These divisions contribute to some fundamental differences in the management and delivery of the WORKSTEP Programme, which are described in more detail in the following chapters which report the findings from the case studies. The variety of providers and delivery models offers a very flexible approach to service delivery, which Section 3.4 highlights as a key strength of current provision, although the differences in the management of the Programme may be more problematic. Chapter 4 discusses issues related to Programme management in more detail.

2.3 Organisational and policy context

2.3.1 Jobcentre Plus structural change

The evaluation was carried out during a time of major structural changes within Jobcentre Plus. The results of an organisational design review (ODR) were published a few months into the work of the evaluation. Some of the changes announced, that had a direct impact on the management of WORKSTEP, were implemented before the end of the project. In particular, the staff who formed the WORKSTEP Policy Team were relocated across a number of divisions, and the operational responsibility for WORKSTEP regional contract management was moved to Jobcentre Plus districts.

This shift in contract management was announced during the summer of 2005 and whilst it was implemented fairly rapidly in a small number of regions, final arrangements remain unclear in a number of regions. However, given the clear downward pressure on Jobcentre Plus staffing numbers this may mean that any shift in responsibility could result in reduced staff resources to undertake this role.

2.3.2 Developments in policy

At the time of the evaluation a major focus of Government welfare-to-work policies for disabled people is the ongoing reform of incapacity benefits. Publication of the Welfare Reform Green Paper and related strategic aims to help disabled people into employment will generate extra demand for support via all programmes which aim to help disabled people find and retain work.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has, therefore, been taking forward a more wide ranging strategic review of employment services for disabled people, including the related Jobcentre Plus adviser roles and specialist service provision, such as WORKSTEP. This review is aiming to inform the establishment of a more responsive and coherent range of services, which deliver better value for money.

2.4 Research aims

The WORKSTEP evaluation case studies aimed to:

- examine the design and delivery of the WORKSTEP Programme;
- explore the performance of WORKSTEP at a number of organisational levels;
- assess the effectiveness of the Programme at enabling disabled people to achieve successful employment outcomes and wider social objectives;
- develop recommendations to take forward organisational improvements in the WORKSTEP Programme;
- develop methodologies to consider longitudinal aspects of the research.

2.5 Methodology

Fieldwork was carried out over a period of ten months (February – November 2005) via a series of 17 main case studies based around WORKSTEP provider organisations. Eleven sites were selected from regionally contracted providers, one from each of the Jobcentre Plus regions with a further six from national providers, (two nationally contracted and four Remploy sites.)

Initially, it was planned that one of the case studies would cover six of the very small providers (i.e. with a contract size of less than ten places). However, during the course of the project it was agreed that the original sample of three Remploy sites would be increased to four, and only one very small provider was included. A visit to an additional contracted provider was also agreed following a request to include a provider who was judged to offer outstanding WORKSTEP provision following their Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) inspection, so that in total, 19 provider sites were involved in the study.

Data was collected via an analysis of management information on the outputs of the current Programme and other documentary review. Data was also collected through interviews across a range of stakeholders:

- WORKSTEP Policy Team;
- WORKSTEP Quality and Contract Teams;
- Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs);
- provider organisations;
- employers;
- supported employees;
- ALL staff.

2.5.1 Selection of sites

A range of criteria was considered when selecting the sites:

- provider type:
 - Remploy (Interwork and supported business sites⁴), local authority, not for profit organisation, private sector;
 - supported businesses and/or supported placements⁵;
- provider contract type and size:
 - Remploy, national contractors, regional contractors;
 - very large organisations, large, medium, small and very small providers (defined in Section 9.1);
- excellent/innovative providers:
 - as identified by WORKSTEP Contract Managers;
 - outstanding as identified by ALL;
- performance:
 - contractual, e.g. occupancy levels, conversions from starts to jobs, progressions (although there were some difficulties in obtaining this data):
- longstanding and newer providers;

⁴ Remploy consists of a number of supported businesses and Remploy Interwork a specialist employment agency delivering WORKSTEP supported placements.

⁵ Where a provider directly employed supported employees in jobs that formed part of their core activities, (e.g. a local authority provider that has a WORKSTEP supported employee working within their housing department) they were, for the purposes of the study, classified as working within a supported business rather than on a placement.

- geographical spread including urban/rural split;
- timing of recent or planned AL/Estyn inspections;
- other research demands on providers, e.g. National Audit Office (NAO) study.

This large number of variables, and potential overlap with the NAO study⁶ presented some challenges in terms of sampling as, after all the factors were taken into consideration, a relatively small number of providers were left to sample from in some regions.

Further details of the case study sample can be found in Appendix A.

2.5.2 Case study process

Initial discussions were held with the DWP Project Manager, and a representative of the WORKSTEP Policy team to determine how best to approach providers. It was agreed that Contract Managers were the key stakeholders to facilitate successful access to the providers' sites, based on their ongoing relationship with these organisations. Contract Managers were briefed about the research at one of their regular meetings and following this, written briefing documents were circulated to highlight the proposed research process. Providers were also informed of the research via the WORKSTEP Extranet, which is maintained by Jobcentre Plus to disseminate information to providers. Copies of the briefing documents can be found in Appendix B.

Figure 2.1 illustrates an outline of the process for each case study. Once sampling was completed, initial contact with the provider site, seeking their agreement to participate in the research, was made via the Contract Manager. When agreement was obtained, a range of documents were also requested from both the Contract Team and the sampled provider. Details of the request are highlighted in the briefing documents (Appendix B).

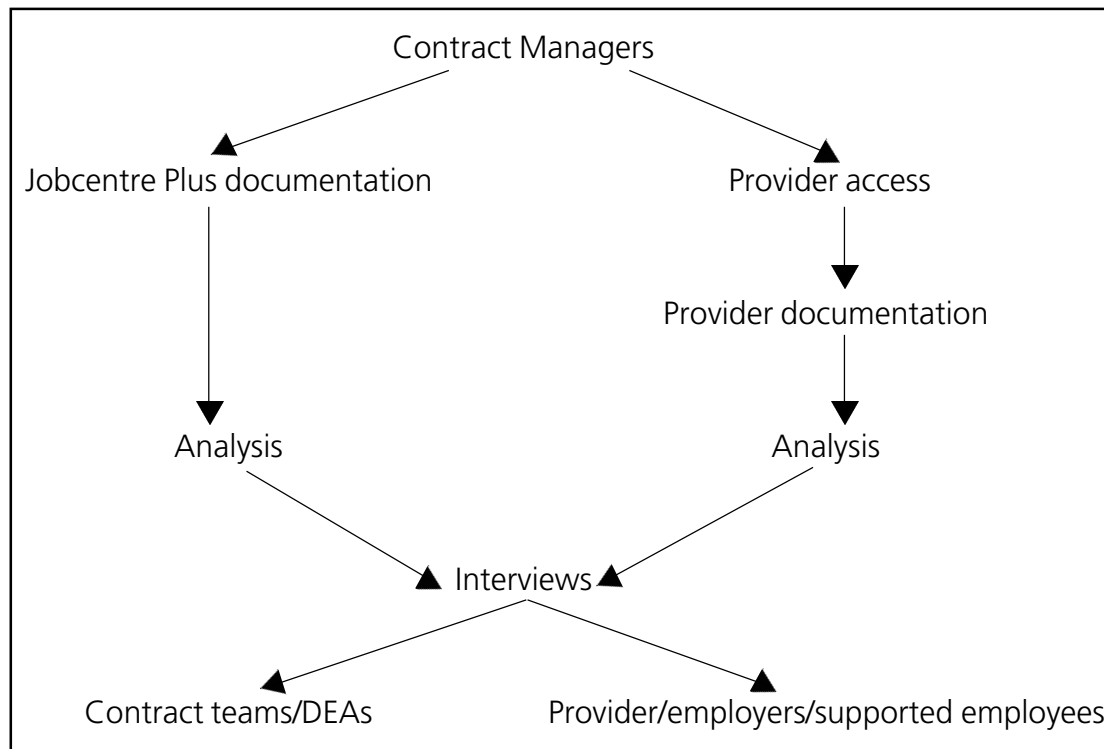
Where possible the interviews with the Contract Team/Manager were carried out prior to those at the provider site. In some cases this was with a single individual and in others it involved discussions with two or more members of the Contract Team. These interviews, along with the background documentation, often highlighted supplementary issues regarding the sampled provider, which were followed up during the visit.

Interviews were then carried out with a range of provider organisation staff, including managerial and administrative staff and those who worked directly with WORKSTEP supported employees (referred to here as support workers). In the case of supported businesses, those responsible for business activities and the supervision of the supported employees who worked there were interviewed.

⁶ National Audit Office (2005), *Gaining and retaining a job: the Department for Work and Pensions' support for disabled people.*

The numbers of interviews involved varied depending upon the size and nature of the provider. Where supported placements were offered a number of the external employers were also interviewed.

Figure 1.1 WORKSTEP case study process



In addition to this, one of the DEAs who may make referrals to the provider site was interviewed in each Jobcentre Plus region.

Providers offering supported placements were asked to facilitate access to the employers they had arranged placements with, and all providers were asked to facilitate access to the WORKSTEP employees they supported. A number of factors were considered before it was decided to seek access to supported employees in this way. These included concerns that providers might be selective about the supported employees who were involved and, if the initial request for the interview came via the provider, supported employees might be wary of expressing any negative views of the support they received. However, there were also concerns that a number of the supported employees are vulnerable individuals who might find an interview difficult or distressing. It was felt that providers were best placed to ensure that these individuals were not approached.

The involvement of the provider also ensured that any particular needs, such as sign language interpretation, could be identified in advance and appropriate arrangements made.

Supported employees were usually interviewed at their workplace or at provider organisation premises, with a smaller number of interviews taking place within

supported employees' homes. Organisations and researchers working with people who have a learning disability were consulted prior to the case studies as around one-third of supported employees reported 'learning disabilities' as their primary impairment. These discussions indicated that carrying out the interviews within the workplace was helpful for people with learning disabilities as it offered a clear context for the discussion with the researcher.

All those involved were assured of the confidential nature of the interviews, and that neither individuals, individual provider organisations nor Jobcentre Plus regions would be named in any ensuing discussions or reports.

The interview schedules for each of the stakeholders, details on numbers of interviews undertaken and a profile of the supported employees involved can be found in Appendices C to F. Supported employee and provider interviews were carried out face-to-face, as were the majority of Contract Managers interviews. Employer interviews were carried out by telephone and face to face, and all DEAs were interviewed by telephone.

2.5.3 Data analysis

As highlighted above, documentary materials were requested from both the Contract Managers and provider organisations. This was reviewed prior to the case study and provided background information on the provider and their delivery of WORKSTEP. It also identified a range of supplementary issues that could then be raised as part of the interview process if required.

Permission to record interviews was sought, and in the majority of cases obtained. A small number of supported employees were happy to be interviewed but preferred not to have the discussion recorded. In these cases, notes were taken via the tabular interview schedules.

The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, and reviewed, along with interview notes, to identify key themes. A coding framework linked to the key themes identified, and incorporating areas of interest highlighted within the research specification and proposal, was then devised and the interview transcriptions coded accordingly. Tables were then constructed for each stakeholder group, which identified the key themes, with rows for the insertion of a summary of the coded data from the individual interviews.

A final stage of analysis was carried out which aimed to highlight patterns within and across the various stakeholders, both within and across case studies.

2.6 Related discussions

In addition to the stakeholders identified in the original study design, a number of organisations have approached the research team regarding the evaluation. Discussions have been held with these individuals from staff and employer organisations, (the National League of the Blind and Disabled section of Community

and the National Association for Supported Employment (NASE) now British Association for Supported Employment (BASE)⁷, and from a number of WORKSTEP providers not sampled as part of the case studies.

This input has not formally fed into the research process but the research team found these related discussions offered valuable insights into issues related to the Programme. In particular it highlighted the high level of interest and the commitment of the individuals involved with the Programme to ensuring the success of its ongoing development.

⁷ BASE was formed following the merger of the Association for Supported Employment (AfSE) and the NASE. BASE is a membership organisation for supported employment agencies and supported businesses in the UK.

3 Programme design

3.1 Supported Employment Programme (SEP) to WORKSTEP

The changes to previous supported employment programmes are highlighted in Section 2.1, and the modernisation of Supported Employment Programme (SEP) to introduce WORKSTEP was seen to signal a radical shift in focus. Previous programmes were underpinned by a principle of compensating for the limited productivity levels of supported employees, whereas the premise for WORKSTEP concentrated on providing the right kinds of development so that individuals can reach their full potential and, where appropriate, work in mainstream employment.

Table 3.1 offers the Jobcentre Plus description of key changes to the Programme introduced with WORKSTEP, and highlights the objectives associated with these changes.

Table 3.1 Key programme changes

	SEP	WORKSTEP	Objective of change
1 Changes to the eligibility criteria	Based entry on an estimate of candidate's 'productivity'.	Criteria identify disabled people facing more complex employment barriers, who are not immediately ready for independent work and require sustained support, focusing on people with a disability claiming incapacity benefits and long-term unemployed people.	To target those people who will benefit from the programme most.

Continued

Table 3.1 Continued

	SEP	WORKSTEP	Objective of change
2 Targets for progression to unsupported employment	None.	From 1 April 2001, contractors were required to progress at least ten per cent of existing supported employees into mainstream employment in each of the subsequent two years and at least 30 per cent of new entrants within two years of the date the person starts on the programme.	Challenging but achievable targets for progression into mainstream employment (includes a managed programme of support for both the former supported employee and the employer for a minimum of six months after progression.)
3. Output related funding	Funding related to occupancy.	Funding relates to occupancy, key stages and outcomes.	To encourage investment in developing the skills and employability of all people in supported employment and allow those achieving greater success in helping people to progress into mainstream work to expand their service and provide for greater numbers.
4. Quality standards for Programme delivery	No behaviour-defining standards.	Implementation by provider of standards defined by a Quality Standards Framework.	Ensure consistency across the country, underpin numerical achievements and drive forward continuous improvement.
5. More individual support	Provide 'safe' environment for supported employees.	1) develop and improve job skills and employability, including the ability to work with others and to sustain a job; 2) meet the requirements of disabled people facing the most significant barriers to working, who need continuing support over a period; 3) encourage personal development and promote independence for disabled people; and 4) enable individuals to work effectively in a job, focusing on their and their employers' requirements.	Improve support and maximise potential for progression.

Continued

Table 3.1 Continued

	SEP	WORKSTEP	Objective of change
6. Decreasing dependence on wage subsidy	Used wage subsidy as primary means of encouraging employers to retain customers.	Avoids use of wage subsidy in favour of individual support described above.	Ensure focus on customer support, encouraging personal development and promoting independence for disabled people.

3.1.1 Changes to the eligibility criteria

This change aimed to ensure that the Programme was targeted at those people who would benefit most i.e. disabled people (within the meaning of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)) who face the most complex barriers to finding and keeping work. However, when eligibility criteria were discussed with stakeholders two key issues were highlighted which suggest that further development is required to ensure that the Programme does target those who would gain most benefit from it.

The first is the complexity and subjectivity associated with the definition of complex barriers, and the second is the difference between suitability and eligibility for the Programme, and both of these issues are discussed in more detail in Section 3.2.

3.1.2 Targets for progression to unsupported employment

When WORKSTEP was first introduced, there were expectations that the new Programme would facilitate a high rate of supported employee progression into open employment (around 30 per cent of new entrants within two years). Whilst there are some difficulties regarding the generation of Programme management information, highlighted in Section 4.2, so that it is not possible to give a totally accurate assessment of performance, Jobcentre Plus currently reports a progression rate of around four per cent.

Recent Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) analysis suggests, however, that data produced for contracted providers from manually collected Jobcentre Plus figures offers only a crude measure of total progressions, and is under-reporting Programme performance in this area. This is discussed further in Section 4.2.3.

Overall, whilst the Programme may be some way from the 30 per cent target that was set in April 2001, it is clear that there has been significant movement towards this model, and away from the very static situation within SEP. The majority of WORKSTEP providers had very clear plans to develop this area, and many demonstrated considerable progress towards increased progression rates.

3.1.3 Output-related funding

The introduction of output-based funding aimed to encourage investment in developing the skills and employability of supported employees and to allow the

providers achieving greater success in helping people to progress into mainstream work, to expand their service and to provide the Programme to greater numbers.

A number of issues regarding the current funding structure are discussed in more detail in Section 4.3, although, overall, there was a consensus amongst stakeholders that the current structure does not offer sufficient incentive for contracted providers to prioritise progression.

3.1.4 Quality standards for Programme delivery

The introduction of quality standards for providers offered another major challenge for the new Programme and it is clear that considerable efforts have been made to develop individuals, organisations and systems to support quality assurance systems and a culture of quality improvement within WORKSTEP provision. Although there were some difficulties associated with the introduction of quality standards and inspection the overwhelming majority of stakeholders described the impact in a very positive way. These issues are discussed in more detail in Section 4.4.

3.1.5 More individual support

Sections 5.3 and 5.4 below highlight the wide range of individual support delivered by provider organisations, and the systems of development planning that are in place to facilitate this. Overall, the study highlighted numerous examples of supported employees' lives being transformed by the opportunity to work and by being given assistance to sustain this and progress within it. WORKSTEP clearly provides invaluable support to many people who would be unlikely to find and sustain employment via any other route, and this area is clearly one of the significant successes associated with the modernised Programme.

3.1.6 Decreasing dependence on wage subsidy

As highlighted in Section 5.3.7, the support offered to employers was varied, although financial assistance was the most commonly found within the study. Generally, it appeared that financial assistance was offered and given to the majority of employers and some employers who were involved in SEP still regarded this as a 'wage subsidy'. However, providers also highlighted that a number of employers did not require any form of financial support.

Where financial assistance was utilised for a WORKSTEP placement most providers had a sliding scale in place, reducing payments over time. Payment was based on the level of support required by the supported employee, and payments were reviewed at an agreed period, sometimes linked to monitoring meetings to discuss the supported employees' progress at work.

Thus, whilst there has been some progress in this area, an element of financial support to employers remains a key element of the Programme. However, the vast majority of stakeholders are clear that this is no longer a 'wage subsidy' and should be utilised for the development of supported employees.

3.1.7 Success of Programme modernisation

Overall, whilst it is clear that some of the modernisation objectives for WORKSTEP remain to be fully achieved, there has been significant progress in many areas, most notably the introduction of quality standards and the development of the support available. It should also be acknowledged that the changes introduced with WORKSTEP presented a significant challenge for providers, and the overwhelming majority responded very positively to meet this challenge and embrace the Programme changes.

Areas for possible future development of Programme design, such as eligibility, and how WORKSTEP fits with other disability employment programmes are discussed below.

3.2 Eligibility – who is WORKSTEP aimed at?

Responses to this issue varied widely across the stakeholders, with some respondents being very clear that the Programme aims to find, secure and retain jobs for DDA defined disabled people who have more complex barriers to finding and keeping work, and others seeing it as a Programme open to *'anyone with a disability'*.

However, although eligibility criteria are clearly stated, the guidance could be seen as ambiguous as it also states that individuals referred to and accepted on WORKSTEP should be 'job ready' and should not be left waiting for a suitable job for longer than eight weeks after completion of their development plan.

Whilst it is feasible that some individuals who are facing complex barriers to finding and keeping work, may be described as 'job ready', many others appear to require additional assistance and support before they reach this stage. Thus, for many prospective customers these two eligibility requirements may be contradictory.

There is also some ambiguity with regards to the interpretation of the terms 'complex barriers' and what is meant by 'job ready'. As described in Section 3.2.3, many providers stated that people referred to WORKSTEP are often not 'work' or 'job ready', although there does not appear to be any formal definition of what is meant by this. Issues related to the definition of complex barriers are discussed in Section 3.3 and further details of Jobcentre Plus eligibility criteria are given in Section 5.1, which describes the process of entry onto the Programme.

3.2.1 Contract Manager perspective

All Contract Managers were clear that the WORKSTEP Programme is for those who face complex barriers to employment, although one described the eligibility criteria as *'too complex and subjective.'* Whilst they acknowledged that when customers register for WORKSTEP they should be work ready, some pre-employment training and support is seen as usual. The majority expected providers to undertake a range of pre-employment support activities.

One of the Contract Managers highlighted the importance of differentiating between 'eligibility' for the Programme and 'suitability.'

'We don't want people thinking that because they are...eligible groups that they should be referred to or be recommended for WORKSTEP as they may not be suitable. They may not need it or may not be anything like job ready. You may get somebody who is being referred on IB and let's say they have been inactive for a while, they have lost confidence, but clearly they are capable of work and it might well be that what they need is a little bit of Work Prep, a little bit of rehab and then straight into work. You don't necessarily need the support of WORKSTEP for the next two years.'

The eight week target for a job start was also questioned:

'Contract managers tend to apply common sense to it, you know, it is better that it takes 13 weeks to get a person into the correct job than to rush somebody in for the sake of meeting a target.'

3.2.2 Disability Employment Adviser perspective

All Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) interviewed described WORKSTEP as an employment programme for disabled people, with around half mentioning complex barriers to employment. A small number described it as for any disabled person who requires support and fits the eligibility criteria. The majority stated that WORKSTEP is for those who need long-term support within employment, although some described using it for both long- and short-term support.

Most of the DEAs interviewed had been involved in disability advisory positions for a considerable part of their careers (over ten years) and were very experienced in working with disability programmes, although three were relatively new to the role. Both experienced and newer DEAs described a lack of clarity and guidance regarding WORKSTEP eligibility, and one described current guidance as '*far too flexible*'.

The possible contradictory nature of guidance that describes WORKSTEP as for those facing complex barriers, and at the same time 'job ready' with an expectation of placement into work within eight weeks, was highlighted by one DEA:

'If they are that ready to step into a job within eight weeks then I would have thought well hang on a sec, could they not have done that without the help of the WORKSTEP provider?'

Many felt that support for their work as DEAs was inadequate, and suggested that a lot of newer DEAs do not fully understand the differences between WORKSTEP, Work Preparation and New Deal for Disabled People. The newer DEAs questioned the suitability of the training they had been given.

Whilst they were positive about the general disability awareness element of their training they reported that very little information was given on the various Jobcentre Plus programmes. One DEA described their induction training:

'When I did my training initially we didn't go into the ins and outs of what provision we would use for which customer...I found it really vague when I started...most of the training was really about how to deal with disabled people, how to talk to people with disabilities, it was a lot of disability awareness stuff...which was good but I think that was only half of what you needed.'

A number of the long standing DEAs also supported this view of training:

'I don't think the DEA training is as good or as comprehensive as it was when I did it.'

Regarding more general support for their role, a number of DEAs referred to line management structures. Almost half were still working in specialist disability teams and this arrangement was viewed positively by all of the DEAs interviewed. They highlighted that within disability teams knowledge sharing was common, DEAs could help each other with difficult cases, and they felt that their role was understood by their line managers. Some of those under Jobcentre Plus local management expressed concerns that their specialist role was not understood by their managers and they had similar targets to other advisers despite the complex issues they have to deal with:

'What you had then [in a specialist team] was somebody who was actually aware of the role that you did, the technicalities of the job you did...the role of the DEA is just not understood.'

Most of those under Jobcentre Plus local management felt that they were seen as being no different from other advisers:

'The service we provide has been diluted so much over the previous five or six years that it bears no resemblance to what we used to do, in fact, in many cases now, the DEAs are being asked to do jobs which really don't need our expertise. They are very basic adviser jobs...you are not really a specialist...and it doesn't look as a department that we give that service to the customers that we were always dedicated to give.'

DEAs usually saw pre-employment support as part of the WORKSTEP Programme and most acknowledged that many providers work with customers for long periods of time without being given the appropriate funding to undertake this. Section 4.3 describes Programme funding structures and highlights that whilst providers are paid for production of a customer development plan, there is no further payment until employment is commenced. However, whilst the majority of providers do carry out an element of pre-employment support, in two Jobcentre Plus regions it did not appear to be the exclusive responsibility of the provider. In one region, the Contract Manager stated that job searching and ensuring that the customer is 'job ready' was generally the responsibility of DEAs, and in the other region, the DEA interviewed described a very close working relationship with providers in the 'work preparation' and job search stage, although this was not necessarily a region-wide practice.

Several DEAs also described using a combination of Jobcentre Plus Programmes, in particular the Work Preparation Programme followed by WORKSTEP, to facilitate the employment of disabled people:

'It's very rare I would do a direct referral to a WORKSTEP provider.providers seem a little bit reluctant if it's not tried and tested.'

'We'd probably look at them perhaps doing a Work Preparation first to see where they are at and what support they might need and how they cope with the work environment and then sometimes that could lead on to WORKSTEP.'

Some DEAs who described this approach suggest that ideally the customer should remain with the same provider for both Programmes, although one did report that there were no contracts for Work Preparation with any providers in their area.

3.2.3 Provider staff perspective

Most WORKSTEP providers stated that WORKSTEP was for people with disabilities, facing more complex barriers to employment. In practice, however, many providers appeared to have supported employees who seemed to be more suitable for programmes which provide initial rather than long-term support, an issue which is discussed in more detail in Section 3.3. One provider commented that not everybody who they worked with needed WORKSTEP provision. They felt, however, that this was sometimes difficult to identify at the start of the Programme. A small number of providers suggested that WORKSTEP was for *'anybody with a disability'* and the only criterion they used was that the individual *'wanted to work'*.

Nearly all providers expressed the view that customers are generally not *'work ready'* when the referral comes through. Pre-employment support and/or training is a large part of the work which provider organisations undertake. In one case a national provider was working with customers for up to 12 months before they were ready for employment, although it was not clear if they were utilising non-WORKSTEP funding to provide this support.

Some providers have developed their own training programmes as forerunners to WORKSTEP to help supported employees become *'work ready'*. One provider was undertaking pre-employment training with all supported employees and rarely referred the supported employees back to the DEAs despite the fact that they may not find employment for long periods of time. Their reasoning behind this was that their contracted places were not full and if the supported employee was referred back to the DEA the referral might not come back to them when the person was work ready. They felt that if the supported employee went to a provider offering Work Preparation and WORKSTEP, the supported employee would remain with that organisation for both programmes.

3.2.4 Supported employee perspective

Whilst a clear majority of supported employees found the support of their WORKSTEP provider invaluable, a small number expressed the view that they did not need support, and some did not see themselves as disabled:

'All I can say is that it has done me personally so much good, but I do feel that I am...how can I put this...there is a lot of people worse off than myself who could have been here instead of me. You know what I mean...I feel a bit of a fraud sometimes, because I am able bodied, and there is a lot of people here that's... can only use one hand or something you know...It's a brilliant place.'

This supported employee felt that the main issues that prevented him finding a job were his age (i.e. prospective employers wanted someone younger) and the fact that he lacked basic skills. Whilst he did have a health condition that meant he was no longer able to carry out his previous work, he did not see the condition itself as a barrier to other types of employment.

3.2.5 Definition of complex barriers

One of the key issues regarding eligibility is that the term 'complex barriers' is not clearly defined and this appears to lead to a range of different interpretations of who is a suitable candidate for the Programme. While it was not within the remit of the case study research to assess the eligibility of supported employees, a number of those interviewed appear to be capable individuals who were competent at work, and required little or no support. This suggested that a number of supported employees do not appear to face 'complex barriers', if these are defined as being due to the effect their *impairment* has on their ability to undertake a job. It would also imply that they do not require the level of support the WORKSTEP Programme is designed to offer.

However, if 'complex barriers' are interpreted to include issues such as long-term unemployment, low levels of literacy and numeracy, the supported employees' age, and poor local employment opportunities *in addition* to an impairment then this may not be the case.

For example a number of the supported employees interviewed felt the main barriers to them finding work prior to entering the WORKSTEP Programme were issues such as their age, lack of local employment opportunities and in one case their lack of basic skills. These individuals did not perceive their impairment as the main barrier to finding work, however they did understand that WORKSTEP is a programme aimed at facilitating the employment of disabled people.

If the 'complex barriers' referred to in the Programme aims are limited to the impact of an individual's impairment it appears that WORKSTEP could be deemed appropriate for around half of the supported employees interviewed. It should, however, be noted that this assessment is based on limited information and a single contact with each supported employee, for the research interview. In addition, many of these clients may have had such complex barriers in the past but have now overcome

these. There are also issues highlighted in the case study process (Section 1.2.2) which may have skewed the sample towards those with less profound support needs, i.e. providers were asked to select supported employees for interview to ensure the most vulnerable individuals who might find an interview difficult or distressing were not selected.

In order to ensure that eligibility criteria for the Programme are consistently applied, Jobcentre Plus need to confirm which issues should be taken into consideration when defining 'complex barriers' within the context of WORKSTEP.

Other factors, which may be pertinent to the assessment of current supported employees' eligibility within the case studies, are that slightly over half of those interviewed have registration dates prior to April 2001, and they were, therefore, transferred onto WORKSTEP from SEP.

3.2.6 Transfer of supported employees to WORKSTEP from SEP

From 1 April 2001, existing SEP supported employees transferred to the WORKSTEP Programme. While their employment terms and conditions were unchanged, it was expected from this point that the supported employee would have a development plan, which considers development in their current role, and progression into unsupported employment, if appropriate.

Contract Managers and provider staff all highlighted the difficulties in changing the expectations of both supported employees and employers where people were part of the old programme and then transferred onto WORKSTEP. Thus, a supported employee may appear to be working without any apparent requirement for support, but because the employer insists on financial assistance, (and employment may terminate without it), progression does not take place.

A number of Jobcentre Plus and provider staff reported that some of the most difficult employers to tackle on this issue were within the public sector, including government departments, government agencies and local authorities. The Disability Discrimination (Amendment) Act 2005 places a statutory duty on public sector authorities to promote disability equality. This duty comes into force in December 2006 and it is hoped that it will encourage public bodies to become exemplar employers of disabled people, and so should facilitate some improvements in this area.

Meanwhile, the two nationally contracted providers involved with the evaluation reported that in a small number of cases where supported employees have transferred from SEP to WORKSTEP, their monthly payment to employers has remained in excess of the monthly payment from WORKSTEP, despite their efforts to negotiate change.

One of the regionally contracted providers had, however, utilised WORKSTEP Modernisation Funds to employ staff to carry out an audit of all current SEP commenced placements. This approach, which utilised a 'fresh pair of eyes' to

review the current situation and then to enter into discussions with the employer regarding the changes to the Programme, the need to review financial support, and the aim of progression, proved to be quite successful. It facilitated both a phased reduction of payments and some progression to open employment for a number of these placements.

Another issue which may skew perceptions of the eligibility of current supported employees (and also affect progression rates) is that of longstanding employment by Remploy or local authority-supported businesses.

Generally, employees in these businesses have relatively good terms and conditions and they are, therefore, reluctant to 'progress' to open employment where they would lose job security and might not secure such favourable conditions. In addition to this, some supported employees, whilst they appear very capable of undertaking a wide range of tasks to a high standard, have been within the same environment – which they describe as 'safe', 'comfortable', and 'supportive' – for most of their working lives. They feel very uncomfortable about moving to a different workplace and are clear that they do not wish to move on. Some also highlighted that a move would mean they would lose continuity of employment which would affect entitlement to sick pay, pensions, etc. In these cases a move to another job is not seen as 'progression' as employees feel they have a lot to lose.

There are other issues which may affect progression rates from supported businesses, which are reviewed in Section 6.1.3.

3.3 How does WORKSTEP fit with other disability employment programmes?

The lack of clarity around who the Programme is aimed at, discussed above, has led to some practical difficulties in differentiating between the eligibility for, and support offered by, WORKSTEP and other programmes such as the New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP), the Work Preparation Programme and Access to Work. Many stakeholders highlighted the way in which provision is currently split into a range of programmes, which sometimes overlap and a lack of overall coherence. There was clear support for the rationalisation of current provision, with one provider manager describing their ideal model for a disability programme as follows:

'I firmly believe there needs to be one pathway for employment of people with disabilities. From school, right the way through to 37 hours a week...I cannot see any other model that would be more effective...I can't see why there needs to be several different programmes. I think it is just one model with different stepping stones within it.'

A Contract Manager commented on the lack of coherence in provision.

'Programmes do not link up which is all wrong. Those working on new Programmes such as Pathways want to do everything new and do not want to be involved in older programmes. Programmes should be linked and we should "hide the wires"...the person does not need to know they are moving from one funding stream to another.'

A recent National Audit Office (NAO) report⁸ describes the areas of overlap between the key programmes and highlights that this can cause some confusion for both customers and providers. The case studies highlighted that this confusion is also apparent with some Jobcentre Plus staff.

3.3.1 New Deal for Disabled People

When questioned about this, staff from one provider, who offer both WORKSTEP and NDDP, stated there was no difference in the support offered to employees supported through WORKSTEP and those on NDDP. However, where providers have contracts for both NDDP and WORKSTEP the majority seemed clear about the differing levels of support which they are designed to offer. One provider also reported that they have placed individuals on NDDP knowing WORKSTEP would be more appropriate, as they had no vacant places on their WORKSTEP contract and this was the only service they could offer.

Staff from another provider with both contracts felt it would be far more logical for them to be merged. They described the programmes as complementary, but from a managerial perspective they thought the system would be clearer and more efficient if there was one scheme to manage provision. They highlighted that they found it useful to operate both programmes so that they could offer a wider range of support to individuals. They stated that supported employees are not interested in the details or name of the programme that offers them support, the key issue being the quality and appropriateness of support delivered.

Another provider also highlighted that although '*not accepted*' by Jobcentre Plus, they find it can work well to offer supported employees six months' support under NDDP, and during this period establish if longer-term support is required. If this were the case, they could offer a smooth transition to WORKSTEP, allowing continuity of point of contact with the provider and with the employer:

'All of that really works for the individual, the employer and us but it doesn't work for Jobcentre Plus because they want to use a very "black and white" approach to programme eligibility and the cross over between programmes.'

From a Jobcentre Plus perspective there is a concern that such circumstances may offer the potential for providers to be 'double-funded' for work with an individual customer.

⁸ National Audit Office (2005), *Gaining and retaining a job: the Department for Work and Pensions' support for disabled people.*

3.3.2 Work Preparation

In some areas, Work Preparation is clearly utilised as a 'feeder' programme for WORKSTEP, as described in Section 3.1.2, although this is not actively encouraged by current Jobcentre Plus guidance to DEAs:

'Work Preparation cannot be used alongside WORKSTEP. An individual referred to, and accepted on, WORKSTEP should be 'job ready'.'

'There may be times when an individual has completed Work Preparation and their final report recommends that WORKSTEP should now be considered. This is acceptable if the DEA/provider are clear that it is the most appropriate option and with the most appropriate provider. However, we would not want this to be the automatic route into WORKSTEP.'

Two DEAs describe using a combination of the Work Preparation Programme followed by WORKSTEP where appropriate. This appears to offer the opportunity to assess the needs of supported employees more thoroughly, and may ensure that only those who clearly require longer-term support are then referred on to WORKSTEP:

'We'd probably look at them perhaps doing a Work Preparation first to see where they are at and what support they might need and how they cope with the work environment and then sometimes that could lead on to WORKSTEP.'

The DEAs who described this approach suggest that, ideally, the supported employee should remain with the same provider for both Programmes, to facilitate a sense of continuity for the supported employee and a smooth transfer between programmes. However, this transfer may not currently be possible, as many WORKSTEP providers do not hold Work Preparation contracts, and in two regions visited it was highlighted that there was no Work Preparation provision in some of their districts. Whilst it may be technically possible for a DEA to refer outside their district, there may be practical difficulties for the customer if they were faced with having to travel some distance for Work Preparation.

Thus, most WORKSTEP providers carry out a significant amount of 'work preparation' with WORKSTEP-supported employees. There are also local Jobcentre Plus organised 'work trials' with some WORKSTEP providers who operate supported businesses.

Where providers do offer significant 'work preparation' and job search support, they highlighted the fact that, currently, the contracted funding structure for the Programme does not cover the costs of providing this support. This apparent lack of recognition for the support offered by most providers prior to the commencement of employment, is also reflected in programme performance indicators. While providers are monitored in terms of occupancy for their WORKSTEP contracted places, this figure is only based on the numbers of supported employees who are currently in work.

Performance information and the structure of the current funding system is discussed in more detail in Sections 4.2 and 4.3.

3.3.3 Access to Work

In addition to the Programme links described already, many providers will facilitate applications for Access to Work funding for WORKSTEP-supported employees. These applications are mainly for help with travel to work, for example, where transport by taxi is required, for adaptations to the workplace or where specific equipment is required to enable the supported employee to carry out their job. There was also some evidence that WORKSTEP funding was being utilised for this type of support, such as transport and for aids and equipment, (see Section 5.3.9), although there was no evidence of Access to Work funds being utilised to provide support workers for WORKSTEP-supported employees. Jobcentre Plus staff did not highlight any potential overlap in terms of the support worker element of Access to Work and the support offered by WORKSTEP providers.

This apparent cross over of WORKSTEP funding may, in part, be due to a lack of clear guidance on what is available via Access to Work, the types of support WORKSTEP funding should be utilised for, and how these two funding streams should operate in conjunction with each other. However, some providers did report that recently, the application process for Access to Work funding appears to be taking longer, and generally funds seem to be harder to access. Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People⁹ also highlighted concerns regarding the time it can take to realise applications to this Programme:

'Employers are particularly concerned with the speed of the programme, many have complained of waits of six months or more for equipment and adjustments. This is too long for employers to wait for an employee to be able to do their job.'

Providers may, therefore, be utilising WORKSTEP funding where supported employees require aids and equipment, normally funded through Access to Work, to circumvent possible delays in providing supported employees with this type of support if required.

3.3.4 Hours worked and contract length

One of the changes introduced by WORKSTEP was the requirement for supported employees to work 16 hours or more. However, one of the providers who also has an NDDP contract, pointed out the apparent contradiction of the Programme aimed at assisting disabled people with the most need (WORKSTEP) insisting on a minimum of 16 hours, when this is not a requirement for NDDP. Their view was that this requirement was a significant barrier, which meant WORKSTEP could not be utilised for those with the greatest support needs.

This provider was supporting a supported employee who was working as a gardener for a local authority. The supported employee had a mental health condition and was extremely anxious about dealing with new situations and meeting people. The

⁹ Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2005), *Improving the life chances of disabled people: final report*. London: Cabinet Office.

provider support worker described how in the initial stages this supported employee was only able to cope with one hour each day in the workplace, but they had built this up over a period of time, and were now working 30 hours each week. The supported employee was also progressing well with all of their work duties and the employer suggested that if this level of progress was maintained, they could see no reason why the employee would not progress from the Programme into open employment.

As the provider was part of a (different) local authority disability employment service they were supported, in part, by funding from the authority, in addition to the funding they received from their Jobcentre Plus NDDP and WORKSTEP contracts. If they had not had access to this range of funding they may not have been in a position to work with this supported employee in the early stages of their job. Without this support the individual would not now be progressing well at work, supported via the WORKSTEP Programme, with a likelihood of sustaining open employment in the future.

A number of other providers highlight the minimum hours worked requirement as a significant problem, with one proposing the need for *'a stepped procedure from...permitted hours to WORKSTEP hours'*.

Many also highlighted the minimum employment contract of six months as a feature of WORKSTEP they felt to be problematic. This was particularly the case in areas where seasonal work is more common, and providers highlighted missed opportunities of securing work for supported employees in the retail, leisure and agricultural sectors. They stated that some demonstrable 'real' work experience, (as opposed to training or work experience schemes), even short-term, will increase the supported employees longer-term employability.

More generally, WORKSTEP Contract Managers acknowledged these points, and more than one highlighted the changing nature of employment, with short-term contracts on limited hours being the common starting point for many opportunities in retail and catering. They felt that the Programme did not reflect the realities of current employment practice in many areas.

One of the providers to highlight this issue suggested that Jobcentre Plus programmes are currently designed by targeting groups of individuals based on eligibility criteria such as benefits, and then designing programmes to try and assist these groups into work. They suggested that programmes should start with what the employment market requires and work back to *'candidate groups'*.

3.3.5 Self-employment

A number of providers talked about the issue of support to prospective supported employees who either were, or wished to become, self-employed. There is no

specific reference to self-employment within the WORKSTEP Handbook for Providers¹⁰ or the Jobcentre Plus WORKSTEP contract, although the majority of Jobcentre Plus staff and providers stated that such support could not be offered via WORKSTEP. One provider did report that they were currently supporting a self-employed supported employee. Another provider reported that they had supported someone who was setting up their own business, and had been able to claim at the development plan stage, but nothing after this point. A Contract Manager highlighted that they had sought, and been granted, approval for a supported employee entering self-employment to be classified as a progression, as the individual was no longer supported by the provider. They also felt that this should be an option for job starts, although they highlighted the need for close monitoring if this were introduced.

One of the regional providers stated they had few enquiries of this nature, but when these arose they would refer on to another agency as WORKSTEP could not be offered. However, one of the very large national providers estimated that they had around 200 such cases within the previous year where the person clearly required WORKSTEP support but was either self-employed or hoping to start up as self-employed and so was not eligible.

There is a very small scheme to assist self-employed disabled people run a business from their homes. This Blind Homemaker's Scheme is administered by local authorities and is part-funded by Jobcentre Plus. Although the majority of homeworkers have a visual impairment, it is also open to other disabled people. Local authority involvement in this scheme does vary across Great Britain, and some have a policy of not supporting homeworkers or extending current provision. The scheme currently supports around 150 self-employed disabled people.

3.3.6 Employment agencies

One provider highlighted that a large number of vacancies within their area were placed with employment agencies, rather than employers recruiting staff directly. They had concerns regarding the potential for very complex contractual arrangements if they were to pursue this route of seeking jobs for WORKSTEP-supported employees. However, they were also aware that they were potentially missing valuable opportunities for supported employees if they did not utilise every option available, and were seeking guidance from Jobcentre Plus on the best way forward. Although no other providers raised this issue, it was clearly significant in the area that this provider operated, and others may have discounted this route due to the potential complexity of contracting.

¹⁰ *The Handbook for WORKSTEP Providers* does refer to the requirement for all supported employees to have contracts of employment, and for all employment supported through WORKSTEP to be deemed as class 1 employment (class 1 National Insurance contributions are for employer earners).

3.4 A customer centred approach

The key strength of current Programme design, most commonly acknowledged by all stakeholders, is the flexibility it offers to meet the needs of individual supported employees. There appears to be limited constraint on the nature of the support that can be provided, enabling the provision of a programme which can be specifically tailored to the individual, and offering providers the opportunity to develop innovative approaches to service delivery. A Contract Manager stated:

'The real strength of the Programme is its flexibility...not one size fits all, we aim to get it right for individuals. Too many of our programmes are too rigid.'

A note of caution was, however, sounded by some WORKSTEP Contract Managers who felt that there was currently insufficient monitoring of the way in which providers utilise their WORKSTEP funding. There also seems to be little evidence of monitoring employers' use of the financial support they receive. Such monitoring is not required within current contractual arrangements, and this issue is discussed further in Section 4.3.7.

This flexible approach, which prioritises the needs of the individual, and aims to offer a personalised service, reflects the priority driving many aspects of the modernisation programme across public services. However, this may, to some extent, be compromised by a lack of coherence across disability employment programmes and the barriers associated with moving between those currently in place.

3.5 Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, whilst some of the modernisation objectives for WORKSTEP remain to be fully achieved, there has been significant progress in many areas, most notably the introduction of quality standards and the development of the support available. The main strength of current Programme design, most commonly acknowledged by all stakeholders, is the flexibility it offers to meet the needs of individual supported employees.

However, a number of concerns have been raised regarding Programme design and fit with other disability employment programmes. There is a lack of clarity as to the exact nature of the customer group the Programme is aimed at and a lack of consistency in some of the eligibility criteria between WORKSTEP and other programmes. For example, the minimum hours requirement for WORKSTEP as opposed to NDDP is described by some Providers as a barrier to the 'hardest to help' customers they regard the WORKSTEP Programme as aimed at. There are also some clear overlaps in provision.

3.5.1 Rationalisation of provision

Rather than suggesting individual changes to current Programme design, it is recommended that the rationalisation of all current disability employment programmes is considered. This could offer a flexible modular approach, which

should provide a more coherent service to disabled people seeking work, and better value for money in the management of provision.

Such an approach could offer a number of components, including:

- pre-work support for those who are not job ready, such as that which is currently delivered by Work Preparation and WORKSTEP;
- help for the job ready to find and secure work;
- short- to medium-term support for those who require initial assistance when they commence work, with a strong emphasis on progression into open employment;
- longer-term support for those requiring it, recognising that within this group there will be some who are unable to progress to open employment.

Ideally, providers could be contracted to provide a range of these services to ensure a seamless service to supported employees.

The provision of funding for travel to work, aids and equipment should also be reviewed, as the case studies highlighted that this is currently provided via both Access to Work and WORKSTEP funding.

Some of the barriers highlighted regarding minimum hours worked, contract length and self-employment should be reviewed as part of any move to a new model of provision. It is also important that the key strength of current WORKSTEP Programme design, i.e. the flexibility it offers to deliver support appropriate to individual need, is incorporated in any new modules.

A thorough consultation with stakeholders would be desirable regarding proposals for the development of Programme design. This should ensure that alternate ideas and views are taken into consideration, and the consultation should also cover the transition strategy and plans for the evaluation of any change.

3.5.2 Strengthen the DEA role

DEAs play a key role both in offering appropriate advice to disabled people who are seeking work and also in ensuring that they are referred to the most suitable elements of provision. Previous DWP research on incapacity benefits reforms highlighted the value that Jobcentre Plus customers place on support received from DEAs¹¹. The research also highlighted that whilst Jobcentre Plus Incapacity Benefit Personal Advisers (IBPAs) felt that the introduction of the IBPA role had lessened the need for referrals to DEAs, the DEA role was still particularly valued for harder to help disabled customers. In this context, IBPAs highlighted both the option of referring the customer to the DEA, and the DEA as a source of advice to the IBPA¹².

¹¹ Corden, Nice and Sainsbury, (2005), *IB Reforms Pilot: Findings from a longitudinal panel of clients*, DWP.

¹² Knight, Dickens, Mitchell and Woodfield, (2005), *IB Reforms – the Personal Adviser role and practices: Stage Two*, DWP.

The DEA role, therefore, continues to be a priority for customers and Jobcentre Plus so that the issues raised by DEAs, regarding support and training should be addressed. The importance of the gatekeeping element of the DEA role is discussed further in Section 5.1.

3.5.3 Transfer of supported employees

A structured review of the position of current supported employees, transferred from SEP, (as described in Section 3.2.1), should be considered by all providers.

Lessons should also be learned regarding the transfer of supported employees from one programme to another. In the event of any future changes it is recommended that:

- clear, consistent and timely messages about change are delivered to Jobcentre Plus staff, providers, supported employees and employers;
- robust transitional arrangements are put in place, which may include an assessment process to ensure existing supported employees are transferred to the appropriate support module and the structuring of performance measures to recognise the impact of previous eligibility criteria and expectations.

4 Management of the Programme

4.1 Management and contracting structures

Separate arrangements are in place for the management of WORKSTEP via Remploy and other providers, a separation that has existed prior to the introduction of WORKSTEP in April 2001. Given the distinct nature of these arrangements, the non-Remploy providers will be referred to as contracted providers for the purposes of clarity within this chapter.

With the introduction of WORKSTEP, a new management structure was planned to replace the Supported Employment Programme Advice and Consultancy Service (SEPACS). Prior to the Supported Employment Programme (SEP), there were no contracts in place with providers of supported employment, and the introduction of contract management, for providers other than Remploy, represented a significant shift as the relationship had previously focused on the provision of business support and advice to the supported businesses.

Existing contracted SEP providers were automatically given new three-year contracts for the provision of WORKSTEP. Additional funding was also provided to extend Programme coverage and new organisations and existing WORKSTEP providers were able to bid for these new two-year contracts. Contract Managers reported that although a number of providers have decided to withdraw from WORKSTEP contracts since 2001, they were not aware of a WORKSTEP contract ever being withdrawn by Jobcentre Plus. Contracts for the provision that was in place prior to 2002 have not been subject to competitive tendering at any point since the Programme commenced.

The length of contracts with Jobcentre Plus was an issue raised by some providers. They felt that current contracts were inadequate for them to plan effectively and one suggested a minimum contract length of five years. They felt this would offer sufficient time for them to develop and implement changes, and also to monitor and

fully evaluate their impact. Other providers described a more general sense of uncertainty about the future of contracts with Jobcentre Plus, and the difficulties this caused with regards to planning and investing for the future.

WORKSTEP funding and contract management for the regionally based providers was devolved to regions in 2003. This lag in implementing the new contract management arrangements may have contributed to the delay in the development of areas of the new programme such as the new Quality Framework and Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) inspection. For example, providers who were part of the early stages of ALI inspection highlighted the fact that they had little or no guidance or support from Jobcentre Plus on what was likely to be involved and how they should prepare for the process.

Described below are the three models for the management of WORKSTEP providers that were in place for the majority of the study. As highlighted in Section 2.3.1, the Jobcentre Plus organisational design review (ODR) has resulted in a number of changes for WORKSTEP management structures, although at the time of writing, Jobcentre Plus is in a transitional period and final details regarding the division of responsibility between the districts and national tier is yet to be confirmed.

As already stated there are fundamental differences in the Jobcentre Plus relationship with Remploy as opposed to contracted providers, and there are also significant differences in the management of nationally (as opposed to regionally) contracted providers, with widely differing resources available to support and scrutinise WORKSTEP Programme delivery:

- Remploy:
 - management and financial statements set out a broad framework within which the Company will operate including overall aims, objectives and performance targets;
 - strategic link via WORKSTEP Policy Team (staff now based within the Partnerships Division).

The relationship with Jobcentre Plus was viewed within the WORKSTEP Policy Team as a *'hands off'*, strategic link with the Remploy Board, rather than a contractual one. The main focus of this link is to review Remploy strategic plans and their performance against a rolling three-year business plan, which includes performance targets:

- national contracts:
 - contracts managed by a member of the former WORKSTEP Policy Team who has more recently become part of the newly formed Procurement Division.

Three large providers are national organisations and have national contracts for the provision of WORKSTEP, which are centrally managed by a member of the WORKSTEP Policy Team (who has more recently moved to the Procurement Division);

- regional contracts:
 - managed within Jobcentre Plus regions.

The remaining providers have WORKSTEP contracts that are operationally managed by the 11 Jobcentre Plus regions, although the WORKSTEP Policy team has some central responsibility for overall Programme management.

From a contract management perspective, there are two main areas of concern with this framework: The first is the very limited resource available for the management of the relationship with Remploy and nationally contracted WORKSTEP provision. Although the majority of the global WORKSTEP budget is spent on this element of provision, the model for Remploy and national contracts offers little scope for meaningful monitoring of operational Programme delivery. It also limits the extent of support available to providers, although larger providers do have greater organisational and financial capacity in areas such as strategic planning and quality assurance.

The second is the lack of clear lines of accountability for Programme performance between operational Contract Management Teams, who are managed at regional level and the Head Office WORKSTEP Policy Team, who have lead responsibility and also directly manage some elements of contracting with providers. Thus, whilst the Head Office staff are accountable for the Programme as a whole, they have no direct line management responsibility for regional teams.

4.1.1 Regional contract teams

Some form of specialist disability contract management team was in place in all of the Jobcentre Plus regions visited and whilst there was some variation in the resource available within these teams, the scope of their responsibilities, and their levels of experience, this approach does appear to offer a more robust model for the management of contracts with providers than the national contracting arrangements. This is due to both the levels of staff resource available and the geographical logistics of managing provision within a specific area. Thus, regional teams can spend time on the 'hands on' monitoring of service delivery. They are physically closer to the providers they manage and in a position to develop a better understanding of local circumstances. They are also in a position to maintain links with other Jobcentre Plus staff such as DEAs which can facilitate the gathering of 'local intelligence' on issues regarding provider performance.

Generally, regional Contract Managers see their role as encompassing both contract monitoring and the development of provision, with a significant emphasis on the improvement of quality. Due to limited resources, some tended to tailor the level of provider monitoring visits based upon their assessment of provider performance. Thus, a poorly performing provider would receive more of these visits than a provider judged to be performing well. They also stated that they would often spend more time with providers who are due for ALL inspection or reinspection.

At the time of the case study visits, three of the regional Contract Managers had been involved in the management of WORKSTEP since the Programme was introduced, and two of these worked within SEPACS. The majority of the other Contract Managers had significant experience of working with disability programmes, for example, as Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) or DEA Managers. A small number of Contract Teams appeared to have little or no experience of disability programmes prior to the set up of regional contracting in late 2003, and this group had some concerns about their level of expertise and knowledge. One member of a regional Contract Team commented on the inadequacy of their general induction to the role, the lack of appropriate training and ongoing support for anyone new to the role. Others within this less experienced group also described their teams as new, and suggested they were only just beginning to understand some of the complexities of the Programme and local provision. All of the teams had been in place since late 2003, which suggests that a reasonably significant period of time may be required to acquire adequate levels of understanding of both the Programme and providers.

Subsequent to these discussions, developments in the training and support for WORKSTEP Contract Managers have occurred and these are discussed further in Section 4.4.2.

Contract Managers highlighted a number of issues which they regard as potential barriers to effective contract management within regions. These included poor management information, limited staffing resources, and a lack of sanctions which can be applied to poorly performing providers (as already noted, no WORKSTEP contracts have ever been withdrawn by Jobcentre Plus.)

Issues regarding management information are discussed in Section 4.2.

The staffing resources across the teams did vary to some extent, and one regional manager highlighted that, until very recently, they had sole responsibility for all of the WORKSTEP contracts within their region. This manager had also been allocated responsibility for Access to Work in early 2004, with no additional staffing support until later that year.

This Contract Manager felt that many regions were reluctant to take on WORKSTEP responsibility when it was devolved in 2003. They also commented that whilst Head Office had given some indication of the level of resource required to manage the Programme, Head Office staff were not in a position to give instructions to regions to ensure that this happened. The manager also stated that they felt that some regions did not fully understand the Programme, or what was necessary to manage it effectively, which resulted in insufficient resources being put into place.

Another issue, which clearly had an impact upon the effectiveness of regional Contract Management Teams, was the variation in the number of contracts managed within each region. There are around 200 providers of WORKSTEP and a significant number of WORKSTEP contracts cover a relatively small number of contract places. Some of these are associated with fairly small provider organisations,

although others are with much larger organisations such as local authorities. It is likely that Contract Teams may struggle to manage such a large number of contracts effectively with the resources currently available to them. However, the increased costs associated with additional contract management resource for relatively small numbers of contracted places may not offer best value for the Programme.

One of the Contract Teams had taken a proactive approach to reducing the number of smaller, less viable contracts within their region. Whilst they had not withdrawn any contracts they had prioritised the management of quality issues and were very clear with providers about the requirements of the new Programme, so that some providers had withdrawn. Whilst in the short-term the focus on this priority may have had some impact on regional contract occupancy rates, this team felt it was more important to focus on the initial improvement of quality, followed by building up occupancy.

There are a number of other issues regarding the size of WORKSTEP contracts and provider organisations which are discussed further in Section 6.4.

4.1.2 Nationally managed provision

Responsibility for managing contracts with nationally contracted providers formed part of the role of a member of the WORKSTEP Policy Team (now based within the Procurement Division). This level of resource is clearly significantly lower than that dedicated to managing contracts at regional level, and with the additional constraint of covering service delivery on a national, rather than regional basis it is clear that 'hands on' monitoring of day-to-day service delivery is not possible.

There were slightly more staff dedicated to the management of the relationship with Remploy based within the Policy Team (now based within the Partnerships Division), although again there was clearly no capacity to carry out any detailed monitoring of service delivery. However, the relationship with Remploy is also fundamentally different in that it is not governed via a Jobcentre Plus contract.

Contract Managers, DEAs, and a number of regionally contracted providers did express some concerns about aspects of provision delivered by the national providers. Examples of these concerns are highlighted in Sections 5.1.2, 5.1.3 and 5.1.4. Many stated that when they have raised these issues with the Policy Team they were either ignored or not adequately responded to. The staff responsible for the national providers stated that this was not the case, and when concerns have been raised they were always addressed. They also stated that it was more often the case that issues raised were very general in nature, and clearly without specific information they were not in a position to follow up issues with the provider concerned.

For some regional Contract Managers, an area of concern was the lack of information and influence on the activity of national providers within their regions. Whilst the manager for the nationally contracted providers did collate and circulate management information on the activity of national providers within Jobcentre Plus regions, no similar data was provided on Remploy activity.

One Contract Manager gave an example where they 'had heard' that a national provider was due to extend provision and open a new office within a city where they already had contracts in place with a number of WORKSTEP providers. They highlighted that there were areas within their region which had gaps in local provision, and if new places were to become available they should be targeted in these areas. However, they were frustrated that they were not in a position to ensure that this local need would be covered.

In this situation the national contract manager reported that the WORKSTEP places were allocated to the national provider on the basis that they had an NDDP contract in the area. The provider wanted to ensure that if they had customers who commenced on NDDP, and it then became clear they required the longer-term support of WORKSTEP, they could transfer them without having to involve another Provider. This approach would offer a seamless service to the customer.

Another Contract Manager raised the issue that national providers have been allowed to oversubscribe contracted places when they have been instructed that regional contracts must not do this.

'...we get told categorically that we must not allow our providers to over deliver against the contracted number, yet xx (provider) with x places is running best part of x per cent over contract...now that word gets around and it is very hard for us to have credibility when we are saying to our other providers no you can't go over contract.'

However, some national providers also highlighted their frustration that in certain areas regional provider contracts are significantly underoccupied while they have waiting lists of customers because their contracts are full.

The concerns related to some aspects of national provision were contrasted with the generally positive views from regional Contract Managers and DEAs about the current regional model. Some did comment that the reorganisation of DEA provision, which moved them from specialist disability teams into district teams, had been detrimental to the links between disability contract management and DEAs. However, overall there appeared to be positive relationships between DEAs and the Contract Teams which supported the management of regionally contracted WORKSTEP provision.

4.1.3 Provider view of contract management

Generally, providers were positive about their relationship with Jobcentre Plus Contract Managers, although there was a perception that Contract Managers often have limited resources and appear reluctant to challenge poor performance in 'other' providers. Most regionally contracted providers felt that their Contract Managers were available to provide advice and support, although a few commented that it appeared as though many issues had to be referred up to 'Head Office' (the Policy Team) before an answer was forthcoming. However, some regional providers in the later stages of the study tended to report more limited contact with their Contract Manager, and generally felt that this had reduced over recent times.

Some providers who were National Association for Supported Employment (NASE) (now British Association for Supported Employment (BASE)) members also reported that communication on some developments and upcoming WORKSTEP-related issues came to them via the Association before their Contract Managers were aware of them.

4.1.4 The future of regional contract management

Following the Jobcentre Plus ODR there are plans in place to shift responsibility for WORKSTEP contracts currently managed at regional level to Jobcentre Plus Districts. Given the apparent impact which the delays in establishing current arrangements have had on programme development, and the concerns that newer regional Contract Managers have highlighted regarding their levels of experience, support and training, it is vital that Jobcentre Plus ensures appropriate resources are in place prior to any handover of responsibility.

It should also be noted that a significant number of the more experienced and knowledgeable Contract Managers who contributed to this study have recently moved on from their roles, or are due to do so shortly. This decline in experienced contracting staff will also need to be addressed if provider performance is to be managed in a proactive manner.

4.2 Management information

4.2.1 WORKSTEP payments database

The central WORKSTEP payments database was designed to hold information on every supported employee including details of their WORKSTEP provider. Payment-based programme outputs are recorded on to this system, (e.g. submission of a development plan, job start) and in this way it was expected that in addition to generating payments to providers it would also offer management information (MI) on supported employees, providers and Programme performance.

There are, however, significant difficulties associated with the system, for example, the way in which key dates such as registration, submission of development plans and job starts are recorded. After a certain period (linked to the cycle of payment generation) these dates cannot be changed so anybody inputting data has to enter an incorrect date that is closest to the actual date, as the system will allow, which could be many months, and in some cases, years after the actual date. There have been instances where, due to technical difficulties and problems experienced by system users, data has been lost or not input, and due to these constraints in entering data after a certain period, it was then not possible to input the correct dates. Other system constraints have meant that there is no facility to update employer details, and there is also very limited facility within the database to hold personal details, so information such as multiple disability types¹³ and home addresses are not recorded.

¹³ Jobcentre Plus monitoring categories, see Section 5.2.

Due to these difficulties the expectation that the WORKSTEP payments database would provide adequate MI has not been realised.

In addition, there is also a significant problem in utilising any form of contract payments database for generating MI on the WORKSTEP Programme as a whole because Remploy do not have a formal Jobcentre Plus contract for WORKSTEP and are not funded in this way. Although Remploy provide Jobcentre Plus with figures on agreed monitoring standards, they do not provide Jobcentre Plus or Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) with raw data that would enable analysis across the Programme as a whole.

This contracting issue also presents difficulties with generating performance reports on the Programme as a whole, as Remploy do not have a structured contract, with fixed places, and, therefore, they are not monitored on the same areas as contracted providers, such as occupancy.

The current position with regards to MI presents Jobcentre Plus with significant challenges, as currently they have no reliable single central data source that can provide comprehensive, accurate information on providers, supported employees or performance in a comparable way across the whole Programme. Without this type of information it is very difficult to monitor Programme-wide delivery, assess the impact of the Programme overall or make informed plans for future Programme developments.

4.2.2 Manual MI systems

In the absence of reliable data from the payment database, some alternative manual systems were introduced by the Policy Team to provide information on contracted Programme performance by regions and for the nationally contracted providers, e.g. contract occupancy and progression rates.

Within a small number of regional Contract Teams good local systems have been developed which allow the tracking of their regionally contracted providers' performance. One region shares the data produced via their local systems with all providers across that area. Another Contract Manager stated that they used similar information on the relative performance of providers during individual monitoring visits, but preferred not to circulate a *'league table'*.

The Contract Team who shared performance data with providers also had systems in place for checking referral patterns to WORKSTEP. The information on referrals allowed them to monitor levels of referral by DEA and identify issues regarding the appropriateness of referrals, and the initial outcome for supported employees, (i.e. acceptance onto WORKSTEP by the provider and time to job start or referral back to the DEA). In this way they have been able to address training needs for DEAs, and highlight issues regarding provider performance.

They do not, however, have the same level of information on the activity of nationally contracted providers operating within their area, which means that they only have a partial picture of activity within the region. The information they

generate was produced without significant additional demands being placed on providers, mainly via paperwork already in place to administer payment for the Programme, although it did require the capacity within their team to devote time to this. A Contract Manager from another region stated that they would find this type of information useful, but simply do not have the staffing resource required to produce it.

4.2.3 Performance targets

Currently the contracted WORKSTEP providers are monitored via occupancy rates, time to job start, progression to unsupported employment and leaver rates. These are defined as:

- occupancy rate – the number of filled places against the places specified within the provider's contract;
- time to job start – the time taken between the completion of a development plan and successfully placing the customer within a job;
- progression to unsupported employment – numbers of supported employees moving from the Programme into unsupported employment. Sustained progression, where a progressed supported employee has sustained employment for six months after the date of progression, is also monitored;
- number of leavers – those who leave the Programme other than via progression.

However, there are few clearly defined performance targets against these areas, e.g. the aim for supported employees to commence employment within eight weeks. This lack of contractual targets is a significant barrier to the effective management of provider performance and the measurement of overall Programme effectiveness.

As Remploy does not have a contract, performance is not assessed on occupancy rates. Instead four performance related agreement (PRA) targets are in place. These are gross margin for Remploy businesses, progressions, average cost per supported employee and the percentage of time spent on supported employee development.

Current performance measures are discussed below highlighting some of the difficulties associated with these, and Section 4.2.4. goes on to propose some possible further developments that could be considered in this area.

Time to job start

As highlighted in Section 3.1, Jobcentre Plus guidance states that individuals referred to WORKSTEP should be 'job ready' and there is a stated aim for supported employees to commence employment within eight weeks. As already discussed in Section 3.1, there are issues as to whether those referred to WORKSTEP are actually 'job ready' and it is acknowledged that many WORKSTEP providers spend a significant amount of time working with supported employees prior to job starts.

These issues aside, this performance measure is possibly only appropriate where providers are facilitating placements with external employers, rather than offering

employment within their supported business, as in this situation it is likely that employment could commence immediately. Currently, information on whether a supported employee is working within a business or on a supported placement is not available centrally so it is not possible to use this as an indicator of effective provision.

Contract occupancy

Regarding occupancy rates a number of providers and Contract Managers highlighted that, at times, they have been directed to prioritise the improvement of levels of occupancy, only to be instructed a short time later that the Programme is facing financial constraints and full occupancy is no longer desirable. Providers stated that this apparent lack of consistency in approach by Jobcentre Plus leads to considerable frustration and difficulties for providers attempting to plan service delivery.

There are also tensions between providers (and to some extent between regions) whose contract places are either full or over contract, and those who have vacant places (see Section 4.1.2). A number of providers whose contracts were full highlighted their frustration at the fact that they feel there are significant numbers of prospective supported employees who require the support of WORKSTEP but that they do not have the contract places to work with them.

For those providers who are struggling to fill their contract places there may also be a tension between aiming to ensure all places are full, and the need to progress supported employees. This tension may also be heightened by the financial pressures of maintaining monthly income against a relatively small progression payment. WORKSTEP funding structures are discussed in more detail in Section 4.3.

If this indicator is to continue then Jobcentre Plus should ensure that adequate finances are available to support all contracted places, and it should be made very clear to providers (and Contract Managers) what action will be taken if occupancy is not achieved and maintained.

Progression to open employment

When WORKSTEP was first introduced there were expectations that the new Programme would facilitate a high rate of supported employee progression into open employment (around 30 per cent of new entrants within two years).

Given the difficulties regarding the generation of MI, highlighted above, it is not possible to give a totally accurate assessment of performance, although the progression rate Jobcentre Plus reported at the time of the study was around four per cent for contracted providers.

Recent DWP analysis suggests, however, that data produced for contracted providers from manually collected Jobcentre Plus figures offers only a crude measure of total progressions, and is under reporting Programme performance.

The Jobcentre Plus figure is calculated on the total number of progressions as a percentage of the average filled places for the period covered, as data does not enable the identification of cohort progression rates. This figure is based on 'whole' places occupied rather than headcount, i.e. a supported employee working between 16 and 21 hours is classed as part-time (0.5 for the calculation of progression), and over 21 hours full time (1.0 progression).

If figures are based on headcount rather than places, which would offer data comparable to that reported for other programmes such as NDDP, the figures for contracted providers are as follows.

Table 4.1 Cohort progression rates

Cohort – based on date of registration	Size of cohort	Number of progressions	Progression rate by October 2005 %
Pre 2001	12,492	1,459	12
2001-2002	1,179	260	22
2002-2003	2,234	415	19
2003-2004	3,000	426	14

Further work on the production of progression figures is, therefore, required to ensure that this measure accurately reflects performance.

However, based on current Jobcentre Plus methods of calculation, it is clear that there are significant variations in progression rates between providers, and in particular between models of service delivery (supported placements versus supported businesses), with placements producing much higher levels of progression. One national provider appeared to have progression rates as high as 80-90 per cent from supported placements, compared to other providers who have progression rates of up to around ten per cent.

Comments from staff at the provider with the highest rates of progression suggest that it is not uncommon for them to progress supported employees after three to six months of employment. This may raise questions about the appropriateness of the initial referrals and link back to the issue of 'eligibility' for the Programme as opposed to 'suitability'. Particular concerns were raised by DEAs, Contract Managers and some providers about the providers who are able to 'self-refer' opting to take on customers who they judge will be easiest to place in work and progress, a process described as 'creaming' or 'cherry picking.' Further discussion of the potential advantages and disadvantages associated with the results based models for supported employment can be found in previous DWP research¹⁴.

¹⁴ Corden and Thornton, (2003), *Results-based Funded Supported Employment*, DWP.

As WORKSTEP aims to support customers who face the most complex barriers to finding and sustaining work, measures to deter the 'cherry picking' of the easier to help may need to be strengthened if progression targets are enforced. Such measures could include clearer guidance and definition of the target customer group and a strengthening of both the gatekeeping role of DEAs and monitoring by Contract Managers. This issue is discussed further in Section 5.1.

Another potential difficulty linked to an increased emphasis on progression targets is that it may lead to providers progressing supported employees to open employment before they are ready. Within one region, the Contract Manager suggested that regionally contracted providers often received referrals where the person had previously been on the Programme, but had not received appropriate support from a national provider. These customers had been unable either to find work or to sustain open employment having been progressed too early, and were 'churning' back through the system.

A national provider support worker also noted that they sometimes work with customers whom they have supported in the past, and who had previously progressed into open employment.

It may, therefore, be useful to place more emphasis on a target for sustained progression, which is currently measured at six months for contracted providers, and also to put in place some longer-term tracking of supported employees. It is a concern that Remploy do not appear to produce data on sustained progressions for supported employees on placements, as without this it is not possible to assess longer-term outcomes and the effectiveness of WORKSTEP.

Finally, as discussed in Section 3.2.1, it should be noted that a significant factor, which affects progression rates is the position of supported employees who were transferred from SEP. These supported employees joined the programme with a very different set of expectations to those now in place and it may be unfair to penalise providers who are supporting a significant number of 'pre-WORKSTEP' customers for lower progression rates. For example, one provider highlighted that their overall progression rate was around 4.5 per cent, however, if this was broken down to look at pre- and post-WORKSTEP-supported employees, the rates would be around 2 per cent and 20-30 per cent respectively.

It should also be acknowledged that there are a range of employment issues related to WORKSTEP-supported employees within supported businesses, such as accrued employment and pension rights, which also affect progression rates.

4.2.4 Proposed development of management information

Overall, the lack of fundamental MI on supported employees, providers and Programme performance is a significant weakness and must be reviewed as a high priority for WORKSTEP or any successor programme. Some proposals on the requirements of a central data set are detailed in Appendix G.

'In Programme' performance and quality indicators

In addition to the output- and outcome-based targets described already, some measures of 'in programme' performance and quality should be considered to develop a 'balanced score card' approach to performance management.

Currently, WORKSTEP offers long-term support with no clear milestones between gaining supported employment and moving to unsupported open employment, a process which may take a number of years. Given this lack of structure, it is important to incorporate some measurement of 'distance travelled' within the Programme. Ideally, this would form part of the WORKSTEP-supported employee development planning process.

In this context 'distance travelled' would offer all stakeholders a measure of the distance a supported employee has travelled towards open employment and clearly demonstrate their readiness to move from the Programme once targets are reached. For those supported employees who may never achieve open employment it also offers clear evidence of progress and the impact of their involvement with the Programme. This issue is discussed further in Section 5.4.

A range of quality based indicators could also be developed to offer some perspective on the quality of support offered by provider organisations. These could include measures such as the ratio of supported employees to provider support workers, the frequency of, and time allocated for progress reviews, the amount of time supported employees spend on training and development activities, etc. This approach would, to some extent, reflect the performance targets for Remploy, which include the percentage of time spent on employee development.

Remploy key performance targets also adopt a balanced approach to overall company performance. Progression rates in their supported businesses are, in common with all supported businesses, low. These, however, are balanced by progressions from the supported placements offered by Remploy Interwork which are relatively high. Similarly, the significant percentage of time spent on employee development is primarily derived from the highly structured provision that can be offered within Remploy-supported businesses, compared to more individually based arrangements that can be put in place for supported employees in placements with other employers.

Remploy also have a financially-based target regarding the average cost per supported employee. The need for improved financial monitoring, across all WORKSTEP provision was raised in Section 3.4 and is discussed further in Section 4.3.7.

Regarding the overall quality of provision the ALLI and Estyn¹⁵ currently inspect

¹⁵ ALLI inspect provision based in England and elements of provision in Scotland and Wales where the provider has their headquarters based in England and Estyn inspect providers based in Wales. Providers based solely in Scotland are not inspected, as there is no Scottish equivalent to ALLI or Estyn.

WORKSTEP providers on behalf of Jobcentre Plus, and produce reports on the quality of provider performance. This data could feed into the assessment of overall provider performance.

National versus local performance targets

There are a significant number of issues which have an impact upon the performance of WORKSTEP providers and a number of these have already been highlighted, e.g. transfer of SEP-supported employees and the nature of the delivery model (supported placement or supported business). In addition, there may be specific issues, which will impact upon the performance of providers who specialise in working with particular groups of supported employees, e.g. learning disability.

The demographic make up of the population and rural/urban nature of the area served may also place specific demands upon providers who aim to meet local needs. For example, one provider highlighted that whilst in some areas providers are able to work with large employers who may offer a number of placements, this approach is not possible in others:

'We don't have large employers taking large numbers of people so we are working on an individual client basis and it's predominately with individual employers...there's nowhere where you can actually say we've got ten people working in a factory as you may have in other parts of the country.'

The model of developing service level or partnership agreements with large employers, adopted by some of the larger national providers, is discussed further in Sections 5.2.7 and 5.5.2.

Whilst there may be a need for some national minimum performance targets for all providers, there is also a need to take into consideration the local factors highlighted above. In order to do this, local targets could be agreed and built into the contracts of each provider. These should be subject to annual review and focus on an incremental approach to continuous improvements in service quality, outputs and outcomes.

4.3 Funding

4.3.1 Funding structures

Annual funding for WORKSTEP in 2004/05 totalled just under £185 million for the support of around 27,000 customers within both the employment and pre-employment phases of the Programme. Of this, Remploy received approximately £116 million for their work supporting just under 9,500 customers with the remaining WORKSTEP providers sharing £68.7 million for supporting around 17,000 customers. It should be noted that these figures are not directly comparable as Remploy report a yearly average for Programme customers, and the figure for contracted providers is a total for the year, highlighting again some of the difficulties associated a lack of consistent MI.

There are significant differences in the manner in which payment received by Remploy is structured compared with other WORKSTEP providers.

Providers, with the exception of Remploy, are paid on the basis of the actual number of filled full-time places (working over 21 hours) and part-time places (working 16 – 21 hours) up to the maximum specified in their contract. These monthly figures are based on the supported employees they are currently supporting within employment, and do not include those in the pre-work phase. The only payment associated with this element of Provision is for the production of a development plan and then for a job start.

Thus, for supported employees who started the Programme on or after April 2001, providers receive payments for each supported employee, at key stages and at a flat monthly rate. The funding structure for these contracted providers is outlined in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 WORKSTEP contract payment structure

	Existing employees at 1 April 2001		New employees from 1 April 2001	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Development plan	n/a	n/a	£500	£500
Job start	n/a	n/a	£250	£250
Monthly payment	£400	£200	£400	£200
Progression	£500	£500	£500	£500
Sustained progression	£500	£500	£500	£500

A number of providers stated that they felt the differential in the payment for a part-time place and a full-time place was not reasonable:

'...in terms of support that somebody potentially requires, if you are looking at purely the funding there, the support, training or whatever (as opposed to wage subsidy) it does not make any difference if that person works 16, 21 or 37, your input is the same.'

In fact a number of individual cases identified through the study suggest supported employees who face some of the most significant barriers, and require the most support from providers, are often only able to work part-time.

In contrast to these structured payments, Remploy are funded via grant in aid, which is agreed with the Secretary of State and linked to Remploy's business plan proposals. During 2004/05, the average annual cost per supported employee within Remploy's supported businesses was around £18,000, as compared with around £3,400 per supported employee supported via Remploy Interwork¹⁶.

¹⁶ National Audit Office (2005), *Gaining and retaining a job: the Department for Work and Pensions' support for disabled people*.

4.3.2 Additional funding sources

In addition to the funding described in Table 4.2, supported businesses run by contracted providers are also subsidised via a system of Factory Support Grants. During 2004/05, around £2.1 million of the total WORKSTEP contract budget of £68.7 million was utilised for these support grants. They aim to provide additional investment to providers in order for them to be able to purchase new equipment, consultancy support and marketing to maintain and develop their businesses, although the level of funding available via this route has reduced during recent years. Contracted providers who have received this funding in the past expressed some concerns about this, and highlighted that withdrawal of this type of support may undermine the long-term viability of their businesses.

One provider who had a very small supported business and a larger number of supported employees within supported placements said that it would be useful to have some form of development fund to support all models of delivery. They highlighted that the funding they accessed via the WORKSTEP Modernisation Fund had enabled them to extend their provision of supported placements, which they felt was the appropriate model for the future of Programme delivery.

Many providers also tapped into other funding from a range of sources, for example, via the provision of other Jobcentre Plus Programmes such as New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP), or from the European Social Fund. Training programmes for supported employees are often provided via agencies such as Learn Direct or through local colleges, so the funding does not come from the DWP via WORKSTEP, but from other sources such as Department for Education and Skills.

Local authority providers also tended to receive additional funding from Authority budgets, in particular for supported business provision. This does vary by authority, although those within the case studies often had local authority funding that matched or exceeded the amount received via WORKSTEP. There was, however, a clear downward pressure on funding via this route. Most local authority providers had clear year-on-year targets to reduce the portion of their operating budget derived from the Authority, and had been successful in meeting these targets.

4.3.3 Front-end and progression payments

The majority of contracted providers commented on perceived difficulties with current payment structures, in particular their perception that the significant amount of 'work preparation' carried out with many supported employees is not rewarded. However, one contracted provider did state that the lack of up front payment makes *'you work harder to get people a job.'*

The need for an increase in front-end payments was also raised by some Contract Managers, although many also felt the need for more incentives with regards to progression. The apparent lack of acknowledgement for the work many providers carry out in the initial phase is also apparent in the monitoring of occupancy figures (number of filled places verses contracted places). Filled places are based on supported employees in work, and do not take into account customers in the pre-employment phase.

Some providers stated that they rely on the monthly payments they receive for supported employees who require minimal levels of support in work to subsidise the work they carry out with others during the pre-employment phase.

This highlighted the need to review the links between current disability employment programmes, particularly in this case between Work Preparation and WORKSTEP, where pre-employment work could be funded via the former programme. A provider with contracts for both elements of provision would not be operating the 'pre-employment' elements of provision at a loss, and thus, relying on support from 'in employment' payments to cover this. However, where providers do not hold Work Preparation contracts, they are reluctant to refer customers back to the DEA if support of this type is needed, as they fear that the Customer may not return to them for WORKSTEP support, if this is also required.

The removal of this need to subsidise pre-employment support via other aspects of the Programme might also assist the pace of progression to unsupported open employment. All stakeholders currently acknowledge the lack of incentives for progression within the current funding structure, and changes to funding, which may facilitate an increased emphasis on progression, should be considered. However the points noted in Section 4.2.3, regarding the need to balance any increased emphasis on progression with improved gatekeeping and an equal emphasis on the sustainability of progression, should be noted.

4.3.4 Review of payment levels

Another issue highlighted by a number of contracted providers and some Contract Managers was that there had been limited increases in payment levels since the Programme was introduced, and suggested that, in real terms, this meant a decrease in the funding.

The monthly payment to contracted providers was increased in April 2004. For existing (Supported Employment Programme (SEP)) supported employees this rose from £396.68 to £400 for full-time, and £198.34 to £200 for part-time. For new supported employees this rose from £320 to £400 for full-time and £160 to £200 per month for part-time.

4.3.5 Remploy and contracted provision

Overall, the disparity in both the funding and management arrangements for Remploy and contracted providers prompted several stakeholders to comment on the '*lack of a level playing field*' within WORKSTEP provision. This lack of consistency relating to such fundamental elements of the Programme also presents significant difficulties when attempting any systematic review of WORKSTEP. Direct comparison between providers is not possible within the current system and the harmonisation of Programme arrangements should be considered for the future.

4.3.6 Payment systems

The majority of contracted providers expressed their ongoing concerns and frustrations with the WORKSTEP payments system. There were a number of issues with the

provision of data and there is a perception that the same data has to be provided in a number of different formats. Contracted providers complete both paper-based and on-line returns for WORKSTEP payments and monitoring, and there is some evidence of duplication in data requests for these two purposes.

However, the main area of concern for providers was regarding the complexity of the original payments system and in particular the formula used by Jobcentre Plus to generate payments. This produced a system in which providers have been unable to reconcile their calculations for payment due and the payment received from Jobcentre Plus.

This issue was recognised and a new system of payment by actual outputs / occupancy (rather than retrospective averages) was introduced in April 2005. This new system aimed to address many of the difficulties raised by providers, and some of those visited in the later stages of the study commented that the new system was significantly less complex, and more transparent. A small number of providers stated that there were ongoing difficulties with the payments system and overall the majority of providers commented on the apparent increase in 'bureaucracy' and a related increase in the administrative burden on their organisation since the introduction of WORKSTEP.

This dissatisfaction may, in part, be related to the frustrations of those providers who perceived that they were required to supply the same data in more than one format, or to more than one department within Jobcentre Plus (for example, to the Contract Manager and the payments team). For longstanding providers it may also be linked to perceptions around the introduction WORKSTEP processes, such as the production of annual self-assessment reports and inspection, which were not required for SEP.

4.3.7 Financial monitoring

Payments to contracted WORKSTEP providers are subject to scrutiny via a system of Financial Appraisal Monitoring (FAM) which aims to provide Jobcentre Plus with an assurance that payments to providers are in accordance with Programme guidance. However, the way in which providers utilise the money they receive is not currently subject to any form of monitoring and this issue was a cause of concern to some Contract Managers:

'On the old funding system they had to account back to us, they had to have a sheet each year which showed us what they had spent it [SEP grants] on, including their admin costs and so on, now we don't do anything.'

In particular a Contract Manager questioned how money is spent supporting some longer-term supported employees:

'I think we have got to...look more critically at what we would call the low maintenance clients...you are paying five thousand pounds a year, which is quite a lot of money. If you are not paying financial subsidy what's it paying for? We know that they will have high maintenance people, I was talking to one of our small providers last week and she was seeing a client...every few days to keep them stable, and that's high costs, we know that. But once you have that initial surge of expenditure and once you have been there six months and are settled in a job what are they doing with that five grand?'

Without some form of monitoring it is not possible to offer any clear picture of how providers are utilising their WORKSTEP allocations. For example, one of the aims of the modernised Programme was to decrease dependence on wage subsidies to employers. However, financial payment does appear to be one of the most common forms of support to the employers of supported employees on placements (see Section 5.3.7). Without some form of monitoring it is not possible to assess if these payments have decreased, increased or remained static since the introduction of WORKSTEP, or if they are linked to the provision of support and training by the employer, or treated as wage subsidy.

It is likely, in the light of provider perceptions around the administrative burden of WORKSTEP, that the introduction of financial monitoring may not be well received. However, consideration could be given to the production of some basic financial information, such as that required by SEP.

4.4 Quality systems

4.4.1 WORKSTEP quality systems

The introduction of quality standards for WORKSTEP providers was one of the key developments of the new Programme. The process for developing the quality standards framework commenced in early 2000, and the supporting guidance, 'WORKSTEP A Quality Standards Framework for Providers', was issued in September 2002. This guide aimed to provide information to enable providers to use the standards effectively to monitor and improve the quality of their service. It offered guidance on the meaning and content of the standards, the provider self-assessment process and the role of ALI.

The contractual requirement for WORKSTEP providers to carry out annual self-assessment was generally perceived as positive, and the majority of providers were able to show evidence of annual self-assessment reporting and related action planning, although this was not universal.

The format and content of these self-assessment reports and action plans was widely varied, and some providers commented that there was a lack of sufficient initial guidance and practical support from Jobcentre Plus. The introduction of the more structured provider 'health check', a template-based process, in 2005 was described by some as, 'a step in the right direction,' although one smaller provider

felt it was more appropriate for large organisations and had some difficulties with the options it offered to describe their provision. Provider awareness of the health check was also patchy and no decision had been made as to whether this process would be introduced with Remploy.

A provider visited towards the end of the study stated they had only received information about the health check within the last few days, although it had been publicised for some considerable time via the Jobcentre Plus WORKSTEP extranet. Another provider commented that their Contract Manager had told them '*not to bother with it*'. A more general concern was that the health check process was in addition to, rather than instead of, the self-assessment reporting process. However, some providers felt it may provide a useful tool to facilitate self-assessment.

The lack of a standardised or 'template-based' approach to self-assessment reporting was also found in other Programme areas such as supported employee development planning. A number of providers indicated that they would much prefer a template, rather than having to devote time to develop their own systems. The majority of Contract Managers also indicated that a more standardised approach would greatly assist in the monitoring process and their ability to compare the operation and performance of providers, although one individual did comment that they felt it would be inappropriate to impose systems of this nature on providers.

4.4.2 The impact of inspection

The inspection of WORKSTEP providers by ALI commenced in June 2002. One Contract Manager described Jobcentre Plus briefing sessions for providers which covered quality standards in the morning, and inspection later the same day:

'We did a session on quality standards...we also on those sessions introduced ALI so that the providers were hit with somebody from Head Office talking to them about quality standards for the morning, then bringing an inspector in to talk about ALI and the inspection process which didn't totally sit with our quality standards and people leaving those events were totally confused.'

The issue of the timing of the introduction of inspection so shortly after the launch of the quality standards is discussed in *Timing of inspection*.

All of the providers visited to date, with the exception of the Scottish regionally contracted providers, had undergone an inspection from ALI or Estyn, the office of HM Chief Inspector of Education and Training in Wales. ALI cover provision based in England and elements of provision in Scotland and Wales where the provider has their headquarters based in England and Estyn inspect providers based in Wales. Providers based solely in Scotland are not inspected, as there is no Scottish equivalent to ALI or Estyn.

Overall, providers described the impact of inspections in a positive way, highlighting the importance of improving quality and the way in which the introduction of inspection had required them to prioritise this. However, some, particularly those who were inspected during the earlier phases, felt that there were a number of issues around the process which required improvement.

Educational focus

The 'academic' or 'educational' focus of some inspectors was commented upon, for example, some ALI inspectors used the term 'learners' when referring to supported employees. Providers also felt inspectors were too focused on the provision of training and basic skills to supported employees, rather than the priority of employment.

Some providers commented that supported employees should not automatically be expected to be involved in training, particularly if it is not directly related to their job. One gave an example of a supported employee in a cleaning job who did not want to participate in any educational courses, did not require any qualifications for the job they did, and was happy with their employment. The provider noted that not everyone wants to develop their 'basic skills', and felt that this focus was inappropriate for an employment programme. Another provider also commented that it could become awkward to regularly ask supported employees if they want to attend basic skills courses when they have already indicated that they do not wish to do so.

ALI staff did acknowledge that there were some difficulties with a small number of the early inspections regarding the focus on educational rather than employment models, in particular the numeracy, literacy and language support on offer via providers. There may have been too much emphasis on the identification of needs in these areas and an expectation that providers would themselves have programmes in place to address these needs. However it was pointed out that both ALI and providers have learnt lessons from these experiences, and certainly those providers who were inspected in later phases were much less critical of the process.

Timing of inspection

Some Contract Managers felt that the introduction of inspections in June 2002 was too soon after the start of the new Programme:

'In terms of the introduction of WORKSTEP and quality standards for WORKSTEP and ALI inspections it was all concentrated into a very tight timescale...and I think it would have been better if we had had a longer running in period and therefore what we got was a lot of negative resistance to ALI because we hadn't been in a position to prepare them for it.'

'ALI was introduced too soon after the introduction of the quality framework, this whole area was new to many providers and they didn't have a chance to put things in place prior to inspection. WORKSTEP providers were asked to do in nine months what other Jobcentre Plus programmes had years to put in place.'

ALI again acknowledged that perhaps the pilot phase should have been longer, but pointed out that there is often no *'right time'* for inspection and they highlighted that significant progress had been made since the process commenced. ALI staff suggested there has been a cultural shift with the vast majority of providers, who now accept and are positive about the need for inspection.

In Wales, Estyn took a more incremental approach to the introduction of inspection. The initial process was described as a *'dialogue'* with providers and Jobcentre Plus, followed by a series of thematic inspections of providers. These lasted for a single day allowing providers and inspectors to develop a more mutual understanding. Once this process was completed across the country the more formal inspections commenced.

All stakeholders appeared to recognise that providers were poorly prepared for inspection, and a number of actions have followed to address the difficulties this caused. One Contract Manager felt that Head Office had initially given ALI a *'false impression'* about how much support was available to providers from Jobcentre Plus. However, ALI did not highlight this as an issue and commented that despite early difficulties, providers have demonstrated that they have the capacity to improve following a failed inspection.

Lack of a consistent approach – Jobcentre Plus and ALI

The final main area of concern regarding inspection, highlighted by both providers and Contract Teams, was a sense that ALI and Jobcentre Plus Contract Managers were not always in agreement. One provider described a situation where their Contract Manager had praised their supported employee development planning and review documentation, only to have these criticised by ALI. Contract Teams from other regions highlighted similar situations, which had arisen in their areas. Providers felt such circumstances left them in a very difficult position, unsure of which agency they were accountable to, Jobcentre Plus or ALI, and they also highlighted inconsistencies between the common inspection frameworks, used by the inspectors, and the requirements of WORKSTEP Quality Standards Framework. These inconsistencies have been addressed in an amended version of the WORKSTEP Quality Standards Framework, issued in August 2005.

WORKSTEP Contract Managers also commented that they had been offered little guidance or training in order that they could assist and support providers with the inspection process, particularly during the early phases. It should be noted that inspections commenced at around the same time as the regional Contract Management structure was put in place, so that many Contract Managers were new to their roles and were just beginning to familiarise themselves with WORKSTEP and their local providers.

Outcomes of inspection

Bearing in mind the issues discussed above, many providers have scored poorly in their ALI inspections, and during the inspection year July 2004 to June 2005, just

over half of the WORKSTEP providers inspected were judged to offer inadequate provision, (although the vast majority of those who were subsequently reinspected were then assessed as at least satisfactory.)

Some evidence from the case studies suggests that poor scoring of provision via an inspection does not always reflect that there are poor levels of support available to individual supported employees. It is also related to the lack of evidence of the activities providers have undertaken and a limited appreciation of the need for robust systems linked to quality improvement including the need to carefully record these processes. The providers who had a better understanding of the requirements of inspection, which may be linked to the previous work experience of individuals, e.g. within education, appeared to score better, although the day-to-day support on offer to supported employees may be of a similar level to that offered elsewhere.

However, there was clearly a need to address the issues regarding the poor performance of providers at inspection, the apparent lack of a co-ordinated approach between Jobcentre Plus and ALI, and the lack of adequate training and support for WORKSTEP Contract Managers. Jobcentre Plus has, therefore, worked with ALI aiming to develop the knowledge and skills of Jobcentre Plus staff and providers, to update guidance for providers and produce additional guidance for inspectors.

For a period of six months from June 2005, Jobcentre Plus and ALI dedicated resources for a specific WORKSTEP Improvement Project. This aimed to focus on quality improvement within the Programme and in particular worked with Contract Managers to develop their skills so they could act as 'champions' to facilitate improvement across the Programme more broadly.

Initial feedback from this work appears to be very positive, although it is too early to assess longer-term benefits, and one concern is the risk that positive results may be undermined by the changes to WORKSTEP contract management structures and staffing. However, one of the outputs of the project was described as a resource, which will offer guidance on the key elements of provision such as development planning, equal opportunities and strategic planning. It is primarily aimed at Contract Managers, although ALI also reported that there are plans to make this more widely available via the WORKSTEP Extranet.

4.5 Communications and marketing

4.5.1 Communication with Jobcentre Plus

As reported in Section 4.1.3, stakeholders generally describe good communications and positive relationships with Jobcentre Plus, although a small number of regionally contracted providers reported that recently they had less contact with their Contract Managers than previously. Some voiced frustrations that Contract Managers often had to refer things '*up to Head Office*' before they could respond to enquiries. There was also a suggestion that sometimes BASE members had information on

developments and upcoming WORKSTEP-related issues before Contract Managers were aware of them.

The other key relationship with Jobcentre Plus staff that many providers highlighted is with the DEAs. This was particularly strong with most of the regionally contracted providers who see the DEA as holding a key role within the Programme. Many of these providers stated that they did not wish to adopt the system of self-referral to the Programme as they felt it was important to maintain links with DEAs.

Providers were also generally happy with the WORKSTEP extranet, and e-mail alert system, which notifies them of any amendments or additions to the site. However, some did state that they felt the content was limited and they would like to see some developments in this, although they were not able to offer specific examples of the type of content they wished to see.

The most common single issue raised by many of the longstanding providers, regarding their links with Jobcentre Plus, was a perception that there was an ever increasing administrative burden related to Jobcentre Plus requirements for the Programme. In general this appeared to refer to the requirements linked to the payments system, the requests from Contract Managers for monitoring information and also reflected the need for much improved documentation of activity linked to the new quality standards and inspection.

4.5.2 Provider networks

In some regions the Contract Management Teams facilitate WORKSTEP provider meetings, and where these networks are in place they are generally well received and felt to be useful. In regions where Contract Teams do not facilitate networks, there is often some form of provider network in place, facilitated by providers themselves, and many providers were members of BASE and attend their regional meetings. Contract Managers are often invited to, and attend, these meetings.

Some providers did highlight that there was sometimes a reluctance to share information with other providers as they are in a competitive situation regarding their contracted position:

'...it sounds nice to be sharing with your colleagues, but we are actually fighting for the same clients when you're under contract.'

'Competition....we don't like using the word but it does exist.'

However, there were also good examples of providers working together in a collaborative way around a specific activity, for example, software development or preparing for inspection, or with regard to provision more generally.

'...[another provider] said "I've got somebody who needs to go onto WORKSTEP but I haven't got a vacancy, can you take him on?" and I said yes so we just transferred him, he left their adviser and joined one of our advisers and went on the Programme.'

Following the WORKSTEP Improvement Project (see Section 4.4.2 above) networks of providers have also developed with the aim of improving the quality of provision.

Providers with supported businesses highlighted that they would particularly welcome assistance with developing mechanisms to share good practice related to the business element of their provision, and a number highlighted difficulties in obtain specialist advice in this area.

4.5.3 Marketing of WORKSTEP and WORKSTEP providers

One of the most common themes regarding communications surrounding WORKSTEP was the lack of Jobcentre Plus publicity about the Programme. Many Contract Managers and providers stated that levels of awareness about the availability of the Programme and the type of support it offers were very low with potential supported employees, employers and within Jobcentre Plus. Contract Managers commented,

'It (WORKSTEP) needs to have its profile raised with the general public and with Jobcentre Plus staff in the first place...if you walk into a Jobcentre, I guarantee you, the only people who would have heard of WORKSTEP are the DEAs.'

'...there was an instance a few weeks ago where a young girl [with a disability]...has got a job at xx airport as a customer service rep...she basically got that job through one of our providers...and is now on WORKSTEP...she met [the minister] and was on the local news...but never once was it mentioned that she was on WORKSTEP.'

Some stakeholders suggested that it was a deliberate decision not to publicise the Programme more widely, as if increasing numbers of prospective supported employees and employers were aware of its benefits there would be insufficient resources to cope with the demand.

A number of providers do carry out a significant amount of their own WORKSTEP marketing, targeted at potential supported employees, employers and DEAs. Generally, national providers produce the most comprehensive range of advertising materials, although some of the regionally contracted providers also produced an annual WORKSTEP marketing plan in addition to a range of marketing materials.

Two of the nationally contracted providers commented that they do not currently advertise the Programme as their contracts are full and they are unable to offer places to prospective supported employees.

Interviews with employers during the case studies also highlighted there were quite low levels of awareness of the Programme with some of those who had employees supported via WORKSTEP (see Section 5.5.2). Some Contract Managers felt that a standard information pack for these employers, which gives details of the Programme and types of support available to employers and supported employees would be helpful, in addition to general marketing materials.

A pack of this type for employers could be complemented by a similar one for supported employees. This would also highlight what support should be available, and how to raise any concerns about provision.

4.6 Conclusions and recommendations

There are a number of areas for consideration with regard to the development of current management arrangements. These recommendations are based on the arrangements in place with the existing Programme, although some of the areas which require review are directly related to issues of Programme design discussed in the previous chapter, for example, the need to pay providers for pre-employment activities.

4.6.1 Consider harmonisation of Programme management arrangements

There are currently a number of structures and systems in place for the management and funding of WORKSTEP provision and this does not facilitate a consistent system for monitoring delivery, managing service development or rewarding providers.

Overall, the disparity in both the funding and management arrangements has led to the sense of a *'lack of a level playing field'* within WORKSTEP provision. It also presents significant difficulties when attempting any systematic review of the Programme, and the comparison of provider performance is very problematic. The harmonisation of Programme arrangements should be considered for the future, in particular, arrangements for the production of comparable performance information and monitoring.

4.6.2 Strengthen leadership and accountability

Clear leadership and direction for the Programme appeared limited, and lines of accountability for Programme performance and development are ambiguous. Clarification of responsibilities within this area should be considered to facilitate the successful implementation of any future change or improvement plans.

4.6.3 Build on locally-based systems

The regional model for contracting and management arrangements appears to offer the most robust model for monitoring delivery and matching provision with local needs. The development of a model, which would ensure national provision is appropriately linked into locally-based systems, may offer a positive way forward.

4.6.4 Ensure appropriate management resources are available

Following the Jobcentre Plus ODR regional WORKSTEP contracts are due to be passed on to district level. Given the impact which the delays in establishing current arrangements have had on Programme development, and issues regarding the experience, support and training of some Contract Managers, it is vital that Jobcentre Plus gives due consideration to the allocation of appropriate resources prior to any handover of responsibility.

4.6.5 Review funding structures and develop financial monitoring

A number of concerns with the current funding structure have been highlighted and consideration should be given to review and development of this area. This may include development of a system which would offer appropriate levels of payment to providers for all aspects of the work they carry out with supported employees, such as pre-employment work if required. There should also be some critical review of ongoing monthly payments where little activity occurs, such as for the long-term support for 'low maintenance' supported employees.

Some degree of monitoring provider WORKSTEP expenditure may be required to identify how WORKSTEP payments are utilised and ensure value for money is achieved.

Payments could offer more encouragement for sustained progression to open employment, although issues such as improved Programme gatekeeping need to be considered in parallel with this.

4.6.6 Improve Programme management information

Overall, there is a lack of fundamental MI on supported employees, providers and Programme performance. This is a significant weakness and is a high priority for review with WORKSTEP or any successor programme.

Performance targets are lacking and require development, and there are some fundamental differences between those in place for Remploy and the contracted providers. It is recommended that common performance measures are developed and implemented across all providers.

In addition to the current progression measure, more emphasis should be placed upon sustained progression. The measurement of Programme quality and 'in programme' performance should also be considered. This may include quality measures such as the ratio of support workers to supported employees, frequency of supported employee development reviews, inspection scores and should aim to incorporate some measurement of 'distance travelled' within the Programme.

Consideration should also be given to the development of locally sensitive targets, which take into consideration issues such as service delivery models, supported employees transferred from SEP, and local employment markets.

4.6.7 Continue development of quality systems

Despite some of the difficulties associated with the introduction of inspection, the overwhelming majority of stakeholders described the impact it has had in a positive way. They highlighted the importance of improving quality and the way in which inspection has prioritised this.

Some evidence suggests that poor scoring of provision via an inspection does not always reflect poor levels of support available to supported employees. It is also related to the lack of formal evidence of the activities providers have undertaken and their limited understanding of inspection.

Templates and more detailed guidance on areas such as self-assessment should be considered, to assist providers with the process and to facilitate comparison during monitoring.

Given the positive impact of inspection on provision elsewhere, consideration should be given to the inspection of provision within Scotland. However, lessons from the introduction of inspection in England and Wales should inform any developments in this area.

Considerable effort has gone into the development of individuals, organisations and systems to support the development of quality systems and a culture of quality improvement. It is vital that Jobcentre Plus ensures appropriate resources are in place so that momentum is not lost with any handover of responsibility for WORKSTEP from regions to district level.

4.6.8 Develop communications and marketing

Where it is in place, Jobcentre Plus facilitation of provider networks is generally well received and encourages the sharing of experience and good practice. The development of these networks should be encouraged and supported.

Contract under occupancy is an issue for some providers and this may be improved if low levels of awareness of the Programme are addressed. As a minimum, Jobcentre Plus WORKSTEP leaflets and posters could be produced and disseminated. This would offer resources to smaller providers who may not have the capacity to develop their own materials, and also ensure a corporate approach to the messages being delivered about the Programme. More proactive marketing should also be considered, although this could only be taken forward if issues regarding the availability of Programme places are taken into consideration when planning any specific local advertising.

Standard Jobcentre Plus information packs for supported employees and their employers could also be developed to give details of the Programme, the types of support available and how to raise any concerns about provision. These may be supplemented by information from individual providers, but there is clearly a need to ensure that consistent information is delivered to these groups.

5 Programme delivery

The following two chapters review issues regarding WORKSTEP Programme delivery, with this chapter focusing primarily on entry to the Programme and the support delivered by WORKSTEP providers. Chapter 6 will offer some analysis of the different models of service delivery and types of provider organisation. Within these two chapters the WORKSTEP providers referred to as 'national providers' encompass all of the nationally-based organisations, including Remploy, although discussion of issues specific to Remploy, raised in Chapter 6, will refer to the organisation by name.

5.1 Entry to WORKSTEP

Those eligible for support under the WORKSTEP programme are:

- those on Incapacity Benefit (IB);
- those on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) for six months or more;
- those on JSA for less than six months but who had been in receipt of IB immediately before claiming JSA;
- former supported employees who have progressed but need to return to the programme within two years, or who left for any other reason and want to return to WORKSTEP within one year;
- those in work but at serious risk of losing their job as a result of their disability;
- recent or prospective education leavers who do not fit into the other groups.

(Jobcentre Plus, Guidance to Disability Employment Advisers)

Jobcentre Plus can also make discretionary decisions to allow customers entry to the WORKSTEP programme. Such decisions would be made in a situation where the customer does not fit into one of the eligibility criteria but there is evidence that the customer could benefit from WORKSTEP.

5.1.1 Disability Employment Adviser referral

When a referral takes place a customer would usually meet with a Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) in their local area. The referral may come through to the DEA from a range of sources, e.g. from other Jobcentre Plus staff, a local GP, a local college, etc. The DEA arranges to meet with the customer to assess what programme they are eligible and suitable for. The focus of the assessment is the customer's work experience, any skills they feel they need to develop, what perceived barriers they face, and any other factors which have impacted upon their ability to gain employment.

Some DEAs may meet the customer on three or four occasions before they decide what programme and which provider to refer the customer to, others feel comfortable in making a decision after one or two meetings.

In most situations, the DEA would decide what programme is appropriate for the customer, however, a small number of DEAs offer the customer an element of choice. Once the DEA and the customer have decided upon the most suitable programme, the customer would be referred to an appropriate provider.

5.1.2. Self-referral

Provider organisations can undertake their own eligibility assessment and make their own WORKSTEP referrals. Providers require a variation to their contract in order to adopt this approach.

Some of the case study providers had adopted this approach, although all providers still take DEA referrals. Providers who do not self-refer, i.e. they only have customers formally referred to them by a DEA, stated that they felt it was important to always have the DEA involved within the referral process. They reported that the role played by the DEA was crucial to ensure that suitable customers enter the correct Programme.

The self-referral approach was criticised by a number of Contract Managers and provider staff as potentially leading to the 'cherry picking' of supported employees, i.e. taking supported employees who require very little support and can be progressed relatively quickly (see Section 4.2.3). Concerns were raised that the self-referral process is not monitored closely enough to ensure that 'cherry picking' does not occur.

One Contract Management Team highlighted that whilst they have some systems to monitor self-referral activity with regionally contracted providers, they cannot oversee the use of this system by national providers. This team also reported concerns over the potential abuse of the self-referral system had been highlighted during a review of WORKSTEP by the Jobcentre Plus Internal Assurance Service in 2004.

Another Contract Manager highlighted particular concerns over the misuse of the self-referral system when it is used for retention cases.

5.1.3 Retention

Employees can enter the WORKSTEP programme if they have, as a result of an impairment, begun to require support from their employer, outside the 'reasonable adjustments' that employers have a duty to undertake. Employees are also eligible if their impairment has changed in such a way as to have begun to affect the job that they do, leading to them being at serious risk of losing their job. The supported employee must meet the eligibility criteria and evidence must be provided that their job could be lost. Progression and return to non-supported employment may still be an option in the future for the retention supported employee.

A number of concerns were highlighted by Contract Managers, DEAs and providers with regards to retentions. It was suggested that some providers have been 'cold calling' employers to ask if they have any disabled staff and offering their services to the organisation.

When raising the issue of the need to 'tighten up' procedures regarding retention, one Contract Manager went as far as to suggest the need for a different programme to deal with them:

'Some nationals go into workplaces and suggest employers put disabled employees onto the Programme...an open cheque for providers.'

Another Contract Manager commented:

'I have also had complaints about the fact that...[provider] have been going into places...saying, "have you anybody with a disability, have you got anyone who is currently off work sick, we have a programme that will support that.'"

5.1.4 Selecting the provider

DEAs reported that they take various factors into consideration when deciding which provider a customer should be referred to. One of the most contentious issues raised was that of whether to refer to a regional or larger national WORKSTEP provider.

Only three of the DEAs interviewed in this study commented that they did not have any issues about referring customers to larger national providers, the other nine DEAs interviewed mentioned that they had some concerns about the service delivered by them.

Firstly, they were very critical of poor communications with larger national providers. DEAs stated they were often not informed of progress or developments that supported employees were making. One DEA commented:

'I remember they came in once to interview two people, they use our Jobcentre and our building to interview these people but they don't even come and tell me what they are doing. They had two self-referrals that they saw here and that particular time they brought them both up to me and said we can't help them so could you help them?'

Secondly, DEAs suggested that because larger national provider support workers have too wide an area to cover, they often have insufficient knowledge about the local employment situation. This was particularly apparent in situations where the provider support workers were not based in the local area.

'...and...[regional providers] because they're based in ...[town] they know the local patch very, very well. So if you refer somebody for a job they know upfront, they have an idea of the employers who they might approach, and employers they've got links to. Whereas I've known it happen, where referrals to a national provider for them to phone up and say can you suggest anywhere we can approach locally? I'm not criticising the job that they do but I think they're disadvantaged because they don't know the local patch.'

Finally there were concerns from DEAs that the support given to supported employees from larger national provider support workers was insufficient. DEAs highlighted high caseloads and the wide geographical areas that they cover as reasons for this.

If DEAs had regular contact with provider staff they were more likely to refer to those organisations. Some DEAs did attempt to refer customers to all providers to ensure that they are not seen to be favouring one over another, however the majority emphasised the importance of the provider maintaining contact with the DEA and keeping them informed of developments with supported employees.

One DEA mentioned that they consider the resources of the provider organisation, in particular the amount of time a support worker can dedicate to a customer in the pre-work stage. For example, where a provider support worker has a high caseload and was, therefore, unable to offer the support needed in the pre-work stage of the programme. In this situation the DEA would undertake job searching with the customer and refer to the provider once a job had been found.

Within a small number of areas, DEAs have very few WORKSTEP providers to choose from. One DEA reported that they currently faced difficulties in referring customers to providers because there were very few providers within their area, and the providers that were operating had very few, if any, places available.

Other factors highlighted were whether the provider specialised in working with customers who have particular impairments, whether the provider had good links with certain types of employers, and whether financial assistance was offered to employers. One DEA reported they would refer to a provider that offered financial assistance as the customer would be more likely to find employment if this incentive was given to employers.

5.2 Barriers to work

Employment Service research¹⁷ describes a range of factors, both actual and perceived, that influence the employability for disabled people. Potential supported employees could be facing a number of barriers which prevent them from finding employment without the support of the WORKSTEP Programme. There are barriers which relate directly to the effect a supported employees' impairment has on their ability to undertake a job. It is also possible to identify a range of related factors such as prospective employee confidence levels, and employer perceptions which can also act as barriers to achieving and maintaining employment.

Generally, disabled people seeking work face a range of these barriers, some more directly linked to their impairment, and others arising from the related issues such as self confidence and employer perceptions and the complex interactions between these factors. It was also generally acknowledged that impairments can primarily restrict the range of jobs open to disabled people. WORKSTEP-supported employees reported a wide range of impairments, which for the purposes of Jobcentre Plus monitoring, are categorised in the following way:

- condition restricting mobility/dexterity (e.g. affecting back, joints or limbs);
- visual impairment;
- hearing impairment;
- speech impairment;
- long-term medical condition (e.g. respiratory, heart, asthma, diabetes);
- learning disability;
- mental health condition;
- neurological conditions (e.g. epilepsy, MS);
- other.

A number of supported employees reported more than one category of impairment, and the barriers presented by their impairment often depended upon the type of work being sought or carried out.

However, a number of stakeholders also reported that employer perceptions of impairments can present as significant, or a greater, barrier as the effect of a supported employees' impairment (See Section 5.2.7).

¹⁷ Birkin and Meehan (1999) *The key dimensions of employability for disabled people. Journal of the Application of Occupational Psychology to Employment and Disability.*

5.2.1 Supported employee: personal

A number of provider support workers reported that low self-esteem and lack of confidence are two of the biggest barriers which supported employees have to overcome before entering employment. Lack of confidence could impact upon the potential supported employees' chances of finding employment and was often the result of a long period of unemployment and/or a negative employment experience in the past.

5.2.2 Supported employee: social

The communication and interpersonal skills of customers sometimes made it difficult for provider support workers to find employment for potential supported employees. Some providers spent a great deal of time working with customers to ensure that when faced with job interviews and eventual employment, they had the skills to communicate with their employer and fellow employees.

5.2.3 Supported employee: employment experience

DEAs commented that the lack of work experience, unfamiliarity with the routine of work, and uncertainty about the job application process are barriers that customers face in relation to finding work. Many customers need support in looking for jobs, in applying for jobs, in designing CVs, and completing application forms. All of these issues affected the customer's employment prospects and required the support of WORKSTEP providers.

5.2.4 Labour market: the nature of available work

The labour market itself presented barriers to many WORKSTEP-supported employees. One of the biggest difficulties for some supported employees to overcome was that employers often expect workers to be able to 'multi-task'. Multi-tasking could be a significant barrier for many WORKSTEP-supported employees, particularly those with a learning disability, where the routine of undertaking the same duties was often helpful to them.

One employer who was experiencing financial problems reported that a supported employee's productivity had become an issue. Within the small manufacturing organisation, multi-tasking was essential:

'...[supported employee] really struggles if I ask him to do anything other than the one task he is comfortable with, I'm finding this very difficult to support.'

Within the retail environment employees are often expected to restock, carry out stock checks, and work on cash registers. In the past, these duties were often separated. Within administration, basic clerical jobs are now uncommon, and few roles encompass purely routine tasks such as filing and photocopying. Other requirements such as telephony, and IT skills may be essential.

One of the employers interviewed within the catering industry employed a number of WORKSTEP-supported employees. They stated that they were happy with the supported employees' performance but were unable to progress some to unsupported employment because they could only undertake part of the catering assistant role. The employer reported that in the catering industry employees need to be able to multi-task and as an organisation they could not justify paying a full wage to someone who could not undertake a full job. With the financial assistance they received from the provider they were able to justify the employment of WORKSTEP-supported employees. It should be noted that some supported employees who were able to undertake a full range of duties within this organisation have been progressed by the employer and remained as full-time employees of the organisation.

A DEA commented that the changing nature of work meant that many jobs that could have been undertaken by supported employees in the past are simply not available now:

'Modern technology is actually robbing a lot of people of basic routine jobs and that's where we have got real issues.'

Provider support workers did, however, give examples of employers changing job specifications and undertaking role negotiations to ensure supported employees could work within their organisations. (See Section 5.3.9)

5.2.5 Labour market: employer commitment

Another difficulty which has an impact upon securing employment for supported employees was that it could be difficult for providers to find employers that feel they have the time to offer in-work support, and also the time to dedicate to the processes involved in the Programme. One supported employee commented that if employers have to make adaptations before they are able to employ a WORKSTEP supported employee they might look elsewhere for an employee because of the extra effort required. A regional provider manager added:

'I think as well sometimes the fact that we want to go in and support that client but what benefit is it to the employer for us to keep going in, not interfering but saying this client must have this, this and this in place.'

Some employers did state that they felt the constant checking of progress, and taking the supported employee from work for review meetings had a negative impact upon their organisation. This was particularly the case where employers felt that the supported employee did not require additional support. In this situation there did not appear to be any clear rationale as to why the supported employee had not been progressed to open employment.

5.2.6 Labour market: employer perceptions

Support workers reported that discrimination on the part of employers was a significant barrier for supported employees to overcome. Although some employers are progressive in their views, there was still a concern that many employers appear to discriminate against disabled people. The Department for Work and Pensions

(DWP) has published a number of studies which explore employer views on employing disabled people, copies of which are available via their website¹⁸.

Provider support workers commented that employers still think that they will have to constantly supervise disabled people, and that their productivity will be significantly lower than other employees. One employer commented that within their organisation, the personnel department had expressed the view that they did not want the WORKSTEP supported employee to be representative of their company 'image'. They had also expressed concerns that the supported employee's line manager was devoting too much time to them and other members of staff were not receiving the support they required. As the supported employee has developed within the role, the line manager felt that this was now less of an issue.

A supported employee with a visual impairment described applying for a secretarial role within an accountancy firm. She felt that the telephone interview had been going very well until she mentioned her need for specialist equipment to assist with reading and typing. This supported employee was subsequently unsuccessful in gaining the job within a supported business.

Another supported employee described a situation where the company he had been working in was privatised, and he was sacked from his post. He subsequently took his case to an employment tribunal, and the new employer was judged to have dismissed him unfairly. The supported employee felt that it was clearly a case of discrimination because he is disabled, and although he was offered the opportunity to return to his old job, in addition to financial compensation, he chose not to take up the offer. He was very clear that he did not wish to work for an employer who operated such discriminatory practices, and was unemployed for some time before he moved into his current post with the support of WORKSTEP.

One of the providers visited had closed a factory as part of the restructuring of their supported business. As the provider was part of a local authority they had hoped to gain some alternative employment for supported employees now facing redundancy, within other departments of the authority. They had offered a full package of support which included payment of the supported employees salary for a considerable period. Despite this they were unable to secure employment anywhere within the authority.

Many Contract Managers, provider support workers, DEAs, and employers highlighted the lack of publicity that exists around the WORKSTEP programme. They felt that positive promotion of the Programme could have an impact upon the negative perceptions that some employers have of employing disabled people. A DEA commented:

'...you know what would be really good was if we got some good news stories and actually see in practice where providers have helped somebody and see the process they've gone through because they're [Jobcentre Plus] not very good at publicising it and I think that is really good way of selling it.'

¹⁸ <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People¹⁹ also highlights a similar view:

'Employers are more likely to be interested in case studies of successful practice, and in advice from other employers, rather than messages from government'.

5.2.7 Labour market: vacancies

Service Level Agreements (SLAs) or Partnership Agreements have been developed between some of the larger national providers and large employers for the provision of WORKSTEP employees on placements. A national support worker commented that they are encouraged to work with the employers that they have national agreements with:

'It is just because we are orientated and targeted to go for employers that we have national agreements with and what we have to do is work with them on a national level...I think it is to help us get people, we are looking for sort of multiple places for people, only larger organisations can do that and there are too many small employers out there, to go and knock on every single door, to give a quality service to the employer and the people.'

It should be noted that not all of the national providers have adopted the approach of concentrating their work with a particular range of employers, however, where they have there may be a risk of limiting the range of opportunities that are available to WORKSTEP customers. This approach may also be of limited use in certain areas, as highlighted in Section 4.2.4, some locations have few 'large' employers with whom an SLA could be developed. Within one region, a DEA commented that one of the larger national providers did not cover a significant part of their region, and they felt this was, in part, due to the lack of large employers. The DEA also suggested that because it was a rural location, the provider did not see it as being a priority. (See Sections 5.5.2 and 6.2.1 for further discussion of issues relating to this type of SLA)

In another region, a provider reported that a considerable number of jobs are only available through employment agencies. Much of this work is temporary, and sometimes less than 16 hours, which meant that it was not possible for WORKSTEP supported employees to consider this option.

Some supported employees were only able to work part-time hours because of their impairment, which often restricted the employment options that they had. One of the regional provider managers reported:

'Maybe you've got a client and he can only do a certain number of hours because of his disability, we've got a job that would be perfect for him but the employer wants somebody to do 40 hours per week. It's sort of matching what the client needs with what the employer needs and sometimes that can be quite a big gap'.

¹⁹ Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2005), *Improving the life chances of disabled people: final report*. London: Cabinet Office.

5.3 Support delivered

There are two distinct models for the delivery of the Programme, via work within a supported business or via a supported placement with a mainstream employer. Many providers with supported businesses also facilitate supported placements for supported employees and a number of providers concentrate solely on placements.

The support delivered was found to be hugely varied, both in terms of the nature of the support and the time that is available to support individual supported employees, with provider support worker caseloads varying significantly. There were also differences in the support offered to supported employees within supported businesses and those on supported placements.

5.3.1 Pre-work support

When a customer is referred to the WORKSTEP Programme they normally receive a range of pre-work support from a provider organisation. Many customers are not 'work ready' when they are referred and subsequently need a great deal of support before they can enter employment. One provider manager gave the example of supporting customers for as long as 12 months:

'I think the officers are very conscious that because it is the last resort if they can't work with someone they are very aware that this could be it...if we refer them back to the DEA the only other place, they will come back to us again, so the DEA will say "I know but I can't send them anywhere else can I"...so you can have someone on your pre-employment for a year.'

In one region much of the pre-employment work which is usually expected to be undertaken by providers, was done by DEAs, despite guidance to the contrary in the WORKSTEP Handbook for providers:

'It is the responsibility of the provider to match jobseekers to a suitable job opportunity. However, DEAs may advise you about local employers who are able to offer suitable places.'

One of the DEAs interviewed in another region also carried out a small amount of job searching and pre-work support but would refer to the provider as soon as they thought they could offer a more dedicated service.

Amongst the reasons given for DEAs taking on these tasks were that providers did not have the resources to be able to undertake in-depth job searching, or would not accept customers unless they had a job lined up. In some cases the DEA believed such work to be part of their role.

Vocational profiling, job searching, interview techniques, CV skills, and attending interviews with the customer, were all forms of support that the majority of providers gave in the pre-work stage of WORKSTEP. Some support workers offered this on a one-to-one basis, whereas others ran group sessions.

Other training/support offered by provider support workers included courses focusing on the particular type of employment that the customer was hoping to enter, and personal development courses focusing on confidence, communication skills, and personal presentation.

The sessions were usually 'in-house' and in most cases were funded through WORKSTEP monies, despite the fact that the current funding structure offers very limited resource for this part of the Programme. Some providers were able to link into other provision that they delivered, for example, if another programme was running a session on confidence building they would let the WORKSTEP supported employee attend if appropriate.

There were two distinct models that providers have adopted with regard to support staffing: Some providers had generic support workers that carried out all of the support that supported employees required, whether in the pre-work stage or in employment. They were also responsible for establishing links with employers. Other providers have specialist workers who were responsible for the specific aspects of the Programme. For example, who a support worker worked with the customer in the pre-work stage, another worker who linked with employers, and a support worker who was responsible for all of the in-work support that is required by the supported employee.

Some support workers felt that the continuity of contact was crucial for some supported employees, particularly for those who needed a great deal of personal support before they are ready for employment. Other providers felt that it was more efficient to have support workers dedicated to particular parts of the Programme.

Providers that had mixed provision, i.e. supported businesses and supported placements, also took differing approaches to supporting WORKSTEP employees within work. Within a small number of these providers, support staff worked with either participants within the supported business or participants on supported placement. Other providers had support workers with caseloads that comprised of both types of supported employees. This latter approach was described by one support worker as beneficial because it ensured a consistent approach across provision.

5.3.2 Development planning

The first stage for all new WORKSTEP customers was to work with the provider on the production of some form of personal development plan, although there was no standardised format or content for this. Some providers included vocational skills profiling at the development planning stage, whilst a number of others carried this out as a separate initial exercise.

The majority of providers had a pre-work development plan that was replaced by an in-work plan once the supported employee entered employment, although some simply continued to add information to the original plan. Whilst some plans concentrated purely on the development of work/task-related skills, others took a much broader approach that included personal and social development.

All providers kept the development plans within supported employee portfolios, some also recorded them electronically using various software packages.

The review of development plans and tracking of supported employee progress varied. The majority of providers stated an aim of reviewing development plans every six months, although there were a number who have increased, or are looking to increase the frequency of reviews to every three or four months to improve the monitoring of supported employees. One provider manager was planning to increase reviews to three or four per year, but only where appropriate, although he did have some concerns that the employing organisations may start to see this as a nuisance.

Although there is a requirement for providers to review plans every six months, there was some evidence that reviews can be less frequent than this. Within supported businesses there are systems for day-to-day support and supervision in place, whilst in placements this may mean a considerable period without any contact from the provider. However, many providers also offered significant support to supported employees in addition to scheduled reviews, both by telephone and face-to-face.

One provider described the use of WORKSTEP Modernisation Funds to facilitate the separation of the day-to-day supervision and support that was in place within their business, and formal WORKSTEP development plan reviews. This was introduced by the appointment of a WORKSTEP development officer, who was external to the business. This member of staff carried out reviews with supported employees both within the business, and on external placements, ensuring consistency of approach and an emphasis on progression. The provider also highlighted that in their view it was unrealistic to expect supervisors within a supported business to have the specialist skills necessary to facilitate good development planning.

Many of the supervisors in supported businesses were responsible for the development plans, although this was not universal. In some businesses, development planning and review was facilitated by training staff, or carried out jointly with training staff and supervisors.

5.3.3 Supported employee views of development planning

When questioned, the majority of supported employees reported having a development plan, although most did not recognise the term without some prompting. When the issue was explored further they often referred to forms, action plans, training records, etc.

The use of these different terms did not appear to directly correlate to the supported employees' experience of development planning and the associated reviews, which are quite varied in nature ranging from regular, productive meetings to those which take place very infrequently or that are formulaic and of limited benefit.

In one provider, all supported employees stated that they had a development plan, and seemed aware of what this was, but when the issue of reviews was explored further it became clear that until very recently, this process had not taken place on a

regular basis. Indeed, one supported employee stated that they had only had one review meeting in the past 13 years.

By contrast, in another provider, where the supported employees seemed less familiar with the term 'development plan' and referred to training plans or 'forms', there was clearly a robust process for six-monthly formal reviews of progress and discussions of future plans for development which were then taken forward into action. In addition, it appeared that less formal discussions of training and development issues were easily initiated with support workers if required.

5.3.4 Development planning for longstanding supported employees

An issue which arose in discussions of development plan reviews and progression was that of the ongoing development of supported employees who have been on the Programme for several years.

Both support workers and supported employees themselves suggested that there is usually a limit to an individual's scope for development, which may be linked to their inherent capacity or to their aspirations. Clearly, the point at which this limit is reached varies greatly from individual to individual, and needs to take into account particular circumstances such as a health condition which is deteriorating or changeable over time.

Some longstanding supported employees appeared to feel that development was no longer of great relevance to them. They were content with their current job and did not feel the need for further training or development. Support workers also mentioned individual supported employees with whom they work who are in this situation, and highlighted difficulties in continuing to raise the suggestion of further training or development opportunities. However, one support worker within a supported business highlighted the continuing importance of development reviews for longstanding supported employees as a means of identifying any adverse changes in levels of performance. In this situation they described progression or development as working with the supported employee to identify the causes of the decline and the actions required to address this.

A number of providers stated a clear aim that WORKSTEP support, for those new to the Programme rather than those transferred to it from Supported Employment Programme (SEP), would normally be time limited. Typically, they suggested between one to three years' support once employment is achieved. It was made clear to both the supported employee and the employer that the support of the provider and the WORKSTEP Programme is time limited, with an expectation that once someone is settled into work and performing satisfactorily for a period of time they will be regarded suitable for 'progression' to unsupported employment.

5.3.5 In-work support

The degree of support on offer to supported employees was to some extent dictated by the size of support worker case load (see Section 5.3.8). Within supported businesses, support to employees may also be limited by the amount of time supervisors have available for staff supervision and development, as opposed to their responsibilities for the production side of the business. Previous research²⁰ has suggested that sometimes the pressures of production could undermine the capacity of supervisors to provide adequate support, but generally this study found little evidence of this.

Within supported placements day-to-day contact and support from the provider organisation was via their support worker. There are a number of differing titles for this role within providers, including Employment Officer, Employment Adviser, and Development Worker. Within supported businesses support generally tended to be delivered via line management or supervision structures, although a number also had dedicated support workers who focused on development planning and review and were separate from business-related roles.

In addition to some of the more practical types of in-work support described in the following sections, many provider support workers also offered support of a more pastoral nature and often made themselves available to supported employees outside normal working hours. However, at the other extreme, some supported employees had little or no discernable contact with their WORKSTEP provider.

5.3.6 In-work support: supported businesses

The main support offered to supported employees within supported businesses can generally be described as twofold, namely the nature of the supported environment, and the facilitation of good access to training facilities.

Supported employees often described the environment as '*safe*', '*comfortable*', and '*supportive*.' One supported employee commented, '*everyone understands the difficulties disabled people can face*'. This view of the working environment was also expressed by some supported employees in placements with mainstream employers, although not as frequently as within supported businesses.

There were numerous examples of physical adaptations to the workplace, and flexibility of working patterns for supported employees who require this. One of the main benefits within a supported business is the opportunity for supported employees to experience a number of different roles within the workplace. Job rotation was undertaken regularly within a number of providers and supported employees were frequently mentored by their fellow employees. This process was also seen as development for the mentors who were often WORKSTEP-supported employees.

²⁰ Meah and Thornton (2005), *Desirable Outcomes of WORKSTEP: user and provider views*, DWP.

Supported businesses generally had good structures for the delivery of work-related training in place, and offered supported employees the opportunity to develop a range of skills and progress within the workplace.

The majority of the supported businesses visited also provided some form of dedicated training facilities and linked with other organisations such as local colleges to deliver training such as 'Skills for Life' and IT courses within their premises. Training was built into the working week within many businesses and one provider had made it compulsory for new supported employees to register on an education/training course, although for most this was optional.

Some courses were linked directly to the type of employment that the supported employees are involved in, whereas some providers offer courses where the skills developed are not necessarily related to the work undertaken. One provider manager noted that the sickness rate within the factory had gone from 15 per cent to less than five per cent since the introduction of training courses. Although the training was not always related to work, by giving the supported employees opportunities to develop themselves, the organisation had seen the development of a more committed workforce.

Another support worker within a supported business commented,

'I think we get a positive reaction, and they recognise that they've been given an opportunity to develop themselves and I think that shows in their work.'

This type of support and development was most common where the training facilities were on site, and supported employees on supported placements were much less likely to have these opportunities.

Many providers felt that supported employees would not have undertaken training outside of the supported business because of the negative experiences they have had in mainstream education/training in the past. It has been recognised that disabled people are generally less likely to engage in training opportunities.

'Disabled people do not benefit as much as the general population from government-provided training – only 9.5 per cent of learners in LSC (Learning and Skills Council) funded provision are disabled, although 20 per cent of the working age population are disabled.'

(Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People, Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, 2005)

A WORKSTEP supported employee, who was also a Trades Union learning representative within a supported business, commented:

'I am disabled myself and one aspect I put to people is that I feel happy working with other disabled people, I feel happy learning with other disabled people. Now, I would not be happy to go up my local learning centre which is in the middle of the town for example, where I have got able bodied people around, you don't know if they are sniggering behind your back basically.'

5.3.7 In-work support: placements – support for employers

Financial support

The support offered to employers was varied, with financial assistance being the most common. Generally, it appeared that financial assistance was offered and given to the majority of employers and some employers who were involved in SEP still regarded this as a 'wage subsidy'. Providers described the difficulty in changing the perceptions and expectations of this group, and they were clear that they would never jeopardise a supported employee's job by trying to reduce the financial assistance paid if the employer was very resistant to this.

Where financial assistance was utilised for a WORKSTEP placement, most providers had a sliding scale in place, reducing payments over time. Payment was based on the level of support required by the supported employee, and payments were reviewed at an agreed period, sometimes linked to monitoring meetings to discuss the supported employee's progress at work.

Providers were also clearer with new employers that the financial assistance was to aid the development and training needs of the supported employee, such as for the provision of additional supervision or job coaching. However, some payments were given to cover additional staffing costs associated with the completion of work tasks where the supported employee is unable to perform these, or to cover lower levels of 'productivity.'

In a small number of cases, where supported employees have transferred from SEP, quite substantial payments were being made to employers, sometimes equivalent to the whole monthly WORKSTEP payment or even in excess of this amount.

However, all providers highlighted that some employers refused financial assistance, preferring to cover any additional costs incurred to support the supported employee themselves. In other cases, where the employer was part of a large company, the local managers refused payment, as they were aware that this would not be devolved to the department or local site to assist with support for the supported employee.

Support to resolve day-to-day difficulties

The other most common form of support employers described was the provider '*being on the end of the phone*'. Many employers stated that if they needed any support they could call the provider and they would respond to the issue very quickly. Such support could include assisting to resolve difficulties with new tasks or duties, family or relationship problems which were affecting work performance, personal hygiene, and/or inappropriate behaviour within the workplace. Such difficulties could sometimes be linked to the supported employee's impairment, or could be of a more personal or social nature.

Despite this apparent ability of most providers to offer a rapid response to employer concerns, some employers did tend to wait until the next monitoring review meeting

before they informed the provider of any problems. This was more likely to occur in situations where the provider organisation did not work closely with the employer, and the employer saw the provider more as a support mechanism for the supported employee than providing support to them.

To ensure continuous contact with the employer, one provider had a system of monthly telephone monitoring. A support worker would contact the employer once a month to ask if there were any problems or issues that they needed help with. The support worker commented that the system was useful because it ensured that the employer and supported employee knew that the provider was always on hand. They also felt that it could be used as a tool for marketing the WORKSTEP programme to the employer, as they could ask about vacancies and mention potential supported employees.

In some cases employers did not view WORKSTEP-supported employees as being any different from the other members of staff they employed and felt that they needed very little, if any, support from the provider. This raised the question as to whether the supported employee actually required the support of WORKSTEP in these circumstances.

A number of employers suggested that more information on the WORKSTEP Programme would be helpful as they had insufficient knowledge of what support they could expect from providers. A small number of employers were also unaware of the payments that providers received to support their supported employees.

5.3.8 In-work support: placement support workers

In addition to all of the generic forms of support described in Section 5.3.9, which were found in both supported placements and supported businesses, the main method for the delivery of support to those on placements was via an individual support worker. The levels of support these workers deliver to individual supported employees varied hugely across the Programme. Within some providers, where staff had a relatively small case load, the support given to supported employees was very focused and individual. Generally, regional provider support workers had caseloads of around 20-30 supported employees, whereas some larger national provider's support workers had caseloads as high as 60-70 supported employees.

One employer, who employed supported employees from both a regional and a large national provider, felt that the regional provider gave much more individual and personal support to supported employees, whereas the large national provider seemed to be more of a '*business*' offering limited support.

5.3.9 Generic support for supported employees

A wide range of generic support mechanisms were found across both supported businesses and placements.

Job coaching

Job coaching was common within many providers. In one provider, the support worker spent the first day of a new job with every supported employee; this included having lunch with the supported employee, showing them around the workplace and assisting with their work. This could take place three or four times in the first week, and would then gradually decrease as the supported employee became more comfortable with the work situation and the tasks they had to undertake each day. Job coaching was also undertaken when new tasks or duties were introduced.

Within supported placements, many providers thought job coaching was best when undertaken by the employer and financial assistance would usually be offered in this situation, although some employers did not require this.

Natural supports

Natural supports were promoted within most organisations, this would take the form of other employees taking responsibility and acting as a 'buddy' or 'mentor' for the WORKSTEP-supported employee. Within one employer when a supported employee had a problem with a particular task, other team members were responsible for trying to resolve the issue, and generally would not call upon their supervisor or the provider support worker to deal with it.

Support materials

Visual aids and checklists were commonly used by WORKSTEP providers, for example, one support worker had developed flash cards with clock faces showing the different times when tasks had to be undertaken. This support gave the supported employee a clear structure to the tasks they performed through the day, and was essential to this supported employee who had a learning disability.

Another provider support worker designed and produced a photograph-based manual, which explained how to use particular machinery within a factory. This support was crucial for the supported employee who was deaf and whose first language was British Sign Language so that the existing English instruction manual was unsuitable.

Adjustments to work patterns

Employers tended to be more flexible with WORKSTEP employees, allowing time off for meetings with support workers, giving the employee extra breaks if required, and sometimes changing work patterns to help with the supported employees' personal circumstances. This was easier to facilitate within a supported business where the needs of supported employees are prioritised.

A supported employee within a supported business needed to take six months off work every three to four years to manage his condition. This flexibility was offered by the provider and the supported employee's job was never jeopardised. There were

also a number of examples of flexibility in working hours offered where supported employees have fluctuating mental health conditions.

Another supported employee reported that if he felt pressurised or stressed within the workplace it had a detrimental affect on his condition. Within the supported business he was allowed regular breaks to take time out of the factory if needed. The supervisors within the business understood that the supported employee needed to take time off when his condition deteriorated, and assured him that his job was not under threat. This flexibility ensured that the supported employee was able to return to work when he felt ready. The supported employee felt that he would not have had this level of support in 'open' employment. There were some examples of this type of flexibility within supported placements, although it was generally more evident within supported businesses.

One provider had adapted a job specification so that the WORKSTEP-supported employee could undertake a full role within the organisation:

'A few years back we found this niche, that she had a bent for IT, and as the Council was moving towards doing a lot more publishing, with taking her through training, we redesigned the job and that way we have been able to make sure that she undertakes basically a full range of duties whereas doing clerical admin work, there was quite a bit of limitation on her being able to carry out a full range of duties, even with adaptations.'

Adaptations to the workplace

There were numerous examples of physical adaptations to the workplace being introduced to meet the requirements of supported employees. These were often funded through Access to Work, and sometimes through the WORKSTEP Programme.

A supported employee who worked within a supported business highlighted several adaptations that had been made to her workstation. A new desk, chair, and specialist audio equipment had all been provided. The provider support worker also ensured that the supported employee had a suitable workstation at home, with internet access, for the times when her health condition meant she was unable to travel into work.

Travel

As already reported (Section 3.3.3) there seems to be a lack of clarity about whether help with travel to work should be paid for through Access to Work or through WORKSTEP. In two providers, WORKSTEP funding was used to buy bicycles so that the supported employees could get to work. A provider also helped pay for driving lessons so that a supported employee could drive to work, and a support worker attended the lessons to assist the confidence of the supported employee.

Generally, supported employees who required taxis to get to work were supported through Access to Work.

Training and development

The extent to which training was a part of WORKSTEP differed greatly between providers. Although providers generally believed in the work-based development of supported employees, some provider staff expressed the view that Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) had influenced their decision to focus much more upon literacy, numeracy, and basic qualifications. Supported employees within supported businesses appeared to be more likely to be involved in this type of educational development.

Training provision was often undertaken in collaboration with local colleges, or training organisations. Some providers only offered work-related training but did signpost supported employees to other services if they wished to undertake different types of courses.

Supported businesses generally focused their training on basic skills, e.g. literacy and numeracy, IT skills and/or courses that could impact upon the workplace, e.g. NVQs in manufacturing. The most common development activity that took place within supported businesses involved the 'rotation' of duties so that supported employees were developing new skills and increasing their employability. Within most supported businesses, there were examples of WORKSTEP-supported employees developing their skills and being promoted to supervisory positions, and these supported employees would then train and support new WORKSTEP-supported employees. The majority of supported employees who did move into supervisory positions remained on the WORKSTEP Programme, although it could be questioned whether they continued to require the support of the Programme to maintain their employment.

Personal support

Providing general personal support to supported employees was a large part of the work undertaken by many providers. For example, some support workers attended the first few days of work with a supported employee, and accompanied the supported employee on their journey to work so they felt more comfortable with the situation. Many also offered support and advice on a range of social and personal issues such as housing, personal finances, family and relationship issues, whilst others, rather than providing this directly, signposted supported employees to other appropriate agencies.

One support worker described the job as being that of an '*underpaid social worker*'. This support worker offered counselling, emotional support, and general personal help for supported employees whenever required. Another support worker reported recent work with a supported employee, which had taken up a significant amount of their time, and was not all directly related to the workplace:

'At the moment, for example, I'm setting up somebody in a job on the WORKSTEP Programme and I seem to have lived in this particular factory for the last three weeks...there's just so much to do, so many threads to tie up. I would say that I've spent the best part of a quarter of my time over the past three weeks with this one person and the employer and the mother and father and extended family and contact with the Access to Work team.'

The dedication of many individual support workers, and the positive and supportive cultures within provider organisations was one of the most striking features of Programme delivery. When asked about their views on the Programme the overwhelming majority of providers described the positive impact WORKSTEP has on the lives of supported employees. Many gave numerous positive accounts of individuals they have worked with, and it was clear that the majority of providers place a very high value on the work they do. They also appeared to gain a great personal satisfaction from making a positive difference to the lives of disabled people.

The ALI Annual Report of the Chief Inspector (2004/05) highlighted this feature of WORKSTEP provision:

'The dedication and enthusiasm of staff continues to be a great asset to WORKSTEP. Staff formed strong and productive working relationships, which frequently continued when supported employees went into a post-WORKSTEP work placement. Many staff went with supported employees as they moved into new job roles, to give coaching during what can be difficult early days.'

Overall, the commitment of provider staff, along with the flexibility and range of support available via WORKSTEP, are the main strengths of Programme delivery.

5.4 In-work progression

5.4.1 Personal and social benefits of WORKSTEP

Many WORKSTEP-supported employees described a wide range of personal and social benefits related to work, in addition to financial rewards. There were a significant number of cases where supported employees' lives have clearly been transformed by finding work, being given the support they required to sustain this and to progress within it.

A supported employee who had been working within a supported business for 26 years had recently moved into her own home for the first time. The supported employee had a great deal of support from provider support workers and from social services and felt that being in employment had given her the confidence to take this step.

Another supported employee who had been attending training courses within a supported business added:

'...literacy is life changing. I do all the shopping now, go to the club, pub, cafes...'

Supported employees described personal and social benefits such as increased confidence, independence, better health, improved social and communication skills, and greater confidence when meeting new people. Many felt that work gave them a greater sense of self-esteem, personal dignity and increased self-reliance, and for a small number, the workplace was clearly their primary source of social

contact. Such outcomes highlight some of the significant benefits of WORKSTEP for supported employees and links back to earlier research on desirable outcomes of WORKSTEP as identified by supported employees and providers²¹. Support workers commented:

'Progression for us is if I can bring a guy in here who won't even look you in the eye when they are talking to you, if I can progress him onto talking to other people...that to me is progress.'

'You see people there [in the supported business] who have learning difficulties, but within a year or two you can see them actually read their newspaper. That's massive.'

A support worker within a supported business learning centre reported that the benefits of training courses were two-fold: Firstly, supported employees could learn how to do their job more efficiently, whilst increasing their qualifications, and secondly, they could improve their communication, social, and personal skills through interactions in the learning centre. In this environment, employees were interacting not just with fellow workers but also with trainers and the managers of the supported business.

The success of this aspect of the Programme suggested that it fulfils many of the aspirations of those who are participating in it, although these may only link indirectly to the WORKSTEP aim of progression into open employment. However, in order to fully evaluate the value of WORKSTEP it is vital to ensure that such issues are taken into consideration.

5.4.2 Measuring soft outcomes

Personal and social benefits are often referred to as soft outcomes, where an 'outcome' is the result of an output, e.g. confidence might increase (outcome) as the result of the successful completion of a training programme (output).

The 'soft outcomes' within the WORKSTEP Programme can come through a range of experiences including training and support within the workplace, social interactions with fellow employees, the chance to earn a wage, etc.

Some difficulties do, however, exist with regards to measuring soft outcomes:

- attribution: it is difficult to say that the progress an individual makes is solely because of the experience they have had within a specific programme;
- subjectivity: individuals might over or underestimate achievements;
- language: the language used to describe certain soft outcomes might be patronising to some supported employees;

²¹ Meah and Thornton (2005), *Desirable Outcomes of WORKSTEP: user and provider views*, DWP.

- different baselines: each supported employee has specific needs when they enter a programme and as they will all have a different starting point this means that comparison between, and within, groups is very difficult.

Despite these issues there was a general consensus amongst providers that 'in-work' progression is a significant aspect of the WORKSTEP Programme. There are a number of benefits associated with measuring such progress, or 'distance travelled', where this is defined as the, 'progress beneficiaries make in terms of achieving soft outcomes that lead towards sustained employment or associated hard outcomes.'²²

These benefits are described as follows:

- supported employees can be shown how much progress they are making;
- provider organisation staff can see how the programme is progressing;
- information can be provided to support programme development;
- individuals can show potential employers that changes have been made;
- project staff can show the funding organisation that a programme is making a difference.

Whilst it is fairly straightforward to identify and measure the completion of a training course or obtain a qualification, it is more difficult to measure something that is not clearly definable and quantifiable.

Where hard outcomes were the result of the WORKSTEP Programme they were clearly recorded by providers within the development plans, however, the extent to which soft outcomes were recorded varied greatly.

Thus, whilst all providers acknowledged the importance of supported employees' progression with social and personal issues in addition to progression to open employment, few attempted to systematically measure soft outcomes, and one questioned the appropriateness of doing so. One provider had a system in place for measuring distance travelled within its other programmes. Personal skills, communication, motivation, personal appearance, and attitude were all measured, however, they did not use this for WORKSTEP as it was not a Jobcentre Plus requirement to measure in-programme progression.

Providers also recognised the importance of focusing upon 'in-work progression' and support workers stated that it gave a good indication of how close a supported employee was to open employment. How providers recorded this progression varied greatly from one organisation to the next. In most, providers' progression was noted within the development plan but there were very few examples of providers trying to systematically measure in-work progression.

²² 'A Practical Guide to Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled: Guidance Document', DWP, 2003.

Two regional providers had considered measuring distance travelled and used a scoring system for looking at in-work progression. Details of their approach are given.

Case A: regional provider

This regional provider scored the tasks that a supported employee carried out within their work. A numerical scale one to five was used; one was the lowest level and five the level at which an unsupported employee would be expected to perform.

When the supported employee reached point five, satisfactory performance was achieved and when the majority of tasks reached this point, the supported employee was suitable for open employment. The support worker, the supported employee, and the employer would be involved in agreeing this score.

This scoring system gave the provider a clear impression of when the supported employee might progress since they could see how much progression was being made within work. The employer clearly understood that when the majority of tasks were signed off, the support from the provider would be withdrawn and the supported employee knew that if they got to the point where the tasks were being completed at the same level as an unsupported employee they were ready for open employment.

This provider felt that personal and social benefits of the programme such as confidence, independence, etc should not be measured within WORKSTEP as an employment programme and that it was not their responsibility to ensure that the personal lives of the supported employees were improving.

Case B: regional provider

The second provider attempting to measure progression used Proman Harp software, and both work-related and personal outcomes were measured during their WORKSTEP review meetings. The software was used to measure distance travelled and produced charts to show how far a person had progressed within a specific period of time.

They highlighted the fact that this software package had originally been developed for work within the prison service and that, therefore, some of the soft outcomes within the system were not always appropriate for WORKSTEP-supported employees, although they hoped to develop it further.

5.4.3 Distance travelled

As part of the WORKSTEP evaluation, a tool was developed and piloted which aimed to assess the feasibility of measuring the progression a supported employee makes within supported employment. Based on the analysis of past research on disability

and employment, and discussions with a number of disability-related support organisations, a tool was developed that focused upon the 'soft outcomes' associated with being in employment. The soft outcomes utilised within this tool were primarily those identified within the 'Desirable Outcomes of WORKSTEP' study.²³

There are many difficulties which exist with trying to measure distance travelled, not least within the scope of this research. In particular, within an interview situation there is very little time for a rapport to be built up between supported employee and interviewer. It also became clear that a reasonable knowledge of the supported employee and an ongoing relationship with them are required to ensure that relevant outcomes are identified. The provider support worker should, therefore, be ideally placed to identify appropriate hard and soft outcomes.

Other programmes which have attempted to measure distance travelled have done so through adviser/client interactions, with regular meetings taking place to establish the appropriate work, personal, and social outcomes for that person²⁴.

Another issue that was highlighted during the trial of the tool was the difficulty of trying to develop a single tool for the very diverse supported employee group within WORKSTEP. A set of questions which were relevant for one supported employee were not always suitable for another, thus, the tool requires further development so that it could be adapted for each supported employee. The next step may be to identify and establish a comprehensive list of possible hard and soft outcomes associated with being on the Programme, from which a sub-set could be selected which are relevant to each individual. Progress would subsequently be measured against this individualised set of measures.

Currently, WORKSTEP offers long-term support with no clear milestones between gaining supported employment and moving to unsupported open employment, a process which may take a number of years. Given this lack of structure it is important to incorporate some element of 'distance travelled' within the Programme. Ideally, this would form part of the WORKSTEP development planning process.

In this context 'distance travelled' would offer all stakeholders a measure of the distance a supported employee has travelled towards open employment and clearly demonstrates their readiness to move from the Programme once targets are reached. For those supported employees who may never achieve open employment, it also offers clear evidence of their progress and the positive impact of their involvement with the Programme.

²³ Meah and Thornton (2005), *Desirable Outcomes of WORKSTEP: user and provider views*, DWP.

²⁴ DWP (2003), *A Practical Guide to Measuring Soft Outcomes and Distance Travelled: Guidance Document*.

5.5 Awareness of the Programme

5.5.1 Supported employee perspective

The knowledge of WORKSTEP among supported employees varied greatly, and a number of those interviewed had little or no understanding that they were participating in an employment programme. This was more pronounced where supported employees had been on the Programme for some time, and in supported businesses where they simply described themselves as being employed. If these supported employees had any appreciation of WORKSTEP it was often viewed as the training that may be on offer to them, or within mixed provision supported employees within the supported business viewed it as an external placement.

Within a small number of providers, the supported employees appeared to fully understand that they were on a Programme and could describe various aspects of it. Those who did have an awareness of WORKSTEP were also aware of its aim of facilitating progression to open employment. This was generally viewed in a positive way although most, particularly those in supported businesses, did not see this as an option they would want to pursue.

Where supported employees appeared to have no knowledge of the term WORKSTEP, or did not appear to realise that they were on a supported employment programme, they usually knew the name of the provider support worker who worked with them. They also had a reasonable understanding of the types of support available to them. Therefore, although a significant number of supported employees might not refer to being on the WORKSTEP Programme, most knew about the service provided and who to contact if they required support within work. In addition to this, supported employees were generally very positive about their work situation and described many of the social and personal benefits of being in work, in addition to the financial rewards.

5.5.2 Employer perspective

Employers' awareness and knowledge of WORKSTEP was also found to vary. Some employers described a very positive relationship with the provider and demonstrated a reasonably good understanding of the Programme. In addition they also felt that good levels of support were available to them and WORKSTEP-supported employees.

Providers often utilised these positive contacts built up with employers to seek further placements with that employer, or by asking employers in large organisations to recommend WORKSTEP to colleagues in other departments.

Other employers had a limited knowledge of WORKSTEP and expressed some concerns about their involvement with the Programme. These were often related to an expectation that employing a disabled person would be a drain on the time and efficiency of other employees and that it would have a detrimental effect on the business as a whole. Generally, these initial concerns were allayed once the supported employee was in post, and support from the provider was working well.

A smaller number of employers had a very limited understanding of WORKSTEP and some stated that they had not heard of the Programme or did not know what support it could offer to the employer or the supported employee. This lack of knowledge was associated with a number of factors. In some instances, there was poor communication between the provider and employer from the early stages of the placement, whilst in others there may have been a change in management within the employing organisation, and the new manager had not been informed about the WORKSTEP Programme. In some cases of longstanding supported employees transferred from SEP, the change to WORKSTEP had not been clearly communicated.

In one case, low levels of employer knowledge of the Programme appeared to be associated with the SLAs that were in place with one of the larger national providers. Although senior managers within this large employer may have a clear understanding of WORKSTEP, the line managers and supervisors interviewed as part of the case study appeared to have little or no knowledge of the Programme. A support worker from one of the larger national providers also reported that when they are setting up these arrangements they tend to focus on the kind of support mechanisms they offer, rather than details of specific programmes.

The SLAs have also been a source of concern for other providers and DEAs. Some providers feel they were being blocked from working with these employers because arrangements were in place with the larger national providers, although the SLAs do not appear to prevent employers from also working with other WORKSTEP providers. A support worker from an provider who has SLAs in place commented:

'...so basically we've got...understandings of processes, so if one of my local colleagues has a candidate they want to introduce to that company, they know it's going to be easier for them to do it. Its simply a way of stating how that's going to work and it's not an exclusive arrangement that says because you're working with [provider] you don't need any other disability providers, it's more about the way in which we work together.'

Some DEAs expressed the view that in these arrangements, the provider appears to be acting as an employment agency trying to fill vacancies rather than looking at the requirements of the customer and then seeking opportunities in that area. As highlighted in Section 5.2.7 providers concentrating their work with a particular range of employers may risk of limiting the range of opportunities that are available to WORKSTEP customers.

Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People²⁵ highlights the need for a personalised support service for disabled people seeking work that offers proactive job searching and job to skill matching. The development of this agency approach by providers is discussed further in Section 6.2.1.

²⁵ Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2005), Improving the life chances of disabled people: final report.

Other concerns about the Programme expressed by employers related to their perception that neither they nor the supported employee was receiving, or required, support from the provider. One employer, visited as part of the case study on one of the larger national providers, also stated that they did not know that the person they were employing was on the WORKSTEP Programme until after employment had commenced.

Generally, employers with post-WORKSTEP placements had a better understanding of the Programme because it had been clearly explained to them when they became involved, although a small number of these employers perceived the provider role as purely one of supporting the supported employee, not the employer. On this basis they felt that they did not need to know the details of the Programme.

Despite the apparent lack of employer knowledge about WORKSTEP many providers said that they had some outstanding employers providing excellent support to their supported employees. Therefore, although their understanding of the Programme might be limited, the support that they offered was still beneficial to the supported employee.

Employers with the greatest understanding of the Programme often demonstrated a personal commitment to the importance of improving the lives of disabled people and had frequently been proactive in seeking out information about the Programme. One employer described how they had previously organised work placement opportunities for individuals from a range of disadvantaged groups, and now employed someone via WORKSTEP:

'I believe in treating all staff as you would want to be treated, everyone deserves the right to get on in life. [WORKSTEP]...gives good opportunities to get people back to work and helps support their development...the support worker is very caring and the programme is brilliant.'

5.5.3 Employer benefits

Employers reported numerous benefits arising from the employment of supported employees through the WORKSTEP programme. There was a perception that supported employees were more dedicated to their jobs than other employees. Employers felt that supported employees were very committed, had good punctuality, and had a positive impact upon fellow employees. One employer within a manufacturing company believed that WORKSTEP supported employees *'more willing to work and impress'* than other employees.

Although financial support was the most common form of support to employers, most did not raise this as a benefit of their involvement with the Programme. Where this form of support was highlighted by employers it was most commonly referred to in terms of the incentive it offered, which overcame their initial concerns about employing a disabled person (linked to perceptions of a possible negative impact on productivity).

A number of employers described the personal satisfaction they got when they could see supported employees developing. One employer had dedicated a considerable amount of time over a ten-year period to a supported employee and they reported great satisfaction when they saw the individual develop and grow in confidence.

An employer within a children's nursery commented that employing disabled people had a positive impact upon their organisation. They felt that it was good for the children to have disabled people working within the nursery as it helped promote social inclusion, and was viewed as a positive learning experience. Within another nursery, the employer commented that it gave their organisation a '*positive image*' when they were seen to be employing disabled people.

A number of employers also commented that employing WORKSTEP-supported employees promoted equal opportunities and was a learning opportunity for all members of staff.

5.6 Conclusions and recommendations

The study highlighted numerous examples of supported employees' lives being transformed by the opportunity to work and by being given assistance to sustain this and progress within it. WORKSTEP clearly provides invaluable support to many people who would be unlikely to find and sustain employment via any other route.

5.6.1 Committed provider staff

To a significant extent, the positive outcomes for many supported employees are due to the commitment of staff within many providers, and the positive and supportive cultures within most of these organisations. The evaluation found this to be one of the most striking features of WORKSTEP Programme delivery. The ALL Chief Inspector also highlighted this in their Annual Report for 2004/05:

'The dedication and enthusiasm of staff continues to be a great asset to WORKSTEP.'

5.6.2 Maintain flexibility of provision

A number of strengths were identified within Programme delivery, in particular the flexibility and range of support that is available to supported employees. It is, therefore, important to retain this degree of flexibility in order to ensure a personalised service can be delivered to meet the needs of individual supported employees.

In order to build on this success and ensure that the resources of the Programme are targeted in the most effective way, a number of areas for improvement have also been identified.

5.6.3 Strengthen the DEA role and referral process

DEAs have a crucial role to play in ensuring that customers are both eligible and suitable for WORKSTEP support. The training, guidance, and support available to DEAs must ensure that they have a clear understanding of all disability programmes and can refer customers to the most appropriate level of support.

The retention and self-referral routes onto the Programme need to be more closely monitored. Adequate mechanisms and resources should be available to ensure that those referred to WORKSTEP are eligible and suitable, and 'cherry picking' of supported employees does not occur.

5.6.4 Improve publicity and information provision

In order to address the information needs of those currently involved in the Programme, and to ensure that more employers and potential supported employees can be informed about WORKSTEP, it would be helpful to have a range of Jobcentre Plus WORKSTEP advertising and information materials.

It is highlighted in Section 4.5.3, that a number of stakeholders commented on the lack of publicity about the Programme, and many stated that levels of awareness about the availability of the Programme and the type of support it offers are very low with both potential supported employees and employers.

In addition to advertising materials, some standard documentation, setting out the arrangements between the provider and the employer, may also assist in ensuring that all parties are clear on the levels of support that can be expected. Such documentation could also cover information for supported employees, so that they have some clear reference on their position with regards to the Programme, their WORKSTEP provider and their employer.

5.6.5 Develop the measurement of distance travelled

Currently, the only formal measure of supported employee progress is progression from the Programme to open employment. Given the long-term nature of support offered by WORKSTEP, many Contract Managers and providers felt that a mechanism for measuring progression within the Programme would also be valuable.

This could capture many of the personal and social benefits that supported employees value, in addition to progress with regards to work-related skills and experience.

In this context, 'distance travelled' would offer all stakeholders a measure of the distance a supported employee has travelled towards open employment and clearly demonstrate their readiness to move from the Programme once their individually agreed targets are reached. For those supported employees who may never achieve open employment, it also offers clear evidence of their development and the positive impact of the Programme.

A degree of standardisation within development planning, to incorporate a distance travelled component, could offer the opportunity to measure in programme development and progress towards open employment. It is, therefore, recommended that further development and piloting of a tool to measure distance travelled is considered.

6 Analysis of delivery models

As described in earlier chapters there are significant variations in both the types of provider organisation and the form of WORKSTEP service delivery:

- types of provider organisation:
 - local authority;
 - voluntary/not for profit sector;
 - Remploy;
 - private sector;
- the method by which WORKSTEP support is delivered:
 - supported business;
 - supported placement;
 - a combination of a supported business and supported placements.

A number of other factors have been identified which influence delivery models. Currently, there are around 200 WORKSTEP providers and there are significant variations both in the size of provider organisations and in the size of the WORKSTEP contracts they hold. Local factors such as the rural or urban nature of the geographical area served and the local labour market are important, as is the specialist nature of some provider organisations, for example, voluntary sector organisations that work with specific customer groups.

There are two distinct models for the delivery of the Programme, via work within a supported business or via a supported placement with a mainstream employer. Many providers with supported businesses also facilitate supported placements for supported employees and a number of providers concentrate solely on placements. It is important to note that within the context of WORKSTEP, a supported placement refers to a 'real' job, rather than some form of work experience placement. There is a contract of employment in place, which is normally with the employer, and there is a requirement for the supported employee to be employed on the same terms and conditions as any other employee within the employing organisation. In some cases

the contract is held by the provider organisation, an arrangement found with some of the supported employees who transferred to WORKSTEP from Supported Employment Programme (SEP).

During 2004/05, contracted providers supported 11,539 full-time equivalent contracted places in supported placements and 3,307 full-time equivalent contracted places within 83 supported businesses run by 73 providers. Remploy reported that they supported an average of 5,758 individuals within 82 supported businesses and 3,622 individuals via Interwork during the same period.

Significant differences were found in the types of support delivered to supported employees, the rates of progression to open employment and the costs associated with these two models. Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) inspectors highlighted that examples of both good and poor provision have been identified within both of these models during inspections.

6.1 Supported businesses

A number of the key delivery features of supported businesses have been described in more detail in Section 5.3, these are summarised below.

6.1.1 Benefits

Training and development opportunities

Generally, there was very good provision of training and development opportunities for all supported employees within supported businesses. A number of supported employees highlighted that they would not have taken up similar opportunities (e.g. literacy, numeracy and IT courses) outside of their workplace, for example, within local community colleges, etc. Section 6.2.3 highlights that training and development opportunities were also available within supported placements, although they were found to be less common. This may be due to the fact that training and development may be less straightforward to organise within a placement, as compared to a supported business where there were on-site facilities and the provider has direct control over working hours.

The supportive environment and supported employee satisfaction

Supported employees were generally positive about working within supported businesses and the majority state that they wish to continue to work there.

They highlighted their satisfaction with the supportive working environment, and felt that the ongoing support it offered was important to them (see Section 5.3.6). Within supported businesses, employees also highlighted the support and understanding of both supervisors and peers and the opportunities for training and development. The majority stated that they did not wish to move on from their current employer and a number also suggested that they felt they would not be able

to work in a different environment and thought that the support they received would not be available to them within a mainstream workplace.

These perceptions may be linked to more general concerns that supported employees reported regarding work, highlighted in previous research²⁶. The concerns included fears that they may be not respected or may be picked on at work, or that employers might be unwilling to accommodate their conditions. It seems likely that such concerns link to previous negative experiences, either within their day-to-day lives, or more specifically at work. Some of the supported employees who expressed these views had previously worked in mainstream employment, and had direct experience of some of the issues they were describing.

There were also some examples of supported employees who had moved from supported businesses to supported placements with other employers, and had then requested a return to the supported business as they were unhappy with their new environment. The feedback from this group to other supported employees on their return may, to some extent, reinforce negative perceptions about work outside the supported business. There may be limited opportunities for this to be balanced by positive feedback from those who have made a successful transition, either to a supported placement, or into mainstream employment.

Adaptations to the workplace

The majority of the supported businesses visited had numerous adaptations to the physical environment to ensure it was suitable for the needs of supported employees.

Flexible working patterns

Numerous examples of flexibility within working patterns, to meet the needs of supported employees, were identified. These were particularly helpful for those with fluctuating conditions, and many of those who benefited from such arrangements felt that mainstream employers would not offer them such a degree of flexibility. However, for many this was vital to ensure that they were able to maintain their employment.

Employees with the greatest support needs

All stakeholders believed that there is a group of supported employees currently working within supported businesses who could not sustain employment in an 'open' environment. They are, however, engaged in what one provider manager described as, '*real work as opposed to alternative employment*' offered via day centre provision. This group also presented some of the most profound examples of the related personal and social benefits that WORKSTEP facilitates, (described in Section 5.4.1). Potential tensions in supported businesses fulfilling this role are described in Section 6.1.2.

²⁶ Meah and Thornton (2005), *Desirable Outcomes of WORKSTEP: user and provider views*, DWP.

6.1.2 Financial viability

In contrast to these positive factors, there are a number of concerns associated with provision via supported businesses, in particular, the high costs and relatively low levels of progression to open employment. As already highlighted there is likely to be an increasing demand for support via all programmes which aim to help disabled people find and retain work (see Section 2.3.2). A shift in resources from the more costly supported businesses towards supported placements could offer an opportunity to increase the overall number of Programme places available.

Cost and viability of provision

The high costs of provision associated with supported businesses has already been highlighted (Section 4.3.1), i.e. during 2004/05, the average annual cost per supported employee within Remploy's supported businesses was around £18,000, as compared with around £3,400 per supported placement via Remploy Interwork²⁷.

Supported businesses within contracted provision receive the same level of payment from Jobcentre Plus for supported employees whether they are within supported businesses, or on supported placements. However, as highlighted in Section 4.3.2, a number of these supported businesses also receive funding from a range of other sources, so it is not always possible to quantify the overall cost per supported employee.

As noted within the NAO report on DWP disability employment programmes²⁸ and also highlighted by many stakeholders during the study, the manufacturing sector is generally in decline across the UK and many supported businesses have been affected by this downturn.

In this report, the National Audit Office (NAO) also stated that the majority of Remploy businesses are '*currently not sustainable in economic terms and are unlikely to become so in the future*'. This judgement may also apply to a number of the other supported businesses within WORKSTEP provision.

However, there was evidence from the case studies that many of the supported businesses visited, have modernised their activities and are moving towards a more viable self-supporting model. For example, most of the supported businesses linked to local authorities were facing a clear downward pressure on funding via this route. The majority had clear year-on-year targets to reduce the portion of their operating budget derived from the authority, and had been successful in meeting these targets.

²⁷ National Audit Office (2005) *Gaining and retaining a job: the Department for Work and Pensions' support for disabled people*.

²⁸ National Audit Office (2005) *Gaining and retaining a job: the Department for Work and Pensions' support for disabled people*.

Possibly linked to this pressure, there did appear to be a clear decline in recruitment of supported employees to these businesses. The same pressures might give an incentive to 'cherry pick' easier to help employees, but this study found no clear evidence of this.

There were also a number of good examples of the radical rethinking of business activities, with the development of useful products and services that are valued within the local community, (e.g. NHS equipment loan services, furniture for schools and local authority premises, refurbishment of properties to offer accommodation for asylum seekers).

Where it has not been possible to make the necessary changes, some businesses have closed, and this may continue to occur as financial and business-related pressures increase. It is, therefore, likely that there will be some natural wastage of the least viable supported businesses that are unable to modernise their operations.

Remploy may face particular pressures in this area, as people interviewed in this study reported that they currently have a 'no redundancy' policy for supported employees, in fact the assurance of no compulsory redundancy currently exists for disabled Remploy factory employees only. However, this constraint may make it more difficult for them to carry out radical restructuring of their supported businesses if required.

Providers are, however, very aware of the need to improve the performance of businesses, and many highlighted that they need more advice and guidance to assist them to modernise, although Jobcentre Plus Contract Managers are not in a position to offer this type of specialist advice. Section 4.5.2 highlighted that providers with supported businesses would particularly welcome assistance with developing mechanisms to share good practice related to the business element of their provision, and a number highlighted difficulties in obtaining specialist business advice.

A small number of stakeholders did highlight that supported businesses need to develop different ways of presenting themselves to the market if they are to improve their financial viability. There was a suggestion that they should capitalise more on the fact that they are set up to offer employment for disabled people. There are other examples of the successful use of a socially responsible stance when promoting a business, such as the growing market for 'fair trade' products.

Reservation of public sector contracts

Another factor which may also have a positive impact on the longer-term viability of supported businesses is article 19 of the new European public sector procurement Directive. Guidance from the Office of Government Commerce on reserved contracts in the new Procurement Regulations²⁹, highlights that public authorities

²⁹ Office of Government Commerce (2006), *Supported Factories and Businesses. OGC guidance on reserved contracts in the new Procurement Regulations.*

can now reserve certain contracts for supported businesses. This may acknowledge the wider social benefits associated with some supported businesses and the role they play in offering employment opportunities to disabled people. The Procurement Regulations state:

'It is Government policy to as far as possible give people with disabilities the opportunity to enter the labour market; it is for this reason the Government sponsors supported employment. When spending public funds these should be used in a way that supports this objective wherever practical. One route is by reserving contracts for supported factories and businesses. The use of supported factories and businesses also contributes towards meeting your organisations Corporate Social Responsibility objectives.'

The shift in some supported business activities towards products and services that are valued within local communities, highlighted above, also demonstrates the potential contribution to wider social benefits that they can offer. In addition to this, the links developing with local schools and colleges described in Section 6.1.3, also offer the potential for wider social benefits. These benefits include facilities offering work experience placements, and an opportunity for young people to encounter positive examples of disabled people working within their community.

6.1.3 Progression from supported businesses

As discussed in Sections 3.2.1 and 4.2.3 there are relatively low levels of progression from supported businesses into open employment. This is, in part, due to the longstanding employment of many supported employees currently within supported businesses. Many transferred from SEP, and Contract Managers and provider staff all highlighted the difficulties in changing previous expectations of 'a job for life' within a supported business.

Reemploy and local authority-supported businesses also have relatively good terms and conditions and supported employees are, therefore, reluctant to 'progress' to open employment where they would lose job security and might not secure such favourable conditions. Some supported employees also highlighted that a move would mean they would lose continuity of employment which would affect their entitlement to sick pay, pensions, etc. In these cases a move to another job is not seen as 'progression' as employees feel they have a lot to lose.

In order to move away from this static model many supported businesses have now adopted a policy which means that new employees placed within the business are appointed on short-term contracts and after this period, the expectation is that they will be moved into supported placements. A number of supported businesses were also developing links with local schools and colleges to offer work experience placements and training opportunities for disabled young people.

The final issue regarding progression from supported businesses is the possible tension regarding the progression of key workers from within the business. Clearly, those supported employees who may be easiest to progress in terms of their skills and experience, may play an important role within business delivery. If providers

progress on all such workers it could make the task of maintaining the viability of the business as a whole very difficult. Whilst providers did acknowledge this issue, most were clear that the needs and wishes of the supported employee were the first priority.

The mix of supported and unsupported staff within the businesses visited appeared to ensure that business needs could be addressed without undue pressure to retain any supported staff that may wish to move on. However, within most supported businesses there did appear to be a clear decline in recruitment. Although there was no evidence that businesses were 'cherry picking' easier to help employees when recruitment did take place, if a member of staff with a key skill set were to leave then it seems likely that business pressures would necessitate the selection of a candidate with relevant experience to replace them.

6.1.4 Segregated environment

Supported business have also been criticised on grounds that they create a segregated environment and Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People³⁰ recommended moving away from programmes which fail to integrate disabled people in mainstream employment. This view was not widespread amongst the stakeholders interviewed as part of the case studies, although two provider managers (from organisations that offered mixed provision) did highlight concerns of this type. They also believed, however, that for a number of current employees, progression to employment outside of the environment offered by the supported business was not a realistic option.

The supported businesses visited did have a mix of supported and unsupported employees. Traditionally, the 'shop floor' level had been supported employees with 'unsupported' supervisory staff, however, there are clear moves towards a model of internal progression for supported employees into supervisory and specialist roles in most businesses. It should also be reiterated that although there are arguments against segregated workplaces, the majority of supported employees within supported businesses feel very positive about the environment they work in.

6.1.5 Future of supported businesses

The overwhelming majority of stakeholders interviewed stated that they feel there is a role for supported businesses within WORKSTEP provision, although there was a perception that this role may be declining, due, in particular, to increasing business pressures and financial constraints. Many also highlighted concerns about future prospects for those disabled people with the greatest support needs, for whom work in a supported business may be the only viable route to achieving and maintaining employment.

³⁰ Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2005), *Improving the life chances of disabled people: final report*. London: Cabinet Office.

The study did identify some examples of supported employees with very significant support needs working within supported placements. If supported businesses continue to decline it may, therefore, be possible to develop additional placement opportunities of this type. However, it is likely that in reality the majority of mainstream commercial employers would not be willing to offer opportunities for those with the greatest support needs.

The study also found some evidence of negative attitudes towards employing disabled people within public sector organisations. The Disability Discrimination (Amendment) Act 2005, places a statutory duty on public sector authorities to promote disability equality. This may offer an opportunity to promote their role as 'exemplar' employers of disabled people by offering opportunities for those with greatest needs. There is a risk however that facilitating change of this nature is a long-term project, and in the interim the Programme may move from offering services to support disabled people with the greatest needs.

6.2 Supported placements

As the role of supported businesses is perceived to be declining, many providers are expanding their provision of supported placements. This form of provision has a number of positive features, for example, it is more cost effective allowing more people to benefit from support within the same overall Programme budget.

As highlighted previously, there is likely to be an increasing demand for support via all programmes which aim to help disabled people find and retain work (see Section 2.3.2). A shift in resources towards supported placements could offer an opportunity to increase the overall number of Programme places available.

Supported placements are seen as more socially inclusive and benefits for supported employees working in a supported placement with a mainstream employer may include the sense of working within the 'real world' of work, rather than a 'segregated' environment of a supported business. Experience of working with a mainstream employer may also facilitate an easier transition from supported employment to open employment when supported employees progress from the programme, as highlighted in Section 6.1.4, *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People*³¹, which recommended moving away from programmes which fail to integrate disabled people in mainstream employment.

This form of provision also offers supported employees the potential for a much wider range of employment opportunities, and those opportunities would not be tied to a single geographical location, i.e the site of a supported business.

³¹ Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2005), *Improving the life chances of disabled people: final report*. London: Cabinet Office.

Other key features, which appear to define this type of provision, are summarised below.

6.2.1 Individual support and 'agency' models

Providers have developed two different approaches to provision via the supported placements model: The first appears to place more of a focus on the individual requirements of the supported employee, and the second has adopted more of an employment agency approach and appears to place more focus on the requirements of employers. The larger national providers have developed the latter approach, and have entered into Service Level Agreements (SLAs) or partnership agreements with a number of large employers for the provision of WORKSTEP employees on placements (although not all national providers work in this way).

The employment agency model is described in Section 5.2.7 and 5.5.2, and as already highlighted Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs), Contract Managers and other providers have raised a number of concerns regarding this approach.

Some providers have expressed concerns that they are being blocked from working with employers because of the arrangements that are in place through the SLAs. However, whilst employers may opt to work with one particular provider the SLAs themselves do not appear to prevent employers from also working with other WORKSTEP providers (see Section 5.5.2).

Some DEAs described these arrangements as providers trying to fill vacancies for employers, rather than looking at the requirements of the customer and then seeking opportunities in that area. This may risk limiting the range of opportunities that are available to WORKSTEP customers. As highlighted in *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People*³², there is a need for a personalised support service for disabled people seeking work, that offers proactive job searching and job-to-skill matching.

Employment Service research³³ has also highlighted that '*meeting the requirements of employers*', '*effective jobsearch*' and the '*job-person match*' are key factors of employability for disabled people. It seems likely that the development of SLAs and the agency approach may facilitate an opportunity to improve the capacity to meet the requirements of large employers. However, it may to some extent limit job searching and the potential for a successful job-person match.

³² Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2005), *Improving the life chances of disabled people: final report*. London: Cabinet Office.

³³ Birkin and Meehan (1999), *The key dimensions of employability for disabled people*. *Journal of the Application of Occupational Psychology to Employment and Disability*.

However, without more detailed information on the extent to which this approach is utilised, including comparative data on areas such as job starts and sustainability of employment, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions on the effectiveness of this model as compared with a more individualised approach.

What is clear, however, is that the employment agency model would not be equally effective in all areas of Great Britain. One provider highlighted that whilst in some areas providers are able to work with large employers who may be able to offer a number of placements, this approach is not always practical as there are areas with no larger employers (see Section 4.2.4). There was also some evidence of poor levels of employer knowledge and understanding of the Programme associated with the agency approach (see Section 5.5.2) which providers and employers may need to review.

6.2.2 Support worker caseloads

The support delivered to supported employees within placements varied hugely across the Programme. Within the case studies, regional provider support workers generally had caseloads of around 20-30 supported employees, whereas some larger national providers' support workers had caseloads as high as 60-70 supported employees. Where staff had relatively small caseloads, the support given to supported employees was very focused and individual and it would seem likely that support workers with high case loads may only be able to offer relatively limited support.

6.2.3 Training and development opportunities

Clearly, within supported placements, the access to training and development opportunities may be less straightforward to organise than within a supported business where there are on-site facilities and the provider has direct control over working hours, etc., although the study did see evidence of employers using WORKSTEP funding to pay for training supported employees.

Issues regarding time to attend training courses and meet with support workers need to be negotiated with the employer, and some providers highlighted that at times this could cause tensions. Providers reported that they felt employers can regard their presence as a nuisance, for example, where they wished to increase monitoring of development plans (see Section 5.3.2). Some employers themselves did also state that they felt that progress checking and review meetings were a drain on resources although this may be linked to perceptions that these meetings were not always necessary (see Section 5.2.6).

6.2.4 Support to employers

Providers and supported employees reported that there is still a significant barrier regarding the negative attitudes of some employers towards employing disabled people (see Section 5.2.7). In order to increase the numbers of placement opportunities, further efforts will be required by all stakeholders to address these perceptions and encourage more employers to become involved in the Programme.

Advertising and information provision

It was highlighted in Sections 4.5.3 and 5.5.2 that improvements are required both to the way in which the Programme is promoted to employers, and to the information available for those already involved in the Programme.

The use of 'good news stories' was highlighted by providers and Jobcentre Plus staff as a way to market the Programme. Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People³⁴ also highlighted that employers are likely to be interested in case studies of successful practice, and in advice from other employers (see Section 5.2.7). Examples of the benefits that employers report are described in Section 5.5.3. It may be helpful to promote this type of feedback, alongside examples of the positive impact of the Programme for individual supported employees.

Financial support

As reported in Section 5.3.7, financial support still appears to be the most common form of support offered to employers, although a small number of providers and employers do not accept this approach. There was, however, an aim to decrease dependence on wage subsidies to employers when WORKSTEP was introduced. Overall, it is difficult to assess the extent to which this type of support is utilised by providers, as there is no financial monitoring of provider WORKSTEP expenditure in place.

There are difficulties with the financial support to some employers who were previously involved in SEP. They still regard financial support as a 'wage subsidy', and appear to have little intention of progressing supported employees on to 'unsupported' employment within their organisation. Providers described the difficulty in changing the perceptions and expectations of this group and stated that they would not jeopardise a supported employee's job by trying to reduce or withdraw payment if an employer was very resistant to this.

Employers who have become involved with the Programme more recently were clearer that any financial assistance received through WORKSTEP is to aid the development and training of the supported employee. Most providers also have a sliding scale in place, which reduces payments over time, often based on the level of support required. These payments are reviewed at an agreed period, sometimes linked to monitoring meetings to discuss the supported employees' progress at work.

6.2.5 Provider held employment contracts

In some of the larger provider organisations, supported employees' employment contracts are held with the provider and not with the employer. This situation was inherited with the transfer from SEP, and although supported employees are usually

³⁴ Prime Minister's Strategy Unit (2005), *Improving the life chances of disabled people: final report*.

on similar terms and conditions to the staff they work alongside they sometimes miss out on company bonuses and do not receive a pay slip from their employer.

Within the providers facing this issue, it is a high priority to move supported employees from provider contracts to those of the host employer. However, difficulties arise when the terms and conditions offered by the provider are favourable to those of the employer. In this situation supported employees are usually unwilling to change their contractual position. Providers also described the unwillingness of some employers to take on the contracts of WORKSTEP supported employees working for them.

6.2.6 Progression to open employment

All stakeholders reported that there were higher levels of progression to open employment from supported placements, as compared to supported businesses, although this comparative information is not currently produced on a Programme-wide basis.

A number of factors can affect the progression of supported employees to open employment, and some of the barriers are highlighted in Section 3.2.1. Providers highlighted difficulties in changing the expectations of both supported employees and employers where there have been transfers from SEP. As described in Section 6.2.4, some employers have proved to be very resistant to moving away from the concept of a wage subsidy, and continue to insist on this financial support to maintain their employment of the supported employee. The provider held employment contract described in Section 6.2.5 also presents another barrier to progression.

There may also be a lack of clarity around what level of performance at work is required before a supported employee would be considered for open employment. Given the challenges faced by many supported employees related to low levels of confidence and self-esteem (see Section 5.2.2), it is important that both the supported employee and employer have a clear view that progression is a Programme aim, and that they have a shared view of when this should be considered.

In order to facilitate this understanding, providers are now much clearer with employers and supported employees about the nature of the Programme and support it provides. One provider utilised a structured method to monitor progress within the workplace, in order to offer a shared understanding of progress towards open employment. As described in Section 5.4.2, the performance of work-related tasks was scored and the employer and supported employee were clear that once a certain level of competence was reached, the supported employee was suitable for open employment.

Such measurement of 'distance travelled' can offer all stakeholders an appreciation of the distance a supported employee has travelled towards open employment and it can demonstrate their readiness to move from the Programme, once targets are reached. It is suggested in Section 5.6.4 that a degree of standardisation within

development planning, to incorporate a distance travelled component, should be considered, and that further work is undertaken to develop this area.

A final issue which can impact upon the progression of supported employees in placements, and, to some extent, within supported businesses, is where contracted providers have vacant places on their WORKSTEP contract. A number of the regionally contracted providers had not achieved full occupancy of their contract, a situation which may be made worse if they progress supported employees to open employment. The negative impact upon provider income of unfilled places, which is not offset by the progression payment, may encourage some reluctance to progress supported employees in this situation.

6.3 Type of provider organisation

In addition to the two main models for delivery described previously, there are also distinctions in types of provider organisation which impact upon WORKSTEP delivery.

6.3.1 Local authorities

Local authorities often provide significant additional funding to WORKSTEP provision, in particular to supported businesses, as discussed in Section 4.3.2. There is, however, a clear downward pressure on funding via this route and most local authority providers had clear year-on-year targets to reduce this portion of their operating budget.

The supported employees within local authority businesses are employed on local authority contracts, with associated benefits such as pensions, etc. As already highlighted, progression rates through these businesses are, therefore, generally low.

There are also particular issues with regards to some local authority providers, primarily those with small contracts, concerning the transfer of supported employees from SEP.

Contract Managers and provider staff highlighted the difficulties in changing the expectations of employers after the introduction of WORKSTEP (see Sections 3.2.1 and 5.3.7). It was reported that some of the most difficult employers to tackle on this issue were within the public sector, including local authorities.

There was clear evidence from the case studies that some local authorities, particularly those with small contracts, who directly employ staff within the authority, are primarily using WORKSTEP as a wage subsidy. Whilst in two cases, adjustment to job design to facilitate development opportunities for supported employees, had taken place, overall, there was very little evidence that provision had developed in line with WORKSTEP requirements.

Whilst supported employees generally worked within a supportive environment and appeared reasonably satisfied with their job, there was little or no evidence of monitoring, structured development or systems to assure the quality of provision.

In addition to their contractual responsibilities for WORKSTEP-supported employees, the Disability Discrimination (Amendment) Act 2005 places a statutory duty on public sector authorities to promote disability equality. Although this duty does not come into force until December 2006, it may encourage local authorities in this position to accept their responsibilities to become 'exemplar' employers of disabled people.

Finally, there are also some complex arrangements in place where some local authorities hold a WORKSTEP contract, although the supported employees actually work within the supported business of another provider. This can lead to a lack of clarity as to which provider is actually responsible for WORKSTEP requirements such as development planning, monitoring, etc. This arrangement seems primarily to be linked to the supported businesses of specialist providers, such as those who work with people with a visual impairment.

6.3.2 Remploy

A similar picture to that described within local authority-supported businesses is found within Remploy factories. Remploy employees are also employed on contracts with relatively good terms and conditions, and a high degree of individual protection. It was reported by Remploy staff that supported employees are offered secure 'life-time' employment within the company, and that Remploy have a policy of no redundancies for supported employees. As would be expected, progression rates from these businesses are low, and as highlighted in Section 6.1.2, the constraints of a no compulsory redundancy policy for disabled supported employees working in Remploy factories may make it more difficult for Remploy to carry out radical restructuring of their supported businesses if required.

6.4 Size of provider and WORKSTEP contract

There is a significant range in both the size of provider organisations and the size of the WORKSTEP contracts they hold. The smallest contracts currently cover one place, with the largest covering around 2,500 places. Remploy support, around 9,500 WORKSTEP-supported employees.

As highlighted in Section 6.3.1, there are concerns with regards to the quality of provision delivered via some small local authority contracts, although, in general, the study did not find any clear link between the size of provision and quality. This point was also highlighted in the ALI Annual Report of the Chief Inspector (2004/05), which stated, '*there is no direct correlation between the size of a provider and the quality of its provision*'.

However, there may be issues for providers and Jobcentre Plus with regards to the viability of very small contracts. It is likely that providers with very few places may find that the infrastructure required to meet WORKSTEP requirements with regards to administration, monitoring and quality issues cannot adequately be addressed via this income alone. Although one provider with a small contract offered a range of employment and training programmes, so that infrastructure costs were met via the pooling of related income.

One Contract Manager also highlighted the development of a consortium approach to provision between four of the smaller providers within their region. These providers worked closely together and shared resources for some of the administrative functions of their WORKSTEP provision, such as the submission of monthly payment claims. The lead provider highlighted a number of benefits related to this approach, such as an opportunity to share good practice and develop a consistent approach to quality improvement. They also highlighted that some small providers can feel isolated, and the opportunity for them to work together in this way had been a positive experience.

From a Jobcentre Plus perspective there did appear to be an impact upon the effectiveness of regional Contract Management Teams, related to the number of contracts they had to manage (see Section 4.1.1). It appeared that some Contract Teams were struggling to effectively manage a large number of contracts with the resources currently available to them. However, the increased costs associated with additional contract management resource, for relatively small numbers of contracted places, may not offer best value for the Programme.

One of the Contract Teams had taken a proactive approach to reducing the number of smaller, less viable contracts within their region. Whilst they had not withdrawn any contracts, they had prioritised the management of quality issues and were very clear with providers about the requirements of the new Programme, so that some providers had withdrawn from WORKSTEP provision.

6.5 Specialist expertise

A final area to highlight when reviewing WORKSTEP delivery models is where providers have expertise or specialist skills in working with specific customer groups. This was often linked to voluntary sector provision and found in areas such as mental health, learning disability and sensory impairment.

There was a sense that many providers have moved away from offering only this type of specialist provision, as a number of providers that had originally specialised in working with a specific customer group, have now broadened their approach. Generally, providers seemed more likely to work with a wider customer group, and buy in specialist support, such as sign language interpretation, as required.

This highlights that there is still clearly a need for the provision of specialist expertise linked to offering support, most commonly, for disabled people with sensory impairments, learning disability or mental health conditions. One provider highlighted that their staff did not support employees who have mental health conditions, as they felt that they did not have the specialist skills required to offer adequate support in this area. Other providers do offer excellent specialist support delivered by their own staff, for example, a provider who worked with visually impaired disabled people. Their provision of specialist technical support regarding equipment and adaptations to the workplace was clearly invaluable in securing and maintaining employment for WORKSTEP-supported employees.

This provider offered their specialist support via their own staff, and was able to offer timely advice and support to employers, employees and those seeking work. In addition, the provider held a pool of specialist equipment which was available on loan, meaning supported employees could commence work quickly and did not have to wait until applications for equipment via Access to Work were processed or other funding became available. The provider was also able to offer advice and consultancy for employers and employees seeking assistance regarding more general adaptations and access issues related to visual impairment.

Some supported employees who had a hearing impairment required the provision of specialist support, such as access to sign language interpreters, and arrangements for this were usually made by the provider. A number of the supported businesses visited had also made special arrangements such as providing vibrating pagers for any supported employees who were unable to hear their fire alarm system. Many of the staff in such businesses also had some basic skills in sign language, so they were able to communicate with supported employees who used sign language, on a day-to-day basis. There were also examples of the development of useful support materials, a provider support worker had designed and produced a photograph based manual, which explained how to use particular machinery within a factory. This support was crucial for the supported employee who was deaf and whose first language was British Sign Language so that the existing English instruction manual was unsuitable.

Many providers offered high levels of personal support of the type described in Section 5.3.9 to supported employees, and also support for employers to resolve day-to-day issues, as highlighted in Section 5.3.7. These types of support mechanism appeared to be particularly useful and valued where supported employees had a learning disability or mental health condition.

There were also numerous examples of providers developing visual aids, checklists and prompts to assist the supported employees with learning disabilities who required this type of support, to carry out their duties at work.

Supported employees with mental health conditions also frequently highlighted their need for flexibility to adjust working patterns. This included examples where they were able to take regular breaks during the working day and also where overall

working hours were adjusted as required. This type of flexibility was found to be most common within supported businesses. A number of supported employees with mental health conditions highlighted that it was this flexibility and the high levels of personal support available at work that were the key factors in enabling them to maintain employment.

6.6 Conclusions and recommendations

6.6.1 The future of supported businesses

Supported businesses can offer a supportive environment that prioritises the needs of supported employees. This facilitates the provision of flexible working arrangements, good adaptations to the physical environment and well structured, readily accessible training and development opportunities. Overall there appeared to be relatively higher levels of supported employee satisfaction related to this form of provision as compared with supported placements, although it may be most suitable for employees with the greatest support needs.

The low level of progression from supported businesses is a concern with regards to the Programme aim to facilitate progression to open employment. Whilst there are a number of factors associated with this low progression rate (see Section 6.1.3), it is in part due to the long-term support needs of many of their employees. It was explicitly stated when the Programme was introduced that it would continue to provide long-term support for those who require it.

The high cost associated with this form of provision has raised questions about the long-term financial viability of many businesses, although there are examples of modernised provision offering useful products and services that are of value to the community.

Given the high costs, and the relatively small numbers of disabled people supported by this type of provision, future investment in this model is open to review. It is, however, recommended that an ongoing role for the functions that supported businesses provide within WORKSTEP provision is acknowledged. Opportunities could be developed to build on best practise in this area including:

- further development of training functions and links with educational facilities;
- sharing of best practice and advice to develop business opportunities, including building on the European directive covering the reservation of public sector contracts;
- sharing of best practice and advice to assist the development of effective marketing for goods and services.

However, if this form of provision continues to decline the development of a strategy for the ongoing support of those employees with the greatest needs may be required. Whilst the study did identify some examples of supported employees with

significant support needs working within supported placements, it seems unrealistic to expect that the majority of mainstream commercial employers would be willing to offer these types of opportunities in the foreseeable future.

The Disability Discrimination (Amendment) Act 2005 places a statutory duty on public sector authorities to promote disability equality and this may offer an opportunity to promote their role as 'exemplar' employers of disabled people by offering opportunities for those with greatest needs. Facilitating such developments may, however, take some time and in the interim there is a risk that the Programme could move away from offering services to support disabled people with the greatest needs.

6.6.2 Review developing models for supported placements

Two distinct approaches to the provision of supported placements have developed: an 'employment agency' and a more individual approach. More evidence on the nature and effectiveness of the two approaches would be helpful to assess their relative benefits, although it can be acknowledged that the agency approach of developing SLAs with large employers would not be suitable for every locality.

The need for improved management information (MI), to allow developments of this nature to be evaluated, links back to the need for improvements in this area for the Programme as a whole.

6.6.3 Develop Programme quality indicators

The levels of support available to supported employees on placements will, to some extent, depend upon support worker caseloads, and it is recommended that quality indicators be developed in this area.

6.6.4 Improve information and support for employers

There is a clear need to improve both the way in which the Programme is promoted to employers, and to the information available for those already involved in the Programme.

It would be helpful to have a clearer view of the extent to which financial support to employers is utilised and some monitoring of this type of expenditure by WORKSTEP providers could be considered.

6.6.5 Develop the measurement of distance travelled

A measurement of 'distance travelled' can offer all stakeholders an appreciation of the distance a supported employee has travelled towards open employment and demonstrate their readiness to move from the Programme, thus facilitating improved levels of progression. A distance travelled component should be considered within the development planning process, and it is recommended that further work be undertaken to develop this area.

6.6.6 Review arrangements for small contracts

There are concerns that some of the smaller local authority contracts are clearly not offering the type of support that WORKSTEP aims to facilitate, and a critical review of provision in this area is required. This review should also encompass contractual arrangements where local authority-supported employees are placed within the supported businesses of other providers.

Overall, whilst there are no clear links between size of contract and quality of provision more generally, there are concerns about the viability of supporting and managing very small contracts.

From a provider perspective it would appear that smaller contracts are viable within an organisation that carries out a range of employment and training activities. Providers in some areas have also developed consortium based arrangements that appear to be working well.

From a Jobcentre Plus perspective, some rationalisation of contracting arrangements could be considered. A proactive approach to managing quality, with clear messages to providers about the requirements of the Programme, has managed down the number of contracts within one region, and this approach could be adopted elsewhere. Some facilitation of consortium-based arrangements could also be considered, although it is crucial that these arrangements build on existing provider relationships, and are not imposed.

Any changes to contracting arrangements should focus on the key priority of improving quality and the provision of specialist expertise, where required, should not be jeopardised.

7 Conclusions

Whilst WORKSTEP is a relatively small programme, supporting around 27,000 supported employees in 2004/05, it encompasses a very complex series of arrangements that have evolved over a considerable period of time. The fundamental differences in these arrangements, related to the various providers, and the models of delivery, are so significant that it can be difficult to regard it as a single Programme.

The changes introduced with WORKSTEP were significant and presented a considerable challenge for providers, which the majority have responded to in a positive way. Whilst some of the modernisation objectives for WORKSTEP remain to be fully achieved, there has been significant progress in many areas, most notably the introduction of quality standards and the development of the support available.

In general, supported employees were very positive about their involvement with the Programme and many highlighted numerous personal and social benefits, in addition to the financial rewards they derive from their work. These benefits link back to issues they identified as desirable outcomes of participation in the Programme in previous DWP research³⁵, and suggest that WORKSTEP is generally meeting the requirements of those it aims to support.

However, the evaluation has also highlighted a number of potential areas for improvement, in particular with regards to the design and management of the Programme. The main recommendations for change aim to improve the overall quality and effectiveness of the Programme.

The evaluation case studies aimed to review the Programme across three broad areas: Programme design, management and delivery, although a number of cross-cutting general themes have also emerged. The key findings and recommendations related to these general themes are highlighted in the following sections, followed by specific issues related to the main Programme areas.

³⁵ Meah and Thornton, (2005) *Desirable Outcomes of WORKSTEP: user and provider views*, DWP.

7.1 Cross-cutting themes

7.1.1 Strengthen the DEA role and referral process

Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) play a key role both in offering appropriate advice to disabled people who are seeking work and also in ensuring that they are referred to the most suitable elements of provision.

With regards to WORKSTEP, DEAs have a crucial role to play in ensuring that customers are both eligible and suitable for WORKSTEP support. The training, guidance and support available to DEAs should ensure that they have a clear understanding of all disability programmes and can refer customers to the most appropriate level of support.

The retention and self-referral routes onto the Programme need to be more closely monitored. Adequate mechanisms and resources should be available to ensure that those referred to WORKSTEP are eligible and suitable, and 'cherry picking' of supported employees does not occur.

7.1.2 Improve Programme management information

Overall there is a lack of fundamental management information (MI) on supported employees, providers and Programme performance. This is a significant weakness and should be reviewed as a high priority for WORKSTEP or any successor programme.

Performance targets are lacking and require development, and there are some fundamental differences between those in place for Remploy and the contracted providers. It is recommended that common performance measures are developed and implemented across all providers.

In addition to the current progression measure, more emphasis should be placed upon sustained progression. The measurement of Programme quality and 'in-programme' performance should also be considered. This may include quality measures such as the ratio of support workers to supported employees, frequency of supported employee development reviews, inspection scores and should aim to incorporate some measurement of 'distance travelled' within the Programme.

Consideration should also be given to the development of locally sensitive targets, which take into consideration issues such as service delivery models, supported employees transferred from Supported Employment Programme (SEP), and local employment markets.

7.1.3 Develop the measurement of distance travelled

Currently, the only formal measure of supported employee progress is progression from the Programme to open employment. Given the long-term nature of support offered by WORKSTEP, many Contract Managers and providers felt that a mechanism for measuring progression within the Programme would also be valuable.

This could capture many of the personal and social benefits that supported employees value, in addition to progress with regards to work-related skills and experience.

In this context, 'distance travelled' would offer all stakeholders a measure of the distance a supported employee has travelled towards open employment and clearly demonstrate their readiness to move from the Programme once targets are reached. For those supported employees who may never achieve open employment it also offers clear evidence of their development and the positive impact of the Programme.

A degree of standardisation within development planning, to incorporate a distance travelled component, could offer the opportunity to measure in programme development and progress towards open employment. It is, therefore, recommended that further development and piloting of a tool to measure distance travelled is considered.

7.1.4 Continue development of quality systems

Despite some of the difficulties associated with the introduction of inspection, the overwhelming majority of stakeholders described the impact it has had in a positive way. They highlighted the importance of improving quality and the way in which inspection has prioritised this.

Some evidence suggested that poor scoring of provision via an inspection does not always reflect poor levels of support available to supported employees. It is also related to the lack of formal evidence of the activities providers have undertaken and their limited understanding of inspection.

Templates and more detailed guidance on areas such as self-assessment should be considered, to assist providers with the process and to facilitate comparison during monitoring.

Given the positive impact of inspection on provision elsewhere, consideration should be given to the inspection of provision within Scotland. However lessons from the introduction of inspection in England and Wales should inform any developments in this area.

Considerable effort has gone into the development of individuals, organisations and systems to support the development of quality systems and a culture of quality improvement. It is vital that Jobcentre Plus ensures appropriate resources are in place so that momentum is not lost with any handover of responsibility for WORKSTEP from regions to district level.

7.1.5 Develop marketing and information provision

Where it is in place, Jobcentre Plus facilitation of provider networks is generally well received and encourages the sharing of experience and good practice. The development of provider networks should be encouraged and supported.

There are low levels of awareness of the Programme. In order to address the information needs of those currently involved, and to ensure that more employers and potential supported employees can be informed about WORKSTEP, it would be helpful to have a range of Jobcentre Plus WORKSTEP advertising and information materials.

Standard Jobcentre Plus information packs for supported employees and their employers could be developed to give details of the Programme, the types of support available and how to raise any concerns about provision. Supporting documentation could clearly set out arrangements between the provider and the employer, to assist in ensuring that all parties are clear on the levels of support that can be expected. Such documentation could also cover information for supported employees, so that they have some clear reference on their position with regards to the Programme, their WORKSTEP provider and their employer.

7.2 Programme design

The main strength of current Programme design, most commonly acknowledged by all stakeholders, is the flexibility it offers to meet the needs of individual supported employees. However, a number of concerns have been raised regarding Programme design and fit with other disability employment programmes. There is a lack of clarity as to the exact nature of the customer group the Programme is aimed at and a lack of consistency in some of the eligibility criteria between WORKSTEP and other programmes. For example, the minimum hours requirement for WORKSTEP as opposed to New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) is described by some providers as a barrier to the 'hardest to help' customers they regard the WORKSTEP Programme as aimed at. There are also some clear overlaps in provision.

7.2.1 Rationalisation of provision

Rather than suggesting individual changes to current Programme design, it is recommended that the rationalisation of all current disability employment programmes is considered. This could offer a flexible modular approach, which should provide a more coherent service to disabled people seeking work, and better value for money in the management of provision.

Such an approach could offer a number of components, including:

- pre-work support for those who are not job ready, such as that which is currently delivered by Work Preparation and WORKSTEP;
- help for the job ready to find and secure work;
- short- to medium-term support for those who require initial assistance when they commence work, with a strong emphasis on progression into open employment;
- longer-term support for those requiring it, recognising that within this group there will be some who are unable to progress to open employment.

Ideally, providers could be contracted to provide a range of these services to ensure a seamless service to supported employees.

The provision of funding for travel to work, aids and equipment should also be rationalised, as the case studies highlighted that this is currently provided via both Access to Work and WORKSTEP funding.

Some of the barriers highlighted regarding minimum hours worked, contract length and self-employment, should be reviewed as part of any move to a new model of provision. It is also important that the key strength of current WORKSTEP Programme design, i.e. the flexibility it offers to deliver support appropriate to individual need, is incorporated in any new modules.

A thorough consultation with stakeholders would be desirable regarding proposals for the development of Programme design. This should ensure that alternate ideas and views are taken into consideration, and the consultation should also cover implementation and review planning.

7.2.2 Transfer of supported employees

A structured review of the position of current supported employees, transferred from SEP, should be considered by all providers.

Lessons should also be learned regarding the transfer of supported employees from one programme to another. In the event of any future changes it is recommended that:

- clear, consistent and timely messages about change are delivered to Jobcentre Plus staff, providers, supported employees and employers;
- robust transitional arrangements are put in place, which may include an assessment process to ensure existing supported employees are transferred to the appropriate support module and the structuring of performance measures to recognise the impact of previous eligibility criteria and expectations.

7.3 Programme management

There are a number of areas for consideration with regards to the development of current management arrangements. These recommendations are based on the arrangements in place with the existing Programme, although some of the areas which require review are directly related to issues of Programme design, for example, the need to pay providers for pre-employment activities.

7.3.1 Consider harmonisation of Programme management arrangements

There are currently a number of structures and systems in place for the management and funding of WORKSTEP provision and this does not facilitate a consistent system for monitoring delivery, managing service development or rewarding providers.

Overall, the disparity in both the funding and management arrangements has led to the sense of a *'lack of a level playing field'* within WORKSTEP provision. It also presents significant difficulties when attempting any systematic review of the Programme, and the comparison of provider performance is very problematic. The harmonisation of Programme arrangements should be considered for the future, in particular, arrangements for monitoring performance and the production of comparable performance information.

7.3.2 Strengthen leadership and accountability

Clear leadership and direction for the Programme appeared limited, and lines of accountability for Programme performance and development are ambiguous. Clarification of responsibilities within this area should be considered to facilitate the successful implementation of any future change or improvement plans.

7.3.3 Build on locally-based systems

The regional model for contracting and management arrangements appears to offer the most robust model for monitoring delivery and matching provision with local needs. The development of a model, which would ensure national provision is appropriately linked into locally-based systems, may offer a positive way forward.

7.3.4 Ensure appropriate management resources are available

Following the Jobcentre Plus organisational design review (ODR), responsibility for regional WORKSTEP contracts are due to be passed on to district level. Given the impact which the delays in establishing current arrangements have had on Programme development, and issues regarding the experience, support and training of some Contract Managers, it is vital that Jobcentre Plus ensures appropriate resources are in place to support any handover of responsibility.

7.3.5 Review arrangements for small contracts

There are concerns that some of the smaller local authority contracts are clearly not offering the type of support that WORKSTEP aims to facilitate, and a critical review of provision in this area is required. This review should also encompass contractual arrangements where local authority-supported employees are placed within the supported businesses of other providers.

Overall, whilst there are no clear links between size of contract and quality of provision more generally, there are concerns about the viability of supporting and managing very small contracts.

From a provider perspective it would appear that smaller contracts are viable within an organisation that carries out a range of employment and training activities. Providers in some areas have also developed consortium-based arrangements that appear to be working well.

From a Jobcentre Plus perspective, some rationalisation of contracting arrangements could be considered. A proactive approach to managing quality, with clear messages to providers about the requirements of the Programme, has managed down the number of contracts within one region, and this approach could be adopted elsewhere. Some facilitation of consortium-based arrangements could also be considered, although it is crucial that these arrangements build on existing provider relationships, and are not imposed.

Any changes to contracting arrangements should focus on the key priority of improving quality and the provision of specialist expertise, where required, should not be jeopardised.

7.3.6 Review funding structures and develop financial monitoring

A number of concerns with the current funding structure have been highlighted and consideration should be given to the review and development of this area. This may include development of a system which would offer appropriate levels of payment to providers for all aspects of the work they carry out with supported employees, such as pre-employment work if required. There should also be some critical review of ongoing monthly payments where little activity occurs, such as for the long-term support for 'low maintenance' supported employees.

Some degree of monitoring provider WORKSTEP expenditure may be required to identify how WORKSTEP payments are utilised and ensure value for money is achieved.

Payments could offer more encouragement for sustained progression to open employment, although issues such as improved Programme gatekeeping need to be considered in parallel with this.

7.4 Programme delivery

The study highlighted numerous examples of supported employees' lives being transformed by the opportunity to work and by being given assistance to sustain this and progress within it. WORKSTEP clearly provides invaluable support to many people who would be unlikely to find and sustain employment via any other route.

7.4.1 Committed provider staff

To a large extent, the positive outcomes for many supported employees are due to the commitment of staff within many providers, and the positive and supportive cultures within most of these organisations. The evaluation found this to be one of the most striking features of WORKSTEP Programme delivery. The Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) Chief Inspector also highlighted this in their Annual Report for 2004/05.

'The dedication and enthusiasm of staff continues to be a great asset to WORKSTEP.'

7.4.2 Maintain flexibility of provision

A number of strengths were identified within Programme delivery, in particular the flexibility and range of support that is available to supported employees. It is, therefore, important to retain this degree of flexibility in order to ensure a personalised service can be delivered to meet the needs of individual supported employees.

7.4.3 A continued role for functions supported businesses provide

Supported businesses can offer a supportive environment that prioritises the needs of supported employees. Overall, there appeared to be relatively high levels of supported employee satisfaction related to this form of provision as compared with supported placements, although it may be most suitable for employees with the greatest support needs.

The low level of progression from supported businesses is a concern with regards to the Programme aim to facilitate progression to open employment. Whilst there are a number of factors associated with this low progression rate (see Section 6.1.3.), it is, in part, due to the long-term support needs of many of their employees. It was explicitly stated when the Programme was introduced that it would continue to provide long-term support for those who require it.

The high cost associated with this form of provision has raised questions about the long-term financial viability of many businesses, although there are examples of modernised provision offering useful products and services that are of value to the community.

Given the high costs, and the relatively small numbers of disabled people supported by this type of provision, future investment in this model is open to review. It is, however, recommended that an ongoing role for the functions that supported businesses provide within WORKSTEP provision is acknowledged. Opportunities could be developed to build on best practise in this area including:

- further development of training functions and links with educational facilities;
- sharing of best practice and advice to develop business opportunities, including building on the European directive covering the reservation of public sector contracts;
- sharing of best practice and advice to assist the development of effective marketing for goods and services.

However, if this form of provision continues to decline, the development of a strategy for the ongoing support of those employees with the greatest needs may be required. Whilst the study did identify some examples of supported employees with significant support needs working within supported placements, it seems unrealistic to expect that the majority of mainstream commercial employers would be willing to offer these types of opportunities.

7.4.4 Review developing models for supported placements

Two distinct approaches to the provision of supported placements have developed: an 'employment agency' and a more individual approach. More evidence on the nature and effectiveness of the two approaches would be helpful to assess their relative benefits, although it can be acknowledged that the agency approach of developing Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with large employers would not be suitable for every locality.

The need for improved management information (MI), to allow developments of this nature to be evaluated, links back to the need for improvements in this area for the Programme as a whole.

Appendix A

Case studies sampling framework

Contract type/region	Type	Contract Size*	Supp. Business	Placements	Mixed	'Excellent' nomination
Region 1	Not for profit	L			x	x
Region 2	LA	M			x	x
Region 3	LA	M	x			x
Region 4	Not for profit	M			x	x
Remploy	Factory 1	XL	x			
Remploy	Interwork 1	XL		x		
Remploy	Factory 2	XL	x			
National	Not for profit	L		x		
National	Not for profit	XL		x		
Region 5	LA	M			x	
Region 6	Not for profit	S	x			
Very small**	LA	VS	x			
Region 7	LA	L			x	
Region 8	Private	S		x		
Region 9	LA	M			x	x
Remploy	Interwork2	XL		x		
Region 10**	LA	S	x			
ALL 'outstanding'	Not for profit	S			x	
Region 11	Not for profit	L			x	

*Contract size (based on sampling criteria used in previous WORKSTEP research)

VS = 10 or less, S = 50 or less, M = 51 – 200, L = 201 – 1999, XL = 2000+

** classified as 'supported business' as all supported employees worked within the local authority

Appendix B

Stakeholder briefing documents

B.1 Stakeholder briefing

WORKSTEP NATIONAL EVALUATION

Provider Linked Case Studies and Modernisation Funding

Background

Two linked research projects focusing on the WORKSTEP programme will take place during 2005. The first of these projects will undertake **Case Study Research** across Britain, which will examine programme design along with the delivery and performance of WORKSTEP. The second project will focus on **Modernisation Funding** in order to evaluate delivery of the funding and the nature and impact of activities and investments arising from it.

Case study research

The case study research will take place in a number of WORKSTEP Provider Organisations:

- case study sites will be selected with the aim of covering a range of Provider types and locations, and other demands on Providers such as recent or planned ALL inspections will be taken into account so as not to overload individual Providers;
- in each case study the research team will collect and analyse information from documentation and interviews;
- documentation will include current programme outputs, contracts and self assessment reports;

- interviews will take place with WORKSTEP Quality and Contract Teams, DEAs, Provider Organisation staff, Employers and supported employees;
- the information from each of the case studies will feed into broader analysis about the overall performance of the programme;
- the research will also generate recommendations to inform programme delivery in the future.

Modernisation funds

The evaluation of Modernisation Funding will also involve a number of WORKSTEP Provider Organisations:

- the research team will undertake documentary analysis and interviews with relevant Jobcentre Plus and Provider staff;
- the research will focus on the administration and delivery of funds and the nature and impact of activities and investments arising from modernisation funding;
- the information collected will also allow the research team to identify specific examples of good practice that can be shared;
- the research will also generate recommendations to inform the establishment and administration of any similar innovation or change funds in the future.

B.2 Regional Contract Manager briefing

WORKSTEP NATIONAL EVALUATION

Provider case studies

Update for regional Contract Managers

It has now been agreed that **one Provider from each of the Jobcentre Plus Regions** will be involved in the WORKSTEP (WS) case studies, and six of the very small Providers from across Britain will also be involved in single case study on small Providers. National Providers will be involved in a further five case studies and work is now expected to commence in March and continue through to November 2005.

Initial contact for regionally contracted WS Providers will be through you, as the relevant Regional Contract Managers. The Centre for Public Policy (CPP) will give you details of a 'sampled pair' of Providers from your patch and will ask for your advice on any issues regarding access to these Providers. As Regional Contract Manager you will then be asked to make initial contact with the first Provider and, assuming the response is positive, we would like you to agree a nominated contact for the Provider, and pass their details on to CPP. The nominated Provider contact will be asked to work with CPP to allow the detailed negotiation of access to other Provider staff, employers and supported employees. The CPP will also nominate an individual from their team who will act as lead contact for that particular case study. Details of

the case study interviews and information requests are given below, in order that you can inform Providers of what is involved. Providers should also be reassured about the confidential nature of the research and the fact that no individuals or their organisations will be named in reports.

You should be aware of the following requests:

- CPP will be arranging a follow up telephone or face-to-face interviews with each Regional Contract Manager and relevant members of their team to discuss issues re: the WS programme more generally, the structure of their regional WS team, and the sampled Provider.
- Prior to case study visits CPP will ask for access to the following (to gain the relevant background and minimise data requests to Provider.) This data can legitimately be shared with CPP as they are under contract to the Department for Work and Pensions to carry out the evaluation on their behalf:
 - provider contract (in particular schedule 4 the method statement);
 - provider self assessment and action planning documentation;
 - provider performance data;
 - a sample of the format used for development plans by that Provider.
- CPP will also need advice on obtaining contact details/access to DEAs as the study will also involve telephone interviews with at least one DEA in the area covered by each selected Provider.

Some issues have arisen as the case study evaluation is starting at the same time as the current National Audit Office (NAO) study. Providers can be assured that the two studies are not linked. The case studies form the main stage of the WORKSTEP programme evaluation, the strategy for which was agreed in October 2002. However CPP will take into account the demands on Providers by the NAO study when selecting case studies.

Provider involvement

Each case study will involve interviews with a number of Provider organisations staff. Organisational size will be used to determine the numbers involved, ideally we would like to involve two managerial posts and two support workers who deal directly with supported employees. Where the Provider is also the employer (supported businesses) interviews with managerial/supervisory staff will also be requested.

Where the Provider offers supported placements, interviews with employers will also be sought, so relevant contact details will be requested from the Provider. Ideally we would like initial contact to any employers about the research to be made by the Provider. The employer will then be contacted by CPP, asked for an interview (face-to-face or telephone) and also if they are happy for their supported employees to be interviewed whilst they are at work.

Interviews with eight supported employees per case study site are also planned. These will usually be held either at Provider premises or with the agreement of their employer at their place of work. Where the employer or supported employee does not agree to work place interviews an alternative venue will be sought. Advice will also be sought from Providers regarding the communications needs for nominated supported employees in order that any special arrangements for interviews can be organised.

In addition to the interviews information for the case studies will be drawn from documents and prior to the case study interviews a number of these will be requested. These will vary according to the size and structure of the Provider organisation but examples may include the following:

- mission and Policy Statements;
- annual report/Business plan;
- organisational chart/staffing structure;
- examples of types of management information collected and used;
- details of any organisational quality systems with related policies and procedures;
- policies on recruitment, staff development, equal opportunities;
- procedures for handling complaints, dealing with harassment, health and safety;
- documentation to support supported employee development planning (including sample plans);
- examples of communications/marketing material.

Contact details for the Centre are given at the bottom of the page, and you can also e-mail questions about the project to Ann Purvis or James Lowrey:

Ann.Purvis@northumbria.ac.uk James.Lowrey@northumbria.ac.uk

The project manager from the Department for Work and Pensions is Lisa Naylor, who is based in the Family and Disability Analysis Division. Lisa can be contacted at:

Family and Disability Analysis Division (FDAD 4),

Department for Work and Pensions, Level 2,

Kings Court, 80 Hanover Way

Sheffield S3 7UF

e-mail - Lisa.M.Naylor@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

B.3 Provider checklist

WORKSTEP NATIONAL EVALUATION

Provider case studies

Regional provider checklist

The case study will be undertaken over a two to four day period, depending on the availability of the interviewees.

Ideally we would like the following document ten days before case study visit:

- mission and Policy Statements;
- annual report/Business plan;
- organisational chart/staffing structure;
- examples of types of management information collected and used;
- details of any organisational quality systems with related policies and procedures;
- policies on recruitment, staff development, equal opportunities;
- procedures for handling complaints, dealing with harassment, health and safety;
- documentation to support supported employee development planning (including sample plans);
- examples of communications/marketing materials.

Interviews to be undertaken within Provider Organisations (variations might occur depending on size of the organisation):

Supported factory:

- two management level;
- two/three WORKSTEP advisers/coordinators;
- one employer;
- eight customers.

Supported placements:

- two management level;
- two/three WORKSTEP advisers/coordinators;
- four employers;
- eight customers.

If the Provider Organisation offers placements as well as a supported factory a combination of the two approaches will be adopted.

Strategic and managerial	Clarity and understanding of programme aims and objectives	Objectives of WS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does it differ from SEP? • Eligibility criteria – who is WS aimed at? • Where it fits with other disability programmes?
	Views on strategic capacity of sampled Provider	Are they new/longstanding WS Provider? Does Provider have clear strategic aims/mission? Has Provider fully embraced modernisation of SEP and move to WS?: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any particular strengths/weaknesses? Does Provider have effective links with stakeholders?
Programme design/delivery	Does Programme design/delivery support the achievement of aims/objectives?	Delivery of WS: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of WS processes they are involved with (prompts: contracting, performance, inspection, Provider development) • Overview of Provider role • Overview of how WS operates for supported employee
	Views re: programme strengths and weaknesses Availability and quality of performance data	What works well and what could be improved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues with design/delivery of programme which support/act as barriers to achievement of its objectives? • Issues re: minimum hours/contract length (seasonal work) • Relationships with National Providers within their Region: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Information on local delivery – Communication of issues/feedback Management information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What MI do they use – sources/systems? • What MI do they provide (to HO/Providers/others)? • Is MI accessible, timely, useful? • What could be improved?
	Views on sampled Provider business planning processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What MI does the Provider collect/produce? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Performance data – Data on local labour market/employers • What MI do they provide (to HO/contract manager/others)? • Does Provider use MI effectively to manage their own WS provision? • What could be improved?

Continued

<p>Funding</p>	<p>Views re: programme budget and resource allocation</p> <p>Supportive of aims and possible disincentives</p>	<p>Is the resource adequate to support the delivery of the programme? Does WS offer value for money? Is the current funding model supportive of the achievement of WS objectives?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any suggestion for ways to improve this? • Front end funding/progression payment etc
	<p>Provider funding</p>	<p>How does Provider utilise WS funding?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wage subsidy, training, development initiatives <p>Are they aware of other sources of Provider income?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other JC plus programmes?
	<p>Modernisation funds</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any involvement? • Views on communication/administrative process • Support provided to local Providers? • Positive outputs/good practice developed?
<p>Quality standards, review and inspection</p>	<p>Review current WS Provider self assessment and action planning process</p>	<p>How well does this system operate?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is it effective in promoting culture of continuous improvement/development with Providers? • Does it have a positive impact on development of Provider service delivery?
<p>Appropriate and supported by effective systems</p>	<p>Plans for new Provider Health Check</p> <p>Other Provider performance reviews</p>	<p>How will they link the new process with current self-assessment requirements? Do they carry out any other performance reviews of WS Providers?</p>
	<p>ALL inspections</p>	<p>How much involvement have they had with ALL inspections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers of Providers inspected within their Region • Results of inspections • Follow up activity <p>Have they found that ALL inspections have had a positive impact on development of Provider service delivery? Has sampled Provider been inspected?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any particular issues arising from inspection?

Knowledge sharing/ communication	Are effective communications links/mechanisms to facilitate knowledge sharing and good practice in place?	<p>What is in place & how effective is it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Links with HO/other WS Contract Managers • Provider meetings – individual/regional – National Providers? • WS Extranet <p>How often do they meet with individual Providers?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are these meetings used for? <p>How well do Providers within their Region to work together?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they facilitate regular Provider meeting? • Do national Provider representatives attend? • Are there blocks to sharing good practice?
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Table C.2 Disability employment adviser

Interviewer Date	Interviewee Region	
<p>Introduce self/CPP/overview of research (we have been asked to carry out an evaluation of the government programme called WORKSTEP, which aims to help disabled people find jobs and support them within work).</p> <p>State purpose of the interview.</p> <p>Explain independence of evaluation from Jobcentre Plus/DWP and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All information given is confidential (no particular reference will be made to individual people or organisations) • No names will be used in any documents • They have the right to withdraw from the research at any point <p>Inform them that they will have the opportunity to tell us anything else at the end – or to go back and revise what they have said.</p> <p>Inform being tape recorded (if this is the case), as this is the best way of ensuring all information is collected accurately. Ask if any objections to this.</p>		
Question	Prompts	Notes
<p>Part A) Background Information</p>		
How long have you been working as a DEA?		
What parts of the region do you cover?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where are you based? • How is the team you are in structured? • Reporting lines? • Targets to meet? • Does this pose any problems? 	
How many customers could you be working with at any one time?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would the split be between the disability programmes? • Are you encouraged to refer people to particular programmes ahead of others? (WORKSTEP is expensive) 	
		Continued

Question	Prompts	Notes
PART B) WORKSTEP eligibility		
When you first meet a customer what process would you go through?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where would you meet with the customer? • When do you decide to refer the customer to a Provider? 	
Who is the WORKSTEP programme for?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you decide who WS is for? • Particular impairments? • Is WORKSTEP more suitable for some people with disabilities than others? • Is there clarity about who WORKSTEP should be for? 	
How do you decide whether to refer somebody to an NDDP, work-prep, or a WORKSTEP Provider?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any problems with this? 	
Do you spend more time with customers since WORKSTEP has come into place?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is different about the way you work from the old SEP process? • Do you have to spend time identifying types of support the customer might need within work? 	
PART C) The WORKSTEP programme		
What do you see as the main difference between the old supported employment programme and WORKSTEP?	<p>Views on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support given through WS? • Progressions? • Funding? • Development planning process? 	
How large a part of the work you do is related to WORKSTEP?		
What are the main differences between NDDP and WORKSTEP?		
Should pre-employment support be a requirement within WORKSTEP?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do Providers undertake pre-employment support? • How do you think the Providers view this? 	
Can customers be referred to WORKPREP then register for the WORKSTEP programme?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any difficulties with this? Why? Where does this advice come from? • Is this a suitable 'feeder programme'? 	Continued

Question	Prompts	Notes
PART D)		
Provider Selection Process		
How do you decide which Providers you refer customers to?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a particular process that you go through? • Do you have particular Providers that you prefer to work with? • Do some Providers specialise in working with a particular customer group? • Do you try to refer customers to all Providers? • Why is this? Service offered? • What do you see as a good Provider? 	
How did you/do you find out about new Providers within the region?		
Are Providers in competition with each other?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition for referrals? • Why does this exist? • How do you deal with this issue? 	
Are there any issues about referring people to Regional or National WORKSTEP Providers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they ever refuse customers? • More common with national than regional? • Any personal preference? Why? Anything to do with how the programme is delivered? Support given? 	
Do you have sufficient knowledge about the Providers within the areas that you cover?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you attend DEA forums? 	
PART E)		
Communication Lines		
Do you attend meetings with Providers?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEA forums? • Contract manager meetings? 	
Do you have good communication lines with the JC+?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What could be better? 	
Do Providers contact you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How often? • Why? • Problems/concerns? 	
How has the management change from regional to district affected your work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positives? • Negatives? • Has it impacted upon referral process? • Could the set-up be improved in any way? 	
PART F) Overall		
Views on the WORKSTEP programme?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity of who it is aimed at? • What would you like to see happen in the future with regards to the disability programmes? 	

Table C.3 Provider manager

Interviewer Date	Interviewee Region
<p>Introduce self/CPP/overview of research (we have been asked to carry out an evaluation of the government programme called WORKSTEP, which aims to help disabled people find jobs and support them within work).</p> <p>State purpose of the interview.</p> <p>Explain independence of evaluation from Jobcentre Plus/DWP and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All information given is confidential (no particular reference will be made to individual people or organisations) • No names will be used in any documents • They have the right to withdraw from the research at any point <p>Inform them that they will have the opportunity to tell us anything else at the end – or to go back and revise what they have said.</p> <p>Inform being tape recorded (if this is the case), as this is the best way of ensuring all information is collected accurately. Ask if any objections to this.</p>	
Organisational/background	Notes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Length of involvement in WS/SEP: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How significant a part of organisational business is Workstep? – Involvement in other programmes? – Other income streams? – Development of supported businesses/placements • Their role within Provider organisation – length of employment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Work on a day to day basis – Role as an employer (with supported businesses?) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Possible conflict of interest re: progression <p>Strategy/policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims of WS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Differences from SEP – changes required – Links with other disability programmes • Aims/mission of Provider organisation 	
<p>Programme design/delivery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligibility criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Who is Workstep for? • Provider process for delivery of WORKSTEP programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Referral process /acceptance criteria – Support/training – Pre employment, in employment – Links to other programmes • Performance Indicators/MI used: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Progression – soft progression/open employment • Tracking of customers – admin process/software? • Issues re: minimum contract length and hours per week • Issues re: self-employed customers 	<p>Continued</p>

Organisational/background	Notes
<p>Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding model: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Incentives? More 'up front' resource? – Other suggestions for improvement? • Resource utilisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How WS income utilised – Financial support to employers (wage subsidy?) – is this utilised? – Other types of support to employers? – Response of employers to any changes in subsidy? • Payment process – experience to date & plans for new system (payment by actuals) 	
<p>Quality standards/inspection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract monitoring and review process with JC plus (detail on actual process and views on utility – areas for improvement?) • WS Quality Framework – self assessment and action planning • Provider Performance Reviews? (currently NE only?) • New Provider Healthcheck – awareness? Feedback? • Other Provider quality assurance systems? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Routine performance monitoring (individual and programme) – Staff appraisal/training needs analysis – Feedback from employers/customers etc – Complaints process – Equal Opportunities – statement, monitoring processes • All inspections: positives/negatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – appropriateness 	
<p>Communications/info sharing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing activity – employers/customers / DEAs? • Links with JCplus – DEAs/contract team <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Support/advice from JC plus contract team? – Opportunities to feed in views on programme? • Links with other Providers – info sharing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – NASE/AfSE members? • WS Extranet • Areas for improvement 	
<p>WS programme overall</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future involvement – expansion? • What is good/could be better/suggestions to achieve improvements? 	

Table C.4 Provider support worker

Interviewer Date	Interviewee Region
<p>Introduce self/CPP/overview of research (we have been asked to carry out an evaluation of the government programme called WORKSTEP, which aims to help disabled people find jobs and support them within work).</p> <p>State purpose of the interview.</p> <p>Explain independence of evaluation from Jobcentre Plus/DWP and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All information given is confidential (no particular reference will be made to individual people or organisations) • No names will be used in any documents • They have the right to withdraw from the research at any point <p>Inform them that they will have the opportunity to tell us anything else at the end – or to go back and revise what they have said.</p> <p>Inform being tape recorded (if this is the case), as this is the best way of ensuring all information is collected accurately. Ask if any objections to this.</p>	
Question	Prompts
<p>PART A) Background Information: Development workers role How long have you been working for [insert Provider organisation]?</p> <p>What is your role on a day-to-day basis? How many customers do you work with? What do you see as the main aims of WORKSTEP? employment placements? programmes? What are the main aims of [insert Provider organisation] Who is WORKSTEP aimed at?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long have you been working on WORKSTEP? • Are you involved in other areas of [Provider organisation’s] work? • Do you work within a particular area? • How does it differ from supported • Where does it fit with other disability • How do these fit with WORKSTEP? • Programme eligibility criteria
<p>PART B) Provider-customer relationship What process do you go through when first contacting customers? When the customers register on WORKSTEP are they ready for employment?</p> <p>Do customers understand that they are on the WORKSTEP programme?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedure for acceptance onto Provider programme • Do you ever have customers that are not suitable for the WORKSTEP programme? • DEA/Provider self-referrals? • Why are they usually unsuitable? • Do customers require pre-employment training? • Links to other disability employment programmes? • Does this vary depending on how long the customer has been on the programme?

Continued

Question	Prompts
<p>Do the customers understand what your role is? Do you undertake a full profile of the individual?</p> <p>Do you aim to match the job to what the customer wants?</p> <p>Are customers accompanied to interviews?</p> <p>How much time do you spend with each customer?</p> <p>Do you have a steady turnover of customers?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish employment plus wider aspirations? • Identify existing skills and abilities? • Identify gaps? • Explore previous employment history? • Does customer have a choice of employment? • Choice of location? • Do you encounter any difficulties with this? • Do customers have unrealistic expectations? • Do they receive any specific guidance or training? • Do you spend more time with those that have been on the programme the least amount of time? • Those that need intensive support? • Is this due to customers moving to unsupported employment? • New referrals from DEA referrals? • What happens if you cannot find employment for a customer?
<p>PART C) Development plans</p> <p>Do all customers have a development plan?</p> <p>How often are they reviewed? How do you track supported employees' progress?</p> <p>Do you attempt to measure distance travelled? Is personal and social development discussed when you meet with the customers? How realistic would you say the aim of open employment is?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When are the plans complete? • Do you have different plans for different stages? • Pre-employment? • During employment? • What does the review consist of? • Do you use any software? • Asset? • Proman harp? • GEMMA? • Soft outcomes? • Would it be beneficial to measure soft outcomes? • Is it a burden? • Do customers understand the aim?
<p>PART D) Support mechanisms</p> <p>How do you identify the type of support your customer requires?</p> <p>Is there a procedure for each customer that you have to follow?</p>	<p>Is this done in consultation with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The customer? • The employer? • The DEA?

Continued

Question	Prompts
<p>What sort of support do you offer the customer?</p> <p>Do you undertake follow up work to ensure that the support has taken place?</p> <p>How do you monitor/evaluate the support that is given?</p> <p>Are there any problems with trying to get customers to undertake training?</p> <p>Are there ways for customers to highlight issues/concerns regarding WORKSTEP?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal support? • Job coaches? • Support materials? • Visual aids? • Environment adaptations? • Is travel to and from work arranged? • Is the customer involved in this process? • Is the employer involved? • Do you aim to get customers on courses? • Do you see employment as the main aim ahead of training? • Can customers give their views on the programme? • Does this occur often? • How would you deal with a customer complaint about support provided by the [Provider organisation]?
<p>PART E) Provider-employer relationship</p> <p>How many employers do you work with?</p> <p>Do you have regular contact with employers?</p> <p>What is discussed with employers?</p> <p>At the outset do you state their role as an employer of a WORKSTEP customer? Do employers understand the aims and objectives of WORKSTEP?</p> <p>Do the employers receive financial support? Do you ensure the customer gets the same conditions and contract as other staff? Do all customers have a contract of employment? Are there ways for employers to highlight issues/concerns regarding WORKSTEP?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are employers identified? • What types of work? • How often? • When? • Variations between employers? • Customer progress? • Support? • What is explained to them? • How do they usually react? • Any problems with longstanding employers? • Problems with change in emphasis from supported employment to WS? • Is this viewed as a wage subsidy? • Holiday? • Sick pay? • Why is this not the case with some? • Does this occur? • What is good about this? • What could be better?
<p>PART F) WORKSTEP overall</p> <p>Is the minimum contract length, hours worked per week an issue?</p> <p>Do you ever have customers that would like to be self-employed?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would it be better if customers could have shorter term work? • Why is this the case? • How often does this happen? • Would it be beneficial if the programme allowed people to be self-employed? <p style="text-align: right;">Continued</p>

Question	Prompts
Do you have much contact with the JC+ staff?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DEA? • Contract manager? • Is this beneficial? • What could be better?
Overall what do you see as the WORKSTEP programmes strengths and weaknesses?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is good about the programme? • What areas need to be improved? • Any suggestions for how to achieve improvements?
PART G) Working at [insert Provider organisation]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you find working at [insert Provider organisation]? • What is good? • What could be better? • What is in place to support your work and personal development?

Table C.5 Employer

Interviewer Date	Interviewee Region	
<p>Introduce self/CPP/overview of research (we have been asked to carry out an evaluation of the government programme called WORKSTEP, which aims to help disabled people find jobs and support them within work).</p> <p>State purpose of the interview.</p> <p>Explain independence of evaluation from Jobcentre Plus/DWP and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All information given is confidential (no particular reference will be made to individual people or organisations) • No names will be used in any documents • They have the right to withdraw from the research at any point <p>Inform them that they will have the opportunity to tell us anything else at the end – or to go back and revise what they have said.</p> <p>Inform being tape recorded (if this is the case), as this is the best way of ensuring all information is collected accurately. Ask if any objections to this.</p>		
Question	Prompts	Notes
<p>Part A) Background Information</p> <p>Can you give us some general information on the nature of your business and the number of staff?</p> <p>How long have you been involved with the WORKSTEP programme?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public/private sector? • How many sites do you have? • How many employees? • How many WORKSTEP supported employees? • Were you involved with the Supported Employment Programme (and for how long?) 	<p>WORKSTEP introduced April 2001 – prior to this SEP</p> <p>Continued</p>

Question	Prompts	Notes
<p>How did you become a WORKSTEP employer?</p> <p>Why did you get involved with WORKSTEP?</p> <p>What does your organisation gain from involvement in WORKSTEP?</p> <p>Are you involved in any other programmes such as the New Deal for Disabled People?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did this process involve? • Did you have to make any changes to your organisation? • Was it easy? • Promotion of Equal Opportunities? • Positive PR? • Financial incentives? • Financial (wage subsidy)? • Other types of support offered by <i>[insert Provider name]</i>? 	
<p>Part B)</p> <p>1. Employer – provider relationship</p> <p>Do you have regular contact with <i>[insert Provider name]</i>?</p> <p>Are your views on the WORKSTEP programme sought by <i>[insert Provider name]</i>?</p> <p>Does <i>[insert Provider name]</i> give you appropriate support for dealing with WORKSTEP issues?</p> <p>Overall do you think that the contact you have with <i>[insert Provider name]</i> is beneficial/useful?</p> <p>2. Employer – Provider Selection Process</p> <p>Are you consulted with regards to the WORKSTEP customers that you employ?</p> <p>Do you inform <i>[insert Provider name]</i> when you have vacancies?</p> <p>Do you employ disabled people other than those on the WORKSTEP programme?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When (and how often) do you hear from them? • Why do you usually hear from them? • In relation to supported employees? • Your involvement in the WORKSTEP programme more generally? • Do you usually receive any feedback on issues you raise? • What type of support? • If you are having problems with a supported employee? • If you need extra funding? • Who else might you go to for support? • What is good about the contact you have with them? • What could be improved? • How does this process operate? • What is good about it? • What is could be better? • Is there a system in place for doing this? • Does this system operate effectively? • How many? • In what types of role? • Is this similar to work carried out by supported employees? 	<p style="text-align: right;">Continued</p>

Question	Prompts	Notes
<p>Part C) Principles of being a WORKSTEP employer</p> <p>What is your understanding of the aims/objectives of the WORKSTEP programme?</p> <p>How do these aims link with what you aim to get from involvement with WORKSTEP?</p> <p>What are your goals for the WORKSTEP supported employees?</p> <p>Do you actively encourage your WORKSTEP customer to aim for unsupported (open) employment?</p> <p>Have any of your supported employees moved into open employment?</p>	<p>WORKSTEP provides supported employment for disabled people, helping them find secure and retain work, and progress into open employment where appropriate. In comparison with other programmes WORKSTEP can provide substantial long-term support and aims to target disabled people that face more complex barriers to finding and keeping work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving them the opportunity to work? • Personal development? • Preparation for move to open employment? • Are there any barriers to this? (<i>probe re: losing experienced employees</i>) • Do you see open employment as the main objective for the supported employees? 	<p>cf. Part A 'why did you become involved in WORKSTEP?'</p>
<p>Part D) 1. WORKSTEP: Organisational</p> <p>What changes, if any, have you had to make since you started employing people supported through WORKSTEP?</p> <p>Have you had appropriate support/advice in making any necessary changes?</p> <p>What types of support/advice have you had?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to staffing – e.g. levels supervision/coaching? • Physical changes to workplace? • Adapted facilities? • Changes in way you operate? Work patterns? • Staff training – e.g. disability awareness? • Do you know where to go for support/advice? • Support from DEAs? Support from [<i>insert Provider name</i>]? • Financial support? • Do you feel confident that support will be available? • Has it been helpful/appropriate? 	<p>Continued</p>

Question	Prompts	Notes
<p>2. WORKSTEP: Customer</p> <p>Are you aware of the type of support WORKSTEP employees receives from <i>[insert Provider name]</i>?</p> <p>What sort of support do you give to the WORKSTEP supported employees?</p> <p>When was the support introduced and is it monitored?</p> <p>Does your supported employee have a Development Plan from <i>[insert Provider name]</i>?</p> <p>Do you receive any financial support for employing someone who is supported through WORKSTEP?</p> <p>Overall:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing contact with a support worker from <i>[insert Provider name]</i>? • How was this identified? • In consultation with <i>[insert Provider name]</i> and/or supported employee? • Training courses? • Support materials (e.g. visual aids, checklists)? • Job coach/supervision? • Is it continuous or delivered in intervals? • Do you monitor and evaluate the support? • Do you undertaken follow up work to assess whether customer needs are being met? • Have you phased out any support? • How was this plan developed? • In conjunction with your organisation? • Do you monitor the progress the supported employee is making in the workplace? • Is this monitoring different to that undertaken with employees not supported through WORKSTEP? • What level of funding do you receive? • How often? • What do you use this for? • Is this enough for your requirements? • What is good about the support WORKSTEP provides? • What could be better? 	
<p>Part E)</p> <p>1. The Employment of WORKSTEP supported employees</p> <p>At the outset did you have open discussions about your needs and expectations and those of the supported employee?</p> <p>Does the WORKSTEP employee have a contract of employment?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was this facilitated by <i>[insert Provider name]</i>? • Was it useful? • Is the customer on the same terms and conditions as other staff? 	<p style="text-align: right;">Continued</p>

Question	Prompts	Notes
<p>2. The Employment of WORKSTEP supported employees: organisational</p> <p>Do you have any concerns about employing people supported through WORKSTEP?</p> <p>What are the benefits of employing disabled people?</p> <p>Do you find your WORKSTEP supported employees fit in well with other staff?</p> <p>Do you think you should receive more information and advice about employing disabled people?</p> <p>Do you consult with other WORKSTEP employers?</p> <p>Overall what do you see as the WORKSTEP programmes strengths and weaknesses?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Productivity? • Health and safety? • Greater training/supervision needs than other staff? • For promoting equal opportunities? • For positive PR? • For other staff (disability awareness)? • What sort of information would you like? • Why would this be useful? • How did this come about? • Is it useful? • Do you discuss concerns/ share experiences/support for employees? • What is good about the programme? • What areas need to be improved? • Any suggestions for how to achieve improvements? 	<p>Cf. Part D 1</p>
<p>Give your contact details in case they would like to contact us in the future about the interview or to clarify any points that they have made.</p> <p>Thank them for their time and cooperation.</p> <p>Reiterate that they will not be named and all information given is confidential.</p>		

Table C.6 Supported employee: generic

Interviewer Date	Interviewee Region
<p>Introduce self/ CPP/overview of research (we have been asked to carry out an evaluation of the government programme called WORKSTEP, which aims to help disabled people find jobs and support them within work).</p> <p>State purpose of the interview.</p> <p>Explain independence of evaluation from Jobcentre Plus/DWP and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All information given is confidential (no particular reference will be made to individual people or organisations) • No names will be used in any documents • They have the right to withdraw from the research at any point <p>Inform them that they will have the opportunity to tell us anything else at the end – or to go back and revise what they have said.</p> <p>Inform being tape recorded (if this is the case), as this is the best way of ensuring all information is collected accurately. Ask if any objections to this.</p>	

Question	Prompts	Notes
<p>PART A) Employment Background</p>		
<p>What is your job?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long have you worked here? 	
<p>How did you find this job?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With help from <i>[insert Provider name]</i>? • Other? 	<p>Any reference to WORKSTEP?</p>
<p>How long have you had this job?</p>		
<p>How many hours do you work?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you like to work more/less/the same hours? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If working part time, what fears do you have about increasing hours? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of bad effect on health? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear of letting people down/ losing job if you can't sustain that many hours? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear about effect on benefits? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If hours worked could be changed if required for health reasons, would you consider working more hours? (Fear of effect on benefits?) 	
<p>What sort of work do you do?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you work on your own or as part of a team? 	<p><i>Possible demonstration of work they do</i></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is good about the work you do? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What could be better with the work you do? 	
<p>Have you been employed before?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sort of job did you do? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When was this? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was this part of WORKSTEP/ supported employment? 	
<p>How much of a say did you have in choosing your current employer?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who discussed this with you? <i>[insert Provider name]</i> 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Was this job chosen as it matched what you wanted to do? 	
<p>Why did you want to find work?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you want to get from having a job? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet new people? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a career? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial independence? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of 'ordinary life'/ social inclusion 	
<p>What do you think you would be doing if you didn't have this job?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In another job? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unemployed? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Going to a day centre? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doing voluntary work? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you feel about that? 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you prefer to be doing something else? 	
		<p>Continued</p>

Question	Prompts	Notes
<p>PART B) Working Environment</p> <p>WORKSTEP is the name of the government programme that helped arrange or retain your job with support from [insert Provider name].</p> <p>Is the workplace suitable for your needs?</p> <p>Have you undergone any training or development within work?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you heard of WORKSTEP? • What do you know about WORKSTEP? • Do you know what support is offered through WORKSTEP and [insert Provider name]? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have there been any changes/adaptations to the workplace so that you can undertake your job? • Has any special equipment been provided? • What was this? • What was good about it? • What could have been better with the training? • Do you have a job coach/mentor? If yes, who is this? 	<p>WORKSTEP provides supported employment for disabled people, helping them find secure and retain work, and progress into open employment where appropriate. In comparison with other programmes WORKSTEP can provide substantial long-term support and aims to target disabled people that face more complex barriers to finding and keeping work.</p>
<p>PART C) Development Plans</p> <p>When you first registered on WORKSTEP did you complete a development plan?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you work with [insert Provider name] on this? • What sort of aims did you identify? • Have you met any of the aims you identified? 	<p>Continued</p>

Question	Prompts	Notes
<p>Do you have a copy of your development plan?</p> <p>Do you have your development plan updated?</p> <p>Are you happy with the development plan?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May we see a copy? • Who do you work with on this? • Do you talk about what you would like to achieve? • What is good about the development plan? • What could be better within the development plan? 	
<p>PART D) Supported employee support</p> <p>One aim of WORKSTEP is to support people to develop and have the chance to achieve more through their job.</p> <p>What help have you had from <i>[insert Provider name]</i>?</p> <p>Did this support ease the pressure of finding a job?</p> <p>Does someone from <i>[insert Provider name]</i> visit you within your workplace?</p> <p>If you wanted some extra support within work who/what would you go to?</p> <p>How do you travel to work each day?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you know about this? • Help completing job application forms? • Help finding vacancies? • Help with interview techniques? • Were you accompanied to the interview? • What was good about the support? • What could be better with regards to the support? • How often do they talk to you about: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Your work? b. Support you might require? c. Your views on your job? d. Your views on the WORKSTEP programme? • Your employer? • Fellow workers? • Your Provider? • DEA? • Family? • How was this organised? • Who gives you the support? • Is there a cost for this support? 	<p>If recently started work or just registered on WORKSTEP:</p> <p>Have you had any response to issues you have raised?</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Continued</p>

Question	Prompts	Notes
<p>PART E) Soft outcomes</p> <p>What have you got out of the WORKSTEP programme/being in employment?</p> <p>How much independence do you have within work?</p> <p>Do you think you are more financially independent?</p> <p>Is the workplace a friendly and supportive environment?</p> <p>Do you spend time with other people you work with?</p> <p>Do you want to progress/gain promotion?</p> <p>Overall is there anything that could be improved within work to make your employment more beneficial/satisfying?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you feel more confident now than before you were in work? • Does this impact upon other areas of your life? • Has having a job improved your quality of life more generally? • Do you plan what you will do each day? • Are you happy to work on your own? • What does earning a wage allow you to do? • Could you have done this before? • Does this extend to outside of the workplace? • Do you think you would need support to do this? 	
<p>PART F) Future expectations</p> <p>What would you like to see happen with regards to your employment in the future?</p> <p>Do you think that WORKSTEP will help you work towards any of these?</p> <p>Another aim of WORKSTEP is to help people work independently, without the support of organisations such as [insert Provider name] if that is right for them.</p> <p>If unsupported employment isn't suitable you can return to supported work through WORKSTEP.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep working where you are? • Move to new job? • Become more confident? • Meet new people? • Anything else? • Are you aware of this aim? • What do you think about this? • Do you have any concerns about this? • Would you worry about losing the support that you have? • Did you know about this? • Would it make you more willing to try a move to unsupported work? 	<p style="text-align: right;">Continued</p>

Question	Prompts	Notes
5. I have the following impairments:	Condition restricting mobility/dexterity (e.g. affecting back, joints or limbs) Visual impairment Hearing impairment Speech impairment Long-term medical condition (e.g. respiratory, heart, asthma, diabetes) Learning disability Mental health condition Neurological conditions (e.g. epilepsy, MS) Other (please specify) Prefer not to say None	
5a. If more than one, which impairment most affects your ability to work?		
5b. Does the affects of your impairment change over time or stay the same?		
6. Have you gained any qualifications since you started on the WORKSTEP programme – what are they?	Did you have any prior to the programme – what are they?	

Table C.7 Supported employee: distance travelled

Interviewer Date	Interviewee Region	
<p>Introduce self/CPP/overview of research (we have been asked to carry out an evaluation of the government programme called WORKSTEP, which aims to help disabled people find jobs and support them within work).</p> <p>State purpose of the interview.</p> <p>Explain independence of evaluation from Jobcentre Plus/DWP and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All information given is confidential (no particular reference will be made to individual people or organisations) • No names will be used in any documents • They have the right to withdraw from the research at any point <p>Inform them that they will have the opportunity to tell us anything else at the end – or to go back and revise what they have said.</p> <p>Inform being tape recorded (if this is the case), as this is the best way of ensuring all information is collected accurately. Ask if any objections to this.</p>		
Question	Prompts	Notes
PART A) Employment Background		
What is your job?	• How long have you worked here?	
How did you find this job?	• With help from [insert Provider name]? • Other?	Any reference to WORKSTEP?
		Continued

Question	Prompts	Notes
<p>How long have you had this job? How many hours do you work?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you like to work more/less/the same hours? • If working part time, what fears do you have about increasing hours? • Fear of bad effect on health? • Fear of letting people down/losing job if you can't sustain that many hours? • Fear about effect on benefits? • If hours worked could be changed if required for health reasons, would you consider working more hours? (fear of effect on benefits?) 	
<p>What sort of work do you do?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you work on your own or as part of a team? • What is good about the work you do? • What could be better with the work you do? 	<p><i>Possible demonstration of work they do</i></p>
<p>Have you been employed before?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sort of job did you do? • When was this? • Was this part of WORKSTEP/ supported employment? 	
<p>How much of a say did you have in choosing your current employer?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who discussed this with you? <i>[insert Provider name]</i> • Was this job chosen as it matched what you wanted to do? 	
<p>Why did you want to find work?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did you want to get from having a job? • Meet new people? • Have a career? • Financial independence? • Sense of 'ordinary life'/social inclusion 	
<p>What do you think you would be doing if you didn't have this job?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In another job? • Unemployed? • Going to a day centre? • Doing voluntary work? • How would you feel about that? • Would you prefer to be doing something else? 	

PART B) Supported employee: distance travelled

		Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Levels of confidence (In workplace)	Do you enjoy the things that you do at work?			NOT SCORING		
	Are you comfortable with the tasks you do on a regular basis?	5	4	3	2	1
	Are you happy to try new things within work?	5	4	3	2	1
	If you needed help with something you are doing at work do you feel comfortable to ask for help?	5	4	3	2	1
					Total	
Levels of independence	Do you decide what tasks that you will carry out each day?	5	4	3	2	1
	Are you happy to work on your own?	5	4	3	2	1
	How do you get to work each day			NOT SCORING		
	Do you get help to travel to work?	1	2	3	4	5
					Total	
Levels of confidence (Outside workplace)	Are you happy using public transport (buses, trains)?	5	4	3	2	1
	Would you be happy using public transport (buses, trains) on your own?	5	4	3	2	1
	What do you usually do in your spare time?			NOT SCORING		
	Where do you go for your shopping?			NOT SCORING		
	Do you feel comfortable doing your own shopping?	5	4	3	2	1
					Total	

Continued

PART B) Supported employee: distance travelled (continued)

		Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Financial independence	What do you usually spend your money on?			NOT SCORING		
	What sorts of things do you like to spend money on?			NOT SCORING		
	Do you have enough money to buy things that you would like?	5	4	3	2	1
	Do you make a financial contribution to the place in which you live?	5	4	3	2	1
	Do you manage you own finances/bank account?	5	4	3	2	1
					Total	
Levels of motivation (In workplace)	Do you enjoy going to work?	5	4	3	2	1
	Do you feel your work gives you more than just financial rewards/ money?	5	4	3	2	1
	Do you ever feel that you do not want to go to work?	1	2	3	4	5
					Total	
Skills for the workplace	Are you normally able to get to work on time?	5	4	3	2	1
	Do you normally finish work tasks on time?	5	4	3	2	1
	Are you normally able to maintain your concentration with tasks you are carrying out?	5	4	3	2	1
					Total	

Continued

PART B) Supported employee: distance travelled (continued)

		Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Ability to maintain a career	Do you feel you want to continue working?	5	4	3	2	1
	Do you feel confident that you will be able to continue working?	5	4	3	2	1
	Do you want to learn new skills to help do your job better or to obtain promotion?	5	4	3	2	1
					Total	
Social and communication skills	Do you find it easy talking to people?	5	4	3	2	1
	Do you feel comfortable meeting new people at work?	5	4	3	2	1
	Do you feel c omfortable meeting new people outside work?	5	4	3	2	1
					Total	
Feelings of inclusion, equality, 'normal' life	Do you feel part of a team at work?	5	4	3	2	1
	Do you ever feel 'left out' of things?	1	2	3	4	5
	Do you feel that having a job improves your quality of life?	5	4	3	2	1
					Total	

PART C) Measuring soft outcomes

Total the scores for each outcome and mark on the table below.

	Very low/ poor	Quite low/ poor	Average or not applicable	Quite good	Very good
Levels of confidence (in workplace)	1 – 3	4 – 6	7 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 15
Levels of independence	1 – 3	4 – 6	7 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 15
Levels of confidence (outside workplace)	1 – 3	4 – 6	7 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 15
Financial independence	1 – 3	4 – 6	7 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 15
Levels of motivation	1 – 3	4 – 6	7 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 15
Skills for the workplace	1 – 3	4 – 6	7 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 15
Ability to maintain a career	1 – 3	4 – 6	7 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 15
Social and communication skills	1 – 3	4 – 6	7 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 15
Feelings of inclusion, equality, 'normal' life	1 – 3	4 – 6	7 – 9	10 – 12	13 – 15

Appendix D

Interviews undertaken

Contract Managers	18
Disability Employment Advisers	12
Provider staff	100
Employers (external placement)	30
Supported employees	130
Adult Learning Inspectorate	2

Appendix E

Supported employee profile

Category	Number (%)*	Programme figures **
Gender		
Female	44 (34%)	4,256 (30%)
Male	86 (66%)	9,771 (69%)
Unknown	N/A	145 (1%)
Age group		
Under 20	0 (0%)	273 (2%)
20-29	24 (18%)	2,883 (20%)
30-39	38 (29%)	4,125 (29%)
40-49	45 (35%)	3,789 (27%)
50-59	21 (16%)	2,558 (18%)
60+	2 (2%)	544 (4%)
Ethnicity		
Bangladeshi	1	
Black Caribbean	2	
Indian	4	
Pakistani	1	
White British	121	
White Irish	1	
Provider type		
National	47	
Regional	83	

Continued

Category	Number (%)*	Programme figures **
Impairment		
Condition restricting mobility	36 (28%)	2,468 (17%)
Hearing impairment	7 (5%)	742 (5%)
Learning disability	47 (36%)	5,196 (37%)
Long-term medical condition	5 (4%)	616 (4%)
Mental health condition	9 (7%)	999 (7%)
Neurological condition	8 (6%)	985 (7%)
Visual impairment	17 (13%)	861 (6%)
None (other/missing)	1 (1%)	2,305 (16%)
Employment type		
Placement	63	
Supported Business	67	
Pre or Post WORKSTEP		
Registered before 1 April 2001	77 (59%)	7,736 (55%)
Registered on or after 1 April 2001	52 (41%)	6,436 (45%)
N/A	1	N/A

*Percentages have been included where comparisons with Jobcentre Plus data are possible

**WORKSTEP 2004-2005 figures excluding Remploy

Appendix F

Stakeholder feedback requests

Contract Manager

Dear (Contract Manager)

Workstep National Evaluation

I am writing to express our thanks for your involvement in this project. Your help and support in organising the (Region) case study and your input at our interview was invaluable to us, and very much appreciated.

If there are any further issues regarding the Workstep Programme you would like to raise we would be happy to hear from you, and we would also be pleased to receive any comments or questions you may have on the research process.

As a team we aim to continually review the quality of our work, and to ensure that the process for those involved in our research projects runs as smoothly as possible. Your views are a vital part of this process, so any feedback or suggestions for improvement you can offer would be helpful to us.

We will aim to share initial findings of the evaluation with Contract Managers at your meetings and will circulate the final report, once approved by the Department for Work and Pensions. As you may be aware the case studies are due to run up to the end of this year, so we anticipate that the report will be available in the early part of next year and will ensure a copy is sent to you.

Many thanks again for your assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Ann Purvis

Senior Research Consultant

Provider Manager

Dear (provider manager)

Workstep National Evaluation

I am writing to express our thanks to you, the staff at (provider), and your Workstep Programme supported employees for your involvement in this project.

Your help and support in organising the (provider) case study was invaluable to us, and very much appreciated by the research team.

If there are any further issues regarding the Workstep Programme you would like to raise we would be happy to hear from you, and we would also be pleased to receive any comments or questions you may have on the research process.

As a team we aim to continually review the quality of our work, and to ensure that the process for those involved in our research projects runs as smoothly as possible. Your views are a vital part of this process, so any feedback or suggestions for improvement you can offer would be helpful to us.

We will of course be sharing the findings of the evaluation with all of those involved, via circulation of the final report, once approved by the Department for Work and Pensions. As you may be aware the case studies are due to run up to the end of this year, so we anticipate that the report will be available in the early part of next year and will ensure a copy is sent to you.

Many thanks again for your assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Ann Purvis

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Appendix G

Proposed central dataset for WORKSTEP

WORKSTEP supported employees

Name

Contact details

Gender

Date of birth

Ethnicity

National Insurance number

Impairment (with an option to record more than one type)

Date referred to WORKSTEP provider

Name of WORKSTEP provider*

Referral source (DEA/provider self referral)

Jobcentre Plus District

Date accepted by WORKSTEP provider (or referred back to DEA)

Date development plan completed

Date employment started

Date of progression

Date of sustained progression

Date left WORKSTEP (and reason for leaving)

As the longer-term outcomes for supported employees are not currently monitored, it would be useful to have an indication of how long they remain in employment following the sustained progression period. The provider and/or Contract Manager could follow this up for a proportion of supported employees, as part of the ongoing monitoring process and dates for this be included in the database.

WORKSTEP providers

* Name of WORKSTEP provider is linked to the supported employee and there should also be a centrally accessible source of data on the following:

Name of provider

Contact name

Contact address, telephone/e-mail

Number of contracted places

Number of filled places (generated by link to supported employee data)

Jobcentre Plus districts/regions covered

Contract start/renewal date

Links between the provider and supported employee data should allow the generation of provider performance data such as occupancy, progressions, sustained progressions etc.

Reporting

Reporting requirements should be thoroughly explored prior to any database development, to ensure that data captured can be reported as required, e.g. provider performance by Region, supported employee data by provider and start date, progressions by referral type etc.

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