

FOR INFORMATION



Leading learning and skills

Research Report

A qualitative assessment of the introduction of employment focussed training offer for unemployed people in FE Colleges

October 2009

Of interest to all in the further education
sector

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1 Executive summary

- 1.1 This research examined the response of Further Education (FE) colleges to delivering employment related skills to the unemployed. The research explored how colleges have responded to a number of programmes in this area and sought to understand colleges' experiences of early implementation.
- 1.2 Further Education (FE) colleges are at different stages of involvement in a number of funding offers that encourage them to deliver employment focussed training to those who are out of work, and to support these learners in securing sustainable employment. The FE colleges' contribution is an important part of the Government's Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) agenda.
- 1.3 This evaluation of implementation focussed on four programmes. The National Voluntary Training Pilots (NVTP) which ran in the West Midlands until July 2009; for this programme fieldwork was conducted shortly after the offer had finished. The remaining three programmes (the Training Offer for those Unemployed for Six Months (Six Month Offer); Adult Learner Responsive Pilots (ALR Pilots) and the Sector Employability Toolkits Pilot (SET Pilot) were all launched around April 2009 and therefore were at an early stage at the time the evaluation took place.¹
- 1.4 When fieldwork was undertaken for this research most colleges were in the very early stages of setting up and offering training under these programmes (except NVTP). This report therefore identifies useful pointers for colleges as they set up their programmes and move forwards but is not a full evaluation of the response of colleges to these programmes.
- 1.5 The opportunities and challenges for colleges, and examples of effective responses to these, have enabled good practice and key lessons to be identified and disseminated to inform future work around IES.
- 1.6 A Good Practice Guide and a series of Case Studies have also been produced as part of this study. Whilst the report has taken a thematic approach the Case Studies reflect how individual colleges have approached activities for the programme(s) they are involved with. More detailed recommendations for action can be found in the Good Practice Guide. Both documents can be found in the annexes to this report and will also be stand alone documents to be circulated to colleges.
- 1.7 The evaluation fieldwork took place in June and July 2009 and comprised in-depth interviews with the programme leads at each college and managers and advisers from three Jobcentre Plus (Jobcentre Plus) offices in the West Midlands.

¹ Please note that throughout the report findings are common across programmes unless specified otherwise.

Planning and set-up

The majority of the colleges involved in the study had a history of providing training for the unemployed and of working closely with local employers. Most therefore were well placed to respond to the offers quickly and to identify key challenges and opportunities in the individual programmes.

Key issues

- Ensuring offer is tailored to the local labour market.
- Building relationship with local Jobcentre Plus offices and managers and ensuring college aims are aligned with those of Jobcentre Plus.
- Delivering training for the unemployed under multiple offers or funding streams.

Recommendations

- Develop nature of the provision by consulting local or regional partnerships (e.g. Regional or Local Skills and Employment boards), involving college staff who were experienced in delivering employment related training (e.g. from college Employer Responsive teams), proactively contacting recruitment agencies or reviewing job vacancies in local newspapers.
- Clearer communications and guidance from both the LSC and JCP to be produced to support set up and planning of future offers.
- Establish a dialogue with local Jobcentre Plus offices as early as possible in the process (when offer being agreed).
- Recruit additional staff or expand the responsibilities of existing staff to enable them to respond effectively to the offers. Having dedicated staff such as an 'unemployment champion' or 'Jobcentre Plus outreach manager' to build relationships with local Jobcentre Plus offices
- Present programmes as a single, coherent offer to learners and employers. The actual mechanics of which programme, or funding stream, will be used for an individual should be secondary to identifying appropriate provision. The focus needs to be on getting learners 'through the door' in the first instance.

The nature of provision

Colleges are typically using the offers to deliver reasonably short courses lasting around a month on average that deliver units of a Level 1 or Level 2 qualification. The hours studied for in the week varied from course to course. For almost all colleges the intention is that once in employment, learners will be able to continuing training via Train to Gain or an Apprenticeship to complete the full qualification.

Key issues

- Some learners will benefit from training in employability skills basic skills or 'softer' skills such as confidence building within the offer.
- Being able to offer flexible provision.
- Accommodating unpredictable and / or inconsistent learner numbers.

Recommendations

- Embedding additional skills to assist with employment within the subject area of the 'core' course to encourage learners to see it as relevant and applicable to them.
- Using involvement in the offers as an impetus to introduce greater flexibility into provision which may be already planned. The benefits this can offer could be used as a 'selling point' for other staff.
- Consider a range of flexible approaches to delivery such as; roll-on / roll-off facilities, part-time provision, having a 'bank' of part-time tutors to draw on, staggered start dates and summer provision.
- Grouping together with other local colleges to offer classes could help address the issue of low learner numbers. Keeping in close contact with Jobcentre Plus could increase awareness of likely numbers to help planning.

Increasing referrals and securing enrolment

Colleges are not reliant purely on Jobcentre Plus referrals; many are planning and conducting a wide range of marketing activities. Having town centre drop-in centres and producing flyers have been particularly successful so far.

Key issues

- Reaching the Jobcentre Plus advisers who are directly responsible for referring customers to colleges.
- Ensuring Jobcentre Plus staff (and other relevant organisations) are fully aware of the nature of the offer and when courses can begin.
- Reducing the high number of 'no shows' (those not attending) initial interviews at the college and understanding the complex barriers to learning many have (even if they have agreed with Jobcentre Plus to be referred).
- Securing enrolment onto a suitable course once an individual had been referred.

Recommendations

- The LSC and JCP need to provide clear guidance to providers regarding referral processes and contact arrangements to support referrals.
- Colleges need to be highly proactive, compete for Jobcentre Plus staff time and arrange regular meetings with the advisers.
- Providing concise descriptions of the offer, the potential benefits to the customer and the process in an easily accessible paper form is essential for Jobcentre Plus advisers' awareness and understanding of the provision (which underpins the volume and appropriateness of referrals).
- Keeping advisers updated about numbers enrolled, progress and when more referrals are needed for a particular course will incentivise them to make more referrals in future. Placing college staff in Jobcentre Plus offices has worked well for all colleges that had tried this.
- Introducing processes aimed at encouraging all those referred to at least attend an initial interview or meeting with the college reduces 'no-shows' such as calling individuals who did not attend at first to reassure them that there is suitable provision available and that the interview process is informal and not intimidating.

- Conducting three way interviews (college staff, Jobcentre Plus adviser, the unemployed individual) accelerates the enrolment process and ensures all available options can be discussed, and eligibility determined.
- As Jobcentre Plus offices may have resources too limited to send staff to colleges it may well be in colleges interests to place staff in Jobcentre Plus offices at regular times.
- Pulling together a wide range of opportunities for the unemployed means that no-one needs be turned away if the initial programme or course referred to is inappropriate.

Learner support

Demographically and in terms of work / benefit history, those referred were very varied.

Key issues

- Some of the learners referred are highly experienced and want a qualification to formalise their skills to make them more transferable, for example in IT. Others want to do a short 'quick fix' style course to improve their CV or refresh existing skills.

Recommendations

- Colleges that offer regular, ongoing, tailored support (for both learning and personal issues such as finances, housing and health) are seeing better completion rates.
- A few were setting up mentor schemes; others had personal tutors or support staff that learners see once a week to check on progress. Reinforcing the importance of regular progress reviews may help.

Achieving and monitoring employment outcomes

Support with CVs, interview practice and jobsearch techniques were being built into many courses, and colleges were offering access to the internet, local papers, careers resources and personal advice.

Key issues

- A culture change is required (and recognised) by colleges if they are to be more effective in moving people into sustained employment after a period of training.
- Support with CVs, interview practice and jobsearch techniques.
- Helping students find employment.
- New or additional requirements around recording employment outcomes.
- Uncertainty on how sustainability and job outcomes in general would be consistently captured and for a minority some confusion around the impact involvement might have on other targets and OFSTED reports.

Recommendations

- Support with applications can be built into many courses, and colleges can also help by offering access to the internet, and local papers as well as careers resources and personal advice.
- Recently many colleges have developed employer facing teams who can assist in finding employment. Activities such as finding 'sheltered placements' with SMEs, setting up voluntary work with charities or work placements with large employers could be considered.
- Most colleges were confident that their existing MI systems would accommodate recording employment outcomes after some initial development work.
- Clarification at a national level about how OFSTED will treat these programmes would be welcomed.

Looking forward: lessons learnt from the National Voluntary Training Pilots

Exploring the experiences of colleges that participated in NVTP provides some insight into the likely issues, challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for those colleges that are in the early stages of delivering employment-related skills to the unemployed. Two colleges in particular stood out as having trained far more learners under NVTP: just under 100 unemployed students each.

Key issues

- Great variation in numbers trained by different colleges.
- Difficulty in recording sustainable job outcomes on current provider systems.
- Identifying which flexibilities the college is able to offer.
- Additional learner support needed for those with barriers to learning.
- Building internal capacity to provide sufficient resource.

Recommendations

- The two colleges that had trained the most learners had worked hard to develop excellent relationships with Jobcentre Plus, and had key personal contacts there. One had placed staff in the Jobcentre to talk to customers, and the other had Jobcentre Plus advisers attend their drop-in days and initial interviews – both had been successful in terms of increasing referrals.
- Extensive planning of what they could realistically offer was identified as a key step, being ready to deliver roll on / roll off, evening classes and other flexible options was made possible by securing internal buy-in to the programme.
- Both colleges had also built up a programme of all-encompassing learner support (involving an induction period followed by regular meetings with support staff who were able to assist with a range of issues including a lack of confidence, lack of literacy / numeracy skills or issues with finances or childcare), and considered how to make these learners feel welcome, comfortable and confident and how to break down the barriers they may have previously had to learning.
- Those colleges that had experienced successful involvement in NVTP anticipate similarly successful involvement with the Six Month Offer and are confident of their relationships

with Jobcentre Plus and the processes they now have in place to respond to an offer of this nature.

- Colleges stress though that success is closely linked with the amount of work a college is prepared to put in and they highlight the need for appropriate staff resource to undertake this work. Building capacity would therefore, according to these colleges improve results.

2 Introduction, background and methodology

Introduction and Research objectives

- 2.1 The importance of raising the skill levels of the UK workforce has been recognised for some time: the Leitch Review published in 2006, strongly urged that the UK should raise achievement at all levels of skills, while the 2007 Budget Report emphasised that workforce skills are key to the country's capacity to respond to new challenges arising from the changing global economic environment.
- 2.2 In January 2008 the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) jointly launched '*Ready to Work, Skilled for Work: Unlocking Britain's Talent*'; detailing the Government's ambition to offer individuals a seamless journey from pre-employment to post-employment skills development. The command paper 'Work Skills' (DWP/DIUS) that followed this established the Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) agenda in policy. The Government is committed to delivering an IES service which helps those currently out of work to find and retain sustainable employment. Following the recommendation of the National Employer Panel the LSC is now the body responsible for the funding and provision of pre-employment skills development for Jobcentre Plus customers.
- 2.3 Further Education (FE) Colleges have an important role to play in delivering the IES agenda. Colleges typically offer a very wide range of courses, local accessibility, supportive and flexible methods of delivery, and close contacts with local schools, employers and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). A number of current offers exist which aim to encourage colleges to support those who are out of work to gain (sustainable) employment. These include the four programmes that were the focus of this study:
- National Voluntary Training Pilot (NVTP)
 - The Training Offer for those unemployed for six months (Six month offer)
 - Adult Learner Responsive Pilot (ALR Pilot)
 - Sector Employability Toolkits Pilot (SET Pilot)
- 2.4 The current research project sought to evaluate colleges' experiences of implementing these offers and to identify key lessons learnt to inform further work to be rolled out later in 2009. The research was *not* an evaluation of the programmes themselves. More specifically the objectives of the research were to:
- Identify the issues facing colleges as they respond to these programmes that seek to provide employment related skills to the unemployed
 - Identify the opportunities available to colleges;
 - Assess any interaction around these projects that colleges have had with external organisations (e.g. Jobcentre Plus, employers etc) and identify the positive and negative aspects of this interaction;
 - Identify and describe effective responses that colleges are making to both issues and opportunities and develop a good practice guide from these;
 - Identify specific barriers facing colleges which they cannot address and which may require action by stakeholders;
- 2.5 Case studies and a good practice guide are included at Appendix I and Appendix II of this report and are also available as separate documents.

Overview of the four programmes

- 2.6 Development work on NVTP commenced in April 2008, with delivery starting in September. Other programmes had only been running for a relatively short period of time. However, all those not involved in NVTP had planned their offer, and a handful had started training learners at the time of this research. The four programmes are described briefly in the following sections.

National Voluntary Training Pilots

- 2.7 The aim of these pilots is to stimulate greater responsiveness in colleges to meet the needs of Jobcentre Plus customers, including changing perceptions and delivery approaches. This offer has been developing since April 2008 across the West Midlands region, and 26 colleges have been involved on a voluntary basis in delivering more responsive and flexible provision for Jobcentre Plus customers. There is no discrete funding for this activity; it is supported by part of the college's adult learner responsive budget. A portion of their ALR is ring-fenced and protected from impacting on their minimum levels of performance.
- 2.8 The target group of these pilots are people aged 25 plus (19+ from April 2009) who have been unemployed for six months or more. Through these pilots, they can be offered 8 weeks full time training, (with travel and childcare costs) paid by LSC. This full time training has to be related to the local labour market and support participants to get a job in the relevant sector; but it does not need to be focused on delivering a qualification.

The Training Offer for those Unemployed for Six Months

- 2.9 At the Employment Summit on 12 January 2009, the Prime Minister announced a package of measures to help people who have been unemployed for six months to get a job. Training is an important part of this package, and the DIUS announced an £83m investment from April 2009 to March 2011 to fund an extra 75,000 places specifically for people who have been unemployed for six months. After this, delivery organisations will be expected to deliver appropriate provision from their mainstream funding.
- 2.10 The offer aims to support colleges in receipt of both adult learner responsive and employer responsive funding to quickly develop their capacity to play a full role in delivering an effective skills response to the economic downturn. The focus is on providing a significant uplift in someone's skills so that they are able to get a job and continue in training while they are working, either through in-work training (e.g. Train to Gain) or through part-time provision alongside work commitments.

Adult Learner Responsive Pilot

- 2.11 The pilot is operating during the 2008/09 and 2009/10 academic years, from April 2009 and is intended to assist the LSC in considering how the achievement of sustainable employment can be encouraged and supported within the adult learner responsive (ALR) funding model. It is also intended to help the LSC understand the issues around collecting information about learners who are not in employment and their progression into sustainable employment in a consistent way.

Sector Employability Toolkits Pilot

- 2.12 Sector employability toolkits (SETs) are targeted at those who wish to return to the labour market and cover the essential sector-specific skills necessary for those who have not worked in the relevant industries before. They are designed by the Sector Skills Councils to meet the needs of major employers in each sector (who directly contributed to their development). SETs therefore provide a consistent, nationally available offer for employers within a particular sector.
- 2.13 They provide an ideal platform for people to enter work and progress into further learning and development opportunities in the sector. The toolkits incorporate some elements of the core Level 2 NVQ and work experience, and therefore give people who are changing sector a relevant enhancement to their skills. The programme does not itself address other needs such as basic skills as these are assumed to have been dealt with at an earlier stage either by referral from a Jobcentre Plus adviser to the employability skills programme or the college's Skills for Life offer.
- 2.14 SETs are furthest developed in the retail and hospitality sector but are emerging in some other sectors. Individuals who have expressed an interest in working in a specific industry sector will be offered a short intensive training programme that will provide the necessary skills to secure a job and work in that sector. At the time fieldwork for this research was conducted five colleges were involved in delivering retail and hospitality SETs.

Methodology

- 2.15 A qualitative approach was taken to collect in-depth information about how colleges had responded to providing employment-related skills to people who are not working. A small number of interviews were also conducted with Jobcentre Plus staff.
- 2.16 Among colleges, a total of 42 interviews were conducted across 34 different colleges. Interviews were conducted during June and July 2009 with the college manager responsible for the individual programme. The screener used to identify appropriate college contacts can be found in Appendix I. In terms of the programmes discussed with respondents these were:
- 25 interviews were conducted with those delivering the Six Month Offer
 - 10 with colleges providing NVTP
 - 3 delivering SET Pilot
 - 4 delivering ALR Pilot
- 2.17 The sample included a mix of urban and rural colleges, with 15 of the participating colleges located in rural areas and the remaining 19 colleges in urban centres.
- 2.18 Given that NVTP was only offered in the West Midlands region a relatively large number of the colleges that participated in the research were based in this region (13). The remainder of the colleges were spread broadly evenly across the country with each region represented by 2 to 4 colleges.

2.19 Twelve interviews were conducted face to face, and lasted around an hour. The remainder were telephone in-depth interviews lasting around 45 minutes. All interviews covered the following topics, the full topic guide is in Appendix II

- Background
- Engagement (referrals from Jobcentre Plus, referrals from other sources, profile of learners)
- Delivery (the learning programme – content and method of delivery, supporting learners, interaction with other stakeholders)
- Administration and MI (specific programme issues)
- Outcome phase (moving into employment)
- Institutional / operational issues (adapting the programme, general opinions, looking forwards)

2.20 In addition we spoke to advisers and branch managers at three Jobcentre Plus in the West Midlands about their experience of working with colleges as part of NVTP, interviewing one manager and one or two advisers at each Jobcentre Plus office. These additional interviews were conducted in late July and early August 2009. The screener used to identify appropriate respondents can be found in Appendix III.

2.21 These interviews were all conducted face to face. Manager interviews lasted 30-40 minutes and adviser interviews around 15-20 minutes. Interviews covered the following topics, although some sections were only discussed with managers. The full topic guide is in Appendix IV.

- Background
- Setting up offer
- Knowledge of college offer
- Offering training
- Working with colleges – operational issues
- General opinions & looking forwards

3 What are the opportunities and challenges in setting up appropriate courses and delivery methods?

- 3.1 In this chapter we examine how colleges are setting up their programmes internally and the types of preparatory discussions they have undertaken with local Jobcentre Plus. We discuss how colleges decide which provision is most appropriate for these learners and the process of building on existing flexibilities in delivery, or beginning to move towards a more flexible provision model.

Previous involvement with the unemployed and local labour market

- 3.2 Prior work with Jobcentre Plus, the experience and contacts of their Employer Responsive team and / or their proven ability to be flexible and responsive to different funding streams and other non-mainstream forms of provision such as Train to Gain, Response to Redundancy, Pathways to Work and New Deal resulted in the majority of colleges feeling the transition to delivering this new provision would be smooth.
- 3.3 The majority of colleges had prior experience of providing training for the unemployed as a discrete group - often, though not always, via Jobcentre Plus referrals. Those with extensive previous experience felt they were particularly well placed to adapt provision for these programmes (notably ALR and SET Pilot colleges), but even those Six Month Offer or NVTP colleges less accustomed to directly working with the unemployed felt in the main that they could build on their understanding the delivery of externally funded programmes and were not starting from scratch.

"Once you are set up for one, it's not difficult"

ALR Pilot / Six Month Offer, South West

- 3.4 Only a handful of Six Month Offer and / or NVTP colleges felt that they had nothing in place, or that the college had little experience that could be readily adapted to meet the needs of the new programmes. For these colleges involvement in the programmes was a completely 'new entity' and correspondingly they were more likely to feel that they were some way from being ready to receive referrals. Although offers had been established, many of these less experienced colleges were adopting a 'wait and see' approach for the finer day-to-day programme management details, expecting they would react to the needs of individual referrals, or their local Jobcentre Plus as they arose.
- 3.5 Most colleges also had experience of setting up provision tailored to the needs of the local labour market, for example through Train to Gain, New Deal or Apprenticeship training.

Establishing the nature of the provision

- 3.6 Several colleges had worked hard on establishing a dialogue with their local Jobcentre Plus early in the process to determine what Jobcentre Plus themselves were looking for from the college's offer, and to discuss provision relevant to the local labour market, for example, by discussing the Jobcentre Plus's main current vacancies.
- 3.7 Other sources of labour market intelligence used by colleges used to develop their provision included local or regional partners, strategic or research organisations such as the Cumbria Intelligence Observatory or the Oldham Partnership. However, many felt they had good existing knowledge of the local labour market through more informal means such as dealings with local

employers, established Employer Responsive links, contacts with recruitment agencies, and frequent observations of the range of vacancies advertised in local newspapers.

- 3.8 Commonly colleges had been in contact with other providers about the programmes. This was sometimes to discuss their previous experiences of similar programmes and what had worked well, or, more specifically, the content of provision in an attempt to maximise regional provision and minimise unnecessary over-lap:

“...so that the programmes complement each-other and aren't directly in competition with each-other”

NVTP, West Midlands

- 3.9 Colleges that are involved with more than one of the programmes aimed at the unemployed typically aim to present one coherent offer to learners. For example colleges delivering retail and hospitality SETs do so alongside a range of similar courses in other sectors which are offered using Six Month Offer funding – learners can select from a suite of sector-specific courses, with the different funding streams and varying administrative requirements of these courses ‘hidden from view’.
- 3.10 Six Month Offer, NVTP and ALR Pilot colleges are taking varying approaches to the logistics of their provision. Colleges can be split between:
- Those that have created new courses for unemployed learners and those that are using existing provision (those using solely existing provision – a handful – were those colleges who had not previously been involved with offering provision to the unemployed).
 - Those that are delivering or will deliver training using the same teachers and facilities as they use in mainstream activity and those that are not.
 - Those that are placing learners on courses with students who are funded differently and those that are not.
- 3.11 Colleges are generally offering (or planning to offer work-focused) vocational courses, generally around 3-4 weeks in length and a mixture of part-time and full-time (courses up to 26 hours per week were mentioned by one college). Typically these courses are intended to lead to a Level 1 or a level 2 qualification.
- 3.12 For the Six Month Offer, most colleges see a qualification as being delivered via Train to Gain once an individual has gained employment, not in their relatively short time at the college via the initial programme, although due to the early stages of this programme link-up to Train to Gain has yet to be effected. However, many were aiming to provide where appropriate shorter courses for certificates that could make the difference to employment outcomes, for example basic food hygiene certificates or Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards.
- 3.13 SET Pilot colleges had the content of their hospitality and retail courses pre-determined by the relevant Sector Skills Council (one of the objectives of the SET Pilot is to deliver a nationally consistent offer). Six Month Offer, NVTP and ALR Pilot colleges were offering provision in a range of subjects the most common being:
- Admin / Business admin
 - IT
 - Health and social care
 - Retail
 - Hospitality and catering
 - Food hygiene

- Security / door supervisor
- Bookkeeping and accounts
- Manual handling
- First aid
- Construction (for example getting people their CSCS cards)
- Engineering
- Travel and tourism
- Hair and beauty
- Care for children
- Classroom assistants
- Customer service

3.14 The number of different courses that individual colleges were offering under the Six Month Offer, NVTP and ALR Pilot programmes was varied. Most commonly colleges were offering around three to six different courses, although a few colleges were offering more than ten choices and a couple were offering just one course. Colleges were explicit that the courses offered were a direct response to the needs of the local labour market, as established through communication with Jobcentre Plus and links to local employers.

3.15 A small number of colleges incorporate employability training within their offer. This can involve help with CV writing and job applications, job search skills and interview techniques. This is in response to some having concerns, as several colleges were, over the employability of their learners who are not in work, particularly those that have become unemployed after an extended period of employment:

“If someone has been out of work for 6-8 months and had been in employment for 15 years, they won’t have a clue what modern CVs are like, they won’t have interview skills, they won’t have done an application form for years”

Six Month Offer, South East

3.16 One college involved with the Six Month Offer, whilst strongly advocating the need for employability skills for this group, were under the impression that there was no scope in their contract to provide such training and support (this seems to be a misunderstanding on the part of some colleges as contracts do allow for this). Despite this impression some were providing this element anyway because it was felt to be needed to achieve the required employment, and (sustained) employment outcomes for their learners.

3.17 One college was developing a tailored training package through the ALR pilot, involving certificates in business start-up, financial planning and sales techniques designed to enable learners to set up as self employed². The college felt that this was the most appropriate offer in terms of the local economy and the aspirations of their learners:

“One of the features identified to the economy of the town is the lack of business start-ups, so one of the strategies of the Local Authorities as part of the local area agreements has been to look at promoting small businesses. So really, that was what influenced our decision to look at that programme: where we could support people that had recently been made redundant but had an idea of wanting to set up a business.”

ALR Pilot / Six Month Offer, North West

Offering flexible delivery methods

3.18 The majority of colleges are already offering flexible learning in one or more forms. Around half the colleges are offering a roll-on roll-off facility whereby learners can start a course at any point

² As a note, one of the other strands of the Six Month Offer is support for becoming self-employed which is delivered by JOBCENTRE PLUS through Business Link.

with completion coming after a full 'cycle' of the programme. A smaller proportion are offering part-time provision and staggered start dates (including over the summer holiday period).

- 3.19 Colleges saw offering such flexibility of provision as an essential part of meeting their obligations under these programmes as well as the needs of the learners. Being able to enrol learners and start the course as soon possible after referral is seen as key to maintaining the motivation of individuals and minimising drop outs. It also crucially builds trust with local Jobcentre Plus that colleges can deliver courses as required.

"We meet student needs with training times as we are aware of our clients' fractured lifestyles"

Six Month Offer, London

"Totally flexible...Probably not enough yet for roll on roll off"

Six Month Offer, South West

- 3.20 All colleges that do not currently have such flexible offers running anticipate offering flexible learning in one form or another as and when the number of learners allows them to do so. A few colleges spoke of having to balance flexibility with courses being financially viable; for example one college needed eight learners to make Fork Lift Truck provision viable (as the equipment needed to teach this was more expensive than for other courses which they could run viably with lower numbers).
- 3.21 Many colleges that have not yet started roll on / roll off or similar flexibilities face a "catch 22" or chicken and egg situation. On the one hand they need a few more referrals in order to start courses or begin to set up flexible delivery but on the other Jobcentre Plus staff were unsure how quickly customers could start courses (or whether the college would be able to handle larger numbers) and therefore were reluctant to refer customers in case they were left waiting. More colleges could perhaps consider focussing on just getting the absolute minimum number they require to run one course in the flexible manner they have planned so they can build on and learn from this example internally, as well as using it to illustrate to Jobcentre Plus and learners that they are able to run courses successfully in this manner.
- 3.22 A handful of colleges that were about to start training learners through the Six Month Offer reported that summer starts were proving difficult to deliver with staff holidays although the programme managers felt that offering summer starts was key as the wait until September and standard term time would be an inordinately long period.

Planning how to handle referrals, direct recruitment and other preparatory activities

- 3.23 Few colleges mentioned internal constraints in the process of setting up their offer. Those that did cited resourcing or staffing issues as a result of a changing or increasing workload – these tended to be colleges where the management of these programmes was an additional part of the workload for existing staff rather than their having recruited people specifically to run these programmes. A handful of colleges were still getting to grips with different funding streams or with the offer as a whole.
- 3.24 Several colleges had recruited staff specifically to manage these programmes. This was either because they needed a person with experience of running programmes for the unemployed, or simply because the scale of the expected programme required additional staff. These roles covered administration, day-to-day project management, marketing, and dealing with Jobcentre

Plus offices (one college recruited an 'unemployment champion' who visits their local Jobcentre Plus offices regularly to deal with marketing and promotion of their offer). Generally colleges adapted or added to the responsibilities of existing roles, for example planning for staff to act as 'mentors' to assist each learner on an individual basis throughout their time at the college.

- 3.25 Virtually all colleges had planned a broadly similar approach to dealing with referrals, with the individual undergoing various assessments / diagnostic tests at the college, reviewing their work history, their skills and qualifications, including numeracy and literacy, and their employment desires to build upon the background information supplied by Jobcentre Plus. These would then be used to assess or check eligibility for the programme and agree appropriate provision.

"Each individual learner will be given IAG [information, advice and guidance] when they come to us by the project manager. He will determine the type of work that they may have been involved in, or the type of work that they want to become involved in. He will look at what qualifications they have had previously, what's available within college, and they will do some assessment with them as well on entry, to determine that the course level is right for them."

Six Month Offer, North East

- 3.26 Several colleges were still working hard to develop a relationship with Jobcentre Plus, with the main issue a lack of referrals and/or a perceived lack of understanding amongst Jobcentre Plus advisers of the college's offer. A few colleges wanted to be able to liaise with Jobcentre Plus advisers but were having to deal only with managers and were therefore reliant on them to cascade the information down. Colleges who feel that their relationship with Jobcentre Plus is working well are those that either had previous close relationships or who have worked particularly hard to develop a dialogue with their local Jobcentre Plus offices and who actively promote their training and keep advisers informed.

- 3.27 Many colleges had not initially identified they would undertake marketing campaigns to attract more learners (eligible for these programmes) as they expected all referrals to come from Jobcentre Plus initially, but after a few months, many Six Month Offer colleges were now planning these activities to boost numbers, this is discussed in more detail from paragraph 4.19.

- 3.28 Amongst the NVTP colleges a handful had set up a process for those recruited directly, or via agencies other than Jobcentre Plus (such as nextstep). An extra stage in the referral process would mean that once the individual had spoken to the college and established the course they would like to do the college would ask individuals to request referral at their next Jobcentre Plus meeting. The adviser would then assess the customers eligibility before formally (re)referring them to the college with the appropriate paperwork. Other colleges were planning similar systems.

"We ring Jobcentre Plus and say we have whoever it is here and they'd like to think about the offer, check out eligibility, we always say to them go back when's your next sign in day, who's your regular advisor - talk to them, just mention the college or our name and they will then ring us."

NVTP, West Midlands

- 3.29 While most colleges felt they had planned a suitable range of provision for most referrals (i.e. they could offer something beneficial to most of the individuals referred), a few anticipated that a key challenge would be motivating and supporting the individuals throughout their learning. The ways in which colleges dealt with this challenge is described in Chapter 6 of this report.

4 What are the most effective ways of increasing referrals and numbers recruited directly?

- 4.1 In this chapter we discuss how colleges are successfully working with Jobcentre Plus to increase the number of referrals they receive, and also how many are taking the opportunity presented by these offers to market directly to those out of work.

Increasing Jobcentre Plus referrals

- 4.2 While the majority of colleges involved with the Six Month Offer, SET Pilots and ALR Pilot had seen a small number of referrals (around ten) so far from the Jobcentre Plus a significant minority were yet to receive any referrals at all from the Jobcentre Plus (although in these cases referrals were typically expected imminently). The level of referrals amongst NVTP colleges was much higher as the programme was more established.
- 4.3 The majority of colleges had been expecting and planning for more referrals than they had received so far. However, a handful of colleges reported already seeing referral levels at or higher than they expected.
- 4.4 The various ALR Pilot colleges were each planning for different numbers of referrals to each other, and none were entirely reliant on Jobcentre Plus referrals. Those that were running particularly specialised routes, such as self employment were not expecting (or seeking) large numbers as their emphasis was on *appropriate* referrals.
- 4.5 It was very rare that colleges had seen any referrals unless they had proactively engaged with their local Jobcentre Plus (on a regular rather than one off basis) to explain their offer and the processes that the college had in place for advisers. Colleges that had more experience of working specifically with the unemployed were more likely to have engaged fully with Jobcentre Plus already, during the early set up of the programme, and these colleges were now most confident that they would see the referral rate increase.

"We've opened a lot of networks and channels of communication. We've taken quite a pro-active approach to making sure we've met with Jobcentre Plus advisers., We've had college employees going into the Jobcentre Plus which I think is a good thing . . . we have tried to learn their terminology."

Six Month Offer, East Midlands

- 4.6 SET Pilot colleges reported that despite direct contact and work with the Jobcentre Plus their referral rates were low, but it was still early in the programme. Colleges mentioned that a launch event was planned for mid-July where they would have the opportunity to meet with Jobcentre Plus managers to promote the programme. They expected an increase in referrals following this launch
- 4.7 Jobcentre Plus managers highlighted that whilst in the first instance their role was to explain the offer to advisers, colleges' appointed contacts with Jobcentre Plus could only benefit from spending time speaking to advisers directly themselves, explaining their offer and how it could benefit customers as advisers are the key link between customer and college.

"Really, if they want their provision sold, and they want referrals, they need to target the advisers because those are the people that at the end of the day are going to be selling that provision".

Jobcentre Plus manager

4.8 Colleges and Jobcentre Plus were also working together in a number of ways to attract referrals and speed up the referral process. Whilst Jobcentre Plus advisers are extremely busy and colleges' access to Jobcentre Plus offices is by no means unlimited, steps taken to help facilitate referrals included:

- College staff being given desk space in Jobcentres on a regular basis to hand out information and answer questions
- College staff going to Jobcentre Plus 'Back to Work' sessions (available for all unemployed claimants when they reach 6-8 weeks of their claim in JRFND Phase 1 areas)
- Group talks and one-to-one training for advisers from college staff
- Jobcentre Plus staff attending college drop in days and sitting in on three way interviews with potential learners

"We have a very co-operative relationship with Jobcentre Plus . . . we've got such close working links that sometimes it's hard to tell whose staff is whose really."

NVTP, West Midlands

"It has worked much better since [our staff member] has been down there. We couldn't get it to work at all before. I think . . . advisers on the floor . . . don't have time to read their emails about what the offers are. We have seemed to get over that because I am down there and I have handouts to give them."

NVTP and Six Month Offer, West Midlands

"At first a slow trickle but we anticipated that. Now they're really good at ringing me or the administrator, they'll ask questions. I've made it clear – do ring up – even if it's not in our offer, let's see what we can do."

Six Month Offer, East Midlands

4.9 Initial meetings with Jobcentre Plus had typically been at a managerial level, but there was recognition that attention needed to focus on Jobcentre Plus advisers, though this was not always easy. One Jobcentre Plus Manager wanted the college's dealings with Jobcentre Plus to come through them directly because of very high adviser workloads. More recently colleges had been working to ensure that advisers were aware of the college offer, that they were confident in offering it to customers and understood the process.

"Communication is key, so making sure the advisers at Jobcentre Plus understand what the offer is and know the offer is there . . . I think actually sending my staff down to Jobcentre Plus and working with the advisers that's worked well. It's putting resources aside to allow that to happen."

Six Month Offer, South East

4.10 New staff starting at Jobcentre Plus and the frequent introduction of new initiatives and processes meant that one 'start up' meeting was not sufficient and a few colleges had (or were planning) weekly update meetings, or frequent refresher sessions. The regularity of the contact seems critical.

"We have fairly good links with College X . . . they are good because they will come down and talk to advisers and tell them about the provision, they will send literature to myself so I can also sell it . . . we have a good rapport, they come to meetings; they talk to advisers and tell us about the provision. And they keep coming to remind us that that provision is there and that we need to "use it or lose it"

"What advisers want to know is what that course delivers for our customers, how we refer to it, and what bits of papers we need to fill in. And sometimes, that is where the message gets lost because sometimes the advisers get very confused because they may know that there is some provision there, but ... the advisers will shy away from it because they won't know the details. And sometimes, that is where referrals may suffer because we have all this provision out there ... but [they don't know about it at] at nuts and bolts level."

Jobcentre Plus manager

- 4.11 One Jobcentre Plus office had run an adviser event where colleges (alongside other providers) had been invited to give a ten minute one-to-one talk to each adviser, explaining their offer and how to access it.
- 4.12 Producing plenty of hard copy handouts for advisers had also helped increase referrals. Several colleges had given out maps, directions and transport details, step by step flow charts for the college processes, individual flyers for each course detailing the course content, how this would help them find work and the extra employment support on offer. Without these materials most advisers would only have a list on their computer screen which may not provide enough detail for them to be confident to refer a customer appropriately.
- 4.13 One Jobcentre Plus manager felt that despite having good links with individuals in the college they were not sure how ready the college was for large numbers as they had experienced some problems receiving the paperwork and communication around the referral process in a timely fashion (necessary to ensure that customers' benefits were not affected). They reported customers starting on courses without the Jobcentre Plus being informed.

"[The college] haven't got the infrastructure. It is like they are set up for trickles of numbers and not a massive influx of customers who desperately need the training . . . the way that it is set up, it is not big enough to deal with the demand."

Jobcentre Plus manager

- 4.14 From the college perspective there were hold ups reported in getting forms to and from the District level Jobcentre Plus office which had to go via local offices. This has been overcome by faxing forms to the District and local offices at the same time as recommended by Jobcentre Plus. These comments indicate the need to agree the procedures and protocols for the administration side of these programmes, in addition to colleges simply communicating details about their offer.
- 4.15 Several colleges and Jobcentre Plus saw a conflict of priorities between Jobcentre Plus and colleges, with Jobcentre Plus staff more focussed on work outcomes and colleges on learning outcomes. Addressing this issue early on in the process and agreeing common goals (as far as possible) would alleviate these problems.

"I think the barriers are the distance between our goals and theirs. Ours is to get them into work, and theirs is to get them into training."

Jobcentre Plus manager

- 4.16 However, colleges generally had a clear understanding that the central aim of these programmes was to provide (sustained) employment outcomes.
- 4.17 One Jobcentre Plus office reported that if they knew which courses were proving most successful in employment terms (and if they were sent more details about attendance and dropout rates) they would be more likely to refer people.

Recruiting via nextstep and other agencies

4.18 A significant minority of colleges (predominantly Six Month Offer colleges) were anticipating referrals by nextstep, and a handful had already seen this happen. Other organisations that colleges were liaising with to gain referrals and / or to place marketing were:

- Community centres, and libraries
- Voluntary organisations and charities (including drug rehabilitation centres and women's refuges)
- Offender services

Increasing numbers directly recruited

4.19 The majority of colleges (around two thirds) were running or planning their own marketing campaigns to attract additional unemployed learners; colleges were split between those who anticipated doing this from the outset and those that have realised the need for this only once the initial number of Jobcentre Plus referrals has been lower than expected. Activities undertaken included:

- PR work to get mentioned on local radio (a few felt this was much more effective than paid advertising)
- Placing adverts in local papers
- Producing flyers to distribute at job fairs, open days and local events
- Placing flyers in supermarkets, doctors surgeries and other public areas
- Arranging direct mailings with Jobcentre Plus offices to eligible individuals
- Adding mention of opportunities for the unemployed on their existing marketing materials

4.20 Word of mouth was mentioned by several colleges as being key. Once programmes start to see people moving into work or obtaining qualifications it will be useful for colleges to advertise their successes.

4.21 For colleges situated outside of city centres, using outreach centres or having a drop in location the town centre can work well. One NVTP college was involved with a 'Skill Bill' centre where potential learners could go to talk to careers advisers and have the offer explained to them. A few rural colleges were questioning how wide an area they could potentially market their offer to, and were keen to expand into nearby urban areas. Similarly one SET Pilot college was using an outreach team to visit Jobcentre Plus, sector specific recruitment agencies, and local employers dealing with redundancies.

4.22 One Six Month Offer and ALR Pilot college had worked with Jobcentre Plus to identify particular wards where they should target their marketing materials.

4.23 To summarise, colleges have found that unless they are proactive in working with Jobcentre Plus frontline staff they tend to receive very few referrals. Colleges need to ensure Jobcentre

Plus advisers fully understand and are supportive of colleges' offers, and also invest in their own marketing and recruitment activities to increase numbers.

5 How can colleges maximise the conversion from referral / recruitment to enrolment and learning?

- 5.1 This chapter examines how colleges are working to ensure as many of those referred (or recruited directly) are able to start on relevant, appropriate courses as soon as possible. Keeping the conversion rate high entails working closely with Jobcentre Plus as well as ensuring learners are on the course that best matches their needs and employment desires.

Those referred by Jobcentre Plus

- 5.2 Not all those individuals referred by Jobcentre Plus went on to enrol on courses. One of the NVTP colleges that had seen high levels of referrals reported around three in five Jobcentre Plus referrals going on to train, other colleges reported proportions of 50% or less going on to train after referral. Many of those not going on to enrol had not attended the initial interview with the college arranged when Jobcentre Plus staff referred them. Most colleges involved in Six Month Offer, SET Pilot and ALR Pilot were not in a position to yet estimate the proportion converting.
- 5.3 Whilst most colleges were mainly focussed on increasing the number of referrals from Jobcentre Plus at the time the research was conducted, colleges who had seen higher levels of referrals were recognising there is also a need to ensure procedures are in place to maximise converting referrals to starts.
- 5.4 Colleges that had worked directly with Jobcentre Plus to train unemployed people before expected quite a high proportion of referrals from Jobcentre Plus not to attend the initial interview they had booked at the college ('no shows'). Colleges that had not worked with the unemployed previously may have been over optimistic about how many referrals would result in attendance at interview. An awareness that the numbers referred by Jobcentre Plus will have dropped by the time individuals are due to attend their initial interview will enable the handling of referrals to be set up more efficiently.
- 5.5 Extra processes put in place to reduce 'no shows' included the college putting arrangements in place to enable Jobcentre Plus to call to book appointments with the college during the customer's interview, and ensuring colleges were made aware of the number of referrals they should expect so they could monitor this and take action when necessary.

"Jobcentre Plus have a central phone number [at the college] to call. They often call when the client is with them and they'll discuss opportunities. Then our administrative team log the call, and sets up the initial advice and guidance appointment."

Six Month Offer, South West

- 5.6 A few colleges opted to run drop in or open days where referrals could be dealt with in a batch (so advisers could tell the customer to go along on that day without needing to contact the college first to arrange a specific appointment). Others who were dealing with larger volumes preferred to have set appointments to make sure they would be able to speak to everyone who arrived. A couple of colleges felt it helped to call the people the day before the appointment to check they had remembered and that they knew how to get to the college. It was difficult for these colleges to quantify the extent to which this boosts attendance, but it was certainly felt that this helps increase potential learner's sense of inclusion at the college and that the college was there to help them.
- 5.7 Apart from a low number of referrals from Jobcentre Plus, the only other issue that was mentioned by colleges was occasional inappropriate referrals. For example, some learners were flagged by colleges as being in need of basic skills training, rather than specifically level 2 qualifications. As such, these individuals might not benefit as much as other learners from the programmes.
- 5.8 Colleges would also find it useful to be provided with more details of people's background to highlight where extra support may be needed (for example if there were mental health issues, drug addiction or family problems). However, colleges assumed these personal details could not be provided due to data protection or legal reasons, and would often accept minimal information about the person and subsequently assess the needs and situation of the person at the initial interview. A few colleges who had good relationships with Jobcentre Plus staff would feed back these issues on a regular basis, and doing so directly in this way did lead to improvements in the appropriateness of referrals.

Those recruited directly

- 5.9 Colleges found that commitment to starting the programme tended to be higher amongst those learners recruited directly however, not all were eligible for funding under the specific programmes the college may have been advertising. This was sometimes only identified by Jobcentre Plus staff once the college had encouraged the individual to ask the Jobcentre Plus to approve them for referral onto the course. Around half of the colleges then considered other funding options for these individuals and ensured they were able to enrol on the most suitable course.
- 5.10 Those learners who had been recruited directly through marketing activity had evidently crossed the first hurdle of visiting the college and speaking to a member of staff, so did not necessarily require as much support as those initially referred by Jobcentre Plus in terms of motivation, but colleges found many still did need a confidence boost, and an in-depth initial interview to explore their aims and abilities.

The initial college interview

- 5.11 Many colleges conducted very thorough initial interviews that gave them insight into the potential learner's interests, skills and experience to facilitate placement on an appropriate course. They also clearly outlined the benefits the course could offer, and when necessary – as found by a handful of colleges, challenged any preconceptions of the customer that this was just something they had to go through to claim their benefit but would not offer practical help. Stressing the practical, hands-on nature of the provision was often a successful way of overcoming participants' initial scepticism.

"I have to say a lot of people [referred initially by Jobcentre Plus] at the beginning were, quite wary about it, they were quite sceptical . . . but the feedback has been great because they've actually been doing plumbing or they've been doing electrics, or they've been doing carpentry ... as I see it as that's what's so vital about this, that they're progressing as individuals."

NVTP and Six Month Offer, West Midlands

"We have to show them that this is an opportunity to develop particular skills that will have a likely prospect of employment because we are going to develop the programme where we know there are employment opportunities."

PEO and Six Month Offer, North West

- 5.12 One NVTP college had run three way interviews once they started seeing large numbers of referrals from Jobcentre Plus so a Jobcentre Plus adviser was present as well as college staff. This helped both organisations speed up processes and learn from each other.
- 5.13 Many colleges (especially larger ones) took the opportunity to offer the person an alternative course and funding stream if the one they were referred to was not suitable.

"We interview them first before we've put them on any courses. That's worked well because we get an idea of the type of work they are looking for and what they've done previously. And we can say to them maybe there's courses that we can talk about that they haven't thought about doing."

Six Month Offer, South East

- 5.14 Colleges involved with ALR and SET Pilots had more specific requirements and therefore were more likely to turn down Jobcentre Plus referrals as they had more exact criteria and wanted to ensure only learners who they were sure would be motivated and sufficiently skilled participated. For example, one ALR Pilot college that had designed a course focussed on learners entering self-employment and were looking for a relatively low number of learners (15) with a specific interest in becoming self-employed.
- 5.15 During the initial interview colleges tended to highlight the support available at the college, and used this interview to identify any extra needs the learner might have. Several mentioned specific forms they had in place for all their students to pick up information on support for health, drug or alcohol problems, financial, housing or family issues; others preferred a trained adviser to talk these issues through with the learner.
- 5.16 A few colleges actively contacted people referred by Jobcentre Plus up to three times if they did not arrive for their initial interview. One college found that over two thirds that had not attended their first booked interview did attend after 'a friendly voice' had reassured them, made them feel welcome and emphasised that they really wanted to discuss their aspirations not to 'tick boxes'.
- 5.17 Colleges that had not worked with the unemployed previously were sometimes taken aback at the low motivation and confidence levels of those referred, and staff were taking time to adjust to how best to encourage them to take up their learning opportunities. It is unclear whether this issue is due to advisers not selling the potential benefits of the course, colleges not sufficiently engaging or motivating learners or a fundamental scepticism of those referred.

Administration

- 5.18 Most colleges thought that the administration process after referral worked well, or was improving after having processed their first few cases. Recognising the strict timing for supplying paperwork for Jobcentre Plus to ensure learners did not lose benefits is important. Having a staff member to chase paperwork helped many colleges, as many Jobcentre Plus were very busy when programmes commenced. Many colleges had appointed a new member of staff who had responsibility for the administration of the programme (alongside perhaps marketing and building Jobcentre Plus relationships).
- 5.19 Colleges that had trained (or were starting to train) considerable numbers highlighted the importance of having simple, direct communication lines to deal with paperwork and address any problems that occurred. Having one named contact at the Jobcentre Plus who fully understood the programme and procedures was considered helpful.
- 5.20 Similarly Jobcentre Plus advisers liked to have at least one named person and a direct line to call which they knew would be answered if they needed to call during an interview. If this chance was missed it could mean missing a referral as advisers cannot necessarily call back later having such busy schedules.

"It is very difficult to get through to the colleges: they probably haven't got enough people, and our interviews are fast and furious: one after another for 40 minutes."

Jobcentre Plus manager

- 5.21 Keeping the gap between initial interview and starting on the course as short as possible helped minimise drop outs – around half the colleges always aimed to keep this gap under a week. As mentioned above, if Jobcentre Plus are made aware that people are already waiting to start this adds an extra incentive for them to refer other appropriate customers quickly.

6 Profile of the unemployed learners and the support needed

- 6.1 Here we examine the types of unemployed learners being referred or recruited to the programmes, and how this may differ from colleges' traditional learners. We review the types of support needed by learners, and how colleges plan to supply this.

Demographic profile and work / benefit history

- 6.2 Colleges that had seen a number of referrals (including the majority of those that were offering NVTP or had been selected for the ALR Pilot) generally reported having a very wide range of learners in terms of age, gender, length of unemployment, qualification level and work experience. The long term unemployed are a new type of learner for around half the colleges involved only with the Six Month Offer and for most it was too early to comment on the profile of these learners. These colleges did not have a specific demographic in mind that they thought they would be catering for.
- 6.3 This diversity of customers, whilst welcomed, is perhaps adding to colleges' early concerns about the viability of the courses on offer. Being able to attract large enough numbers for specific courses was an issue for many during the initial months. A few colleges are reacting to this by: encouraging people onto more generic courses as a pragmatic starting point; working with other colleges in the area to pool teachers and resources; or informing their local Jobcentre Plus which courses already have learners enrolled and are a priority to fill.
- 6.4 The majority of colleges said they 'would not turn anyone away', and would find an appropriate course (and funding) even if the course (and funding stream) initially referred for was thought to be unsuitable. Even a few smaller colleges were planning this approach, seeing their size as an advantage allowing them to be more flexible and offer more tailored solutions fitting learners' needs.
- 6.5 Colleges participating in NVTP typically reported a higher number of men than women involved, and had found males aged 40 or over the most common demographic group participating. A couple of colleges involved with NVTP thought that large scale redundancies in the West Midlands in recent years had contributed to this concentration of relatively highly skilled, male workers whose qualifications did not necessarily match the level of their experience.
- 6.6 Colleges' opinions of the level of support likely to be needed by the individuals varied depended on the approach of the local Jobcentre Plus to selecting individuals to refer. A few Jobcentre Plus were thought to be 'sifting' and only referring those they thought suitable (i.e. those with the least barriers to learning), whilst others were thought to be referring all those who expressed an interest in the offer and were eligible.
- 6.7 Most colleges had to some extent discussed the profiles of customers they should expect when setting up the programme with Jobcentre Plus managers. Most had discussed suitable times and days for courses to run to meet other commitments learners may have. Others visited their local Jobcentre Plus weekly and discussed the current customer profile and needs.

Appropriate level of study

- 6.8 Due to the recession most colleges were anticipating high numbers of people who had been in employment permanently before being made redundant relatively recently rather than those who had been only ever been employed for short periods, and they anticipated that these learners would already hold qualifications above Level 3 and be more suited to higher level courses.

- 6.9 Colleges that had experience of working specifically with the unemployed were more likely to suggest that learners would be 'low achievers', have barriers to overcome, or may need basic skills development, as well as motivation and support to move towards work and /or and to complete their course.
- 6.10 College staff who were responsible for initial interviews felt quite strongly that they, rather than Jobcentre Plus advisers, were best placed to discuss learners' expectations and the suitability of the course in terms of level and interest. They found the course recommended by Jobcentre Plus advisers (and any other background information provided) a useful starting point for discussion, but they expected to spend time advising potential learners about the full offer available and then liaise with Jobcentre Plus staff to change the paperwork if a different course was decided upon. College staff felt they could offer a new environment to customers where they would feel able to talk about their previous learning experiences and be reassured of the supportive nature of the college, perhaps compared to experiences of school.
- 6.11 Several of the colleges involved in NVTP felt that a proportion of those referred to them benefited from courses not leading to a qualification, as enrolling on a course which may include assessment might intimidate them, or they were not academically capable of achieving a qualification. Colleges felt that being able to offer this type of non-qualification course to a proportion of those who may be referred under the Six Month Offer in future would be useful to provide a confidence boost.
- 6.12 As part of the initial interview the majority of colleges included a literacy and numeracy check. For many this was to highlight where extra support was needed (and the individual was still allowed to enrol), for others this served as a screening process and they encouraged those who needed support to enrol on specific literacy or numeracy courses. Colleges who had worked with the unemployed specifically before (or who had been involved with NVTP) highlighted the need to approach this sensitively with the learner, and introduce it in a non-formal manner designed to ensure they were not intimidated (for example saying it was not a test but just to ascertain if any of the college support services could help them, as they help many other students). Several colleges found that learners were very anxious about the test and that having it as part of their induction process rather than at the initial college interview stage was helpful.
- 6.13 A couple of colleges (one Six Month Offer, South East and one Six Month Offer and NVTP, West Midlands) reported that Jobcentre Plus staff had asked them not to do skills assessments as they would have already screened customers earlier in their claim. However, these colleges reported it was easier to run their own tests so they had a consistent measure with their other students. This may be an area worth further exploration to ensure there is no duplication.

Personal support

- 6.14 Colleges that recognised the need for, and provided, ongoing support (in the form of inductions, weekly meetings, one-to-one support and signposting to external support services where needed) to unemployed learners have been most successful in terms of training higher numbers of learners under the programmes. In one college that had trained over 80 unemployed students as part of the NVTP programme, the Student Support Services team had been responsible for leading the programme. In a handful of other successful colleges a new member of staff had been appointed whose remit it was to deal with support issues (often alongside administration and marketing of the programme).
- 6.15 This extra support was seen as key for many – to attract students, to convert referrals into enrolments, to completion of the course and to help learners move into employment.

- 6.16 Colleges that had started training unemployed learners recognised that some of these learners would not have been in a formal, classroom setting for a long time or may find the large numbers of other students intimidating, so were considering different start times (to avoid crowds) and/or using classrooms with their own kitchen or quiet area.
- 6.17 Even if the learner was only enrolling for a short course the more successful colleges provided an induction of at least a couple of hours. These made new learners feel welcome and 'part of the college' by showing them round and explaining the types of support on offer. Inductions were also used to convey the expectations colleges had of learners in terms of attendance, punctuality, behaviour towards other students and staff and dress code.
- 6.18 One NVTP college had weekly meetings with learners to talk about progress, attendance and check all was well – they felt offering this one-to-one support from the same person each week helped their attendance and completion rates, especially so for those on courses with several different tutors.
- 6.19 Overall, colleges were split between whether attendance was lower than average amongst unemployed learners or not – many colleges thought that non-completion rates would be no different amongst these learners than others (or thought it too early to judge). However, the NVTP colleges who had seen highest numbers of referrals and trained most actually found non-completion to be higher amongst this group, and therefore placed particular importance on continued support.
- 6.20 Colleges involved with NVTP also reported that whilst some tutors had initial reservations about the programme, once a few people had successfully completed the scheme they saw it as a valuable programme for the college to be involved in, and were enthusiastic about encouraging new unemployed learners. One college with high numbers of learners made support staff available to tutors for whom the needs of unemployed students could be a completely new area. Offering guidance to staff on the best way to handle any problems that may arise could be something other colleges could replicate, whether via training or links to dedicated support staff.

“At the start we had to explain it and had to win staff over, win a few heads of department over but ... now it's been taken onboard and everybody picked it up and ran with it . . . I think [the support team] being involved more and being much more proactive with our departments, with our tutors helped...I think once we've introduced people [learners], where there may have been a little bit of reticence because the course was already full ... the particular individuals [learners] have really, really, become involved [in the college and course] and done very well.”

NVTP, West Midlands

- 6.21 Colleges that had not specifically worked with the unemployed before were less likely to have additional support systems in place and were more likely to think that this would be the responsibility of the Jobcentre Plus rather than the college.

7 How are colleges planning to help students move into sustainable work and continue learning?

- 7.1 This chapter looks at the various steps that colleges have put in place, or plan, to encourage employment outcomes, or continued learning.

Support with Jobsearch and careers guidance

- 7.2 On balance, Six Month Offer colleges had not yet got to the point where they were planning specific employment support. Around half had not considered it at all yet and those that had tended to think that learners would simply access the college's existing support. For example, many planned to guide and support learners through their Employer Responsive Team or a dedicated Employment Advice Service or Business Development Team (for smaller colleges this may be one member of staff, for larger colleges, a small team).
- 7.3 Colleges that had worked specifically with the unemployed previously were more likely to use their Student Support team to also help with careers guidance and day to day support with finding and applying for vacancies.
- 7.4 Colleges felt that having one central point where learners knew they could turn for dedicated, drop in careers advice, access to the internet, local newspapers and details of recruitment agencies and other relevant organisations would help and many already had such offices or staff established. One Six Month Offer college was opening a 'Job Club' for these specific learners.
- 7.5 As discussed previously, around half of the colleges were integrating employability skills into the course, particularly NVTP colleges who often offered support with CV writing, job searching and interview techniques with continued completion.
- 7.6 One of the most successful NVTP colleges had helped move people (around 5% of those trained) into work and felt that their review meetings held throughout participation and at the end (to focus on how many jobs had been applied for, offer individual help to find suitable vacancies, help with CVs and application forms etc) played a key part in this. They felt that simply showing students they were interested in their search for work was a real motivator, and other Six Month Offer colleges also believed this continual encouragement would deliver results.

"Our role is to coach individuals in to getting a job, push them and help them deal with employers and interviews. We make them phone us every other day. Look in ads in papers, on the websites for them, suggest what they should go for."

Six Month Offer, East of England

- 7.7 Another NVTP college was planning to encourage students on the Six Month Offer to create a CV when they started and then update it regularly throughout the course to reflect the experiences they had gained, hoping that seeing the difference it was making to the skills they could sell to employers would be highly motivating.
- 7.8 Six Month Offer colleges with the most numbers on training, and NVTP colleges, saw that they needed the (sometimes new) perspective that they would be the driving force behind helping students into employment. Using their specific employer links and other relationships to their advantage, these colleges felt that taking more responsibility for this stage was increasing the likelihood of students moving into work. A cultural shift is needed (and is recognised) in many colleges to move towards this shared undertaking to increase employment outcomes.

- 7.9 All SET Pilot colleges had established dedicated employer facing teams in the last eighteen months or so in response to the growing number of initiatives and work they were doing that involved helping students find and progress in work.

Identifying vacancies

- 7.10 A couple of colleges had set up internal recruitment agencies, with staff responsible for finding placements and work for students, and they felt this was part of moving to a structure which would focus more on job outcomes and slightly less on qualification outcomes.
- 7.11 In other colleges, help with identifying vacancies included activities ranging from checking through the local newspaper advertisements, to calling employers on behalf of learners.
- 7.12 One NVTP college had set up courses they knew would fit with the main employers with whom they had a successful record of learners getting a job. They had built up a relationship in which the college was seen as a successful recruitment channel.
- 7.13 A few Six Month Offer colleges had specifically identified potential vacancies when setting up their courses (for example one college knew that 90 security staff were required locally, another that a new retailer was opening in the area) and were training specifically with these opportunities in mind. Similarly one ALR Pilot college was helping a few people who had a job lined up (once they had the necessary qualification), speaking to the employer concerned and tailoring the content of the course to the nature of the job.
- 7.14 A few colleges were anticipating a potential difficulty as the likely high number of highly qualified (degree level) referrals: they felt these highly qualified learners would be harder to move into employment as they would not be willing to take roles paying less than their previous positions. In these cases a key role (at induction and through the programme) would be to encourage realistic expectations given the state of the local job market. Colleges also felt discussing expectations with students with lower level qualifications was important. One found that encouraging learners finishing a catering course to apply for food preparation roles rather than chef roles whilst liaising with their new employer to explore potential opportunities through Train to Gain helped widen the scope of some job searches.
- 7.15 The recession was the main barrier most colleges felt they would face when helping learners into employment. Ensuring colleges are up to date with the vacancy situation locally is recognised as important. A couple of NVTP colleges pointed out that the usual sectors may not be the first to start recruiting in their area.
- 7.16 Smaller colleges felt they would struggle to act as 'employment brokers', or to dedicate a member of staff to careers support. Although colleges themselves did not mention this exploring links with voluntary organisations in their areas may help.

Building on links with Jobcentre Plus, employers and other organisations

- 7.17 In terms of utilising links with Jobcentre Plus, a couple of colleges in each case mentioned activities such as:
- working with Jobcentre Plus account managers to set up employer visits for learners.
 - looking to work with Jobcentre Plus to arrange practice interviews.
 - using the relationship they had with their Jobcentre Plus account manager to help plan their employment strategy.

- 7.18 Some colleges were planning to use their existing links with employers to find work for learners, for example one NVTP college had arranged for Marks and Spencer, HSBC and the DWP to give talks about their expectations of new recruits. Similarly a SET Pilot college was arranging for retail employers to offer an interview with potential employment opportunities to all those who completed the course – an incentive for learners and an opportunity to market future learners to the employer. Across colleges involved with the Six Month Offer, NVTP and ALR Pilot some had invited employers to come into the college to either give a talk, meet students, or even arrange for a guaranteed interview (although not a guaranteed job) at the end of the course (or were planning to do this). Others were arranging for learners to do site visits, or to speak to other ex-students who were now in employment.
- 7.19 One Six Month Offer college had built up a list of ‘sheltered placements’ with SME employers for learners who might need extra support. Some colleges reported seeing SMEs as a target market for their learners, seeing them as more flexible in their employee requirements.
- 7.20 One NVTP college that had been successful in terms of numbers trained was planning to contact all employers they had links with as part of the Training Offer for those Unemployed for Six Months, in order directly to advertise that these trained people would be seeking work:

“We will ask them if they can identify any vacancies, tell them we will do the training and they can interview the learner. If they are not suitable, then they are not suitable, but it is an opportunity.”

Six Month Offer and NVTP, West Midlands

- 7.21 Voluntary organisations were being considered to provide work placements to help boost confidence and to demonstrate their skills to potential employers.
- 7.22 A Six Month Offer college was working on building links with the recruitment network in their local area, involving their local authority and other training providers, to ensure employers could be made aware of the recruitment opportunities available to them (by advertising the list of courses that relevant learners were doing). Similarly, one ALR Pilot college was setting up links with other agencies in the local area and were planning to facilitate networking for those moving into self employment.
- 7.23 Once learners had moved into work, one college involved with the Six Month Offer was planning to offer mentor training for the employer’s supervisors and managers to help ease the transition.
- 7.24 One SET Pilot college highlighted the importance of their general publicity work and reputation in ensuring employers in the area would approach them when they wanted to recruit. Similarly others were planning to attend job fairs and other local networking opportunities specifically to talk to employers about the Training Offer for those Unemployed for Six Months.

- 7.25 A few colleges suggested that having some kind of incentive for employers may be useful, at least as a way to open up discussion with them. Those that are eligible for the Six Month training offer may also be eligible for a self marketing voucher which pays employers a certain amount for employing them, and more six months later if they remain employed. Colleges could perhaps encourage learners to enquire about these vouchers at the Jobcentre Plus and then advise on suitable ways to approach employers. This could be particularly effective amongst SMEs. Only one college (that had a particularly good relationship with their Jobcentre Plus) mentioned this scheme, and they were also looking into other ways they could liaise with the Jobcentre Plus so that initiatives could be tied together.

"With the Six Month Offer there is the "Golden Hello", so there is an incentive of £1000 that we can offer an employer if they take someone on that is long-term unemployed, 6 months plus. So I think that in some areas, especially in small organisations, maybe that will be good. And I was talking to Jobcentre Plus to see if there were any other incentives, and I think there might be a "Three Week Work Trial" so they are going to email me anything else that is a "carrot".

Six Month Offer and NVTP, West Midlands

Continuing in learning

- 7.26 Most Six Month Offer colleges were planning to use Train to Gain or Apprenticeship routes to ensure learners in work continued to progress. Their student records would then be marked as both Six Month Offer and Train to Gain so colleges could monitor success for both. SET Pilot colleges were even more strongly focused on finding jobs with in-work skills development.
- 7.27 Colleges were hoping that by offering additional flexibility (evening classes, flexi-time, online options or outreach centres) that most people would be able to find a way to fit learning around their new job.
- 7.28 Encouraging learners to keep in touch even if they did not immediately plan to continue with their studies was also a strategy several were adopting. One Six Month Offer college was proposing that learners who did not go straight onto a job after completion would be "kept warm" by returning every couple of weeks to keep themselves up-to-date with the sector and repeating softer skills training.
- 7.29 A few Six Month Offer colleges mentioned that they were unclear about their main objective – whether this was to get people into work or to complete the course. Most colleges appear to plan to focus on completing the course and towards the end helping the learner to find work, rather than necessarily doing this from day one.

8 How are colleges planning to monitor success in learning and work?

- 8.1 This chapter looks at the ways in which colleges will collate information on unemployed learners studying as part of these programmes, examining areas that may be new for some colleges such as measuring sustainability of work.

Collecting and providing Management Information

- 8.2 When asked about providing Management Information on unemployed learners as part of the programmes those colleges that were accustomed to dealing with external contracts (such as ESF or Train to Gain) were confident that their current systems and staff provision would be sufficient, and were anticipating no difficulties. Most colleges said there would be no extra burden; they would collect all the required information in the usual way.

"I think because we're a large college we have a whole management information team and they just take it in their stride."

Six Month Offer, London

- 8.3 However, although the majority did not yet have the volume of students to test their systems, colleges for whom managing large external contracts was new thought there might be some teething problems. A couple of colleges were concerned that Jobcentre Plus might require extra ad hoc information on learners that they might find it difficult to provide.
- 8.4 Those NVTP colleges that had trained learners reported it was easy to administer NVTP activities as part of the ALR budget and targets. Where internal issues had been encountered at the start these had been overcome by identifying one contact at the Jobcentre Plus who could answer their questions and send information.
- 8.5 The remainder of colleges were split between those for whom managing new funding streams was no problem at all, and those for whom the 'tight controls', paperwork or simply the fact that it was new meant it was likely to have some impact. The former were mostly colleges that had experience of working specifically with the unemployed.
- 8.6 There was a lack of clarity around how OFSTED would view non-completers, with a few colleges sure it would not affect their ratings whilst a similar number were concerned it would do. SET Pilot colleges in particular seemed unclear about the impact involvement would have on their other targets, and what would be classed as a successful 'outcome'. If this could be addressed at a national level it may reassure those confused.

Tracking job outcomes and measuring sustainability

- 8.7 Many colleges were unsure how they would go about tracking job outcomes, and two involved with NVTP had not monitored outcomes for students on these courses.
- 8.8 Most colleges involved with the Six Month Offer intend to use their existing systems to monitor job outcomes. For the minority these were comprehensive Customer Relationship Management databases, but more typically were ad hoc spreadsheets. Plans for collecting outcomes varied; ranging from appointing a staff member or 'job monitors' to call learners six months after completing, to sending out destination forms for learners to fill in. Most colleges saw this as a formal process, whereas for others it was less formal (for example those relying on learners informing them they had moved into work).

- 8.9 Sustainability of work was thought to be related to length of employment, and few colleges seemed to have seriously considered how this would be measured going forward outside of Train to Gain, Apprenticeships or other existing models. For most Six Month Offer colleges it is of course early days so systems can be developed, and it may help with internal commitment to the programme and attract more referrals if successes are clearly tracked and advertised. Some Six Month Offer colleges did not yet have a full understanding of the information they would be required to report to the LSC and sought further guidance / clarity on this issue.
- 8.10 Seasonal recruitment was a concern for colleges in the South West, to the extent that their local economy provides short term work opportunities but fewer longer term ones, making it difficult for them to help completers into sustainable employment (and resulting in colleges feeling comparison with other colleges would be unfair to some extent).

Funding for the unemployed when the Six Month Offer ends

- 8.11 Overall, colleges anticipated still being able to offer similar courses under another funding stream once the Six Month Offer ends. The majority mentioned ALR funding or Employer Responsive funding as likely to cover these learners. Others assumed other funding would be made available as this group of unemployed is critical and likely to grow in number. Others were talking about further liaison with Jobcentre Plus or with other agencies in their community.

“At the moment I’m in negotiation with the local council. We’re looking for them to fund some courses for us for the unemployed. Part of our remit is to look at other opportunities that are coming our way, or that are coming in to the area.”

Six Month Offer, South East

- 8.12 However, a handful of colleges were concerned that they might not be able to offer the ‘quick fix’ courses to make people job-ready that they could under the Training Offer for those Unemployed for Six Months, for example CSCS cards for those wanting to work in construction.

9 What are the key messages from the National Voluntary Training Pilots?

9.1 As NVTP has now ended, this chapter discusses in more detail the learning points identified by NVTP colleges and how those colleges who were successful in training large numbers used the opportunities presented by this programme.

9.2 Two colleges in particular stood out as having trained far more learners under NVTP, just under 100 unemployed students each.

Key Recommendations

- They both had worked hard to develop excellent relationships with Jobcentre Plus, and had key personal contacts there. One had placed staff in the Jobcentre to talk to customers, and the other had Jobcentre Plus advisers attend their drop-in days and initial interviews – both had been successful in terms of increasing referrals
- Extensive planning of what they could realistically offer was identified as a key step, being ready to deliver roll on / roll off, evening classes and other flexible options was made possible by securing internal buy-in to the programme.
- Both colleges had also built up a programme of all-encompassing learner support (involving regular meetings with support staff who were able to assist with a range of issues), and considered how to make these learners feel welcome, comfortable and confident and how to break down the barriers they may have had previously to learning.
- Those colleges that had experienced successful involvement in NVTP anticipate similarly successful involvement with the Six Month Offer and are confident of their relationships with Jobcentre Plus and the processes they now have in place to respond to an offer of this nature.

9.3 Colleges stress though that success is closely linked with the amount of work a college is prepared to put in and they highlight the need for appropriate staff resource to undertake this work. Building capacity would therefore, according to these colleges improve results.

9.4 Colleges that had received referrals and had learners on courses were positive about the programme, and felt it had offered unemployed people a chance to progress, build confidence and develop useful skills. From their own perspective these colleges had found they had developed strong relationships with Jobcentre Plus staff, an understanding of the types of support needed to ensure success, and recognition that they could offer something to the vast majority of unemployed learners.

“It’s widened opportunities and chances for the individuals. A start for individual learners, we recognised that they have different needs, different situations.”

Six Month Offer and NVTP, West Midlands

9.5 Those colleges who had been most successful said that “proactively setting up communication channels, and then ensuring Jobcentre Plus advisers as well as managers were aware of both the college offer and the process they needed to follow” would be the best advice they could give other colleges setting up programmes.

“I think having a person down at Jobcentre Plus and breaking down some of those communication barriers [would be the best piece of advice for other colleges]”

Six Month Offer and NVTP, West Midlands

“Contact your Jobcentre Plus immediately and make sure that all the staff are fully trained in what the project is all about, and that they have all the relevant information they need regarding who to contact at the college regarding the project.”

Six Month Offer and NVTP, West Midlands

- 9.6 The NVTP programme was perceived to have started slowly, with few or no referrals for all colleges. However, those colleges that used their existing links with the Jobcentre Plus or determinedly set up meetings and talks with Jobcentre Plus staff (both managers and advisers) saw this change completely. It took most colleges some time to master the paperwork required and ensure that everything was in place to enrol students quickly (and ensure that changes to their benefit payments were correct). Having one person at the college responsible for the administration and liaison with one, named, Jobcentre Plus contact was the favoured and most effective approach. Being in frequent contact with their contact at the Jobcentre Plus either by telephone or in person helped address individual issues and in the longer term to set up a smoother process.
- 9.7 Several colleges had given Jobcentre Plus marketing materials to give to customers and delivered regular talks to advisers. One college with high numbers of learners had gone even further and produced a one page step by step process guide for advisers explaining target groups, the forms they needed to complete, who they should contact at the college and what the college would do next. They reported that this was welcomed by Jobcentre Plus advisers, and felt it had directly contributed to an increase in referrals.
- 9.8 Planning content and the delivery method of courses thoroughly with colleagues responsible for the curriculum was another aspect thought important. Managing roll on / off modules was found to be challenging and having internal buy in was the best way to ensure it ran smoothly.

“Just make sure you plan it well because you need to make sure that you can deliver it flexibly, because what you don’t want is to find you have issues when you have customers on the course, because the last thing you want to do is let the customers down.”

Six Month Offer and NVTP, West Midlands

“I would say yes it certainly can work, it needs to be set up properly, discussed with your colleagues [who decide on course content], so they are aware and you’re aware of what they can offer. We would never say we need you to do this, it’s been the other way around, what can they offer us, what can realistically happen that is genuine, the candidate can move forward or can they qualify, and certainly go for it . . . people are asking for it, they are hungry for that type of programme.”

Six Month Offer and NVTP, West Midlands

- 9.9 Offering a mixture of existing modules (for those at a level able to ‘in-fill’) and bespoke courses (for those who were less confident or needed extra support) worked well, and successful colleges certainly prized the flexibility of their offer.

“There’s been some really good successes and wonderful feedback mainly from clients who appreciated actually being able to access formal trainingthey were infill on to a, dare I say in inverted commas ‘proper’ qualification. And that they could continue on with that under the 16 hour rule of course.”

Six Month Offer and NVTP, West Midlands

- 9.10 Colleges being able to build in extra help with literacy, numeracy, applications and interviews or counselling was seen as a real benefit to learners. Linking in college support services, and ensuring learners had staff to turn to (and to show interest if they did not attend) was thought to help reduce non-completion, and anecdotal evidence of this was given.
- 9.11 The length of the courses was seen as sufficient to boost confidence and motivation, useful in removing immediate barriers to employment for some, and as providing tasters of subjects to help learners to decide what they might be interested in studying further. Colleges felt that knowing it was only for a couple of months made the initial move into study seem less daunting than a longer course might.

Learning points for Six Month Offer and future work with the unemployed

- 9.12 NVTP colleges were more likely to say they thought running the Six Month Offer programme would be challenging, usually because of the anticipated amount of work likely to be needed to get referrals, offer appropriate courses, and provide support to ensure as many students as possible completed their courses.
- 9.13 Colleges involved in NVTP realised that in order to make a success of future programmes they would need to be very proactive – engaging with the Jobcentre Plus as soon as possible as well running their own marketing campaigns to attract students. Even those colleges that had not seen many referrals had taken their involvement as a learning process, most feeling they had built relationships up with Jobcentre Plus staff now which would put them in a much better position to work with them on the Six Month Offer.

"[The thing I would have done differently is to] get out to the Jobcentre Plus a lot quicker rather than wait for them to send the customers, which is why with the Six Month Offer we have already started the process to get out there."

Six Month Offer and NVTP

- 9.14 Being prepared for a significant proportion of referrals not attending their initial interviews, and having flexible arrangements in place to follow up individuals and re-arrange, rather than seeing this as a failure, was another way a few colleges had moved to adapt and would continue to do so for other similar programmes
- 9.15 Take up was low on some courses developed for NVTP, meaning that they were not viable, but colleges were thinking of linking up with other colleges in the area for future programmes. Jobcentre Plus staff also suggested informing them when a particular course needed extra people as the incentive of knowing it would start soon and knowing that others were already signed up would encourage further referrals.
- 9.16 A couple of colleges thought that having targets for Six Month Offer would help them drive the programme along better, as they found with NVTP that places with other funding were filled first to meet other targets.
- 9.17 The scope for placing students on longer courses leading to qualifications under the Six Month Offer was welcomed, especially for those learners who were clear about their interests and the type of study they wished to do. A few colleges felt NVTP was a good introduction and were then trying to place students on longer courses using other funding, and being able to this directly would be beneficial.

10 Context, Good Practice Guide and Case Studies

- 10.1 When fieldwork was undertaken for this research most colleges were in the very early stages of setting up and offering training under these programmes (except NVTP). This report therefore identifies how colleges have set up their programmes and plan to move forwards but is not a full evaluation of the response of colleges to these programmes.
- 10.2 Key issues for colleges to consider, and recommendations are discussed in the Executive Summary above.
- 10.3 A Good Practice Guide and a series of Case Studies have also been produced as part of this study. Whilst the report has taken a thematic approach the Case Studies reflect how individual colleges have approached activities for the programme(s) they are involved with. These can be found in the annexes below and will also be stand alone documents to be circulated to colleges.

10.4

Appendix I – Good Practice Guide

<AWAITING SIGN-OFF>

Appendix II – Case Studies

<AWAITING SIGN-OFF>

Appendix III – Screener for FE colleges

PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL

Evaluation of the response of FE colleges to delivering
employment-related skills to people who are out of work
Screening Sheet

4746
June 2009

Office Use only:

SERIAL				CARD

REF No				

REGION		

Address Label or Written Details	FINAL OUTCOME	
	Respondent interviewed / recruited .	01
	Out of quota ().....	02
	Non qualifier ().....	03
	Refusal: (SPECIFY)	04
	Not available in deadline	05
	No contact with resp after 7 tries	06
	Unobtainable / dead line / fax number	07
	Wrong number	08
Other (DESCRIBE).....	09	

Contact Record - Please complete for every contact, however short

No	Date	Time	Spoke to	Outcome
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				

Please use:

NDC = No Direct Contact DC = Direct Contact NR = No Reply C/B = Call Back Eng = Engaged

PRE-CONTACT INFORMATION
(CHECK FOR QUOTA PURPOSES)

A) PROGRAMME INVOLVEMENT (MULTICODE POSSIBLE)

National Voluntary Training Pilots	1
Training Offer for those who unemployed for six months (Six Month Offer)	2
Adult Learner Responsive flexibilities pilot – Sustainable Job Outcomes Pilot	3
Adult Learner Responsive flexibilities pilot – Sector Employability Toolkit	4

B) REGION

East Midlands	1
East of England	2
London	3
North East	4
North West	5
South East	6
South West	7
West Midlands	8
Yorkshire and Humber	9

C) LOCATION

Urban	1
Rural	2

D) INTERVIEW TYPE

Face to face	1
Teledepth	2
To be confirmed through screener answers	3

ASK TELEPHONIST

1) Can I speak to (<NAMED PERSON>)?

Yes	1	ASK Q2
Not available currently	2	ASK FOR BEST TIME / DATE TO CALL BACK _____

WHEN SPEAKING TO RESPONDENT

2) Good morning / afternoon. My name is XXX calling from IFF Research. We are carrying out research on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council looking at the response of FE colleges to delivering employment related skills to people who are out of work, specifically in relation to [PROGRAMMES]. You may recall receiving an email from the LSC introducing this research in the last week or so?

The LSC has commissioned IFF Research to evaluate colleges' experiences of implementing programmes around employment and skills and your college has been selected to participate.

Your views would be valued by the LSC, and by taking part in the research you will be helping to influence future LSC strategy from this autumn as well as informing developing practice in FE colleges across England around their offer to those who are out of work.

As a result of the research we will be producing a best practice guide for use by FE colleges, and we will send you a copy as a thank you for taking part.

We are looking to undertake a [IF INTERVIEW TYPE TELEPHONE OR TBC: telephone] [IF INTERVIEW TYPE TBC: or perhaps] [IF INTERVIEW TYPE TBC OR F2F: face to face] interview with the person responsible for managing the programme/s. These will take about 45 minutes to an hour (and will be at a time convenient to you).

REASSURANCES:

- We work strictly within the Market Research Society Code of Conduct
- Contact at is IFF Research Peter Hall (020 7250 3035, at LSC is Sue Maggott (tel 02476 82 3371)

3) We understand that [COLLEGE] is participating in [PROGRAMME/S], is that correct?

NOTE: Please code as Yes even if no students yet started / enrolled, or not planning to start until September or later.

READ OUT THOSE ON SAMPLE:	Yes – college involved	No college not involved (take details)
National Voluntary Training Pilots	1	2
Training Offer for those who unemployed for six months (Six Month Offer)	1	2
Adult Learner Responsive flexibilities pilot – Sustainable Job Outcomes Pilot	1	2
Adult Learner Responsive flexibilities pilot – Sector Employability Toolkit	1	2

IF INVOLVED WITH NONE THANK AND CLOSE

- 4) We understand that you would be the best college manager for us talk to about [PROGRAMME/S], is that correct?

READ OUT THOSE ON SAMPLE:	Yes – best contact	No (take details of contact)
National Voluntary Training Pilots	1	2
Training Offer for those who unemployed for six months (Six Month Offer)	1	2
Adult Learner Responsive flexibilities pilot – Sustainable Job Outcomes Pilot	1	2
Adult Learner Responsive flexibilities pilot – Sector Employability Toolkit	1	2

IF NOT BEST CONTACT FOR ANY ASK TO BE TRANSFERRED AND START AGAIN

REPEAT FOR EACH PROGRAMME INVOLVED WITH

- 5) And which of these statements do you think best describes the stage you are at currently?

		National Voluntary Training Pilots	Training Offer for those who unemployed for six months (Six Month Offer)	Adult Learner Responsive flexibilities pilot – Sustainable Job Outcomes Pilot	Adult Learner Responsive flexibilities pilot – Sector Employability Toolkit
We are involved but little has happened yet or we are still in the planning stages	IF YES RECORD WHEN ANTICIPATE STARTING TO ENROL STUDENTS AND ESTIMATED VOLUMES	1	1	1	1
We are involved, have processes in place and are offering places but no students as yet	RECORD REASON FOR NO PARTICIPANTS	2	2	2	2
We have started enrolling and training students but it's still in the early stages	RECORD APPROX NO ENROLLED / STARTED AND CONTINUE	3	3	3	3
We are well underway with a number of students enrolled / training	RECORD APPROX NO ENROLLED / STARTED	4	4	4	4

REPEAT FOR EACH 6MO, ALR AND SETS PROGRAMME INVOLVED WITH

- 6) Which of these statements do you think best describes how well the implementation of the programme has gone so far?

	Training Offer for those who unemployed for six months (Six Month Offer)	Adult Learner Responsive flexibilities pilot – Sustainable Job Outcomes Pilot	Adult Learner Responsive flexibilities pilot – Sector Employability Toolkits
Very well	1	1	1
Fairly well	2	2	2
Not very well	3	3	3
Not at all well	4	4	4
DO NOT READ OUT: Too early to say / Don't know	5	5	5

IF DEPTH OR (TBC AND Q5=1-3 OR Q6=3-5)

- 7) Would you be willing to help with this research? This would involve a 40-45 minute telephone interview with one of our research team.

IF F2F OR (TBC AND Q5=4 AND Q6=1-2)

- 8) Would you be willing to help with this research? This would involve a member of our research team visiting to talk face to face for 45 minutes – one hour.

When would be a good time to conduct this interview?

Name:	
E-mail:	
Date for interview	
Time of interview:	

SAY CONFIRMATION E-MAIL WILL BE SENT.

IF ANOTHER PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR OTHER PROGRAMMES TAKE DETAILS

ANY OTHER COMMENTS / NOTES?

THANK RESPONDENT AND CLOSE INTERVIEW

I declare that this survey has been carried out under IFF instructions and within the rules of the MRS Code of Conduct.		
Interviewer signature:	Date:	
Finish time:	Interview Length	mins

Appendix IV –Topic guide for FE colleges

PRIVATE& CONFIDENTIAL

Evaluation of the response of FE colleges to delivering
employment-related skills to the unemployed
TOPIC GUIDE

4746
June 2009

Start Time:	
College Name:	
Programme(s):	
Respondent:	
Job Title:	
Interviewer:	

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research which we are conducting for the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to evaluate colleges' experiences of implementing programmes around employment and skills.

The actual transcripts of this interview will not be given to the LSC but due to the nature of this evaluation we may want to refer to the views expressed by the college in the report, [IF F2F: case studies] or best practice guide. If we do mention the college we will forward you a copy to review and approve before publication.

OBTAIN PERMISSION TO RECORD INTERVIEW

IF CONTACT FOR MORE THAN ONE PROGRAMME: I would like to firstly talk about [PROGRAMME], and then move on to talk about [PROGRAMME] separately, although if there is anything you feel apply to both then please feel free to mention this.

The interview will take about [IF F2F: 1 hour] [IF TELEPHONE: 45 minutes]

The aim of this interview is to understand your experiences of setting up and implementing the programme. Throughout the interview I would be very interested to know about any areas which have worked particularly well, or in which improvements have been introduced, or ways in which the college has adapted programmes to work better.

A. BACKGROUND

- 9) Can you first tell me your job title and role in implementing this programme?
- 10) Please could you *briefly* outline the college's offer or planned offer under this programme?
- 11) What stage are you at with setting up the programme? Are you progressing as planned? IF NO: Why is this?
- 12) Was the college involved specifically in provision for the unemployed prior to involvement with this programme or is this a new area?
- 13) Prior to any involvement in the programme was training linked to local jobs and the labour market? IF YES: In what way? How was this done? (PROBE: sources of information, employer involvement, Jobcentre Plus involvement?)
- 14) And when you were setting up this programme did you try to tailor provision to the local labour market? IF YES: In what way? How was this done? (PROBE: sources of information, employer involvement, Jobcentre Plus involvement?)
- 15) Could you tell me about any planning or preparatory activities you undertook before recruiting or engaging with any learners? Please describe the type of arrangements you put in place, and any internal processes that you set up or adapted.

B. ENGAGEMENT

- 16) How are / were you expecting to recruit learners to the programme? (PROBE: via Jobcentre Plus, nextstep, the Careers Advice Service)
- 17) Are you directly targeting people out of work? IF YES: How? (e.g. intermediary agencies, marketing to local communities, publicity). Is this new, or building on existing activity?
- 18) In general what has worked well and not so well with recruiting / enrolling students?

Referrals from Jobcentre Plus

- 19) How many referrals have you had from Jobcentre Plus, including any who have not started training? IF NONE AND EXPECTED SOME: Why not? Would you have expected to have referrals by this stage?

NB: IF NO REFERRALS COUCH REST OF QUESTIONS IN FUTURE TENSE (e.g. How do they expect things to work? What are their concerns when they do have referrals? What plans have they made based on their assumptions?)

- 20) Are the numbers and patterns of referrals from Jobcentre Plus as expected? [IF NOT: Why not? What impact has this had on successful delivery?] Are the referrals appropriate? If NOT, why not?
- 21) Could you talk me through the referral process, and what happens internally? Do you receive learner details via Jobcentre Plus?
- 22) IF RECEIVE DETAILS FROM Jobcentre Plus: How well is the referral process from Jobcentre Plus working? What aspects are working well? What steps have been taken to improve this, and which are working well? What could still be improved?
- 23) How have relationships with Jobcentre Plus developed over the last year?

Referrals from other sources

- 24) Have you had referrals from any other sources (PROBE: **nextstep**, the Careers Advice Service, any others mentioned above)? IF YES: How many? IF NONE AND EXPECTED SOME: Why not? Would you have expected to have referrals from these sources by this stage?

NB: IF NO REFERRALS COUCH REST OF QUESTIONS IN FUTURE TENSE (e.g. How do they expect things to work? What are their concerns when they do have referrals? What plans have they made based on their assumptions?)

- 25) Are the numbers and patterns of referrals from these sources as expected? [IF NOT: Why not? What impact has this had on successful delivery?] Are the referrals appropriate? If NOT, why not?
- 26) Could you talk me through the referral process, and what happens internally? Do you receive learner details via these other sources?
- 27) IF RECEIVE DETAILS FROM OTHER SOURCES: How well is the referral process from these sources working? What aspects are working well? What steps have been taken to improve this, and which are working well? What could still be improved?
- 28) How have relationships with these sources or other local stakeholders involved developed over the last year?

Profile of learners

- 29) How would you describe the profile of people referred from Jobcentre Plus so far? (PROBE: qualification level, age, previous employment, commitment to learning) Has the profile been as expected? [IF NOT: How are they different? Are they harder to help than expected? What impact has this had on delivery?] IF OTHER SOURCES: Is the profile of people referred / recruited from [OTHER SOURCE] similar? IF NOT; What are the differences? What impact does this have, if any?
- 30) How do you decide which course is most appropriate for the individual? Have you found that your mainstream offer is more suitable than the specific programmes for any of the individuals referred to you / recruited? If so, can you estimate roughly the proportion?

C. DELIVERY

- 31) Could you tell me about the processes you have in place once someone is enrolled? Please describe the type of arrangements you have put in place, and any internal processes that you set up or adapted.
- 32) How many people have started training as part of the programme? IF NONE AND HAD REFERRALS: Why is this? IF HAVE SOME STARTING: Is this the number / proportions expected? IF LOWER: Why is this?

NB: IF NONE STARTED COUCH REST OF QUESTIONS IN FUTURE TENSE (expectations and plans)

- 33) What is the typical timescale between referral, enrolment and starting a course? Does this cause any problems?

The learning programme – content

- 34) What challenges, if any, have there been in identifying appropriate training? How have these been overcome?
- 35) What type of training is being delivered (PROBE: subject, duration etc)? Approximately what proportion of learners are pursuing a qualification? At what levels?
- 36) Did you put learners on existing courses or set up new courses specifically? Why? Is this working well?
- 37) Has this offer enabled you to make better provision in terms of course content for unemployed people? IF YES: In what way?

The learning programme – method of delivery

- 38) How is training delivered? Is this programme(s) being delivered through the mainstream college activity or separately (e.g. dedicated staff, separate courses)? How much overlap/integration is there between the specific offer and your mainstream adult activity? Have delivery approaches for specifically Jobcentre Plus customers changed significantly? How?
- 39) Have you provided / are you offering flexible learning? (PROBE: part time, roll-on roll-off, staggered start dates, non-classroom based) IF YES: Is this new for the college or were you offering this previously? How well introducing this worked? How are you ensuring quality? How will you monitor effectiveness and performance? IF NOT MONITORING: Why not?
- 40) What challenges, if any, have you faced in delivering suitable provision? How are you overcoming these?

- 41) What aspects of delivery of training have worked well? Which less well? Why?

Supporting learners

- 42) Have you any systems or processes for identifying additional needs amongst Jobcentre Plus customers, e.g. financial, housing, health?
- 43) Have you had to supply more support for these learners than other students (PROBE: study support, support with personal circumstances)? How have you managed this?
- 44) Have you had any issues with non-completion which is above what you would have expected? Have you set up any initiatives to support Jobcentre Plus customers specifically?
- 45) Once learners get a job, how is the college facilitating their continued learning? Once in employment, does the college offer any continuing support in addition to training?
- 46) Since involvement began with the programme do you think perceptions of Jobcentre Plus customers within your college has changed? (PROBE: amongst staff, other learners, employers)? How? Why?

Interaction with other stakeholders

- 47) What dealings have you had, if any, with Jobcentre Plus during delivery? IF DEALT WITH Jobcentre Plus: What aspects are working well? IF NOT: Have any steps been taken to improve this? What could still be improved?
- 48) IF SETS: How well have any dealings with SSC Academies worked? Why? What has worked well? What would you like to improve? How?
- 49) Are you involving local employers in any way? (e.g. identifying future vacancies, provision content, delivery). IF YES: how do you engage with employers? What has worked well / not so well?
- 50) To what extent is your college utilising your links with employers via your Employer Responsive provision?

D. ADMINISTRATION AND MI

- 51) How have you dealt with having to provide management information on these learners? Have there been any issues or problems with this? IF HAD PROBLEMS; how have you dealt with these? Have any changes worked particularly well?
- 52) What impact has using these new funding mechanisms had? How are you handling the separate funding streams? How has this impacted on internal processes? How will you track job outcomes and sustainability of employment?

Specific programme issues

- 53) IF NVTP PROGRAMME: How easy or difficult has it been to administer NVTP activities as part of the ALR budget and targets? How have you overcome any problems?
- 54) IF SIX MONTH OFFER: What early thoughts do you have about your plans to manage funding once the six month funding has ended?
- 55) IF ALR -SJO: How do you determine or measure the role you have had in returning people to employment? How have you dealt with identifying employment as 'sustainable' or not? What barriers do these learners face? How do you help them to overcome these?

E. OUTCOME PHASE

Moving into employment

- 56) How are you helping learners to get a job and to stay in employment? How successful has the programme been in leading to participants getting work? What involvement have you had with Jobcentre Plus, employers or other agencies in finding employment opportunities?
- 57) How are you recording if learners get work and whether this is sustainable? What implications has this had for internal college systems, staff, and processes? How are you managing the changes to funding administration?
- 58) What barriers have there been to achieving more work outcomes? [IF BARRIERS: Which are the most significant barriers? What might help overcome these?]

F. INSTITUTIONAL / OPERATIONAL ISSUES

- 59) What are the overall challenges the college has faced in delivering the programme? [PROBE: data management, staffing, flexible start dates / hours] Which are 'initial teething problems and which are more persistent issues?
- 60) Is there anything your college had in place already which made it easier for you to set up the programme?
- 61) Have you identified any structural barriers, beyond the college's control, affecting the success of the programme / activities? If so, how could these be addressed?

Adapting the programme

- 62) What changes have you introduced since your involvement began that you feel have worked well? Which practices or delivery approaches have worked well?
- 63) If you were setting it up again what would you do differently?
- 64) What would you definitely keep the same?

General opinions

- 65) Overall, how has the process of setting up the programme compared with your expectations? Why do you say that?
- 66) Overall how successful has involvement been for the college? Why? Is it something the College sees as a success?
- 67) Has there been liaison with other programme providers? IF YES: How useful has this been? Has 'best practice' been shared? Which particular areas do you feel it would be most useful to discuss with other providers?

Looking forwards

- 68) What advice would you have for other colleges who are about to become involved in the same programme?
- 69) Do you envisage any problems further down the line? If yes, have you put anything in place/are you considering putting anything in place to counter these?
- 70) IF SETS: Do you anticipate being involved with other sectors in future? Do you have any plans in place? Will there be issues specific to each sector in each future? Why?

G. CLOSE

- 71) Is there anything else you would like to add on the process of setting up the programme that we have not already discussed?

Thank respondent.

Appendix V – Screener for Jobcentre Plus

PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL

**Evaluation of the response of FE colleges to delivering
employment-related skills to people who are out of work**
Jobcentre Plus Screening Sheet

4746
July 2009

Office Use only:

SERIAL	CARD

REF No				

REGION	

Address Label or Written Details	<p>FINAL OUTCOME</p> <p>Respondent interviewed / recruited . 01</p> <p>Out of quota ()..... 02</p> <p>Non qualifier ()..... 03</p> <p>Refusal: (SPECIFY) 04</p> <hr/> <p>Not available in deadline 05</p> <p>No contact with resp after 7 tries 06</p> <p>Unobtainable / dead line / fax number 07</p> <p>Wrong number 08</p> <p>Other (DESCRIBE)..... 09</p>
----------------------------------	---

CONTACT RECORD - PLEASE COMPLETE FOR EVERY CONTACT, HOWEVER SHORT

No	Date	Time	Spoke to	Outcome
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				

<p>Please use: NDC = No Direct Contact DC = Direct Contact NR = No Reply C/B = Call Back Eng = Engaged</p>
--

ASK TELEPHONIST

Can I speak to (<NAMED PERSON>)?

Yes	1	ASK Q2
Not available currently	2	ASK FOR BEST TIME / DATE TO CALL BACK _____

WHEN SPEAKING TO RESPONDENT

Good morning / afternoon. My name is XXX calling from IFF Research. We are carrying out research on behalf of the Learning and Skills Council looking at how FE colleges are working with Jobcentre Plus to offer employment related training to people who are out of work.

We are interested in your interactions with FE colleges as part of LSC- funded training initiatives aimed at the unemployed, especially the National Voluntary Training Pilots/NVTP that have been running over the last year, [IF RELEVANT: and the NEP Sector Routeways Pilot/SETs] as well as any work or communication you have had with them as part of the training element of the Six Month Offer introduced in April.

Margaret Tovey, Customer Services Director, Jobcentre Plus West Midlands area has agreed that IFF can contact you about this research and passed on your contact details to us.

Your views would be valued by the LSC, and by taking part in the research you will be helping to influence future LSC strategy from this autumn as well as informing developing practice in FE colleges across England around their offer to those who are out of work.

As a result of the research we will be producing a best practice guide for use by FE colleges, and case studies illustrating ways in which colleges can work best with Jobcentre Plus offices.

We are looking to undertake a face to face interview with the person responsible for managing the programme/s within the Jobcentre Plus. These will take about 20-30 minutes (and will be at a time convenient to you).

During the same visit we would also like to speak to one or two advisers (in a paired interview) about their experiences of advising customers about the training offers. This will take about 15-20 minutes.

REASSURANCES:

- We work strictly within the Market Research Society Code of Conduct
- Contact at is IFF Research Peter Hall (020 7250 3035, at LSC is Sue Maggott (tel 02476 82 3371)

IF UNSURE ABOUT NVTP: This is full time, eight week training related to the local labour market designed to support participants in getting a job in the relevant sector. Customer are supported by a training allowance (including travel and childcare costs) paid by Jobcentre Plus.

IF UNSURE ABOUT 6MO: This is training for those unemployed for six months or longer, normally on a course leading to a level 2 or level 3 qualification, perhaps broken down into short units. Customers are encouraged to move into employment (with training) as early as possible and continue the achievement of their qualification whilst in work. It is one of the Six Month Offer voluntary strands.

IF UNSURE ABOUT SETS: This is a two to three week programme of training designed by the Sector Skills Councils to meet the needs of major employers, currently in the hospitality and retail sectors. Customers who express an interest in working in these sectors can be offered a place on these short intensive training programmes that will provide the necessary skills to secure a job and work in that sector.

We understand that [Jobcentre Plus NAME] is working with local FE colleges as part of [PROGRAMME/S], is that correct? NOTE: Please code as Yes even if no customers yet referred or not planning to start until September or later.

READ OUT THOSE ON SAMPLE:	Yes – aware of Jobcentre Plus involvement	Not aware of Jobcentre Plus involvement
National Voluntary Training Pilots	1	2
Training Offer for those who unemployed for six months (one strand of Six Month Offer)	1	2
Sustainable Job Outcomes Pilot	1	2
Sector Employability Toolkit / NEP Sector Routeways Pilot /SETs	1	2

IF INVOLVED WITH NONE DO NOT THANK AND CLOSE JUST REASSURE WE ARE INTERESTED IN THEIR GENERAL EXPERIENCES / COMMUNICATIONS WITH FE COLLEGES.

We understand that you would be the best manager for us talk to about [PROGRAMME/S], is that correct?

Yes	1	
No	2	take details of contact / ask to be transferred

Would you be willing to help with this research? This would involve a member of our research team visiting to talk face to face to you for 20-30 minutes, and either before or after this speaking to one or two (in a paired interview) of your advisers. When would be a good time to conduct the interview with you and with your staff?

Name:	
E-mail:	
Date for interview	
Time of manager interview:	
Names of adviser(s):	
Time of adviser(s) interview:	

PLEASE EMPHASISE THAT WE WILL HAVE LIMITED TIME SO WE WOULD BE VERY GRATEFUL IF THEY COULD PRE-ARRANGE THE TIME SLOT WITH ADVISERS. SAY CONFIRMATION E-MAIL WILL BE SENT.

ANY OTHER COMMENTS / NOTES?

--

THANK RESPONDENT AND CLOSE INTERVIEW

I declare that this survey has been carried out under IFF instructions and within the rules of the MRS Code of Conduct.	
Interviewer signature:	Date:

Appendix VI –Topic guide for Jobcentre Plus

PRIVATE& CONFIDENTIAL

**Evaluation of the response of FE colleges to delivering
employment-related skills to the unemployed
Jobcentre Plus TOPIC GUIDE**

4746
July 2009

Start Time:	
Jobcentre Plus Name:	
Programme(s):	
Respondent:	
Job Title:	
Interviewer:	

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research which we are conducting for the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to evaluate the experiences of colleges' implementing programmes for the unemployed.

I would like to talk about your interactions with FE colleges as part of LSC- funded training initiatives aimed at the unemployed, especially the National Voluntary Training Pilots/NVTP that have been running over the last year, [IF RELEVANT: and the NEP Sector Routeways Pilot/SETs] as well as any work or communication you have had with them as part of the training element of the Six Month Offer introduced in April. If there is any other contact you have had with FE colleges you feel is relevant please feel free to mention this.

IF UNSURE ABOUT NVTP: This is full time, eight week training related to the local labour market designed to support participants in getting a job in the relevant sector. Customers are supported by a training allowance (including travel and childcare costs) paid by Jobcentre Plus.

IF UNSURE ABOUT 6MO: This is training for those unemployed for six months or longer, normally on a course leading to a level 2 or level 3 qualification, perhaps broken down into short units. Customers are encouraged to move into employment (with training) as early as possible and continue the achievement of their qualification whilst in work. It is one of the Six Month Offer voluntary strands.

IF UNSURE ABOUT SETS: This is a two to three week programme of training designed by the Sector Skills Councils to meet the needs of major employers, currently in the hospitality and retail sectors. Customers who express an interest in working in these sectors can be offered a place on these short intensive training programmes that will provide the necessary skills to secure a job and work in that sector.

The aim of this interview is to understand your experiences of working with FE colleges as they set up and implement the training offers. Throughout the interview I would be very interested to know about any areas which have worked particularly well, or in which improvements have been introduced, or ways in which FE colleges have adapted to work better with the Jobcentre.

The interview will take about [IF MANAGER: 20-30 minutes] [IF ADVISER: 15-20 minutes]

IFF Research is an independent market research company, working on behalf of the LSC. All of our work is carried out according to the strict Code of Conduct of the Market Research Society, which means that everything you tell us will be treated in the strictest confidence. We will not identify you or this particular Jobcentre Plus office when reporting, but indicate that staff at a Jobcentre Plus indicated this.

OBTAIN PERMISSION TO RECORD INTERVIEW

H. BACKGROUND

IF MANAGER: Can you first tell me your job title and briefly outline your general/longer term involvement with FE Colleges in the area

Please also explain your involvement with the process of offering FE college training to customers as part of NVTP, the Six Month Offer [AND SETS IF RELEVANT]?

IF ADVISER: Can you first tell me your job title and briefly explain your understanding of what is available to Jobcentre Plus customers as part of NVTP, the Six Month Offer [AND SETS IF RELEVANT] and how you go about offering FE college training to customers ?

IF MANAGER: Did the Jobcentre Plus refer customers to FE college training provision prior to involvement with these programmes or is this a new area? Are you using the same providers or different ones? Why?

IF MANAGER: Are there some FE colleges you feel you have better relationships with than others? Why, what has driven this? And which worse? Why, how could the colleges improve this?

A. SETTING UP OFFER

IF MANAGER: How was the programme(s) set up? How did you work with the LSC to establish the offer? How well did working with the LSC go?

IF MANAGER: Could you tell me about any internal planning or preparatory activities you undertook before offering training to customers or referring any learners? Please describe the type of arrangements you put in place, and any internal processes that you set up or adapted.

IF MANAGER: How did you work with the LSC to identify the types of training and learning that should be offered? Did you work with FE colleges on this? IF YES: Which colleges? Who approached who? Did you advise them based on customer's preferences / backgrounds? Did you advise them on the local labour market? How useful / successful was this process?

IF MANAGER: How was the college offer finalised and agreed?

B. KNOWLEDGE OF COLLEGE OFFER

Could you tell me about any training or communications you [IF ADVISER: received IF MANAGER: gave to your staff] about offering FE college training to customers as part of these programmes? Was this from managers / yourself? Were FE college staff involved? Others? What was most useful? What would you / your staff like to have known more about?

IF ADVISER: How did you find out which FE colleges offer relevant provision for your customers? How much do you feel you know about them? Why do you say that? Do you know more about some of them than others? Why is that?

How well do you / your staff feel you know the types of courses on offer from each FE college? How have they gained this knowledge? What has been most helpful in finding out about the types of courses?

How has your / your staff's knowledge of the training FE colleges can offer developed over the last year? What have colleges done that has helped?

C. OFFERING TRAINING

IF ADVISER: How do you identify opportunities for customers? How do you feel about suggesting FE college training? Do you feel confident when suggesting it? Why / why not? IF NEGATIVE: What could FE colleges do to change this?

How do you / your staff decide which FE college to suggest to customers? Do you / your staff decide which courses to suggest to particular customers or do you leave that to the college? Is there anything FE colleges could do to help inform these decisions or would you prefer them to be fully responsible for such advice?

Do you feel the colleges offer appropriate courses for your customers in terms of content and delivery methods? IF NOT: Why not? What could be better?

IF ADVISER: How do customers normally react when FE college training is suggested? Why? IF NEGATIVE: What could FE colleges do to change this? Is there any change in customer response once they have been in touch with the college/have completed a course? Have you had any feedback from customers about the referral process and/or the college training? Are they positive or negative? Why? What could be improved? What is most useful?

Could you talk me through how you / your staff refer a customer to a college? What happens internally at this stage? Do you / your staff send learner details to the college? Which details do you send? Has this changed in the last six – twelve months? IF YES: Why? Is there anything colleges could do to improve this process?

Are there any materials available for the customer (e.g. college prospectus, leaflet etc)?

Could you talk me through how the college informs you that a customer has enrolled / started training? What happens internally at this stage? Do you require learner details from the college? Which details do you need? What works well / less well about this process?

What is the typical timescale between referral, enrolment and starting a course? Does this differ from college to college? Why?

Could you tell me the rough proportion of customers that you refer that actually go to the college? How many drop out between referral and starting the course? Do you know the reasons for drop out? (PROBE: insufficient start dates, not able to start course at right level, no courses interested in etc)

D. WORKING WITH COLLEGES – OPERATIONAL ISSUES

What changes have you introduced in the last six - twelve months in the way you communicate with colleges? Which communication methods have worked well? What could still be improved?

Do you / your staff interact with colleges to help support the customer once they are enrolled on a course? IF YES: How does this work? IF NO: Would this be valuable? How could the college improve this?

Whilst participating in [PROGRAMME] does Jobcentre Plus continue to offer support to find job vacancies? Are you aware of any support offered by colleges in directing customers towards job vacancies / support to find job opportunities? Does Jobcentre Plus contact colleges with details of relevant vacancies? What involvement have you had with colleges in terms of finding employment opportunities? What has worked well / less well here? Why?

E. GENERAL OPINIONS & LOOKING FORWARDS

What has been the most useful contact you have had with an FE college? Why?

What further information / support would you like from FE colleges?

IF MANAGER: What advice would you have for other Jobcentre Plus and FE colleges who are about to become involved in the same programme?

IF MANAGER: What drives a successful partnership between Jobcentre Plus and FE colleges? What are the barriers? How can these be overcome?

How do you think improvements could be made for Jobcentre Plus customers?

F. CLOSE

Is there anything else you would like to add that we have not already discussed?

Thank respondent.

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