

## Summary: Evaluation of New Deal for Long Term Unemployed People Enhanced National Programme.

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This qualitative study examined the effectiveness and impact of the enhanced national provision introduced to New Deal 25 plus from April 2000. Interviews and group discussions were conducted with seventy participants, twenty eight staff and twenty five employers, all of whom had involvement with the programme after April 2000. Interviews took place in February and March 2001.

The results of the research show:

- Staff delivering New Deal 25 plus were generally of the view that some of the individual enhancements had improved the programme, in particular weekly, or at least more regular, advisory interviews and the Jobseeker's Grant.
- That said, most staff felt that the impact of the enhancements as a whole had been relatively limited. Some gave the main reason for this as being that the clients they are dealing with increasingly consist of a hard to help group who have poor motivation and who face serious barriers to employment. Hence the enhanced programme is felt to be operating in more difficult circumstances than prior to April 2000. Others felt that the programme can help those who are motivated or who can be re-motivated, but that there are insufficient tools to help them assist the remainder.
- There was a common desire among staff to have the power to make parts of the programme mandatory, and for New Deal 25 plus to be made more like New Deal for Young People in terms of the options available.
- It was evident that the enhancements had not always been implemented as intended. For example, weekly advisory interviews were not the norm (fortnightly interviews being more common), and most clients staying in the Gateway for four months receive fewer than ten interviews (evidence for this came from both staff and participants). Also case conferencing appears to be happening on a much more informal and irregular basis than planned in the enhancements.
- Participants were relatively evenly split between those positive about their experiences on New Deal and those who were negative, with a small number ambivalent. Positive views tended to focus on the support provided by their adviser, the perceived benefit of some activity undertaken on the Gateway where applicable, and some positive impact or outcome of their involvement (from increased confidence to obtaining a job). Negative feelings often focussed on feeling pressured, including pressure to take the first job that comes along and being pushed towards low paid jobs or jobs they feel are unsuitable.
- It is very difficult to determine the impact that the enhancements have had from the point of view of participants. While a very small number cite specific enhancements as the best aspect of their New Deal experience, for example their receiving Jobseeker's Grant, most comment on more general aspects, such as the relationship with their adviser. Clearly enhancements such as more regular advisory interviews may have contributed in these areas, but their exact role is impossible to determine.
- Overall the majority of participants felt their involvement in New Deal had been useful or beneficial. Specific areas where benefits were most often cited were increased confidence, both at a personal level and in relation to their perceived chances of finding work, and improved motivation.
- The majority of employers recruiting New Deal 25 plus participants since April 2000 were satisfied with the performance of the recruit or recruits, or at least felt they were performing as expected. Among employers who had recruited from New Deal 25 plus both pre and post April 2000, the research provides *some* evidence (which would need to be verified based on larger sample sizes) that the enhanced national programme has delivered improvements in terms of better matched candidates. Still employers would like to see improved screening of New Deal candidates that they are sent.

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The New Deal for Long Term Unemployed is a government programme designed to help adults aged 25 or over to return to the labour market. In April 2000 a number of enhancements were made to the national programme so that the Gateway more closely resembled that tested in pilot areas. This report presents the findings of a qualitative research exercise investigating the views and experiences of three groups: staff responsible for delivering the service, participants who joined the programme after April 2000 and employers who have recruited New Deal 25 plus participants after this date. The research was conducted in five areas, selected to provide a mix in terms of such factors as local labour market conditions, geography and urban and rural.

The key objectives of the research were to assess the effect of the April 2000 enhancements and to provide a picture of how well New Deal 25 plus is meeting the needs of participants and employers prior to further enhancements to the programme in April 2001.

## The views of staff

The general consensus amongst staff is that while some of the individual enhancements to the programme have been beneficial, as a package the effects have been marginal in terms of providing additional support over and above what was already available pre April 2000. One of the main reasons why staff feel the enhancements have had relatively limited impact is the view that, although their New Deal 25 plus caseloads have fallen, they now increasingly consist of what some describe as a 'hardcore' of clients who have poor motivation, very long spells of unemployment and serious barriers to finding work. Many of these participants have been on other Jobcentre programmes before, and often New Deal 25 plus in particular.

The general feeling among staff can be summed up by the view that the New Deal 25 plus programme enables them to help participants who are motivated or who can be re-motivated, but does not give them sufficient tools to help the remainder, who account for the majority of their caseloads.

It is worth noting here that many of the changes introduced by the April 2001 enhancements have not been implemented as intended, something discussed throughout this report. Hence when staff comment on the relatively limited impact of the enhancements, they are here discussing the impact of the changes *as they have been implemented in their area*.

The two most common sentiments expressed by staff in regard to improvements they would like to see, are

that it lacks mandatory elements and that it needs to be made more like New Deal for Young People (NDYP).

Having the power to make some course of action mandatory was seen as the key priority for a number of staff that we interviewed. Being able to enforce certain options would mean that people could be directed to where help was most needed, not where it was most wanted (if indeed help was wanted at all).

Staff expressed the desire to see the range of options available to those aged 25 and over to be made similar to those offered on NDYP. New Deal 25 plus was seen as being more limited than NDYP despite having a more difficult to help client group. Two areas which would be particularly beneficial, mentioned by a number of staff we interviewed, were the Environmental Task Force and the voluntary sector options.

While staff generally felt the overall impact of the April 2000 changes to have been limited, there were individual elements within the changes that were viewed positively. Most commonly mentioned in this regard were weekly, or at least more regular, advisory interviews with participants and the addition of the Jobseeker's Grant to the 25 plus programme. The former allows a better chance of a good relationship with the client developing and can introduce an increased sense of purpose to the process in distinguishing it from fortnightly signing on. Jobseeker's Grant was felt to be a useful tool to have available to offer the more motivated, job-ready clients who faced some of the minor last minute hurdles to getting a job. More generally, it is seen along with the employer subsidy, as something concrete with which to 'sell' New Deal 25 plus to participants.

## The views of participants

Overall the sample splits relatively evenly between those who are positive about their New Deal experiences and those who are negative, with a small number who are somewhat ambivalent. Attitudes are largely determined by a mix of the following:

- the extent to which participants felt their needs were taken into account during the process
- their views of their adviser and the advisory interviews
- their views of any activities undertaken
- the impact of the programme, both in terms of hard outcomes (i.e. jobs) but also softer measures (e.g. their views on the likelihood of finding work)

For example, one aspect that is often highlighted as being liked by participants is the supportive environment provided by the adviser, with many contrasting the friendly and acting-for-you-not-

against-you atmosphere with their previous Jobcentre experience. The other feature that is most often viewed positively is an activity undertaken on the Gateway, typically a training course. It is interesting to note that relatively few were negative about an activity or course they had undertaken, even though many had been sceptical beforehand that they would learn nothing new and that it would be of little benefit.

Not surprisingly those getting subsidised or unsubsidised employment through New Deal were usually very positive about their time on New Deal. This was not always the case: some were motivated to get work to get off the Gateway, and some argued that their getting work had nothing to do with New Deal. Criticisms of their New Deal experience tended to focus on a feeling of being pressured. This was expressed in a number of ways, including being pressured to take the first job that comes along, being pushed towards low paid jobs or jobs in which they had no interest in, having to attend interviews where they felt they had no chance of getting the job and being forced to attend some activity for fear of sanctions.

For some individuals this contributed to a view that the programme is just a means to get people off the register (or 'to get me on the minimum wage', as one person put it), though a number of these participants had entered the programme with a very sceptical outlook. Others felt their being pressured into what they saw as unsuitable options was a sign that the adviser had not really been listening to what they had been saying, and this was a cause of particular frustration, especially where their limitations and needs were health-related.

### **Impacts of Enhanced New Deal 25 plus**

There were a range of outcomes among those who were not still on the Gateway, from a large number who had returned to claiming JSA to those who had gained unsubsidised employment. The range of outcomes does not differ in kind to those found for research among participants pre April 2000, nor does the qualitative nature of the research allow for comparisons to be made in terms of the proportions achieving various outcomes.

The range of benefits from involvement in New Deal is also very similar to that found for previous research. It is clearly encouraging that the majority of participants (44 of the 70) felt that their involvement in New Deal had been useful or beneficial. Specific areas where people felt they had benefited included increased confidence, both at a personal level and also in relation to finding work and job search, mentioned by some 32 respondents, and a similar number saying their motivation improved. It is also encouraging that a

significant number of respondents benefited in a number of ways specifically related to their approach to finding work: some had broadened their job search to include a wider range of types of work, and others changed the way they went about looking for work. Overall the participants surveyed appeared somewhat more positive than the staff interviewed about the benefits of the New Deal 25 plus programme.

### **The effects of specific enhancements**

*The number and regularity of advisory interviews:* weekly interviews are not the norm, fortnightly interviews being more common. This usually appeared to be a result of staff believing their offices did not have the resources to deal with their caseload. Some admitted aiming for fortnightly interviews but struggling even to manage this.

Staff and participants confirm that most clients who stay in the Gateway for four months tend to receive fewer than 10 interviews. This varied by District, but a target of eight appeared to be typical, tying in with fortnightly interviews over a four month Gateway.

*The Client Progress Kit (CPK):* the CPK is almost universally disliked by staff, who feel it to be an administrative burden, of little benefit and a duplication of effort with the Action Plan. Most appear to use it, but only because they are supposed to and not with any intent that it will be a 'live' document which they refer to and use over the course of the Gateway. Many would be happy to see it scrapped. For these reasons the impact of the CPK in skills assessment appears to have been negligible.

*Case conferences:* formal case conferencing at which advisers regularly discuss their New Deal 25 plus clients with their manager or a senior adviser is certainly not the norm, as the design of the programme intended. Much more common is the situation where advisers discuss their difficult cases with other advisers on an informal basis. This is done on an as needed basis rather than at specified points on the Gateway. Senior managers or advisers will often only be called in when the advisers feel this would be beneficial. There were mixed views on the usefulness of case conferences. Those positive thought it can be useful to have a fresh pair of eyes looking at a case, and in some instances new ideas had been recommended. Those negative focussed on the difficulty somebody would have understanding a 'case from the outside' and had found that few useful suggestions had been made. Again the findings suggest that the procedures for case conferencing as introduced by the April 2000 enhancements have had relatively little impact overall.

*A four-month Gateway period:* limiting the Gateway to four months was either viewed positively by staff or it was seen as having had little impact. Where positive it was nearly always a case of preventing the process drag on for longer, the view being that for those clients who are motivated and can be helped four months is more than sufficient. Where neutral, staff simply felt this change had not really affected things very much. From a participant perspective there was no sign that the limiting the Gateway to four months had been an obstacle. There were no cases where respondents felt that with a bit more time they would be able to have found employment.

*Broadening Gateway services:* the availability and hence use of external Gateway services varied widely between Districts. Some staff talked of having full provision locally, while others lacked provision. There were also differences in how these services were being deployed by District. In one area the Gateway to Work course was essentially mandatory, and here 95 per cent of clients were estimated to attend some form of external provision. This compared to another area where the figure was put at less than five per cent.

A number of staff were quite sceptical of the quality of some Gateway provision. Some felt it had evidently been 'borrowed' and pieced together from other programmes, and was hence somewhat 'tired'.

The most common type of provision received by participants appears to be short courses and modules aimed at improving job search. Typical was a two-week course looking at CVs, writing job applications, interview technique and methods of job search. As has been noted these courses were generally well received by participants. Indeed across the range of provision, it was apparent how rare it was for attendees not to benefit in some way from external Gateway courses, and the general conclusion must be that participation in some activity should be strongly encouraged.

*The Jobseeker's Grant (JSG):* the JSG has been well received by staff and is, not surprisingly, something picked out as a real positive by those participants who actually received it. For these individuals it does seem to have made a difference in their getting work or their transition into work, rather than it being simply some reward. However, the overall impact of its introduction is limited by the fact that staff say they use it relatively infrequently because it is only suitable for their more job ready clients. It is not a change that is felt to have had any impact on the more 'hardcore' of clients with more serious barriers to employment.

## **The views of Employers**

Overall there was a generally positive picture in regard to the views of employers who had taken on New Deal

25 plus participants since April 2000. It is worth noting that a number had not known they had recruited via New Deal 25 plus (knowing only that they had taken on a New Deal candidate), and a few were unaware of New Deal altogether knowing only that they had taken on people from the Jobcentre.

Approximately half the employers were satisfied with the participants they had taken on, with the person seen as fitting in well and doing a good job. Three of the 25 employers had had problems: one felt the recruit lacked any motivation, another recruit had alcohol problems and another was accused of stealing. The remainder tended to say the recruit was okay without being outstanding, which is not surprising given their length of unemployment.

The research provides some initial evidence that employers have noticed some improvements since April 2000. Nine of the employers that we interviewed had recruited New Deal 25 plus participants both pre and post April. Two had noticed a change in the quality of the candidates they had seen since April 2000, and both indicated that they felt the quality had improved.

Still most employers want further improvements in the filtering of candidates. The key improvement that employers would like to see is increased screening of the New Deal candidates that they are sent. Others requested more information about the candidates before they come to them, again to be able to filter out potentially unsuitable candidates. There was also a desire for more information and general contact with the Employment Service / Jobcentre.

## **Conclusions**

It is evident that many of the areas where staff feel New Deal 25 plus needed to be improved in order to help the long term unemployed are just those which the April 2001 enhancements aim to tackle. It remains to be seen how effective they are in meeting the needs of the long term unemployed. If the enhancements are to be effective, though, this is only likely to happen if they are being delivered as intended. As this research into the April 2000 enhancements shows, this cannot be assumed.