

Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 228

Evaluation of Single Provider Employment Zone Extensions to Young People, Lone Parents and Early Entrants

Interim Report

Rita Griffiths and Dr Gerwyn Jones

A report of research carried out by Insite Research and Consulting on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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Abbreviations

ADF	Adviser Discretion Fund
ATJ	Action Teams for Jobs
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESOL	English for Speakers of other Languages
EZ	Employment Zone
IWBC	In Work Benefit Calculation
ND 25+	New Deal 25 plus
ND 50+	New Deal 50 plus
NDLP	New Deal for Lone Parents
NDYP	New Deal for Young People
PA	Personal Adviser
PJA	Personal Job Account
WFI	Work Focused Interview

Summary

Introduction

Employment Zones (EZs) were introduced in April 2000 in fifteen areas of the UK experiencing high concentrations of long-term unemployment. EZs originally targeted unemployed people aged 25 and over who had been claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) for at least 12 months. Participation was, and continues to be, mandatory for this client group.

Previous research has shown that EZs are working for a group of long-term unemployed people for whom mainstream Jobcentre Plus services have been unsuccessful in the past. EZ participants have also been found to achieve a higher rate of job outcomes than would otherwise have occurred if they had participated in New Deal 25 Plus.

EZs were expanded in October 2003 to include lone parents in receipt of Income Support, unemployed people aged 18-24 otherwise returning to New Deal and claimants of Jobseeker's Allowance entitled to early entry due to disadvantages they face in the labour market. Participation for young people, and for early entrants who decide to join, is mandatory. For lone parents, participation is voluntary.

In November 2003, Insite Research and Consulting was appointed by the Department for Work and Pensions to conduct a qualitative and longitudinal evaluation of the extension of EZs to new client groups in seven EZ single provider areas. Phase one, conducted between November 2003 and November 2004, addressed early implementation issues through a series of in-depth face-to-face interviews with EZ advisers and new customers participating in EZs. Live observations of meetings between EZ advisers and clients, and desk research covering new client delivery plans, was also carried out. No interviews were held with Jobcentre Plus staff.

This summary presents phase one interim findings. The second phase will consider longer-term outcomes and assess what is working in EZ provision for new customers. Overall, the research will contribute to the body of evidence on the reform of public services.

Set up and delivery arrangements

In the main, whether mandatory or voluntary, most new customers were receiving essentially the same treatment and service as the original 25 plus client group. The plans EZs had to introduce innovative and client specific provision for new groups had not been fully implemented at the time of the research. One EZ had introduced dedicated delivery for lone parents with its own separate premises and specialist lone parent advisers, but it was too soon to ascertain with what degree of success.

The slow referral and recruitment of new customers, particularly lone parents, was a key reason for delays in the implementation of planned specialist and innovative provision. Partly this was due to the lower than anticipated number of referrals from Jobcentre Plus. It was also because many EZs had been slow to get lone parent marketing and recruitment activities underway.

With the exception of a few specialist lone parent advisers, most EZ advisers dealing with new customer groups were generalists. None had received any special training in connection with the introduction of new client groups. Two key training needs were identified: in welfare benefits; and customer specific training for lone parents whose needs and barriers were considered to be quite different from mandatory customers.

Relationships between EZs and Jobcentre Plus were cordial, but the volume of new client referrals was lower than expected. EZ advisers believed that some Jobcentre Plus colleagues poorly understood EZs and had limited knowledge of early entry criteria. These factors were felt to have inhibited customer referral to EZs.

Adviser methods and working practices

Advisers were using the same methods and working practices developed for 25 plus customers, with new client groups. These practices gave advisers the flexibility required to design individually tailored and funded programmes of support to assist new customers into work. Using their discretion, advisers would determine how much time to spend with their clients, what kind of help to provide and how much to spend on them (within pre-determined limits). Customers influenced these decisions mainly through the level of commitment they showed to securing work in their chosen field.

Assuming the job goal is realistic, irrespective of the barriers to work, the more job focused and determined customers were, the more help they were getting. No evidence was found that those furthest away from the labour market attracted

less resource overall or were receiving an inferior service. Advisers may work less intensively with harder to help customers but they often did so over longer periods of time.

Help with jobsearch, curriculum vitae preparation, interview techniques, together with In Work Benefit Calculations (IWBC), were all part of the standard package of assistance for new customers. Financial help, for example towards the cost of training or transport, was also offered as an in-work incentive to encourage clients to remain employed for at least 13 weeks. On going personal support was also available for customers who needed it. Advisers provided most of the help clients were getting, but specialist provision was brought in, as appropriate.

New Deal returners

EZ advisers were, for the most part, finding New Deal returners a relatively straightforward group to help. Most young unemployed people were considered capable of and willing to work. A large amount of advisers' time was spent motivating these clients and supporting them in practical jobsearch tasks. Some were persuading young people to consider jobs offering better prospects.

Most New Deal returners found the support they had received from New Deal or Jobcentre Plus was not sufficiently tailored to their needs and lacked job focus. In contrast, EZ help was believed to be more geared to getting work and advisers more accommodating of clients' individual circumstances and aspirations. These customers particularly valued the ability to exercise choice in jobsearch and the perceived commitment and enthusiasm of EZ advisers.

Young people appeared to be responding well to the EZ work first approach and seemed receptive to the in-work incentive regime. IWBCs were also proving to be helpful in overcoming attitudinal barriers regarding the financial benefits of working.

Early entrants

Advisers found younger early entrants aged 18-24 to be very similar to New Deal returners, but their employment barriers were more pronounced. Basic skills deficiencies were more common, together with housing problems and driving offences. Advisers were supporting these customers in the same way as they were New Deal returners.

The majority of younger early entrants had chosen to join the EZ but some felt pressurised into participating. Most were more positive about their EZ experience than the help previously received from New Deal and Jobcentre Plus.

Early entrants over the age of 25 were a more heterogeneous group. Some were job ready and mainly needed financial help to get them back to work. Others had fixed views on acceptable jobs, pay and working conditions. Customers with multiple

barriers and a long history of unemployment often had previous experience of EZs. Some had serious drug and alcohol dependencies and mental health conditions, and were felt by advisers to be unlikely to benefit from further EZ participation.

For the majority of these customers, the EZ experience compared favourably with Jobcentre Plus and New Deal. Most valued the personal service ethos of EZs, but the financial assistance available was believed by many to be the most important factor in helping them back to work.

Lone parents

Many lone parents who volunteered for EZ help had only experienced mandatory Work Focused Interviews (WFI's) and had not previously participated in the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP). They often chose to join the EZ to access financial help or intensive support. Lone parents who self referred were usually persuaded to join by a friend or relative or attracted by the marketing. Outreach and child friendly delivery was also an important attraction for lone parents who joined EZs. Many said they also valued the intensity of support and the enthusiasm of EZ advisers in helping them get work and achieve their career goals.

Low customer referral and the complexity of barriers facing lone parents, were key issues facing EZs at the time of the research. Advisers had expected these customers to be relatively easy to help, but many lone parents were reported to have complex needs and barriers. Some had longer-term job goals and were far from job ready. Most advisers believed that specialist knowledge and expertise and help for longer periods may be needed to get them into sustained work.

Emerging findings

To date, New Deal returners, early entrants and lone parents who have joined EZs are responding well to, and appear to be benefiting from, EZ help. Satisfaction levels were high among all new customer groups but especially so among New Deal returners. Young people's willingness and ability to be flexible, together with their receptiveness to incentives, may explain why EZ help appeared to be working for them. For customers over the age of 25 who were looking for work and job ready, access to practical and financial resources seemed more important. However, they too placed significant emphasis on the importance of personalised support and provision.

As a client group, lone parents probably represent the biggest challenge to the EZ work first approach and funding regime. Many want to work but, in the short-term, not all have the capacity or capability to do so. Some also aspire to longer-term careers. The need for advisers to work more intensively with them and for longer periods could present difficulties for some EZs, given the outcome based business model through which they are currently funded.

Few customers had moved into work at the time of the research and it was too early to assess the overall effectiveness of the EZ approach or to draw conclusions about what is working in EZ provision for new customers. The intention is for phase two of the research to examine these issues in detail, including the extent to which EZs are helping new clients to secure sustained work.

1 Introduction

1.1 Evaluation of Employment Zones

This report presents the interim findings of a two phase longitudinal research project to evaluate the extension of Employment Zones (EZs) to lone parents, unemployed 18-24 year olds otherwise returning to New Deal for Young People (NDYP) and unemployed individuals eligible to join EZs early because of the disadvantages they face.

EZs were introduced in April 2000 in fifteen areas of the UK experiencing persistently high concentrations of long-term unemployed people. EZs target unemployed individuals aged 25 and over who had been claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) for at least 12 months. Participation is mandatory for eligible JSA claimants in the targeted areas.

The introduction of EZs formed an important part of the Government's Welfare to Work programme which marked a radical shift in policy in addressing the problems of long-term unemployment. Programme flexibility and adviser discretion were fundamental to the EZ 'work first' approach which sought to deliver client centred services to assist unemployed individuals into sustainable work. Flexibility lay in terms of individually tailored and funded programmes of support, with EZ advisers using high levels of discretion in developing customised provision for caseloaded customers. Contracts were awarded by open competition to private sector organisations and strongly emphasised payment by results in terms of getting clients into sustainable employment.

The current research is the latest in a series of studies commissioned by DWP to examine the effectiveness, outcomes and impact of EZs. Previous research and evaluations have shown the EZ approach to be working for a group of long-term unemployed people for whom mainstream Jobcentre Plus services have proved unsuccessful in the past.¹ EZ participants have been found to achieve a higher rate of

¹ Hirst A et al. Cambridge Policy Consultants & Mori 'Employment Zones: A Study of Local Delivery Agency and Case Studies' 2002.

job outcomes than would otherwise have occurred if they had participated in New Deal 25 Plus.²

1.2 Extending the EZ to new client groups

EZs were expanded in October 2003 to include lone parents in receipt of Income Support (IS), young unemployed people aged 18-24 otherwise returning to New Deal and JSA claimants entitled to gain early entry to the EZ due to identified disadvantages they face in the labour market. Participation is mandatory for young people, and for early entrants who have decided to join. EZ activity to increase the participation of mandatory clients is not permitted. For lone parents, participation is voluntary and they may leave at any time. Contractors are, however, encouraged to market their services to lone parents.

In seven EZ areas, a single provider is delivering services to both new and the existing 25 plus client group. In the other four EZs areas, multiple provider arrangements are being explored.

1.3 Single provider contractors

Single provider EZs operate in the following seven areas: Plymouth, Nottingham, Doncaster, Middlesbrough, South Wales, North West Wales and Brighton. Following a competitive tendering exercise, four contractors were awarded contracts to deliver services to the new client groups, in addition to the original 25 plus client group. The same contractor delivers services in Plymouth, South Wales, North West Wales and Brighton.

1.4 EZ stages

Working with nominated EZ advisers, participants can spend up to 52 weeks on the EZ. EZ stages relate to the periods for which providers receive funding. There are three stages and a follow on period, as follows:

Stage One: A maximum four week introductory period (reduced from the previous 13 weeks) to identify the client's needs and employment barriers. After agreeing an action plan at any time during this stage, unless the client secures work, the JSA participant or lone parent moves on to Stage Two.

Stage two: Up to 26 weeks of intensive support to implement the action plan and seek to place the client into work.

² National Centre for Social Research 'Evaluation of Employment Zones: Report on a Cohort Survey of Long Term Unemployed People in the Zones and a Matched Set of Comparison Areas' 2003.

Stage Three: Relates to the period during which the client is in employment. EZs receive outcome payments when the client moves into work and a further payment if the client remains in work for at least 13 weeks.

EZ follow on: A maximum of 22 weeks follow on support is available for mandated clients who remain unemployed at the end of stage two. EZs are not paid for this stage but can claim outcome payments if the client goes on to secure work.

1.5 Research aims and objectives

In November 2003, Insite Research and Consulting was appointed by the Department for Work and Pensions, to evaluate the extension of EZs to the new client groups in the seven single provider EZ areas. The research is being conducted over two phases to enable early implementation issues to be distinguished from structural findings and to explore EZ effectiveness through an examination of longer term outcomes. The overall aims of the research were to:

- explore early implementation issues surrounding the extension of EZs to new client groups;
- investigate the content and effectiveness of delivery arrangements for the new client groups;
- explore the experiences of lone parents, young people and early entrants in EZs, and the range of factors that underpin and affect participation and outcomes;
- increase the understanding of what works and why in EZ provision for the new client groups;
- contribute to wider debates concerning the modernisation and contestability of public services.

This report presents interim findings from phase one.

1.6 Methods

Qualitative, longitudinal and observational methods are being used to meet the research objectives and to allow clients' progress to be tracked from their early involvement in the EZ through to longer-term outcomes. Phase one ran from November 2003 to November 2004 and phase two will run from November 2004 to September 2005.

Observations were used to increase the understanding of what happens during adviser customer meetings, to ascertain the immediate 'real time' views of advisers and customers and, during phase two, to enable linkages to be made between client interventions and subsequent outcomes.

In phase one, the methodology comprised a series of face-to-face interviews with EZ staff and customers in each of the seven single provider EZs, live observations of meetings between EZ advisers and clients, and desk research covering new client delivery plans. To avoid any overlap or conflict with other research studies, no interviews were held with Jobcentre Plus staff or customers.

The phase one research consisted of:

- face-to-face depth interviews with local managers in each of the seven EZs;
- face-to-face depth interviews with EZ Regional Managers;
- face-to-face depth interviews with 35 EZ advisers;
- face-to-face depth interviews with six EZ employer liaison staff;
- live observations of 38 adviser/customer meetings comprising:
 - 18 New Deal returners
 - 3 early entrants aged 18-24
 - 11 early entrants aged 25 plus
 - 6 lone parents
- face-to-face depth interviews with 109 EZ participants comprising:
 - 44 New Deal returners
 - 10 early entrants aged 18-24
 - 20 early entrants aged 25 plus
 - 35 lone parents
- review of seven EZ delivery plans.

Phase one staff interviews and observations were carried out in February and March 2004 and customer interviews were conducted between March and June 2004.

1.7 Report structure

This report is written in seven further sections, as follows:

- Section two describes EZ management and delivery arrangements in respect of the new client groups and explores early implementation issues.
- Section three investigates EZ advisers' methods and working practices.
- Sections four to seven cover each new client group in turn: New Deal returners; early entrants aged 18-24; early entrants aged 25 plus; and lone parents. Each section describes the characteristics, perceptions and early experiences of new customers, explores the views of EZ advisers and gives an early indication of what seems to be working in EZ provision.

- Section eight summarises emerging findings from phase one of the research.
- A bibliography of related research and background material is included in References.
- The appendix lists the eligibility criteria for early entry to EZs.

2 Set up arrangements and early implementation issues

2.1 Planned provision and services for new client groups

Single provider contractors were required to prepare a delivery plan setting out their proposals for extending Employment Zones (EZs) provision to the new client groups. Most plans included proposals for innovative and client specific provision, for example:

- mixed group sessions for 25 plus and 18-24s;
- 'outward bound' type residentials, mentors and career counselling by an occupational psychologist for New Deal returners;
- 'pamper days,' work experience placements, childcare tasters and in-house crèche provision for lone parents;
- establishment of a 'Childcare Academy' to train and provide crèche facilities for lone parent customers;
- identification of family friendly employers;
- 'attendance officer' to re-refer lone parents who have dropped out;
- dedicated staff to facilitate out of office hours contact.

Contractors' prior experiences of delivering support to long-term unemployed people strongly informed and provided a platform for developing these plans. The same key tenets and core values which underpin EZs, and which serve to distinguish them from mainstream Jobcentre Plus services, featured in all new client plans and arrangements. Proposed provision for new groups thus built substantially on contractors' existing products and services.

Some, but not all, of the proposed innovations had been implemented at the time the research was conducted. Where they had not, this was mainly due to the slow referral of clients. Much provision was still being planned or in the early stages of implementation, and it was too soon to say whether or in what ways innovations were proving effective in respect of new client groups. Early emphasis was placed on tried and tested methods delivered alongside the gradual introduction of new provision as client referrals increased and lessons were learned:

'It's a rolling change...because we didn't want to go 'right we've got all these new products let's just get on with them,' without doing a proper evaluation to see if they do work.'

EZ Manager

Important too was the strong confidence placed in the traditional EZ model which was seen to have performed well for the 25 plus client group and therefore to require only limited 'tweaking' in respect of new clients.

As implemented at the time of the research, provision for the new extension groups was not generally client specific. The approach largely replicated and ran in parallel with that pioneered for the 25 plus client group, being delivered from the same high street premises, and mostly by the same advisers. The key exception was in respect of lone parents. In a number of EZs, specialist lone parent advisers had been recruited or would join the team in the future. One EZ had very recently opened new premises dedicated to lone parent delivery, staffed by specialist lone parent advisers. In the main, however, whether mandatory or voluntary, existing or new, most EZ clients were receiving essentially the same treatment and service as provided under the original EZ model.

2.2 Premises and delivery venues

Some EZ premises are large and ergonomically designed with bright modern décor and furnishings, not unlike Jobcentre Plus offices. In these, 'hot desking' and 'work pods' are used to facilitate open communication, encourage team working and promote good practice. Other premises are smaller and less plush but comfortable and friendly. All make use of open plan design and most have private meeting rooms available. Working practice in many offices is for advisers to sit alongside, rather than face-to-face with clients. Clients seemed to like this interface, feeling it was less adversarial:

'There are no desks as it were, no barriers, so it's more personal...I'm not talking to a person over a desk... You're on the same side as they are, so it looks like they are on your side as well.'

New Deal returner

Most premises provide customer tea and coffee making facilities. Customers are welcome to serve themselves, though it is not uncommon for advisers to offer to make their clients a hot drink. Several clients commented on this personal,

egalitarian touch which compared favourably with Jobcentre Plus:

'Go into the Jobcentre and if someone come to me and said 'do you want a cup of tea?' I'd fall over I'm telling you!'

Young early entrant

Clients also have free access to personal computers and the internet, with facilities staffed in some EZs to assist clients in tasks such as job search, curriculum vitae (CV) preparation and job applications. Some clients specifically mentioned the value they placed on the practical help on offer, drawing comparisons with the self service approach in Jobcentre Plus where assistance with jobsearch tasks was not so readily available.

The majority of EZs have premises in town centre and high street locations offering good profile and visibility and easy off-street access. Some have neighbourhood based satellite offices and a few EZs have begun to make use of outreach venues to recruit and support lone parents. A number of EZs have a permanent presence in Jobcentre Plus offices to meet and greet clients at the point of referral.

With the exception of dedicated lone parent delivery in one EZ, providers were using the same premises to deliver support both to the original 25 plus and new client groups. Some also mixed EZ mandatory clients with voluntary Action Team³ and Progress2Work⁴ customers. The decision to mix client groups seems largely to have been commercial and logistical, based on client throughput and the location of advisers. However, mixed venues were seen to offer the added benefit of providing opportunities for the recruitment and referral of voluntary clients. In contrast, the only provider to have introduced dedicated lone parent delivery had done so consciously to differentiate lone parent from mandatory provision. The decision was made following a series of lone parent focus groups which showed them to be reluctant to share premises with mandatory groups. Dedicated premises were seen to be more conducive to informal drop in and offer a more child-friendly environment.

In both mixed and dedicated EZ venues, clients liked what they perceived to be a more relaxed, friendly and informal atmosphere. This contrasted sharply with the much larger scale and more frenetic pace of Jobcentre Plus offices which many clients found uncomfortable. Some lone parents and more vulnerable clients described the experience of attending a Jobcentre as daunting and intimidating. However, the lack of privacy in smaller, quieter EZ offices and the close proximity between staff and customers in EZ offices using desk 'pods' was felt to be inhibiting by a small number of customers. A small minority of clients, generally those who

³ Action Teams is a voluntary DWP initiative introduced in 2000 to increase employment rates among disadvantaged groups. Action Teams work with jobless people in nominated wards with high rates of unemployment and joblessness.

⁴ Progress2Work is a voluntary DWP programme to help individuals recovering from drug and alcohol dependency get sustainable employment.

wanted to sign on and be left to their own devices, preferred the anonymity of Jobcentre Plus offices.

2.3 Organisational and staffing issues

The introduction of new client groups had occasioned some organisational re-structuring and staff recruitment in most EZs. One contractor used the opportunity to de-centralise operations to allow local management greater autonomy and control. Most other contractors already functioned with flat, locally devolved organisational structures. These lighter touch management arrangements give local managers and advisers the high degree of operational flexibility and discretion needed to make decisions at the point of delivery.

With the exception of a few specialists dealing with lone parents, ex-offenders and 50 plus clients, most advisers were generalists dealing with all new customer groups, including, in some cases, 25 plus clients. Most contractors had recruited additional staff to deliver the new contract, while remaining within the same basic staffing structure of local manager, advisers, employer liaison and administrative staff. New advisers were generally young professionals with work experience gained from a myriad of backgrounds and former jobs. Some EZ providers prefer to recruit graduates but others view experience and aptitude as being equally important as formal qualifications.

New staff are assigned 'mentors' or 'buddies' and all undergo an intense period of induction. Beyond induction, most training is around contractor 'products' and IT software systems. Formal training is kept to a minimum with peer and 'on the job' training and work shadowing the norm in most EZs. One contractor had however trained all its advisers in basic skills assessment and the identification of substance misuse. This decision appears to have been taken as a result of working with the 25 plus client group. Other contractors were considering similar steps to bring specialist support and expertise in-house.

There has been no specific training for new recruits or existing staff in connection with the introduction of new client groups. In the main, this was reported to have presented no major difficulties. Advisers with previous experience of working with the new groups, for example through the Zone Action Teams, found the expertise gained to be directly transferable. Staff with no prior experience felt more exposed, though most were confident that they were coping well. Some advisers did however feel they would benefit from some specialist training, particularly in the field of welfare benefits. Most generalist advisers dealing with lone parents also felt that this client group required them to have more specialist knowledge and expertise. Specialist training was planned in some EZs.

2.4 Relationships with external organisations, providers and employers

All EZs have made efforts to establish relationships with external organisations offering complementary provision to new client groups, particularly those delivering specialist support services, for example in the fields of drug and alcohol rehabilitation and mental health counselling. Much of this builds on pre-existing contacts and networks established for the 25 plus client group, falling short of formal 'partnership' working and operating more at practitioner than strategic levels. Some EZ contractors did however make specific efforts to improve partnership working, believing previous arrangements to have fallen short of best practice. A number of EZs had begun to establish more formal partnership working with Sure Start and other lone parent outreach projects.

Relationships with training providers and specialist service providers (for example CV preparation, first aid training, debt counselling) tend to be contractual and brought in on a customer by customer basis. A few EZs were however delivering group activities including outward bound courses using external providers. As with the previous 25 plus contract, use of external providers is judicious and there was no evidence of large scale pre-contracted provision.

Under the previous 25 plus contract, specialist marketing and employer liaison staff sourced job and placement opportunities, while adviser colleagues identified clients suitable for screening and matching. The approach works through having dedicated staff who represent the best interests of employers on the one hand, and customers, on the other. The same employer liaison strategies and account management arrangements were being used to handle employer relationships under the new contract. EZs were busy building rapport with employers and some had begun referring new customers to vacancies. It was too soon to say with what degree of success. This issue will be addressed in the second phase of research.

2.5 Relationships with Jobcentre Plus and client referral

In the main, relationships with Jobcentre Plus were reported as cordial, particularly at strategic and management levels. Operationally too, working relationships appeared generally good. This applied both to existing and new EZ contractors. Low numbers of new client referrals had however created some recent tensions. Referral problems were initially experienced across all new client groups but were reported by EZs to be more pronounced in respect of early entrants and lone parents. Some EZ advisers had concerns about small caseloads, some as low as ten clients, and the implications this would have on their ability to meet job performance targets. Others were more sanguine, expecting the situation would soon improve:

'They're [customers] just not coming through and we can't see what's being done about it either...it's quite worrying for the current advisers that have small caseloads because obviously to achieve your performance, you need to have a fairly healthy caseload ...'

EZ adviser

Least problematic was the New Deal returners group. In all EZs referrals here were steady and in some cases higher than planning assumption levels.

It is difficult to pinpoint the precise reasons for low referral. Interviews were only conducted with EZ advisers, not their Jobcentre Plus colleagues. The fact that EZs' marketing to lone parents had been slow to get underway may have exacerbated the situation with regard to this client group. New customers had also been introduced alongside changes to eligibility conditions for the original 25 plus client group⁵ and this too had served to reduce overall client throughput.

There was also a belief among EZ advisers that some Jobcentre Plus staff had poor knowledge of EZs. Limited understanding of EZs could, it was believed, give customers mixed messages about EZs and what they could do to help:

'They're getting mixed information from Jobcentres...about what we can actually do for them. Some have said that some of the feedback has been 'you'll give me driving lessons the Jobcentre have said' or... 'you're a training organisation, if you don't get me work in...about 13 weeks you're going to put me on a training course.'

EZ adviser

The research seemed to support this view; EZs with a regular presence of staff within Jobcentre Plus offices appeared to be experiencing fewer problems and had higher referral rates overall.

Some EZ advisers believed early entrant criteria, intended to identify specific barriers, may have been inadequately communicated and poorly understood:

'The [Jobcentre Plus] staff have not been trained in the new contract...[a key issue] is getting Jobcentre Plus staff to understand about early entry criteria because it's their responsibility.'

EZ Operations Manager

'I don't think many people down at the Jobcentre knew what the early entry criteria was...they thought the early entry criteria was much stricter than it was.'

EZ adviser

⁵ Eligibility in some areas had changed from 12 months to 18 months unemployment.

Similar issues were identified in a previous qualitative evaluation where the need for Jobcentre Plus to provide customers with better information about EZs at the time of referral, was a recurrent theme.⁶ A few EZ advisers believed that early entry criteria may be being used retrospectively to justify the referral of certain hard to help or non-compliant customers. A perception was also held that some Jobcentre Plus advisers may be reluctant to refer because of the potential loss of key client groups to a 'competitor.' This they considered to be particularly acutely felt in respect of lone parents:

'Initially, they [Jobcentre Plus staff] were very sceptical, didn't want to refer people, because it was like, 'if you're a success, we lose our job', 'what can you do that we can't do?'

EZ lone parent adviser

An initial confusion that job outcomes resulting from lone parent referrals would not count towards Jobcentre Plus targets was also felt to have contributed to low numbers. Clarification of this misunderstanding had improved referral rates. However, client throughput was still considered to be below expectations and planning assumptions.

To promote better working practices and improve referral rates, some EZ providers had set up meetings and organised joint seminars with Jobcentre Plus colleagues. In others, job shadowing between EZ and Jobcentre Plus advisers had taken place and links had been established with Jobcentre Plus staff responsible for childcare issues:

'We are trying to train or get it through to the Jobcentre staff more information about [the EZ] because...they could refer more people if they actually understood more about [the EZ]... We would capture more early entrants and ...more people if they did that, so that's taking place at the moment.'

EZ adviser

One EZ had boosted the recruitment of early entrants by distributing publicity flyers to eligible customers at Jobcentre Plus offices:

'We have a team that will go to the Jobcentre...hand out flyers and they get referrals through that way...so if they've got some kind of problem or they meet the early entrant criteria then they will give a card and just an invitation to come around and meet us.'

EZ adviser

Lone parent adviser events bringing together colleagues from EZs and Jobcentre Plus had been organised in a number of areas. These various efforts and activities were believed to have paid off and working relationships and customer referral across many areas had markedly improved as a result.

⁶ See Hirst A. et al 2002 pp 36.

2.6 Lone parent marketing and recruitment

EZ participation is voluntary for lone parents and Jobcentre Plus advisers cannot force these customers to join. EZs were therefore encouraged to be proactive and market their services directly to lone parents. In many EZ areas, marketing and outreach had been slow to get off the ground. Some EZs were finding the recruitment of lone parents to be a more labour intensive business than envisaged, requiring up-front investment of time and resource. EZs operating Action Teams already had procedures in place for marketing to lone parents and some referrals were coming via this route. In the main, numbers were small.

Other EZs were finding partnership working took longer to establish than expected. Collaborative ventures with Sure Start projects had begun in many areas, but it was early days. Outreach in playgroups and family resource centres was reported to be working well, but required the dedicated input of staff and time. Plans to go into local schools had been temporarily shelved in some EZs due to staff being first required to undergo police checks.

In contrast to other areas, the EZ pioneering separate, dedicated lone parent delivery had seen huge volumes of new customers recruited. Cash gifts paid to lone parent customers for new clients they introduced may have influenced early take up. However, EZ staff attributed their success to separate premises, specialist staff and a comprehensive marketing strategy that included newspaper advertisements, publicity flyers and outreach visits to playgroups and Sure Start projects.

In most other EZs, and, in spite of some improvement, the low recruitment and referral of lone parents remained the key issue facing EZs. Few EZs were confident that planning assumptions would be met in the near future, leaving many concerned about the potential impact on performance targets and income.

Adviser methods and working practices

3.1 EZ approach and operating principles

The key features of EZs which emerged from the research include:

- a strong work focus;
- individual aspirations and goals drive jobsearch activity and support;
- support and provision structured according to individual barriers to employment, rather than programme eligibility or group characteristics;
- interventions determined individually on a client by client basis;
- an holistic approach to getting clients into work, addressing social, personal and financial barriers;
- significant adviser discretion and flexibility in the use of time and financial resources;
- provision mainly delivered in-house by personal advisers;
- selective and judicious use of externally contracted out provision, including skills training;
- support and provision which does not cease with the start of employment.

Perhaps less well documented and understood is how these core underlying tenets translate into working arrangements at the point of delivery. This chapter seeks to get beneath the surface of EZs to explore what the approach means for working practice at the client adviser interface. These techniques, methods and working practices of EZ advisers, were observed during meetings between advisers and new customers and addressed in interviews. Further discussion of the effectiveness and impact of these methods in relation to the new client groups is presented in succeeding chapters.

3.2 Time management

Fundamental to making the EZ model work is the ability of advisers to manage their own time. Managing their own caseloads and diaries gives advisers the capacity to respond differentially to individual clients presenting diverse barriers and needs. It also allows them the flexibility to see clients at very short notice and to vary the intensity of support through variable amounts of time spent with them at each meeting.

Clients were aware of and appreciated the flexibility available to advisers in determining how much time to spend with them. The ability to drop in without appointments was found by many to be extremely useful. Most clients were seeing their adviser at least weekly, but daily contact was not unusual, particularly when customers were applying for jobs and attending interviews. Meetings were said to vary from between ten minutes to more than an hour, depending on the stage clients were at and the help required. Meetings were felt by clients to be neither too long nor too short. The variability in length helped to reinforce the message that EZ clients are treated as individuals:

'I've come in at two o'clock and didn't leave until quarter past three...because [my EZ adviser] is interested to learn and find out all about me, and she has been explaining everything, like me [becoming] self-employed...understanding how I would be able to support my child, and work, the family tax credit and how I fill in all my forms. She [EZ adviser] has been brilliant.'

Lone parent

3.3 Assessing client needs

There is little formal assessment of clients' needs and barriers in most EZs. A common technique is for advisers to seek corroborating evidence of employability through setting clients job search tasks and monitoring their performance. Competence in basic skills, job application letters, form filling, use of computers, telephone manner and interview technique, for example, are all assessed through observing clients in live situations.

As with 25 plus clients, new customers may be categorised as 'slow', 'medium' or 'fast' lane. Such categories are not used in any formalised way but act as informal markers for the amount of time and financial resource which may be required to get the client into work. As such, they are as much an indication of a client's motivation and commitment to work as they are a hard measure of employability. There was no evidence that these categories were used as pretexts for restricting investment.

The new four week intensive period of assessment, reduced from the previous thirteen weeks, was considered by advisers to be sufficient to diagnose barriers and agree goals with new clients. Assessment is, however, on-going throughout EZ participation.

3.4 Negotiated, twin track approaches

Most EZs have developed techniques of negotiation to move customers into work, while moderating expectations of what job or jobs are reasonable and realistic to aspire to. These techniques lie at the heart of the EZ work first approach. Where goals are realistic but not immediately attainable, advisers may agree to a 'twin track'; providing assistance to help clients achieve their goal, but only once the client is in work. The offer of help, often financial incentives towards the cost of transport or training, is thus made conditional on acceptance of an initial job.

A variation in this technique is the 'dream job' and 'fall back' position. Here, the adviser agrees to help the customer achieve their dream job if the customer adopts a fall back position in the event that their ideal job fails to materialise. Where job goals are very ambitious, customers may be given set tasks and time limits to discover for themselves how realistic a goal it is:

'We're not going to smash someone's goal if they want to be a jet pilot, we'll give them a certain amount of time...When they have to come back to us with all the information and .. have found out ...that it's not going to work for them, then we'll discuss a change of direction and the majority...will...say okay that's fine.'

EZ adviser

3.5 Use of action plans

All EZs are required to complete action plans for clients. The type and use of action plans and their effectiveness varied between contractors. At one extreme, action plans are simple, one sided documents completed largely as an administrative necessity before clients move into stage two. Action plans whose primary role is to fulfil a contractual obligation, were viewed by many advisers as having limited value and benefit. Some customers viewed them as largely worthless documents, reminding them of school days.

At the other extreme, action plans are completed at every meeting in order to meticulously plan, structure and review the content and effectiveness of individual client interventions. Plans which identify conversations, specific agreed actions and milestones of achievement, appeared much more helpful in terms of motivating clients and keeping them focused on the task in hand than those that purely recorded goals. Some customers found them useful by breaking down job goals into manageable tasks and giving structure to their jobsearch:

'It's good to see certain deadlines, well self-set deadlines between the adviser and myself for getting me into gear.'

New Deal returner

A few clients believed that following the action plan had even been instrumental in them getting work:

'...as soon as it [the action plan] got set up, part of it was looking in the [EZ area] Post finding two or three jobs, phoning up to try and get an interview...if I wasn't using that I wouldn't be in this job.'

Lone parent

Somewhere between these two extremes, action plans function as useful case management tools, helping to uncover clients' barriers and containing a historical record of contact, agreed actions, goals and financial spend. This not only helps to review progress, but can also facilitate continuity of service in the event that client responsibility passes over from one adviser to another.

Clients are aware and grateful that money has been spent on them. However, many treated with apparent disinterest the cost and financial information contained in action plans. The inclusion of financial information on spend levels in the action plan did not, in itself, appear to motivate or change attitudes. More valuable, some clients found, was the non-monetary resource expended by advisers, such as time and understanding:

'Most effective was probably the personal support you got. Yeah. I mean the financial help was greatly needed at the time, but...looking back, confidence and knowledge of your own abilities is probably worth more than a few hundred pounds worth of financial support.'

New Deal returner

Advisers, too, felt that it was not so much the amount, nor even the availability of funding that was most important, but how money was spent and what accompanied it. Going shopping with a customer to help choose a new suit, for example, could help boost confidence and self esteem in preparation for a forthcoming job interview.

3.6 Use of In Work Benefit Calculation (IWBC)

EZs were systematically conducting In Work Benefit Calculations (IWBC) for all new client groups. The IWBC is usually carried out during stage one at the first or second induction meeting, usually with respect to a hypothetical job. It may then be repeated any number of times for a job vacancy the customer is intending to, or has applied for, or a job offer. For new customers, particularly young people, the technique was proving useful in highlighting common misconceptions about the relative financial benefits of working:

'It was quite useful actually because I thought that because I was having to pay my loan and stuff I thought there would have been no point in my working part-time but that benefit calculation showing me how much I would get, some off my housing benefit, but I would get some off my council tax benefit as well and I would get that thing called Working Tax Credit...and still be better off'

Early entrant 18-24

Advisers were also finding the IWBC a particularly effective tool in demonstrating to young people living with their parents how much better off they would be working.

3.7 Investment decisions

EZs have greater flexibility afforded to them in the use of financial resources than Jobcentre Plus. For example, the Personal Job Account (PJA), can be used to address any personal, social and financial barrier which, in the estimation of advisers, is interfering with getting or sustaining work. Unlike the Adviser Discretion Fund (ADF) in Jobcentre Plus, it can incentivise both the movement into and retention of work, typically funding the in-work purchase of driving lessons, mountain bikes and short, job specific courses. One contractor operates a 'points' system but rarely are cash incentives offered. Similarly, employer subsidies are used infrequently and only in specific justifiable cases, for example, to support wages during training.

Advisers generally control financial spend, subject to pre-set upper limits which operate in all EZs. Upper spending limits vary from one contractor to another, between £200 and £1,000 per client, before advisers must seek higher authorisation. Clients do exert influence but mainly through the commitment they show; advisers and customers do not jointly decide how to spend an allocated 'pot of money.' There is no absolute upper limit on the amount spent on any one client but the average maximum was reported to be around £1,000. Average spend is about £300, but the range varies from nought to upwards of £2,000. Spend at this high level is rare and generally restricted to cases where clients are setting up in business.

Word of mouth can get around about the availability of funding, but clients expecting a 'free gift' are generally disappointed to find it has strings attached. In the main, PJA expenditure appears cautious and judicious, with purchases designed to improve job outcomes and sustainability.

3.8 Working with harder to help customers

A potential risk of payment regimes based on job outcomes is that the investment of time and money is focused on 'easy hits' secured from job ready customers, to the detriment of harder to help individuals. A key issue here is definitions. Most advisers were reluctant to proffer a categorical definition, believing that harder to help customers existed among all client groups and across all levels of skill, experience and motivation. What appears to be important is allowing advisers the discretion to decide which clients are harder to help, and how to help them.

New customers that advisers were finding hard to help included:

- people with multiple employment barriers – basic skill deficiencies, no qualifications, limited or no work experience, criminal record;
- people with drug, alcohol or mental health conditions;
- graduates and professional people;
- well qualified and experienced people with a rigid or narrow view of acceptable employment;
- highly motivated individuals with serious or long term barriers – e.g. a chronic health problem, complex caring responsibilities, ESOL needs, unspent criminal record;
- those with chaotic or unstable lifestyles – homeless, on probation, drug taking, criminal activity etc;
- ‘difficult’ customers with no objective barriers but with confrontational personalities or a negative attitude to work.

Different provision, techniques and tactics may be used in respect of harder to help customers including referral to specialist provision such as Progress2Work, drug and alcohol counselling services, and basic skills and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses. Exceptionally, clients considered unfit for work, for example active drug users and people with mental health conditions, may be re-referred back to the Jobcentre, to a health professional or a drug rehabilitation service. This action was justified in terms of EZs’ clear mandate as a work first employment programme:

‘They rang up my doctor and put me on the sick, the woman at [the EZ],...and I was on anti-depressants for a while.’

New Deal returner

Some advisers struggled to know how best to help graduates and professional people, particularly those with former high earnings. With high expectations of the help they will get, some can be disappointed if, as they see it, EZs fail to deliver. Irrespective of which new client group they fell into, they were most critical of and least satisfied with the service they received:

‘...it very quickly seemed to me to turn into a repeat performance - [the EZ] was the Jobcentre all over again...you can tell there’s a bit more money sloshing around and it’s not so overtly bullying, but...I get the feeling they’re just geared for helping...redundant dockworkers or farm workers...they just don’t know how to handle graduates.’

Early entrant 25 plus

Advisers report that individuals closest to the labour market may receive financial spend and help more intensively over a much shorter period of time (fast lane) while

those furthest away may receive spend and help over a more protracted period (slow lane). While a few advisers did admit to focusing on 'easy hits,' generally speaking, the amount of time and money invested in any one client is determined by how responsive and demonstrably committed to working the client is. No evidence was found that those furthest away from work are systematically 'parked,' attract less resource overall or receive an inferior service.

Most advisers did however have new clients on their caseload for whom there was no realistic expectation of a job entry. These were mainly individuals with serious drug, alcohol and mental health conditions and a long history of unemployment. Many were repeat EZ clients. In such cases, the tendency was to work with them less intensively. Some advisers questioned whether such individuals can truly be classified as employable:

'I just don't think they should be here in the first place. I think there should be some kind of scheme...because this is purely job focused. We haven't had the training to deal with people [with] mental health issues.'

EZ adviser

At the time of the research, no new clients had reached the 'follow on' stage. However, advisers were dubious whether people with mental health conditions or serious substance dependencies, would benefit. Many believed such clients would remain difficult to help, even within the extended follow on period. Different treatment and separate provision was suggested as an alternative:

'...sometimes I think there should be some sort of separate situation that once they've been assessed and we know that they are here with heroin problems or they're drug or alcohol related problems, then they should be on a different programme. Our aim here is to get people back into employment and although we are having to spend time with these guys...they're not really employable.'

EZ adviser

3.9 Going the extra mile

Clients picked up on the fact that many EZ advisers were recent recruits, untainted by the 'employment programme attrition'. Jobcentre Plus advisers were seen to operate under stricter conditions and more constrained in terms of their capacity to tailor support to individual needs. In contrast, EZ advisers were perceived as having greater flexibility and many showed a willingness to 'go the extra mile.' Examples included meeting customers in different venues, taking out of hours telephone calls at evenings and week-ends, arranging and re-arranging meetings at short notice, and liaising directly with employers to get feed-back and advocate on behalf of their clients. Most important of all was the amount of time advisers were willing and able to invest in helping their clients get and keep work.

3.10 Reciprocal tasks

There is an expectation among EZ advisers that any serious investment of time or money needs to be matched by the client's own efforts. Reciprocal tasks required of clients include researching job entry criteria, registering with employment agencies and sourcing employers. These tasks have a number of useful functions. They require action on the part of the client, demonstrating motivation and drive towards achieving an identified job goal. It also gets practical tasks done more quickly thereby helping to speed the movement into work. Some advisers use this technique to test how committed a customer is to work towards a specific job they say interests them, or indeed to becoming employed more generally. As such, a client's willingness to carry out reciprocal tasks often proved a good indicator of their likely job success.

3.11 Working with employers

Through working with 25 plus clients, EZs have learnt the lesson that conflicts of interest can arise when the same staff deal with both customers and employers. Most therefore have dedicated staff to deal with employers, source vacancies and make speculative approaches. New client groups were receiving the same cautious handling as 25 plus clients when being referred to vacancies and placements. EZs are careful to screen potential job candidates to ensure a good fit between customers' skills and aptitudes, and employers' requirements.

EZ advisers also have direct contact with employers. Here they act as advocates for individual clients, liaising with potential employers, giving interview feed-back and providing continuity of service through supporting clients in work.

At the time of the research, new clients had not been referred to employers in sufficiently large numbers for any specific issues to have arisen. Employers were reportedly showing interest in the 18-24 client group, but it was too soon to say with what degree of success. Some EZs had begun to seek out family friendly employers amenable to employing lone parents, but approaches were tentative.

3.12 Aftercare

Advisers believe that job sustainability begins through placing customers into work they want to do. They therefore invest significant time and effort at the outset to ensure that individual client interests and aspirations, not referral to vacancies, drive the jobsearch process. When clients have moved into work, they may receive on going support, known as 'aftercare.' EZs can provide this help for as long as they choose. Outcome payments are due if customers remain in work for 13 weeks.

Aftercare mainly consists of out of hours contact and in-work financial support. One EZ contractor had created a new aftercare consultant post to offer dedicated in-work support during evenings and week-ends. Other EZs operated free telephone

helplines. EZ advisers also provide continuity of care into employment. Aftercare was felt to be particularly effective during the first few weeks of employment when most problems were seen to arise. Preventing drop out through negotiating directly with employers on behalf of individual clients is one useful technique:

'We had a lady that...went for the job on nights in Morrison's. She walked out within 5 minutes of starting...any other employer would be really peeved off ...the employer rung us up, she's walked out blah, blah. Ok I guaranteed to get an answer back within 24 hours...We got the member in, what was the problem? I was just scared, I changed my mind, I don't want nights...I...had a word with the employer [he] quite conveniently opened up a vacancy for her to start the next day, on days, not on nights, in the department where she wanted...'

Employer Liaison Manager

Financial help during this period can also smooth the transition from benefits to employment at a time when financial exposure is at its greatest. In-work incentives are also used to pay for training and other benefits designed to improve job progression and sustainability.

Recognising that some customers may need support through a number of unattractive positions before achieving a more desirable or secure job, some EZs were experimenting with a longer-term approach to aftercare. Selective support was being offered to certain customers beyond the 13 week sustainability mark:

'We've got somebody coming in today at 4 o'clock...I think it will be about 17 weeks now. He's coming in now and he's looking for other work. He's still in his driving job but he's looking for other work...'

EZ adviser

It was too soon to say whether or in what ways this extended support was proving effective with new clients, or how feasible it was to offer support longer-term, given the EZ funding model. This will be explored further in phase two of the research.

4 New Deal returners

4.1 Eligibility of New Deal returners for EZ help

In EZ areas, Jobcentre Plus staff refer jobseekers who are aged between 18 and 24 years old, have previously participated in New Deal for Young People (NDYP) and have been in receipt of income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) continuously for six months or more. Young people have a one in three chance of returning to NDYP, even if they get a job on leaving⁷ and around 40 per cent of jobs secured on New Deal are sustained for less than 13 weeks⁸. EZs are intended to offer an alternative approach to this group of young people who would otherwise be due for repeat referral to NDYP. Participation for this group is mandatory.

4.2 Characteristics of New Deal returners

Interviews with, and observations of, advisers and clients showed New Deal returners to be a relatively homogeneous group. Most had left school aged 16 or earlier with few or no qualifications. For the majority, their employment history was characterised by sporadic periods of short-term employment interspersed with periods of unemployment. Key employment barriers included lack of direction, low motivation and loss of self confidence:

'I am not a highly motivated person, you could say. Other than that confidence is a bit of a problem for me. I am usually OK when I get into it, but it's the confidence to actually go into the new working environment.'

New Deal returner

⁷ The experience of young people contrasts with the experience of those over the age of 25, significantly fewer of whom return to New Deal if they have been successful in securing work first time around. See for example, A New Deal for All: Report of the National Employment Panel's Working Group on New Deal 25 Plus 2004.

⁸ S Martin in A Westward (ed) New Deal 2 The Industrial Society.

Housing problems were common, with advisers reporting many customers to be of 'no fixed abode.' Poor literacy and numeracy and dyslexia were also reportedly widespread and transport difficulties figured highly.

In spite of these problems, the vast majority of young people had recent experience of paid work in the open labour market, though few had sustained jobs for periods longer than six months. Employment was predominantly within the low paid, manual and low-skilled service sector and often secured through agencies. Most young people had held a variety of different jobs, rarely demonstrating a clear pattern of employment within one particular sector. Work in factories, warehouses, shops and on building sites was commonly cited, much of it temporary.

4.3 Advisers' views of New Deal returners

Young, malleable, open to persuasion, and without the added complications long-term unemployment can bring, EZ advisers were, for the most part, finding New Deal returners a relatively straightforward group to help into work. Most advisers said they found young people easier to help than 25 plus clients and only a minority of advisers reported difficulty in engaging them. Employers, too, were reported by EZ staff to look upon this client group more favourably, with some even willing to overlook petty criminal offences such as shoplifting and driving convictions. The shorter periods of time young people have been unemployed was believed to be a key reason:

'I personally find the 18-24 year olds quite easy to work with because I can relate to them...in my head they're still young enough to be moulded if you like and also they're young enough for employers to be able to look at them and think well they've not been unemployed for 15 years.'

EZ adviser

'I have to say the 18-24 year olds I have found them a lot easier to work with than the 25 plus that I am used to. I can generalise and say that I find that they are more open to any help that you can give them, they are not as set in their ways...'

EZ adviser

4.4 Attitudes to work among New Deal returners

Virtually all New Deal returners said they wanted to work and the vast majority expected to be working in a year's time. Advisers concurred with these findings, believing most referred young people to be capable of and willing to work, key indicators of the likelihood of them going on to do so. However, many felt that the value and perceived benefits of working varied among clients, depending on their circumstances. Sporadic work was believed to provide the means to pay for specific items or activities, for example, or to relieve boredom. Periodic unemployment, for

some, was considered to be a 'lifestyle choice' allowing time for recreational interests⁹.

Advisers reported that young people living with parents were more likely to exhibit these attitudes and behaviours, and less likely to be working. The research largely concurred with this. Though not a representative sample, young people living with parents were much less likely to be working than those living independently. In explanation, advisers cited the influence of inter-generational unemployment which they felt could predispose and accustom young people to a life without work:

'It's [unemployment] very generational. It's very much that they're set in their ways, 'my mum and dad have been unemployed for years, so it doesn't really matter that I am.' We try and take them out of that pattern... They're listening to us telling them, 'you should go into work, you're going to have a better life for yourself and for your family... Then they're going back home and they're hearing something totally different from people that they trust – their parents.'

EZ adviser

Others believed that living with parents may simply help to cushion young people from the worst privations of unemployment.

Previous research indicates that family circumstances are crucial to the experience of unemployment⁹. Proactive parents can place pressure on young people to look for work. On the other hand, workless families may teach young people some of the strategies necessary to cope with the boredom and financial hardship of worklessness including periodic employment, signing off benefits and working 'on the side'.

It would be wrong to overstate the importance of a 'culture of worklessness'. Young peoples' work behaviour is strongly influenced by the labour market conditions they face. Frequent movements in and out of jobs may be as much a product of flexible labour markets as they are of young peoples' or parents' attitudes. Job insecurity and immobility, rather than a 'negative attitude' to work or even necessarily a lack of skills, may thus predispose some young people to intermittent work patterns:

'I'm willing to accept a job that I don't like as long as it's on...a fixed term contract, then I know when it's going to end. I'm not accepting an open ended job that I won't like and that I can't get out of.'

New Deal returner

Few young people interviewed enjoyed agency work which they saw as being poorly remunerated and with virtually no opportunities for progression. However, most were willing to undertake temporary and fixed term contracts because they boosted income in the short-term before allowing a legitimate return to benefits. Most risky were 'dead end' jobs paying low wages and offering no prospect of progression.

⁹ A Furlong, F Carrmel, Vulnerable young men in fragile labour markets. Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2004.

Leaving such jobs could occasion long periods without income, with all its attendant problems:

'It did happen to me in the past, it happened to me twice actually... basically I had come out of a job and I had to re-apply for Housing Benefit, re-apply for JSA and... I can't apply for Housing Benefit until I get JSA. JSA takes what three weeks? That's three weeks without any rent cheque and... you've got a backlog of rent because of it and food and electric...'

New Deal returner

Advisers confirmed that being trapped in a job with no prospects or possibility of progression was among young peoples' most common fears:

'... I think that is one of their biggest fears... 'a dead end job', which a lot of mine call them, they like to know that they are going somewhere.'

EZ adviser

4.5 EZ provision, methods and working practices

Using a variety of techniques, much of advisers' time was spent cajoling and motivating clients to promote a return to work. Rather than move them quickly into jobs with no prospects, some advisers were persuading young people to think longer-term in an effort to steer them towards employment offering better conditions and prospects:

'It can be all about a short-term goal that they're looking to do now, but what you want to find out is what is the long term goal?... where would they see themselves in 5 years time?... the 18-24... client group... haven't necessarily got the aspirations to want to do something more and I think it's our role to encourage them to do that.'

EZ adviser

Practical assistance with jobsearch, job applications and interview technique was standard practice. Housing problems were reported to be common among this group. Some advisers were liaising with housing associations and local authorities, frequently over many weeks, to help secure suitable accommodation for their clients. The PJA was also being used as an incentive to pay for housing bonds and deposits if clients found work. Other uses of the PJA included clothing for interviews, haircuts and dental work. Relative to the cost, items purchased through the PJA could have a sizeable impact on 18-24 customers:

'I just got two shirts and a tie, £20 each for the shirts and £30 for my tie. But when I put that tie on my neck... and a nice white shirt and I put my suit on over the top and I walked out that day, I felt like a million bucks mate, no-one could tell me anything. I was ready to sell myself, like I was ready to pitch the person who was interviewing me... I was like full of energy.'

New Deal returner

Formal diagnostic tests of ability do not conform to current practice in many EZs. However, where basic skills assessment training had been carried out, this was reported to have stood advisers in good stead. Here, advisers were able to help young people themselves, rather than referring them to external course providers.

IWBC for the 18-24 client group were being used as standard. These were proving to be helpful in overcoming attitudinal barriers among young people regarding the financial benefits of working:

'It was very useful because I've got this misconception... which I was concerned about because I've got a bank loan... and they said you won't have to pay that really unless you've got a certain income, it eased my mind a bit... they said I would be about £100 a week [better off]... because I thought that a lot of it would be taken by tax.'

New Deal returner

There was some evidence that in-work incentives may be helping to improve job sustainability among young people who could otherwise lose interest with work:

'Normally, if I had started work, I would get bored easily. I wasn't actually bothered about keeping it but knowing that some of the things [the EZ] can still help me with, even though I'm working... it's helped made me stay.'

New Deal returner

'I thought once I'd started work that would be it... but they've carried on helping me... when my driving ban's over... he [adviser] says that they will send me on this course... and I've got a lot of work needing doing on my teeth, and ... he says that if I've been working for 13 weeks then they can pay for that ... So they've helped me out no end, which I didn't think they would do once I'd started work, but they have... I'd probably have whacked this job on the head by now if it wasn't for the help that I'm getting.'

New Deal returner

4.6 Experiences of EZs

Many New Deal returners set out their views of EZs in the context of their previous experience on New Deal. In the vast majority of cases, these clients were those who had not gained or sustained work as a result of participating in New Deal. Their perceptions and experiences are therefore likely to be very different to those who had achieved a successful outcome on the New Deal programme.

Most interviewees perceived NDYP to lack work focus and felt the programme served to benefit option providers more than customers. Those placed on the

Employment Option were more likely to have positive views, mainly because they found work, but these young people were in a minority:

'All I can remember is sitting in an office room with about 10 other people who weren't interested in working and all we were doing was writing, filling out forms, writing CVs and replying to a fake job...It was like going back to school...depressing...'

New Deal returner

Many felt the Jobcentre Plus regime was premised on the notion that they were 'work shy' or 'benefit scroungers' with no interest in working. This appeared to have compromised and limited the scope of the whole PA customer relationship from the outset. Feeling de-personalised, like 'a number' or 'a statistic' in the system, was a common view:

'At the Jobcentre, they never explained anything at all. To them, I was just a number'

New Deal returner

'The thing with the Jobcentre is they see so many people every day signing on and it's like you're just one of the numbers basically.'

New Deal returner

The emphasis of Jobcentre Plus on job vacancy submissions appeared to be a key factor in explaining negative views. For some clients, the referrals to vacancies which they had little interest in applying for and rarely succeed in getting, had undermined confidence, reduced jobsearch activity and adversely affected their performance at interviews:

'...if you're getting jobs thrown at you – from experience I've applied for every job going and I've got no replies back, so that in the end, I couldn't be bothered to be honest.'

New Deal returner

Overall, participating in NDYP was reported by many New Deal returners, the vast majority of whom did not achieve a successful outcome, as having been a largely ineffectual experience.

Few New Deal returners had prior knowledge of the EZ or knew what to expect before being referred. The vast majority knew that attendance was mandatory and sanctions could be applied. This did not seem to perturb them unduly. Most simply had no or very low expectations and assumed it would simply be 'more of the same':

'I've done a lot of training courses in the past and I just thought oh it's just another way of killing some time for the Jobcentre really, another excuse to palm me off to someone else. I went there with...very little hope of doing anything at all to be honest with you.'

New Deal returner

Once referred, the freedom to exercise job choice based on personal interest and aspirations came as a revelation. This difference alone was seen to represent a major departure from NDYP and Jobcentre Plus:

'I didn't get any help from the Jobcentre it was...going there once a fortnight and signing on and it was the same old jobs...They just wanted me to take any job...regardless. There was too much pressure to take jobs that you didn't want...[At the EZ] we were talking about...what sort of jobs I wanted to do, rather than telling me what I should be looking for - it's a very big contrast...'

New Deal returner

Aiming for work that interested clients and provided progression opportunities was seen by them to be infinitely more productive an approach than being forced into what many saw as 'dead end jobs.' Simply put, the more they liked the job, the more likely they felt they would be willing to stay:

'With the Jobcentre, all they want to do is find you a job...[the EZ] help you try and find a job you like...If you get a job you like, you'll stick at it.'

New Deal returner

The type of jobs young people gain with EZ help and the extent to which these jobs are sustained are key areas to be followed up during the next phase of research. Previous research showed that 25 plus jobseekers were gaining the same kind of jobs under EZs as they were under Jobcentre Plus provision.

Many New Deal returners also appreciated what they considered to be the stronger job focus in EZs:

'I just think it's the concentrating on getting you into work straight away as quickly as they can, rather than doing training and stuff.'

New Deal returner

The sense of being treated as an individual, as an adult, with respect and as an equal, was appreciated. The service was reported as being personal and EZ advisers sympathetic to clients' circumstances and aspirations:

'They [EZ] treated me as an adult and an individual, with respect really, not just another...lazy unemployed person at the Jobcentre, which just doesn't give you very much confidence to do anything.'

New Deal returner

'It's very personal...it's not people looking down their nose at you because you're on the dole. It's someone looking at you and talking to you as a person, no matter what you're wearing and...what you look like.'

New Deal returner

'The [EZ] treat me as a person not as somebody who is just coming in and doesn't want to work.'

New Deal returner

Young people also mentioned the greater amount of time and effort EZ advisers were able and willing to spend helping them. A few believed this was the only real difference between EZs and Jobcentre Plus. It should be noted that some of these clients were referring to their experiences of the JSA fortnightly signing regime delivered by front line staff along with the range of Jobcentre Plus services, rather than NDYP:

'[EZ] have got time for you, ... you make an appointment and like you could be there for 10 minutes...or an hour...there's no rush. Whereas in the Jobcentre it's a set time and when your interview's over, it's over...you've got no one to go back to if you've got problems.'

New Deal returner

'I would say, like, both are about the same. It's just that the Jobcentre haven't got the time for you really.'

New Deal returner

For most others, the evident commitment of advisers seemed palpably different. Perhaps surprisingly, many young people liked the overt enthusiasm, even pushiness of EZ advisers. Most seemed unperturbed by and many valued the intensity of the support offered, equating in some instances to daily contact or meetings of an hour or more. Such intense contact helped many to structure their day, provide routine and spur them into action. Their adviser's enthusiasm for the job some young people found infectious:

Interviewer: Do you think it was worthwhile you coming today?

ND returner: Yes

Interviewer: Why?

ND returner: Because I'm confident that [EZ adviser] is going to get me a job.

Interviewer: Why are you confident about that?

ND returner: Because he's confident about it

The flexible and holistic support EZs offer which takes into account individual needs and circumstances was viewed positively:

'He ...sorted out our deposit for this flat...It was a bit unbelievable at first...but I think they realise that you've got so many parts to your life.. you've got work life but there's also other things going on...'

New Deal returner

Only a small minority of interviewees had an unsatisfactory experience and a stated preference for NDYP or Jobcentre Plus. This was mainly due to differences of opinion and personality clashes with advisers, rather than difficulties with the EZ approach:

'...it's not [the EZ], it's the person she has referred me to. I'm not getting on with her at all...I'd rather be on New Deal in the Jobcentre to be honest.'

New Deal returner

The most common source of client dissatisfaction was regarding the purchase of driving lessons or other incentive, which for some clients, had failed to materialise.

4.7 What appears to be working for young people

Being able to exercise choice and the sense that their job preferences will be given a sympathetic hearing, appears to help motivate young people who have participated in New Deal before, to find work. It is perhaps the strongest indication to these clients that programmes are designed with their best interests in mind. Having choice, and the belief that they will be helped into work, may also counter any resentment they may have regarding the mandatory nature of EZ participation.

Young people also seem to respond well to being treated as responsible adults who want to work and improve their lives. The personalised and individually tailored approach of EZs helps to boost confidence and self esteem, and the intensity of the support and 'pushiness' of advisers also seems to inject greater pace and purpose into job search.

Early evidence suggests that techniques to incentivise work appear to be engaging this client group. The IWBC seems effective at addressing financial barriers in the transition to employment, particularly when used in combination with the PJA. Options such as job tasters, work trials and placements can also help clients to manage both the financial and psychological risks of moving off benefits and into work:

'One of the good things [about placements] is that you don't come off benefit...you don't have to re-sign on and...you're left...with no money and ...a backlog of rent because of it...So I think the placement was a very good idea because you don't have to go through all that hassle.'

New Deal returner

There are tentative indications, too, that in work support and incentives may be helping to overturn previous work attitudes and patterns of behaviour:

'I'm just more willing to stay at work now. When I was on the social I wasn't bothered whether I got a job or not...I've done a bit of cash in hand work before and...and I just knew I could never afford to...do the courses and with [the EZ] helping me to get my ticket now I know that if I keep at this job until August and then I get my ticket...Even if this job finishes, if I've got my ticket I can go and find another job somewhere else.'

New Deal returner

Claims by a small number of customers that promises of in-work support and incentives had failed to materialise, together with the thirteen week cut off period for in-work support, could affect satisfaction and job sustainability over the longer-term. These will be important to monitor in phase two of the research. To date, however, most young people seemed positive about the help they had received from EZs.

EZ support seems to work by enabling young people to access personal, practical and financial resources through which they can become or remain attached to the labour market. This may be particularly important for more disadvantaged young people whose circumstances preclude access to the practical help and advice often necessary to getting and keeping work. At its best, this support may help to overcome the barriers and instabilities these young people can face in the present labour market, leading to more secure and better paid jobs.

While early findings in respect of New Deal returners are mainly positive, previous research suggests that a degree of caution should be exercised in reading too much into their significance at this juncture. The evaluation of StepUp¹⁰, for example, showed similarly high levels of satisfaction among customers. As with EZ customers, many cited gains in motivation, confidence and self esteem as a result of the perceived greater job focus of the programme compared with New Deal. This could indicate that it is the fresh approach and perceived departure from NDYP which is most influential. What will be important to monitor is whether reported attitudinal gains are sustained, and the extent to which the jobs secured by young people offer better conditions, security and opportunities for progression than those they can get without EZ help.

Previous research also shows that getting work generally presents fewer problems for this age group than keeping it¹¹. It also indicates that low skilled and poorly paid work rarely provides a bridge into more secure sectors of the labour market¹². If EZs are to improve on the performance of Jobcentre Plus and New Deal, they need to counter rather than contribute to patterns of churning in and out of temporary, casual and low paid work.

Early evidence suggests EZs are using their flexibilities to help break the cycle of churning through enabling people to stay in work, not just move them into jobs. It is too soon to say whether their methods are working. During phase two of the research, job sustainability and job progression among New Deal returners will be key areas of interest to follow up on.

¹⁰ Step Up is a pilot programme offering New Deal returners a full-time subsidised job. See Evaluation of Step Up: Interim Report DWP 2004.

¹¹ See for example A Furlong, F Carrmel, Vulnerable young men in fragile labour markets. Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2004.

¹² See Max Nathan, Getting people attached to work Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion 2002.

5 Early entrants aged 18-24

5.1 Eligibility criteria for 18-24 early entrants

In the Employment Zones (EZs) single provider areas, unemployed clients aged 18-24 whose barriers and circumstances are deemed by a Jobcentre Plus adviser to place them at significant disadvantage in the labour market are entitled to join the EZ earlier than the normal six months qualifying period, provided they are in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)¹³. At this stage, they volunteer to join. However, once they agree to start on the EZ, their participation becomes mandatory and subject to the same sanctions regime as New Deal returners.

5.2 Characteristics of 18-24 early entrants

Young early entrants exhibited similar characteristics and employment histories to 18-24 year old New Deal returners, but had more pronounced barriers to work. The majority of early entrants reported that they left school without any, or only low graded, qualifications. A significant minority also had health problems which they said were a barrier to work. All but one young early entrant said they had participated in New Deal on at least one previous occasion.

5.3 Adviser views of 18-24 early entrants

Most advisers did not differentiate or see major differences between New Deal returners and young early entrants. Indeed, as noted in section, 5.5, some advisers may initially be unaware of a clients' early entry status. However, most confirmed that, as a group, early entrants generally had more and more severe barriers to employment than New Deal returners. The most common barriers they mentioned included health conditions, basic skill deficiencies, learning difficulties, communication problems and criminal convictions' including possession of drugs and shop lifting. Many early entrants also had housing problems and among those that could drive,

¹³ The full list of early entry criteria is included in the appendix.

few had a clean licence; many were reported to have points, driving convictions or bans.

5.4 Decision to participate

Early entrants can be categorised into three distinct groups in terms of how they came to join the EZ. The first group, a minority, were those with prior knowledge of the EZ who requested a referral from their Jobcentre Plus adviser. For them, the choice to participate was both voluntary and positive. Word-of-mouth recommendation from a relative or peer group member appears to have been influential in many cases:

'A few of my friends had been there and told me [the EZ] was really good, so I wanted to give them a try and see what they could do with me.'

Early entrant aged 18-24

The second group, again a minority, comprised customers reportedly told to attend by a Jobcentre Plus adviser. Some customers believed participation was mandatory, having reportedly been given an ultimatum by their adviser either to join the EZ or have their benefits stopped:

'...they stopped it straight away for four weeks and I didn't have any money. ...One of the [EZ] advisers said to me 'you don't have to do it if you don't want to do it.'...but...they [Jobcentre] stopped my money then because I didn't want to do it...So you couldn't do owt about it because they'd stop your money.'

Early entrant aged 18-24

Others experienced subtle coercion rather than pressure. Such customers often had no particular objection to joining but felt that it was the Jobcentre adviser's decision, rather than their own choice, that led to their participation:

Interviewer: What did you know about [the EZ] before you went?

Customer: [My Jobcentre adviser] explained to me they trained you to get back into work and see if they could help. There were better options [through the EZ].

Interviewer: Was it your decision to go [to the EZ] or was it the adviser's?

Customer: The adviser's.

Interviewer: What did you think about that? Were you happy to go along?

Customer: Yeah, anything to help me get back to work.

The third group, the majority of customers, were recommended or advised to participate by their Jobcentre Plus adviser, often to access additional funding or specialist support. These customers felt they had exercised choice in joining:

'It was me who made myself go to [the EZ]. They didn't say to me 'right you've been signing on for such and such, you've got no ambition'...I said right 'I want to do music...I need help [to] do my music', so I went to [the EZ]'

Early entrant aged 18-24

'I asked for funding to start my own business, [the Jobcentre] said we can't because we've already given you money for the driving, so we'll transfer you over to [the EZ].'

Early entrant aged 18-24

'It was by my choice...it was either carry on signing on or go on to [the EZ] and try and find a job through the [EZ], so I decided to do the [EZ]...'

Early entrant aged 18-24

Virtually all these early entrants seemed to understand the mandatory nature of participation, once the decision to join had been made:

'They [Jobcentre Plus] did say once I've joined, if I was to leave, then the whole claim would stop.'

Early entrant aged 18-24

5.5 Reason for early entry

The specific reason for early entry, and indeed whether or not a customer had early entry status, was not always apparent to adviser or customer. EZ advisers reported that information identifying early entry status and criteria was often not forthcoming from Jobcentre Plus.

'There's nothing actually when they're referred to say that they're an early entry [or] why they're an early entry...I think it's an issue that we need to sort out in-house so that we are aware.'

EZ adviser

In some instances, this may have resulted in the particular employment barrier facing an early entrant to have been overlooked. One customer, for example, had a serious and chronic health condition (haemophilia) which represented a major barrier to employment. However, he claimed the EZ adviser had no knowledge of his condition and no specialist help was arranged:

Customer: Most employers don't want to take responsibility for what kind of blood I've got....

Interviewer: Did she [EZ adviser] refer you to any health organisation that could help you with your condition at all?

Customer: No.

Interviewer: No. Did she seem to know a lot about it?

Customer: She didn't know nothing, I had to tell her...

Interviewer: Do you think she understood?

Customer: No, I don't think she knew what it meant.

This was all the more frustrating for this particular customer who believed he had been mandated to attend the EZ:

'I didn't want to go but they [the Jobcentre] told me to go...I wanted a job, I told them I wanted a job instead of going to [the EZ] and they said, 'oh, you've got to go, otherwise we'll stop your money.'

Early entrant aged 18-24

5.6 EZ provision, methods and working practices

Essentially the same provision and adviser methods were being used for young early entrants as for New Deal returners. More emphasis was placed on help to improve basic skills and tackling the housing problems said to be more prevalent among this group. Clients were generally persuaded to get a job first, with financial help to pay flat deposits and bonds offered as an incentive.

5.7 Experiences of EZs

The majority of young early entrants found the EZ service more flexible than Jobcentre Plus. Jobcentre staff were seen to operate under stricter guidelines which was believed to impair their ability to offer a customer focused service. Here again it is important to note that many respondents were speaking about the range of Jobcentre Plus programmes and services, including signing on for benefits, and not just the EZ equivalent provision:

'They have a lot more rigid rules and regulations which they have to follow which in turn means they have to be as cold as ice...they're not allowed to get any personality out...the staff don't like working there [at the Jobcentre] which you can see clearly when you walk into the place...a lot of them are just there because it's a job.'

Early entrant aged 18-24

'I much prefer [the EZ], I wish the Jobcentre was like [the EZ], because if it was, I think there would be a lot more people who would be in work or at least ...closer to working than they are now.'

Early entrant aged 18-24

This contrasted with the discretion and flexibility available to EZ advisers to deliver a more tailored service taking into account clients' individual needs and circumstances:

'I went in...explained to her that we needed electricity desperately and...she said, 'right, there you go, there's ten pounds out of your funds for something which is essential.' But if it was the dole, they'd have said no'

Early entrant aged 18-24

Some customers with poor health found the EZ to be more understanding and accommodating of their condition, prepared to re-arrange meetings at short notice:

'When I'm in pain with my stomach, if I've got a meeting with [EZ adviser] I phone him up and he says that's not a problem, we can make other arrangements.'

Early entrant aged 18-24

The lack of personal service and practical assistance in Jobcentres was particularly problematic for customers with poor reading, writing and IT skills:

'They've [Jobcentre Plus] got...no one that's ready to help you with their skills, like help you with your CV or help you with interview techniques, there [is] no one there ready to transfer their knowledge to help you get a job, they're just using their knowledge to get you through the system.'

Early entrant aged 18-24

Clients who admitted to basic skill problems found the EZs hands on help with putting together CVs, applying for jobs and interview techniques invaluable. One customer with dyslexia and learning difficulties struggled with the 'self-service' approach of Jobcentre Plus, comparing this with the one to one help on offer in EZs:

'The [EZ adviser] is more one to one, and down there [the Jobcentre] they just don't bother, like before I asked him [Jobcentre adviser] to do a job search and [he] said 'oh just touch that screen out there! ...I can't read half the stuff.'

Early entrant aged 18-24

A minority of customers stated a preference for Jobcentre Plus or perceived the service provided by EZ to be no different from that on offer at the Jobcentre:

'It's what the Jobcentre would do, it's just like the same.'

Early entrant aged 18-24

However, this particular customer was one of a very small minority who preferred the Jobcentre environment to the EZ:

'[The EZ is] just like four desks and just like people sit in there and there's nobody else in there, so it's a bit quiet...[in the Jobcentre] there's more people around.'

Early entrant aged 18-24

While for most customers, EZ participation had not yet led to direct job outcomes, many reported they had moved closer to meeting their goals and aspirations as a result of attending and most were confident that they would, in time, secure sustainable work:

'In the long-term that place [the EZ] will get people back to work a lot faster...and people will stay in work a lot longer.'

Early entrant aged 18-24

Among the few customers from this group that had secured employment at the time of the fieldwork, many felt that the EZ support had been instrumental. Others were more positive about future job prospects:

'I'm not saying I'm going to be in this job now for the rest of my life, but once I've got that driving licence, it's a major help. I can think 'right, I can look up a bit now'. It's like another step up a ladder...They've taken me one more step [to] thinking 'right, I can get a better job now.'

Early entrant aged 18-24

5.8 What appears to be working for 18-24 early entrants

During phase one of the research, other than help with basic skills, there was limited evidence of specialist support or provision for early entrants aged 18-24. The number of EZ customers in this category was also relatively small. Those interviewed were receiving essentially the same provision and services as other customers and appeared to be responding positively to EZ help in much the same way as New Deal returners. The individual, client centred approach and flexible delivery of EZs was apparently proving useful, together with practical help in jobsearch tasks. Phase two will look in further detail at the help these customers received and its role in helping them secure sustained employment.

6 Early entrants aged 25 plus

6.1 Eligibility criteria for 25 plus early entrants

Clients aged 25 and over in EZ single provider areas who are disadvantaged in the labour market are entitled to join the EZ early provided they are in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). As with younger early entrants, they volunteer to join the EZ. However, once they agree to start, their participation becomes mandatory and subject to the same sanctions regime as other 25 plus customers. The same early entry eligibility criteria listed in the appendix apply to 25 plus customers.

6.2 Characteristics of 25 plus early entrants

Older early entrants interviewed and observed represented a broad range of individuals who fell into three main categories:

- those with a sporadic employment history; short-term employment interspersed with relatively short periods of unemployment. Customers in this category comprised the largest group. Some had participated in the EZ once before; others were participating for the first time;
- those with a limited employment history; protracted periods of unemployment punctuated by repeat participation in employment programmes. All these customers had participated in the EZ on at least one previous occasion and most had also taken part in New Deal 25 Plus;
- those with a relatively stable and long history of employment with minimal or no previous periods of unemployment and no prior involvement in an EZ. This group was in a minority.

Employment barriers included drug and alcohol problems, criminal records, health problems, skills mismatch and transport difficulties. A large proportion of older clients in the two former categories lived with one or both parents, and a number had lost their driving licences through drink driving offences.

6.3 Advisers' views of 25 plus early entrants

Advisers broadly corroborated these client characteristics. Most believed older early entrants to be a heterogeneous group with diverse employment barriers and needs. Many were considered to be harder to help, even those with a history of sustained employment and no prior involvement in EZs. Such customers were often highly motivated to work but also had fixed views on acceptable jobs, pay and working conditions. Most wanted full time permanent jobs and few were willing to consider part-time, temporary or agency work making them less open to the twin track approach:

'I didn't want to go agency because you're in one place for two weeks, another ...for three...I want a job where I can save up and plan and pay into a mortgage...I want to know what I'm doing, know where I'm going. It may seem pretty menial, it may seem the same thing day in, day out, 9 to 5 or whatever it is, but it's a job and it's a secure one, a pretty well paid one.'

Early entrant aged 25 plus

'I think basically the reason why I'm not working at the moment is I want to do a job which I...enjoy and I'm earning a reasonable pay cheque...I think I'm getting a bit more choosy because I don't want to end up stuck in a job where they ..pay minimum wage and you know you're doing something you're not enjoying and...you don't want to be there for any length of time.'

Early entrant aged 25 plus

Clients with a long history of unemployment and repeat periods of participation in employment programmes were viewed as among the hardest to help. Some were just 'difficult,' having no identifiable employment barriers but a negative attitude, obstructive manner or confrontational personality. Others had serious and long standing barriers including drug and alcohol dependencies and mental health conditions. Some advisers believed such clients may have been referred early because Jobcentre Plus were at a loss to know what to do with them, or how best to help. EZ help was felt to be inappropriate for this group due to its strong job focus and relatively short time frame of intervention.

Early entrants returning to the EZ having failed to find work the first or second time around were considered to be particularly difficult to move off into jobs. This is borne out by previous research which shows that a previous failed attempt on New Deal 25 plus was more likely to result in subsequent failure¹⁴. Unlike young New Deal returners, repeat participation by older groups is more likely to be indicative of serious and chronic barriers to work.

¹⁴ See Hasluck, C, The Re-engineered New Deal 25 Plus: A Summary of Recent Evaluation Evidence, 2002, and A New Deal for All: Report of the National Employment Panel's Working Group on New Deal 25 plus 2004.

6.4 Reason for early entry

Few EZ advisers were aware of customers' entry status and eligibility criteria at the time of referral. As with the younger early entrants, many customers were referred without any supporting paperwork which would indicate their early entry status or the criteria for which they were eligible:

'When someone comes in and says 'I've been unemployed for the last year'. There's nothing actually when they're referred to say that they're an early entry [or] why they're an early entry.'

EZ adviser

Although most customers were familiar with the term 'early entrant,' few knew why they were eligible for EZ support, giving a variety of reasons for why they were allowed to join. Some customers believed they had been able to join the EZ due to a lack of qualifications, others because of the length of time unemployed, or their age:

'I was told that I could qualify because I was fifty.'

Early entrant aged 25 plus

One client said he had picked a category from a list shown to him at the Jobcentre:

'I was showed a book and they [Jobcentre adviser] said if anything applies to you...we'll put the code down and you can become an early entrant. The one I picked...was drug and alcohol.'

Early entrant aged 25 plus

Another customer, a graduate but with a long history of unemployment, believed he was referred for being 'difficult':

'I think they [Jobcentre Plus] were basically just trying to get rid of me because I was awkward.'

Early entrant aged 25 plus

6.5 Decision to participate

Virtually all 25 plus early entrants understood the specific conditions attached to joining the EZ; that the decision was voluntary but, thereafter, participation would be mandatory:

'They put me back on the dole for three months and as soon as that was finished I went to see them and said 'can I go back to [the EZ]?' They said 'yes, but it's mandatory, you are not allowed back [once you've started]'...

Early entrant aged 25 plus

'...I didn't have to go but then again I told him it was what I wanted to do.'

Early entrant aged 25 plus

Many customers made an active decision to join to enable them to access EZ funding. A few asked to re-join the EZ to complete a training programme started during a previous stint. These clients had a clear idea of the work they wanted to do and simply needed financial help. Clients were often advised by Jobcentre Plus advisers that EZs were better placed to pay for training courses, clothing and other items clients needed to facilitate the move into work:

'She [Jobcentre Plus adviser] just said there's a new scheme out and I think you'd be better suited to that...they'll be able to help you with the courses ...She said she wouldn't have been able to authorise [paying for the course].'

Early entrant 25 plus

'I asked the Jobcentre if the DHSS would help me if I found work for anything like clothing and stuff like that. They said that [the EZ] would and they referred me to them.'

Early entrant 25 plus

Some clients had received positive feedback about EZs from friends, relatives or third party and specifically requested a referral:

'My partner, he was at [the EZ]...and I went with him one day just for company and I was surprised at how well they helped him find a job...it was brilliant what they did...they had time for him...then when I signed on myself I asked if I could be referred.'

Early entrant 25 plus

Clients who had participated in the EZ before were a mix of those motivated by a previous positive experience and those recycling through the system. Among the former group, most chose to join again because they had formerly benefited from EZ help, most finding work:

'Well, it works for you once, so you try it again...It worked for me previously and I believe it should work again. I'm sure it will'

Early entrant 25 plus

'Well, before Christmas I thought I really wanted to get a job. They [the EZ] are really good at actually helping you and doing your CV. I think they can actually arrange for me to do interview techniques as well...They supply envelopes if I want to post [job applications]...It was my choice. I actually did say to the Jobcentre, could I go on [the EZ].'

Early entrant 25 plus

The latter group was generally viewed by EZ advisers as harder to help, involvement in the EZ two or three times previously being seen as a strong indication of serious barriers to work.

6.6 EZ provision, methods and working practices

25 plus early entrants were essentially receiving the same provision, and EZ advisers were using the same methods with them, as both New Deal returners and the original 25 plus client group. Less emphasis was placed on career advice and guidance, with greater focus on personal support and confidence building, practical help in applying for jobs, and financial assistance to pay for training courses and transport costs. There was no evidence that these clients had affected delivery or provision to EZs' original 25 plus customers.

6.7 Experiences of EZs

For most 25 plus early entrants, the EZ experience compared favourably and was seen as an improvement on the service they had previously received from Jobcentre Plus. Many liked the client centredness and personal service ethos of EZs. However, as noted previously, many respondents' comments were directed at the range of Jobcentre Plus programmes and services, including signing on for benefits, not simply equivalent EZ provision

'I felt that the help was far more qualitative and the approach was far more personal, far more...tailor made to your requirements and your capabilities at that time...far more empathic, flexible...your views were encouraged...that was the difference...they were very skilled in bringing out the best in me...'

Early entrant aged 25 plus

Some customers were effusive in their praise, referencing the enthusiasm and commitment of EZ advisers and their focus on helping people get and keep work:

'I had a lot of positive support from the [EZ adviser]...an excellent person, positive attitude, tremendous support...I can't speak highly enough of [EZ adviser]. More support than I could have wished for because he helped me to get into that job, stay in that job and survive.'

Early entrant 25 plus

That said, older clients were generally more understanding of and sympathetic towards Jobcentre Plus advisers, finding fault with the system under which they operate, rather than criticising them as individuals. Inflexible support and time consuming bureaucracy were believed to constrain and sap the enthusiasm of even the most committed Jobcentre Plus advisers. The flexible way in which EZ advisers were able to work stood in sharp relief. One early entrant who had previously participated in New Deal 25 plus said his EZ experience had served to improve his estimation of public employment services more generally:

'One of the main differences is restoring my faith in the system. [Jobcentre]...staff were fine but the actual system that you actually have to work with can be really frustrating at times and inflexible. The difference I found with [EZ] was that their approach was flexible, the staff were great and you had that personal touch which you can't really sort of do with the Jobcentre and the Social Security offices, it just doesn't allow for that and [EZ] does.'

Early entrant 25 plus

Some older customers sensed a greater pressure on staff time and resources at Jobcentre Plus and felt this negatively impacted on the quality of service. This was also believed to compromise the extent to which these advisers could deal with customers as individuals.

'...at the Jobcentre you're not a personality...it's like a cattle market...no one gives a damn really. [It's] not because they don't want to, it's because they see so many people and they just haven't got the time, whereas [the EZ] do find that time.'

Early entrant 25 plus

6.8 What appears to be working for 25 plus early entrants

In the main, 25 plus early entrants had more specific requirements for EZ funding and less need of personal support and advice. They tended to know what they wanted, and among EZ returners, what to expect. As such, they generally had high expectations of the support they would receive, their referral to the EZ having been made to fulfil a need which Jobcentre Plus was unable to meet. For many, the ability to access financial help was seen as critical in being able to secure and stay in work:

'I wanted some funding so I could sit my...test again and I just didn't have the money so basically I was hoping they could find some funding...and become self-employed again.'

Early entrant 25 plus

'... , purely and simply is the fact that they will fund things. I mean they can give you all the advice under the sun, but you need the funding to pay for...the training.'

Early entrant 25 plus

'[The] financial [support] I would say was the biggest gain I had from [the EZ] because without that I wouldn't have been able to do the PTS [Personal Track Safety] course.'

Early entrant 25 plus

For others, practical help with jobsearch, CV preparation and job applications, was important. Simply having an adviser who knew you personally and was looking out for your interests, boosted clients' motivation and confidence to find work:

'I think you get more help from [the EZ] as a one-on-one. You have your personal adviser...and they get to know you, but with the Jobcentre you see different people.'

Early entrant 25 plus

'It's [the EZ] more personal, it's more [on a] one-to-one basis. You're seeing somebody that knows your details and is concerned about finding you employment.'

Early entrant 25 plus

While clear cut needs may, on the face of it, seem easier to deal with, having high demands and aspirations can lead to disappointment if expectations are not met. Of all new client groups, older early entrants expressed the highest levels of dissatisfaction. A few were critical of EZ advisers' skills and expertise, believing them ill equipped to deal with graduates and professional people. Others claimed the EZ had failed to deliver on promises of in-work support, with some losing their job as a result:

'[The EZ] went back on their word and didn't pay out...wouldn't help towards my training. So the employer had to let me go...I am sure there is more [EZ adviser] could have done even if it was to sit down and chat with my boss.'

Early entrant 25 plus

The work first approach may be less appealing for this group. Many want full-time permanent jobs and are reluctant to consider part-time or temporary work. Most will only accept jobs they consider inferior as long as in-work support delivers and allow them to access better paid, more secure and more satisfying jobs.

'I don't want to be a taxi driver, I want to drive trucks... The [EZ adviser]...said, this is just temporary to get you into work, we will definitely still fund your HGV. I was like fine ok, that's the only reason I agreed to do it, otherwise I would have said no.'

Early entrant 25 plus

EZ returners who 'know the ropes' can also use their prior knowledge of EZ tools and techniques to put pressure on advisers to get what they want:

'...the object was to get an HGV licence which they promised all along...but now they are dragging their feet...I said look, if you don't get my HGV sorted, I certainly won't be taxi-driving at the end of three months...Now they have woken up all of a sudden. I have had a couple of phone calls...and they have put me forward for my theory...so my threat to return to the dole seems to have bucked them up.'

Early entrant 25 plus

The initial findings for 25 plus early entrants are broadly positive from a customer satisfaction perspective. However, as with other new customer groups, it is too soon to tell exactly how and how effectively the EZs approach is working. Few had moved into work at the time of the fieldwork. Phase two of the research will seek to address these issues in more detail.

Longer term, this client group could present EZs with greater challenges than they may have anticipated. In particular, failure to deliver in-work support could serve to undermine customer satisfaction and job sustainability.

7 Lone parents

7.1 Referral of lone parents from Jobcentre Plus

Most lone parents working less than 16 hours per week who are in receipt of Income Support undertake a second Work Focused Interview (WFI) six months after their initial claim for benefit. At this point, and at subsequent WFIs, Jobcentre Plus lone parent advisers in EZ single provider areas are meant to ask lone parents if they wish to volunteer to participate in EZ provision. In addition, lone parents can volunteer to join the EZ at any time that suits them. However, lone parents cannot participate in New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) and EZs at the same time.

7.2 Reason for Jobcentre Plus referral/decision to participate

From the small number of lone parent interviews conducted, it is not possible to generalise about the messages being conveyed to lone parents about EZs during their second WFI. Interviews were not held with Jobcentre Plus advisers and no clear or consistent picture emerged from lone parents interviewed.

A few lone parents appeared to be given the choice to move from NDLP to the EZ because NDLP help had not succeeded in getting them into work.

'[the Jobcentre Plus PA] asked me whether I'd like to try a different approach... you know...she hadn't been successful – maybe a different way might be the answer'

Lone parent

This lone parent was initially concerned that, rather than broadening her options, going to the EZ would reduce them, believing that two advisers would be better than one.

'I thought I was cutting my options down because I could have had two people trying to look for work and jobs for me...'

Lone parent

Few lone parents interviewed appear to have been offered a straight choice between NDLP and EZ provision at their second WFI. Most received specific information about EZs and the help they can provide, based on their needs and circumstances at that time. The majority of lone parents believed they had been referred, and chose to join, for financial reasons. Examples include lone parents who wanted help towards the cost of driving lessons, broadband and living expenses while working a month in hand. In these cases, a Jobcentre Plus adviser had informed them that EZs could offer them more financial support than NDLP.

The perceived greater ability of EZs to offer specialist or in-depth help and advice was the key reason for most other referrals. Examples include lone parents with longer term career aspirations, and those wanting to set up in business, become self-employed or pursue professional careers. Customers with professional backgrounds, for example, had been advised to join the EZ specifically to help them source job vacancies in the professional sector:

'[My Jobcentre adviser] said to me that [the EZ] were more likely to be able to deal with somebody who was a professional, that they would have more of an idea [of how to help me].'

Lone parent

Another lone parent with a criminal record was referred to the EZ for specialist help and advice regarding the disclosure of convictions to potential employers. For others, the decision to join was made as a result of the attraction to a whole package of support that was said, by Jobcentre Plus advisers, to be on offer:

'[The EZ adviser] told us that she could help with transport, childcare, clothes for interviews...any course you need to go on, they help you. They give you driving lessons as well so you can learn to drive for transport. They do your CV...All that you need to do to get you into work.'

Lone parent

7.3 Reasons for self referral

Among the reasons given by lone parents who self referred, wanting to join a friend or relative already participating figured highly. In at least one EZ, a financial 'carrot' in the shape of an introduction fee was being offered to participating lone parents to encourage the recruitment of family and friends. This did not seem to detract from the quality of service or customer satisfaction levels. Word of mouth about what EZs can offer also seems to have encouraged some lone parents to join:

'I was talking...about jobs and transport and somebody said that one of their friends had driving lessons with [the EZ], so to go and see them, because I told them at the Jobcentre...they don't do anything like that.'

Lone parent

Outreach and child friendly delivery was an important attraction to many self referring lone parents. In addition to the more relaxed and familiar environment of the community centre or playgroup, of particular significance was the absence of other Jobcentre Plus clients. Many lone parents who had joined an EZ said they found the atmosphere of Jobcentres uncomfortable, feeling they were being scrutinised and judged. A few recounted negative experiences of Jobcentre Plus in the past and had made a conscious decision to try something different:

'The [EZ] are nicer people...it's just you can talk to them...When you go to the Jobcentre you feel uncomfortable as if they're looking down on you...I didn't feel comfortable at all [at the Jobcentre]'

Lone parent

A number of lone parents self referred having found out about the EZ at their local Sure Start project. A couple of customers interested in self employment had been referred to the EZ from a local business enterprise agency. Others simply walked past the EZ office and dropped in, or were attracted by the marketing and curious to find out more:

'[The leaflet] was bright orange. I saw it was bright orange that's all I can remember really. It said [the EZ] on it and said if you need help finding a job...'

Lone parent

7.4 Advisers' views of lone parents

Somewhat unexpectedly, of all new clients, lone parents were reported by EZ advisers to be the group currently presenting the biggest challenge. As voluntary customers, the expectation had been that lone parents would be relatively easy to help, highly motivated and ready to move into work. Experience to date was proving different. Though often motivated to get work, lone parents had needs and barriers considered to be qualitatively different from other EZ client groups:

'... lone parents is a specialised field, you know, it's a voluntary programme..., a very different client group from the mandatory people...I think they've got very different barriers as well.'

EZ lone parent adviser

Detailed understanding of the complexities of the benefit and tax system was required to help lone parents, together with local knowledge of childcare provision. Observations confirmed that IWBCs were more complex, took longer to complete and needed repeating for different jobs. Because of caring responsibilities, many lone parents had restrictions over the type and amount of work they could do. Some had additional barriers including health and transport problems. There was also a belief that aftercare was likely to be important. Not only were these differences seen to require specialist adviser knowledge and expertise, but lone parents' voluntary status meant a lighter touch was required. Perhaps most challenging of all was the

fact that many lone parents had longer term job goals and were far from immediately job ready:

'I had this one lady...The idea of work at the minute is just not in her vocabulary...She's got this year long plan of where she wants to be, she's basically come to [the EZ] for...a bit of financial support, but you know she's got not intentions of working within that year...I can help her, I can support her in her back to work programme, but you know at the end of the day there may not be an outcome at the end of it, you know what I mean? But I'm helping her try and achieve her goal.'

EZ adviser

Jobcentre Plus referrals, in particular, were generally perceived to be lone parents with complex barriers, at some distance from the labour market, who needed a great deal of time and resource investing in them before becoming job ready:

'When [the lone parents] come over from the Jobcentre they want driving instructor courses or one lady...had no computer, had no landline, has no computer experience, had never touched a computer and wanted to do web design. We would need a lot of money and time, which is fine, but she won't set out the house to do any courses...and you are talking years down the line as well [before she finds work].'

EZ lone parent adviser

7.5 EZ provision, methods and working practices

This complex interplay of needs and barriers had led one EZ to the conclusion that dedicated, specialist provision was the best way of dealing with the lone parent client group. This contractor had made a substantial investment in establishing dedicated lone parent delivery and provision including newly refurbished, child friendly premises. At the time of the research, this had only recently opened and it was too soon to judge its impact or success.

Elsewhere, low client throughput was not felt to warrant or allow dedicated lone parent provision. A number of EZs did however have specialist lone parent advisers. Low caseloads, particularly among specialist advisers, meant that a few lone parents were getting help above and beyond what might ordinarily be provided. One lone parent, for example, was given daily support over a three month period to help her set up in business, including preparation of a business plan, design of marketing materials and financial help to pay rent on premises, a shop sign and advertising. This client's only previous work experience was as a cleaner. She also had poor literacy and health problems.

Another example includes a client who received funding for two training courses; financial assistance with driving lessons and theory test; practical help in CV preparation, interview technique and completion of job application forms; and a

driver to take her to and from work during the first two months of employment, prior to her passing her test, also funded by the EZ.

In other respects, even when delivered on an outreach basis, EZ services for lone parents were much the same in content and approach as those delivered to mandatory clients. Specialist provision planned for lone parents such as crèches and childcare tasters had yet to be implemented in most EZs. IWBCs and financial advice was looking in detail at the expenses of everyday life and how lone parents would cope during the transition from benefits to work:

'She went through a lot more of my personal life...and my outgoing expenses...and had a look generally at the whole picture, not just that I needed a job. That helped a lot.'

Lone parent

Help with jobsearch, CV preparation, short courses, interview techniques, boosting confidence and self esteem along the way, was all part of the standard package of assistance.

7.6 Experiences of EZs

The majority of lone parents described their experience to date of EZs in positive terms and as an improvement on previous support received from Jobcentre Plus. For lone parents who had chosen to join an EZ in preference to joining NDLP, this is not surprising. Most lone parents were however unable to distinguish between mandatory WFIs and NDLP. Our understanding is that the majority of comments made reflected their prior experience of mandatory WFIs, rather than NDLP. WFIs are a mandatory interview that may not necessarily occur when a lone parent is ready for work. The assumption is that lone parents volunteering for EZs are ready to think about work.

The commitment and enthusiasm of EZ advisers in helping lone parents into work was cited as key:

'[My EZ adviser] pushed me, she kept pushing me and pushing me and that's what it was. If she hadn't have pushed me I probably wouldn't have gone back to work. That's what [my EZ adviser] did. She just pushed and pushed, and now I'm back at work.'

Lone parent

'[EZ PA] was full impact, like you know, you're going to do this and you're going to do that, and she really got me motivated.'

Lone parent

EZs were felt to have greater ability than Jobcentre Plus to help lone parents find

work, through having access to a greater number and wider range of job vacancies, for example:

'[The EZ] encouraged you to work. For me to know 'well, we will find you a job' and the job they got me wasn't even advertised in the Jobcentre...so [the EZ] got in there first...'

Lone parent

In a similar vein, others felt that the EZ had given them the confidence and support to broaden their horizons, suggested a wider range of career options and encouraged them to apply for jobs they would not have otherwise considered:

'I think [the EZ] has given me a wider range of job prospects. Jobs that I wouldn't have thought I would go for, wouldn't consider, I'm looking into them more.'

Lone parent

A few lone parents reported that their Jobcentre Plus adviser had been unwilling or unable to help them to progress towards a longer term career goal. One client, for example, had a goal of a career in nursing but lacked practical experience and qualifications. She was disappointed when her Jobcentre Plus adviser suggested she should wait until her children were in full-time school before doing anything:

'...for somebody to tell you 'oh you're in a catch twenty-two, there's nothing you can do until they're full-time in school, so just sit tight!' That just really annoyed me because all I wanted to do was work.'

Lone parent

The response from the EZ was in sharp contrast:

'The first time I went through the door I felt a bit like I was on the scrounge...which felt really degrading. But with the welcome that I got and the reception that you get through the door, that soon passes and...they were saying, 'yes, we can help you with this...you can spend this much and...they were actually able to say to me 'yes, we can get you into a job.'

Lone parent

With EZ help, the client had passed an access course and secured part-time work in a nursing home to gain the experience needed before applying for a full-time nursing training course.

One lone parent who said the EZ service was *'one hundred percent better,'* believed that work pressures served to limit the amount of time Jobcentre Plus advisers were able to spend helping them:

'At the Jobcentre you want to say something or do something and you feel restrained...you know that it's not them putting the pressure on you, the pressure has been put on to them and it's been passed around.'

Lone parent

Most lone parents found EZs' more informal and personal approach helped them to relax and open up:

'I think when you spoke to people and it was [first name] and it was [first name], rather than Mrs... You felt relaxed, you knew they [EZ advisers] were doing their job well, but you didn't feel you had to sit up and watch your Ps and Qs...'

Lone parent

The physical location of EZ services away from Jobcentre Plus and, in some cases, delivered from outreach venues helped to reinforce the message that EZs were different and unconnected with benefit entitlement and officialdom. The flexibility in appointments and ability to drop in at short notice and with children in tow, was welcomed. Lone parents also found the practical 'hands on' help, together with availability of telephones, PCs and printing facilities, extremely useful:

'You go in there [Jobcentre Plus] and...the atmosphere isn't right, the set up ain't right...It's just not an experience that most people would want, but with [the EZ] the set up...it's comfortable...and you can use the computers and they print stuff off. You can use the phone if you want to make calls for interviews and stuff like that.'

Lone parent

Among the few lone parents who had previously participated in NDLP, most said they found the EZ help more useful. This is not unexpected; many had volunteered to join an EZ because of an unsuccessful outcome or previous unsatisfactory experience on NDLP. Again, the perception of a stronger job focus and the motivating effect EZ advisers' enthusiasm had, were seen to be key important differences:

'[My Jobcentre adviser] I thought [was] interested for a Jobcentre employee, but [my EZ adviser] was full impact, like you know, you're going to do this and you're going to do that...She really got me motivated.'

Lone parent

Previous research suggests that NDLP has also had a strong positive impact on lone parents' entries into work. 'Lone parents tend to view the programme positively, with the majority describing the programme as a whole as helpful and/or informative. Many praised their Personal Adviser, referring to them as helpful, competent, friendly, efficient and understanding of individual circumstances'¹⁵.

Though it was still early days and the sample was small, a majority of lone parents who were working at the time of the research attributed their success in securing or staying in employment to EZ interventions. In most cases, financial help was felt to

¹⁵ New Deal for lone parents evaluation: Findings from the quantitative survey (2003) Lessof et al.

have been most instrumental. Other lone parents reported they were moving closer to achieving their job and career aspirations as a result of the EZ help they were receiving.

Failure to live up to expectations ranked high amongst the reasons given by the few lone parents with negative views of EZs. These lone parents generally had high aspirations; some wanted to become self-employed or set up in business, others had ambitions to train for professional careers. One lone parent who left NDLP to join the EZ re-joined NDLP after six months. Her adviser suggested the EZ would be better equipped to help her set up an English language school. In fact, she felt the opposite was the case:

'The [EZ] adviser I just felt he felt a bit intimidated by me. I felt he didn't really know what to do with me and he would have been quite happy if I'd been a bit less educated or less experienced.'

Lone parent

Another lone parent believed the more training oriented approach of Sure Start better suited her long-term career goals. A third was disappointed when expected help in the day-to-day running of her business failed to materialise, the EZ having funded set up costs and provided on going help and advice throughout the start up period.

7.7 What appears to be working for lone parents

From a customer satisfaction perspective, the findings thus far are generally positive. Lone parents appear to be responding well to the relaxed informality and convenience of EZ support, particularly when delivered on an outreach basis. They also like the strong job focus of EZs and value the amount of time advisers are willing and able to spend helping them. Overall, the intensity of support and significant lengths advisers can go towards helping them seems to be working to fulfil practical needs and boost confidence.

It is too early to say at this stage of the research whether and in what ways the EZ approach is effective in moving lone parents into work. This will be explored in phase two. However, the evidence from stage one suggests that EZ funding model based on job outcomes achieved within a relatively short period of time could present challenges over time. While the vast majority of lone parents interviewed were considering a return to the labour market, not all wanted immediate work or were job ready. Many had longer term career goals. Even if job ready, many lone parents may not be able to take a short-term or 'second best' job. Caring responsibilities put constraints on the type of jobs and hours of work lone parents are able to consider. Supporting longer term career goals and overcoming complex barriers is expensive of time and resource. It remains to be seen what the impact of increased caseload sizes will be and whether current levels of investment can be sustained by EZs longer term.

8 Emerging findings

Building on the experience and lessons learned from supporting long-term unemployed people into work, EZs have set up effectively and begun delivering support to new client groups. Services largely mirror and are successfully running alongside services for 25 plus clients. Emerging evidence to date suggests that New Deal returners, early entrants and lone parents who have joined EZs are responding well to, and appear to be benefiting from, the EZ work first approach. Satisfaction levels were high and customers were beginning to make the transition from benefits to work, many as a result of the EZ help they had received. The slow referral of new customers from Jobcentre Plus and low recruitment of lone parents was, at the time of the research, the key early implementation issue facing EZs which had yet to resolve itself.

EZ services for new client groups were still in the early phase of implementation at the time the research was carried out. Most customers were in the initial stages of being helped into work and few had moved into jobs. Fewer still had achieved 13 weeks or more employment and none had reached the follow on stage. It was therefore too early to assess the overall effectiveness of the work first approach or to draw conclusions about what is working in EZ provision for which new customers and why. The intention is that these issues will be explored in phase two of the research.

New Deal returners, in particular, have responded positively and consistently as a group. Young peoples' willingness and ability to be flexible, together with their receptiveness to incentives, may explain why EZs seem to be working for New Deal returners. Previous negative experiences of New Deal and Jobcentre Plus arising mainly from a failure to find sustained work, may also account, in part, for the significantly more positive attitude towards EZs. However, the ability to choose what work to aim for, the personal service ethos, and at once pushy and nurturing approach of advisers, may be equally important in explaining the comparative attractiveness of EZ help.

Working with long-term unemployed people, EZs appear to have learnt the lesson that personal and social problems can present as great if not greater challenges to securing work as harder measures of employability such as qualifications and

experience. At their best, EZs can offer young people the prospect of a more grown up approach based on mutual respect and negotiated compromise, offering potentially greater rewards in return for greater responsibility. This is a refreshingly different approach for customers having few advantages in life and with limited resources to draw on. Its strength lies in the time, flexibility and discretion advisers have to build relationships with young people and to tailor interventions to meet their individual needs.

For young people, however, the problem they face is not so much finding work, but keeping it. Those with few skills and qualifications and limited work experience can find themselves at the sharp end of the UK labour market. Quite simply, work has become harder to find and keep among people restricted to jobs in the low skilled sectors of the economy. Finding work that is well paid and provides opportunities for progression, is more difficult still. Some customers may need to be supported through a number of jobs before attaining the safer reaches of the labour market.

The true test of the EZ approach with regard to young people will therefore be its effectiveness in ensuring job retention longer term. What will be useful to monitor in phase two is whether EZ help and reported attitudinal gains are sustained beyond thirteen weeks of employment. Also important will be to assess whether the employment secured by young people is any better in terms of pay and conditions than the jobs they can get without EZ help.

For 25 plus early entrants who are seriously looking for work and reasonably job ready, access to practical and financial help may be more important. These customers often need little in the way of hand holding. Here, the flexibility EZs have in the use of resources may be key, although these customers, too, greatly appreciated and appear to have benefited from the personal, customised service they received.

Individuals with a long history of unemployment and with multiple barriers may need more support and active intervention to engage prospective employers. Due to the early stage of implementation, the research did not directly address EZs' work with employers. This will be covered in more detail in phase two.

Though it is still early days, lone parents could present EZs with some big challenges. As a group, lone parents probably face the greatest barriers when moving from benefits into work. One of the important lessons learned by Jobcentre Plus is that lone parents require specialist help and advisers need specialist knowledge and expertise, if they are to be helped into work.

The evidence also suggests that to attract and retain lone parents as customers, EZs may need to work more intensively and for longer periods. Though many lone parents may want to work, in the short-term, not all have the capacity or capability to do so. Many also aspire to careers and are not interested in immediate employment. The relatively short timeframe for intervening and the restrictions of the EZ funding model could, in time, give rise to possible tensions in respect of lone parents with longer term career goals.

Key research questions to be addressed in phase two will be to examine whether EZs are effective in securing sustained work for lone parents, the extent to which this effectiveness is dependent on the intensity and longevity of support, and whether this can be sustained by EZs longer term given the current funding model.

The EZ approach probably reaches the limits of its effectiveness in respect of hard to help individuals still immersed in drug or alcohol misuse or with mental health problems. The strong work focus of EZs and relatively short timeframe for intervention may mean that such customers are not suitable candidates for participation without adjustments to the funding model. The early stage of research did not allow for an examination of the impact of additional time allowed through follow on. However, evidence to date suggests that alternative approaches may be required for this client group.

Phase two will enable a detailed exploration of issues arising from phase one. In particular, follow up interviews with customers will allow an assessment of whether and how EZ activities and methods translate into better outcomes.

Key research questions to be addressed in phase two include:

- what is working in EZ provision for new customers;
- which aspects of EZs translate into better outcomes for new customers;
- the sustainability of employment outcomes;
- the sustainability of positive customer views;
- the effectiveness of EZ follow on;
- the extent to which EZ help is sustained beyond 13 weeks;
- whether jobs secured with EZ help are any better in terms of pay, conditions or security than those customers can achieve without EZ help;
- the appropriateness of the EZ business and funding model in respect of customers needing more intensive and sustained help to get them into sustainable work.

Appendix

Employment Zones early entry criteria

Early entry criteria as criteria as described in the Employment Zone contractor guidance document, are as follows:

Some people have particular circumstances that make it harder for them to get work. They may be able to start an Employment Zone early if they are already getting Jobseeker's Allowance. Once they start the Employment Zone programme, they must continue.

This may include people:

- with a physical or mental disability need help with reading, writing or numbers;
- whose first language is not English, Welsh or Gaelic;
- who are lone parents do not live with a partner and are responsible for at least one child living in their household (by partner we mean a person somebody is married to or a person they live with as if they are married to them);
- who have served in the regular armed forces;
- who were looked after as a child by a local authority;
- with a criminal record;
- with a drug problem;
- who have participated in Progress2Work;
- have been told by the Home Office that they are officially a refugee and have been given exceptional leave to enter the United Kingdom by an immigration officer.

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