

Research Summary

Background and Methodology

Personal Advisers are central to a wide-range of employment programmes delivered by the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. Previous research has drawn attention to Personal Advisers' diversity and importance, highlighting the strong impact they have on client satisfaction. However, there is a lack of detailed knowledge of how Personal Advisers deal with their caseloads. To provide more information, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned a research project focusing on 'how Personal Advisers work' in Employment Zones and New Deal 25 Plus.

The main aims of the project were to:

- Examine how Personal Advisers carry out their roles with different clients;
- Explore what factors impinge on the ability of Personal Advisers to carry out their role effectively; and to
- Compare and contrast New Deal 25 Plus with Employment Zones.

The research was carried out in three stages: the workshop, pilot and the mainstage. The mainstage included a total of ninety depth interviews with Personal Advisers in nine New Deal 25 Plus Units of Delivery and nine Employment Zones. Fieldwork was carried out between November 2001 and January 2002. These interviews lasted for ninety minutes and comprised five interviews per area.

Key Findings

- Both sets of advisers used a similar range of approaches with clients, the two groups considering that the most effective were confidence building within one-to-one interviews and discretionary funds for clothes, transport and other job seeking and job taking costs;
- Both sets categorised their diverse caseloads in similar ways based on advisers' assessments of clients' job prospects, focusing on those nearer the labour market; confronting those believed to be working and signing; and identifying a wide range of employment barriers faced by clients with perceived low probabilities of finding work;
- Both sets considered themselves to have relatively high autonomy, those in Employment Zones having the most flexibility in dealing with clients;
- Placement targets differed within and between programmes and offices, job targets being highest in some Employment Zones while New Deal generally had a range of employability-related targets;
- Salary levels tended to be higher in Employment Zones, job security lower (due to a wide-spread use of short-term contracts).