

RESEARCH SUMMARY

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Mentoring and Post-Employment Support

Sixteen mentoring and post-employment support pilots were introduced under the New Deal Next Phase (NDNP) in October 2001 and February 2002. The Mentoring Pilots were developed to meet those customer's needs that were not being met by mainstream mentoring, and to provide alternative methods of resolving barriers to employment.

The Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) commissioned ECOTEC Research and Consulting to evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot mentoring approaches. The evaluative study was carried out in two phases during Summer 2002 and Spring 2004. The research focused on collecting information from the pilot areas regarding what worked and why. An important aspect of the evaluation was to draw out lessons which were useful for mainstream mentoring providers.

The first phase evaluation methods included: visits to all pilot mentoring providers and referring Jobcentre Plus offices; a review of documents; and analysis of Management Information (MI) data. The second phase constituted: a survey of all pilot mentoring providers; and case study visits to three pilot areas which demonstrated good practice.

Key Findings

- MI data showed the level of referrals to the pilots to be very low. Supporting 'hard to reach' customers was achieved primarily by Counselling and Vocational Mentoring, which had the highest throughput. These pilots were also the most effective in providing in-depth and focussed interventions.
- Confidence and credibility were highest for Counselling and Vocational Mentoring approaches both for PAs and customers, which explains the higher levels of throughput.
- The pilots allowed for flexibility in approach and delivery, enabling very effective interventions for specific customer needs. Counselling Mentoring was particularly valued by PAs as a means to tackle entrenched barriers to work amongst customers.
- Vocational Mentoring was also highly regarded by PAs and customers. Shared vocational interests were used as the basis for matching mentor and mentee. Customers valued this type of mentoring as a means to gain an insight into a career path and practical advice about jobs and work.
- Whilst the pilot approach was able to explore an individual's barriers to work in depth, there were customers who had practical needs which could be met through mainstream mentoring approaches or other advice and support bodies. In these cases the pilot approaches did not add value to existing services.
- Collection of soft outcome data was considered to be particularly helpful in showing impact and progression as a result of mentoring. This was especially the case where customers had a significant distance to travel to achieve employment or training placements.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sixteen mentoring and post-employment support pilots were introduced under the New Deal Next Phase (NDNP) in October 2001 and February 2002. The five forms of mentoring tested were:

- Counselling
- Vocational
- Co-ordinator
- Peer
- Family

All pilots also tested Post-Employment Support (PES) for customers in their first 13 weeks of employment.

This report presents the findings from an evaluation of the pilots. Information for the report was gathered through interviews, data analysis, an e-survey and three case study visits to pilot areas.

Key findings

The throughput within the pilot mentoring areas was very low across the board, and less than anticipated. Management Information (MI) did not clearly distinguish between the Mentoring Pilots and mainstream provision, making data analysis problematic. However, Counselling Mentoring and Vocational Mentoring appear to have consistently achieved the highest throughput of the pilot types. PES providers experienced distinct problems and had a very low throughput. Quantitative outcome and impact data were not available for the evaluation.

Low referrals and starts for the majority of the mentoring pilot areas can be attributed to:

- lack of Personal Adviser (PA) and customer confidence in the pilot mentoring forms; and
- the mentoring types being insufficiently distinct from each other and from mainstream mentoring.

Where referrals and starts were higher this can be attributed to:

- Personal Adviser and customer confidence in the professional or expert nature of the mentoring type; and
- the type of mentoring on offer having a clear definition which made it distinct from mainstream mentoring services.

Providers were pro-active in trying to boost referrals and starts through working with PAs. Referral routes such as Gateway to Work programmes and training and placement provider referrals became the main source of mentoring customers in some pilot areas. Despite this, conversion to starts remained low for Co-ordinator, Peer and Family Mentoring.

Customer barriers to being mentored also played a big part in the low level of referrals and starts. Customer openness to mentoring depended on a number of factors including:

- their understanding of what mentoring entailed;
- length of unemployment and levels of benefit dependency; and
- openness to engage in mentoring.

Providers also noted that not all referrals were appropriate. Many customers had practical needs including:

- housing problems;
- financial and debt problems;
- poor personal appearance and presentation; and
- lack of exposure to working life.

Some providers suggested these were *not* most appropriately met through mentoring, and could be met more effectively through referral to other advice agencies, or mainstream mentoring.

Where the mentoring pilots had higher numbers of referrals, it was because they provided a flexible service and PAs were able to select the most appropriate method of mentoring to suit the individual's background, attitudes and behaviour.

Counselling Mentoring

Counselling mentoring had a relatively high number of starts. This form of mentoring had a professional character, with qualified counsellors and therapists delivering the service. The expertise of the mentors was an important marketing point for this provision. A barrier to referral and take-up was the perception of counselling as 'middle class'.

Counselling Mentoring provided an avenue of referral for customers with the most challenging cognitive and behavioural issues. Counselling Mentoring was used to deal with these issues directly or to speed up referral to other specialist agencies. Counsellor Mentors also provided support to PAs in dealing with difficult customers.

Counselling Mentoring was more open ended and longer-term than other forms of mentoring, offering more opportunities for problem resolution.

Vocational Mentoring

Vocational Mentoring also had a relatively high level of referrals and take up. The popularity of this form of mentoring can be attributed to the distinct purpose of vocational mentoring. Vocational interests were used as the basis for matching mentor and mentee, and this was a selling point for advisers, customers and potential mentors.

The service was viewed as tailored, professional and relevant by PAs and customers. Customers benefited from vocational mentoring through gaining an insight into a career path and gaining practical advice about jobs and work. In some pilot areas, Vocational Mentoring was being used as a pre-cursor to more general mentoring.

Co-ordinator Mentoring

The distinction between mainstream and Co-ordinator Mentoring was particularly hard to determine.

Co-ordinator Mentoring was reported to have had success in challenging benefit dependency and established patterns of customer behaviour towards PAs and job search. Some pilots used Co-ordinator Mentoring to develop training

and support to prepare customers to benefit from mainstream mentoring provision.

Peer Mentoring

Peer Mentoring had a very low take up. Providers used the Gateway to Work programmes to promote the service. Both PAs and providers found it hard to point to the specificity of this provision over other forms of mentoring. Providers were very active in working with District Offices and PAs to try boost recruitment to this form of mentoring but it remained unpopular. Where customers had issues in common, providers believed it was a more practical option to provide group training. Recruiting peer mentors was reported to be a problem in some areas. Providers were ambiguous about the value of ethnic matching in mentoring relationships.

Family Mentoring

Providers found it challenging to market this service to advisers and customers, and throughput was very low. The issues that led to this included: lack of evidence to support the effectiveness of this form of mentoring; lack of experience on the part of providers in providing this service; and practical difficulties in arranging Family Mentoring.

Post-Employment Support

Recruitment and referral was a fundamental problem for PES pilots. Some providers abandoned the PES elements of provision altogether.

PES recruitment faced barriers such as:

- difficulties in engaging employers;
- customer fear of being 'singled out' at work; and
- practical difficulties in arranging the service.

Customers' desire to sign off benefits and 'move on' was central to the lack of referrals, although procedural difficulties were also a factor. Effective recruitment occurred only when providers intercepted customers before they signed-off. There were also positive reports of PES style employment support being

provided as an informal continuation of other Mentoring Pilots.

Conclusions

Recruitment proved a fundamental issue across all the pilots. Counselling Mentoring and Vocational Mentoring were the preferred options with both customers and PAs. Use of specialist mentors, in Counselling Mentoring or Vocational Mentoring, was effective in persuading both advisers and customers of the value of provision. Despite this, some pilot areas transferred lessons from the pilots to mainstream provision, and so added value in provision for hard-to-reach groups. These included:

- matching processes for mentees and type of mentoring service;
- mentor training;
- marketing strategies; and
- in-depth mentoring methods, including counselling.