New Deal for Disabled People: An in-depth study of Job Broker service delivery

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The New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) is a voluntary programme that aims to help people who want to work and are on qualifying incapacity related benefits to move into sustained employment. Services are delivered by public, private and voluntary sector organisations known as ‘Job Brokers’. In 2002 a first wave of qualitative research explored the organisation, operation and impacts of NDDP from the perspective of users and providers of Job Broker services, as well as Jobcentre Plus staff. This second report uses a longitudinal approach to concentrate on the longer-term impact of using the service, and developments in the delivery of Job Broker services and relationships with Jobcentre Plus. Fieldwork in late 2003 and early 2004 focused on 23 selected Job Broker services and consisted of interviews with clients interviewed in the first wave, ‘new’ clients who had recently registered with a Job Broker, Job Broker managers and Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) as well as group discussions with Job Broker staff and Jobcentre Plus advisers. The research forms part of a comprehensive evaluation of NDDP.

Key findings

- Changes were taking place in Jobcentres which affected how staff worked alongside Job Brokers, including the continued roll-out of Jobcentre Plus, the Incapacity Benefit Reforms and new targets and guidance.
- Positive relationships were formed through personal contact between Jobcentre Plus and Job Brokers, and by Job Brokers providing feedback about clients and demonstrating the quality of service provision.
- Job Brokers saw advantages over Jobcentre Plus in being able to spend more time with people, providing more in-depth service, working more flexibly and being independent of government systems. There was some support for this among Jobcentre Plus staff.
- Job Brokers have established themselves as important contributors to the NDDP aims. However, the current funding structure creates the risk that their services become more concentrated on job ready people. There are arguments for earlier funding and more reward for intermediate outcomes and inputs. Changes in the details of outcome related funding had been helpful, but there remained concerns that the funding structure could constrain the range and intensity of services for clients.
- The key changes in how Job Brokers worked related to staffing structures, the profile and integration of the Job Broker contract, rising caseloads, more referrals from Jobcentre Plus, and more targeting of services to people who were closer to work.
- People required a range of services to meet their varying needs to move into work. Job Brokers need to identify these needs to match them with an appropriate service, with the right types and levels of support. Where Job Brokers could not provide services for clients, they needed to signpost them on to other appropriate services. Where this did not happen, some clients’ needs were not met.
• The provision of support at an appropriate pace, strong relationships with advisers, on-going dialogue and maintenance of contact by advisers were important to clients’ longer term progress.

• The longitudinal data highlight the different rates of progression towards work. Over the longer term, some people continued to draw on support form the Job Brokers, although others’ needs were not fulfilled; in some cases they had gone elsewhere for support.

• Longer-term contact with the service could be particularly helpful for people who had been out of the labour market for some time, or who had mental health conditions.

• In addition to key elements of the service, such as support in job-searching and vocational guidance, clients valued services that boosted confidence and maintained motivation.

• Whilst some clients did receive in-work support from the Job Broker, such services were generally under-used, suggesting that the availability of this type of support may need to be emphasised.

• The analysis shows there is no single model of organisation or delivery is necessarily associated with effectiveness. However, it suggests a link between high performance and: strong organisational support for the service, strong management and existing resources and expertise to draw on; higher payments for job placements and sustained work; staff working solely on NDDP or not differentiating it from other work; a core adviser working with each individual client; team support; an outward facing approach; possibly wider ranging and more in-depth support; and a more proactive and managed approach to maintaining contact with clients, both pre and post employment.

Executive summary

Jobcentre Plus staff play an important role in signposting Job Broker services to potential clients and working alongside Job Brokers. In Jobcentre Plus, there had been changes which affected how Jobcentre Plus staff interact with Job Brokers including the continued roll-out of the Pathfinder model, the introduction of Incapacity Benefit Reforms pilot areas, and the introduction of new targets and guidance.

Within Job Broker organisations there had been changes in staffing structures, in the profile of the Job Broker contract and in its integration within the organisation. Caseloads had generally risen and there was more active management and prioritisation of casework. Some Job Brokers reported more clients approaching the service through Jobcentre Plus. Changes in the way in which Job Brokers worked included more targeting of services to clients who were closer to work (influenced by an emphasis on outcome levels and job entry targets), more use of team or personal staff targets, more use of external services including Jobcentre Plus, and more use of financial incentives for clients.

In their contacts with employers, most Job Broker activity appeared to be what was seen as ‘client led’, where advisers contacted employers to seek specific vacancies or in support of an application. The increase in the registration payment and reduction in the period of work required for the sustained work payment were seen as helpful by Job Brokers. Although the principle of outcome related funding was supported, it had sometimes required internal subsidy of Job Broking and constrained the range and intensity of services provided.

NDDP participation and the impact on movement towards and into work

People came to the Job Broker with a range of needs, but were often unclear about what services were available and registered without accessing detailed information about the service and how it could meet their needs. Specific Job Broker service components people identified as helping them move into work were: general careers guidance and direction; providing access to voluntary work, work placements or Permitted Work; training; job search support; help with applying for jobs; financial support and advice and confidence building. Key to providing effective help to move into work was that there was clear dialogue between clients and their advisers about what people needed and what the service could provide. Developing trust and rapport with advisers over time was important, requiring regular contact and an on-going assessment of needs. Where this did not occur,
it could have a negative impact on a client’s movement toward work.

The need for Job Brokers to achieve outcomes impacted on their ability to meet the needs of all their clients, the level of contact advisers had with clients and the extent of the service provided. It would appear that it was the support (in terms of type and level) required by those who were furthest from work that tended to be neglected where choices about the allocation of resources had to be made.

**Longer-term outcomes of participation in NDDP**

Aspects of the Job Broker service which emerged as being particularly important to peoples’ longer-term progress were providing support at the appropriate pace and intensity for clients, strong relationships with advisers, and maintenance of contact by advisers. Key elements for those who needed longer-term help were: support for confidence and motivation; vocational guidance; training and work placements; and in-depth support with looking for and applying for jobs. Whilst some got the help they needed from Job Brokers, others had to go elsewhere and in some cases described receiving the same type of support that other clients had received from Job Brokers.

This longitudinal research highlights the diversity of the needs of NDDP clients and the fact that, whilst some people may enter work relatively quickly, progress will be gradual for others. However, it is clear that the services can be effective in providing both long-term support to clients and also more focused support which remains valuable to them and on which they continue to draw after their contact with Job Brokers has ended.

**Job retention and sustainability**

Job retention was affected by being financially better off in work, the suitability of working hours and job tasks, job satisfaction, the working environment and workplace relationships with colleagues and managers as well as changes to working conditions. Deteriorating health and the ending of short-term contracts and Permitted Work could lead to people leaving employment. Some clients were able to resolve difficulties themselves or with family support, and some received help from the Job Broker service (or other organisations). However, there were also people who had difficulties in work but did not contact the Job Broker service for help, and clients generally did not see in-work support as a particularly salient part of the Job Broker service. The importance of the quality of ‘fit’ between the job and the client is also highlighted, as well as the benefits of continued contact, insofar as those who had more contact with the service before they entered work were more likely to have continued contact in work. Nevertheless, in-work support from the Job Broker service does appear to be under-used by clients, suggesting that the availability of such provision may need to be emphasised by Job Brokers.

**Relationships between Job Brokers and staff in Jobcentre Plus offices**

Job Brokers generally reported feeling that Jobcentre Plus staff had better understanding of their services than previously. Work-focused interview advisers and Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) felt their awareness had been developed through written information provided by Job Brokers, existing contacts, Job Broker websites, visits and presentations between Job Brokers and Jobcentre Plus staff, and Job Brokers having a presence in Jobcentre Plus offices. The Jobcentre Plus staff described varied approaches to signposting Job Broker services to clients, with some selectivity based on assessments of the client’s interest in or readiness for work and whether Jobcentre Plus provision was appropriate. Factors affecting selection of a Job Broker included staff views as to which Job Brokers provided the services most relevant to the client, were better at giving feedback to DEAs, or were on-site.

Positive influences on relationships between Job Brokers and Jobcentre Plus staff included structural changes, direct personal contact and, for Jobcentre Plus staff, demonstration of quality of service provision and feedback about clients. Factors felt to constrain relationships were negative attitudes to Job Broker services, lack of proactivity from Job Brokers in providing staff with information about their services, and over-rigid interpretations of the requirement for impartiality on the part of Jobcentre Plus staff. Job Brokers felt that, compared to Jobcentre Plus, they were able to spend more time with clients, to provide a more in-depth service, to work more flexibly, and were free from association with government and the benefits system. There
was some support for this among Jobcentre Plus staff, although there was a recurrent view that the work of Job Brokers and Jobcentre Plus staff was complementary, to the benefit of each of them and the client.

### Features associated with Job Broker effectiveness

An innovative analysis drew out the features of Job Broker service organisation and practice which are associated with effective performance. The analysis used a combination of local level performance data and qualitative data to identify four groups. First, *highest performers* with a high proportion of registrations resulting in job entries and high or medium levels of sustained employment. Two worked with clients with specific impairments likely to be further from work, the remainder with clients likely to be closer to work. Second, *middle performers*, with high job entry rates but low sustained work rates, or with medium job entry rates and high or medium sustained rates. All worked with clients likely to be closer to work. Third, *in-depth Job Brokers* with low job entry rates but high sustained employment rates, working with clients likely to be furthest from work and providing particularly intensive services. Finally, *lower performing* Job Brokers with low or medium rates for job entries and sustained work, or with low job entries among people closer to work albeit high sustained employment rates.

The analysis then looked at patterns in organisation, staffing, funding, services and ways of working across the four groups. The findings are necessarily tentative. They show that there is no single model of organisation or delivery which is associated with effectiveness, but suggest a link between high performance (in terms of job entry levels and sustainable job levels taking into account different client profiles) and:

- strong organisational support for the Job Broker service;
- existing resources and expertise which provides a foundation and support for the Job Broker service;
- strong management of the Job Broker service;
- higher payments within the Job Broker contract for job placements and sustained work;
- staff either working solely on the Job Broker contract, or not differentiating between job broking and their other work;
- a core adviser working with each client throughout their contact with the service, either providing all support or drawing on specialist staff to complement their own role;
- team working and strong team support;
- an outward facing approach with proactive marketing, good links with other external services, and strong relationships with Jobcentre Plus, but not more ‘employer-led’ contacts with employers;
- possibly wider ranging and more in-depth support; and
- a more proactive approach to maintaining contact with clients, and more intensive and tightly managed approaches to contacting clients in work and providing in-work support.

### Conclusions and implications for policy

Ultimately what works lies in the ability of Job Broker services to identify the needs of clients, for them to be matched with an appropriate Job Broker service and with the right types and levels of support, and to maintain effective relations and communication with clients. None of this is straightforward or easy, and the report highlights both successes and shortcomings in meeting clients’ needs and suggests that a single type of organisation will never be sufficient.

Matching clients’ needs with provision is made more complicated because of the different ways in which people can come into contact with Job Broker services, and because there is a diverse network of provision. The evidence in this report suggests that client choice is not working particularly effectively. Where clients are aware of more than one Job Broker they tend to exercise their choice based on very little detailed information which suggests a need for better advice and guidance, from within Jobcentre Plus and more widely.

The current funding structure has implications for Job Brokers’ ability to continue to contribute to comprehensive provision for people on incapacity benefits. There are risks that Job Broker services continue to become more concentrated on job ready people at the expense of those further from the labour market and that
services which are not self-sufficient are vulnerable. There do not appear to be strong arguments in favour of restricting Job Broker services to some types of clients only, but there are strong arguments that encouraging provision for people who are further from work will require changes to funding arrangements, with more earlier funding and more reward for intermediate outcomes and Job Broker inputs.

It is clear that whatever form NDDP takes in the future, it will need to be compatible with the process model of work-focused interviews. Relationships between Job Brokers and Jobcentre Plus are likely to be key to the success of NDDP, and might be supported by dissemination of examples of good and effective practice. However, there is also perhaps a need for the highest tiers of management to promulgate and reinforce the message that collaboration at all levels is necessary for the future success of NDDP. Collectively, Job Brokers have established themselves as important contributors to the aims of NDDP through the provision of services that can complement and add capacity to what is provided through existing Jobcentre Plus programmes and contracts.


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