



Now It's Personal

Personal advisers and the new public service workforce

By Clare McNeil

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Abbreviations

AACS	Adult Advancement and Careers Service
DIUS	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
DWP	Department for Work and Pensions
ESA	Employment Support Allowance
EZ	Employment Zone
FND	Flexible New Deal
IES	Integrated Employment and Skills system
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
NAO	National Audit Office
PA	Personal Adviser
PEP	Personalised Employment Programme
WFI	Work Focused Interview

Executive summary

Background

The recession has led to a 90 per cent increase in the numbers of people 'signing on' to receive benefits, meaning more people are receiving back-to-work support from a personal adviser than at any point since the creation of Jobcentre Plus in 2002.

Providing tailored one-to-one support to help people back into work has been central to the UK Government's reform of the welfare system over the past decade. The goal of 'personalised support for everyone' is a key element of new reforms to the system.

The 20,000 personal advisers working across the welfare-to-work sector are largely responsible for the success of this goal through the one-to-one support they provide on the frontline of the welfare system. Personal advisers are also pivotal to achieving related goals such as reaching the 2020 target to end child poverty, which depends on higher rates of employment among parents.

Despite the tightening of public finances, employment programmes have received extra investment from the Government in the past year to tackle the rapid upsurge in unemployment since the recession began. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) was allocated £1.7 billion in the recent Budget, in part to increase its network of Jobcentre Plus personal advisers.

Now It's Personal argues that a fresh examination is needed of the role of personal advisers in the welfare system. Current policy is failing too often in its intention of providing personalised back-to-work support and significant 'up-skilling' of the adviser workforce is needed for more effective services.

'Up-skilling' personal advisers in the welfare system

This report is based on focus groups with service users, in-depth interviews with advisers, surveys of personal advisers and employment providers and a review of the literature. It examines promising innovations in adviser practice, training and development in the UK and internationally. It argues for three key areas of reform for a future strengthened workforce, better equipped for a responsive and personalised welfare system.

- The use of more innovative approaches to training and workforce development to 'up-skill' the adviser workforce
- An ambitious agenda for career progression and professional development to encourage a more professional and skilled cadre of personal advisers
- A framework which better supports adviser practice in the context of greater discretion and more flexibility as well as wider policy developments.

Key findings

The impact of the recession

New quantitative analysis is presented to show changes to the ratio of Jobcentre Plus personal advisers to the number of interviews they conduct since the recession began.

- In early 2008 before the full impact of the recession, there was a ratio of almost 40 interviews a month per Jobcentre Plus adviser for claimants of Job Seeker's Allowance (JSA)
- In February this year this rose to 65 as the number of benefit claimants surged
- June 2009 is expected to see a peak of just over 70 interviews a month per adviser as the cumulative effect of growing long-term unemployment is felt

- This is expected to ease in early 2010 to 50, but based on a variant projection showing a higher path for unemployment, it could still be as high as just over 60 interviews a month per adviser.

To maintain pre-recession levels of personal support by Jobcentre Plus, an additional 3,000–5,600 full-time equivalent (FTE) personal advisers need to be recruited, which would be a 30–60 per cent increase in the number of advisers currently in place. With interview rates likely to peak this month (June 2009), it may already be too late to meet a significant amount of additional demand caused by the recession.

Personal support in the welfare system

Our research shows that although there were some excellent experiences of individual advisers, on the whole ippr's focus group participants did not feel advisers provided them with sufficient help or were able to 'push' them in the right direction and they described a lack of relevant support. Tasks involved in Jobseeker's Allowance interviews left some service users feeling daunted, with little time left for diagnosing need and job search assistance. Almost half of advisers surveyed (47 per cent) said they did not have as much time as they would like to support their clients. Overall, what matters to citizens – being treated with respect and given relevant advice and guidance to find work – is not available consistently enough.

Qualifications and career progression

There is no minimum industry-wide qualification for employment advisers, with employment providers recruiting more on the basis of experience and skills-fit. There is evidence, however, that the absence of a professional qualification risks reducing the overall level of quality of job brokerage undermining its status as a sector.

Half (49 per cent) of advisers surveyed did not feel there were many opportunities for them to progress into a role with more responsibility or (54 per cent) to a better paying job. There was evidence that relatively low pay resulted in a loss of skilled staff and high staff turnover, with a negative impact on continuity of support for clients.

Training for personal advisers

The most common forms of training for advisers were one to two weeks of in-house training and/or staff shadowing. Some private and voluntary sector providers favoured practical and experiential approaches as a way of developing adviser interviewing skills. There was also evidence that new training techniques such as Cognitive Behavioural Interviewing technique can encourage a more open and productive dialogue between adviser and client, enabling discussions to move onto employment-related goals more quickly. A major gap was in specialist training with half of advisers reporting not receiving adequate training in childcare, homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse or mental health problems.

Wider systems change

A key challenge facing the welfare system is the unequal nature of support provided to those from disadvantaged groups and for whom the impact of the recession is likely to be hardest. Localised networks of outreach support are proven to be effective in reaching those furthest from the labour market but current provision of outreach is patchy. One recent promising scheme, the Partner Outreach for Ethnic Minorities programme (POEM), was abandoned by Jobcentre Plus, despite having outperformed other welfare-to-work programmes within its first year.

The recession presents opportunities to shape a more assertive approach to outreach at a local level. Local partnerships are being set up in the recession as employment support

becomes a higher priority for a range of organisations to link into. These partnerships present opportunities to form longer-term arrangements to bring together provision of support at a local level.

Finally, there has been a proliferation of advisory roles, described here as forming part of a growing adviser workforce. Employment advisers are just one of a number of adviser roles across public services such as health advisers, family support workers, legal advisers and debt advisers which are increasingly converging in community settings. Integrating adviser roles more closely offers opportunities for improving the quality of advice through shared training and development as well as the potential to generate cost savings as public spending is cut.

Recommendations

1. Impact of the recession

- To maintain pre-recession levels of personal support by Jobcentre Plus, between 3,000 and 5,600 additional full-time equivalent personal advisers need to be in place to meet the demand caused by higher unemployment as soon as possible.
- The personal adviser role should adapt to reflect evidence showing the negative impact the transition to unemployment has in the first six months by using new group sessions and targeted support at three months and onwards to signpost to relevant counselling support.

2. Workforce development

- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) should publish a comprehensive workforce development plan setting out steps for developing training and professional development opportunities for a more skilled adviser workforce. This should include extending the use of 'training coaches' for a more flexible and interactive training system and trialling new training techniques such as Cognitive Behavioural Interviewing to evaluate their impact on client engagement and labour market outcomes.
- Advisers across all public employment services should be given better training in specialist areas such as mental health and drug and alcohol misuse to improve confidence and skills in diagnosing the needs of a wider range of groups for earlier and more effectively targeted support.
- A best practice exchange should be set up to broker information and the sharing of best practice and innovation across sectors bringing together prime subcontractors, public sector and voluntary sector organisations and service user groups. A hub set up by ippr as part of the *Now It's Personal* project could act as a catalyst for a more permanent exchange.

3. Professional development

- The adoption of a core qualification for advisers should be supported by DWP, such as a newly developed Vocational Related Qualification (VRQ) in Job Brokerage, to standardise practice across providers. This would ensure that key core competencies needed for employment advisers are better recognised. Existing Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) qualifications should be reviewed to see if these qualifications are meeting the needs of advisers and employers.
- Debate is needed within the welfare-to-work sector about how clearer progression routes can be built for advisers to improve staff motivation, performance and retention. A 'natural progression' approach building on entry-level adviser roles and leading up to 'advanced practitioner' roles is proposed in this report as a starting point for this.

4. Welfare reform and a framework for adviser practice

- Comprehensive criteria and guidance should be issued to advisers and training provided on how to identify claimants for mandatory fast-tracking into specialist support in the JSA regime. Claimants should also be given clear information in interviews to assess whether they are eligible for voluntary early entry to the Flexible New Deal.
- The additional support from a personal adviser at Stages 2 and 3 of the JSA regime should be ring-fenced to ensure that it is not squeezed out as a result of extra pressure on services.
- Better use of Job Search Review staff knowledge of claimants should be made through greater joint working between Job Search Review staff and personal advisers. This would improve understanding of clients' progress and ensure additional support is targeted at those claimants who need it most, reducing the likelihood of deadweight costs.
- Greater opportunities for advisers to benefit from reflective practice through case conferences or peer support should be introduced where not already available.
- To counterbalance increases in adviser discretion, structures should be put in place to ensure that staff are supervised against outcome targets and that they have the opportunity to discuss complex cases with managers or peers as part of a more structured approach to case management.

5. Wider systems change

- The challenge of growing long-term unemployment should be used as an opportunity to reach out further to engage with disadvantaged groups to prevent entrenched worklessness. A more assertive and coherent national policy of outreach should provide power for local Jobcentres to set up localised networks to broker support by linking up with partners in the community.

Conclusion

Personalised employment programmes are the most effective, including cost effective, way of providing active employment support. They are also highly dependent on a proactive and motivated adviser workforce. Over the next couple of years, tackling unemployment will arguably be one of the greatest challenges the country faces. There are now more compelling reasons than ever to invest in high quality strategies to train and retain skilled staff and ensure that advisers can play their vital role in supporting people back into work.

Findings from this paper will develop and evolve as a result of working with delivery partners in the next phase of the *Now It's Personal* project, a programme of action research. With partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors, this will test different aspects of the adviser role through a series of demonstration trials. A best practice 'hub' will form the centre of a research network, which will take forward some of the issues raised in this paper. A final report will be published in 2010.

Introduction

For many of us, our experience of public services is shaped largely by our interaction with the frontline staff with whom we come into contact. The quality of that interaction can be just as important to us as the outcome we receive from the service. That a service is only as good as the people delivering it has become a cliché. Yet what that understanding implies for public policy and how services are designed has not been sufficiently explored.

As well as being the face of the state, frontline staff exert a great degree of influence over how public policy is delivered on the ground. It has been suggested that public policy is best understood not as being made in government departments, but in the daily encounters between the public and staff in schools, hospitals, welfare-to-work programmes or the legal courts (Lipsky 1980). Despite this, frontline staff or 'street level bureaucrats' as they have been described, frequently lack a voice and place in public sector reform.

This report gives shape to the argument that the next focus of public sector reform should be on the relationship between the citizen and frontline staff in public services. It does so by focusing on what matters in the relationship between citizen and the state on the frontline of public services. This is explored through the case study of benefit claimant and personal adviser in the welfare-to-work system in the context of *personalisation*, which aims to improve services by offering a more tailored response to individual need and has become an increasingly central intention of welfare reform over the past decade.

Specifically, it considers how the relationship between adviser and benefit claimant can be improved by ensuring frontline staff have the right incentives, degree of control over their work and autonomy to provide effective and responsive services.

The landscape of welfare to work has changed radically over the past year, as the recession has led to the most rapid upsurge in benefit claimants in the past twenty years (National Statistics 2009a). This has turned government policy on its head, receding targets on achieving fuller employment into the distance and posing a set of new and urgent challenges. Based on patterns of the last two recessions, employment may not return to pre-recession levels until around 2016 (National Statistics 2009b). Employment services will therefore be working with a fundamentally different job market as long-term unemployment grows and will need to cater for a wider range of occupations than before.

How support from personal advisers can be most effectively harnessed will increasingly be a concern for all political parties as they seek to reduce mass unemployment. The blueprint for reform set out in the 2007 Freud Report forms the backbone of both the Government's and opposition parties' policies on welfare reform, with its key proposal for involving the private and voluntary sectors to deliver tailored back-to-work programmes for the long-term unemployed taken up by the major parties (Freud 2007).

Despite significantly reduced labour market demand as a result of the recession, neither the Government nor the opposition is backing away from the outcome-based, payment by results model of the *Flexible New Deal*, which offers intensive adviser-led support for the long-term unemployed.

Despite differences on the exact mechanisms necessary to achieve it, all political parties agree on the need to create effective, responsive services that are built around citizens' needs. It is therefore critical to examine to what extent policy is reaching its goal of providing personal support through advisers (Department for Work and Pensions 2004, 2008) and how effective it is at achieving the aim of helping people find work.

This report summarises the key evidence on the role of personal advisers so far, drawing on new qualitative data, looking at learning from the public, private and voluntary sectors and international evidence. It examines promising innovations in adviser practice, training and development in the UK and internationally to build a picture of a future, strengthened workforce, better equipped to meet the challenges it faces. This is not as an end in itself, but rather where it increases the likelihood of successful outcomes and results in more effective policy implementation.

Personal advisers and benefit claimants in the welfare system: a case study

ippr's 2007 report *It's All About You* made the case for a *citizen-centred* approach to welfare to work, where support would be personalised, built around individual need and determined by demand rather than rigid eligibility criteria. It argued that this approach was needed in the light of falling job-entry rates of participants on New Deal programmes and the system's failure to provide effective support for disadvantaged groups through lost opportunities to direct resources according to particular needs (Bennett and Cooke, eds., 2007). Although personalised services can require additional up-front costs (though they can also often result in savings) the overall result is more *effective* services, which result in similar overall costs when the impact on sustained employment is considered. The report concluded that in the context of welfare to work, this approach rests heavily on the skills of personal advisers.¹ The purpose of this paper is therefore to consider the current composition, skills set and role of personal advisers and to examine what needs to change for the delivery of a personalised and responsive welfare and skills system.

The challenge of personalisation in welfare-to-work programmes has been to adapt services to better respond to user needs, in the context of mass, standardised services and often with restrained resources (Sultana and Watts 2005), an even more demanding task in a recession.

In the UK, as across much of Europe, employment services have attempted to personalise their programmes as part of the widespread adoption of more 'active' labour market policies which aim to increase the number of people in work by requiring benefit claimants to take up support, such as one-to-one guidance or training, as a condition of receiving benefits. They grew out of the public works schemes of the inter-war period and were reintroduced in the 1980s when it became clear that existing programmes were not successful in tackling rising job losses.

As a more active labour market policy has been introduced, the personal adviser role has moved from one focused largely on processing benefit claims, towards job broking, providing advice and navigating a wealth of employment and skills support for clients. For some advisers, the reality of providing employment services has changed substantially since they were first recruited. Others find themselves in situations for which they have not necessarily been prepared and have had to develop competencies while on the job in order to deal with the different demands (Sultana and Watts 2005).

In the past few years there have been calls for a more professional and standardised approach to job broking (London Development Agency 2004). This is underlined by the fact that until last year, the field had no specific industry-wide qualification². There is also a wider recognition that there is a limited understanding of how advisers can be 'up-skilled' and that

1. For a full explanation of what is meant by 'personal advisers' see 'Definitions and language', below.

2. A nationally recognised 'job brokerage' qualification developed by Tank Consulting (funded by the European Social Fund and the London Development Agency) has now been included in the new National Qualifications Framework. See Chapter 4 for more details.

a broader evidence base is needed for 'what works' in providing effective personal support (Gregg 2008).

The wider adviser workforce

By examining the role of personal advisers within the welfare system this paper aims to provide a basis for thinking about the links between advisory roles in employment and other services.

As the personalisation agenda has advanced, functions such as advice, advocacy and support brokerage have come to play a more significant role in the public services workforce. The increased value placed on these skills and functions has led to a proliferation of advisory roles across public services. These roles are described here as forming part of a growing *adviser workforce*, which is now to be found across a wide range of sectors including housing, legal aid, youth services, welfare to work and learning, skills and careers.

The use of outreach work to target the 'hard to reach' by making services more accessible means that adviser roles are increasingly converging, for example in 'one-stop-shops' or 'co-located' services. Analysis in this report shows that there could be several different 'advisers' working with one individual, all drawing on the same core skills of advocacy, support brokerage, advice and guidance. What the growth of these roles means has been under-researched. We examine opportunities for creating greater synergy between these roles across public services.

Report aims

Our key research questions are:

- What is a personal adviser?
- What constitutes an effective personal adviser?
- How can policy better support personal advisers to be effective?
- Are there core skills the adviser workforce has in common? What lessons can be drawn from examining the personal adviser role in welfare for other areas of public service delivery?

Findings from this report will develop and evolve as a result of working with delivery partners in the next phase of the *Now It's Personal* project, a programme of action research. With partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors, this will test different aspects of the adviser role through a series of demonstration trials. A best practice 'hub' will form the centre of a research network which will take forward some of the issues raised here, with a final report to be published in 2010.

Definitions and language

For the purposes of this project, personal advisers are defined as 'staff working for employment service providers working directly with job seekers to either assist the jobseeker find work, help the jobseeker become job ready or help the client retain employment after finding a job' (based on Considine *et al* 2009).

Though the staff as defined above have a number of different job titles, for the purposes of this report they are referred to as 'personal advisers' or 'employment advisers'. Employment providers contracted by the Department for Work and Pensions from the private and voluntary sectors are referred to as 'specialist providers'.

Those using these services are referred to as 'client', 'service user' and 'claimant' interchangeably.

Methodology

Reflecting our focus on those using and providing public services at the frontline, our methodology sought to understand the perspectives of both clients and personal advisers.

- Six in-depth interviews were carried out with two personal advisers working in the private sector, three advisers working in the voluntary sector and one adviser working in Jobcentre Plus. The advisers were recruited directly through these organisations. There were five females and one male among the interviewees. Two were recent to their roles (6–14 months) and four had been in their roles for over four years.
- Site visits were undertaken with six welfare-to-work service providers from the public, private and voluntary sectors. A number of staff were interviewed. Locations visited included Bolton, East London, Newcastle upon Tyne, Peckham (South London) and Stockport. The providers were from private, voluntary and Jobcentre Plus branches and covered a range of contracts working with different client groups.
- Three focus groups were carried out with a total of 24 users of welfare-to-work services in South London in September 2008. Participants were a mixture of long- and short-term unemployed, in receipt of a range of benefits and with an even mix of gender. All had experience of either Jobcentre Plus solely or both Jobcentre Plus and specialist provision.
- **ipp**r held 'Getting Personal', a conference which brought together practitioners and stakeholders from the welfare-to-work sector and a number of other areas including local authorities and statutory and voluntary services in November 2008. Leading up to and following on from this event, interviews which informed this research were carried out with a number of stakeholders in the welfare-to-work sector including academics, a range of managers and practitioners from private and voluntary sector organisations and Jobcentre Plus.
- Two separate online surveys were carried out with personal advisers and with employment support providers (see Annex A) in order to gain access to a wider group of personal advisers and providers. Findings generated are illustrative rather than representative and are used here to highlight the experiences of particular groups.

The number of responses to each question varied, with some advisers answering more than once. The *n* number displayed is the number of advisers who responded to that question and were able to be used in the statistical analysis. In order to ensure a consistent number of responses were counted advisers' duplicated responses were removed. The survey for advisers was completed by 110 personal advisers from the private sector (38 per cent), voluntary sector (24 per cent) and public sector (38 per cent). The survey for providers was completed by 36 employment support providers from the private sector (40 per cent), voluntary sector (27 per cent) and Jobcentre Plus (33 per cent).

- Secondary data analysis was carried out on literature on personal advisers in the welfare-to-work system, including evaluation evidence.

Personal advisers work across a range of services, from Jobcentre Plus to private and voluntary sectors and community providers. Our research methodology sought to examine advisers working across each of these sectors in equal measure. However, a greater body of secondary evidence and research is available on Jobcentre Plus advisers than on the others, and the analysis here reflects this to some extent. It is also important to note that more detailed analysis in the report centres on Jobseeker's Allowance as the main working-age benefit. It is hoped that greater attention to recipients of other benefits can be given at a further stage in this project.

Report structure

- Chapter 1 sets out general principles for the adviser role in the welfare system we need
- Chapter 2 profiles personal advisers in employment support, drawing on new qualitative data, secondary data analysis and UK and international comparisons. It includes analysis of skills and competencies across the wider adviser workforce
- Chapter 3 examines the adviser role in the context of personalisation, drawing on evidence from service-user focus groups
- Chapter 4 brings together findings on qualifications, pay and progression
- Chapter 5 summarises findings on workforce development for personal advisers
- Chapter 6 considers the changing adviser role in the context of policy reform
- Chapter 7 looks at how the adviser role should adapt to the challenges of growing long-term unemployment and considers wider systems change
- Chapter 8 summarises recommendations, draws conclusions and sets out next steps for the *Now It's Personal* project.

1. Personal advisers and the welfare system we need

Summary

- The recession has touched all sectors including 'white collar' workers and professionals, but those most affected are unskilled, semi-skilled and administrative workers in manufacturing, construction, distribution and leisure and hospitality jobs.
- All disadvantaged groups are faring worse than the general working-age population, while rates of employment among the low skilled have dropped off at a faster rate than for any other group since early 2008.
- The Government needs to maintain its focus on the low skilled, the disadvantaged and the young in order to prevent entrenched long-term unemployment.
- A number of long-standing challenges for the welfare system need to be tackled for fair and effective support for all, including 'cycling' between work and benefits, in-work poverty, unequal support for the disadvantaged and inflexible support.
- Employment programmes which provide relevant, specific and professional personal advice are integral to improvement in each of these areas.

The economic downturn is presenting the greatest challenge to the UK's 'active' employment support system since it was established by the Government over a decade ago. Latest figures show that unemployment has reached the highest level for 13 years, at 2.22 million (National Statistics 2009a). Pressures have increased on personal advisers as they have attempted to cope with a 90 per cent increase in Jobseeker's Allowance claimants alone over the past year (ippr analysis, see Box 7.1, Chapter 7). How to maintain the quality of frontline support in these circumstances without compromising support for disadvantaged groups is a key challenge.

The recession has touched all sectors including 'white collar' workers and professionals, but those most affected are unskilled, semi-skilled and administrative workers in manufacturing, construction, distribution and leisure and hospitality jobs (National Statistics 2009b). Jobcentre Plus personal advisers have, however, needed to offer job search assistance for a much larger range of occupations than the standard areas of leisure, retail, and hospitality and are seeing people with no previous experience of long spells of unemployment.

The rapid increase in the number of claimants since the recession began has also squeezed the amount of time advisers can spend with claimants. Interview times for Work Focused Interviews carried out by personal advisers have slipped from an average of 40 minutes to 30 minutes or less in some areas due to rising adviser caseloads. The task of motivating claimants and placing them into work has become more demanding for advisers as the number of unemployed for every job vacancy rises to five, double the count of January 2008 (National Statistics 2009a).

The past decade saw long-term unemployment fall by 400,000 and the lone parent employment rate increase by 10 percentage points (National Statistics 2009a). The Government has a series of ambitious goals to further reduce long-term unemployment which rely on greater numbers of the 'hardest to help' finding work. These goals include a lone parent employment rate of 70 per cent by 2010 (requiring a further 300,000 lone parents to find work), an employment rate of 80 per cent and a reduction in the number of incapacity benefit claimants by one million.

Though many of these targets will not now be achievable, the Government needs to maintain its focus on the low skilled, the disadvantaged and the young in order to prevent entrenched long-term unemployment. The most urgent priority for the Government therefore remains to provide more effective support for groups including the low skilled and those facing multiple disadvantages to labour market participation.

Box 1.1. The Government's programme of welfare reform

The Government is currently embarking on a programme of policy reform that aims to provide more flexible welfare support while placing a stronger emphasis on 'rights and responsibility' through a strengthened sanctions regime.

- In Autumn 2008, **Employment and Support Allowance** replaced Incapacity Benefit for new claimants of the benefit and changes to the rules for Income Support have required more lone parents to engage in work-related activity.
- A revised **Jobseeker's Allowance regime** and **Flexible New Deal** programme, due to be phased in from Autumn 2009, intends to offer more flexible and personal support to claimants while attaching stronger conditions to benefit receipt.
- Existing New Deal programmes will be streamlined into one under the Flexible New Deal and 'prime contractors' given longer contracts with payments based on outcomes, as well as greater autonomy to design individualised support for those unemployed for more than 12 months.
- A newly **Integrated Employment and Skills system** will introduce an initial skills assessment for claimants to determine whether they require a more extensive 'skills health check' by 2010.

Specialist careers advice will be more readily available as a new **Adult Advancement and Careers Service (AACS)** will see the introduction of a number of careers advisers in Jobcentres.

- Recently introduced measures to tackle unemployment include:
 - A 'Six Month Offer' to providing training places and volunteering options for claimants, including more time with a personal adviser
 - A 'Future Jobs Fund', which aims to create 150,000 jobs and will guarantee young people approaching 12 months' unemployment with a job, employment support, work-focused training or a placement on a Community Task Force

With a view to the longer term, a **review by Professor Paul Gregg** set out a vision for a welfare system based around three broad groups at various stages in the journey into employment. The review outlines a form of 'personalised conditionality' allowing for support based around an individual's needs rather than eligibility for a certain type of benefit. A series of pilots testing this approach are due to begin in 2010.

Underlying challenges facing the welfare system

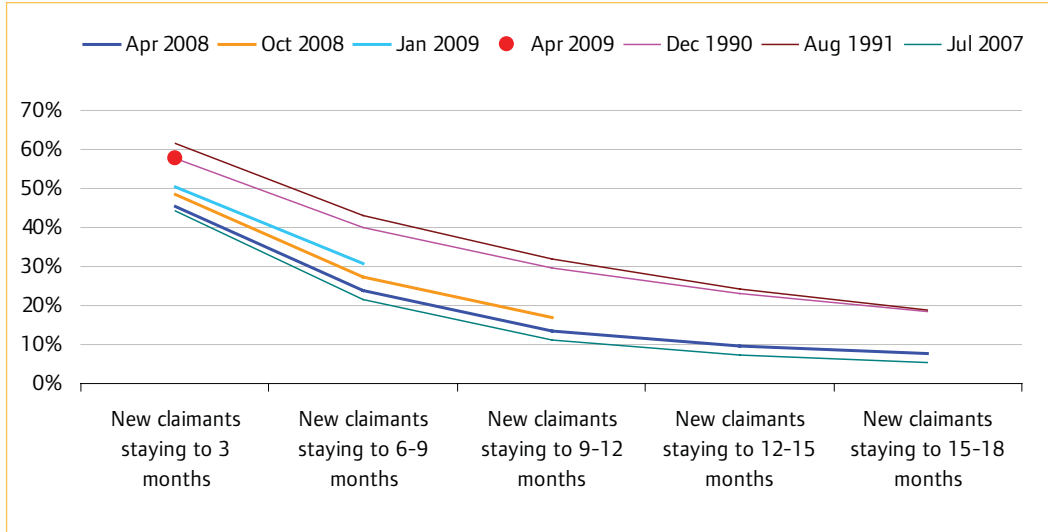
Box 1.1 outlines the Government's programme of policy reform, from a revised Jobseeker's Allowance regime and outcome-based support for the long-term unemployed under the Flexible New Deal. Before turning to the implications of this for personal advisers, we examine a number of long-standing challenges that will need to be tackled by this programme of reform for the welfare system to provide fair and effective support for all.

Preventing entrenched long-term inactivity

The recession has not altered the underlying challenges facing the employment support system. As Figure 1.1 shows, without effective intervention, this recession could follow the pattern of 1990–91 of a mass drift towards long-term unemployment, as the proportion of claimants staying in the system increases.

Figure 1.1.
Jobseeker's Allowance – proportion of starters in month becoming longer-term unemployed

Source: Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion (CESI) 2009



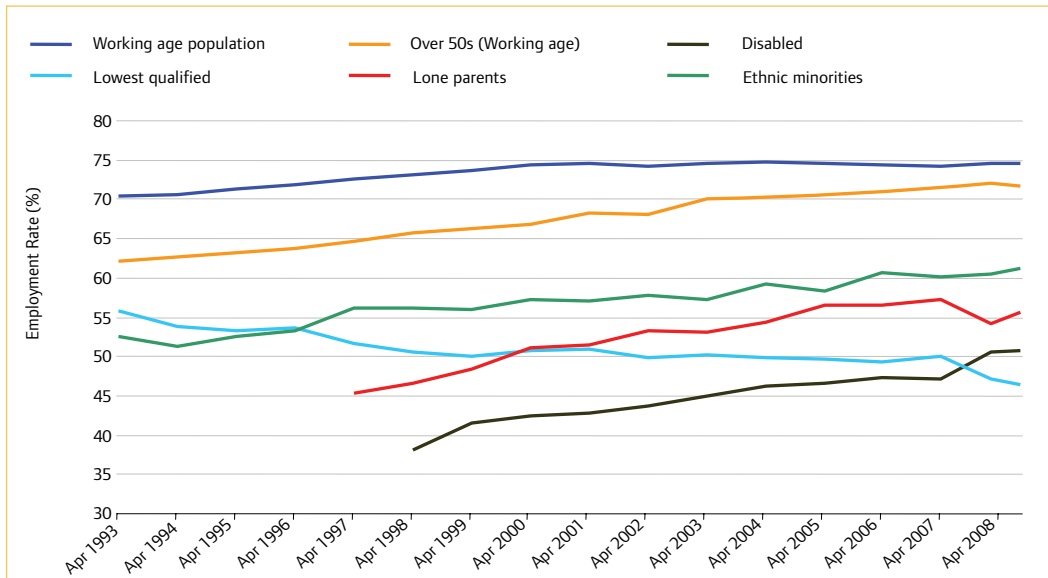
The chart shows how if this recession follows the pattern of the previous recession in 1990–91, around 16–18 per cent of claimants could have been unemployed for 12–15 months by April 2010 (CESI 2009) though the more active support provided by government initiatives such as the Future Jobs Fund for the long-term unemployed aged under 25 would be expected to have some impact on this.

Welfare-to-work programmes have been found to provide less than effective support for those furthest away from the labour market, specifically the low skilled, those with multiple disadvantages and some minority ethnic groups (Hasluck and Green 2007). These are the same groups that are likely to be worst hit by the recession.

As Figure 1.2 shows, all disadvantaged groups are faring worse than the general working-age population, while rates of employment among the low skilled have dropped off at a faster rate than for any other group since early 2008.

Figure 1.2.
Disadvantaged groups: employment rates since 1993

Source: Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion, 2009



'Cycling' between work and benefits

Despite the success of Jobcentre Plus in helping nine in ten Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants off benefits and into work after a year, two thirds of all claims are repeat claims, with many individuals frequently 'cycling' between employment and benefits. Around one third of JSA claimants have been receiving benefits for longer than they have been in work and around 100,000 of these have been receiving benefits for six in the last seven years (Freud 2007).

The employment support system is based around the 'work first' approach, which emphasises job entry over training. The JSA regime, for example, requires benefit claimants to 'submit' to any job after they have been out of work for longer than three months. This is informed by evidence that gaining a job offers better long-term prospects than receiving training (see White 2004). Though it may lead to immediate work, a large proportion of those placed into jobs for which they do not have the right skills, or which do not fit well with their personal circumstances, are likely to return to worklessness often after only a few weeks or months.

Job retention and advancement

Even once a job has been secured, keeping that job and progressing in it is often a far harder challenge (Herr and Wagner 2007). For those working in low paid sectors such as catering, retail and security there is frequently a lack of job security, which leads to the 'cycling' described above. Work is not proving to 'offer the best route out of poverty', with over half of children living in poverty now growing up in a working household. Though action is needed to improve the quality and conditions of jobs, employment support programmes also need to offer better information and support for people to access opportunities for progression and to stay in work (Lawton 2009).

The much-needed Adult Advancement and Careers service, to be in place by 2010, will bring together employment and skills support to offer more opportunities to improve skills or undertake training. But this system will have to reconcile allowing claimants to continue searching for a more suitable job or take up full-time training with the 'work-first' approach of employment support

Support for vulnerable groups

The Flexible New Deal programme is based on the principle of 'duration', where support intensifies the longer a claimant stays in the system. So, for example, after three months the 'hardest to help' will receive targeted extra interviews from a personal adviser and after six months on the Jobseeker's Allowance regime, individuals needing more intensive support will be 'caseloaded' by a personal adviser, meaning that they will receive more regular support. If they are still in the system after 12 months have passed they will be transferred to a specialist provider for more individual support. Certain 'vulnerable groups'³ such as ex-offenders, the homeless and those affected by substance misuse can be fast-tracked into the six-month stage intensive support from an adviser in their first interview.

3. 'Vulnerable groups' include those who have completed a custodial sentence; refugees and others granted leave to stay in the country; the homeless (including rough sleepers); those affected by drug addiction (including alcoholism); those who have been in residential care; ex-Armed Forces personnel; those with language, literacy or numeracy problems; those who have failed Employment Support Allowance Work Capability Assessments or Incapacity Benefit Personal Capability Assessments; and individuals at adviser discretion (in exceptional circumstances) (DWP 2007a).

Statistical profiling is used in some countries, for example the Netherlands and Australia, to identify which claimants need the most help. In the UK, this is done through a combination of adviser discretion and administrative rules, as no approach has yet been found which would not result in 'deadweight' costs (support being offered to people who would not have gone on to become long-term unemployed) (DWP 2007a). People needing more intensive support are comparatively small in number yet difficult to identify. Advisers will have limited information on an individual's work or benefits history with which to identify those who may be 'hardest to help'. But an adviser has no way of knowing, for example, if an individual is homeless, unless they disclose this or the adviser is able to build up a relationship that allows them to find out this information. Though this allows the adviser to use their own judgement, it also requires the time and skills to effectively 'diagnose' need.

Personal support in a standardised system

Though the New Deal programmes will be brought together for a more streamlined service under the Flexible New Deal, specialist support will still revolve around an individual's eligibility for a certain programme. This can fail to recognise changes in circumstances and needs. For example, many lone parents will re-partner and become ineligible for support only to become lone parents again at a later date if the new relationship breaks down. The system needs to respond when circumstances change and problems fluctuate, making the timing of intervention crucial, for example in the early days of a new job. Little of this 'ad hoc' support exists under the current system (Hasluck and Green 2007).

Similarly, there is still much inflexibility in the system. In an interview carried out as part of this research, an adviser who supports people with drug and alcohol addiction described a client who had been involved in a lot of crime. He had changed his lifestyle and obtained a place on a popular course to qualify him for a job he could do self-employed, as many employers were unwilling to take him on because of his criminal record. However, he had to turn down the course because of the mandatory training he had qualified for through his Jobseeker's Allowance claim. Though the course would have equipped him for work and left him with enough time to meet the conditions of his claim, he had to give up his place on the course.

Implications for the role of the personal adviser in the welfare system

Employment programmes that provide relevant, specific and professional personal advice are integral to improvement in each of these areas. However, feedback from focus groups with service users suggests that support frequently falls short of these standards (see Chapter 3). Added to this, the disadvantaged groups for whom support will need to be maintained in order to prevent entrenched long-term unemployment are also frequently the same groups that will experience an increase in conditionality under the new Welfare Reform Bill, presenting further challenges for the adviser role. Three priorities emerge in tackling this.

Firstly, recent research highlights the importance of creating a system that users feel is 'on their side' in order to make progress with problems that are preventing them from working. This relies on well-trained, well-resourced, properly managed personal advice that is driven by the needs of the service user rather than rigid targets or incentives to achieve fixed outcomes (Hirsch 2008).

Secondly, the need to 'up-skill' advisers and create the conditions necessary for them to provide meaningful support has become more urgent with the recession. Unemployment will place even greater pressure on low-income families. Advisers can play an important role in developing parents' skills and enabling them to get jobs that can be combined with family life. They can similarly act as a vital conduit for reforms around employment and skills and tackling disadvantage.

Thirdly, advisers will have increased flexibility under the new Jobseeker's Allowance regime to target extra support in the way they see fit and more discretion as part of the sanctions regime. To balance these new freedoms and allow as equal a partnership as possible between claimant and adviser, the 'rights and responsibilities' agenda will need to extend to the training of advisers and the service they offer (see Chapter 6).

2. Profiling personal advisers

Summary

- Employment advisers are far from a homogeneous group – differences relate in particular to adviser discretion, autonomy, pay and management structures operated by providers and advisers' roles in relation to benefit sanctions.
- In the case of a number of employment support providers there is a 'natural progression' in place from an entry-level generic role into a specialist role. Specialist roles can require both 'breadth' and 'depth' of knowledge.
- Advisers came from a variety of different backgrounds including the prison service, health and safety, retail and recruitment, but what united them all was a genuine enjoyment of working with people.
- A number of strategies were commonly used by advisers with their clients. These include 'rapport building and contracting', 'challenging' and 'selective caseloading'.
- Selective caseloading resulted in the exclusion or 'parking' of some clients, which highlights the urgency of seeking ways to mitigate this technique under the Flexible New Deal model.
- Employment advisers are among a range of adviser roles that have proliferated across public services as the personalisation agenda has advanced. Creating greater synergy across adviser roles could improve quality of advice for service users and has potential to generate cost savings.

This chapter aims to build up a picture of the adviser role, based on advisers' own views and those of service users. It draws on in-depth interviews, focus groups and the findings of a survey of personal advisers. It looks at advisers' motivations for working in the role and the strategies they most commonly use and demonstrates the pressures on advisers and the key constraints they experience.

The stigma associated with worklessness, losing a job or being made redundant is such that welfare support should endeavour to restore people's dignity in the treatment they receive. Similarly, for those who have never worked, or who have had long periods without work, being treated professionally and with respect can help them imagine and obtain the dignity and self-esteem offered by work.

The one-to-one support provided by personal advisers can be crucial to achieving these aims and to engaging and encouraging people in their search for work. To this extent, the quality, commitment and enthusiasm of advisers has been shown to have a more systematic impact on the effectiveness of support for the unemployed than the type of provider, whether Jobcentre Plus, a private sector provider or not-for-profit organisation (Hasluck and Green 2007).

Research by the National Audit Office (NAO) has similarly shown the importance of help from a personal adviser in finding work, concluding that personal advisers are integral to helping the Government achieve its (pre-recession) aim of increasing the employment rate to 80 per cent (NAO 2006).

Personal advisers therefore play a vital part in helping people enter or re-enter employment and are of key strategic importance to the success of the Government's welfare reform plans. As such they are also pivotal to achieving related goals such as the target to end child poverty by 2020, which depends on higher rates of employment among parents.

ippr estimates that the UK has in the region of 20,000 personal advisers or frontline staff helping people into employment across the welfare-to-work sector⁴. Of these, 9,800 work for the Government-funded agency Jobcentre Plus, an executive agency of the Department for Work and Pensions. They conduct an average of almost 950,000 work-focused interviews each month (Hansard 2008) with a wide range of client groups including lone parents, older workers and disabled people.

The remaining 9,500 or so personal advisers work for private or voluntary providers who are contracted by DWP to provide employment support programmes. A network of around 900 for-profit and non-profit providers is contracted by DWP at a combined value of £950 million per year (DWP 2008).

Key activities

Personal advisers perform a range of different activities relating to the ultimate goal of getting people into work. The main function of personal advisers in employment services is to act as 'job brokers', which involves preparing both the jobseeker and the employer in order to fill a post appropriately and in some cases to provide ongoing support to keep the jobseeker in work⁵.

Based on data collected from a range of providers⁶, the activities of advisers can broadly be grouped into six key areas. Advisers typically carry out one or more of these activities.

- Employer liaison – advisers working with employers to secure vacancies and build relationships
- Job placing – advisers working with clients and/or employers to place individuals into jobs
- Specialist support – advisers working with specific claimant groups such as lone parents, disabled, older people or young people, typically on New Deal programmes
- Outreach – advisers who work in the community to encourage referrals, for example visiting job fairs or working in voluntary organisations, in GP surgeries, Children's Centres or specialist advisers working in Jobcentre Plus to recruit clients
- Aftercare – advisers who focus on ensuring clients stay in work, liaising with employers and clients to monitor progress
- Training and skills – advisers who provide specific support related to learning or career development.

An online survey of personal advisers carried out for this research illustrates the range of 'personal adviser' roles and activities, with 49 self-reported job titles across 101 respondents to the question. Figure 2.1 below shows the proportion of job titles named per respondent.

4. Estimate calculated assuming £100,000 of programme activity per frontline member of staff and taking the £950 million operating costs of Contracted Employment Programmes (CEP) as published in the Jobcentre Plus Annual Report and Accounts for 2007-8. The estimate does not take into account additional spending by local authorities or other organisations not directly contracted by the Department for Work and Pensions.

5. Job brokerage has been defined as a 'central labour market policy affecting the matching of demand and supply sides of the labour market' (Raisanen 2003).

6. Based on data collected from site visits and job titles of staff reported in ippr's survey of personal advisers (see Annex A).

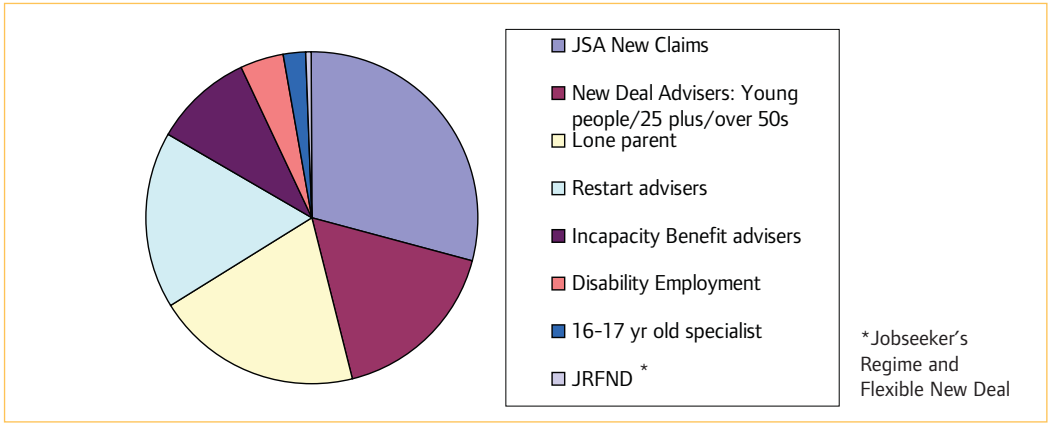


Figure 2.1.
Self-reported job titles
 Source: ippr (see Annex A)

‘Specialist’ and ‘generalist’ adviser roles

With the creation of the New Deal programmes for specific groups came the creation of ‘specialist’ adviser roles such as Disability Employment advisers, Lone Parent advisers and over-50s advisers. Specialist advisers differ from generic advisers in that they will tailor suitable packages of support for clients from the programmes available locally and often have strong ties with local employers, as well as voluntary and community sector organisations relevant to the particular group they work with (NAO 2005). Figure 2.2 shows the six key adviser roles within Jobcentre Plus.

Figure 2.2.
Different adviser roles within Jobcentre Plus
 Source: Jobcentre Plus Activity-Based management information



In a number of employment support providers there is a ‘natural progression’ in place from an entry-level generic role into a specialist role. In Jobcentre Plus, advisers can start as entry-level ‘new claims’ advisers and typically progress into more specialist roles. One voluntary sector provider visited had lead advisers for each specialist area, such as lone parents and homelessness, who were a first point of contact on these issues and who supported other advisers.

Specialist roles can require ‘depth’ of knowledge around certain groups such as people with disabilities, lone parents or asylum seekers or a particular activity such as in-work support or outreach work. Equally specialist roles can require ‘breadth’ of knowledge, such as adviser roles in small teams in rural areas where a range of support is not easily available.

Different roles of advisers from mainstream and specialist providers

Analysis in this chapter will show that personal advisers working in employment support are far from a homogeneous group. Though the core role of providing employment-related support remains the same, approaches to recruitment, training, management and work regimes of personal advisers differ significantly between Jobcentre Plus and specialist providers and also *between* specialist providers.

The UK's welfare system is designed in part to encourage these differences. Jobcentre Plus as a government agency provides streamlined, standardised services for the 'mass market' of benefit claimants in the first 0–12 months of employment support. Specialist providers are contracted by the Government to provide assistance to the long-term unemployed either after six or 12 months to deliver more intensive, tailored support to smaller numbers, as set out in the Freud Report, which provided the basis for the Flexible New Deal model (Freud 2007).

This results in advisers having differing relationships with clients on the frontline of services. In mainstream delivery through Jobcentre Plus, a 'high volume, low spend' model leads to short contact periods between the claimant and the personal adviser. Chapter 3 shows how it can be difficult for advisers to build up a trusting relationship with clients in the time they have allocated. Specialist providers are able to spend more per client and advisers interviewed for this research frequently reported being able to spend as much time as they needed to work with each individual. This can result in a deeper relationship between client and adviser – often likened by these advisers to acting as an employment 'coach'.

The single biggest difference between advisers from different agencies is the role they play in relation to the benefits system. As civil servants, Jobcentre Plus personal advisers act as gatekeepers to the benefits system and have the ability to impose benefit sanctions – either a suspension or cessation of the benefit payment. Advisers working for specialist providers play no part in the allocation of benefits (though they do have to report non-attendance of clients, which can lead to the cessation of benefits). The impact of this distinction will be explored further in this chapter and the next.

What makes for an effective personal adviser?

From interviews with service users, providers and advisers and secondary research a consistent picture emerged of the core skills needed for the role. Views broadly fell into two categories – 'soft' skills and 'hard' skills or competencies.

'Soft' skills

Service users interviewed in focus groups primarily valued personal qualities in advisers. Being listened to, having someone maintain eye contact with them and being respected were by far the most important things they wanted from a personal adviser. Service users asked not to be judged and valued advisers who had had similar experiences to them.

'The last guy was really helpful. Told him about my care issues....He asked me whether I had thought about being a carer; gave lots of information.' (Female)

'I only have had it once when I have felt like she listened. She had come off the dole and become a PA – she understood.' (Male)

This feedback reflects wider findings on public attitudes towards public services. A recent Ipsos MORI survey on citizen responses to public services found that a sense of 'care' was valued and thought to be lacking. The public identified an absence of warmth in the way public services relate to people, with the state expected to play a more nurturing and supportive role than a private company (Ipsos MORI 2007). There was a sense, however, that

for services to be fair, a more personal approach had to go hand-in-hand with the expectation that users would get back what they put in.

Among advisers and stakeholders from employment services, there was a strong consensus that treating unemployed people professionally, with dignity and respect, was important to help them imagine and obtain the dignity and respect offered by work.

Being able to establish a good relationship with a service user was essential for successful outcomes. Advisers who genuinely respected their clients felt that this was a central reason for their success and stressed the importance of not judging clients.

'We treat them like adults. I think that's probably the biggest thing; they're not used to that. It's like "Hello, how are you? How are your children?", "Thanks for asking". Sometimes it's as simple as that.' (Employment consultant, private provider)

Self-awareness was felt to play an important role in regulating the discretionary powers advisers have, whether in relation to sanctions or discretionary funding. As the next section shows, adviser discretion can determine how much or how little support is given to an individual. Studies have shown that these decisions can reflect frontline staff's own prejudices or beliefs, rather than the interests of their client (Wright 2003). Self-awareness can help mitigate against this to the extent that this is one of the attitudes some employers screen for as part of the recruitment process. One adviser described this process.

'One of the questions that we get asked at interview is what our prejudice is and you have to talk about it. The person that says they don't have one gets zero points. We all know that we have our prejudices but we just have to be aware of them, you know and make sure they don't affect anybody.' (Personal consultant, private provider)

As well as having the right skills, 'adaptability' or knowing which approaches and techniques to use in each new situation is one of the key factors for effective support from an adviser (Lewis *et al* 2000). High energy levels and a proactive nature were also considered to be key.

'Personal advisers need to have excellent customer service skills. They need to be able to adapt their communications style very quickly and very well because of the diverse communities we have, and I'm not just talking about language here, I'm talking about the barriers to work.' (Manager, Jobcentre Plus)

'There's a clear correlation between the amount of activity that you have with the client and the job outcome so you must keep your activity levels high.' (Personal consultant, private provider)

In finding out what interests a client has and what job may excite them, an adviser needs to be creative, solution-focused and able to think laterally. But once they have arrived at a possible solution, persistence and patience were seen as vital to achieving success. Several advisers said that intensive, long-term efforts sometimes paid off but did not always result in a reached target.

'Hard skills'

Analysis in the next section shows how advisers play a wide range of roles in supporting clients into work, including 'coach', 'navigator' and 'salesperson' and identifies a number of other areas in which advisers are required to have a good understanding (see 'Nature and skills set' below). These include recruitment practices and a thorough knowledge of the benefits system in order to provide benefits advice.

An evaluation of job brokerage in a number of Greater London Boroughs identified a number of skills needed for an effective job broker. In addition to skills identified above, it specified an understanding of the local labour market, Human Resources and recruitment experience, and project management experience (London Development Agency 2004). Based on that analysis, we summarise the core skills and competencies needed for personal advisers below. How these core skills and competencies map out across the 'adviser workforce' is considered later in this chapter.

Box 2.1. Personal adviser core skills and competencies

Core 'hard' skills or competencies:

- Job broking skills
- Understanding of the benefits system
- Knowledge of the local labour market
- Knowledge of local services and training provision
- Basic skills and knowledge needed to 'diagnose' specialist needs such as drug or alcohol misuse, homelessness, mental health problems
- Excellent administrative and written skills
- Recruitment skills

Core 'soft' skills:

- Excellent oral communications skills
- An empathy and commitment to working with clients to help them find employment, able to demonstrate respect and self-awareness
- Ability to develop excellent working relationships and to market and promote services
- Adaptability
- High energy levels, proactive nature
- Solution-focused

Note: Some of these skills are desirable rather than strictly necessary and while one person may not have all of these skills, they would ideally be available across a team.

Profile and skills set

This section presents evidence gathered through focus groups with service users and in-depth interviews with advisers to build up an understanding of what motivates advisers, the different aspects of their role and the strategies they use to achieve success with service users.

Motivations for working as a personal adviser

As with many people who have chosen to work on the frontline of public services, advisers' strongest motivation was the intrinsic reward that comes from providing a service and the enjoyment they derived from working with people. Advisers came from a variety of different backgrounds including the prison service, health and safety, retail and recruitment, but what united them all was a genuine enjoyment of working with their clients.

'In my past history I did a completely different job, I was actually a jeweller. I couldn't stand the greed, you know, it was more about taking than giving. I did that for a long time and thought – "I need to do something completely different" – which is give something back to society and help people and I think it's really, really valuable.' (Employment adviser, voluntary sector provider)

Advisers found it stimulating to come into contact with such a variety of people, and the fact that each individual presented a particular challenge. The difficulty of helping someone with limited confidence or with low motivation begin the journey towards employment is a motivating factor for many advisers, despite the ups and downs they face along the way.

'The bit which I love about the job is the variety of people... You kind of come into this job going, "yeah you're unemployed, you're either lazy or you haven't got the skills"... you almost do believe those stereotypes. You come in here and you realise the variety of people that are here and the reasons they're here and it's just amazing. I've got a caseload of about 55 clients that are live and you know it's great, I could tell you 55 different stories.'

(Employment adviser, private provider)

'The rewards you get from helping young people and seeing the end result...when you first get them, sometimes they're not very motivated or very interested in doing much...and actually seeing them coming in with jobs, you know, or going to college, actually finishing the programme, getting a flat, that kind of stuff is so rewarding, that's the thing I like about my job.'

(Employment adviser, voluntary sector provider)

Role juggling – 'Coach', 'navigator' and 'salesperson'

Beyond the core role of employment support, advice and guidance, advisers described several different aspects of their role. These are characterised here as 'coach', 'navigator' and 'salesperson'.

The main responsibility of the adviser as coach was to motivate clients to help them develop a sense of self-belief and confidence, before they could move on to more demanding tasks. For some clients, simply having help in writing up their CV improved their confidence by giving them an improved sense of their employment options. Others needed more intensive confidence building.

'If you have a client and you do have a very good rapport, they will ring you or text you whenever you email them, you really are their coach, you know, their employment coach really to get them back into work and you're always there to support them throughout the whole process and even whilst they're in work...'

(Employment consultant, private provider)

'Raising self-esteem is the most important thing. Some people here will never have had anyone who believed in them. It is the hidden attitudes which are so important.'

(Personal adviser, Jobcentre Plus)

Advisers were clear that many of their clients needed help with issues unrelated to employment. As navigator, their role was to do what was in their power to help the client overcome barriers. This often meant 'going the extra mile' and included anything from signposting onto support services, using funds to make one-off payments, such as renewing a passport or buying a suit for an interview, to providing more personal support such as accompanying them to see a housing officer or finding them a GP or dentist. Advisers knew what their boundaries were and did not report having problems in setting limits to their support.

Being able to market the support services offered by the provider, as well as selling their own knowledge and expertise is considered important by both advisers and providers. One provider explained how these skills are needed for advisers working as outreach workers in GP surgeries, Jobcentres and community centres. As 'salesperson', advisers' knowledge of the benefits system, service provision or the labour market is key to instilling confidence in clients and persuading them to take up opportunities.

'They need to have good negotiation skills or sales skills, because you're selling our services to them, you're persuading them, so you need that negotiation skill – "look, yes work is better for you; this is what work would do for you".' (Manager, Jobcentre Plus)

Other aspects mentioned included counselling skills needed to listen to and support those with personal, health and social issues, recruitment as part of the employer liaison function, administering benefits and providing benefits advice. Jobcentre Plus advisers have the additional role of 'policing' the benefits regime. The combination of these different roles makes for a lively and stimulating job but one that requires advisers to adapt appropriately and intelligently to each new situation.

Adviser strategies for adviser-client relationship

Advisers described their own individual approaches to working with their clients. Some adopted a strongly job-focused approach, with clear distinctions made between 'active' and 'inactive' caseloads – that is, clients who were near to being job ready and those who were either unwilling or unable to engage with the job search process. Other advisers took a more holistic approach, either because their role required it, such as when working with clients with particularly complex constraints, or because they felt their strengths lay in a more intensive support role.

Because of the importance of adapting their strategy to the particular client they were working with, practice varied between advisers. However, several common themes emerged from all advisers around stages in the adviser and client relationship.

Rapport building and contracting

Engaging effectively with clients and clients 'buying in' to the support they are offered has been shown to be key to a successful intervention (Hasluck and Green 2007). Advisers described how building a rapport was the first and most important stage in the client/adviser relationship as it was the foundation for all future work. This was typically attempted by discussing common interests in order to break down perceived barriers of authority.

'Probably rapport is one of my biggest strengths and it's being able to build that rapport. If you can get that you can pretty much, you know, direct...if they trust you. The moment they believe you're going to help them they will respond really positively to anything you suggest.' (Employment consultant, private sector provider)

Advisers working for specialist providers described explaining their role as distinct from Jobcentre Plus to clients, in particular in relation to sanctions. This was felt to be an advantage in encouraging an open and honest dialogue by these advisers.

Advisers frequently described a 'contracting' process with clients which established that the job search was a two-way process between client and adviser. This helped to set expectations of the working relationship and was also used by advisers to raise clients' expectations and gain commitment to the process from clients.

'It's about showing them, "Look, if you put in the work I'll put in the work as well", so I set them homework but I will set myself homework as well...you know, it's a two way street so I think that works.' (Employment consultant, private provider)

Selective caseloading

A key concern in relation to equity in the welfare system is 'parking' and 'creaming'. 'Creaming' is when providers and advisers focus efforts on jobseekers who are likely to find

employment easily anyway, and 'parking' is when they offer minimal support to jobseekers less likely to secure jobs. Our findings suggest that some personal advisers were using a 'selective caseloading' strategy to prioritise 'quick wins' over clients needing longer term support to return to work. Rather than viewing this as 'parking' with that term's negative connotations, it was perceived by these advisers as a pragmatic response to allocating resources and responding to pressure from targets.

'For your caseload, you're not meant to pick, but I'm sorry, I pick who I want on my caseload, because I'm not going to job search for somebody who I look at and I think – you don't want to work....it's gut instinct – I've been here for too long, I can tell.' (Personal adviser, Jobcentre Plus)

Selective caseloading was felt by advisers to be a way of using their time where it could really make a difference and was seen as a strategy which was beneficial for clients as well as helping to meet targets.

'You have to know which clients to put this energy into and then the other ones I'm going to offer this but if they keep rejecting it, I'm not going to keep on and keep on...because otherwise I'm just not going to have any energy left for those people that do need my help...'. (Employment consultant, private sector provider)

This strategy is particularly concerning where it involves client groups who, by the very nature of their problems, need careful and sustained support over a period of time. One adviser who worked for a service supporting former substance misusers into employment explained how some clients are passed over for being too hard to help.

'If a client asks me for help I will register them. If a client asks my colleague for help he will decide whether he will get them into a job. If he doesn't think that they're able to go into a job he won't register them. Now he could probably give them some really valuable support but he won't register them because he can't get them into a job.' (Personal adviser, voluntary sector provider)

Our research shows that the 'parking' of clients is continuing across providers, suggesting that those most in need of support are still being excluded. Furthermore it is perceived as a sensible, pragmatic and worthy decision on the part of the frontline worker.

Concerns have been raised that the Flexible New Deal model encourages a focus on those who are closest to the labour market and will result in fewer specialist organisations being subcontracted by prime contractors to work with the disadvantaged⁷.

Ensuring support for those clients who need it most through client 'profiling' is problematic as systems are unable to allow for different factors such as a clients' motivation levels. Differentiated payment built into contracting models may provide a better way to prevent parking, such as through the proposed 'accelerator model', which increases payments to providers the more people they get into work (see Work and Pensions Committee 2009: 32 for a discussion). These findings should increase the urgency of seeking ways to mitigate the exclusion of some clients from support.

7. Evidence to Work and Pensions Committee from Stephen Bubb of ACEVO, Work and Pensions Committee 2009: 14

Adviser constraints and pressures

Targets

The key driver for parking and creaming is targets. The tension caused by targets was the strongest 'negative aspect' of the job for advisers. Some welcomed the challenge of targets, but the majority found them a cause of stress, either because of the tension between helping clients and meeting their targets or the fear of not reaching targets. This was more the case for advisers working for specialist providers who have individual targets as opposed to Jobcentre Plus's office-based targets.

'We have to get one person a week into work so in a normal month that's four minimum per month and then on a five-week month it's five people and if you get under that then there's a process which we have to go to...I think there might be six stages of review which again can add to your stress...'
(Employment consultant, private sector provider)

'The management... understand the nature of the client group but I would rather have a client for as long as it takes to help them whereas the pressure is on to try and encourage them to do something quickly and not every client is the same, everybody's human, everybody's different, does things at a different pace, is capable of different things.'
(Personal adviser, voluntary sector)

For advisers within Jobcentre Plus, targets are based around 'outputs' rather than 'outcomes' so pressures came, for example, from the number of clients advisers were required to see in a day.

'Seventy per cent of our working day we have to be seeing customers – but then you get the phone calls, providers phoning...sometimes it's just not possible.'
(Personal adviser, Jobcentre Plus)

Though frontline work was the most enjoyable aspect of the role for most advisers, it could also be demanding, with some seeing themselves as doing the job only for a short time due to its intensity. Providers stressed the need for advisers to be able to 'switch off' at the end of the day and one provider offered training in 'dependency issues' to ensure advisers were able to manage clients' problems professionally.

Constraints

Advisers frequently complained of feeling disempowered to help clients as much as they would like because of a lack of access to funding for training provision or resources generally to meet clients' needs.

'There's a major lack of funding for a lot of things, training provision is very poor...that's the most frustrating part is there's not enough help out there for people.'
(Personal adviser, voluntary provider)

Advisers across all sectors were generally critical of the benefits system for being inefficient and bureaucratic and felt that it was too often a constraint on their being able to get clients into work.

Comparisons between advisers from different sectors

Good relationships between advisers from different sectors are important for smooth handovers and creating continuity for clients. But while some advisers working for specialist providers stressed positive relationships with the Jobcentre, other advisers had more negative views of their Jobcentre counterparts due to differences in approaches to working with clients.

Despite some positive experiences of individual advisers, there was also a sense of mistrust among Jobcentre Plus staff about their relationships with specialist providers. They felt that partnerships with providers worked better when their representatives visited the Jobcentre, as they were able to meet clients one-to-one and follow up on their progress.

Personal advisers from specialist providers spoke about their ability to really listen to their clients in comparison to their counterparts from Jobcentre Plus. One adviser from a private provider felt that the reason for their success was because they had more resources than Jobcentre Plus.

‘The good thing about something like us is because we’re a private company, we’re not the Jobcentre, we have a little bit more leeway with things like money and spend that we can do.’ (Personal consultant, private provider)

Other advisers suggested that the fact they were not associated with the Jobcentre allowed them to establish more trusting relationships with clients. This was underlined by the fact that advisers on New Deal programmes were more likely to describe a ‘coaching’ approach to their work because the more frequent and lengthy contact they had with clients allowed for a more intensive form of support. The impact of Jobcentre Plus advisers’ ‘dual role’ is explored in more detail in the next chapter.

The overall picture that emerges is of a challenging and stimulating job but equally one that requires advisers to adapt creatively to each situation using a wide range of skills. The pressure of having to meet targets and the demanding nature of frontline work are common issues faced by frontline workers across public services. The more unique challenges faced by personal advisers are examined in the next chapter.

The wider adviser workforce and ‘co-location’ of services

The personalisation agenda has increased the significance of functions such as advice, advocacy and support brokerage in public services and led to a proliferation of advisory roles, described here as forming part of a growing *adviser workforce*. Employment advisers are one of many similar adviser roles across public services including housing, legal aid, children, young people and family services, skills and careers. These roles are converging as the trend towards ‘co-location’ or bringing different roles and services together in one setting is increasingly used to make services more accessible, convenient and personal. This is based on thinking that one-to-one support can help people navigate complex services but that long-term benefits may be better realised by investing in simpler processes and sharing information between services so they join up more effectively.

‘One-stop shops’ have been set up by many local councils to bring together different local services in order to improve information-sharing and deliver more streamlined services. Similarly, so-called Extended Schools now offer a range of advice services under one roof after school hours. Support includes sexual health advice, drugs and substance misuse advice, behavioural support, family support, parenting support and youth work, to mention just a few (see www.everychildmatters.org).

Co-location looks likely to continue as people prefer to receive advice and support in the same place and in locations that are convenient to them. But while this may be providing more accessible and personal advice for service users, it also raises questions about the way in which support is coordinated and how it can be provided most effectively. Placing

different roles in the same location does not by itself make for coordinated or effective support for service users.

Experience from City Strategy Pathfinders, which bring together local organisations tackling worklessness, highlights the tensions between localisation and centralisation which can be apparent when bringing together different services. This is particularly in relation to barriers around integrating different funding streams and aligning targets. The pathfinders highlight the importance of local commitment as well as having the right structures in place. City Strategy partnerships tended to work best when there was a clear will for stakeholders to work together (Hasluck *et al* 2008).

Recognising that there are many advice services working with the same groups, a number of trial projects have been set up by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to inform the development of the integration of welfare and skills support.

Box 2.2. Learning and Skills Council (LSC) 'Advancement Network Prototypes'

The Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have come together to create a 'radical' new advisory service combining skills and training advice with practical guidance for people on how to overcome the barriers they face in getting on in life. The Adult Advancement and Careers Service will provide a one-stop-shop for those seeking training and help into work but who also face problems in areas like childcare, money matters, housing and disability issues.

This service is being piloted through ten different 'Advancement Network Prototypes' which will trial different ways of delivering the new service by developing partnerships linking together advice on jobs, training, childcare, living costs, health, transport and career development, debt management and legal advice.

The service hopes to create a 'no wrong door' approach such that wherever someone goes to seek help in the first place, advisers will be able to make referrals and appointments with other local specialists to get people the extra help they need. With the person's permission, key details will be shared, so they do not have to repeat everything at each new appointment. It is hoped to co-locate services as much as possible, so that clients can access a number of advisers in one place, instead of having to travel to multiple different appointments.

Prototypes are experimenting with different structures for the service. One prototype being delivered in London by Islington, Camden, Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea Borough Councils has put outreach at the heart of its approach. It will build on outreach through housing offices, Jobcentre Plus, Nextstep and children's centres. In this pilot, 'advancement advisers' will work within the community to identify and offer holistic solutions to the multiple barriers faced by adults needing to up-skill and progress into and within the labour market.

Mapping adviser roles: case study of Brent Council

To examine the growing presence of adviser roles in one local authority and to get a sense of how adviser roles are coordinated, a number of adviser roles across the London Borough of Brent Council were analysed for comparison⁸. Analysis of the job descriptions for the roles

8. The following definition was used as a guide for the collection of roles: 'a non-professional role, tasked with providing advice, information and guidance to the public, frequently offering one-to-one support'.

showed that while job titles varied, core skills required for the roles and key tasks were similar. There was also considerable overlap with the core skills required for personal advisers as set out earlier in the chapter.

Roles included two volunteer coordinators (disability and employment) and a volunteer adviser (volunteer brokerage) from Brent Volunteer Centre (BrAVA), a personal consultant and outreach employment officer from Brentin2Work, an employment support programme, a Connexions Personal Adviser and a referral coordinator for the housing and community care department.

Box 2.3. Adviser core activities:

- Provision of advice, information and guidance, often on a one-to-one basis
- Maintaining records, monitoring goals and outcomes
- Managing caseloads
- Assessment of need and referral of service users to appropriate service
- Advocating on service users' behalf
- Networking and engaging with partner organisations and peers

Core skills:

- Communication skills such as liaison and negotiation to build effective relationships
- Ability to enthuse and motivate clients and peers in partner organisations for optimum participation and service delivery
- Strong organisational skills to plan and manage caseloads
- Ability to promote a service or project to service users and partner organisations

The benefit of this for service users was having access to specialist advice in a number of areas in order to address multiple barriers. Having several advisers working with a single client was felt to help share information about a client's progress, allowing advisers to track what provision has been accessed by them and where gaps may lie in supporting the client further.

However, there were also felt to be risks involved. Frustration can arise if the client is constantly asked to repeat information when moving from one adviser to another. Having to build relationships and learn to trust one adviser after another could also be challenging for clients. Brent Council staff said they felt that the best way to combat this was to clearly explain to clients why they were supported by a number of different advisers.

Creating synergy across adviser roles

The similarity between adviser roles across a range of public services suggests opportunities for a more joined-up approach across a number of areas. Several ideas emerged during the mapping exercise for how the shared skills and activities of adviser roles could be built on. These included:

- Shared training
- Sharing of best practice
- Wider knowledge and shared referral networks
- More consistent methods used by advisers to give advice, simplifying the service user experience
- The creation of a directory of adviser roles across local services.

Drawing more on this common ground could offer considerable opportunities for shared training and development, with potential for achieving greater consistency and quality of advice. As the future for public services is likely to be dominated by the need for spending cuts, greater attention should also be given to how greater synergy between adviser roles could generate efficiency savings.

3. Personalisation and the customer journey

Summary

- Many participants did not feel they had sufficient time with advisers in interviews and complained about seeing different advisers each time with little continuity of contact. Almost half of advisers surveyed (47 per cent) said they did not have as much time as they would like to support their clients
- Different client groups had different perceptions of the support they received from advisers – female lone parents were more likely to find advisers helpful than single men, for example.
- More than seven in 10 advisers surveyed (73 per cent) took phone calls during interviews. Frequent telephone interruptions were a source of frustration for advisers and clients, suggesting further separation of benefits advice from employment support is needed.
- The Jobcentre Plus physical environment has improved substantially in recent years, yet some participants still felt intimidated and uncomfortable in their surroundings.
- Some participants did not feel advisers engaged enough with them beyond their computer screen. Some international and specialist providers have adapted desks to reduce the administrative nature of the interview.
- Over half of advisers (51 per cent) were able to support a client once they have been placed in training and employment for between 13 and 26 weeks, but a quarter (23 per cent) said they were unable to support a client at all post-employment or training.
- While some participants had some excellent experiences with individual personal advisers, there was also a sense among many of expectations not being met. Crucially, overall, service users did not seem to perceive the service as being 'on their side'.

The previous chapter built up a profile of advisers, looking at what motivates them, what strategies they use and what skills and attitudes are needed for the role. This chapter examines the client and adviser relationship in the context of personalisation, using data from service-user focus groups, in-depth interviews with advisers and an adviser survey to examine the effectiveness of one-to-one interviews and how far they can be considered to provide 'personalised support'.

Personalisation seeks to move away from previous approaches to public sector management which have left public services seeming 'machine-like, more like a production line producing standardised goods', according to one of the key proponents of the approach. Instead, personalisation prioritises user 'choice and voice', seeking to involve participants in the design and delivery of public services (Leadbetter 2004).

Tailoring support more closely to individual needs has been central to the Government's reform of the welfare system, though to date creating opportunities for the user to influence the design of services has not. A vision for personalised back-to-work support was originally outlined in *Building on New Deal* (DWP 2004) and the recent White Paper *Raising expectations and increasing support: reforming welfare for the future* took this forward by setting the goal of 'personalised support for everyone' as the basis of a progressive welfare state (DWP 2008).

Personalisation is, however, perhaps furthest advanced in social care, where individualised case planning, direct payments and individual budgets are already being mainstreamed, radically changing the way in which many care services are provided. This has paved the way for the wider introduction of personalised healthcare, particularly for long-term conditions (Hiscock and Stirling 2009).

It is important to note that the relationship between citizen and the welfare system is inherently different from that of other public services because of the requirement for citizens to maintain the conditions of their benefit receipt. Conditionality creates an uneven dynamic between personal adviser and client in a way that does not exist, for example, between social care worker and client. The difficulties this can create in building a trusting relationship are explored later in this chapter.

The challenge of personalising employment support

In personalising welfare support, the UK faces the same challenges as employment services in other industrialised countries: namely, to manage the tension between offering a more individualised service while dealing with large numbers of the unemployed in mass, standardised systems.

Services across Europe have been found to address this challenge in three key ways: through increased partnership working and outsourcing; a shift to self-service models of delivery, drawing on new information technology and increased use of group work to ease the pressure on more labour-intensive one-to-one interviews (Sultana and Watts 2005).

All three approaches are being used in the UK context; in the move towards an outcome-based commissioning system using contracted private and voluntary sector providers to support the long-term unemployed, the introduction of the Jobcentre Plus computerised 'Jobpoint' system for job search assistance and the introduction of 'Back to Work' group sessions as a key feature of the revised Jobseeker's Allowance regime. Further attempts to personalise the welfare system include the step towards simplifying the benefits system through the abolition of income support. Ambitions for 'genuine choice and control' are so far restricted to the Right to Control trials of individual budgets for disabled people from 2010.

More recent policy initiatives have sought to further personalise services by enhancing the adviser role. The new Jobseeker's Allowance and Flexible New Deal regime to be introduced later this year will see advisers provide more personal support for 'hard to help' clients through extra, targeted one-to-one interviews (DWP 2008). Similarly the Gregg Review envisages a greater emphasis on advisers' skills, to engage claimants in producing a 'personalised return-to-work action plan', co-produced and jointly owned by adviser and client (Gregg 2008).

Focus groups carried out for this research indicated that the extent to which service users perceived support as personal was based largely on their interaction with a personal adviser and on the quality of that relationship. Analysis below explores the extent to which support met the expectations of focus group participants, by examining different criteria such as continuity of contact, quality of environment, frequency and length of engagement and response to individual need. Before turning to this analysis, the one-to-one interview process between Jobseeker's Allowance claimants and personal adviser is set out in more detail.

Box 3.1. The one-to-one interview process under Jobseeker's Allowance – key facts

All benefit claimants have to attend an interview with a personal adviser where they discuss with a personal adviser their work preferences, experience and skills. This information is used to create an action plan which is the core of the Jobseeker's Agreement that the claimant and personal adviser both sign up to.

Jobcentre Plus advisers are required to carry out around seven interviews per day, each lasting an average of 40 minutes (House of Commons Public Accounts Committee 2007), with an average of ten minutes allowed for pre- and post-interview activities (Hansard 2008). Though 40 minutes is the average, this can vary significantly across different districts depending on staff workloads, sometimes dipping as low as 20 minutes (Davis *et al* 2007).

Focus: New Jobseeker's interview, Jobseeker's Allowance

The New Jobseeker's interview is a claimant's initial experience of the benefits system. Feedback from advisers in interviews and analysis of the tasks that must be completed by an adviser in this interview (see a full list in Davis *et al* 2007: 32), shows that six key functions must be fulfilled by an adviser in a New Jobseeker's interview:

- **Enforcement:** setting out claimants' rights and responsibilities and explaining about the sanctions regime
- **Information-giving:** explaining the Jobseeker's Allowance regime, including the various programmes and services on offer at different stages in the process depending on their individual circumstances
- **Job search assistance:** discussing work preferences, experience and skills
- **Diagnosis:** discussing any personal problems which may act as constraints to employment and identifying obvious skills needs
- **Guidance:** discussing work experience, preferences and skills to put together an action plan for finding work
- **Administration:** enter client information on Jobcentre Plus computer system and completing paper work.

The high number of mandatory elements involved in the interview, such as setting out a claimant's rights and responsibilities, collecting personal information and giving out information, can leave little time for diagnosing need and job search assistance (see below).

The breakdown of functions highlights a tension between certain aspects of the Jobcentre Plus adviser role. While the adviser is required to set out claimants' rights and responsibilities and communicate detailed information, they must also create the circumstances in which an individual feels comfortable to disclose any personal problems which could cause them problems in finding work.

This gives rise to a tension in the role between what has been described as 'policing' and 'enabling'. This tension can lead to 'role conflict' among advisers, who may identify more strongly with the counselling and guidance aspect of their role, rather than with policing of the benefits regime (Davis *et al* 2007).

Personal advisers and the customer journey

Focus group participants' concerns centred largely on the first 12 months of the benefits regime – the Jobcentre Plus directed job search and assisted job search. It is unclear to from their answers⁹ the extent to which participants distinguished between the short 'Job Search Review' or 'signing-on' interviews, which claimants are required to attend every two weeks (and last on average 10 minutes) and the longer interviews with personal advisers.

Frequency and length of engagement

Many participants described not having enough time with advisers. Several suggested that advisers had too many clients to see, which affected their behaviour and the quality of their service.

'We need quality time to discuss what we want instead of a conveyor belt. Personal advisers – it's a false title...they're supposed to give advice.' (Male)

'I had my work focus [interview] in June and the woman was there, but I don't think that she was listening to me. I went in for 10 minutes and came out with lots of papers – and that's it. It just makes you feel like it's a waste of time.' (Female)

Both clients and advisers stressed it takes regular contact to build up a rapport. The constraints on advisers' time can make it difficult to properly diagnose problems. In the survey of advisers, participants were asked whether they were able to spend enough time with clients who need a lot of support. Almost half (47 per cent) of the sample replied, 'No, I don't have as much time as I would like to support them' and just over a fifth replied, 'Yes, but this means I spend less time with other customers' (23 per cent). Several evaluations of adviser practice have previously highlighted that the extent to which advisers can currently provide personal support is significantly limited by the time they are able to spend with clients and their workload (Green and Hasluck 2009, Davis *et al* 2007, Dickens *et al* 2004).

The majority of Jobseeker's Allowance claimants will only ever have one interview with a personal adviser for the duration of their claim. All individuals are interviewed at the beginning of their claim but almost half of claimants will 'flow off' benefits before their next scheduled interview with a personal adviser at 13 weeks. Only around a quarter will remain at the six month point and just under 10 per cent at one year (DWP 2007a). The personal adviser service is really only intended for those who remain in the system past six months¹⁰, though more support is now intended to be available for the hard to help at three months under the revised JSA regime.

Quality of adviser and client relationship

Different client groups showed contrasting attitudes towards personal advisers. Female lone parents were more positive about the support they received, praising advisers for being understanding and providing them with good support. Single men out of work held the most negative attitudes towards personal advisers.

9. Focus groups create a specific dynamic and participants can spend more attention and time on negative aspects than positive. As the participants were a mix of long- and short-term unemployed, more negative experiences would perhaps be expected.

10. Oral evidence to the Public Accounts Committee, submitted by former Jobcentre Plus Chief Executive Lesley Strathie: 'We have Personal Advisers at the new claim stage to set up the contract of rights and responsibility and help and then the Personal Adviser service kicks in really at six months onwards' (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts 2007: v 7)

There was a common complaint about long waits to see advisers and being passed from one place to the next. Participants spoke about there being a number of hoops to jump through before getting support.

‘Not very helpful – when you ask them for something they pass you on about three times until you can get what you need.’ (Female)

Many participants reported the lack of a personal approach from advisers, citing a lack of eye contact and feeling they were not being listened to. Again this may reflect the heavily administrative nature of the interview as described above. Some also reported a lack of respect from advisers which left them feeling less than confident about their skills and prospects.

‘Some of them look down to you.’ (Female)

‘I have lots of skills – I am somebody – but when I walk in there they make you feel like nobody.’ (Female)

In a study of informal work and the benefits system, many of those who took part in discussion groups (often long-term benefit claimants) similarly reported feeling that they were not treated with respect when claiming benefits (ATD Fourth World and Community Links, forthcoming).

Interruptions in interviews caused frustration among both advisers and clients. The survey sample of advisers was asked whether they received phone calls from customers while face to face with a customer. More than seven in 10 of the survey sample of advisers said yes. Two in five advisers (39 per cent) agreed with the statement, ‘I don’t have a problem with this’, while three in five (61 per cent) agreed with the statement, ‘I often find this disruptive and would prefer no interruptions’. A number of participants also complained that advisers interrupted their appointments to answer their mobile phones or talk to other advisers, which left them feeling de-motivated.

Participants did not seem to know what their rights were or what they could expect in terms of support. They wanted more information to know what they were entitled to, including information on how to access help such as loans for vocational training or starting up a business.

Some participants perceived an uneven power dynamic whereby users are expected to behave in a certain manner but advisers do not match this.

‘They talk down to you. It makes you not want to go out and look for a job. They say like – “have you been looking?”, “have you been on the internet?” – they are sarcastic.’ (Female)

‘This power thing, when you are looking for a job, lots of people have a qualification. When you tell them what you want as a starting salary they say, “you’re not going to get that!”’ (Male)

The balance between conditionality and personal support can be hard to strike. One service user commented:

‘It’s all about filtering out the dishonest rather than helping the honest.’ (Male)

Physical environment

In 2006 the National Audit Office found the physical environment of Jobcentre Plus to have improved substantially. It found that over 80 per cent of Jobcentre Plus customers considered the office facilities ‘pleasant and welcoming’ (NAO 2006). Some focus group

participants, however, still felt intimidated and uncomfortable in the Jobcentre Plus environment.

Several participants said there was a third element in their interview with an adviser – the computer. Advisers were criticised for not engaging beyond the questions prompted by their computer, always asking the same questions and not challenging them enough.

‘My last experience was disappointing. I wanted some help. My personal adviser just read through details on the screen – asks still same address, same phone number. I told her I was still studying doing book-keeping, she wasn’t really very interested...They look at the screen and they aren’t interested.’
(Female)

International studies have shown this to be a common problem in employment services, which is generally dealt with in one of two ways. Advisers frequently attempt to avoid inputting client data during an interview, opting to do it after the client has left (this clearly depends on there being enough time available to do so). Secondly, by changing the physical environment, the administrative element of the interview can be minimised. In France, for example, adviser desks extend sideways and open up into a circular top, enabling the adviser to move away from the computer and to interact more openly with the client (Sultana and Watts 2005). Similarly, advisers working for specialist providers frequently described sitting side by side with clients as a means of breaking down barriers and creating a more personal rapport.

Continuity of contact

Some participants resented the lack of continuity they experienced, in terms of meeting different advisers every time, thus finding themselves having to tell their full story repeatedly.

‘They are meant to be personal to you, but in the last four years I have seen about six different people.’ (Female)

Research to inform the development of Flexible New Deal showed that for some long-term unemployed claimants who were supported by Employment Zones (EZs),¹¹ simply seeing the same adviser on a regular basis and receiving basic hands-on support to find work, such as advice on CV writing and interview skills, achieved results very quickly: clients found work within a week or two of starting the programme (Adams and Carter 2008). More regular support with the same adviser has been incorporated into the revised Jobseeker’s Allowance Regime through adviser caseloading for individuals with a weak employment history at three months and all individuals at six months.

Continuity of contact with an adviser is also important once clients are in work. Continuing support post-recruitment has been found to play a vital role in reducing ‘churn’ between employment and worklessness as those who have been out of work for some time may lack experience of how to cope when events disrupt the normal routine (Green and Hasluck 2009). When asked how long they were able to support a client once they have been placed in training and employment, over half of advisers (51 per cent) said between 13 and 26 weeks, but about a quarter (23 per cent) said they were unable to support a client after they found employment or started training.

11. EZs were set up in April 2000 to test a new, market-orientated approach to reducing long-term unemployment through an outcome-based model of delivering employment services. EZs were found to out-perform New Deal programmes in part because of the greater freedom given to advisers in EZs to determine the frequency, content and timing of their interventions (Griffiths and Durkin 2007).

Responding to individual need

Service users frequently did not feel advice was sufficiently tailored to meet their own specific needs. A large proportion of participants did not feel that advisers provided them with sufficient help or were able to push them in the right direction. There was a sense that advisers could only deal with a narrow set of issues beyond which they were unable to help.

'They [personal advisers] are trained to answer certain questions and if you have other questions they fob you off – they are not trained to answer anything else'. (Male)

'At the end of the day, there is a requirement to treat people well. They just employ them – they don't have training. We need specific types of help and support. They just say "you are not doing enough"'. (Male)

Individual circumstances were sometimes not taken into account by advisers. There were concerns from parents, for example, that their childcare commitments were not considered when appointment times were set.

'She makes a 9am appointment when she knows I have to take my kids to school.' (Female)

Views of advisers and managers

During the site visit and in the in-depth interview, Jobcentre Plus staff reported finding it challenging to carry out interviews in the time they had and said this affected how personal they could make the support they were able to provide.

'Sometimes after the Jobseeker's agreement is drawn up they still don't know what they want to do. If they haven't got a clue and you have to start rushing them it is not fair – we only have 40 minutes. It's a lot of information to take in, sometimes they don't take it all in. It can be very daunting to people.' (Personal adviser, Jobcentre Plus)

Among Jobcentre Plus staff interviewed there was some scepticism about personalised support, with a feeling that service users had higher expectations than could be met by the service.

'"Personal adviser" – to me it's not personal because of time limit and how many you have to see a day.' (Personal adviser, Jobcentre Plus)

'When it's called a "personal adviser", they expect more than what we can give. There's only so much we can do.' (Jobcentre Plus adviser)

'My only concern I do have is sometimes customers' expectations are sometimes very different from what we can provide [for]. Customers tend to want us to put them on training courses [like] learning how to drive because it will get them a job. Well we can't do that. They would want training courses that would maybe cost thousands of pounds. Well, we can't do that...it's also breaking down the barrier of what customers expect of us.' (Jobcentre Plus manager)

Job Search Review staff (formerly called Fortnightly Job Review staff) who interview clients for the weekly or fortnightly 'signing-on' interviews under the JSA regime were thought to build up more of a rapport with clients than personal advisers because they saw them on a more regular basis¹².

12. Job Search Review staff are graded as administrative officers in the civil service structure as opposed to personal advisers who are graded as executive officers.

‘Customers tend to have a bit more rapport with the staff they sign on with every fortnight than personal advisers, who they see about three times a year.’
(Jobcentre Plus manager)

Advisers working for specialist advisers did not reflect the same reservations. They felt they had enough time with clients and that they benefited from not having the same obligations as Jobcentre Plus staff in relation to sanctions. One adviser explained how hard habits were to break once they had built up:

‘They live in two week cycles, I get my pay cheque and then I live for two weeks, then I get my next pay cheque. It’s about breaking the cycle. I think the danger is that it’s not encouraged enough at the Jobcentre. I think there’s a lot more work going on at the Jobcentre now and we do see clients being referred here earlier but...I have some clients that have been signing on for eight, nine, twenty years and are then coming to us. Now if you’ve been living that way for twenty years... it takes a lot. It can take two of three stints on this programme just to get them to the stage where they can work.’ (Personal adviser, private provider)

Implications for personal support

While some participants had some excellent experiences with individual personal advisers, there was also a sense among many of expectations not being met.

Advisers described how the amount of data and information that has to be communicated and collected in an initial interview can leave service users feeling daunted and give little time for meaningful support or job search assistance. As highlighted, the majority of Jobseeker’s Allowance claimants will only ever experience one interview with a personal adviser, yet having sufficient time to diagnose problems and offer appropriate and relevant support is crucial to moving clients forward.

For this reason and at a time when interview times are under pressure from rising numbers of claimants, it is important that the limited time clients do have with an adviser in the first six months is safeguarded.

The productivity of interviews was called into question by the findings on interruptions from phone calls, including personal calls taken by advisers. This raises questions about how adviser time with clients can be more carefully protected, for example through further action to separate benefit enquiries from adviser support and by restricting personal calls.

There was some scepticism among Jobcentre Plus staff interviewed about personalised support, with a feeling that service users frequently had higher expectations than could be met by the service. Job Search Review staff, who see clients every week or two weeks at high volumes, were felt to build up a better rapport with clients than personal advisers, which suggests that these staff could plausibly have a greater role to play in supporting clients than at present.

Crucially, overall, service users did not seem to perceive the service as being ‘on their side’; they felt adviser and client relationships were sometimes characterised more by scrutiny than personal support, falling short on several of the criteria examined above.

These findings must be set in a wider context. In a customer satisfaction survey for Jobcentre Plus, for example, the majority of customers stated that they were ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the service they received. Those least likely to be satisfied included customers who have been claiming benefits for a long time, males and customers who felt that they had some barriers to accessing services – all of whom were represented among the focus group participants (Johnson and Fidler 2007).

However, research has previously suggested that high Jobcentre Plus customer satisfaction figures may relate more to benefit award and timeliness of payment as opposed to support to find work (Finn *et al* 2008). Indeed, one of the highest rates of dissatisfaction for Jobcentre Plus is in relation to providing relevant information (Johnson and Fidler 2007).

Service users not receiving specific or relevant enough support in interviews is a common theme in evaluations of welfare-to-work programmes (see Carter and Adams 2008, Lissenburgh and Marsh 2003). People frequently want more support to 'up-skill' to find a job in a specific sector, as opposed to being encouraged to take any job irrespective of their previous work history or interests.

Conclusion and next steps

The impact of adviser workload and the restricted time advisers are able to spend with clients on the service users' perceptions of employment support has already been noted. How well-trained advisers are to provide the specific support service users want is considered in the next chapter. But a key factor which must also be explored is the challenging nature of the adviser role in relation to conditional support.

Our interviews with advisers showed that those working for specialist providers did not reflect the same reservations in relation to establishing rapport or trust with service users as those working for Jobcentre Plus. The concerns raised here underpin the need not only for changes to widen the range of support advisers can provide but to enhance the evidence base upon which adviser practice is built. Based on findings here, key questions that now need to be addressed are:

- How far does the 'dual role' of the Jobcentre Plus personal adviser damage performance and outcomes for the individual as compared with advisers working for specialist providers?
- What scope is there for further separation of employment support from benefit administration within a conditionality-based system?
- How can some of the mandatory elements of the Work Focused Interview (WFI) be adapted further to make the experience more user-friendly?

Previously much of the evidence upon which the effectiveness of employment adviser interviews is judged has been based on semi-structured interviews with advisers and clients after interviews have taken place. The use of more innovative techniques such as filming of interviews for analysis is beginning to provide more empirical findings that can expand the evidence base.

A major study of language and communication in adviser interviews is currently being carried out by the Centre for Advanced Studies in Communication and Language at York University which is yielding important insights into current interview practice. Over 200 interviews were filmed across a range of DWP customer groups¹³ highlighting the complexity of tasks involved and the multiple objectives for advisers in interviews and providing visual evidence to some of the concerns identified here (Drew *et al* forthcoming).

Research based on actual interviews can potentially offer greater insights into current practice and help devise appropriate responses to some of the challenges described above.

13. These groups included Incapacity Benefit claimants; lone parents; over-50s; receivers of Jobseeker's Allowance and people in Employment Zones.

4. Qualifications, pay and progression

Summary

- Providers were ambivalent about the value of qualifications and tended to rate experience and skills-fit over National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) or other industry qualifications.
- NVQs were considered too general and not relevant enough to job brokerage.
- Requirements for personal advisers working in employment support are typically lower than for those working in related fields, such as careers advisers or Connexions personal advisers.
- International evidence shows that most European countries place a stronger emphasis than the UK does on setting qualification requirements for advisers, with many countries requiring a university diploma or undergraduate degree, together with relevant experience.
- For the majority of providers, starting salaries for advisers were between £19- and £21,000. This is broadly consistent with roles in related fields.
- Over half of advisers surveyed (54 per cent) did not feel they had many opportunities to progress into a better paying job.
- There is evidence to suggest personal advisers in employment support do not have the same opportunities for pay progression as those in roles in related fields.
- Half (49 per cent) of advisers surveyed did not feel there were many opportunities for them to progress in their job into a role with more responsibility.
- High staff turnover had a negative impact on the support advisers were able to offer clients.

The previous chapter focused on the interface between client and adviser, raising questions and concerns about the customer journey. This and the next chapter examine the role of the personal adviser in more detail, in order to look at opportunities to equip personal advisers to better respond to the needs of each client and support them to offer a service that people feel is, as far as possible, 'on their side'.

This section draws on results of a survey of personal advisers and interviews with key stakeholders to understand how advisers are recruited, to what extent qualifications are needed for the role and how this compares with roles in related fields and internationally.

Qualifications

There are no universally accepted minimum qualifications for the recruitment of personal advisers working in employment support¹⁴. Though it was generally desirable for candidates to possess formal qualifications, the values and preferences of employers tended to determine the level to which recruitment depended on qualifications.

Providers were ambivalent about the value of qualifications and tended to prize experience and skills-fit over industry qualifications such as the National Vocational Qualifications

14. Jobcentre Plus, in line with DWP-wide policy, uses competency-based recruitment, rather than educational attainment or qualifications, although a few exceptions exist of the latter for specialist posts (Hansard 2009). No specialist providers that were contacted as part of the research set minimum qualifications for the recruitment of staff.

(NVQ) and Vocational Related Qualifications (VRQ) in Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG)¹⁵. It was felt that as a 'client-facing' role, people skills were as important as having a qualification. There was also a perception that the main industry qualifications were not specific enough to job brokerage.

'We find that some of our best employees have a blend of experience as well as qualifications – we don't often set specific qualifications. If we are looking for an ESOL [English for Speakers of Other Languages] tutor we would define that. If it is someone working in job brokerage we would look at an IAG qualification but it wouldn't be a pre-requisite.' (HR director, voluntary sector provider)

Mixed views on the value of qualifications – 'hard' versus 'soft' skills

Certain personal qualities or 'soft skills' such as empathy, resilience and persistence, were considered essential for effective personal support. There was a consensus among providers that these skills could not necessarily be gained through formal training.

'One of the benefits of not having too formal an approach is creativity between individuals. What you want is to give advisers tools rather than being too process focused – it is about how you can equip with tools but not give them a template – it's about techniques.' (Policy manager, private sector)

For one large private sector employment support provider, screening advisers for certain personal qualities is part of the recruitment process. Advisers are assessed for levels of self-awareness, willingness to learn, ability to build up rapport and respond to diversity and deal with 'hard to shift' views. These skills were deemed as important as 'hard skills' such as industry experience or qualifications.

One head of learning and development for a voluntary sector provider considered NVQs too general and not relevant enough to job brokerage. Where staff had completed NVQs providers were not convinced that this translated into more effective performance. It was also pointed out (by the head of regeneration at a local council) that many advisers choose to work in this field because they are strongly motivated by working with people, and formal study is not always an appealing option for them.

'It is possible to get a paper qualification which ticks all the right boxes, but attitude and the will to build a rapport with people and challenge people is more important. If the NVQ is pumping out people who aren't good on those things then what is the qualification for?' (Head of learning and development, private/voluntary sector provider)

'Many funding streams now require the workforce to be qualified to NVQ 3 or 4, particularly in IAG and this is the main driver for supporting advisory staff to achieve this. In reality it has been found that the qualification has little bearing or impact on their day-to-day work...Of more value has been training in motivational interviewing opportunities to develop personal skills' (Head of regeneration, policy and projects, local council)

There is ambivalence, then, about the value of the key industry qualifications among employers, with a stronger emphasis placed on the importance of soft skills and more job-specific training. For this reason, many employers have developed their own specialised training packages for advisers (see next chapter).

15. The survey sample of providers indicated that 'experience and skills fit' were more important than qualifications when recruiting staff. Of those who did look for minimum qualifications during recruitment, the majority looked for vocational training qualifications such as the NVQ levels 2-4 in Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG).

Promoting professionalism through qualifications

Qualifications have, however, been shown to provide a way of ensuring standards and promoting professionalism and competence.

In 2006 a pilot project led by Tank Consulting and the London Development Agency (LDA) aimed to develop a new qualification to give job brokerage staff across a number of Greater London Boroughs training to bring their services in line with good practice to benchmark the sector and give it credibility (see Box 4.1).

Box 4.1. 'Job brokerage' qualification developed by Tank Consulting with London Development Agency

The National Qualifications Framework Level 3 qualification in job brokerage was developed in 2006 by Tank Consulting, funded by the London Development Agency (LDA) and the European Social Fund.

The three core units in job brokerage were developed with the Open College Network to be integrated into the Vocational Related Qualification (VRQ) Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) framework as an extension from five core IAG units. The three job brokerage units are:

Working with job-seekers

- Initial assessments and developing action plans
- Preparing job-seekers for work
- Matching job-seekers and vacancies

Working with employers

- Marketing job-seekers to employers
- Using employer feedback to improve the service
- Advising employers on recruitment and support methods

Organisation and administration

- Marketing and promoting the service
- Dealing with conflict
- Networking with services and agencies

Pilot evaluation

The training was successfully delivered to 36 participants and was recognised by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority as part of the new National Qualifications Framework. The pilot was independently evaluated by Juice Consulting which concluded that the qualification should be endorsed and that it should be made a contractual requirement for staff to possess the IAG (Job Brokerage) qualification.

Comments from participants:

'It should be made available to everyone. It gives awareness to achieve and a platform similar to the Advice and Guidance qualification. It needs to be governed and to have a benchmark.'

'Whilst completing the units I feel that I have developed myself as an adviser and have evaluated and changed the way that I do a lot of my work. I also have more confidence in some of the work that I do that I previously felt I didn't do well.'

'My experience is that careers guidance is very undervalued by funders. Jobcentres and Jobcentre Plus subcontractors deliver at a low level for disabled people and refugees. I really wish that the profession was professionalised and no one could work without a Level 4 qualification.' (Note: The Job Brokerage qualification is actually a Level 3 qualification)

Source: Juice Consulting 2008

The pilot was set up because of earlier findings showing the varying quality of provision in the job brokerage sector with wide variation in achievement rates for leavers into jobs (from 3 to 70 per cent) across almost 50 providers in Greater London boroughs. The study concluded that the job broking sector was not sufficiently professionalised in relation to the role it plays in getting people back into work (London Development Agency 2004).

An independent evaluation of the pilot concluded that while competence in delivery is the real measure of success, professional qualifications can help to highlight any weaknesses and focus people on what is expected of them. Problems with low literacy levels among some advisers, for example, were highlighted during training which were more easily tackled as a result of being defined (Juice Consulting 2008).

Qualifications and the UK personal adviser model

Advisers working in related fields¹⁶ have higher qualification requirements than employment advisers. Both Connexions personal advisers and careers advisers are required to have an NVQ Level 4 as a minimum qualification and have options for further study through a postgraduate diploma or foundation degree (information from www.everychildmatters.gov.uk and www.careersadvice.direct.gov.uk).

A study of Connexions personal advisers found that students undertaking the foundation degree course had improved confidence, reporting that they felt they were being taken 'more seriously' by colleagues and had a more reflective, critical and questioning attitude to their practice (Edmonds and Price 2007).

This raises the question of why qualifications are not considered to be essential for employment advisers. Some funding streams such as the New Deal programme now require the workforce to be qualified to NVQ Levels 3 or 4. Providers are therefore increasingly required to recruit staff on the basis of qualifications, which could raise the number of 'qualified' staff. Yet despite the requirements, staff in reality do not always hold these qualifications (Juice Consulting 2008). There is also an inconsistency in the fact that DWP specifies that advisers are qualified to a certain standard for some of its contracts but does not require this of Jobcentre Plus advisers.

The absence of qualification requirements may in part be a function of the model of the personal adviser in the UK. This model emphasises the 'work first' approach which prioritises getting a client into work quickly over identifying career aspirations and training or learning needs (Wright 2003). Activities that take more time and demand higher level skills from the adviser can end up being 'muted' (Sultana and Watts 2005).

There is a risk that the absence of qualification requirements in employment support reduces the overall level of quality in delivering job brokerage and undermines its status as a sector. In most European systems there is by contrast an emphasis on the acquisition of formal qualifications.

16. Connexions personal advisers are specially trained to work with young people, for instance undergoing training in safeguarding and child protection, though they also share the core 'career guidance' element of their role with personal advisers working in employment support. There is also a parallel with careers advisers. Specialist careers guidance draws on a deeper knowledge base than the 'job broking' personal advisers carry out as part of job search assistance. However, job broking has been shown to include elements of career guidance (Sultana and Watts 2005).

Box 4.2. European comparisons: qualification requirements for employment advisers

Germany

Germany has distinct training programmes for those at 'assistant level' and 'professional level'. Training for those at assistant level takes place largely at age 16-20, with a three-year training programme linked to a 'dual system' – on-the-job training combined with college-based study. Around 1,500 staff are recruited at this level each year, of whom around a quarter then proceed to the professional level.

The training for those at professional level is a three-year degree course in vocational counselling or public administration at the Federal Employment Agency's Academy for Public Administration in Mannheim. Only around 300 people a year are recruited directly on to the three-year courses. There is also a more flexible modular training programme for those promoted from assistant level and for a new stream of recruits who have university degrees. The modular programme lasts nine months and offers training in counselling, placements, work with employers, social insurance, and administration and leadership.

Spain

In Spain, advisers are required to have a degree in psychology, pedagogy (teaching in social work and education) or social work, with training and/or experience in personal interviews, professional guidance and knowledge of motivation techniques and communication.

Republic of Ireland

In Ireland, all Employment Service Officers must have a Certificate in Adult Guidance, Theory and Practice, which was designed with the national employment service, as a minimum qualification. After three years' on-the-job experience advisers can apply to follow a Diploma/Higher Diploma in Arts: Adult Guidance and Counselling. This two-year course is designed to serve as an accredited training for people working with adults in a guidance setting, providing information, advice, and placement services.

Currently nearly eight in ten employment service staff have had at least some form of careers guidance training in Ireland. They can also undertake a part-time university course in adult guidance over a 12-month period, with their tuition fees and release time for course attendance being paid for and with salary increments for those who successfully complete the course.

Other European countries

In Switzerland advisers must have a degree in psychology with a specialisation in educational and vocational guidance within that degree. In France, advisers need to have a BAC+3 (equivalent to an undergraduate degree) and in Italy almost two thirds of advisers have specialist degrees in such areas as occupational psychology, as well as in sociology, education and social work. Diploma-level courses at universities are offered in Iceland and Malta and Norway has three university colleges that offer further education programmes.

Source: Sultana and Watts 2005

There are no equivalent courses in the UK that offer higher-level training for advisers. NVQs offer opportunities for development, but they can be used to certify existing skills rather than developing new ones (Edmonds and Price 2007). This is not to discount their value. Recent evidence shows NVQs can offer learning and act as a 'throughput' qualification, providing access to higher-level roles when they are well run (Cox 2007).

Higher vocational degrees such as foundation degrees offer stronger returns to skills than NVQs (DIUS and Cabinet Office 2008). A range of 'para-professional' and support roles in the health, education and social care sectors for which no qualifications were previously required have been 'up-skilled' through the establishment of foundation degrees as 'intermediate' level qualifications.

The recruitment industry has recently taken this route by extending the Certificate and Diploma in Recruitment Practice offered by the Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC) to introduce a Foundation Degree and BA Degree in Recruitment Practice, working in conjunction with Middlesex University Business School (see www.rec.uk.com).

Although formal education may not appeal to all advisers, a recent survey of 1,000 frontline staff working in UK employment support agencies found that just under a quarter (24 per cent) of advisers, a relatively high number, had completed an undergraduate degree (Considine *et al* 2009)¹⁷. Work Directions, which offers among the highest salaries in the field, suggests that as many as 90 per cent of its advisers have a university degree (RAND 2006).

This suggests there could be demand for an intermediate-level qualification such as a foundation degree among some advisers, which would increase skills in working with clients, as in other European countries. As a minimum, a universal core qualification requirement for advisers at NVQ/VRQ Level 3 tailored closely to the needs of advisers and providers would bring the UK closer to European equivalents.

Pay

The survey sample of providers was asked what the starting salary was for advisers in their organisation. For the majority of providers, this was £19–21,000, broadly consistent with roles in related fields. The typical starting salary for Connexions personal advisers, for example, is £19–21,000¹⁸ and £18–21,000¹⁹ for careers advisers.

Jobcentre Plus Job Search Review staff are in a lower salary band to personal advisers and are paid £14,700–£17,600 per year. Despite being junior staff, their work has been found to be 'high volume' and 'intense' and plays an important role in policing the benefits regime (Davis *et al* 2007).

Given the modest levels of pay for most personal advisers, the issue of pay progression becomes more central. In Jobcentre Plus, a personal adviser can expect to earn a *maximum* of £23,990, rising to £27,850 in inner London (Hansard 2009). Little information is available

17. When asked to indicate their highest level of qualification, just under a third (32 per cent) had completed A-levels and 16 per cent had completed GCSEs. Only 22 survey participants overall reported having a 'trade certificate'. It should be noted that only 72 per cent of survey respondents described themselves as 'employment advisers' or 'case managers'. The remaining respondents were trainers, managers, outreach officers and employment liaison officers (Considine *et al* 2009).

18. Information adapted from www.prospects.ac.uk/p/types_of_job/print/careers_adviser_personal_adviser.jsp

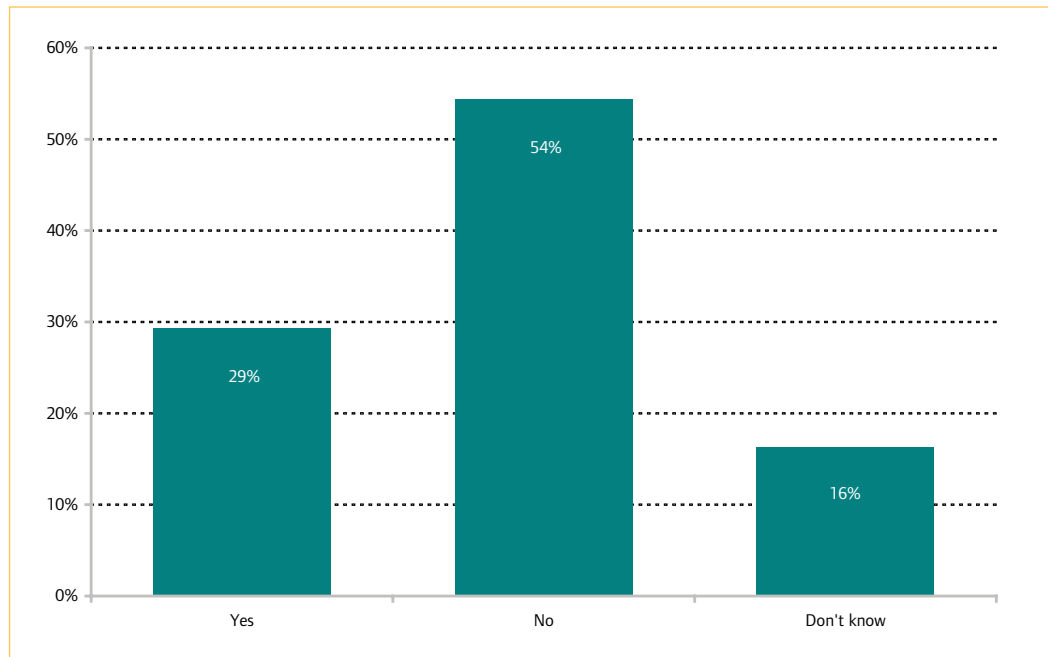
19. Information adapted from <http://careersadvice.direct.gov.uk/helpwithyourcareer/jobprofiles/profiles/profile400/>

about salary progression for advisers working for specialist providers. By contrast Connexions advisers and careers advisers can expect to earn up to £35,000 or more as they progress in their roles (ibid).

Figure 4.1 would seem to confirm that pay progression for personal advisers is limited, with survey results showing that over half of advisers surveyed (54 per cent) did not feel they had many opportunities to progress into a better paying job.

Figure 4.1.
Responses to the question: 'Do you feel there are many opportunities for you to progress in your job, for instance into a role with better pay?'

n=92



In a study of Jobcentre Plus, Finn *et al* found that Jobcentre Plus managers acknowledged that relatively low and fixed pay levels often resulted in a loss of staff expertise (Finn *et al* 2005). A National Audit Office report also raised concerns about staff turnover and consequent loss of experienced staff resulting in lack of continuity for clients (NAO 2005).

Creating development opportunities for advisers to move up in organisations by increasing their skills and linking in with higher pay is of key importance in order to retain skilled and experienced advisers.

Progression

Results of the adviser survey showed that the majority of advisers (76 per cent) had been working in their roles for between nought and five years. Almost one in ten (9 per cent) had been in their role for over ten years.

There were mixed views among advisers interviewed on how long they wanted to stay in their jobs. One Jobcentre Plus adviser said 'After nine years of being here, I still enjoy what I do.' An adviser working for a private provider saw her time there as a 'short stint' before moving on because of the demands of frontline work.

'Unofficially, there's a shelf life on a job like this because you could get to the point where you can get quite tired and jaded...because it is so demanding.... I can't see myself doing this for more than another year and then I must progress...' (Personal consultant, private provider)

One adviser working with young people for a voluntary sector provider explained how high staff turnover impacted on the support they were able to offer clients. Young people's progress could deteriorate if a worker left and a lot of work had to be done to get trust back.

Figure 4.2.
Length of time worked in current role
n=108

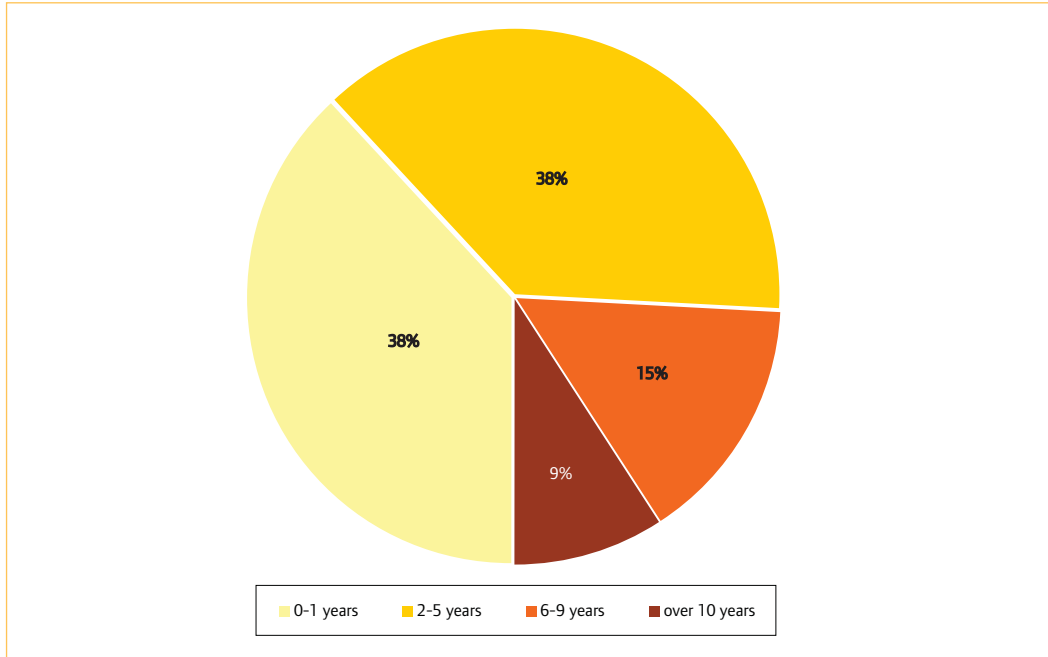
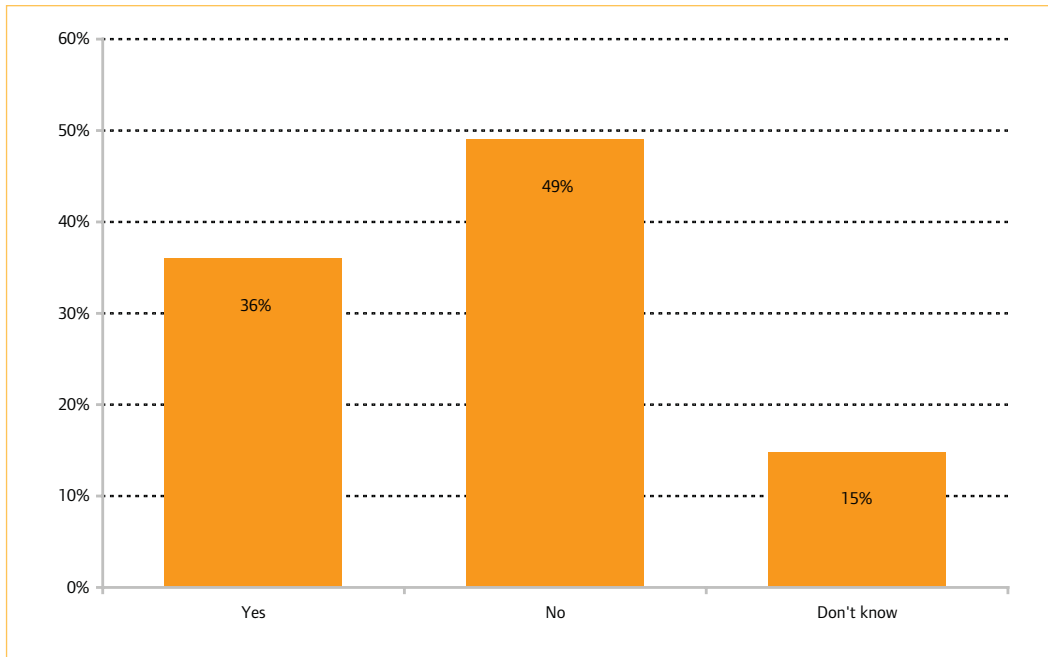


Figure 4.3.
Responses to the question: 'Do you feel there are many opportunities for you to progress in your job, for instance into a role with more responsibility?'
n=108



As we have seen, clear career pathways can promote retention. The adviser survey results showed, however, that almost half (49 per cent) of advisers did not feel there were many opportunities for them to progress in their job into a role with more responsibility.

The survey sample of providers were asked what opportunities there were for advisers to progress in their organisations. The most frequent response was team leader, followed by operations manager, adviser manager, project manager, senior manager. Despite these management opportunities, some advisers are reluctant to lose the aspect of being an adviser they enjoy the most – working at the 'coalface' and supporting people.

Attempts have been made to open up opportunities for progression for advisers in Jobcentre Plus. Changes introduced in 2006 saw the introduction of a new post of Customer Engagement Team Leader (CETL) in the mould of a 'super adviser' to provide support for the personal advisers team.

There are now two management roles in most Jobcentres, the Advisory Services Manager (ASM) and Jobcentre Manager, and advisers can also move into other areas of the civil service. However, there are no opportunities to move across into similar 'practitioner' roles. Opportunities for progression can be difficult to create in organisations such as smaller-scale specialist providers, where flatter hierarchies are common.

An important feature of career ladders, such as the Health Sector Careers Framework developed for the NHS (Skills for Health 2008), is that they are linked into related roles enabling individuals to move sideways and upwards as well as within roles, in order to open up as many opportunities as possible for progression and skills development. The Health Sector Careers Framework both clinical and non-clinical roles, offering additional opportunities on the ladder to non-clinical entry-level workers (Lawton 2009).

Overall, the survey results would suggest that 'career ladders' are lacking or that existing opportunities are not well enough promoted or perceived as viable options by many advisers. This is resulting in the loss of experienced staff and disrupting continuity of support for clients.

Building clear progression routes

The findings here also suggest the need for more creative approaches to career progression for advisers to improve retention and close skills gaps, and this should be debated.

As highlighted in Chapter 2, there is a 'natural progression' in place among many providers, from entry-level generic adviser roles to more specialist roles. This raises the possibility of consolidating this progression into clear career pathways to develop 'advanced practitioner' roles. Similar remodellings of roles and responsibilities have taken place in the health and early years sectors, which were underpinned by the development of foundation degree programmes.

More junior roles, such as Job Search Review staff in Jobcentre Plus, could be factored into the natural progression sequence. As highlighted above, they perform an important role in the benefits regime and have more regular contact with clients than personal advisers. In Germany, workers at assistant level are given three years' training and the opportunity to progress to professional roles.

But research has shown that in the UK junior staff can be seen as an unimportant part of the whole interventions process and as a consequence they can be demoralised (Davis *et al* 2007). They are, however, a key client-facing position and play a central role in service users' overall perception of employment support. Linking in to career pathways could help improve motivation levels and the standard of service offered to the service user.

There are a number of challenging issues to consider for a similar framework to be introduced in the welfare-to-work sector. Specialist roles would need to be broadly consolidated across sectors based on a common language of competence across the workforce to allow for mobility between specialisms. This would need to include a number of generic roles which, as already highlighted, have depth comparable to specialist roles, for example in smaller offices or organisations, where more specialist support is not easily available.

Mismatch between 'supply' and 'demand' for skills (as measured by qualifications) is a well documented problem (see Keep *et al* 2006) so demand from employers would be needed to drive a 'natural progression' approach to career and skills development. There is currently little of the cross-sector working or sharing of practice in welfare-to-work that could provide the foundation for this. The absence of an umbrella organisation bringing together private,

voluntary and public sectors to oversee the process also suggests it may need to take place on an individual employer basis before a broader sector approach could be developed.

The successful completion of an intermediate-level qualification and/or professional competencies would need to be linked to salary increments for advisers in order to recognise advanced practitioner status and achievement, so costs associated with 'advanced practitioner' roles would be higher. But the move would also help to retain experienced, valuable staff and reduce the costs associated with high staff turnover.

Implications for personal support

Successful personal employment programmes are dependent on skilled and motivated personal advisers. To that extent high quality strategies are needed for training and retaining good staff.

Advisers want their sector to be taken seriously and feel that a qualification would confirm the importance of their work. One private-provider stakeholder interviewed highlighted the poor perception of service quality among significant numbers of clients, low levels of outcomes in some organisations and difficulties in dealing with particular client groups as grounds for the need for further professionalisation of the industry. The widespread adoption of a qualification requirement for advisers could help to 'raise the bar' in this respect.

Many advisers and providers did not feel the current IAG qualifications were sufficiently relevant to employment support to be of value. They highlighted the need for training that was more specifically employment-related. The new job brokerage VRQ could provide a good model for this with its job-specific core components in employment support.

Qualifications need to be seen as having value in the workplace to be attractive to employers, but providers were ambivalent about the relationship between qualifications and on-the-job performance among the existing workforce. For many, the qualifications and training systems they develop are also seen as a way of gaining a competitive edge.

As noted, the Department for Work and Pensions requires no minimum qualification for staff, despite requiring this for staff on some contracted employment programmes. This also runs contrary to the Government's own aspirations around meeting skills targets set for 2020.

To this extent and to ensure demand the Government should take a lead role in the introduction of a universal qualification. This would also involve making allowances for any financial impact on providers.

'Black box' delivery models for contracted providers currently enable them to achieve prescribed outcomes as they see fit so this would mark a different approach. However, introducing a universal qualification for employment advisers would ensure more consistent standards across the sector and offer opportunities for improving the quality and range of advice for service users, as well as meeting government aspirations around the skills strategy.

More broadly, a debate should be had within the welfare-to-work sector about how clearer progression routes can be built for advisers to improve staff retention and performance. The 'natural progression' approach outlined above, building on entry-level adviser roles and leading up to 'advanced practitioner' roles, is a starting point for this.

Recommendations

The Department for Work and Pensions should support the adoption of a core qualification for advisers, such as the newly developed Vocational Related Qualification (VRQ) in Job Brokerage to standardise practice across providers. This would ensure that key core competencies needed specifically for employment advisers are better recognised. The use of existing Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) qualifications should be reviewed to see if these qualifications are meeting the needs of advisers and employers

Debate is needed within the welfare-to-work sector about how clearer progression routes can be built for advisers to improve staff motivation, performance and retention. A 'natural progression' approach building on entry-level adviser roles and leading up to 'advanced practitioner' roles is outlined here as a starting point for this.

5. Workforce development

Summary

- The majority of advisers reported to our survey receiving one to two weeks training. 'On the job' training or peer mentoring was also common.
- The average learning a Jobcentre Plus adviser has per year is six days and the minimum amount of learning for an adviser is approximately 16 days. Advisers typically receive additional learning when they make the transition into specialist adviser roles such as a Pathways Adviser.
- Site visits indicated that some advisers receive little 'job-specific' training (such as interview skills) and that many advisers are providing frontline support within days of starting their job.
- Jobcentre Plus staff have comparatively little one-on-one training or interview skills practice such as role-playing; online training or 'E-learning' a key feature of the training system.
- Half of advisers reported not receiving adequate training in childcare, homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse and mental health problems.
- There was a trend towards providers each developing their own accredited training regimes as NVQs in Advice and Guidance were felt to be too standardised and not sufficiently job specific.
- There is some evidence from private and voluntary sector providers that innovative programmes, such as training in Cognitive Behavioural Interviewing Techniques, can encourage more open and productive dialogue between adviser and client, allowing discussions to move onto employment-related goals more quickly.
- Although a key aim of the flexible New Deal is to encourage providers who bring innovation and value, in a 'payment by results' system there can be a reluctance among providers to share information that is linked to their commercial success. It is, however, ultimately in the best interests of the service user that any innovative approaches to improving outcomes are shared.
- Overall there is a lack of evidence about 'what works' in the training of advisers for better client outcomes and a need for more exchange of promising approaches.

Having examined qualifications, recruitment and professional development opportunities for advisers in relation to retention and skills gaps, this chapter looks at the training and development opportunities available for advisers once recruited, across different providers. It also examines promising innovations in equipping advisers with the attitudes and skills to establish more collaborative and productive relationships with clients.

The first section below gives an overview of training and development across Jobcentre Plus and specialist providers to build up a picture of the different approaches used.

Training regimes: Jobcentre Plus

Jobcentre Plus has a portfolio of learning for its advisers, the 'Adviser Learning Routeway', which was last updated in 2008. A new adviser typically receives a blend of learning including classroom learning, e-learning, coaching and in-work consolidation. All advisers complete a set of foundation learning products, generalist adviser learning and then according to their role, they undertake specialist role-specific learning. For example, advisers who work with disabled customers receive additional training to equip them with the necessary skills to support this customer group's journey into sustainable employment.

The minimum amount of learning for an adviser is approximately 16 days. Advisers typically receive additional learning when they make the transition into specialist adviser roles such as a Pathways Adviser. The average learning an individual has per year is six days. 'On the job training' or peer mentoring is also very common.

Training is determined by the needs of the individual adviser and is therefore highly decentralised within Jobcentre Plus. District planners plan the training programme based on the needs of the local area. This also allows Jobcentres flexibility to be responsive to situations on the ground. In the Midlands, for example, there have been large numbers of redundancies in the car industry, so additional training events were scheduled so that sufficient numbers of advisers were in place to deal with the increased volumes of jobseekers through their doors.

A large element of the current training system is e-learning. E-learning was brought in as part of the Jobcentre Plus modernisation strategy and also as a way of reducing the costs of classroom training, which was no longer available following the 'rationalisation' of the Jobcentre Plus estate. This initially involved 'a lot of page turning', rather than being interactive (according to our interviews with staff). E-learning is now provided in-house and efforts have been made to make it more interactive but there are still mixed views on its effectiveness. There have been some calls for a return to classroom training to address this (see Davis *et al* 2007).

Apart from 'on the job' training from peers or managers, then, Jobcentre Plus staff have little one-on-one training or interview skills practice such as role-playing used by some providers (see below).

Training regimes: specialist providers

Some providers offered intensive training courses drawing on a variety of approaches for staff. One private provider offered four weeks of 'intensive' training, including psychotherapists to talk through mental health issues and diagnosis, expert training in substance misuse and how to work with ex-offenders. This was followed by ongoing training and development. However, some providers offered no job-specific training at all. One voluntary provider offered no structured training, with all learning done on the job. This was felt to be manageable because of the small size of the team.

Another provider running a Pathways programme offered only a generic induction plus customer awareness training for its staff. More in-depth courses on disability, mental health and drug and alcohol awareness were provided because of the nature of the Pathways client group, but no training in interview skills or techniques was provided to advisers.

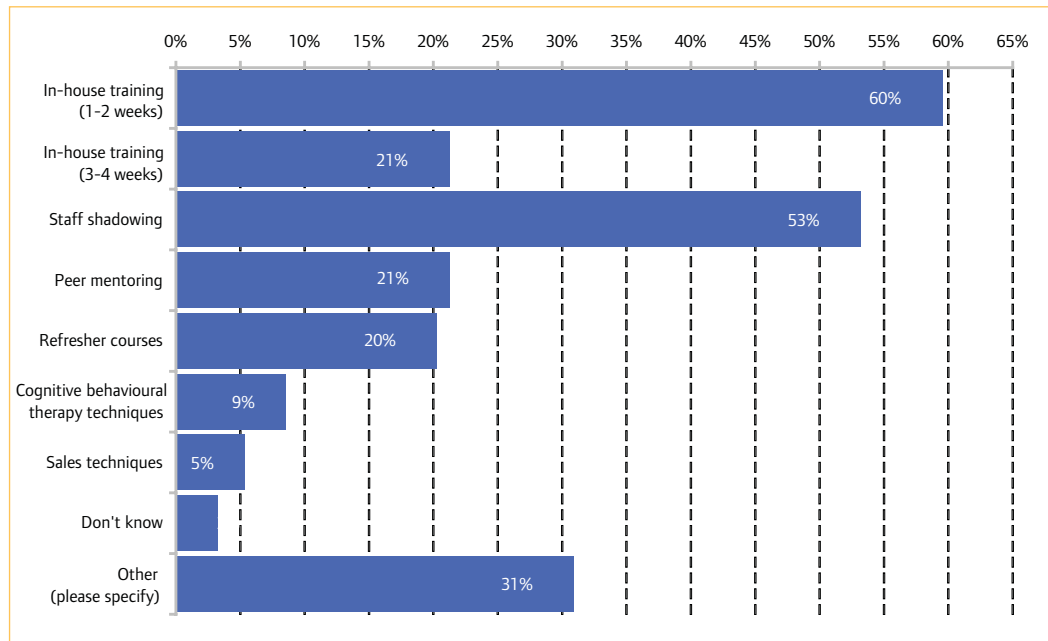
As highlighted earlier, NVQs in Advice and Guidance were felt to be too standardised and not relevant or specific enough to job brokerage, which led providers to develop their own accredited training regimes. A national private/voluntary provider recently developed a programme tailored to meet its needs which was accredited by City and Guilds. The course is 'experiential and practical', using tailored role-play with actors to provide skills practice for advisers and DVD illustrations of interview techniques.

Another large voluntary provider also rejected standard qualifications in favour of a tailored programme.

'IAG qualifications are useful but don't concentrate enough on job brokerage – that is why we have our own internal programme. It is accredited Level 3 NVQ. The main areas are working with job seekers, working with employers and admin. We give our staff a run through of the five core IAG units and consequently they can go and complete them.' (HR Director, voluntary provider)

Figure 5.1.
Training received
since working in
current role

Note: Respondents were able to select as many types of training as required.
n=96



Overall, training provided for advisers varied in approach and duration ranging from in-house specialised training to on the job training and sometimes little training at all. The survey sample of advisers reported experiences of training in line with these findings. Results showed that the majority of advisers (60 per cent) received in-house training for one to two weeks, with one in five (21 per cent) receiving in-house training for three to four weeks. Over half of advisers (53 per cent) were trained through staff shadowing and one in five (21 per cent) through peer mentoring. One in five (20 per cent) also received refresher courses.

Though variation in approaches to training is to be expected, it is concerning that some advisers receive little job-specific training in skills such as interviewing and many advisers are providing frontline support within days of starting their job. Some Connexions advisers, by contrast, go on a nine-month development programme when recruited, which includes training in safeguarding, interview skills, group work skills and work placements. Though this cannot in itself guarantee better outcomes it does indicate a difference in emphasis placed on the importance of training in these roles.

Workforce development 'gaps'

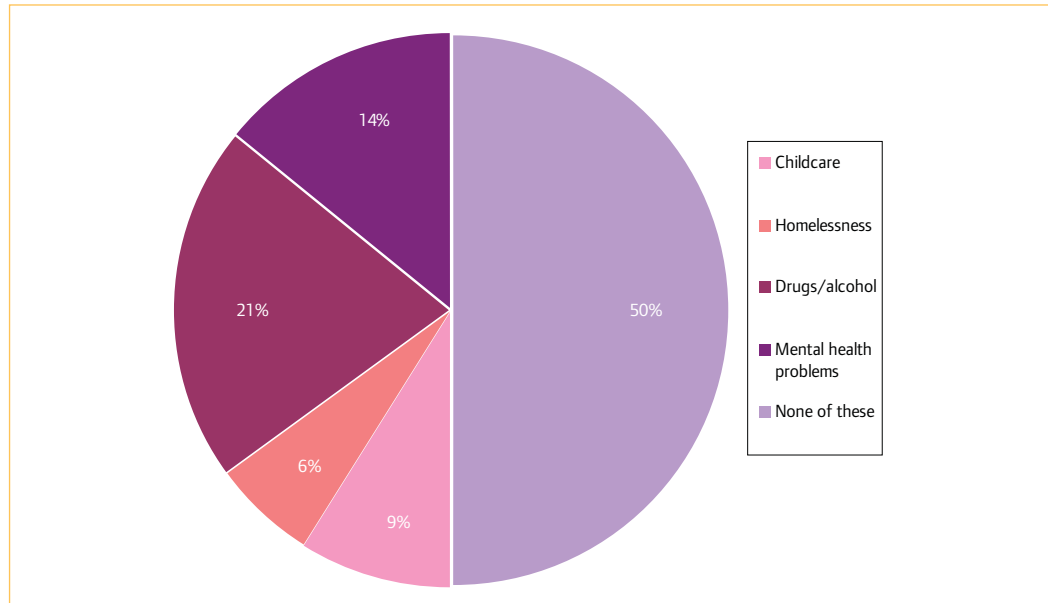
Meeting specific needs

The survey sample of advisers were asked whether they received adequate training in issues that affect many of their clients, particularly those working with the long-term unemployed (Figure 5.2). These issues were childcare, homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse and mental health problems. Half of advisers reported not receiving adequate training in any of these areas. Just over one in five had received training in substance misuse.

A lack of specific training for advisers on the issues that mattered to them was highlighted in service-user focus groups. Though some clients, particularly lone parents, were pleased with the support they received, there was a perception among others that advisers were not able to give advice beyond the standard information they were required to record.

There were some promising examples of specialist training. Jobcentre Plus staff, for example, now receive presentations from childcare partnership managers on the role of childcare in supporting customers back into work and on what childcare is available locally. Personal advisers at one private provider are receiving training from the charity St Mungo's on drugs

Figure 5.2.
Responses to the question: 'Which of the following areas have you received *adequate* training in?'



and alcohol after reporting the need for more pragmatic help on how to handle these problems among clients. But the survey sample results suggest that advisers broadly feel they have not received enough training in these areas.

A recent report reviewing the New Deal found that staff felt that the current programmes did not address the barriers such as debt counselling and help for drug and alcohol addiction. Staff reported how on going through the New Deal programme many clients returned to Jobcentre Plus with the same problems (Work and Pensions Committee 2009).

As well as training for generic staff, concerns have previously been raised about whether specialist advisers receive adequate training for the skilled and complex nature of their roles. In particular, there has been concern about how Incapacity Benefit advisers believed that their training had not prepared them well for the demands of the job, both generally and because the existing customers had such complex and severe problems (Barnes and Hudson 2006).

Evidence shows that being able to diagnose needs is one of the most critical skills for effective support. Where advisers do not investigate a client's circumstances or give enough information about the scope of the service this can fail to arm clients with the knowledge they require to make the programme work for them (DWP 2000). As advisers are increasingly expected to broker specific packages of support for clients, they will need improved training to improve confidence in recognising and responding to particular needs.

Reflective practice

Another gap in workforce development is around 'reflective practice'. Whether peer support, case conferencing led by a team leader or manager or clinical supervision, evidence from site visits and adviser interviews suggested these opportunities offered advisers an opportunity to learn from each other and resolve difficult cases. It has been suggested that more formal mechanisms such as staff meetings and seminars can help share best practice between different staff and help drive up performance (Nice *et al* 2009). However, opportunities for reflective practice for advisers are offered in some Jobcentre Plus districts but not consistently (information from interview with Jobcentre Plus manager) and by many specialist providers, but not all (information based on data collected from site visits).

One voluntary sector provider scheduled case management meetings on a monthly, group basis, as an opportunity for advisers to discuss complex cases or cases that have gone well.

Box 5.1. Case study: Newcastle Futures – piloting cognitive behavioural interviewing techniques to train advisers

Newcastle Futures is a not-for-profit organisation which delivers an employment support service and provides strategic coordination for employment services in Newcastle upon Tyne. Newcastle Futures is one of the first welfare-to-work organisations to pilot the use of cognitive behavioural interview technique (CBIT) skills training among its advisers.

The course is taught by an in-house clinical psychologist and interview skills are consolidated through case study management meetings each month, facilitated by the psychologist. Newcastle Futures first saw the cognitive behaviour approach being used as therapy within the health sector and thought it could have application for employment support because of its 'collaborative' rather than 'directive' approach to one-to-one support.

As opposed to the traditionally directive relationship of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG), CBIT assists a process of 'guided self discovery', where the client is the driving force. Through the use of different questioning techniques the adviser can find out what the individual wants and help them to discover that about themselves. Not all clients need the more in-depth help this provides but for those with a more complex set of issues CBIT can help them to evaluate pros and cons in a decision-making process and to put an action plan together.

Newcastle Futures has found that this results in a more individual approach for clients and advisers have responded well to the training, feeling less restricted by processes and structures. Brief Solutions Focused Therapy techniques and motivational interviewing are now being added to the training – these are all tools for advisers to facilitate behaviour change.

A team leader commented:

'Rather than asking the same rigid, structured questions, it helps advisers to establish what clients want to do and why they want to do it, then to secure a commitment. Clients have to accept responsibility for moving themselves from dependence to independence. We find that much more information is gained through this approach.'

Note: Though techniques are based on cognitive behavioural therapy, the approach is used as an interviewing technique and should not be confused with the cognitive behavioural therapy which is offered by health professionals.

Case study: Working Links – Consultant Diagnostics programme

Working Links' Consultant Diagnostics programme aims to equip frontline staff with a set of key attitudes, skills and behaviour changes necessary to diagnose individual barriers to work more quickly and effectively – and thus shorten the client journey back into employment. It has developed a tracking system which allows the measurement of the effectiveness of the programme tools – and most critically, the distance travelled.

Five days of training for advisers include card-based exercises designed to help advisers uncover critical barriers to work, training in a Jungian Type-based tool for identifying working style preferences, together with a framework for feeding back results as part of a guided discussion around suitable job choices and tools for advisers to help clients to 'break through' barriers and diagnose some of the deeper issues that may be stopping the client from engaging.

Groups looked at problem-solving approaches and how to develop skills. The groups also presented an opportunity to look at 'distance travelled' with a client, beyond target-based outcomes. Peer support was an important element of the groups.

Case management meetings or case conferencing can provide an important opportunity for advisers to reflect on their work and seek advice from managers or peers to help resolve difficulties or learn new approaches. Where these opportunities were on offer, advisers were positive about their value, but a consistent approach was lacking.

Implications for personal support

The amount of training advisers received varied significantly, with the survey results showing the majority of advisers received one to two weeks-worth and site visits indicating that some advisers receive little 'job-specific' training at all.

A major theme that emerged was the difference between training programmes that are practical and experiential and those that use a more passive and instructive approach. This is not about 'right' or 'wrong' techniques but rather giving the adviser a range of tools to call upon so that they can choose the most relevant approach to use with a client.

Practical approaches that give advisers the opportunity to practice interview skills and receive feedback were favoured by some private and voluntary sector providers as a way of developing adviser skills. Similarly, innovative programmes such as the CBIT training run by Newcastle Futures were found to help open up dialogue between adviser and client to find ways to tackle constraints and help reach employment goals. The use of CBIT has previously been found to have a positive impact for clients, particularly in relation to health or mental health conditions that have been an obstacle to securing a job (Centre for Local Economic Strategies 2009).

Research has previously shown how interviews can be more focused on identifying employment barriers than on finding ways to overcome them (Carter and Adams 2008). In the examples cited above, however, training in CBIT allowed advisers to move onto more concrete discussions about employment in interviews and to offer support on interview technique and CV writing, as clients were more focused on employment goals.

A broader approach to training in interview skills for advisers could better equip them with the tools they need to engage clients and improve the productivity of interviews by moving discussions onto employment-related goals sooner.

The use of new and innovative training techniques such as CBIT being developed by some providers should be trialled by Jobcentre Plus as part of its Quality Assurance Framework for advisers²⁰, to evaluate impact on client engagement, interview productivity and labour market outcomes.

Closing the 'insight gap'

Overall, there is a need to build a more meaningful research programme that examines 'what works' to improve the effectiveness of interviews and establish which training approaches work best. This could help build training programmes for advisers which draw upon a wider range of techniques to meet clients' needs.

20. The Jobcentre Plus Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) was introduced to ensure that advisory services are effective and of a consistently high quality.

For innovative approaches to be incorporated more widely, best practice must be shared across sectors. Although a key aim of the flexible New Deal is to encourage providers who bring innovation and value (DWP 2008), in a 'payment by results' system, there can be a reluctance among providers to share information that is linked to their commercial success. It is, however, ultimately in the best interests of the service user that any innovative approaches to improving outcomes are shared.

It has been highlighted that the devolution of service delivery from Jobcentre Plus to contracted specialist providers could result in an 'insight gap' where the contractor also loses understanding of how innovations come about (Finn 2008). Professor Dan Finn suggests that this should be tackled by the development and spread of best practice through cross-sector networks.

There is a need for a 'best practice exchange' which would bring together prime subcontractors, private, public, voluntary sector and community organisations, to broker information and share best practice and innovation in a coordinated way, with the aim of closing this 'insight gap' and representing the best interests of service users.

Recommendations

The Department for Work and Pensions should publish a comprehensive workforce development plan setting out steps for developing training and professional development opportunities for a more skilled adviser workforce. This should include extending the use of 'training coaches' for a more flexible and interactive training system and evaluating the impact of different interview techniques on client well-being and labour market outcomes with a view to incorporating the most effective approaches within the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for advisers.

Advisers across all public employment services should be given better training in specialist areas such as mental health and drug and alcohol misuse to improve confidence and skills in diagnosing the needs of a wider range of groups for earlier and more effectively targeted support.

The use of 'training coaches' should be extended by Jobcentre Plus to provide more interactive training for advisers and allow for extra flexibility in the system as it prepares to cope with large numbers of new and inexperienced advisers.

A best practice exchange should be set up to broker information and sharing of best practice and innovation which would bring together prime subcontractors, public sector and voluntary sector organisations and should also represent the perspective of service users. A hub set up by ippr as part of the Now It's Personal project could act as a catalyst for a more permanent exchange.

6. Welfare reform and the changing adviser role

Summary

- A number of policy reforms are due to impact on the adviser role, requiring new skills and a different framework of support.
- These include increased flexibility and discretion for Jobcentre Plus advisers under the revised Jobseeker's Allowance and Flexible New Deal regime, a new role in diagnosing skills needs and a more 'active' relationship between claimant and adviser as envisaged by the Gregg Review.
- Although devolution of power entrusts advisers to make important decisions, it also means a greater responsibility to make professional and informed choices.
- There is a risk that reforms could be 'watered down' due to increased pressure on services caused by the recession.
- The culture shift needed for advisers to work more flexibly could be achieved through greater use of opportunities for reflective practice such as case conferences.
- 'Up-skilling' advisers so that they have a wider range of tools to draw on in interviews will be crucial to ensuring advisers have the skills and capabilities necessary for the more collaborative relationship envisaged by the Gregg Review.
- Early signs are that advisers will need more support in relation to assessing skills as part of the Integrated Employment and Skills system for this to be more than a 'tick-box' exercise.

The previous chapter highlighted gaps in the adviser skills base and the use of innovative training techniques by some organisations to 'up-skill' advisers. This chapter looks at the adviser role in the context of upcoming policy reforms and growing long-term unemployment, to examine what new skills advisers may need to respond to these challenges and what framework should be put in place to support adviser practice.

As part of a broader set of reforms presented in the Welfare Reform Bill earlier this year, the Government envisages a 'triple devolution' of power from central government to clients, employment providers and advisers, in an attempt to relinquish central control and distribute power more evenly across the welfare system (Purnell 2008). For advisers, this will mean greater control over the way in which they work with clients and more freedom to exercise personal judgement in changes built into the revised Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) regime. New ways of working will be required of advisers under the regime and new styles of management.

Greater devolution of power also means greater discretion for advisers around choices that will affect clients personally and financially. There are concerns about the wider application of conditionality for certain groups in particular, such as parents with children under the age of 7 and people with fluctuating conditions and mental health problems, where there is higher risk of sanctions being incurred unfairly.

Although devolution of power entrusts advisers to make important decisions, it also means they have a greater responsibility to make professional and informed choices. As conditionality is increased under the new system, accenting claimants' responsibilities as well as rights, corresponding changes will be needed to ensure advisers are supported to use discretion appropriately.

Support for claimants is also intended to be increased in line with stronger conditionality, as set out in the Gregg Review. Significant up-skilling will be needed to give advisers the range of tools they require for the more active and collaborative relationship between claimant and adviser envisaged in the Review.

Steps to integrate employment and skills services are more urgent as the recession affects the low-skilled disproportionately (see Chapter 1) and training and skills support is needed to keep large numbers of the unemployed active and equipped to re-enter the workforce. This presents challenges in ensuring advisers are able to properly assess skills needs and to make appropriate and relevant referrals for support or training.

As with all pilots there is a risk that measures become 'watered down' as they are rolled out, but this risk is heightened as these changes are introduced at a time of huge pressure on the welfare system. Test pilots for the JSA regime have already seen additional adviser support for the hardest-to-help reduced or withdrawn as advisers have been pulled into responding to urgent new claims (Bellis *et al* 2009).

In summary, key changes include:

- More **flexibility** for Jobcentre Plus personal advisers in the Jobseeker's Allowance Regime, building on the approach of the Flexible New Deal
- Enhanced **discretion** for Jobcentre Plus personal advisers as part of the strengthened conditionality regime and use from day one of discretionary funding for claimants and a more collaborative relationship between claimant and adviser as envisaged by the Gregg Review
- Requirement for advisers to **identify skills needs** as part of the newly Integrated Employment and Skills system (IES) and to signpost clients to the Adult Advancement and Careers Service (AACS) for fuller diagnosis and support.

Each of these areas is examined here for the opportunities and considerations they present for the adviser role, and recommendations are set out to respond to them. Neither the Gregg Review nor the Welfare Reform Act has provided a template for the new personal adviser role and changes that will come as part of the closer integration of skills and employment services are still unclear. This highlights a gap which needs to be addressed but also means that some of the analysis below is speculative in its nature.

Increasing adviser autonomy and flexibility

The Flexible New Deal gives freedom to employment support providers to tailor support for clients as they see fit, as long as certain outcomes are met. Building on this, the revised Jobseeker's Allowance regime offers advisers a limited amount of flexibility to provide support for clients in the first 12 months of the welfare-to-work system. It is hoped that by providing more support from an adviser at three and six months, problems can be identified earlier and future resources be better targeted.

During in-depth interviews, advisers working for specialist providers raised concerns about repeat claimants, some of whom had been through New Deal programmes several times. They stressed that early referral is crucial for people who have considerable barriers to work.

'I've got a client on my caseload now who starts work next month but he found work originally on the programme, completed the programme, worked for eight or nine months, was made redundant and sat for eighteen months to come through the cycle again. He's working again, he just needed the help which he wasn't getting at the Jobcentre so for eighteen months he sat. I think that's who's missing out.' (Employment consultant, private provider)

Box 6.1. The revised Jobseeker's Allowance regime and Flexible New Deal process

- Advisers will be required to fast-track certain vulnerable groups in the New Jobseeker interview, their first meeting with a client. Under the Flexible New Deal, fast-tracking to the Gateway stage of the process (the six month point) will be mandatory for some groups, using jobseekers' previous benefits history as an 'objective measure of disadvantage' to identify who needs more support.*
- At stages two and three (three months and six months) personal advisers will provide two extra 'adviser interventions' for claimants with particular barriers to work or with an 'erratic' employment history. At stage three claimants will be 'caseloaded' by an adviser with an initial interview and assessment to develop a back-to-work plan and provision for further interviews at four-week intervals, with an average of three hours to use with each claimant as they judge best.
- As part of the new 'six month offer' additional adviser support will also be available at six months for claimants in areas where the revised Jobseeker's Allowance Regime is not yet operating.

Source: Jobcentre Plus (2009)

* In the current system jobseekers can voluntarily access early entry to the New Deals. For the full list of vulnerable groups eligible for mandatory fast-tracking see Chapter 1.

As noted in Chapter 1, identifying the comparatively small numbers who are most in need of support is challenging in the context of a mass, standardised system. The only personal information available to an adviser in order to identify groups for fast-tracking is the individual's benefits history, as employment histories are not currently available to advisers.

An adviser has no way of knowing if individuals belong to the 'vulnerable groups' eligible for fast-tracking unless they choose to disclose this or the adviser is able to build up a relationship that allows them to find out this information. Taking prison leavers, for example, 80 per cent sign on to benefits after leaving prison within a month, but there is no mechanism to identify that they have just come out of prison unless they volunteer this information.

As this approach relies on advisers using their own judgement (as well as drawing on certain administrative rules) it also means they need to have the time and skills to effectively diagnose need. However, Chapter 3 showed how interviews in the first eight to six months of contact are relatively infrequent and take place under tight time constraints.

The 'caseloading' of clients at stages two and three is welcomed by advisers who were interviewed as part of this research; they felt that it offered them the opportunity to offer more of the kind of support they had taken the job to do. But a concern is that the targeted extra support will not be prioritised in the face of rising numbers of claimants. Test pilots for the JSA regime saw this help reduced or withdrawn as the crisis peaked. The evaluation of the pilots also pointed to uncertainty among advisers as to whether additional interviews were intended to support a 'carrot' or 'stick' approach (Bellis *et al* 2009).

Advisers receive no specific support or training in fast-tracking claimants or in how to identify the claimants for additional support at stage two according to our interviews with Jobcentre Plus learning and development staff. Equally as identified in Chapter 5, advisers do not feel they have enough training to diagnose needs around substance misuse, mental health or homelessness. There is a risk that without sufficient guidance or training advisers could be guided more by stereotypes or any personal prejudice than by sound professional judgement.

There is evidence to suggest that greater joint working between Jobcentre staff could help to more effectively target additional support. Analysis in chapter three showed that Job Search Review staff see clients more regularly than do personal advisers and are able to build up more of a rapport with clients than the latter and play a key client-facing role. This knowledge could be harnessed by giving Job Search Review staff greater discretion in influencing which clients are fast-tracked and given additional support through closer working with personal advisers.

Recommendations

Comprehensive criteria and guidance should be issued to advisers and training provided on how to identify claimants for mandatory fast-tracking into specialist support in the JSA regime. Claimants should also be given clear information in interviews to assess whether they are eligible for voluntary early entry to the Flexible New Deal.

The additional support from a personal adviser at Stages 2 and 3 of the revised Jobseeker's Allowance regime should be ring-fenced to ensure that it is not squeezed out as a result of extra pressure on services.

Better use of Job Search Review staff knowledge of claimants should be made through greater joint working between Job Search Review staff and personal advisers. This would ensure additional support is targeted at those claimants who need it most, reducing the likelihood of deadweight costs, and would help to monitor clients' progress.

Implementing flexibility in a process-driven system

Test pilots for the new JSA regime have shown that working more creatively and independently has been welcomed by advisers but has also proven challenging as it necessitates having a wider range of skills (Bellis *et al* 2009).

Previous attempts to increase flexibility and adviser discretion within mainstream Jobcentre Plus have not always worked. When similar attempts were made to introduce more discretion for advisers as part of the New Deal for Young People for example, not all advisers adapted well to their new freedoms, with many preferring tried and tested ways of doing things (Griffiths and Durkin 2007).

Jobcentre Plus has devised a specific training package to offer a framework around discretion and flexibility called 'solutions for customers' which explores with advisers how they can use their new flexibilities to support individuals into work. This will need to help manage change to avoid some of the problems in test pilots and in the example of New Deal for Young People above.

But as personal advisers are given more flexibility, styles of management will also need to change. Personal advisers are currently assessed against a number of 'outputs'. With more independence for advisers, rather than simply managing a process, managers will need to support advisers to reflect more on their own practice. Jobcentre Plus managers as well as advisers will need to feel comfortable in 'breaking the rules' for the new approach to work.

One way this culture shift could be achieved is through greater use of opportunities for reflective practice for advisers. As highlighted in Chapter 5, activities such as case conferences are used in some Jobcentre Plus districts and by many specialist providers, but not consistently.

As staff get used to their new freedoms, reflective practice can be used as a way to share good practice and learn from those who adapt more easily to risk taking. Whether peer

support, case conferencing led by a team leader or manager or clinical supervision, evidence suggested these opportunities gave advisers vital opportunities to learn from each other and resolve difficult cases and seemed to be important in boosting morale among staff.

Reflective practice can also act as a counterweight to greater discretion (see next section) and provide some continuity in the context of broader changes to the adviser role. In the context of Jobcentre Plus, greater use of peer support could offset some of the challenges posed by integrating the new ranks of advisers recruited to help cope with the increase in claimants (see next chapter).

There is some cause for concern that autonomy is being introduced even as it is being curtailed. This year Jobcentre Plus introduced a system called 'taxi-ranking' in response to the rising number of benefit claims. This system means that instead of new claims appointments being allocated to specific advisers, a number of interviews are booked and the next available adviser sees the next customer. For one Jobcentre Plus adviser, the consequential loss of control over her diary was a source of genuine frustration.

'Before, at least if everyone had their own diaries you could cover for someone else – now you can't. We're not names, we are numbers now – I'm 'PA JSA new claims 1', ... not [adviser's name].' (Personal adviser, Jobcentre Plus)

If increasing autonomy is to achieve the aim of improving the effectiveness of support, the approach needs to be applied consistently.

Recommendation

Greater opportunities for advisers to benefit from 'reflective practice' should be introduced where not already available. Whether peer-led or manager-led, regular case management meetings, peer support groups or staff meeting and seminars could help advisers adjust to greater flexibility in their roles and act as a counterweight to increased adviser discretion.

Personalised conditionality and the Gregg Review

Jobcentre Plus advisers will play a pivotal role in the newly strengthened system of 'personalised conditionality' as outlined in the Welfare Reform Bill and based on a review by Professor Paul Gregg.

Strengthened support

The model set out in the Gregg Review requires advisers to have the necessary 'skills and capabilities' to encourage claimants to co-own, co-produce and take responsibility for their journey back to work (Gregg 2008; see Box 6.2, next page). Findings from this research showed that this kind of trusting relationship is often difficult to establish within Jobcentre Plus. Advisers can struggle to balance the 'enforcement' elements of a one-to-one interview with creating the right conditions to diagnose needs or provide meaningful job search assistance. Offering a service that users feel is 'on their side' requires the basic key ingredients of a trusting relationship, such as respect and impartiality, which were sometimes found lacking in the experiences of focus group participants.

The dual nature of the Jobcentre Plus adviser role in supporting claimants while policing compliance, plus the pressures on advisers created by high volumes of clients, combine to create real challenges in creating a more collaborative relationship between claimant and adviser. With even less resources available looking ahead, it may be that for some groups alternatives such as increasing outreach work would offer a better way forward for providing personal support (see next chapter).

Box 6.2. The Gregg Review and new discretionary powers for personal advisers

- The Government has introduced legislation that will allow personal advisers, where a claimant is not complying with conditions for their benefit claim, to decide the appropriate work-related activity for a claimant to carry out*. In these cases, claimants will be required to take part in the specific activity their adviser has chosen. Advisers would be able to sanction clients for not taking part in an activity they have chosen.
- Personal advisers will also have discretionary powers to select those claimants they believe would benefit from inclusion in planned 'Work for Your Benefit' schemes to be piloted. Under these schemes, individuals will be provided with up to six months full-time work experience to test whether the support helps long-term unemployed people back to work. This is being piloted in a number of Jobcentre Plus districts requiring participation from a proportion of those who are still out of work at the end of the Flexible New Deal period and as a discretionary power for personal advisers for those they believe would benefit (DWP 2008).
- Adviser discretion is also being stepped up in regard to financial support. In Jobcentre Plus this was previously only available for the long-term unemployed. However, 'day one' eligibility is now being introduced nationally, as one of a number of measures being pushed through by the Government in order to increase support for people made newly redundant**. Advisers working for specialist providers under Flexible New Deal will continue to have access to discretionary funding for clients.
- The Gregg Review envisages a more active relationship between adviser and claimants, where both work together to discuss and agree an Action Plan comprising activities they think will improve their prospects of moving back into work.

* Work-related activity is defined as 'anything that both parties agree would support an eventual return to work' (DWP 2008: 76).

**It is not yet clear whether the process for obtaining funds, which has been found to be bureaucratic and time consuming, will also be eased.

Plans for a Personalised Employment Programme (PEP) which would provide a single, integrated, flexible employment programme across claimant groups may also make a better platform for a more collaborative relationship between adviser and client. To be piloted from 2011, PEPs are set to follow a 'black-box' approach along the lines of Employment Zones (EZs). Employment Zones were found to out-perform New Deal programmes in part because of the greater freedom EZ advisers had to determine the frequency, content and timing of their interventions (Griffiths and Durkin 2007).

'Up-skilling' advisers so that they have a wider range of tools to draw on in interviews, as set out in the previous chapter, will be crucial to ensuring advisers have the skills and capabilities necessary to realise the model of 'co-production' outlined by Gregg. Training that encourages advisers to examine any personal prejudices as used by some private providers (as highlighted in Chapter 4) could help to encourage self-awareness and tackle some of the more negative experiences highlighted by focus group participants.

Strengthened conditionality

Advisers will need to carefully judge an individual's reasons for being unable to comply with the conditions of their benefit and negotiate activities with clients in order to help them return to work under the system of strengthened conditionality. New provisions in particular for Jobcentre Plus staff to question claimants if they suspect them of being a problem-user of drugs or alcohol will require sensitivity and a degree of understanding on the part of the

adviser if they are not to seriously compromise relationships and even put themselves at risk.

If not managed effectively, these changes threaten to increase the unequal nature of the relationship between adviser and client and they could work against the principles of transparency, clarity and credibility that should underpin an effective sanctions regime.

As discretionary powers increase it is important that accountability and transparency do so also. This should be achieved in part through closer management. Research shows that for discretion to be effective advisers must operate within a framework where they are directly accountable for the actions they take and the resources they spend (Griffiths and Durkin 2007).

To counteract the uneven nature of the adviser and client relationship, efforts should be made to ensure clients have a clear idea of the scope of a service and an understanding of their rights in relation to it. To this extent the DWP should introduce a 'Claimants Charter', as has been proposed by several voluntary sector groups²¹.

Recommendation

To counterbalance increases in adviser discretion, structures should be put in place to ensure that staff are supervised against outcome targets and that they have the opportunity to discuss complex cases with managers or peers as part of a more structured approach to case management.

Integrating employment and skills and the adviser role

Under the planned integration of employment and skills services, for individuals in whose cases screening has identified an 'obvious skills need' personal advisers will undertake full face-to-face skills health checks and design personal action plans that set out training and wider support needs (DIUS and DWP 2008).

There are early signs that advisers will need more support in relation to assessing skills if this is going to be more than a tick-box exercise. Advisers will need to be clear about how to diagnose clients' skills needs and to make appropriate referrals for training and support as part of the new system. The Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) process is outlined in more detail in Box 6.3.

Box 6.3. Integrated Employment and Skills Service

- As part of the new Jobseeker's Allowance regime advisers will identify clients with obvious skills needs.
- The first Integrated Employment and Skills Service trials started in the West Midlands in September 2008 with the aim of identifying and addressing the skills needs of benefit claimants.
- The key features of the trials include an enhanced Jobcentre Plus skills screening process to identify those customers that have potential skills needs (including basic skills needs) that are preventing them from finding sustainable work or staying and progressing in a job.
- Personal advisers will need to carry out skills screening at initial interviews which will be reviewed at weeks 13 and 26. They will also need to work closely with specialists such as careers advisers, Nextstep and Train to Gain advisers.

21. A draft Claimants Charter has been drafted by Child Poverty Action Group, Gingerbread and Citizens Advice to help ensure claimants rights are protected across welfare-to-work providers.

An overall aim of integrating employment and skills is to improve the training and skills support offered to individuals. However, referrals into support can often be the 'weak link' in the current process, with referrals sometimes more adviser-led than client-led. This can be due to advisers placing clients in unsuitable training to meet referral rate targets or resisting making client referrals in order to meet job entry targets (Nice *et al* 2009).

Another key reason for the variable quality of referrals, aside from the quality of provision available locally, is advisers' lack of knowledge and understanding of the provision available (Dickens *et al* 2004). The amount of provision can be high and information on a range of support difficult to retain for advisers. Added to this there is often a lack of information sharing and a lack of time for advisers to research provision (Nice *et al* 2009). This is of concern given that JSA regime test pilots have shown that advisers need to have a broader knowledge of provision than before in order to support clients' specific needs (Bellis *et al* 2009).

There are two methods for dealing with this. Firstly, referrals are more likely to be appropriate if advisers have a good working relationship with providers and a deep knowledge and understanding of the support provided (Nice *et al* 2009). Being given the opportunity to experience training provision or simply establishing personal contact with different providers through taster courses or inductions can improve advisers' levels of awareness and knowledge, making them more confident in describing and discussing options with clients. This will be particularly important with the arrival of the new Adult Advancement and Careers Service from next year.

The short-term nature of much funding, however, means that providers change frequently, making it difficult for advisers to maintain personal connections and update information. So a second method for improving the quality of referrals is to bring together information on training and skills providers in one place, to make it easier for advisers to navigate. Box 6.4 shows two examples of how this has been done effectively.

Box 6.4. Training provision 'route finders' for advisers

As part of the City Strategy Pathfinders in London, information on hundreds of providers was brought together on websites for West London and East/Southeast London. Designed with the guidance of frontline advisers, the website offers a range of information to help advisers to direct clients into the right support. (See <http://directory.westlondonworking.org.uk/>)

In an assessment of Jobcentre Plus and New Deal interventions, Davis *et al* (2007) show how in one Jobcentre Plus district, an 'Adviser Search Portal' was set up where all the information on mainstream provision had been collated and centralised. As a 'route-finder' through contracted and non-contracted provision it prevents advisers having to spend a lot of time searching for information (Davis *et al* 2007).

Tools such as those described above will be needed especially as numbers of large numbers of new and inexperienced staff start work in Jobcentre Plus. An ongoing issue that needs to be tackled is how advisers can keep in touch with what happens to people once they are referred in order to judge the quality of support available.

There are broader questions about how the 'work first' approach will be married up with the sustainable employment approach of a more integrated system and how targets can be aligned to ensure services delivered on the ground can work together most effectively. The Integrated Employment and Skills pilots will need to be carefully examined for the insights they can bring into these issues.

Recommendation

To support the Integrated Employment and Skills agenda, personal advisers should undergo a programme of induction including taster courses or work shadowing with a number of relevant local training providers in order to improve the quality and consistency of referrals for skills support and training.

Local 'route finders' should bring together information on training and skills providers in an easily navigable form to improve advisers' awareness of what support is available and encourage appropriate referrals.

As test pilots for some of the changes to the adviser role highlighted here have shown, advisers will need to be significantly up-skilled to achieve successful policy implementation on the ground. This will depend on their being supported by high quality training, management and a framework encouraging accountability and responsibility. Concerns around the fair application of the strengthened conditionality regime remain, but reforms covered here have the potential to improve support for service users as well as empowering advisers if implemented within a strong framework for supporting adviser practice.

7. Managing the impact of the recession and wider systems change

Summary

- There has been a dramatic increase in the number of interviews personal advisers are required to conduct as a result of the 90 per cent increase in Jobseeker's Allowance claimants alone over the past year.
- To maintain pre-recession levels of personal support by Jobcentre Plus, an additional 3,000 to 6000 personal advisers need to be recruited meaning a 30–60 per cent increase in the number of advisers currently in place.
- With interview rates likely to peak in June 2009, it may already be too late to meet a significant amount of additional demand caused by the recession.
- The recession presents opportunities to shape a more assertive approach to outreach at a local level. Local partnerships are being set up in the recession as employment support becomes a higher priority for a range of organisations to link into.
- These partnerships present opportunities to form longer-term arrangements to bring together provision of support at a local level.

The worst effects of the recession are yet to be felt in terms of long-term unemployment. One survey suggests that over a third of organisations have made contingency plans to make more redundancies over the next 12 months (CIPD/KPMG 2009).

Of key concern are the health and social costs that will be felt as more people reach the threshold of long-term unemployment, with risks of long-term 'scarring' in the form of a higher likelihood of future unemployment and wage penalties (Gregg 2001).

In terms of the adviser role, the most immediate impact of the recession is on adviser workload. Recent research has shown that adequate staff-to-client ratios are crucial for effective active employment support, as when capacity is lacking, completing administrative procedures and meeting targets are prioritised over individual support (Daguerre and Etherington 2009).

From new analysis, Box 7.1 shows the ratio of advisers in relation to the number of interviews they are required to carry out using the modelling of two different scenarios based on unemployment projections.

Box 7.1. Analysis: Two scenarios for long-term unemployment and adviser interviews

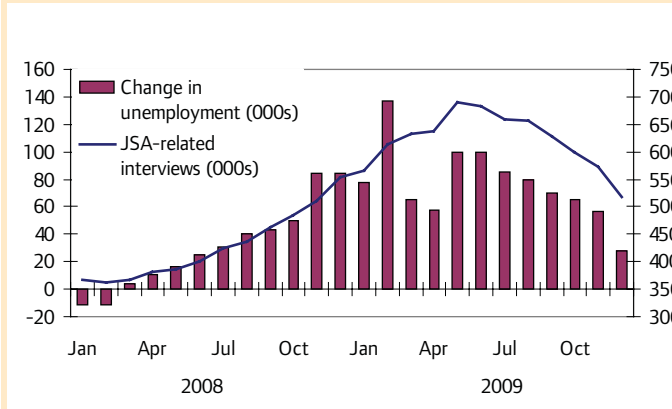
In April 2009 there were 90 per cent more Jobseeker's Allowance claimants than in the same month of the previous year, causing a dramatic increase in the number of work-focused interviews personal advisers are required to conduct. As well as a substantial increase in new claimants, the numbers reaching the thresholds of three, six, 12 and 18 months on JSA have gone up by about 70 per cent over the last year, with the number of one-to-one interviews increasing by a similar amount.

Using unemployment projections we can estimate the number of interviews* advisers will be required to conduct over the next two years under two different scenarios.

*Advisers are meant to carry out 28 interviews per week or 112 per month (Work and Pensions Committee 2007). These include interviews with non-JSA claimants (those on Employment Support Allowance, Incapacity Benefit and so on). However, we do not think these will be sufficient to account for the difference between the number of interviews carried out according to data and the performance targets for advisers.

In the first scenario, based on the latest mean independent forecast of unemployment, as compiled by the Treasury, the number of JSA-related interviews, which increased by 30 per cent between 2007–08 and 2008–09 (April to March), will rise by a further 20 per cent in 2009–10. If interviews for other benefits such as Employment Support Allowance are included, total interviews may be up by 11 per cent in 2009–10.

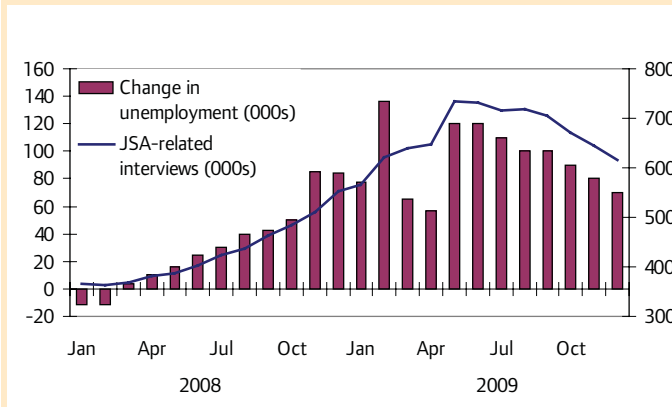
Scenario 1: Unemployment and JSA-related interviews



However, in the next few months, it is possible that independent forecasters will revise their unemployment forecasts upwards. So in a second scenario, based on a higher variant unemployment forecast, the total number of JSA-related interviews would be around 30 per cent higher than in 2008–09 by the end of the

year. After adding in interviews for other benefits, the total number of interviews might be about 17 per cent higher in 2009–10.

Scenario 2: Unemployment and JSA-related interviews



This would follow a 15 per cent increase in 2008–09, meaning a rise of around one-third over two years in the number of interviews that personal advisers are required to conduct.

Taking this analysis further we can see how the distribution of interviews will be spread over the next year.

Starting in February 2008 before the full impact of the recession, Jobseeker's Allowance initial interviews and later work-focused interviews totalled 360,000. With 9,200 full-time equivalent (FTE) advisers in post at that time (Hansard 2008) there was a ratio of almost 40 interviews a month per adviser. This rose to 65 in February this year as the number of benefit claimants surged.

A peak in interview rates is predicted for June 2009, totalling 700,000 JSA-related interviews, as illustrated in the graphs above. With latest figures showing there are now 9,800 FTE advisers this would mean the ratio rising to just over 70 interviews a month per adviser.

By early 2010, the number of JSA interviews is predicted to drop off to a total of around 500,000. If the number of advisers remains unchanged, this would mean a ratio of just over 50 interviews a month per adviser. On the higher variant used above, interviews would total 600,000, with a ratio of just over 60 interviews a month per adviser.

By Tony Dolphin, Senior Economist, ippr.

To reach pre-recession levels and to resume a ratio of 40 interviews per adviser, by these same calculations an additional 3,000–5,600 advisers are needed to meet extra demand, meaning a 30–60 per cent increase in the number of advisers currently in place.

DWP was awarded £3 billion of funding in the Pre-Budget Report and in the recent Budget, in part to increase its network of personal advisers in Jobcentre Plus. However, latest available figures show that since the recession began an extra 600 full-time equivalent advisers have been recruited, bringing the total number of advisers at February 2009 to 9,800 (Jobcentre Plus Activity Based Management model), which is several thousand short of the numbers that were in place in March 2006²² (Hansard 2008).

The DWP is seeking to recruit a further 10,000 people to fill a mixture of full-time and temporary positions in Jobcentre Plus by October 2009 at a rate of around 1,500–2,000 each month (Groves 2009), though it is unclear how many additional full-time equivalent frontline personal advisers this will result in. Analysis shows that peak inflow rates occurred in February 2009 while interview rates are likely to peak in June 2009, suggesting that it may already be too late to meet a significant amount of additional demand caused by the recession.

The recession comes after a period of intense activity for Jobcentre Plus with the introduction of a new benefit, the Employment and Support Allowance, and changes to the lone parent conditionality regime, both of which are expected to result in increased numbers on Jobseeker's Allowance. As highlighted in the previous chapter the pace of welfare reform is far from slowing with the introduction of the Flexible New Deal later this year and the integration of employment and skills.

The pressure this combination of factors places on the system could be eased by a significantly enlarged pool of advisers. However, absorbing thousands of new and inexperienced advisers will bring with it its own set of challenges, particularly as adviser skills will be tested by a tougher employment market. This should be managed in part through the introduction of flexible, on-demand training through an extension in the number of training coaches and by introducing a more consistent framework for reflective practice and peer support (see Chapter 5).

Adapting the adviser role

Studies into the effects of unemployment on mental health have found that the impact is felt most strongly within the first six months of becoming unemployed, with one in seven men developing depression in that time (Kivimaki *et al* 2007) and the effects on health greater the more recent the transition (Thomas *et al* 2005).

The Jobcentre Plus model works in the opposite way to this, with intensive and personal support only offered to claimants *after* six months of unemployment. Recent initiatives to mitigate the impact of the recession, such as the Government's half-a-billion pound 'Six Month Offer' to provide training places and volunteering options for claimants (DWP 2009), have increased this emphasis.

Advisers need to provide one-to-one personal support as early as possible within the process to reduce the impact of psychological distress caused by job loss and to increase the

22. It should be noted that models for counting advisers have changed, making exact comparisons difficult.

likelihood of individuals finding work sooner. This should be done through ensuring advisers can signpost people into appropriate support and offer them relevant and specific job search assistance. It is crucial that a minimum duration for each interview is maintained and that extra staff are in post quickly to provide support.

Wider systems change

As long-term unemployment grows there will need to be a recognition that employment may not be an achievable outcome for some in the short term. Advisers working for specialist providers supporting the long-term unemployed will be tested in particular, with implications for staff morale and performance if targets become increasingly unrealistic.

Allowing organisations to work towards a variety of outcomes may offer clients more appropriate referral routes and assist them into employment in the long term. A broader approach to keeping individuals close to the labour market will only be possible if organisations can work with a wider range of targets to get people back into work.

Returning to the concept of 'triple devolution' outlined in the previous chapter, the recession should be examined for the opportunities it presents to extend local powers to tackle worklessness and further shift the balance of power away from the centre.

As set out in Chapter 1, a key challenge facing the welfare system is the unequal nature of support provided to those from disadvantaged groups and for whom the impact of the recession is likely to be hardest. The urgent need to prevent entrenched long-term unemployment offers an opportunity to re-examine what works to improve labour market outcomes among these groups. The standard job search assistance has struggled to engage sufficiently with disadvantaged groups for a number of reasons, including a reluctance to engage with mainstream services because of mistrust, particularly in relation to Jobcentre Plus's role in policing the benefits system (London Development Agency 2006) and because of the need for more tailored support for some (Hasluck and Green 2007).

As long-term unemployment grows alternative methods will need to be used as the 'cyclical' unemployment caused by the recession compounds the problems of 'structural' unemployment. The local labour market context will become increasingly key with locally tailored support targeted at individuals and neighbourhoods more effective than a 'one size fits all' approach to employment support. The recent Houghton Review concluded that community outreach services should now be the 'norm' for neighbourhoods with high levels of worklessness (Houghton 2009). There are excellent examples of local provision managed by Jobcentre Plus and others in some areas (see Fletcher *et al* 2008), but there is no coherent national policy on outreach provision.

One promising scheme run by Jobcentre Plus, the Partner Outreach for Ethnic Minorities programme (POEM), was recently abandoned when it ran out of funding, despite having outperformed other welfare-to-work programmes on meeting its targets within its first year. The programme had also successfully engaged a wider range of groups than anticipated, including young British-born men who were becoming disengaged from the formal economy, also an increased risk during the recession (Aston *et al* 2009).

The recession presents opportunities for shaping a more assertive approach to outreach at a local level. Local partnerships are being set up in the recession as employment support becomes a higher priority for a range of organisations to link into. These partnerships present opportunities to form longer-term arrangements to bring together provision of support at a local level.

As recent initiatives have shown, the 'dual role' of advisers in relation to benefits need not be a barrier to effective support, with schemes such as Action Teams for Jobs and some

Working Neighbourhoods pilots establishing credibility and trust among local residents by recruiting a number of their advisers from local communities as local 'champions' (Fletcher *et al* 2008). Building on existing outreach programmes, a more assertive policy of engagement with localised networks of linked-in or outreach advisers would orient Jobcentre Plus more strongly within the local community, provide greater support for those in rural areas and help devolve power locally.

Local Jobcentres should be resourced to play a larger role in brokering a wider range of services placed firmly in the context of the local labour market through localised networks of outreach support, targeted at areas with high levels of worklessness.

Recommendations

To maintain pre-recession levels of personal support by Jobcentre Plus, between 3,000 and 5,600 additional personal advisers need to be in place to meet the demand caused by higher unemployment as soon as possible.

The personal adviser role should adapt to reflect evidence showing the damaging impact of the transition to unemployment in the first six months by using new group sessions and targeted support at three months and onwards to signpost to relevant counselling support.

Addressing the challenge of increasing long-term unemployment should be used as an opportunity to reach out further to engage with disadvantaged groups and prevent entrenched worklessness. A more assertive and coherent national policy of outreach should provide power for local Jobcentres to set up localised networks linking up with partners in the community to broker support.

8. Conclusion and summary of recommendations

The focus of public sector reform has shifted away from setting centrally determined targets, towards re-engaging with the relationship between the citizen and state on the frontline of public services. Creating 'citizen-centred' services should be the ultimate goal in this new phase, but there is a growing recognition that this is dependent on public services staff fulfilling service objectives.

We have seen how citizens accept the importance of a reciprocal relationship with public services, believing that for services to be fair there should be an expectation that people 'get back' what they 'put in'. But they also want their experiences of public services to be characterised by dignity and respect, in a relationship that goes beyond simply being treated as a consumer of services. The frontline workers in public services who in many ways are the face of the state are a vital part in this equation.

Personalisation has sought to negotiate this challenge by adapting systems and models of delivery to provide more individually tailored support. However the success of personalisation in employment support has been questioned in this report, with evidence suggesting that 'what matters' to citizens – being treated as of value and given the advice and guidance needed to find work – is not widely accessible enough under the current system.

Personalisation has scope to empower citizens and to shape more effective services. But it must also be recognised that policy will be shaped on the ground regardless of the best intentions of policymakers. To this extent, the focus for policy must be to create the optimum conditions for a healthy relationship between citizen and frontline workers in public services, with the right mixture of incentives and degree of control needed for frontline workers to perform well within accountable frameworks.

The professional and personal development opportunities for advisers have been reviewed in this light, with a range of options considered to 'up-skill' advisers for more professional and personal support. The recommendations below set out five key areas of reform for the future development of the personal adviser workforce.

The next phase of the *Now It's Personal* project will explore and develop these recommendations as part of a programme of action research. With partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors, this will test different aspects of the adviser role through a series of demonstration trials. A best practice 'hub' will also form the centre of a research network, which will provide opportunities for further debate.

Summary of recommendations

1. Impact of the recession

- To maintain pre-recession levels of personal support by Jobcentre Plus, between 3,000 and 5,600 additional personal advisers need to be in place to meet the demand caused by higher unemployment as soon as possible.
- The personal adviser role should adapt to reflect evidence showing the damaging impact of the transition to unemployment in the first six months by using new group sessions and targeted support at three months and onwards to signpost to relevant counselling support.

2. Workforce development

- The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) should publish a comprehensive workforce development plan setting out steps for developing training and professional development opportunities for a more skilled adviser workforce. This

should include extending the use of 'training coaches' for a more flexible and interactive training system and trialling new and innovative training techniques to improve adviser interviewing skills as part of the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for advisers, to evaluate their impact on client engagement and labour market outcomes.

- Advisers across all public employment services should be given better training in specialist areas such as mental health and drug and alcohol misuse to improve confidence and skills in diagnosing the needs of a wider range of groups for earlier and more effectively targeted support.
- A best practice exchange should be set up to broker information and the sharing of best practice and innovation across sectors bringing together prime subcontractors, public sector and voluntary sector organisations and service user groups. A hub set up by ippr as part of the *Now It's Personal* project could act as a catalyst for a more permanent exchange.

3. Professional development for advisers

- The adoption of a core qualification for advisers should be supported by the DWP, such as a newly developed Vocational Related Qualification (VRQ) in Job Brokerage, to standardise practice across providers. This would ensure that key core competencies needed for employment advisers are better recognised. Existing Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) qualifications should be reviewed to see if these qualifications are meeting the needs of advisers and employers.
- Debate is needed within the welfare-to-work sector about how clearer progression routes can be built for advisers to improve staff motivation, performance and retention. A 'natural progression' approach building on entry-level adviser roles and leading up to 'advanced practitioner' roles is outlined here as a starting point for this.

4. Welfare reform and a framework for adviser practice

- Comprehensive criteria and guidance should be issued to advisers and training provided on how to identify claimants for mandatory fast-tracking into specialist support in the JSA regime. Claimants should also be given clear information in interviews to assess whether they are eligible for voluntary early entry to the Flexible New Deal.
- The additional support from a personal adviser at Stages 2 and 3 of the revised JSA regime should be ring-fenced to ensure that it is not squeezed out as a result of extra pressure on services.
- Better use of Job Search Review staff knowledge of claimants should be made through greater joint working between Job Search Review staff and personal advisers. This would improve understanding of clients' progress and ensure additional support is targeted at those claimants who need it most, reducing the likelihood of deadweight costs.
- Greater opportunities for advisers to benefit from reflective practice through case conferences or peer support should be introduced where not already available.
- To counterbalance increases in adviser discretion, structures should be put in place to ensure that staff are supervised against outcome targets and that they have the opportunity to discuss complex cases with managers or peers as part of a more structured approach to case management.

5. Wider systems change

- The challenge of increasing long-term unemployment should be used as an opportunity to reach out further to engage with disadvantaged groups to prevent entrenched worklessness. A more assertive and coherent national policy of outreach should provide power for local Jobcentres to set up localised networks to broker support by linking up with partners in the community.

Annex A: Surveys of personal advisers and employment providers

Two separate online surveys were targeted at personal advisers and employment providers in order to gain access to a wider group of personal advisers and providers. Respondents were recruited through sending surveys to a range of stakeholders from the private, public and voluntary sectors as well as through industry website Indus Delta.

The blank surveys follow below.

1. Providers Survey

Thank you for taking part in this short survey. The survey should only take between 5-10 minutes to complete. Please complete this survey by 10 February 2009.

The information you give us will feed into Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) research on how personal advisers in the welfare system can be best equipped to deliver a personalised and flexible system of welfare to work in order to support more people off benefits and into sustainable employment.

Please note that 'Adviser' is anyone directly providing employment related support to individuals whether through Jobcentre Plus or a voluntary or private sector provider.

This is an independent survey and there are no right or wrong answers - we are just wanting to hear your opinion.

Please also note that you can tick more than one box in your responses.

1. Which type of employment support provider is your organisation?

- Voluntary sector provider
- Private sector provider
- Jobcentre Plus

2. What is the name of your organisation?

3. Which are the minimum qualifications you are looking for when recruiting advisers?

- NVQ level 1
- NVQ level 2
- NVQ level 3
- Undergraduate degree
- Depends on role
- None – experience and skills fit is more important
- Other (please specify)

4. What job title(s) does an 'adviser' have in your organisation?

5. Which of the following training options do you provide for newly recruited advisers?

- In-house training (1-2 weeks)
- In-house training (3-4 weeks)
- Staff shadowing
- Peer mentoring
- Refresher courses
- Other (please specify)

6. Do you offer any enhanced training for advisers, as outlined below?

- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) techniques
- Customer service training
- Sales techniques
- Whole family support
- Childcare
- Lone parents
- Mental health
- Drugs and alcohol
- Homelessness

7. What is the starting salary for advisers in your organisation?

- £16-18k
- £19-21k
- £22-25k
- £26-30k
- £31-33k
- £34-35k

8. Which of the following performance measures do you use to monitor the work of advisers?

- Targets on number of clients placed into work
- Targets on number of clients placed in sustainable work (ie over a certain period of time)
- Targets on employer engagement
- Targets on customer service
- Targets on number of work focused interviews carried out by a certain point in a claim
- Targets on distance travelled (ie progress a client has made towards employment)
- None used
- Other (please specify)

9. What reward systems do you use for advisers?

- Rewards eg payment linked to staff awards
- Bonuses based on performance
- Performance-related pay
- None
- Other (please specify)

10. What is the average caseload of advisers in your organisation?

- 0-10 clients
- 11-20 clients
- 21-30 clients
- 31-40 clients
- 41-50 clients
- Over 51 clients

11. How long, on average, are your advisers able to spend with clients?

- 0-20 minutes
- 21-30 minutes
- 31-40 minutes
- Over 40 minutes
- Cannot say – it varies

12. How long are your advisers able to support a client once they have been placed in training or employment?

- Up to one week
- Up to one month
- Up to 13 weeks
- Up to 26 weeks
- Up to nine months
- Up to one year
- They are not able to do this
- Other (please specify)

13. What opportunities for career progression are available for advisers within your organisation – can you give specific example of jobs frontline staff could be expected to move up into?

- Team leader
- Adviser manager
- Project manager
- Operations manager
- Senior manager
- None
- Other (please specify)

14. Is there anything else you would like to add here?

15. Would you be happy for us to follow up this survey with any additional questions?

16. If yes, please enter your email address below

Thank you

Personal Advisers survey

Thank you for taking part in this anonymous survey. The survey should only take between 5-10 minutes to complete. Please complete this survey before 10 February 2009.

The information you give us will feed into Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) research on how personal advisers in the welfare system can be best equipped to deliver a personalised and flexible system of welfare to work in order to support more people off benefits and into sustainable employment.

Please note that 'Adviser' is anyone directly providing employment related support to individuals whether through Jobcentre Plus or a voluntary or private sector provider.

This is an independent survey and there are no right or wrong answers – we are just wanting to hear your opinion.

Please also note that you can tick more than one box in your responses.

1. What is your job title?

2. Which organisation do you work for?

3. How long have you been working in your current role?

- 0-1 years
- 2-5 years
- 6-9 years
- over 10 years

4. How many people are you working with at any one time, on average?

- 0-10 clients
- 11-20 clients
- 21-30 clients
- 31-40 clients
- 41-50 clients

5. How long, on average, do you spend with your clients?

- 0-20 minutes
- 21-30 minutes
- 31-40 minutes
- Over 40 minutes
- Cannot say – it varies

6. Are you able to spend enough time with customers who need a lot of support?

- Yes, I am able to spend as much time with customers as I need
- Yes, but this means I spend less time with other customers
- No, I don't have as much time as I would like to support them

7. Do you feel that you have enough control over the way you work?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

8. What training have you received since you began working in your current role? (you can select more than one answer)

- In-house training (1-2 weeks)
- In-house training (3-4 weeks)
- Staff shadowing
- Peer mentoring
- Refresher courses
- Cognitive behavioural therapy techniques
- Sales techniques
- Don't know
- Other (please specify)

9. Which of the following areas have you received adequate training in?

- Childcare
- Homelessness
- Drugs/alcohol
- Mental health problems
- None of these

10. Do you feel there are many opportunities for you to progress in your job, for instance into a role with a) more responsibility b) better pay?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

11. Do you receive phone calls from customers while you are with a customer face to face?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

12. If yes, which of the following statements closest fits your reaction to this:

- I don't have a problem with this
- I often find this disruptive and would prefer no interruptions

13. How long are you able to support a client once they have been placed in training or employment?

- Up to one week
- Up to one month
- Up to 13 weeks
- Up to 26 weeks
- Up to nine months
- Up to one year
- I am not able to do this
- Other (please specify)

14. What targets do you have to meet in your job? (You can select more than one answer)

- I have to place a certain number of clients into work
- I have to place a certain number of clients into sustainable work (ie work they have remained in over a certain amount of time)
- I have a target on employer engagement
- I have customer service targets
- I have targets on the number of work focused interviews I have to carry out by a certain point in a claim
- I have targets on distance travelled (ie progress a client has made towards employment)
- None
- Other (please specify)

15. If yes to either of the first two options above, how many clients do you have to place into work and how often? (eg one per week)

16. Is there anything else you would like to add here?

17. Would you be happy for us to follow up this survey with some additional questions?

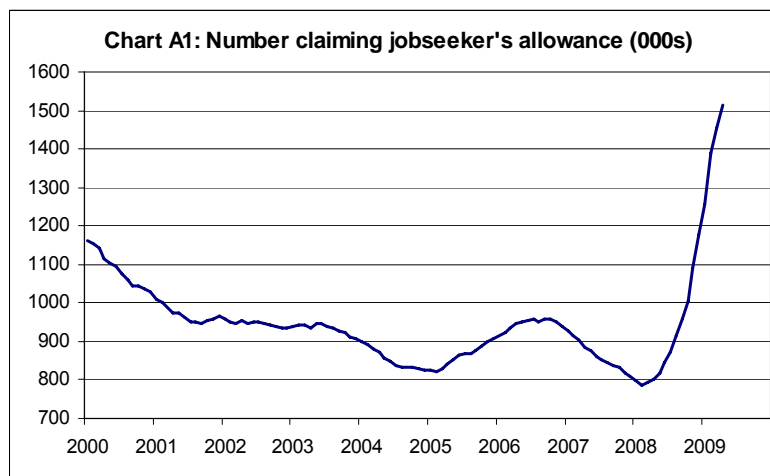
18. If yes, please enter your email address below

Thank you

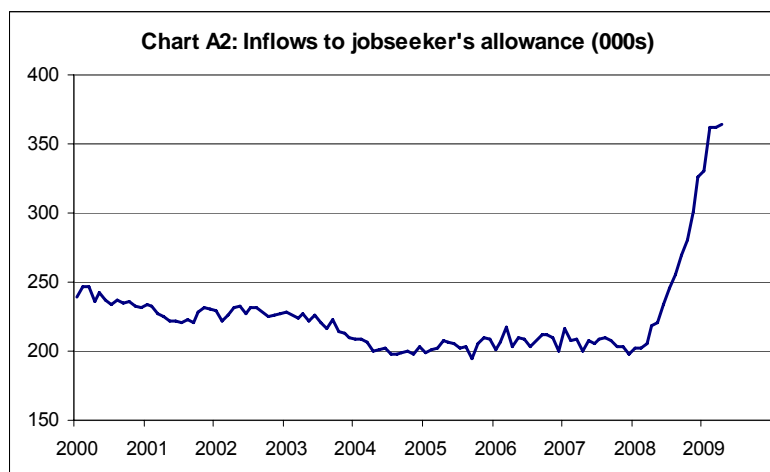
Annex B. The effect of rising unemployment on the workload of Jobcentre Plus personal advisers

Personal advisers in Jobcentre Plus are expected to conduct initial jobseeker interviews with new claimants for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and intensive 'work focused interviews' with those who have been claiming JSA for three, six, 12 and 18 months. The recent rise in unemployment and projected further increases over the next year or so will, therefore, add to their workload. Using data on flows into and out of unemployment and forecasts of future levels of unemployment, it is possible to assess the extent of this increase in workload.

The number of people claiming JSA in April 2009 was 1,513,000 (all figures in this paper are seasonally adjusted, unless otherwise stated), an increase of 710,700, or 89 per cent on a year earlier.



Inflows – that is, new claimants – in the month were 363,900, compared to 218,500 in April 2008, an increase of 67 per cent (as well as being seasonally adjusted, inflow and outflow numbers are standardised, that is converted to a standard 4½ week month). The number of initial job seeker interviews that personal advisers are required to conduct has, therefore, already increased dramatically over the last year or so.



There will also have been concomitant increases in the numbers of people that have been claiming JSA for three and six months and so in the number of work-focused interviews that personal advisers are conducting. It is also likely that the number of people claiming JSA for 12 and 18 months will soon increase sharply as the recession makes jobs harder to find.

We can get a sense of the scale of this increase in initial and work-focused interviews by simulating flows into and out of unemployment, based on assumptions about the success rate of the unemployed at getting jobs (or leaving JSA for another reason) in the first three, six, 12 and 18 months of a claim for JSA. The assumptions we make are:

Period on JSA	Percentage ending claim
Up to three months	50
Up to six months	75
Up to twelve months	90
Up to eighteen months	95

These are a little lower than numbers quoted as historical averages, reflecting the increased difficulty of finding employment at a time when unemployment is rising rapidly.

On this basis, we estimate the number of claimants reaching the thresholds of three, six, 12 and 18 months on JSA has increased over the last year by about 75 per cent from around 160,000 a month to 280,000 a month, which should have led to a similar increase in the number of work-focused interviews conducted by personal advisers. If these interviews are added to the number of initial interviews for those making new claims, then the total number of JSA-related interviews will have gone up from around 380,000 to 650,000 (or about 70 per cent).

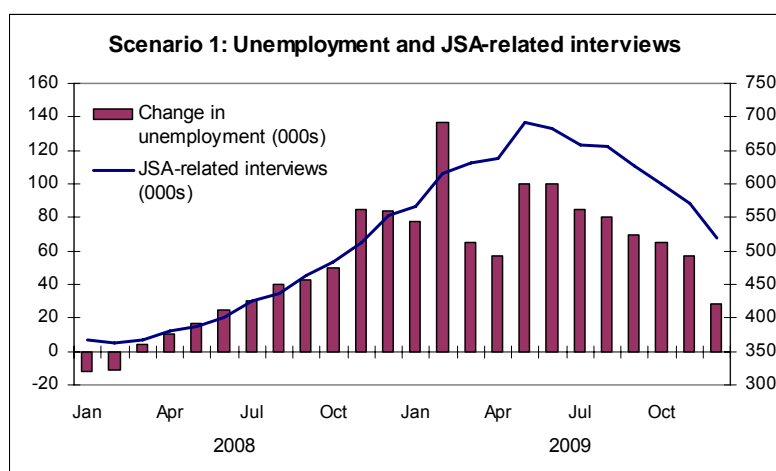
This is not the total interview workload of personal advisers because they also conduct interviews with lone parents and with those claiming incapacity benefit (over 2.5 million people) and the new employment and support allowance (ESA). If people in these categories are seen only once every six months, they would represent over 400,000 extra interviews a month for personal advisers, lifting the total number of interviews to well over 1 million.

It is widely expected that unemployment will continue to increase in the UK over the next two years. HM Treasury collates the forecasts of 40 independent organisations on a monthly basis. The latest mean forecast of unemployment, on the claimant count measure, from this group, published in May, shows it rising from 1.08 million in the fourth quarter of 2008 to 2.07 million in the fourth quarter of 2009 and to 2.39 million in the fourth quarter of 2010.

We have used these forecasts to project monthly increases in unemployment between April 2009 and the end of 2010, and also to project monthly inflows and outflows to JSA. By making assumptions about the percentage of claimants leaving JSA at various stages of their claim, we are also able to project forward the number of initial interviews and the number of 3-month, 6-month, 12-month and 18-month work-focused interviews.

These projections suggest that the monthly inflow to JSA, and thus the number of initial interviews, will decline from the middle of the year and that the number of work-focused interviews will peak at around the same time. Total JSA-related interviews are projected to fall by 20 per cent, from around 650,000 in April to around 525,000, by the end of the year.

This result follows from the independent forecast that unemployment will increase to 2.07 million in the fourth quarter. This would represent an average monthly increase of 73,000 over the next eight months, compared with an average increase of 84,000 over the last six months (November to April). Because inflows to JSA – and thus the need for initial interviews – are closely correlated with the change in unemployment, it follows that the slow down in the rate of increase in unemployment leads to a drop in the required number of initial JSA interviews and, following a lag, a drop in the number of work-focused interviews too.



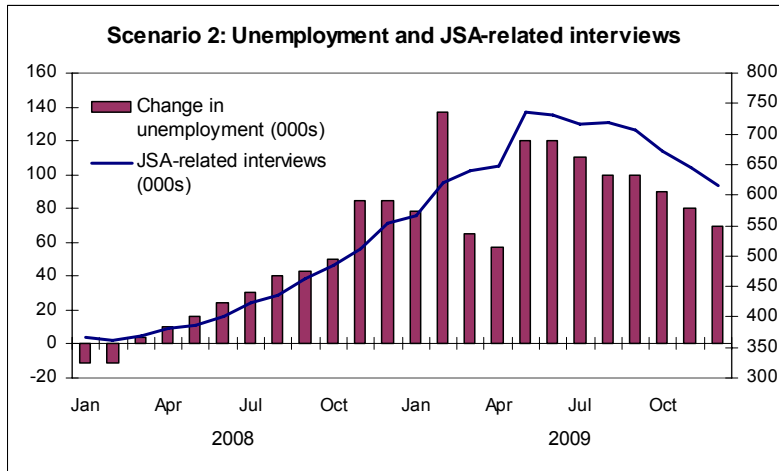
In aggregate, based on this projection, the number of JSA-related interviews, which increased by 30 per cent between 2007-08 and 2008-09 (April to March), will rise by a further 20 per cent in 2009-10.

However, this will overstate the likely rise in the workload of personal advisers. The number of interviews they are conducting with lone parents and those claiming incapacity benefits and the employment and support allowance, will – at least in the short-term – not be closely correlated with the rise in unemployment. If JSA-related interviews increase by 20 per cent, total personal adviser interviews may be up by 11 per cent.

Of course, unemployment could rise by more than suggested in HM Treasury's latest survey of independent forecasters. The depth and length of the current recession are very uncertain. For this reason, we have also looked at a variant projection which envisages a higher path for unemployment.

Unemployment	HM Treasury independent forecasters	Higher variant
2008 Q4	1,080,000	1,080,000
2009 Q4	2,070,000	2,250,000
2010 Q4	2,400,000	2,750,000

In this case, the average monthly increase in unemployment for the remaining eight months of the year would be 100,000 (compared to 73,000 based on the mean independent forecast). As a result, there are higher inflows to JSA and more initial and, with a lag, work-focused interviews. By the end of the year, the total number of interviews is projected to have declined by less than 10 per cent, to 610,000. And for 2009-10, the total number of JSA-related interviews would be around 30 per cent higher than in 2008-09.



After adding in non-JSA-related interviews, the total number of interviews conducted by personal advisers might be about 17 per cent higher in 2009-10, compared to 2008-09. This would follow a 15 per cent increase in 2008-09, so making an increase of one-third over two years in the number of interviews that personal advisers are required to conduct.

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