

The Work Programme – helping the hardest to reach

Community Links briefing paper



Community Links is the most successful New Deal provider in London and the South East, having helped over 2000 of the hardest to reach young people back to work in the last three years. This briefing shares the secret to our success, and proposes how the developing Work Programme must be designed so that it doesn't leave behind those who most need its support.

Community Links' successes

Community Links is based in Newham, the east London borough with one of the highest rates of long-term unemployment in the country. We have been delivering the New Deal since 1999 and have remained the most successful Prime contractor in London and the south east for over 4 years, supporting over 2000 people into work. The majority of our clients have complex needs, are aged between 18-24yrs and are considered long-term unemployed yet through the new Deal they have remained in employment for at least 6 months.

“Most of those who can get a job, will have a job. The hardest to help may take a very long time to do this and distance travelled is just as important as employment results.”
Kevin Jenkins, Co founder of Community Links

Community Links' vision for the 'Work Programme'

To ensure smaller specialist organisations are able to realise their full potential in the Work Programme, we have some specific recommendations in five key areas.

1) Tailor the Work Programme design for the hardest to help

Much of the Work Programme design, particularly the black box approach to delivery, and the focus on results, is very welcome. However, we have two further suggestions specifically for the long-term unemployed:

Provide in-work support for a year, not just monitor

Someone who has been out of work for many years must be provided with intensive and tailored support once they get a job, to ensure they keep it and progress. Monitoring is not enough. In-work grants are currently inadequate and need to be raised, and the contracts need to allow for organisations to provide this support.

Recognise steps on the way to a job

For the hardest to help there are several stages along the way to employment, and these must be recognised in the design of the system, to ensure the significant time invested by specialist providers like Community Links in individuals is recognised.

2) Ensure the black box approach applies to delivery but not to funding

The black box approach to delivery is crucial, allowing organisations to try new and innovative ways of supporting people into jobs. But it must not apply to the funding supplied by prime contractors to their sub-contractors, which should be designed by the DWP and written into the contract, to ensure smaller providers are not disadvantaged. Specifically, contracts must:

Provide upfront capital to smaller and more specialist organisations

A condition of all contracts must be that smaller sub-contractors like Community Links are given some resources and capital upfront, payments are staged, and can be clawed back at the end if necessary. Successful specialist providers like Community Links will not be able to participate without this.

Have a fixed payment for supporting the hardest to help

Under the Flexible New Deal the funding available to sub contractors varied depending on the prime contractor. Instead there should be a set rate, established by the DWP, which must be paid to the organisations supporting the hardest to help. This will prevent creaming and parking by profit-driven primes.

3) Give specialist organisations a voice

Sub-contractors must be recognised as valued stakeholders and invited to participate fully in discussions during the development and implementation of the Work Programme.

4) Set a national target for the long-term unemployed

A national target for the percentage of long-term unemployed supported back to work should be set and responsibility for it should be assigned to DWP, to ensure sufficient resources and energy are devoted to helping those who need most support.

5) Encourage prime contractors to adopt good working practice:

The individual's journey through the system should be smooth and uninterrupted

The secret to our success as a New Deal provider is the one-to-one relationships developed over many months between our advisers and clients. The journey an individual takes through the system must be simple, smooth, and stable, to increase the chance people stay engaged and supported. It must not be punctuated by regular changes of provider.

Favour providers with local roots

Specialist programmes designed to help the hardest to help must be designed in the surrounding area, not parachuted in. This ensures staff have a good knowledge of the particular challenges facing their clients, which can vary widely between areas.

Wider reform of the benefits system

Beyond the design of the Work Programme, DWP must ensure that all decisions on the future of the welfare system are properly consulted on, including through grassroots organisations like Community Links. This consultation should cover not just work incentives within the system design, but also administration, and the levels at which benefits are set.

For more information please contact

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