

Jobs First Evaluation: Interim Report - Summary

Martin Stevens and Jess Harris

Introduction

This is the Summary of the Interim Report of the evaluation of Jobs First, a Department of Health [DH] led demonstration site project being implemented initially in seven local authority sites in England, although only five have participated in this stage of the evaluation.

Key Findings

- Promoting a belief in the employability of people with learning disabilities was seen as a core implementation task
- Jobs First was consistently described as a spur for sites to progress efforts at attitude change
- Supportive families were felt by participants from all groups to be one of the most important elements in encouraging people with learning disabilities to seek paid work
- Increasing choice and flexibility for service users to purchase supported employment services using personal budgets was identified by most participants as the most important potential benefit of the Jobs First approach
- The general view was that it was not possible yet to draw multiple funding streams into a single individual budget to pay for supported employment. Ensuring that enough money was allocated to supported employment, whether from social care or other funding streams, was a key challenge.
- Sites have managed to implement changes and to start working with a cohort of people at a time of unprecedented difficulties for local authorities.

Background

Jobs First is testing personalised approaches to using adult social care personal budgets, in combination with other funding streams, on employment related support. The project combines key central government policy goals of increasing employment and personalising public services. People with learning disabilities in employment have been found to have higher self esteem, job satisfaction and sense of control over their lives. There is also evidence of the financial value of employment for people with learning disabilities, and long term savings for public spending. Furthermore, there is evidence that people with learning disabilities want to work.

Findings

Context

The period over which Jobs First has been operating has been a difficult one financially and a turbulent one for central and local government, which has resulted in much uncertainty in the Jobs First sites. The increase in unemployment has created a perception that it is a bad time for people with learning disabilities to be seeking jobs. However, involvement with other DH projects, particularly Getting a Life, and with Right to Control, a wider Office for Disability Issues [ODI] initiative, was widely felt to be of great value in implementing Jobs First.

Promoting and prioritising employment

Promoting a belief in the employability of people with learning disabilities was seen as a core implementation task for many of the Jobs First Leads. Hearing positive stories and examples illustrating the possibility and benefits of work for people with learning disabilities was the best means of changing these beliefs. A commonly held explanation for negative attitudes towards employment for people with learning disabilities was that services had been over protective.. There was general agreement that most people with learning disabilities, especially younger people, want to work and feel this is possible. However, gaining employment for people who had been using day or other services for a long time was thought to be more difficult after years of institutionalisation and for people with fluctuating conditions and complex needs, who may need more intensive support.

Managing the concerns of staff was felt by several participants to be a key role for Jobs First Leads, in order to encourage workers to sell the idea of employment to the people they work with and their families. Unsurprisingly, frontline practitioners who are negative about the idea could be a powerful influence, discouraging a person to seek employment.

In general, Jobs First Leads were positive about the degree to which a focus on employment was becoming embedded in local authority and wider public sector practice. Jobs First was consistently described as a spur for sites to progress efforts at attitude change. The tight focus of Jobs First was identified as a benefit in promoting the adoption of employment as a goal within organisations. The chance to work with a small cohort was seen as a good opportunity to develop practice locally. However, some were concerned that the short timescale of the project would mean it was not possible to generate sustainable change.

Supportive families were felt by participants from all groups to be one of the most important elements in encouraging people with learning disabilities to seek paid work. Several Jobs First Leads and senior managers identified families' and carers' fear of change as a big barrier to adopting employment as a goal, although there was a strong perception that if workers took time with family members and explained the risks and benefits, most would be supportive of the idea.

Personalised approaches to employment-related support

Increasing choice and flexibility for service users to purchase supported employment services using personal budgets was identified by most participants as the most important potential benefit of the Jobs First approach. However, concerns were raised by Jobs First Leads about the pressures that arise from managing personal budgets. For some, market forces were seen as a safeguard of the quality of supported employment, as people would be able to move providers. For others, the preferred safeguard was quality standards agreed with the local authority. Furthermore, there was some concern that prioritising employment over meeting someone's other social care needs may lead to them having unmet personal care needs, which would never be acceptable.

Supported employment providers

Jobs First is addressing an important interdependency issue in relation to the local supply and demand of supported employment: how can new types of provision emerge when fears about the lack of available services mean that there is uncertainty about encouraging demand? Having a good estimate for the cost of employment related support was thought to help balance the allocation of resources to employment and other social care needs, and the DH report on costing supported employment (Allott and Atkinson, 2011¹) was aimed to provide this kind of

estimate. In terms of job coaches, there was some debate over about whether social care support workers can carry out job coaching tasks without extra training. It was thought that many longstanding day service staff might find it especially difficult to learn the new skills and to commit to the necessary refocusing on employment over care and leisure.

Funding employment related support

Ensuring that enough money was allocated to supported employment, whether from social care or other funding streams, was a key challenge. Specific amounts allocated by adult social care RASs for supported employment were often very low: one Jobs First lead quoted £54 a week on average. However, changing the RAS was not seen as a priority for Jobs First because of the difficulties of achieving this within the timeframe of the project. Some sites had avoided establishing employment within the RAS and had been flexible in letting people use money allocated for other aspects (e.g. social inclusion) for supported employment.

Some progress had been made with regards to accessing different non social care funding streams, although the general view was that it was not possible yet to draw these into a single individual budget to pay for supported employment. Most of the other funding streams tended to be tied up in services (Work Choice) or colleges (Additional Learning Support for learners under 25), making it impossible to access them as a cash payment. Also, different sets of eligibility criteria and assessments have to be met before money can be accessed, complicating the processes. Access to Work was identified as a more flexible source of funding, although there were reports of conflicting advice being given about how it could be accessed and used. Right to Control sites have tended to leave active negotiations with the different funding agencies to the Right to Control project team. Details about the balance of funding from the different streams that is used in the implementation of Jobs First have yet to be worked out by sites.

There were several examples where local adult social care RASs were reported to subtract an amount of money from the allocation of social care funds if other funding streams had been accessed. However, it was felt that if support planners can distinguish different aspects of support to be paid for by the different funding streams, such discounting could be avoided. In a time of cutbacks in public spending, it is likely to be difficult to persuade senior managers to view bringing together of funding streams positively as co-funding (as opposed to 'double funding'). Managers were reported to be facing pressures to cut organisations' budgets, which sustained thinking in narrow organisational silos.

Discussion and conclusion

It is obviously too early to draw any firm conclusions about Jobs First as a whole. It is important, however to stress that sites have managed to implement changes and to get started on working with a cohort of people for Jobs First at a time of unprecedented difficulties for local authorities. Jobs First already appears to have been a useful spur to reinforce and reinvigorate staff to develop new approaches to supported employment, particularly to pilot the use of personal budgets.

Changing attitudes and structures have emerged as the most important themes over the early implementation phase of the project. Sites have worked to change attitudes about the abilities and desires of people with learning disabilities to work, and also to address some of the barriers in terms of impact on families, using multiple funding streams and the availability of employment services. However sites are in the midst of working with key groups such as care managers to translate some of the attitudinal changes into practice. Encouraging more provision

of supported employment has also proved challenging. Implementation of Jobs First is complex and can be characterised as working on multiple fronts both within local authorities and across the locality.

In the follow up stage of the evaluation we will focus on outcomes of the Jobs First approach in terms of employment, and costs of services delivered. Interviews with people with learning disabilities and their families will provide insights into the experiences of seeking and getting jobs. Second round interviews with Jobs First Leads will focus on the outcomes of engagement with different organisations and employers and the degree of success at accessing multiple sources of funding.

About the study

The evaluation is addressing the following research questions:

1. Does the Jobs First approach make a difference to the employment outcomes of people with learning disabilities, compared with standard services?
2. What are the costs and benefits of the Jobs First approach to supported employment in comparison with standard social care and other services?
3. What issues are raised in the implementation of the Jobs First approach?
4. How do people with learning disabilities experience the Jobs First intervention as impacting on their lives?

The multi-methods approach of the evaluation involves comparing employment outcomes for the Jobs First cohort with a matched group of people receiving standard social care and other services. This interim report focuses on interviews undertaken with Jobs First Lead officers in sites, senior managers and three interviews with national leads.

Progress to April 2011

We have received case record data for 74 people with learning disabilities, 44 in the Jobs First cohort and 30 in the comparison group. These groups are fairly similar in terms of age gender and ethnicity and level of learning disability. All those selected were eligible for adult social care on the basis of Fair Access to Care Services criteria, which is likely to mean they have moderate to severe learning disabilities. However none of the sites had selected anyone for the Jobs First cohort or the comparison group who they rated as having severe learning disabilities. We have undertaken interviews with eight Jobs First leads (in five sites), four senior managers and three national leads. Interviews have been conducted with 25 people with learning disabilities, although they have not been included in this report, as they were being conducted during the analysis and writing stages. The final Jobs First Report will be available in 2012.

¹Allott, S. and Atkinson, E. (2011) *Jobs First: Funding employment support with individual budgets*. London, Department of Health. Available from www.valuingpeoplenow.dh.gov.uk/content/employment-resources-hub

This summary and the full Jobs First Interim Report is available to download free from:
www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/kpi/scwru/res/roles/jobs.aspx

Social Care Workforce Research Unit

King's College London

Phone: 020 7848 1782

Email: scwru@kcl.ac.uk

Website: www.kcl.ac.uk/scwru

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