

Research round-up: support on the path to employment

Careers advice for all

The government's planned universal adult advancement and careers service is due to be rolled out this year. Being universal, the new service will include help for adults who encounter particular difficulties in getting on in the labour market, perhaps to do with disability, age, or other factors that can make it harder to find or keep a job.

A recent study set out to explore current best practice in helping adults who are disadvantaged in various ways. The researchers found a number of factors led to success. These included:

- **Encouraging progression** – helping clients to move forward (and in some cases, also preventing regression). This involved proceeding in small steps, understanding when the client was ready for the next step, asking clients to make a commitment to change, challenging the client where necessary, following them up to remind and encourage, and helping them to help themselves.
- **Support with basic skills** – the additional support needed by service users included developing some skills that underpin all others, especially English language skills, literacy, numeracy, and computer skills.
- **Working with employers** – agencies explaining how employing the target group could benefit employees, arranging work experience and volunteering opportunities, and brokering actual jobs.
- **Gathering evidence of impact** – maintaining records of 'hard' outcomes, such as employment or enrolments, but also 'soft' outcomes too.

Evidence source

Hawthorn, R. & Alloway, J. (2009) *Smoothing the path: advice about learning and work for disadvantaged adults*. CfBT Education Trust. Available [here](#)

The findings are based on a study of 12 agencies that provided careers advice to adults with one or more disadvantages such as learning difficulties, mental illness, older adults and ex-offenders.

Lessons learned from past youth employment and training programmes

At the end of 2008, 14 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds in England were not participating in recognised education or training. Of these, four per cent were in jobs without training (JWT), three per cent in employer funded training (EFT) – which is not recognised as high quality training – and seven per cent were not in education, employment or training (NEET). This was the context for a recent historical review of youth employment and training programmes which identified a number of lessons learned.



The importance of individual support

Provision of individual support was a crucial factor in the design of successful employment and training programmes. Individual support covered information, advice and guidance, one-to-one support, and individual plans.

The importance of financial support

Financial support was an effective mechanism for engaging young people in education and training. The young people preferred wages to training allowances because they felt that earning money meant they were undertaking realistic jobs, while employers who were paying a wage rather than a training allowance felt obliged to give 16-17 year old employees genuine, productive tasks to do. But the main lesson from history is that wage payments to 16-17 year olds on programmes were too low relative to the market wage rate. As a result, many employers were either unable to keep young people on programmes or recruit them in the first place, or were criticised for exploiting young, cheap labour.

The importance of programme flexibility

Flexibility was introduced in several ways. For example:

- training start dates were flexible – individuals were able to start programmes when they required a place, rather than when the previous cohort had completed the course, which meant that there was no chance of willing individuals having to wait for places or falling out of the system, and
- programme activities were flexible – individuals could participate in a range of activities and choose those parts that most interested them.

The importance of engaging employers in the right way

In the past, financial incentives were often paid to employers to recruit new young staff, but this proved to be an ineffective mechanism for increasing employer demand for them. Programmes have also engaged employers as training providers, but the training provided was often criticised for being poor or inconsistent. A small number of previous programmes have engaged employers in programme design – an approach that was successful in stimulating employer demand.

Evidence source

Kewin, J., Tucker, M., Neat, S. & Corney, M. (2009) *Lessons from history: Increasing the number of 16 and 17 year olds in education and training*. CfBT Education Trust. Available [here](#)

This study reviewed 18 historical youth unemployment and training programmes implemented between 1972 and 1997.