



The information authority

Paper 7: Additional information collection to support the development of the Employability Skills Programme

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1. What are we asking the board to do?

The board is asked to approve the collection of additional customer data for learners referred to the Employability Skills Programme as set out below.

2. Background

In 'Work Skills' the Government clearly set out its objective to move more people into sustainable employment, through the development of an Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) service in England. Work Skills announced a series of trials of the new IES service offer that will operate across five regions starting with the West Midlands on 29 September 2008. The Government also laid out a new ambition that through the development and implementation of this new service, over 100,000 people would be helped to gain sustainable employment and a recognised qualification in 2010-11.

The Employability Skills Programme sits at the heart of the provision offer for IES that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) is putting in place through joint arrangements between the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Jobcentre Plus (JCP) who make the referrals of eligible customers to LSC-contracted ESP providers. ESP qualification and job outcomes will contribute to the 100,000 target.

The ESP provision offer includes basic literacy/language and numeracy skills embedded into a generic employability curriculum, leading to nationally approved basic and employability qualifications. Both qualifications and job outcomes count as achievements for LSC funding purposes.

The budget for the Employability Skills Programme is set to increase significantly from £29 million in 2008-09 to £42 million in 2010-11, with the expectation of supporting over 37,000 learners in 2010/11 (07/08 target was 13,000 learners). The Work Skills Command paper committed to a further review of ESP in order to establish how even more people could be helped more effectively through the Programme and further allocation increases and learner numbers are expected in the Grant Letter to be published in mid-October. The programme has a high profile with Ministers in both DIUS and DWP and they are already aware that our current data availability is not sufficient to provide them with the evidence to support improvements in the Programme and the processes in operation between JCP and LSC contracted providers to deliver Work Skills intentions.

In 2010 the Government has given the recently formed UK Commission for Employment and Skills the power to review the progress made in implementing an integrated services in England, and if need be, recommend changes to the Machinery of Government should progress not be satisfactory.

3. Current data availability and new requirements

3.1 Data requirements

Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers routinely make referrals to LSC provision and the nextstep service as part of their normal customer interactions. For the ESP, JCP provide the LSC with monthly aggregated referral data for regions and nationally.

Where an individual starts provision and completes or subsequently drops out of learning, follow up work to ascertain the reason can be carried out by the learning provider and the information is recorded and supplied to the LSC via the ILR.

Where a customer fails to attend an assessment interview with the provider, or to start the Programme on the agreed start date, this information is captured by the provider and returned to JCP to initiate follow-up via its own systems and advisers.

The gaps in our knowledge relate to understanding the complexities of the referral process and the various points at which a customer can drop out of the intervention process; the cost implications of any variations in Programme length, particularly where programme length is extended and the relationship between work experience and job placements in terms of generating job outcomes. The appendix outlines the reasons for each of the additional data requirements.

3.2 Impact of Data Sharing Legislation

Proposed changes to Data Sharing legislation will not impact upon the requirement to collect this additional information. The information required is not currently collected at any stage in the process by any of the parties involved.

3.3 Programme Development

The Employability Skills Programme had just completed a first full year of operation, and the programme design is due to be refocused over the coming year. This is likely to be the first of a series of reviews although funding is currently only guaranteed until the end of this Comprehensive Spending Review period. The information obtained through the proposed additional collections will provide important information to inform the future direction of the programme.

It is expected that the programme will need to collect additional data through to August 2010 in order to provide the information required. Data would be collected in an aggregated form, with no individual data collected or supplied to the LSC. If satisfactory conclusions can be drawn at an earlier date then this date could be brought forward.

3.4 Expectation Management

In order that revisions to the programme can be made, the Learning and Skills Council included a clause in the invitation to tender (ITT), stating that the

programme would be subject to changes in policy over the coming years. The Learning and Skills Council also included a clause in the ITT stating that providers may have to supply additional management information and data as requested, due to the fact that this is a developing programme that is of significant interest to Ministers of more than one Government Department. This has also been included as a clause in the contracts for the programme already.

3.5 Consultation

Through a series of national provider events we have discussed the additional data requirements of the programme with most if not all of providers involved in delivering the programme. This was been carried out informally as part of a series of national workshops for providers during 2007/08.

Provider feedback to date has been supportive of the collection of a limited amount of additional information if it helps to develop the programme funding requirements in order to improve the effectiveness of the programme.

4. FE Sector Implications

Employability Skills Programme providers would be required to collect and submit additional information regarding learner decisions on a monthly basis, consistent with the ILR data to which it relates. This information would be used to support the ongoing development of Government and LSC policy in this area, and will help to ensure that FE providers are offering the right type of provision to meet the future skills needs of employers in England. Of approximately 40 ESP providers nationally, currently 6 are FE institutions.

Much of the information is collected in any case for audit trail evidence, for providers' own records and to support independent evaluation.

5. Next Steps

If the additional data collection outlined in this paper is approved, then a process for collecting the data will be rapidly developed. This will require the use of manual returns (in the form of spreadsheets) from providers, or the development of a simple portal that would enable providers to upload information on a regular basis. The cost of development would be a major consideration in any final decision as to which route is followed. In the event of implementing a manual system, security arrangements will be agreed with the LSC's Information, Security and Governance manager.

6. Contact Details

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Appendix A

1. Additional data to be collected:

Data from LSC providers: all information will be reported monthly with a cumulative total to DIUS, DWP and JCP. LSC providers will record:

(1) Number of referred JCP customers (including Incapacity Benefit and Employment Support Allowance customers) who attend an assessment interview.

This figure provides an analysis of attendees, by benefit regime, that can be compared with the outgoing referral figure collected by JCP and should tally with the provider returns of those who fail to attend. However, it also provides an indication of the multiple times that some customers are referred before they attend, the inappropriateness of some customer referrals and potential ineffectiveness of JCP screening processes and tools, or highlight inaccuracies in the collection of referral data by JCP. This will also help us to understand how many JCP customers are finding their own way to provision without a referral from JCP.

(2) Number of provider-direct referrals.

LSC-funded providers are required by contract to promote the Programme and identify potential participants to refer via a JCP personal advisor. This figure helps us to identify the extent to which providers are fulfilling this requirement, and compare the provider and JCP generated customer referrals. It can also indicate whether there is a mismatch between the numbers that providers have referred to JCP for screening and the numbers actually referred by JCP for assessment.

(3) Number of referred JCP customers who are:
(i) referred to other more suitable provision (including what type such as LSC, JCP or learndirect);
(ii) sign-posted to nextstep for careers information and advice.

High numbers provide an indication of both the suitability of JCP screening and referral and the suitability of the provision to meet the customer's needs. This is particularly important in the context of further developing the Programme to better meet the wider range of complex needs for this customer group, and avoiding duplication with other provision funded by other organisations and the LSC. The IES service effectiveness relies on a closer working relationship between JCP, providers and the nextstep service so that customers get access to the most suitable and effective provision to meet their needs.

(4) Number of referred JCP customers with a planned start date but who do not start the Programme.

Currently the conversion rate of referrals from Jobcentre Plus to learning starts stands at 29% for the Employability Skills Programme. This rate of conversion is not sufficiently high to enable us to deliver the level of programme performance required over coming years as the programme grows and we need to measure the impact of improved follow-up processes we are putting in place with JCP.

In addition, there are LSC funding implications for such non-starters: because the provider cannot earn funding for a non-starter but has already invested time and costs in assessing the customer's skill levels and needs, the LSC pays a one-off administrative fee of £50 in such cases.

- (5) Number of direct referrals from JCP-funded Pathways to Work or New Deal providers.

These types of referrals are becoming more frequent and will become even more so as JCP adopts Prime Contractor arrangements for all Flexible New Deal delivery from April 2009. JCP does not collect onward referral data for their customers in such cases and, because these customers are still in receipt of benefit, a Personal Adviser does not have to make any benefit adjustments. Customers referred from JCP to LSC-funded provision in this way can therefore bypass the Jobcentre and current MI data collection touch points.

- (6) Number of full-time learners whose learning programme and Training Allowance is extended beyond 15 weeks:
- (i) For up to 5 weeks
 - (ii) For between 6 and 15 weeks

A significant issue which HM Treasury are keen to understand is how many of the learners on full time provision require longer than the initial 15 weeks that can be supported by a training allowance funded by the DWP. Data available from the ILR does not currently capture this information, as if learners change to part time provision mid course the change is not reported. The impact on the Training Allowance budget is particularly of interest as we work with DWP and Jobcentre Plus to trial new arrangements that relax current benefit regulations and open up more opportunities for people on benefits to undertake skills training.

The 2 categories above relate to the periods of programme extension which must satisfy criteria agreed with Jobcentre Plus.

- (7) Numbers starting on a work-placement/work experience in reporting month.

Providers are encouraged to secure unpaid work experience and placements for programme participants who are ready to seek employment as a way of improving job opportunities and employment sustainability. As this is in-learning rather than a learning outcome, it is not collected via the ILR. Information on this will help to inform Programme development and assess progress towards delivering the Prime Minister's objective of offering people work placement opportunities in order to help to prepare them for work.

IES trial areas only

- (8) Numbers signposted to nextstep at the end of a Programme.

Where Programme participants get to the end of their provision and have no qualification and/or job outcome achievements, providers are encouraged to refer participants for a skills health check. This will be important information to inform the development of the adult advancement and careers service and the IES service to individuals.