

Department for Work and Pensions

Research Report No 605

Joint Pilots baseline research

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A report of research carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions

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Summary

The research summarised here focuses on three pilot initiatives supported by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) which aim to improve employment prospects for individuals exposed to serious social exclusion, particularly ex-offenders. The three Pilots are:

- **The Next Steps test bed Regional Pilots:** established to run for two years in the East of England and the West Midlands regions; these Pilots sought to improve training and employment outcomes for offenders and ex-offenders, largely, but not exclusively, through improving the integration of existing regional infrastructure.
- **Exit to Work:** introduced in October 2006 and originally known as the Job Developer Pilot; the aim here was to improve job opportunities for offenders and ex-offenders through more effective employer engagement. Six Pilots were established, each providing and supporting a Job Developer role.
- **Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE) Pilots:** which comprise 12 Pilots designed to improve service provision and support to secure better outcomes for adults who face chronic exclusion. The Pilots each run for three years from mid-2007 promoting both system change and practical help for people to improve their ability to engage with mainstream services.

It is important to recognise that these Pilots were conceived, designed and largely implemented during conditions of unparalleled labour market buoyancy, which have now ended. This deterioration must have a negative effect on the circumstances and prospects of their target groups, through the increase in competition for fewer available jobs and the increasing strain placed on labour market agencies as a result. Two of these Pilots are subject to formal, independent evaluation separately from this research, which aims primarily to draw out common experiences and broad lessons from across the three.

Working with hard-to-help beneficiaries

Although they are not identical, there is a considerable overlap between the target groups for these Pilots, in the severe, complex and multiple constraints on employment chances which they present. These broadly fall into four groupings:

- **Personal/circumstantial/behavioural/lifestyle considerations:** Many of the beneficiaries of these Pilots demonstrate difficult/disturbed personal circumstances and characteristics which make it difficult/impossible for them to aspire to, seek, secure or hold down jobs.
- **Low objective employability:** Many also lack the basic human capital to make them attractive to employers, even if these behavioural/ circumstantial factors could be contained. As a result, they often have...
- **Low appeal to employers:** The combination of disruptive behavioural patterns and low human capital does not make this an obviously attractive group for any employer. Furthermore, it can make them...
- **Hard to work with:** The same factors that often make these groups unattractive to employers also make them difficult to work with for support providers and/or labour market intermediaries.

The combination of these four elements implies a potentially problematic transition to employment for many in these groups, and the Pilots' experience shows that, as a result:

- a substantial proportion is unlikely to be readily employable. Achieving employment outcomes is, therefore, quite distant for many, and unlikely to ever be secured for some;
- many need sequential and cumulative interventions. Despite the established 'work-first' emphasis of public policies it is clear that for many within these cohorts the path to employment is dependent on at least the containment, if not the resolution, of several higher priority constraints. Consequently...
- routeways into employment are therefore often likely to be long and slow. Many beneficiaries, particularly those with multiple disadvantages and within the ACE Pilots, are therefore likely to face an extended period of intervention and support before there is much chance of their becoming employable. Many may not make it at all.

Engaging with hard-to-help beneficiaries

The Pilots' target groups frequently experience unsatisfactory and problematic relationships with the mainstream services which might be expected to help them so often. Multi-agency co-operation and co-ordination is often required from mainstream service providers. But:

- it is often difficult to establish a lead agency due to the multiple and varied constraints on the part of the individuals concerned;
- the length and complexity of their transition to employment, coupled with the extreme disadvantage experienced by individual clients, mean that often the journey is unlikely to be a simple linear progression. Tracking and assured integration of beneficiaries therefore becomes very problematic;

- there appear to be shortcomings in either the readiness or the capacity (sometimes both) of mainstream service providers to orchestrate their delivery and/or services to meet the needs of the socially excluded.

Pilot interventions

The ACE Pilots were the ones mostly focused on working with individuals, and the main approaches observed here were client-centred, relying heavily on intensive one-to-one support from key workers. A key aim of these Pilots was often to secure the increased stabilisation of client circumstances through addressing issues such as homelessness and substance abuse. This was seen as a necessary prerequisite to improved employability.

While all three Pilots worked, to some extent, towards improving the existing systems and structures of provision, it was the test bed Pilots which focused most strongly on offering a more coherent and integrated system of mainstream skills and employment support. Key strategies included developing working links between partner organisations, increasing the focus on employability and skills within prison and probation services, and co-ordinating employer engagement activities.

It was the Exit to Work Pilot which aimed most consistently at improving employment outcomes for offenders by developing and testing out more effective employer engagement approaches, through identifying employers willing to work with offenders; organising awareness-raising events; offering pre- and post-employment support services to employers; encouraging employers to provide additional services and influence the training taking place in prisons. These activities were supplemented by job-brokering activities to secure specific employment outcomes for individual offenders, and partnership working activities seeking to bring more coherence to employer engagement among offender-facing services.

What works?

Looking first at the often extreme social exclusion with which the ACE Pilots in particular grappled, the research suggests that:

- high levels of personal support (caseloading and support worker provision) are vital in working with socially excluded individuals;
- achieving stabilisation of beneficiary circumstances, particularly regarding access to benefits, homelessness and substance abuse, emerges as a vital pre-condition for many socially excluded clients before they are able to consider employment.

With regards to broader aspects of system change and improvements in system navigation, both the Exit to Work and test bed Pilots demonstrated:

- the importance of being able to draw upon existing infrastructures, strong regional partnerships and existing provision within a time-limited Pilot which lacks substantial funding and/or capacity;

- the value of improving working links between organisations to prioritise employability and skills for this client group. While this activity was largely confined to specific activities, areas and organisations (as opposed to a step change at the systemic level), where it did occur, it often helped to prioritise skills and employment support within prisons and the Probation Service, and among employers. It also brought a degree of coherence to what was, and still is, a complex and fragmented system of support and provision. Among the Exit to Work Pilots, efforts to improve working links sharpened the employer-led focus of existing skills and employment provision, and effectively linked some employers to offender-facing services. Among the test bed Pilots, improved working links led to increased understanding of how other agencies prioritised and worked around skills and employment support and subsequent actions to address the barriers that prevented multi-agency working.

Problem areas

Despite their different objectives and ways of working, some overlap can be seen between the key constraints and problems faced by the three Pilots, in three main areas.

Pilot-specific constraints

In the case of two of the Pilots (ACE Pilots and Exit to Work) a major challenge identified was their status as small-scale, time-limited projects working to achieve their objectives within modest resources. The test bed Pilots, although based on partnerships of mainstream agencies, also faced issues of limited time and resources, although they had been designed from the outset to work largely within existing budgets.

The other Pilot-specific issues (mainly identified in relation to Exit to Work) included a lack of clarity about pilot objectives (due to tension between the need to achieve target numbers of job start outcomes on the one hand and more strategic-level activity on the other), lack of initial consultation with key partners about the focus of the Pilot, and problems with technical support.

Constraints relating to the nature of the client group

This was an issue which impacted on all three Pilots to some extent, although probably the ACE Pilots most of all. Their focus on the most socially-excluded and multiply-disadvantaged clients, meant that significant proportions of their work related solely to stabilisation issues, with employability issues considered as a lesser priority on the whole. This tended to mean that fewer pilot resources were directed towards such activities as developing active links with Jobcentre Plus or providing clients with ongoing support after job entry.

For the other two Pilots, with their focus on supporting ex-offenders into employment, the key issues were:

- how to address the employability needs of such a diverse population – especially those furthest from the labour market;
- high rates of ‘offender churn’ and the mobility of the prison population across the country. This exacerbated the difficulties involved in tracking the offender journey, in cross-estate-related training activities, and in offering a continuity of service ‘through the gates’.

Constraints arising from the broader institutional and cultural context of the Pilots

The central difficulty had its roots in the varied and often conflicting organisational priorities of the mainstream agencies with, and sometimes through, whom the Pilots had to work. As above, the research identified shortcomings in either the readiness or the capacity (sometimes both) of mainstream service providers to orchestrate their delivery and/or services to meet the needs of the most socially excluded, who, therefore, often encountered segmented, partial and hard-to-access provision. Frequently, such mainstream providers did not recognise the problem as wholly or principally their responsibility and/or were overwhelmed by the volume of demand and/or had more pressing priorities with other competing beneficiary groups.

The Pilots’ experiences highlighted the difficulties of small, time-limited and low-spend organisations making much of an impact on the priorities and perspectives of large, established mainstream agencies, even if they were nominally working together in partnership.

In particular, all the Pilots reported having experienced some degree of difficulty in establishing positive working relationships with Jobcentre Plus in addressing the employability needs of their target groups. Although there was Jobcentre Plus involvement at the strategic level (in both the test bed Pilots and Exit to Work), responses at the operational level from Jobcentre Plus offices could be very variable. An overall impression reported by participants in both the test bed and Exit to Work research was that ex-offenders were not sufficiently strongly regarded as a priority group by Jobcentre Plus. A similar strand ran through the ACE Pilots’ perceptions about the receptivity of Jobcentre Plus to their (admittedly often difficult) clients. Accordingly, too many clients were failing to gain access to the enhanced Jobcentre Plus services from which they might have benefited.

These problems were often exacerbated by a lack of data-sharing protocols between partners which contributed to the difficulties which Jobcentre Plus experienced in identifying the beneficiaries of these Pilots and, in the case of the test bed Pilots, severely limited the Pilot’s ability to track employment outcomes for offenders and, thus, to measure Pilot progress against targets.

Employer engagement also emerged as a contested area, with potential competition between partners around meeting their targets and further concerns

about data protection issues. There also appeared to be a lack of consensus among partners around how employer engagement should be defined and what degree of engagement should be aimed for.

Conclusions

These Pilots' target beneficiaries often share common features which are so problematic that they do not often constitute particularly easy or straightforward cases for mainstream agencies to work with, and that their needs are frequently so far removed from those of mainstream clients for ALM programmes, that there are formidable difficulties which constrain the avenues through which they can productively be engaged.

It follows that these negative circumstances and attributes must be mitigated, or in some way held in check, through an initial period of stabilisation, which would allow a subsequent opportunity to build a sufficiently stable platform on which potential employment and other important social advances can realistically be developed.

Achieving this stabilisation can require the provision of caseworker support for clients which far exceeds anything envisaged for even the most hard-to-help ALMP clients. The relatively small and tightly scheduled packets of adviser-time-per-client experienced by the latter stand in stark contrast to the open-ended, near continuous, availability of caseworker support provided by the ACE Pilots.

Extended routeways towards employment for such individuals are likely to draw on the inputs of numerous statutory and voluntary agencies, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes sequentially, as individual cases require. In supporting them the Pilots show the complementary advantages of:

- **system navigation:** the catalytic effect of employing an external agent (a link worker or personal caseworker) who uses proprietary knowledge to access services for clients who cannot do so themselves;
- **system reform and integration:** the more fundamental re-orchestration and integration of existing provision in order to offer a more coherent and joined-up system of skills and employment support provided by mainstream organisations working in partnership.

While the former is relatively quick and easy to introduce, the more substantial advantages of the latter require much more fundamental changes in the ways different agencies work, most particularly in the ways they co-operate. These approaches are often presented as alternatives. By contrast, the experiences of the Pilots suggest that it is their combination which works most effectively for particularly disadvantaged groups.

All three Pilots have been involved in working with, or in, collaborative partnerships. Their experience in this respect suggests that most effective partnerships benefit greatly from a formal framework within which more detailed working relationships

could be developed, problems hammered out, practices reviewed, and joint working at an operational level sanctioned. However, such formal arrangements were seldom sufficient to lead to their coherence at all levels unless operational staff within them found them to be an effective means of securing mutual operational advantages.

The ability of beneficiaries to move more purposively between different support agencies, and the ability of such agencies to co-operate effectively would be enormously facilitated by the ready and accurate transfer of data about individuals. Thus, in order to be able to support the 'offender journey' from custody to community, and of others moving from social exclusion to employment, the mainstream agencies involved urgently need to find ways to develop more effective data-sharing protocols.

The Pilots showed the need to establish a more joined-up approach to employer engagement, in order to avoid confusion and maximise credibility with employers willing to recruit disadvantaged jobseekers. The Pilots only registered limited progress in this area partly because the various agencies involved all had their own competitive targets to meet around employer engagement and were thus reluctant to share information or contacts with partners.

The relatively small size and/or limited duration of these Pilots has significantly restricted their ability to achieve measurable outcomes or impacts, and this has been exacerbated by the extended durations likely to be required to achieve any evident impact with the target beneficiary groups. In addition, building up effective partnerships takes time, and is likely to require a sustained period of engagement/marketing effort as well as practical evidence of utility, both of which are difficult for a new and time-limited Pilot to demonstrate. Finally, those Pilots which have sought to achieve system change from outside have been profoundly weakened by the contrast between their own small size and restricted lifetimes, and the larger organisations through whom they hope to achieve their ends.

In view of the character of the beneficiary groups targeted by the Pilots, their net impact through employment outcomes is likely to be low. Not only are the measurable job outcomes likely to be low but deadweight and substitution effects are also likely to be high. As a result, the application of standard ALMP yardsticks of cost-effectiveness to these Pilots is likely to yield a relatively poor, but not strictly relevant, comparison. The deterioration of labour market circumstances in the past year makes it likely to undermine, further, any possibility of these Pilots achieving parity with more mainstream interventions.

1 Introduction

The Social Exclusion Task Force's 2006 *Reaching Out: An Action Plan on Social Exclusion* report summarised findings from longitudinal studies that reveal that despite overall growth in educational and economic attainment across the UK population, there remains '*a small proportion of people who experience particularly deep and persistent problems throughout their lifetimes*'. For this minority of people, their experience of a number of inter-related problems (such as criminality, drug misuse, health problems and low human capital) is perpetuated in their children in an '*inter-generational cycle of disadvantage*'.

Offenders and ex-offenders are a sub-set of this group of people facing multiple disadvantage and are similarly, often trapped in a cycle of exclusion from work and recidivism. Re-offending is a major contribution to the high numbers in custody and the community: the Ministry of Justice estimates that the costs of re-offending by ex-prisoners alone costs £11 billion. The Government is committed to reduce re-offending by ten per cent by 2010, for both young offenders and adults in prison or serving community sentences. To do so, it must address the factors that contribute to offending and (re)offending. All parties agree that opportunities for meaningful and sustained employment constitute a crucial feature of any such objectives.

As part of its contribution to this end, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has contributed to the funding of a number of diverse initiatives which are variously targeted at the chronically excluded in general and at ex-offenders in particular.

1.1 The current research

The current research focuses on three such pilot initiatives which centre on improving employment prospects for those who enjoy the least, with ex-offenders featuring prominently in them all, and exclusively in two. Two of these Pilots will be evaluated separately, and the aim of this research is not to preclude such work, but rather, it is to consider the three together, and from the point of view specifically of DWP's departmental responsibilities, focusing particularly on the Pilots' approaches to improving employment prospects.

The three Pilots, and their experiences are described in some detail in the appendices to this report, but it is convenient here to briefly summarise their key points.

1.1.1 Next Steps test bed Regional Pilots

The Green Paper, *Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment* (DfES, Home Office, DWP, 2005), and subsequently the Next Steps document (DfES, Home Office, DWP, 2006), together set out proposals to drive forward with three priorities:

- engaging employers through the Reducing Re-offending Corporate Alliance;
- building on the new offender learning and skills service, including through the Campus Model; and
- reinforcing the emphasis on skills and jobs in prisons and probation.

More specifically still for our immediate purposes, in addition to spreading good practice across all nine regions, they proposed to press forward implementation of the three priorities for action through test bed Pilots in two English regions. It argued that:

'Reforming delivery of offender learning showed the importance of working in partnership right through the delivery chain and involving front line staff in design and implementation. Accordingly, we want to take a systematic approach, initially within two regions, to testing the development of our key proposals.'

It also announced a short competition to identify the test bed regions. Bids were called for early in 2007, and two regions were selected to take forward the test bed Pilots – the East Of England and the West Midlands regions. The test bed Pilots were set up explicitly to be sustainable within, and draw largely on, existing resources.

1.1.2 Exit to Work

Originally known as the Job Developer Pilot, the overall aim of the Pilot was to improve job opportunities for offenders and ex-offenders through more effective employer engagement. In order to achieve this, Pilots were established in six areas (Birmingham, London, Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire and Tees Valley), each providing and supporting a Job Developer role. There were seven Job Developers in all (two in London), and their key objectives were to:

- work in partnership with key agencies (prison and probation services, Jobcentre Plus, the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS), Regional Offender Management (ROM) to match individual offenders with jobs;
- identify and work with employers willing to employ offenders;
- provide employers with an improved level of pre- and post-placement support;
- identify local labour market needs and provide strategic advice and guidance to Reducing Re-offending Corporate Alliance partners;
- advise on tailoring individual offenders' skills to meet local employer demands.

1.1.3 ACE Pilots

Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE) Pilots start from the proposition that the current system does not always best serve adults with complex and multifaceted needs, and the concern that this further strengthens the (already often numerous and strong) factors which have led to their exclusion from most aspects of social and economic life. The Social Exclusion Task Force's 2006 Reaching Out report announced funding for 12 pilots offering new ways to change local service provision in order to improve outcomes for adults with chaotic lives and multiple needs.

The Pilots are intended to:

- offer substantive support and implement changes that will positively affect the impact on, and determinants of, chaos within adults' lives; and simultaneously;
- review and improve the structure and accessibility of services which they use.

The sponsoring Government departments are: the Home Office, Communities and Local Government, Department of Health and Department for Work and Pensions. Each has pledged £1.5 million over the next three years for the Pilots. These are also represented on a Programme Board, chaired by the Director of the Social Exclusion Task Force.

1.2 Aims and objectives of the current research

The aims and objectives of the present research are to:

- assess the ways in which the separate Pilots contribute new and effective approaches to the provision of support in securing employment opportunities for extremely disadvantaged customer groups;
- consider the manner and effectiveness of the implementation of the Pilots, including their interaction with the existing infrastructure to deliver their various objectives;
- develop a meta-analysis, drawing on the experiences of all three Pilots, to identify good practice, the best means of delivering it and the potential for replication elsewhere.

1.3 Research methodology

The research design offered a two-phased approach, in which:

- a scoping study ran from May 2007 to spring 2008. This part of the research involved a mix of documentary review, initial analysis of any pilot Management Information (MI) data and qualitative research with key pilot leaders, with pilot staff, local stakeholders and partners and the beneficiaries they are working with. It aimed to provide early insight into the objectives, organisation and activities of the Pilots and these were reported to DWP in spring 2008;¹
- the second stage research has run for a further year from spring 2008, and it is on these full results that the present report is based. It supplements the 2008 findings by reviewing the performance of the Pilots' main delivery phases during the second year of their operation.

The research methodology which was pursued was mixed. It drew on such MI data and formal evaluation evidence as the Pilots have produced to date, but as this has not been substantial, the principal research has been through qualitative interviews with the key actors involved in delivering the Pilots, their various partners and local stakeholders, the officials responsible for their operation and a small number of their beneficiaries.

1.4 Structure of this report

The report comprises a further five substantive chapters, and three appendices, as follows:

- Chapter 2 considers the key challenges facing interventions designed to help and support socially excluded adults.
- Chapter 3 outlines the main strategies adopted by the Pilots in addressing the employability needs of the key target groups and progressing their journey towards employment.
- Chapter 4 draws out a number of key lessons from the Pilots regarding what 'worked'.
- Chapter 5 provides an overview of the key constraints and problems faced by the three Pilots, when considered collectively.
- There is a brief summary of each substantive chapter at the end of it but in addition, Chapter 6 draws these together and sets out our conclusions.
- Appendix A focuses on the ACE Pilots.
- Appendix B focuses on the Next Steps test bed Regional Pilots.
- Appendix C presents findings from the 'Exit to Work' Pilot.

¹ *Joint Pilots Baseline Research: Interim Report*. Institute for Employment Studies, ID: 0938, 2008.

2 Transition to employment for the socially excluded

This chapter looks at the difficult terrain on which these three Pilots have been operating. It begins with a consideration of the difficulties which derive from the characteristics and circumstances of the beneficiaries themselves; if these were easy or straightforward individuals to work with and if they were even averagely well placed to compete for employment, there would be much less of a need for these Pilots. It is frequently suggested that one of the defining characteristics of the socially excluded is precisely a disconnection between themselves and the several agencies who might otherwise be expected to help and support them. So, the chapter goes on to consider the problems arising from shortcomings in their relationship with the mainstream agencies with whom they interact. Thirdly, the chapter looks at the deterioration in the labour market during the past year or so; if the Pilots began their operations with a considerable fillip from an extremely buoyant labour market, then it is only right to consider how effective their operations might be in the more constrained circumstances which now pertain.

2.1 Beneficiary characteristics and circumstances

We begin (Section 2.1.1) by outlining the dominant characteristics of the various target groups of the Pilots, before drawing out the implications of these characteristics for their putative transition to employment and the organisations assisting them in making it (Section 2.1.2).

2.1.1 Key common features

It is important to note that, although there is a considerable overlap between the target beneficiary groups for these Pilots, they are far from identical.

The test bed Regions and Exit To Work focused exclusively on offenders and ex-offenders, and the general characteristics of this group are well known; they are likely to be relatively young (two in three offenders are aged under 35), male (85 per cent), with relatively poor qualifications (40 per cent have none at all).

Furthermore, they are much more likely than the general population to have a record of substance abuse (7.9 per cent of their offences were for drug misuse, and 20 per cent are known to be class A drug users), and similarly to present some or significant psychological problems (34 per cent; all data from OASyS). So far as employment is concerned, a survey of short-term prisoners in 2004 found that fully three-quarters had not been in paid employment, education or training in the month before their sentence. In addition, whatever their previous experience of employment, the fact of their conviction is likely to have had a significant effect on their employment record and status. Thus, two in five of them had lost their jobs during their sentence.

The characteristics of the ACE target beneficiaries cannot be so precisely delineated and there is a degree of flexibility built in to their eligibility criteria. While Bloor *et al.*² found that while there is no formal definition of those facing severe social exclusion, there is nevertheless a general consensus about a set of core conditions clustered around:

- sustained or intermittent mental health difficulties;
- substance misuse;
- patchy employment record;
- accommodation problems;
- disruptive and/or no social relationships; and
- poverty.

When the Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE) programme prospectus (2007) was put together, this profile was somewhat extended/clarified to include:

- skills deficits;
- problems controlling behaviour; and
- anti-social behaviour or offending.

It is clear then, that within both the ACE and ex-offender cohorts, there is likely to be considerable variation and diversity, according to both the precise mix of these various factors in individuals' backgrounds, and the severity with which they are experienced. In addition, in many individual cases, there is likely to be a degree of commonality of both experience and prospects between the Pilots' different beneficiary target groups.

In what follows, we will focus rather more on the commonality within and between these different cohorts but it remains important not to lose sight of their differences, which the separate Pilots reflect and embody.

² Bloor *et al.* (2007). *Service responses and outcomes for adults described as having chaotic lives and multiple needs: a scoping exercise*. Social Exclusion Task Force.

It is certainly the case that most of these beneficiary groups face severe, complex and multiple constraints on employment chances and we can brigade these into four broad sets of factor, as follows.

Personal/circumstantial/behavioural/lifestyle considerations

Many of the beneficiaries of these Pilots demonstrate difficult/disturbed personal circumstances and characteristics which make it difficult/impossible for such individuals to aspire to, seek, secure or hold down jobs. At the very least these limit the chances of securing and holding on to work in the face of less constrained competitors for jobs. At the other extreme, so severe can these difficulties be that they uncontrollably disrupt and undermine the individuals' efforts to improve their circumstances.

Low objective employability

In addition, many of these beneficiaries lack the basic human capital to make them attractive to employees, even if these behavioural/circumstantial factors could be contained. Low basic skills, poor educational attainment, lack of academic or vocational qualifications, poor job records, lack of persuasive references, etc., combine to undermine their objective scope for employment.

Low appeal to employers

The combination of disruptive behavioural patterns and low human capital does not make this an obviously attractive group for any employer. Overlaid with a high degree of conservatism in recruitment and a low level of prior personal experience of individuals from such backgrounds, most employers bring their own sense of caution to this equation. Even when the Pilots were established, it was not at all clear that concerns about demographic tightening or labour shortages in their typical labour markets would move these particular target groups much up the hierarchy, as they do not offer the volumes or ready access which, say, marks out some ethnic minority communities as alternative sources of labour supply.³

Hard to work with

The same factors that often make these groups unattractive to employers also make them difficult to work with for support providers and/or labour market intermediaries. We go on below to discuss the characteristics of mainstream provision to support these groups, and to elucidate their principal shortcomings in this respect, but it is important to keep in mind that it takes two not to tango; these beneficiaries' characteristics are often so out of the ordinary that mainstream agencies have little or no specialist experience of (and thus expertise in) dealing constructively with them.

³ As we will show in Chapter 4, the Exit to Work Job Developers have been able to find employers to take on ex-offenders through the development of trusting relationships and the offer of support to the employer post-hiring.

2.1.2 Implications for employability and employment

The combination of these four elements, and the interplay between the personal/circumstantial factors, the realities of a competitive labour market, and the difficulties which intermediaries face in bridging them, implies a potentially problematic transition to employment for many in these groups.

A substantial proportion are unlikely to be readily employable

Achieving employment outcomes are likely to be quite distant for many, and unlikely to ever be secured for some, particularly among those from the ACE Pilots target groups. Offenders/ex-offenders, the key target group for two of the Pilots, form a more diverse population than ACE, and they include individuals with (possibly) very good employability skills. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted in the literature on offenders and ex-offenders, that as a group they face profound barriers to re-entering employment, often on account of stigmatisation alone.

Many will need sequential and cumulative interventions

In recent years, the emphasis of public policies designed to encourage and support entry into the labour market has focused increasingly on encouraging labour market attachment and promoting jobseeking such that 'work-first' outcomes were seen as most beneficial. At the most, such encouragement for mainstream jobseekers was supplemented through the provision of generic employability skills, where these were deficient. However, it is clear that for many within the cohorts that these three Pilots have worked with, the path to employment is dependent on at least the containment, if not the resolution, of several higher priority constraints before significant progress towards employment can be pursued.

Most of the ACE Pilot respondents in particular, felt that their beneficiaries faced extremely lengthy and difficult transitions to move them to a point where they might be employable. Some of these individuals would have experienced almost their whole lifetimes enmeshed in chaotic and restrictive lifestyles, with profound consequences for both their present circumstances (health, mental health, human capital, etc.) and their potential progression to something better.

Although the needs and circumstances of the beneficiaries of the three Pilots differed considerably, nevertheless, it is possible to draw up an outline of the kinds of sequenced intervention which the Pilots were either providing or thought might be necessary.

- **Stabilisation:** Most ACE respondents stressed the necessity for stabilisation of beneficiaries' circumstances and behaviour as a pre-condition for constructive work with them leading to employment outcomes. There seems to be a distinction between:
 - **initial stabilisation** (often involving getting the beneficiaries off the streets, or away from potential hazard);

- **core stabilisation**, addressing the individual's most pressing and immediate need, and often centred on addressing homelessness and/or substance abuse. This was often supplemented by efforts to 'sort out' their benefit eligibility and receipt; and
- a more individualised, **secondary stabilisation**, which would vary considerably from one person to the next, but might involve health concerns, mental health problems, debt, etc.
- **Developing social skills and life competences**: Several of the ACE Pilots were encouraging beneficiaries to engage in various activities, at the very least to break down a possible habit of passivity and inactivity. Such ambitions are usually split up into separate, credibly achievable pieces, which build from behavioural/attitudinal facets, through basic employability skills and towards key work-related skills.
- **Assessing employability and devising action plan**: Although the timing of this assessment and planning phase varied somewhat from Pilot to Pilot, it usually involved the identification and articulation of specific and individual goals to which beneficiaries aspired, the assessment of the skills which they had and which would help them attain these goals, and conversely, the ones they lacked which they would need to secure to do so.

It is not suggested that all the beneficiaries of the three Pilots might require such extensive support but it is quite clear than many certainly did and that without it, many would not be expected to secure employment outcomes.

Routeways into employment are, therefore, likely to be long and slow

Many beneficiaries, and particularly those requiring ACE-like provision, are, therefore, likely to face an extended period of intervention and support before there is much chance of their becoming employable. Many may not make it at all, either because they drop out of the programme at some point, or simply because they are unable to cope with the demands which employment would place on them. This implies that there will be other, earlier, non-employment stages of provision, which for some are just milestones but for many are outcomes.

As one respondent responsible for skills and employment in an organisation specialising in homelessness put it:

'... about 3,000 to 4,000 people move into our housing projects a year. About 2,000 of those individuals will engage with my part of [name of organisation] in some way, shape or form. But, the vast majority of them will be engaging with us at the early stages of the programme offering a range of structured activity... in a typical year we get 125 of our clients into full-time sustainable work and by sustainable we define that currently as DWP does...that's 6.7 per cent...to my knowledge nobody does it better than this... yes, it is theoretically possible to do better, with enough resource... I think that 20 per cent of the people that we engage could be, with the right sort of support, say over an 18-month period, forced into employment, which would be more like 400 out of 2,000.'

Other respondents pointed to the very common patterns of alternating progress and regression as beneficiaries were unable to sustain improvements in the face of their often extreme exposure to 'events'. Still others pointed to the extreme distance between present circumstances and the requirements of employability.

Whatever the exact constellation of causes, or the exact interventions intended, the complex and severe constraints demonstrated by significant proportions of the beneficiaries of the three Pilots suggest that many of them will take a considerable period of time before they might achieve employability in a regular commercial environment. Thus, individual progress towards employment is often likely to be quite slow, not necessarily straight (i.e. reversals likely), subject to external shocks needing a lot of caseworker support.

2.2 Engagement with support agencies

A defining characteristic of individuals facing social exclusion is that their relationship with services which might be expected to help them is often unsatisfactory and problematic. In part, this difficulty follows on from, and varies more or less directly with the severity of, the problematic characteristics of these groups as discussed above. But in addition, it has to be recognised that there are parallel difficulties which arise from deficiencies in the ways in which the relevant agencies have, or more often, have not, oriented to meet these needs. We examine both sides of this situation in turn.

2.2.1 Demand-side problems

As with the severity of the constraints on their likely employability, so too here, there is considerable variety among the Pilots' beneficiaries in the extent to which they engage with the several agencies which might offer them support. A common problem though appears to be that the combination of multiple and varied constraints on the part of the individuals concerned, coupled with the policy ambition of helping them to progress beyond their present circumstances, makes the issue of identifying 'the lead agency' quite problematic in practice, however clear this might be in theory. As the ACE Final Prospectus put it (p.4):

'It has often been said that the agencies involved "know" who this client group is, but there is no lead agency that is willing to take responsibility for delivering services. Being everyone's problem but no-one's responsibility means that such individuals bounce around the system without their needs being met. ...The available evidence strongly indicates that successful interventions for this client group involve a high degree of collaborative working across agencies.'

Secondly, although such individuals may be in touch with multiple agencies, it does not follow that they are in touch with the right ones, or that the quality of that engagement is satisfactory, either in terms of introducing some stability into their lives or of progression to better ones. Indeed, it seems to be almost a defining feature of this group that their engagement with agencies who might offer them

help is poor, and that their isolation is thereby intensified. It may well, therefore, often be the case for some that not only is their contact with such agencies patchy, it may also be negative – i.e. they are barred from using the agency in question because their past behaviour has been too erratic or problematic for that agency to underpin a positive relationship.

Thirdly, to the extent that employment is seen as a credible goal for such individuals, then for many of them this implies a journey which is not only long and difficult, but one in which the responsibility for their guidance and support switches from agency to agency at different points on that journey. Thus, to the necessity for the simultaneous integration of different agencies at any given point in time (on account of the individual's multiple difficulties) is added the likelihood of sequential transfers of prime responsibility from one agency to another over time, as proximity to the labour market increases.

Finally, the length and complexity of this journey, coupled to the extreme disadvantage experienced by individual beneficiaries suggest that the journey is unlikely to be a simple linear progression. It seems likely that there will be some for whom independent living in a regular employment situation is simply unattainable, and others who will experience reverses and regression as part of their journey. This implies the need for considerable flexibility on the part of the agencies with whom the beneficiary is working if some sense of onwards momentum is to be retained.

2.2.2 Supply-side problems

Although the identification of deficiencies in the 'mainstream' system has not been the main focus of our work with the three Pilots, they have each developed a critique of the system which they have been trying to improve or supplement. These critiques varied considerably from respondent to respondent, both in respect of their intensity and their precise focus. Nevertheless, we can identify areas where there has been a considerable degree of consensus in this respect. Before going on to describe them, it should be noted that few of our respondents were able to bring evidence, beyond descriptive anecdotes, to support their critique, and what follows should, therefore, be treated with some care.

Segmented, partial and hard-to-access provision

Many of our respondents identified shortcomings in either the readiness or the capacity (sometimes both) of mainstream service providers to orchestrate their delivery and/or services to meet the needs of the socially excluded. Typically, these criticisms dwelt on the ineffectiveness of provision in cases where the most relevant mainstream organisation:

- did not recognise the problem as wholly or principally, their responsibility. This criticism was most frequently directed at local authority housing and social care services, but also at the Prison Service in relation to employment re-entry among ex-offenders;

- was overwhelmed by the volume of demand. This criticism was most frequently directed at the Probation Service, again in relation to employment re-entry among ex-offenders but also at third sector and charity groups;
- has more pressing priorities elsewhere. This criticism was fairly universally applied but perhaps most frequently directed towards Jobcentre Plus, for its main orientation towards securing high levels of job entry among the short-term unemployed, and among inactive groups other than the ones under consideration here.

In truth, these three criticisms do not seem to us to be entirely separate, and it is more realistic to see all three as often interacting with individual agencies to reduce and limit the attention they are able to bring to the needs of the socially excluded.

System navigation is problematic

Our respondents frequently asserted that accessing and getting the best from such a system would probably tax the initiative and abilities of the most able and committed potential jobseeker, which, as indicated above, is not the typical individual with whom we are concerned here. There seem to be two rather separate tropes evident here. The first is that the regulations, eligibility criteria and procedural requirements surrounding effective participation in the services offered by mainstream agencies are inherently complex and somewhat bureaucratic, while the capacities and temperaments of many among the Pilots' target groups are not well attuned to dealing with such (for them) complicated and demanding procedures. Secondly, and leaving their capabilities aside, many of these procedures and processes pre-suppose and are predicated on individuals in quite different circumstances from those in which the Pilots' beneficiary groups find themselves.

It was the perceived prevalence of this feature of mainstream provision that led most of the ACE Pilots to emphasise the provision of keyworker support directly to their individual beneficiaries. This was widely regarded by the Pilots as a vital aspect of their provision, extending from the initial stabilisation phase, through the capacity-building phases and into employment (actually beyond initial job entry in two cases where in-work support was being piloted). Staff-beneficiary ratios were generally low, reflecting a high cost commitment from the Pilots to underpin this work.

A parallel, but quite different, example would be the activities of the Job Developers under the Exit to Work Pilot. Here, it is their employer clients who might have been willing to hire ex-offenders but found both private and public job-broking agencies to be geared up to supplying quite different jobseekers and who found these mainstream bodies if not unwilling, at least unused, to providing such a supply of labour.

Multi-agency co-ordination

A further widely-voiced criticism of the mainstream services supporting these target groups is the difficulties they face in co-operating effectively, both in respect of individual cases (involving onwards or simultaneous referral of beneficiaries) and the synchronisation of services (such that their various inputs provide for a cumulative and progressive delivery of support, rather than gaps, changes of pace/expectation or incompatibilities).

So far as the first is concerned, one of the main difficulties seems to centre on the compatibility of different record-keeping systems and the extent to which case-specific data is shared between agencies in line with their beneficiaries' moves from one to the next. Deficiencies in the co-ordinated use of data at the individual level not only add to the bureaucratic demands to recreate such data files at each stage of the individual's journey from agency to agency, but also may impair the ready recognition by a recipient agency of a particular beneficiary's needs and so not trigger the provision of support which they need and for which they are eligible. It would seem that ex-offenders entering Jobcentre Plus represents a particularly acute example of this. Such individuals can access significant provision more quickly than can other individuals making a new claim for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), but may themselves be reluctant to identify themselves as ex-offenders and are not routinely identified as such to Jobcentre Plus by the Probation or Prison Services from which they have been referred.

So far as the second is concerned, there seem to be worrying gaps between the expectations placed upon beneficiaries as they move from one agency to the next. Most importantly for our purposes here, entry into Jobcentre Plus' customer group from long-term inactivity brings with it an associated acceleration in tempo, intensification of expectations and an enhanced necessity to comply with them that some beneficiaries are quite unprepared for and are unwilling or unable to comply with. Thus, long-term inactives (for present purposes those moving through an ACE project or leaving prison after a significant sentence) face an immediately more demanding regime; one in fact modelled on a mainstream short-term unemployed but eminently employable jobseeker, for whom it is presumed self-directed jobsearch will result in job entry within a few weeks. Ex-offenders and other disadvantaged groups can (at adviser discretion) be 'fast tracked' to receive additional help from the first day of their JSA claim, although this relies on them identifying themselves to the adviser and many are unwilling to do this. Otherwise, to qualify for any more profound support could take months of compliance with this regime on pain of loss of benefit. Several projects within these three Pilots have sought to moderate this gap: there may be some preparation in prison prior to release which will demonstrate the advantages of registration or indeed, introduce jobsearch skills to help independent jobsearch; there may be some ongoing support from caseworkers to help beneficiaries adjust to the new circumstances in which they find themselves. Nevertheless, this transfer seems to us to be one which is fraught with difficulty for the individual seeking to make the transition into a jobseeker, and which remains disturbingly prevalent.

Difficult contexts

It is quite clear that some of the circumstances in which socially excluded adults find themselves entail very severe problems for support services who may wish to have access to them. Most prominently here are the very severe problems of access to the Prison Estate; for the most part this seems to be security-related, but additionally, the considerable geographical mobility of prisoners during their sentences makes it difficult for them to access support on a consistent and cumulative basis. All the Pilots reported difficulties both in securing access to the Prison Estate and in working with individuals who were moving around excessively within it. A comparable difficulty has faced some of the ACE Pilots seeking to work with mentally ill beneficiaries in secure psychiatric wards.

Any offender serving a custodial sentence also faces a difficult transition upon release from prison which can make them particularly vulnerable. Poor 'through the gate' service means that offenders risk falling through the gaps in provision, particularly with respect to essentials such as supported housing, health care provision and financial assistance (the 'finance gap').

2.3 External factors

It is important to remember that all three of these Pilots were conceived, designed and largely implemented during conditions of unparalleled labour market buoyancy, which have now ended. On the one hand, this change in external circumstances means that there are fewer job opportunities available for those without work and increased competition from individuals with few or no disadvantages to hold them back, save that of having recently been unlucky enough to lose their job. On the other hand, the demands for support now placed on Jobcentre Plus, in particular, from a newly and massively increased cohort of relatively short-term unemployed seems likely to have potentially unfortunate consequences for groups like socially excluded adults, around whom Jobcentre Plus has had significant problems in focusing its resources when there were significantly fewer competing claims on them.

Of course, it is not the case that employer willingness to recruit from this hard-to-help cohort was only ever a product of the extremely tight labour markets of the last few years, so we would not expect it to disappear now those conditions have done so. Similarly, it was never the case that Jobcentre Plus turned its attention to these groups just because frictional unemployment had fallen to such low levels, so similarly we would not expect their concern for these harder cases to evaporate.

Nevertheless, it would be wilfully irresponsible to pretend that harder times would not make it much more difficult to address the problems of these groups. In addition to this simple numerical calculation about the declining likelihood of an individual getting hired, it is not at all clear that the kinds of intervention, which these Pilots have tested during years of tight labour markets will still be relevant or will work in the same ways, when the underlying balance of supply and demand in the labour market has moved so far and so decisively.

2.4 Summary

This chapter has considered what the Pilots' experiences can show us about the difficulties which face interventions designed to help and support socially excluded adults.

Some of these derive from the characteristics and circumstances of the beneficiaries themselves. There is a considerable overlap between the target beneficiary groups for these Pilots. Although they are they are not identical, they often face severe, complex and multiple constraints on their employment chances, which broadly fall into four groupings:

- **Personal/circumstantial/behavioural/lifestyle considerations:** Many of the beneficiaries of these Pilots demonstrate difficult/disturbed personal circumstances and characteristics which make it difficult/impossible for such individuals to aspire to, seek, secure or hold down jobs. As a result, they frequently demonstrate...
- **Low objective employability:** Many of these beneficiaries lack the basic human capital to make them attractive employees, even if these behavioural/circumstantial factors could be contained. Low basic skills, poor educational attainment, lack of academic or vocational qualifications, poor job records, lack of persuasive references, etc., combine to undermine their objective scope for employment. As a result, they have...
- **Low appeal to employers:** The combination of disruptive behavioural patterns and low human capital does not make this an obviously attractive group for any employer. Furthermore, it can make them...
- **Hard to work with:** The same factors that often make these groups unattractive to employers also make them difficult to work with for support providers and/or labour market intermediaries.

The combination of these four elements implies a potentially problematic transition to employment for many in these groups, and the Pilots' experience shows that, as a result:

- a substantial proportion is unlikely to be readily employable. Achieving employment outcomes is therefore quite distant for many, and unlikely to ever be secured for some;
- many will need sequential and cumulative interventions. Despite the established 'work-first' emphasis of public policies it is clear that for many within these cohorts the path to employment is dependent on at least the containment, if not the resolution, of several higher priority constraints. Consequently...
- routeways into employment are therefore often likely to be long and slow. Many beneficiaries, particularly those with multiple disadvantages and within the ACE Pilots, are, therefore, likely to face an extended period of intervention and support before there is much chance of their becoming employable. Many may not make it at all.

Adults facing social exclusion often also demonstrate an unsatisfactory and problematic relationship with services which might be expected to help them. In part, these are self-inflicted and derive from their characteristics and behaviour. Thus:

- it is often difficult to establish a lead agency: the combination of multiple and varied constraints on the part of the individuals concerned, coupled with the policy ambition of helping them to progress beyond their present circumstances, makes the issue of identifying 'the lead agency' quite problematic in practice;
- although such individuals may be in touch with multiple agencies, it does not follow that they are in touch with the right ones or that the quality of that engagement is satisfactory;
- to the necessity for the simultaneous integration of different agencies at any given point in time (on account of the individual's multiple difficulties) is added the likelihood of sequential transfers of prime responsibility from one agency to another over time, as proximity to the labour market increases;
- the length and complexity of their transition to employment, coupled with the extreme disadvantage experienced by individual beneficiaries, suggest that the journey is unlikely to be a simple linear progression. Tracking and assured integration of beneficiaries therefore becomes very problematic.

But in addition, there are parallel difficulties which arise not from the individual's needs or circumstances, but rather from deficiencies in the ways in which the relevant agencies have, or more often, have not, oriented to meet these needs. As a result:

- many of our respondents identified shortcomings in either the readiness or the capacity (sometimes both) of mainstream service providers to orchestrate their delivery and/or services to meet the needs of the socially excluded, who therefore often encountered segmented, partial and hard-to-access provision;
- frequently, such mainstream providers:
 - did not recognise the problem as wholly or principally, their responsibility; and/or
 - were overwhelmed by the volume of demand; and/or
 - had more pressing priorities with other competing beneficiary groups;
- system navigation is problematic, partly as a result of conflict between the complex and somewhat bureaucratic procedural requirements of the providers, and the capacities and temperaments of many among the Pilots' target groups. In addition, many of these procedures and processes are predicated on individuals in quite different circumstances from those in which the Pilots' beneficiary groups find themselves;

- multi-agency co-ordination around both individual cases and the more general synchronisation of services is often restricted by the:
 - compatibility of different record-keeping systems, and the extent to which case-specific data is shared between agencies in line with their beneficiaries' moves from one to the next; and
 - prevalence of gaps between the expectations placed upon beneficiaries as they move from one agency to the next, such that some beneficiaries are quite unprepared for, and are unwilling or unable to comply with, them.

In addition to these difficulties on the part of both the potential beneficiaries and the mainstream services providing for them, the research also identified some particular physical contexts, such as prison and secure psychiatric wards, where difficulties of access and sustained engagement were particularly evident.

Finally, the chapter notes that these Pilots were conceived, designed and largely implemented during conditions of unparalleled labour market buoyancy, which have now ended. It seems hardly credible that this deterioration cannot but have a negative effect on the circumstances and prospects of these groups, through the increase in competition for fewer available jobs and the increasing strain placed on labour market agencies as a result.

3 How the Pilots addressed the transitions

This chapter describes how the Pilots addressed the transitions to employment for the socially excluded groups they targeted. It details how the Pilots addressed these transitions with regards to:

- working with individuals (drawing mainly on the ACE Pilot);
- re-engineering provision (drawing mainly on the test bed Pilots); and
- working with employers (drawing mainly on the Exit to Work Pilot).

3.1 Working directly with individuals

The ACE Pilots worked directly with individuals in a number of ways to improve their employability and address their transitions to employment. Although four of the 12 Pilots were designed to focus more heavily on transition points to employment than the other eight Pilots, in practice, all Pilots shared a good deal of common ground in their activities and approaches to addressing transitions to employment for the beneficiary group. These are detailed below.

3.1.1 Provision of high levels of personal support

The Pilots offered high levels of personal support through caseloading and the provision of support workers. This was widely regarded by the Pilots as a vital aspect of their provision, extending from the initial stabilisation phase, through the capacity-building phases, and into employment (actually beyond initial job-entry in two cases where in-work support was being piloted). Staff-beneficiary ratios were generally low. Several of the Pilots had opted to deploy ex-service users as keyworkers in this way; emphasising rapport and insight. Others had gone for professionally qualified staff, emphasising perhaps broader perspectives.

Most of the Pilots were aware of the need for, and were committed to providing, relatively high ratios of key worker support on an individual basis to beneficiaries at all stages on this journey. One area where several saw considerable potential

was in ensuring the compliance of beneficiaries with the actions agreed in their Action Plan. Thus, for some of them, real value-added lay less in devising novel or sophisticated things for their beneficiaries to do and more in making sure that they did the simple and straightforward things effectively.

3.1.2 Assistance with system navigation

Working more from the beneficiary end of the relationship, the Pilots offered assistance with system navigation by providing practical help to people to access several social services at one time. In the main, this involved providing help in understanding, accessing and complying with available support from other agencies via the support worker or link worker. In some cases, it involved bringing together multi-agency teams in order to develop an integrated approach to address the complex needs of particular beneficiaries.

3.1.3 Resolving and containing factors constraining employability

The Pilots focused on the resolution of, or at least containment of, critical factors constraining employability, particularly homelessness, substance abuse, behavioural problems and trouble accessing eligible benefits. This was seen as essential to stabilise beneficiaries' circumstances and was regarded by the Pilots as a necessary pre-condition for further work leading to employment outcomes. In particular, getting beneficiaries onto the correct benefit was widely seen as an important facet of stabilisation, which would help beneficiaries to establish the basics of independent and sustainable living through having a reliable source of income.

For many of the Pilot organisations delivering the ACE Pilot, this resolution and containment of factors constraining employability reflected their core or historic function of stabilising beneficiaries' circumstances.

3.1.4 Pre-employment training and other transitional moves towards employment

Some of the Pilots also offered elements of pre-employment training for those beneficiaries who needed help in improving their levels of confidence, motivation, basic skills and capacity for inter-personal relationships. Pre-employment training also aimed at providing modest levels of vocational skills to beneficiaries as well as jobsearch skills, such as CV preparation, mock interviews and job brokering.

Some of the Pilots also offered other transitional moves towards employment for their beneficiaries, such as quasi-employment environments. These environments were often provided through sheltered employment, volunteering or work experience and offered beneficiaries the opportunity to experience and get used to the kinds of disciplines which regular employment would require of them and so simultaneously build their capacity and self-confidence.

3.2 Re-engineering provision

Test bed implementation largely concentrated on re-engineering existing provision of skills and employment support (some of which was already working towards various aspects of test bed goals), rather than on wholesale systemic change. Specifically, the Pilot focused on improving working links between agencies and procedures to provide a seamless system of skills and employment support for beneficiaries; building a new emphasis on employability and skills in prisons and probation; and engaging employers to better integrate vocational skills and employment opportunities for beneficiaries.

3.2.1 Improving working links between key agencies and procedures

Improving the working links between organisations and procedures was always regarded by the test bed regions to be critical to delivering a more coherent system of skills and employment provision. System navigation was, and remains, complex and arguably the most significant barrier to helping ex-offenders move towards the labour market.

Test bed work concentrated on improving the links between the various components of the offender journey through custody. The test bed Pilots did this through a number of activities: First, there was a degree of activity around **auditing and reviewing existing processes and in the regions** – identifying existing delivery mechanisms and how well they were working in prison and probation settings. From this, test bed staff were able to identify a lack of standard operational models across the region's institutions for many key procedures, and inconsistencies in how particular data was being recorded and collected. Second, test bed Pilots worked to **improve key skills and employment support processes and procedures**. This focused around improving induction and referral procedures and models as these were seen as key to how well learners can progress. These efforts were mostly trialled in particular prisons and probation areas first before being considered for broader roll out. Lastly, the test bed Pilots worked to **build practical working relationships between the key agencies** involved in delivering skills and employment provision: Jobcentre Plus, prisons, probation, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), skills and employment providers and the Regional Offender Management (ROM)'s office. Some of this was started by the work around the first two activities, which necessarily involved a degree of multi-agency co-operation and contact but a lot of this work was also done through regional events aimed at bringing organisations together to better understand their respective roles and how they work to progress skills and employment support for offenders. A huge amount of this work was also done through 'behind the scenes' activity, where test bed managers worked to get a particular individual or institution on board to further test bed work on a practical level. This was important because although many organisations, such as prisons and probation, had signed up to the test bed agenda at the regional level, this did not always translate into co-operation at the sub-regional level. This meant that there was some lack of co-operation at

the local level to solve some of the practical operational barriers that impeded the effective delivery of skills and employment support – for example, getting laptops into prison settings for use by Jobcentre Plus advisers.

3.2.2 Building a new emphasis on employability and skills in prisons and probation

The test bed Pilots worked towards building a new emphasis on employability and skills through three key activities. The first was the introduction of the **Virtual Campus** into a small number of prisons. This is a secure IT-based integrated learning and information environment that offers resettlement and learning opportunities to offenders and pulls in vacancies from on-line recruitment agencies. Although this system is still relatively small-scale at the time of writing, both in terms of the number of prisons that have this facility and in terms of the number of offenders who have access to it, the implementation of a secure IT platform represents the first kind of IT-based skills and employment provision of its kind in a UK prison setting.

The second key activity was the **piloting of employability compacts** in a select number of prisons and in particular areas of the community. These compacts offered vocational training to a select number of prisoners who met certain requirements. At the time of writing, the Pilots were still being evaluated, however the main value of the employability compacts would appear to be their potential to usefully bring together a number of different organisations, as well as the offenders themselves, to progress the offender's journey towards work in a very practical way.

The third key activity was **sector-based approaches to identify job vacancies** for offenders. Both test bed regions took a sectoral approach in order to target employment opportunities for ex-offenders and engage employers. In the East of England, these sectors were: construction, logistics, retail and hospitality. In addition, there are some areas of horticulture, manufacturing and waste management which were also targeted for training and employment opportunities. In the West Midlands, these sectors were: construction, hospitality and catering, logistics, industrial cleaning and some areas within the public sector. These areas were targeted largely because of the high number of unfilled vacancies available, but also because of the potential to offer suitable jobs for ex-offenders and previous employment opportunities that have arisen from employers in these sectors. In broad terms, these sectors are also closely aligned to those which are already the focus of broader regional partnerships and economic planning: for example, the seven priority sectors detailed in the East of England Regional Economic Strategy and the priority sectors of the West Midlands Corporate Alliance.

3.2.3 Engaging employers

Both test bed Pilots spent a great deal of time during the Pilot trying to co-ordinate employer engagement between the key agencies in the region as an initial first step (Jobcentre Plus, the National Offender Management Service (NOMS),

prisons, probation and LSC). This was intended to avoid multiple approaches to the same employer and usefully build a database which all the agencies could access and use as a resource in their employer engagement work going forward. In both regions this was being led by Jobcentre Plus. However, eventually, we were informed that this piece of work had stalled, reportedly because of concerns around data protection issues surrounding the sharing of employers' names and other information.

Employer engagement did continue in the test bed regions but little of this could be called 'test bed' activity, and by October 2008, one test bed had withdrawn the test bed element of employer engagement from their remit. In the other region, the Jobcentre Plus had begun to link employer engagement to their LEP activity but it was too late to have any impact on the test bed work.

3.3 Working with employers

The main aim of the Exit To Work Pilot was to test out the role of Job Developers in improving employment outcomes for offenders and ex-offenders, through more effective employer engagement. The Pilot was developed in direct response to a need identified within the Government's 2006 Next Steps document for more effective employer engagement strategies and a general perception that there was a lack of employer-facing services within the Reducing Re-offending arena. The Pilot was, therefore, focused very much at the 'employment outcome' end of the 'client journey'.

Despite the very different regional contexts within which each of the six Pilots operated, a common set of activities and ways of working emerged which could be categorised as: job-brokering activities; employer engagement strategies; and partnership working with other agencies. In addition, at the outset of the project, Working Ventures UK (WVUK) adopted a formal definition of employer engagement, which identified activities as taking place at three different levels:

- employers who were signed up to the local network and were maintained as contacts (e.g. signed up to receive the Exit to Work newsletter or referrals from existing network members);
- employers more actively involved in Exit to Work/WVUK-related activity (e.g. attending events or seminars, newsletter enquiries, offering upskilling events for advisers);
- employers involved in outcome-generating activity (e.g. developing a routeway, working with providers, getting people into jobs, involvement in Local Employment Partnerships (LEPs), etc.).

3.3.1 Job-brokering activities

This was initially a key focus of the Job Developer role: the aim was to secure specific job outcomes for individual offenders through matching suitably screened

and trained candidates to the vacancies offered by employers. However, numbers of job starts across the Pilot as a whole proved to be fairly limited during the first year as Job Developers had to understand the operational and strategic environment from positions of limited knowledge. Whereas the Job Developers had successfully engaged with employers to secure vacancies, there had been a slow rate of response from partners in referring suitable candidates. In addition, the quality of these referrals was, in many cases, considered to be poor, with a significant number of candidates viewed as not sufficiently job-ready to be put forward. The change of project focus towards relationship building between employers and offender-facing services meant that less time and fewer resources were committed to job-brokering activities in later stages of the Pilot.

3.3.2 Employer engagement strategies

The main employer-focused activities included:

- **identifying and working with employers willing to engage with offenders.** Developing links with employers mainly took place through existing Employer Coalition and Corporate Alliance networks, although new contacts were established both at regional and national levels. This involved Job Developers in organising various 'awareness-raising' activities and events in order to promote awareness of ex-offenders as a potentially fruitful source of labour. Within this aspect of their work, some of the Job Developers benefited from the services of 'employer champions' prepared to encourage others to recruit ex-offenders;
- **offering an employer-focused job-brokering service.** This was a unique feature of the Job Developer role, since all the other employer engagement and job-brokering activities taking place within this arena were essentially offender-facing. The service included: screening and matching suitable candidates to vacancies in the open market place and offered directly by employers; offering a post-employment support service; assisting employers to review their recruitment and HR processes to be more 'user-friendly' to potential recruits from ex-offender backgrounds; and offering advice about training allowances and disclosure issues;
- **encouraging employers to offer additional services.** Some Job Developers also successfully tapped into a wider range of services which employers might be able to offer besides jobs, particularly those who supported the Reducing Re-offending agenda but for some reason were unable to employ ex-offenders within their organisations. Examples of such additional services included: mock interviews for offenders; mentoring; offering free consultancy and advice to skills and employment practitioners; or the donation of free training equipment for prison workshops.

3.3.3 Partnership working

It was also recognised that Job Developers would need to work in close partnership with key offender-facing agencies, including prison and probation services, NOMS,

Jobcentre Plus and the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) in order to meet the Pilot objectives and there was more focus on this aspect of the Job Developer role in year two of the Pilot. Key partnership activities included:

- **bringing more coherence to employer engagement.** Most of the Job Developers sought active membership of strategic level groups (such as regional Employer Engagement groups) in order to influence decision-making at the regional level and share information about local labour market needs. This was also beneficial to the project in terms of increasing the visibility of the Job Developer role and providing opportunities to discuss employability issues with providers and other referral agencies;
- **improving skill formation and vocational training in prisons.** Most of the Job Developers worked in collaboration with prison and probation services (and employers) to set up 'through the gates' training pipelines and routeways for offenders in vocational areas such as construction, fitted interiors, utilities, waste management, retail etc. This approach appeared to have worked particularly well in some of the pilot areas and was considered to have more of a sustainable impact than brokering jobs at the individual level;
- **training the trainers.** Another development which took place later in the project was a cross-pilot initiative to design and deliver a 'capacity-building' programme targeted at practitioners offering skills and employment services to offenders, in order to improve the quality of referrals being put forward by partner organisations. The programme included topics such as labour market knowledge, employer needs, jobseeker preparation and disclosure issues.

3.4 Summary

This chapter has outlined the main strategies adopted by the Pilots in addressing the employability needs of the key target groups and progressing their journey towards employment.

In terms of working with individuals, and best exemplified by the Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE) Pilots, the main approaches were client-centred and included:

- providing intensive one-to-one support from key workers;
- assisting beneficiaries to navigate the system more effectively and enabling them to access a range of different social services;
- aiming for the increased stabilisation of beneficiaries' circumstances through addressing issues such as homelessness and substance abuse. This was seen as a necessary prerequisite to improved employability;
- offering elements of pre-employment training and supported work experience, as appropriate.

The test bed Pilot focused on improving existing provision for offenders in order to offer a more coherent system of mainstream skills and employment support. Key strategies included:

- reviewing and developing working links between partner organisations in order to improve multi-agency co-operation across the test bed regions;
- increasing the focus on employability and skills within prison and probation services through: introduction of the Virtual Campus; piloting employability compacts; and targeting job opportunities in key employment sectors;
- co-ordinating employer engagement activities (although this proved difficult because of data protection issues).

The Exit To Work Pilot also aimed to improve employment outcomes for offenders by developing and testing out more effective employer engagement approaches. The key activities adopted by Job Developers were as follows:

- job-brokering activities to secure specific employment outcomes for individual offenders;
- employer engagement activities which included: identifying employers willing to work with offenders; organising awareness-raising events; offering pre- and post-employment support services to employers; encouraging employers to provide additional services and influence the training taking place in prisons;
- partnership working activities which sought to: bring more coherence to employer engagement among offender-facing services; develop a more employer-led approach to skills and employment provision for offenders; increase partners' awareness of employer and labour market needs.

4 What works

This chapter provides analyses on what worked within the Pilots in moving beneficiaries closer to the labour market. Specifically, it draws out lessons on what worked with regards to:

- working with individuals (mainly drawn from the Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE) Pilots);
- re-engineering provision (mainly drawn from the test bed Pilots); and
- working with employers (mainly drawn from the Exit To Work Pilots).

4.1 Working with individuals

Chapter 3 detailed how the ACE Pilot worked to progress individual beneficiaries towards employment. This included:

- high levels of personal support through caseloading and support worker provision;
- help with system navigation;
- resolution or containment of critical factors constraining employability, particularly homelessness, substance abuse, behavioural problems and difficulties surrounding access to benefits;
- pre-employment training;
- small amounts of sheltered employment, volunteering and work experience.

Most of the interventions listed above ‘worked’ but mostly worked in achieving stabilisation in the beneficiaries’ circumstances and in achieving modest onwards movement. Only a minority of beneficiaries achieved job-readiness or employment through the Pilot.

4.1.1 Having the right delivery organisations

The 12 Pilot organisations provided assistance to individual beneficiaries with system change (help with cross-systemic interventions), system navigation (help accessing several services at one time) and transition points (helping beneficiaries negotiate difficult transitions points in their lives).

They constituted a particularly good selection of pilot organisations because they already had the **capacity in place** to facilitate a quick start to the Pilot activities. The ACE Pilot had ready access to existing physical infrastructure and skilled, experienced staff. In this sense, none of the ACE Pilots had to start from scratch and have been able to appropriate existing capacity and resources for the needs of the Pilot. The Pilot organisations also possessed the relevant expertise to address the problems of socially excluded beneficiaries. All the delivery organisations had an **established track record** in working with the particular target groups on which the ACE Pilot focused. This meant the Pilot activities were largely embedded in tried and tested working procedures which were already in place. It also meant that the Pilots had effective and established working links with other agencies and so were also able to act as effective conduits of beneficiary referrals. Related to this, the Pilot organisations also had **visibility to, and credibility with**, the beneficiary group. This meant that the organisations already had an established and positive relationship with the target groups of the ACE Pilot and were able to effectively engage beneficiaries in Pilot activities. This credibility extended to other agencies who worked with the beneficiary group and this facilitated referrals from/to these other agencies.

4.1.2 Having sufficient run time for the Pilot

Having sufficient run time for Pilot activities has been important in allowing the Pilot to adequately address many of the deep-seated problems of individual beneficiaries. It was clear from the Pilot organisations that socially excluded beneficiaries faced very lengthy and difficult transitions to move them to the point where they were employable. The three-year run time allowed the Pilot to make good progress on stabilising beneficiaries' circumstances and behaviour, assessing beneficiaries' employability, implementing keyworker support and facilitating moves towards employment. The three-year run-time also allowed enough time to both effect any capacity-building and have time to exploit it before the end of the Pilot.

4.1.3 Effective partnership working

Effective partnership working through the Pilots was intended to ensure the appropriate range of local partners would be involved in providing multi-agency support to the beneficiary group. This was, at times, successful but required the following elements:

- **A formal membership framework to legitimate smaller organisations and bind in larger ones:** The most effective partnerships observed across these Pilots had enjoyed the support of a formal agreement between the member organisations, specifying the collective objectives and individual contributions of the members. Membership also sanctioned joint working at an operational level (albeit without always resolving practical issues around such things as client information, etc.).

- **Caseworker-level utility:** The experience of these Pilots strongly suggests that it is the recognition that operational advantage can be secured through partnership working that is likely to lead to their coherence. Where the staff at the operational level saw no advantage in such joint work, the higher level contacts became formulaic and sterile, but where they did, the higher level contacts were validated and became the means of stronger co-operation.
- **Peer recognition:** We observed some examples of bi-lateral partnership working which originated at the operational level and led subsequently to more formal organisational links. However, these were only observed where the field staff of the two organisations had recognised in each other suitable and appropriate common purpose and common standards to enable joint work and client referral to succeed.

4.2 Re-engineering provision

The focus of the test bed Pilots was largely to re-engineer existing provision to better meet the needs of beneficiaries. The test bed regions did this through:

- **improving working links** between agencies and procedures to provide a seamless system of skills and employment support for ex-offenders, drawing on provision such as regional and local partnerships, and the Job Developer;
- **building a new emphasis on employability and skills in prisons and probation;**
- **engaging employers** to better integrate vocational skills and employment opportunities for ex-offenders.

From test bed activities and progress to date, it is possible to identify four features of the Pilots which worked well in progressing the beneficiary group towards the labour market.

4.2.1 Strong regional partnerships

In both test bed regions, the Pilots were able to draw on well established and relevant partnerships that were already in place to secure early buy-in to aspects of test bed development. These provided good starting points upon which to progress multi-agency working and an holistic system of beneficiary support. These partnerships also established a degree of accountability for test bed activity and usefully brought together representatives from the key test bed agencies to ensure a degree of joint ownership of the test bed agenda and the test bed Work Plans.

4.2.2 Utilising existing infrastructures and provision

Test bed implementation has drawn heavily upon the existing regional infrastructures and organisational arrangements to build upon provision already in place in the region. This included the utilisation of existing regional and sub-

regional partnerships, existing streams of funding around skills and employment provision and relevant staff with experience of working on skills and employment pathway activities.

Utilising existing infrastructures and provision was regarded as a necessary approach among test bed stakeholders given the two-year timescale of the Pilot and the modest level of Pilot funding. Nevertheless, it ensured that the test bed Pilots had access to existing physical infrastructures (staff, offices, managerial resource) in place to undertake many elements of the test bed work.

4.2.3 Learning about how other key agencies work around skills and employment support

While it remains to be seen whether the test bed Pilots have achieved sustained improvements in multi-agency working at the systemic level (see the appendices), what the test bed Pilots did facilitate was key learning across key agencies at the level of small groups and individuals. This learning was facilitated through regional and local test bed events which involved individuals from across the key test bed agencies and which focused on learning about how different organisations worked with offenders in delivering skills and employment support, what other agencies they prioritised alongside (or instead of) skills and employment support and where the barriers lay in progressing such support for offenders. This learning was also facilitated through other forms of cross-agency engagement that emerged as a result of having to meet the objectives of the test bed work plans.

Whilst stakeholders reported that this learning was a necessary prerequisite to broader step changes in improving multi-agency working and more flexible working practices within organisations, its impact was minimal due to the fact that it took place at the level of individuals rather than organisations; stakeholders reported that it was, nonetheless, a necessary prerequisite to broader step changes in improving multi-agency working and more flexible working practices within organisations.

4.2.4 The role of ICT in expanding learning provision

The trialling and establishment of the Virtual Campus in the test bed regions successfully demonstrated the potential for a secure IT-based learning and information environment that offers resettlement and learning opportunities to the beneficiary group. The Virtual Campus (although only offered on a small scale at the time of writing) offers online courses, jobsearch, help with CVs and information on job opportunities and constitutes the first kind of IT-based skills and employment provision of its kind in a UK prison setting.

4.3 Working with employers

The Exit To Work Pilots relied solely on the role of the Job Developers for implementation. Various forms of support were available to the Job Developers including: line management by Working Ventures UK (WVUK); regular team

meetings; a project co-ordinator within each pilot area to provide administrative and other support functions; and a website designed as a cross-pilot resource tool to match up job-ready candidates to appropriate vacancies. However, each Job Developer remained largely responsible for wide geographical areas, usually including numerous prisons and other key sites, as well as an extensive network of existing organisations.

4.3.1 Capacity building

For the role of a single Job Developer working across large geographical areas, early capacity building activities proved important in establishing a degree of visibility and credibility to the role going forward, particularly with prison and probation services, and Jobcentre Plus. Capacity building activities in the early stages of the project included: active engagement with, and membership of, strategic level groups; familiarisation with existing skills and employment provision and employer engagement activities; and developing links with prisons across the regions.

These activities helped build a visible and credible operating platform from which more tangible Pilot outcomes could be pursued. Despite the relatively small-scale and short-term duration of the Pilot, most of the Job Developers were fairly successful in making their presence felt within a short space of time.

4.3.2 Working flexibly within existing infrastructures

The role of Job Developers, as individual actors, meant that they made a very small net increment to the already extensive field of organisations with various responsibilities for ex-offender support. As such, they had to work flexibly within existing infrastructures and systems of working as opposed to 'reinventing the wheel'. Job Developers did demonstrate considerable flexibility in working within the existing infrastructure of partnerships, organisations and provision. While this was not without difficulty in some individual cases, overall, Job Developers made good headway in working alongside existing organisational arrangements and provision. They worked hard (from a standing start) to build a local profile, contacts and links with the relevant key agencies to secure co-operation of other organisations and a partnership-working approach with offender-facing services in order to achieve the aims of the project.

4.3.3 Sharpening employer-led focus of existing skills and employment provision

While the number of beneficiaries getting into work has been low, retention in those new jobs has been high and the Job Developers did achieve a number of 'soft' outcomes that helped sharpen the employer-led focus of existing skills and employment provision and arrangements. First, some of the Job Developers brought a degree of coherence to employer engagement by often taking on a more strategic role and voice across the various independent organisations all involved in employer engagement. Second, they often played a valuable part in linking together offender-facing services and employers (discussed in Section 4.3.4). Third,

they helped establish a number of sustainable 'through the gate' routeways into employment for offenders in some of the Pilot prisons. Fourth, they tapped into a wider range of services which employers might be able to offer in addition to jobs, such as mentoring, help with interview techniques or access to training equipment. Finally, they have undertaken a number of awareness-raising activities to promote the beneficiary group as potential recruits to a wider pool of employers than those that were previously targeted through employer engagement.

While the numbers of beneficiaries into work has been low, this does not reflect a lack of success on their employer-facing activities (engaging employers, securing access to vacancies, etc.). Rather, it reflects more the difficulties which the Pilot has experienced in securing a satisfactory response from referral agencies in finding suitable applicants for the vacancies to which they have secured access.

4.3.4 Linking employers to prison/probation services

Through the work of some of the Job Developers, it was clear that there were advantages in having a dedicated 'link' role between employers and offender-facing services. Some respondents from the prison and probation services could see the benefits of Job Developers acting as a 'link person' between themselves and employers and also in representing the employer perspective. In some of the areas where this positive relationship was developing, there was a higher percentage of referrals from these sources. Through the collaborative work that was developing in these areas, there was also a growing recognition that prison, probation staff and training providers required feedback from employers so they could adapt vocational training and pre-release programmes in accordance with the needs of the labour market. This feedback was facilitated by the Job Developers and in this respect, they were viewed by some stakeholders as a valuable source of up-to-date labour market intelligence.

4.4 Summary

When looking across the Pilots, it is possible to draw out a number of key lessons regarding what 'worked'. Very few of these lessons relate to 'hard' outcomes (i.e. high numbers into employment) but do hold lessons regarding how to achieve modest progress in the beneficiary's journey towards employment.

Taking into account the socially excluded nature of the beneficiary groups, it is perhaps not surprising that the ACE Pilots demonstrated how instrumental **high levels of personal support** (caseloading and support worker provision) are in working with socially excluded individuals. Such support emerges as critical in supporting beneficiaries to access multi-agency provision, to navigate the system and to progress to more stable circumstances where they are better positioned to consider employment. This is not to say that pre-employment training and other employment-focused activities are not valuable – only that they tend to be more relevant to the minority of beneficiaries who are closer to work-readiness than most. Having the **right delivery organisations** to provide this kind of intensive

and expert support, with the right links to other support agencies and credibility within the beneficiary group, is also evident from the experience of the ACE Pilots. The ACE Pilots also demonstrate how important **stabilisation** is in resolving, or at least containing, those factors which constrain employability. Achieving stabilisation regarding access to benefits, homelessness or substance abuse emerges as a necessary pre-condition for many socially excluded beneficiaries before they are able to consider employment. While having effective delivery organisations to provide personal support and stabilisation only achieved modest onwards movement, these 'softer' outcomes are arguably key milestones in the beneficiary's journey towards employment given the complex and multiple barriers experienced by this group.

With regards to broader aspects of system change and improvements in system navigation, both the Exit To Work and test bed Pilots demonstrated the importance of **being able to draw upon existing infrastructures**, strong regional partnerships and existing provision within a time-limited Pilot which lacks substantial funding and/or capacity. Existing arrangements undoubtedly served both Pilots well in providing a readily accessible infrastructure from which to work within, draw on and build upon. The Pilots also demonstrated the value of **improving working links** between organisations to prioritise employability and skills for this beneficiary group. While this activity was largely confined to specific activities, areas and organisations (as opposed to a step change at the systemic level), where it did occur, it often helped to prioritise skills and employment support among prisons, probation areas and employers that had not prioritised this before. It also brought a degree of coherence to what was, and still is, a complex and fragmented system of support and provision. Among the Exit To Work Pilots, efforts to improve working links sharpened the employer-led focus of existing skills and employment provision and effectively linked some employers to offender-facing services. Maintaining the role of the Job Developer as a single point of contact between the employer and the rest of the offender environment was critical to this success. Among the test bed Pilots, improved working links led to increased understanding of how other agencies prioritised and worked around skills and employment support and subsequent actions to address the barriers that prevented multi-agency working.

5 Constraints and problems

This chapter discusses some of the key challenges and problems encountered by the three Pilots during the course of developing and testing out various strategies for improving employment opportunities and outcomes for the key target groups. It can be seen that some of these challenges were more pilot-specific in nature, whereas others arose from the nature of the beneficiary group or from the broader institutional, cultural or regional contexts within which the Pilots were operating. It is also interesting to note that many of the issues facing the Pilots were overlapping, whether their primary focus was on addressing individual needs, effecting changes to the system or developing a more employer-led approach.

5.1 Working with individuals

5.1.1 Client-centred approaches

The first challenge facing the Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE) Pilots, whose main focus was working with individuals, was the nature of the beneficiary group itself: these were typically the hardest-to-reach individuals, facing multiple and complex problems, which severely limited their access to employment opportunities. The Pilots working with these socially excluded individuals were essentially client-centred in their approach, with the primary aim of helping beneficiaries to achieve stabilisation of their circumstances and behaviour (for example, through addressing homelessness or substance abuse issues). There was, therefore, less emphasis on – and fewer resources directed towards – the later phases of progression, such as the development of employability skills. In fact, although many of these Pilots had identified employment outcomes amongst their objectives, they did not appear to be regarded as a priority across the ACE initiative as a whole.

Furthermore, the specific contexts within which some of the Pilots were located also placed constraints on opportunities to work with beneficiaries towards achieving regular forms of employment. For example, some of the Pilot work took place within highly-institutionalised settings, such as prisons or psychiatric wards.

5.1.2 Small scale and lack of resources

Another constraint on the ACE Pilots was their status as small-scale, time-limited projects working within modest resources (although both the test bed Pilots and the Exit to Work Pilot faced the same issue, it could be argued that this was a particular challenge for the ACE Pilots, because of their remit to work with the hardest-to-help beneficiaries who were furthest from the labour market).

Despite these limitations, some of the projects had the ambitious aim of effecting a more wide-reaching system change in addressing the various needs of their beneficiaries, by working collaboratively with mainstream services (such as those responsible for housing, benefits and health services). However, in practice, this was proving to be a difficult task for such small players within a large and complex field. It could be argued that such a far-reaching cultural shift would have to originate from within the statutory services themselves, for example in making fundamental changes to their usual ways of working, in order to offer more streamlined and co-ordinated support to beneficiaries with multiple needs.

5.1.3 Relationship with Jobcentre Plus

In terms of securing employment outcomes for their beneficiaries, the key statutory service with which the ACE Pilots would be expected to develop links would be Jobcentre Plus. However, our research has indicated that the relations developed so far with local Jobcentre Plus offices have been variable across the Pilots. There have been various reasons for this including the following:

- Several of the Pilots reported having had negative experiences in accessing Jobcentre Plus programmes for their beneficiaries. As a result, onward referrals of beneficiaries to Jobcentre Plus have been few and problematic.
- Similarly, referrals from Jobcentre Plus to the Pilots of individuals likely to benefit from their services have also been limited (perhaps because of the relative invisibility of the Pilots to Jobcentre Plus staff at the local level).
- There appeared to be a potential mismatch between the expectations of project workers and Jobcentre Plus advisory staff. For example, key workers from the projects, with a more beneficiary-focused perspective, would be more likely to have an over-optimistic view of beneficiaries' job-readiness. On the other hand, Jobcentre Plus staff would generally not have the training or resources to handle 'difficult' clients of this kind, who would typically be unable to conform to the standard requirements of customer compliance or behaviour.
- Linked to this point, there are also underlying assumptions within the Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) regime itself that customers should be able to undertake six months of independent jobsearch effectively before receiving additional support. As this standard process was generally the opposite of what the ACE target group needed (i.e. intensive help from the outset), then it would not be surprising if they were unable to conform appropriately to Jobcentre Plus expectations.

- Although many of this beneficiary group would have been eligible for 'fast-tracking' through the system, there were problems associated with data protection and information transfer which restricted the ability of Jobcentre Plus staff to identify individuals' eligibility for additional support, such as early entry to New Deal programmes. This problem could well have been compounded by a lack of motivation or awareness on the part of many beneficiaries to put themselves forward for such services.

5.1.4 Lack of ongoing support after job entry

Given all the barriers faced by the target group for the ACE Pilots, it is not surprising that relatively few individuals so far have been reported as progressing into employment. A key difficulty for those of the Pilots specifically aiming to support beneficiaries into work, was maintaining their progression from less to more challenging work environments (e.g. from in-house-supported job roles or volunteering, to more regular forms of employment external to the project). Although the client journey at this stage would involve moving on from dependence to acting independently, it was also recognised that for most of these beneficiaries, the transition into regular paid employment would require ongoing key worker support. However, given the capacity issues faced by the Pilots, it was questionable whether they were adequately resourced to provide the types of ongoing in-work support necessary for achieving sustainable job outcomes for their beneficiaries.

5.2 Re-engineering provision

5.2.1 Low level of pilot funding

Unlike the other two Pilots, which were set up as small-scale, independent initiatives, the key organisations involved in the Next Steps test bed Regional Pilots were mainstream agencies already involved in delivering or supporting skills and employment programmes for ex-offenders, including the prison and probation services, Learning and Skills Council (LSC)/the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS), the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and Jobcentre Plus. A key objective of these Pilots was to ascertain whether significant changes in the way support was organised and delivered could be achieved within existing budgets. As a result, the Pilots were constrained to operate on an additional budget of only £250,000 per year, per region. In our view, this relatively low budget, together with the relatively short timescale of the project, meant that the Pilots had to draw primarily on existing provision in their respective regions rather than perhaps developing more innovative approaches.

5.2.2 Data sharing and tracking the offender journey

A key aim of the test bed Pilots was to build on the existing regional infrastructure and to co-ordinate existing skills and employment provision within prison and community settings in order to establish a more holistic approach to developing

training and employment opportunities for offenders. One of the main challenges arose from the multi-agency nature of the Pilot itself and the difficulties of sharing Management Information (MI) data held by individual organisations for their own institutional and procedural purposes. This meant it was not possible to track training and employment outcomes for offenders and thus, to provide hard evidence of the effectiveness of this approach within the test bed regions. This finding reinforces the point that, in order to be able to monitor and support the 'offender journey' from custody to community and onwards into sustainable employment, the mainstream agencies involved would need to find ways to overcome this barrier and develop more effective data-sharing protocols.

5.2.3 Employer engagement as a contested area

Similar difficulties arose in relation to establishing a more joined-up approach to employer engagement across the test bed regions. The main purpose of this was to ensure that the various employer engagement strategies already established by test bed partners would be better co-ordinated in order to avoid confusion and maximise credibility with employers willing to engage with the reducing re-offending agenda. Although there was some limited progress in this area in the early stages, this was considered to be the least successful aspect of the Pilots overall. One reason for this was the concerns raised by project partners about the data protection implications of sharing information about employers. In addition to this, the various agencies involved all had their own competitive targets to meet around employer engagement and were thus reluctant to share information with partners anyway.

5.2.4 Conflicting organisational priorities

The problems associated with data sharing, data protection and conflicts of interest outlined above, highlight a key challenge for the organisations involved in the test bed Pilots: how to reconcile disparate and conflicting organisational priorities in order to effectively achieve outcomes at the multi-agency level. Two examples (linked to themes arising within the other two Pilots) can perhaps serve to illustrate this point: Firstly, there was the concern that, despite the recent emphasis on employability issues within reducing re-offending policies, this has historically not been a priority goal within the prison and probation skills and employment services and changing this cultural mindset would need to be considered as a longer-term aspiration. Secondly, there was the question of the commitment of Jobcentre Plus to ex-offenders as a priority group, with the result that, on release, many offenders were not being picked up by Jobcentre Plus staff as eligible for priority services to support their progress into work. As noted in the test bed Pilot research, this problem of a lack of coherence in 'through the gates' skills and employment provision was further compounded by the fact that many offenders were being released back to other regions, making effective inter-agency support even more problematic.

5.2.5 Transferability of good practice to other regions

It was noted that the good progress achieved in meeting some of the pilot objectives depended, to a large extent, on the infrastructure and partnership arrangements which had already been in existence in both regions prior to the test bed Pilots. While this approach has hopefully provided the foundation for further sustained progress and development within the test bed regions themselves, it also raises questions about the transferability of lessons from the test bed Pilots to other areas of the country, particularly to regions which may not have such strong infrastructures and partnerships in place.

5.2.6 Addressing the needs of the wider offender population

The agreed test bed strategy, supported at national policy level, was to target the most job-ready offenders within the two regions; this was considered to be a sensible way to test out approaches to securing employment outcomes within a time-limited project of this kind. However, the test bed Pilots recognised that the offender population is very diverse, with many facing a range of problems which need to be addressed before they are able to move closer to the labour market. It was noted in the research findings that developing an holistic system of skills and employment support which addresses the varying needs of this wider constituency presents a longer-term challenge, which remained largely untested within the test bed Pilots, due to the bigger changes planned to flow from the LSC's activity to appoint successor OLASS providers from August 2009.

5.3 Working with employers

5.3.1 Small scale and lack of capacity

As with the other two Pilots, limited time and capacity was identified as a major issue for the Exit To Work Pilot, in testing out ways of developing a more employer-led approach to offender employment. The project consisted of seven Job Developers working across five large regions and this was generally felt to have provided insufficient coverage, bearing in mind the number of institutions and the size and diversity of the offender populations within each region. One apparent consequence of this was that the Job Developers were unable to undertake much work in the community, where the majority of offenders serve their sentences (although these individuals were not excluded from engaging with the project). Although the extension of the Pilot to a second year provided the Job Developers with an opportunity to consolidate and build on their earlier capacity-building work, it was still considered to be too limited a timeframe to have a more meaningful impact and bring about more sustainable outcomes. In addition, the need to prepare for the project exit just as employer relationships were beginning to embed also negatively influenced the project's potential impact.

5.3.2 Lack of clarity about pilot objectives

There appeared to be some ambivalence initially from the leadership of the Pilot as to whether the key aim should be to focus on developing longer-term strategies for the employment of ex-offenders or on securing short-term job outcomes at the individual level, through job-brokering activities.⁴ It was felt that this difficulty could have been addressed by a clearer articulation of the pilot objectives at the outset and by getting the balance right between strategic and operational objectives. However, the general consensus in the second year moved towards more strategic work with project partners as the best way of securing more sustainable outcomes from the Pilot. These strategic approaches included capacity-building work with skills and employment practitioners (to improve employer engagement, pre-release training and CV preparation) and the development of employer-led 'through the gates' routeways into employment.

5.3.3 Lack of initial consultation with key partners

There was a consensus among the Job Developers that their original remit of working primarily with the larger prisons in their regions had been problematic, as these tended to be hierarchical and inflexible institutions with a largely transient offender population. Some stakeholders interviewed for the research expressed regret about the lack of prior consultation with offender management services on the Pilot's working arrangements and would have liked more opportunity to offer guidance around where the Job Developer's energies could best be directed. More in-depth consultation and negotiation with regional partners (such as Regional Offender Managers (ROMs)) in the planning stages of the Pilot might have facilitated the process of finding the most appropriate prisons and probation areas for the Job Developers to work with.

5.3.4 Problems with technical support

In contrast to the test bed Pilots, where the use of ICT as part of the Campus Model was considered a positive outcome, the Exit To Work Pilot experienced major technical problems throughout. The Exit To Work website was planned to be a key element of the project, aimed at equipping the Job Developers with a resource tool in matching up job-ready candidates with appropriate vacancies across all the pilot regions. In the event, there were continual delays in getting the website up and running and the high hopes which the Job Developers had originally invested in the database were never realised. This lack of centrally-co-ordinated technical

⁴ A similar weakness was attributed to the ACE Pilots in terms of a lack of coherence in their objectives and the extent to which they were aiming either to offer support at the individual level or bring about systemic change. It has been suggested that a stronger consensus across the Pilots about this issue (particularly perhaps between funding partners looking for specific, but different, outcomes) might enable a clearer final assessment of the effectiveness of their interventions (see Appendix A).

support was viewed as a significant factor which had hampered the job-brokering aspect of the Pilot and which, to some extent, had led to a loss of credibility with employers and project partners. According to some respondents, there were lessons to be learnt from this experience in terms of more effective management of the provider contracting and procurement process.

5.3.5 Poor quality of job preparation for offenders

The quality of pre-release job and CV preparation generally provided by skills and employment services in prison and probation was reported to be very variable across the pilot areas and this was identified by the Job Developers as a major problem in identifying a pool of job-ready candidates to offer to employers. It was generally recognised that addressing employability issues with offenders had not historically been a priority aim within prison and probation services and that one of the key challenges was in changing this culture. One short-term solution put forward by the Job Developers was the development of a capacity-building programme for skills and employment provider staff and frontline advisers to raise their awareness of employability issues (this is described in more detail in Appendix C). However, the experience of the Job Developers points to the need for more widespread and systematic changes in relation to the skills and employment offer for offenders, if it is to become more genuinely responsive to employer needs.

5.3.6 Difficulties with data sharing

Another challenge to the Pilot was the high rate of 'offender churn' and mobility of the prison population across the country, making it very difficult to track their progress or support needs, either in prison or when they had left custody. This was exacerbated by a general lack of co-ordination and communication between prison-based services and services in the community. As with the test bed Pilots, findings from Exit to Work reinforced the point that insufficient data sharing between agencies was making it more difficult to provide effective 'through the gates' support for training and job opportunities for offenders reaching the end of their sentences.

5.3.7 Conflicts of interest with other agencies

There were also tensions reported from some of the Exit to Work Pilot regions around the potential conflict between the Job Developer role and other partners' roles in relation to employer engagement. Although there was general recognition of the Job Developer role at regional level, there could be more resistance at the operational level to 'sharing' employers and to a more co-ordinated approach to employer engagement. It seems likely that this mistrust and competitiveness from other agencies might well have contributed to the consistently low numbers of referrals in two of the pilot areas, where the Job Developers faced an uphill task in persuading existing services of the 'value-added' nature of their role.

5.3.8 Relationship with Jobcentre Plus

As with the other two Pilots, issues were raised about the role of Jobcentre Plus in relation to moving ex-offenders into employment. Although, at the strategic level, Jobcentre Plus had a high profile within the Reducing Re-offending agenda, the Job Developers generally felt that there could have been more support for the Pilot at the regional level and that ex-offenders were still not really regarded as a priority group (for example, compared to disabled people or lone parents). Although there was active support from Jobcentre Plus staff in some pilot areas, there were difficulties at the operational level too. For example, in the community context, there was evidence that many Jobcentre Plus staff were failing to identify ex-offender customers who were eligible to be 'flagged' for enhanced services and some Job Developers felt that too many beneficiaries were 'slipping through the net' in this way. This problem was also linked to the fact that there may have been reluctance on the part of many individuals to disclose their offender status.

5.4 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the key constraints and problems faced by the three Pilots, when considered collectively. Despite their different objectives and ways of working, some overlap can be seen between the main challenges, which could be categorised under three main headings:

5.4.1 Pilot-specific constraints

- In the case of two of the Pilots (ACE Pilots and Exit to Work) a major challenge identified was their status as small-scale, time-limited projects working to achieve their objectives within modest resources. The test bed Pilots, although based on partnerships of mainstream agencies, also faced issues of limited time and resources.
- The other Pilot-specific issues (mainly identified in relation to Exit to Work) included: lack of clarity about pilot objectives, lack of initial consultation with key partners about the focus of the Pilot, and problems with technical support.

5.4.2 Constraints relating to the nature of the beneficiary group

This was an issue which impacted on all three Pilots to some extent, although probably the ACE Pilots most of all.

- As the ACE Pilot's focus was on working with the most socially-excluded and multiply-disadvantaged beneficiaries, their approach was necessarily client-centred, with employability issues considered as a lesser priority on the whole. This tended to mean that fewer pilot resources were directed towards such activities as developing active links with Jobcentre Plus or providing beneficiaries with ongoing support after job entry.
- For the other two Pilots, with their focus on supporting ex-offenders into employment, the key issues were:

- how to address the employability needs of such a diverse population – especially those furthest from the labour market;
- high rates of ‘offender churn’ and the mobility of the prison population across the country, exacerbating the difficulties involved in tracking the offender journey and in offering a continuity of service ‘through the gates’.

5.4.3 Constraints arising from the broader institutional and cultural context of the Pilots

These were factors which could be seen to impact most clearly on the test bed Pilot with its aim of developing more effective ways of multi-agency working around skills and employment provision for offenders. However, there were similar problems faced by the Exit To Work Pilot in negotiating difficult organisational and cultural barriers. Key challenges were:

- general difficulties associated with the varied and often conflicting organisational priorities of the agencies concerned;
- a lack of data-sharing protocols between partners which, in the case of the test bed Pilots, severely limited the Pilot’s ability to track employment outcomes for offenders and thus to measure Pilot progress against targets;
- employer engagement also emerged as a contested area, with potential competition between partners around meeting their targets and further concerns about data protection issues;
- all the Pilots reported having experienced some degree of difficulty in establishing positive working relationships with Jobcentre Plus in addressing the employability needs of their target groups. Although there was Jobcentre Plus involvement at the strategic level (in both the test bed Pilots and Exit to Work), responses at the operational level from Jobcentre Plus offices could be very variable. An overall impression reported by beneficiaries in both the test bed and Exit to Work research was that ex-offenders were not regarded as a priority group by Jobcentre Plus and that too many beneficiaries were failing to gain access to the enhanced Jobcentre Plus services from which they might have benefited.

6 Conclusion

As the foregoing chapters show, at the level of detail, the three Pilots have quite varied aims and objectives, they address different client groups, they have been implemented by different kinds of organisation, and they have been operating over different timeframes. Nevertheless, there are common features to be observed across the three, and as a result some common lessons to be derived. We are particularly interested here in drawing out potential lessons for Active Labour Market Policy (ALMP) programmes than for social policy, though of course the Pilots will feed both areas of interest. It is notable (and convenient) then that the common features of these Pilots become somewhat more marked when they are considered less on their own terms, and more from the perspective of employability, labour market opportunities and bridges from social exclusion into employment.

We should also add that whereas the earlier chapters have relied mainly on reportage, this one relies mostly on interpretation. It is, therefore, much more subjective. These are our interim conclusions but this does not preclude others from coming to different ones and we present them simply in the hope that they will contribute to developing understanding of this difficult policy terrain.

6.1 Beneficiaries facing severe, varied and multiple constraints on employment

Although there are differences between the three Pilots, their target beneficiaries clearly share common features, which are so pronounced and/or so far removed from those of mainstream clients for ALM programmes, that they cast a strong influence on the ways in which such people can productively be engaged. We have seen in Chapter 2 how such beneficiaries often present difficult/disturbed personal circumstances and characteristics which make it difficult/impossible for many of them to aspire to, seek, secure or hold down jobs. They frequently lack the basic human capital to make them attractive as employees, even if these behavioural/circumstantial factors could be contained. As a result, they do not readily constitute an attractive group for any employer and nor are they often particularly easy and straightforward cases for support agencies to work with.

However, it should also be remembered that ex-offenders form a very diverse group, which includes some individuals with relevant employability skills and previous work experience (even if these are in a minority). One of the issues for practitioners working with this target group was in 'selling' ex-offenders to employers and challenging stereotyped views of people with offender status.

Finally, the recent deterioration in labour market circumstances seems likely to worsen the circumstances and prospects of these groups, through the increase in competition for fewer available jobs and the increasing strain placed on such labour market agencies.

6.2 Need for pre-employment support and stabilisation

The Pilots have shown that in order to build a sufficiently stable platform on which potential employment and other important social advances can realistically be developed, many of these individuals need support to contain and mitigate the various negative influences and circumstances which have so undermined their lives.

We have shown in Chapter 3 how in their different ways, each of the Pilots recognised the need to develop employability skills. In so far as they worked directly with individuals, they sought to do so through adopting client-centred approaches which generally provided:

- intensive one-to-one support from key caseworkers;
- help and advice to navigate the mainstream support systems more effectively and enable them to access a range of different social services;
- stabilisation of client circumstances through addressing issues such as homelessness and substance abuse, and on this basis, to deliver...
- elements of pre-employment training, development of 'soft skills', supported work experience and job broking services, as appropriate.

Not all the Pilots focused primarily on this need for stabilisation of course. The job-broking service provided by Exit To Work's Job Developers generally avoided it by providing opportunities for those among the beneficiary group whom they believed to be job-ready. Yet it may well be that the difficulties which they experienced in finding enough of them to satisfactorily fill the vacancies which they had identified provide some testimony to the minority status of the job-ready among these potential beneficiaries. These difficulties also highlighted the need for an increased focus on generic employability skills training for ex-offenders in both custody and community settings.

6.3 Low caseloading/high cost

It is worth noting a rather extreme contrast between these three Pilots in the importance they variously attached to the provision of caseworker support for clients. In this respect, Exit to Work was somewhat out of consideration because (by design) it formally offered no support to individual jobseekers but rather, to the employers who might hire them. In practice, though, several Job Developers have reported that they have been reluctantly drawn into this role due to deficiencies in the CVs and applications of some ex-offenders for the jobs which they had secured. By contrast, most of the ACE Pilots attached enormous importance to this facet of their interventions and devoted significant attention and resource to the building of high quality, individualised caseworker support. They justify the high cost of such provision by reference to the high and ongoing societal cost of their clients remaining in the often very needy circumstances in which they find them.

The contrast between these extremely high staffing ratios and those which most ALM programmes typically demonstrate was very marked indeed. The relatively small and tightly scheduled packets of adviser-time-per-client which typify the latter stand in stark contrast to the open-ended, near continuous, availability of Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE) caseworker support. Although some of the ACE Pilots offset the high cost of provision through the use of volunteer and ex-client resources, there seems no doubt that this remains a level of financial commitment which far exceeds anything envisaged for even the most hard-to-help ALMP clients.

6.4 Multiple constraints, varied provision

The range and number of constraints which inhibit progress towards social inclusion and employment among the beneficiaries of these Pilots carry certain implications for the nature of the support which the Pilots have sought to bring to them. As suggested above, although the problems of homelessness, offending behaviour, substance abuse and mental health difficulties are frequently observed, the variety in the ways they are interconnected and supplemented makes for a high degree of individualism in the kinds of action plans drawn up by the support agencies on their behalf. As we have suggested in Chapter 2, these are likely to draw on the inputs of numerous statutory and voluntary agencies, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes sequentially, as individual cases require.

These Pilots demonstrate two different approaches to the orchestration of this provision: On the one hand, the ACE Pilots have made most use of an external agent (a link worker or personal caseworker) who uses proprietary knowledge to access services for their client. The advantages of such an approach reside in their speediness, their relative simplicity, their relative acceptability to the individual beneficiaries, etc. But, at the same time, they are quite fragile, they rely greatly on the ability of these individuals to access the larger, mainstream organisations and secure their clients' various needs from them and they are arithmetical (i.e. they accrue wins only on a case-by-case basis).

On the other hand, the approach taken by the test bed Regions has been more fundamentally to re-orchestrate and improve existing provision in order to offer a more coherent system of mainstream support for education, training and employment. Key strategies here have included:

- reviewing and developing working links between partner organisations in order to improve multi-agency co-operation across the test bed regions;
- increasing the focus on employability and skills within prison and probation services through: introduction of the Virtual Campus; piloting employability compacts; and targeting job opportunities in key employment sectors;
- co-ordinating employer engagement activities.

The advantages here are not so readily or quickly secured, and they require much more fundamental changes in the ways these different agencies work, most particularly in the ways they co-operate. The key advantage here though is scale: these improvements would be likely to apply to a much larger cohort of potential beneficiaries than the case-by-case approach above.

To some extent, the Exit to Work Pilots embraced both these approaches. In their first year they emphasised the catalytic effect of the external player, trying to make mainstream provision work better on behalf of an individual beneficiary (albeit in this case via an employer). Recognising the relatively small numbers of individuals which they were able to help into employment in this way, their emphasis switched in the second year more towards encouraging system integration through demand-led employment training in the prisons.

Although it is tempting to counterpose these two approaches, there is no necessary contradiction here. It seems entirely plausible that the former approach can be a means to enhancing system navigation and customisation on behalf of individuals with quite complex needs even as the system itself was re-aligning and recomposing itself to facilitate more joined-up and coherent provision. It seems that even the most integrated system would be hard pushed to offer the range and variety of the interventions being delivered or accessed for beneficiaries by the ACE Pilots, and so in our view, the most promising way forward would be to encourage both approaches.

6.5 Making collaborative provision and onwards referral work effectively

To a lesser or greater extent, all three of these Pilots have been involved in working with, gaining access to, or trying to set up, various collaborative partnerships, and their experiences in doing so offer some interesting insights into how such integration might be encouraged or made to work more effectively.

The three Pilots offer several different approaches to partnership building. Some of the organisations involved have sought to build or join or improve formal,

multi-partner partnerships between organisations at a strategic level; indeed, for some of them this is their rationale. Others have sought to extend existing partnerships into new areas of responsibility. Others have sought to develop bi-lateral relationships on an ad-hoc basis, with the intention of formalising them and/or extending them to new partners later. Still others have focused exclusively on building practical bottom-up links.

A number of lessons may be discerned from this variety, as follows:

- **Formal framework necessary...** The most effective partnerships observed across these Pilots had enjoyed the support of a formal agreement between the member organisations, specifying the collective objectives and individual contributions of the members. This provided a formal 'space' within which more detailed working relationships could be developed, problems hammered out and practice reviewed. Membership of such a formal partnership also sanctioned staff to undertake joint working at an operational level (albeit without always resolving practical issues around such things as client information, etc.). Both the test bed Pilots and (to a lesser extent) Exit to Work demonstrated the importance of formally integrating existing infrastructures, partnerships and existing provision to make a bigger impact than perhaps a time-limited Pilot lacking in substantial funding or capacity might achieve. Existing arrangements undoubtedly also served both Pilots well in providing a readily accessible infrastructure which they could work within, draw on and build upon.
- **.... but not sufficient:** It was precisely this successful transfer of joint work from the formal, organisational level to the operational one which marked out the more successful partnerships from the less. Where the staff at the operational level saw no advantage in such joint work, the higher level contacts became formulaic and sterile. But where they did see them, the higher level contacts were validated and became the means of stronger co-operation. We concluded that formal 'political' rationales may be sufficient to form and maintain partnerships at the top but only the securing of mutual operational advantages through them is likely to lead to their coherence at all levels.
- **Peer recognition:** We did observe some examples of bi-lateral partnership working which originated at the operational level and led subsequently to more formal organisational links. However, these were solely observed where the field staff of the two organisations had recognised in each other suitable and appropriate common purpose and common standards to enable joint work and client referral to succeed. We observed one or two cases where the 'gap' between the two organisations was simply too great and operational level initiatives from one side were simply brushed off by the other organisation.

- **Size and reach:** What may appear to be a successful formal partnership between the key players in a community, may appear less so to smaller members or putative members. This may, in part, relate to our finding that it is only through securing operational advantage through partnership working that is likely to lead to their coherence. It may well be that the larger partners in partnerships can secure strong mutual advantage in joint work but perceive little to gain from the minnows. Such smaller or newer or more specialist players may, therefore, experience a harder time in securing their advantage through such partnerships. This has undoubtedly been the case for several of the players in our three Pilots, who are all small and/or specialist. Furthermore, at a time when the bigger organisations are manoeuvring for position (for example, under the influence of the Cities Strategy, or the development of the Skills and Employment Boards or indeed the regional test bed Pilots themselves), both access and advantage may temporarily be harder to come by for the smaller ones.

6.6 Data sharing and tracking the clients' journeys

Both of the two considerations raised above (the necessity for individuals to move more purposively between different support agencies and the parallel need for such agencies to co-operate at the level of the individual client and integrate their respective services into a more cohesive whole) would be enormously facilitated by the ready and accurate transfer of data about individuals. A key aim of the test bed Pilots was to build on the existing regional infrastructure and to co-ordinate existing provision within prison and community settings in order to establish a more holistic approach to developing training and employment opportunities for offenders. One of the main challenges arising from the multi-agency nature of the Pilot itself was the difficulty of sharing Management Information (MI) data held by individual organisations for their own institutional and procedural purposes. This meant it was not possible to track training and employment outcomes for offenders and thus, to provide hard evidence of the effectiveness of this approach within the test bed regions.

However, more importantly, as the experience of the other Pilots suggests, it also made it much more difficult to develop cumulative action plans for individuals whom one might otherwise have expected to see gaining momentum and confidence as successive stages of 'their' plan were unrolled. This finding reinforces the point that, in order to be able to monitor and support the 'offender journey' from custody to community and of others moving from social exclusion to employment, the mainstream agencies involved need to find ways to overcome this barrier and develop more effective data-sharing protocols.

6.7 Constructive approaches to employer engagement

As we showed in Chapter 5, similar difficulties arose in relation to establishing a more joined-up approach to employer engagement across the test bed regions.

The main purpose of this was to ensure that the various employer engagement strategies already established by test bed partners would be better co-ordinated in order to avoid confusion and maximise credibility with employers willing to engage with the reducing re-offending agenda. Similarly, in Appendix C, we observe that one of the reasons why the Exit to Work Pilot pulled back from their rather unique approach to job broking for ex-offenders was the large number of unco-ordinated players, each seeking to engage identical employers on behalf of their own beneficiaries and in isolation from (arguably in willful disregard of) the approaches of others. Although there was some limited progress in this area within the test bed Regions, this was considered to be the least successful aspect of the Pilots overall. One reason for this was the concerns raised by project partners about the data protection implications of sharing information about employers. In addition to this, the various agencies involved all had their own competitive targets to meet around employer engagement and were thus reluctant to share information with partners anyway.

Nevertheless, it is possible to draw some important lessons about employer engagement on behalf of hard-to-help beneficiaries from these two Pilots, and there were some instances of good practice from both Pilots which could usefully inform future developments in this area of work, as follows:

- **creating a 'single point of contact' between employers and offender-facing services.** In the Exit To Work Pilot, the Job Developers in some areas met with a degree of success in establishing their role on regional employer engagement forums as a key link-person with employers. According to one employer, the potential advantage of the Job Developer role was in handling the relationship management side of things for employers willing to work with offenders. The employer would then only have to deal with a 'single point of contact' rather than a bewildering array of offender-facing services, thereby reducing their contact saturation;
- **awareness-raising activities.** These met with a positive response within both Pilots, as they could demonstrate the benefits of recruiting ex-offenders in very tangible ways. Particularly successful were events where employers already committed to the agenda were willing to act as 'champions' and 'sell' the business benefits of employing ex-offenders to their peers. Another innovative example of awareness-raising came from Exit to Work, where one of the Job Developers organised a UK Skills Challenge competition in cleaning, with a number of prisons across the pilot areas taking part and competing against industrial cleaning organisations; 100 cleaning jobs were pledged as a result and there were plans to make the Skills Challenge an annual event;
- **encouraging a more active commitment from employers.** As mentioned above, there was an important distinction to be made between simply raising awareness among employers and encouraging their more active participation in securing project outcomes. This was addressed in a number of ways, including:

- **offering a job-brokering service to employers** (Exit To Work): This mainly consisted of screening and matching suitable candidates to vacancies and offering a post-employment service to employers willing to take on ex-offenders;
- **drawing on a wider range of services which employers could offer** (Exit to Work): e.g. involvement in developing new ‘through the gates’ employment pathways for offenders in some local prisons; interview practice and mentoring for offenders; free training equipment for prisons; advice and guidance to skills and employment providers about more up-to-date training techniques, etc.;
- **work trials and work experience** (test bed Pilots): as part of this Pilot, some employers were encouraged to offer work trials and volunteering opportunities to offenders, on the basis that these candidates could then be considered for job vacancies if they proved themselves competent;
- **offering more effective pre-and post-employment support to employers** (Exit to Work): A unique feature of the Job Developer role was that it was primarily employer- rather than offender-facing. The pilot identified some of the specific types of pre- and post-employment support that employers require when recruiting ex-offenders, e.g. information about training allowances and financial incentives; support with disclosure issues; support with reviewing their recruitment and HR policies to make them more ‘user-friendly’ for ex-offenders.

6.8 Limitations of small-scale, short-term Pilots

None of these Pilots is particularly large in terms of overall budget, and those budgets are themselves split up (between a dozen projects in the case of ACE; between seven Job Developers and a central secretariat in the case of Exit To Work; and between two whole Government Office Regions for the test bed Pilots). Furthermore, they have all been working within relatively short timeframes. Arguably the three year funding of the ACE Pilots is extended by comparison with typical ALM Pilots, but if the likely periods for client transition are as extended as many respondents in the ACE fieldwork would have us believe, then they are short relative to their prescription period.

There are a number of consequences flowing from these size/duration considerations, as follows:

- set-up time and exit time are likely to make up a significant proportion of the Pilots’ operational period. To some extent this has been minimised in some cases by the extensive use of existing resources, of facilities already in place, etc. In others, particularly the six new Exit To Work Pilots, this was minimised by a real effort of will to get up and running quickly;

- however, in others, the problem is exacerbated by the extended durations likely to be required to achieve any evident impact. The likely long duration of interventions with the deeply socially excluded has already been mentioned. However, in addition, the test bed Pilots, and those ACE Pilots focused on promoting system-change, also seem to face a particularly lengthy gestation period before any noteworthy outcomes might be attained;
- thirdly, although there is some mitigation to be found in the selection of existing/embedded organisations to undertake the Pilots, there is also the issue of building visibility to, and credibility with, other organisations with whom the Pilots have to work. This takes time and is likely to require a sustained period of engagement/marketing effort as well as practical evidence of utility, both of which are difficult for a new and time-limited Pilot to demonstrate. The quick implementation of the Exit to Work Pilots had been considerably hampered by their relative invisibility to the Prison and Probation Services through whom they hoped to secure applicants for their vacancies;
- finally, there is the issue of the tail and the dog. Those Pilots which seek to achieve system change from outside it, seem to us to be profoundly weakened by the contrast between their own small size and restricted lifetimes and the sometimes entrenched stolidity of the mainstream organisations through whom they hope to achieve their ends. It is not at all clear that the demonstration effects of such Pilots, even if spectacularly successful, can be sufficient to prevail against such potential bureaucratic inertia. By contrast, the test bed Pilots, working from the inside have generally avoided this difficulty but have themselves been constrained by a relatively short timeframe within which to effect change and the modesty of their additional budgets with which to achieve it.

6.9 Selectivity and employment outcomes

We have noted in Chapter 3 that the ACE Pilots are expecting to secure relatively modest numbers of job entrants because of the deeply entrenched disadvantages presented by most of their clients. Only a few are likely to have the capacity to succeed in this way during the lifetimes of the Pilots, although more may achieve partial steps on this particular route. By contrast, the test bed Pilots were overtly aiming their employment interventions at the most readily employable among their client group cohorts. But whether by natural selection (ACE) or intelligent design (test bed Pilots), it is clear that employment outcomes are likely to be in modest volumes and to be a minority objective.

There are two important consequences of this:

- Firstly, the application of standard ALMP yardsticks of cost-effectiveness to these Pilots is likely to yield relatively poor results. Not only are the measurable job outcomes likely to be low but deadweight and substitution effects are also likely to be high. The net impact through employment outcomes is therefore likely to be low. This is all the more serious in view of three further factors:

- the extended timeframe over which it is necessary to test for reduced recidivism effects, and the practical difficulties encountered in so doing, seems likely to undermine the demonstrability of positive outcome on this axis;
 - the difficulty of measuring and assigning a value to any partial advances out of social exclusion (albeit falling short of employment) is likely to be more pronounced if these outcomes constitute the majority of outcomes; and
 - the inter-penetration of Pilot activities with other pre-existing activities, and with other existing agencies' work, which is sensible in operational terms, will make it difficult to ascribe any measurable outcomes to the Pilots' interventions alone.
- Secondly, if the application of these enhanced and integrated interventions is indeed insufficient to bring most of their targeted client groups successfully into the labour market, then we need also to ask what arrangements are there to be for the ongoing support of those who are on a longer, lower or indeed partial trajectory and may never succeed in the open labour market? If the intermediate and quasi labour market activities through which some of the ACE Pilots are working have a finite capacity, then what happens when they are full with people who are slow to move on or not capable of doing so?

6.10 Sustainability in employment

It may be a consequence of the relatively small numbers of individuals whom most of these Pilots envisage entering employment or of their tendency to focus on pre-employment preparation but few had given much evident attention to the issue of retention in employment.⁵ There seems no reason to suppose that the 'revolving door' syndrome, which has eroded the effectiveness of most ALM programmes ever since they were first introduced, will not equally undermine the job entry successes of these Pilots. Indeed, if the demands which the labour market typically places on workers appear as the kind of radical break with clients' past experience and expectations which several of these Pilots have emphasised in their pre-employment preparation, then there is every reason to suppose that drop-out rates will be more of a problem for these client groups and not less.

Against this, there is some early evidence from the Exit to Work Pilots that retention rates have been high and this is ascribed to high quality job broking and matching (i.e. 'finding round holes for round pegs'). The Exit to Work Pilot also offered a unique service of pre-and post-employment support to employers, which may have had an additional impact on retention. Other Pilots have deployed the 'gratitude' argument, i.e. that disadvantaged job entrants will be so grateful for having been

⁵ That is retention in the job which they have just entered, as opposed to preventing them losing jobs which they might already have been in when they joined the Pilots. This latter was extremely rare; very few of the beneficiaries were working when they encountered the Pilots.

given a chance that their commitment will overcome initial shocks and difficulties associated with new job entry. Still others make the rather weak argument that their caseworkers will 'still be available' should the job entrant run into difficulties.

Nevertheless, there remains, in our view, a rather ominous lack of attention given to positive post-employment support. One Pilot (ACE) had taken the rather uncommon approach that they fully expected many, if not most, of their job entrants to leave their jobs prematurely and usually for negative reasons; they had, therefore, deliberately scheduled their intervention (personal caseworker, financial support, etc.) to extend for fully a year after initial job entry, with a proactive approach to checking up on job entrants and offering to sort out difficulties for them as they arose. This was most unusual, however, and it will be an interesting facet of any future research to see how far this works and to ascertain to what extent high levels of drop-out from employment does affect the Pilots' clients.

6.11 Replicability/scalability

As we have observed, the test bed Pilots were scaleable/replicable by design, with the explicit intention being to trial activities that would be sustainable within existing budgets. However, looking at the other two Pilots, in addition to this issue of high staffing ratios, there are a number of other factors which seem likely to influence the potential replicability of the kinds of approaches which they are testing. Prominent among these is the selection of the kinds of organisation (and/or individuals) delivering the Pilots and in particular the extent to which mainstream organisations, without their particular attributes, could replicate their inputs.

In the case of Exit to Work, the secretariat paid particular attention to the personal attributes and backgrounds in selection for the Job Developer role (developed selling/persuasive skills, a background in job broking, experience working with employers), in the belief that such a skillset would be important for a Pilot which placed high value on individuals playing a catalytic role within the existing system. In addition, the deployment of these individuals in the employer-friendly context of local Employer Coalitions and Corporate Alliances further added to the specific mix required which might well prove difficult to replicate in a different context and with different staff.

This appears to be even more the case for the ACE Pilots, where two key attributes of the delivery organisations are: (1) a highly developed expertise in dealing with the specific disabling characteristics of the client groups whom they address; and (2) the widespread acknowledgement of this expertise among both potential clients and the organisations who will be referring clients on to them. Although as we have suggested in Chapter 3, these are characteristics which may also have something of a downside, when it comes to emphasising job entry, they are certainly ones which would be hard to replicate on a bigger scale.

6.12 Summary

This chapter has set out our conclusions.

It argues that target beneficiaries often share common features which are so pronounced that they do not often constitute particularly easy, or straightforward, cases for mainstream agencies to work with and that their needs are frequently so far removed from those of clients for mainstream ALM programmes, that they cast a strong influence on the ways in which such individuals can productively be engaged.

An important consequence of these relatively unfavourable circumstances is the necessity to contain and mitigate their various negative characteristics and circumstances in order to build a sufficiently stable platform from which potential employment and other important social advances can realistically be developed.

Achieving this stabilisation can require a level of caseworker support for clients which far exceeds anything envisaged for even the most hard-to-help ALMP clients. The relatively small and tightly scheduled packets of adviser-time-per-client experienced by the latter stand in stark contrast to the open-ended, near continuous, availability of caseworker support provided by the ACE Pilots.

Extended routeways towards employment for such individuals are likely to draw on the inputs of numerous statutory and voluntary agencies, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes sequentially, as individual cases require. In supporting them the Pilots show the complementary advantages of:

- **system navigation:** the catalytic effect of employing an external agent (a link worker or personal caseworker) who uses proprietary knowledge to access services for clients who cannot do so themselves;
- **system reform and integration:** the more fundamental re-orchestration and integration of existing provision in order to offer a more coherent and joined-up system of skills and employment support provided by mainstream organisations working in partnership.

While the former is relatively quick and easy to introduce, the more substantial advantages of the latter require much more fundamental changes in the ways different agencies work, most particularly in the ways they co-operate. These approaches are often presented as alternatives. By contrast, the experiences of the Pilots suggest that it is their combination which works most effectively for particularly disadvantaged groups.

All three Pilots have been involved in working with, or in, collaborative partnerships. Their experience in this respect suggests that most effective partnerships benefit greatly from a formal framework within which more detailed working relationships could be developed, problems hammered out, practices reviewed and joint working at an operational level sanctioned. However, such formal arrangements were seldom sufficient to lead to their coherence at all levels unless operational staff within them found them to be an effective means of securing mutual operational advantages.

The ability of individuals to move more purposively between different support agencies and the ability of such agencies to co-operate effectively, would be enormously facilitated by the ready and accurate transfer of data about individuals. Thus, in order to be able to support the 'offender journey' from custody to community, and of others moving from social exclusion to employment, the mainstream agencies involved urgently need to find ways to develop more effective data-sharing protocols.

The Pilots showed the need to establish a more joined-up approach to employer engagement, in order to avoid confusion and maximise credibility with employers willing to recruit disadvantaged jobseekers. The Pilots only registered limited progress in this area partly because the various agencies involved all had their own competitive targets to meet around employer engagement and were, thus, reluctant to share information or contacts with partners. Employer engagement emerged as a contested area, with concerns about data protection issues and competition between partners around meeting their targets. These short-term projects had limited time or capacity to address such a complex and deep-seated problem.

Similarly, the relatively small size and/or limited duration of the ACE and ATW Pilots has significantly restricted their ability to achieve measurable outcomes or impacts, and this has been exacerbated by the extended durations likely to be required to achieve any evident impact with the target beneficiary groups. In addition, building up effective partnerships takes time and is likely to require a sustained period of engagement/marketing effort as well as practical evidence of utility, both of which are difficult for such new and time-limited Pilots to demonstrate. Finally, in so far as the ACE and ATW Pilots have sought to achieve system change from outside, they have been profoundly weakened by the contrast between their own small size and/or restricted lifetimes and the entrenched stolidity of the bureaucratic organisations through whom they hoped to achieve their ends. By contrast, the test bed Pilots, working from the inside, have generally avoided this difficulty but have themselves been constrained by a relatively short timeframe within which to effect change and the modesty of their additional budgets with which to achieve it.

In view of the character of the beneficiary groups targeted by the Pilots, their net impact through employment outcomes is likely to be low. Not only are the measurable job outcomes likely to be low but deadweight and substitution effects are also likely to be high. As a result, the application of standard ALMP yardsticks of cost-effectiveness to these Pilots is likely to yield relatively poor, but not strictly relevant, comparison. In addition, few of the Pilot organisations had given much evident attention to the issue of retention in employment. Although the fairly high retention rates achieved by Exit To Work should be acknowledged, there seems no further reason to suppose that the 'revolving door' syndrome, which has eroded the effectiveness of most ALM programmes ever since they were first introduced, will not equally undermine the job entry successes of these Pilots.

Finally, in addition to this issue of high staffing ratios, we identify a number of other factors which will influence the potential replicability of the kinds of approaches which these Pilots are testing. Prominent among these is the selection of the kinds of organisation (and/or individuals) delivering the Pilots and in particular, the extent to which mainstream organisations, without their particular attributes, could replicate their inputs.

Appendix A

Adults facing chronic exclusion: The ACE Pilots

While the Exit to Work Pilots and the Regional test bed Pilots deal exclusively with ex-offenders, the Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE) Pilots address a much more hard-to-reach constituency of individuals who are experiencing, or at risk of, acute social exclusion. Of course, the client group includes ex-offenders, and indeed some of the projects supported by the ACE funding are located in prisons, but the ACE focus is generally broader. It should be kept in mind though that most of the ACE Pilots clients are likely to have more extreme versions of the kind of difficulties which also affect many ex-offenders.

A.1 Pilot aims and objectives

In 2006, the Social Exclusion Task Force's *Reaching Out: An Action Plan on Social Exclusion* argued that there are a small number of localised problems which require intensive and specific action to help lift the hardest-to-reach groups out of poverty and disengagement from society. This requires solutions which are targeted, localised and tailored to the needs of individuals and families. It maintained that these problems will not be solved by a 'one size fits all' approach.

Reaching Out: An Action Plan on Social Exclusion announced 12 Pilots to improve service provision and support to secure better outcomes for adults who face chronic exclusion. The focus of the Pilots was intended to be on improving access to a range of support services for this group through promoting both system change and practical help for people to improve their ability to engage. It was envisaged that the Pilots would each run for three years from mid-2007.

A1.1 The formal objectives of the Pilot

The current system does not always best serve adults with complex and multi-faceted needs and it is feared that this often leads to such individuals seeking to

access services, which in turn appear to them to be chaotic, impenetrable and unhelpful. The Pilots are therefore intended to:

- offer substantive support and implement changes that will positively affect the impact on, and determinants of, chaos within adults' lives; while simultaneously;
- review and improve the structure and accessibility of services which they use.

The sponsoring Government departments are: the Home Office, Communities and Local Government, the Department of Health and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Each has pledged £1.5 million over the next three years for the Pilots. These are also represented on a Programme Board, chaired by the Director of the Social Exclusion Task Force.

The Pilots which have been selected fall into three categories:

- **System change:** Recognising the mixed and multi-layered character of the target group's needs, four Pilots aim to simplify the complexities associated with several separate statutory services (particularly housing, benefits, health and the criminal justice system) and, through working collaboratively, offer co-ordinated support to someone with multiple needs.
- **System navigation:** Working more from the client end of the relationship, these four Pilots offer practical help to people to access several social services at one time.
- **Transition points:** Four Pilots aim to help people to negotiate difficult times in their lives such as leaving prison, leaving care and fleeing domestic violence.

In practice, looking across all 12 Pilots, there is a good deal of common ground, common activities and common perspectives shared by most of them, and this tripartite distinction is somewhat less sharp in practice than it appears in the design.

A.2 Implementation and delivery

In this section we look first at how the Pilots were selected and at the resultant choice of Pilots.

A.2.1 Selection criteria for the Pilots

In selecting the 12 Pilots, some nine separate selection criteria were deployed and it is worthwhile noting them since they have an obvious, tactical/operational adjunct to DWP's more strategic purposes and rationale in supporting the general initiative.

The agreed selection criteria were:

- **identifying the target group:** this criterion considered the means through which the Pilots would identify the client group to ensure that clients would be the most chronically excluded in the Pilot area or would be at risk of joining this group;

- **collaborative working and partnerships:** this criterion considered the means through which the Pilots would ensure that the appropriate range of local partners would be involved in providing multi-agency support to the client group;
- **reducing negative impact:** this criterion focused on how the Pilots would reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, both in communities and families;
- **cost:** this asked how the proposals aimed to be cost effective and deliver better value for money;
- **difference and diversity:** this criterion considered the Pilots' understanding of the service user target group profile and the demography of the local community;
- **avoiding duplication:** this criterion ensured that Pilots had correctly identified a specific gap which their proposals aimed to fill;
- **governance and accountability:** this needed to be clear and appropriate;
- **user involvement and participation:** this asked how the Pilots would ensure that the voice of the user was heard and would be effectual in driving change;
- **evaluation:** this criterion considered how far the Pilots were willing to be involved in evaluation.

The ACE Pilots, selected for funding by these criteria, are commendably diverse, and it is worthwhile to begin by briefly outlining their separate objectives and approaches.

A.2.2 System change

The four Pilots in this category are:

Milton Keynes Link Worker Scheme (Link Worker Scheme)

A group of high needs people has been identified in Milton Keynes who struggle to access or engage with services and whose needs are therefore unmet. The resulting levels of personal chaos put them at considerable risk of offending. The Pilot is intended to bring together an enhanced menu of cross-systemic interventions to tackle this problem.

Specifically: (1) link workers are deployed to access and engage clients presenting across all crisis services; (2) a devolved budget is used to overcome obstacles to the delivery of a responsive and effective service; (3) a multi-agency partnership group is tasked with affecting wider system reform based on the feedback and evidence from the service; (4) this panel is advised by a service user advisory group on the allocation of system improvement budget to help fill gaps in provision; and (5) a system of community volunteer mentoring extends the reach of the project and builds community cohesion. Learning from the project will be formalised into a toolkit to aid national replication.

South West London Trust Merton (devising a 'Chaos Index')

This project aims to prevent the vicious circle of exclusion by early identification of people experiencing difficulties. The team aims to intervene early focusing on Merton residents not engaging in services, resulting in multiple exclusion, chaotic lifestyles and negative social outcomes for themselves, families and communities. Specific aims are: (1) collaborative agency working, to identify individuals or groups to target, using an agreed local 'chaos index'; and (2) development of integrated pathways moving clients from at-risk stages (e.g. prison release, repeat offending, discharge from NHS treatment, non-engagement in services, accommodation problems, etc.) to more structured engagement in services resulting in stable accommodation and employment or mainstream education/training.

The Pilot has established a New Directions Team (NDT) to case manage individuals and assist them in navigating mainstream services. It enjoys a multi-agency steering group for NDT, to 'flex' existing systems/eligibility criteria and enable systems change facilitating engagement in mainstream services and monitor NDT against agreed outcomes framework that incorporates individuals, families and services.

Bolton and Turning Point (Connected Communities Pilot)

The proposal is to conduct Connected Care audits in three of the most deprived areas in Bolton and to set up services based on these audits. Connected Care is a new approach to service delivery, integrating health and social care, as well as housing, employment and community safety, to provide targeted support for people with complex needs in deprived communities. The approach champions the provision of joined-up, bespoke services, which address the full range of individuals' needs, providing a single point of entry and navigation through services.

The key milestones of the Pilot are: the development of a resource audit; a Connected Care audit, profiling the level and breadth of needs within the community; and a cost benefits realisation exercise. These will feed into the development of a service specification for Connected Care services, providing a service model that can be evaluated against the outcomes framework and replicated nationally.

NOAH (early intervention outreach team)

The project is working with those who are chronically excluded in Luton and aims to be caringly proactive in engaging them in a range of co-ordinated support that will help them to improve the quality of their lives and avoid descent into crisis. The project will engage with 20 of the most chronically excluded individuals in Luton. The target group is identified through the steering group, a representative body consisting of members from all of the key agencies in the town. Once identified, the outreach workers seek to engage with these individuals and over time, complete a comprehensive assessment which identifies an individual's history, their current level of need and the services with which they have been, or are currently, engaged with. From this information, a pathway plan is developed which outlines a strategy to enable all identified needs to be met.

The formal objectives for the project are to successfully engage with those in most need within the community, to work with them to break the cycle of service provision and crisis interventions and thus, to enable them to lead a full and active life within the community.

Employment outcomes are among, but not prominent among, the Pilot's objectives for their clients, which focus on:

- a greater level of engagement with health and allied professionals to improve both physical and mental health;
- an increase in confidence and self-esteem;
- a more positive approach to life and the future;
- a reduction in anti-social and criminal behaviours;
- living in good quality accommodation which is appropriate to the needs of the individual;
- budgeting effectively and dealing with day-to-day issues in an appropriate manner;
- greater engagement with either training services/volunteering or employment.

A.2.3 System navigation

Offering practical help to people to access several social services at one time, the Pilots are:

MCCH Autism

This project aims to enable people with autism, learning difficulties or mental health problems to have fulfilling lives. It focuses on supporting people with autism and Asperger syndrome who are sometimes described as 'nobody's client' because they are often undiagnosed, neglected and ineligible for services or referred by default to services such as learning disability or mental health.

The key objective of this Pilot is to engage service users, commissioners and providers of services in developing better outcomes. To achieve this, the project offers person-centred planning, mentoring, advocacy and coaching and supported access to individual budgets and self-determined services through individual support. Increased engagement in vocational or employment activities is included as one of the several Pilot objectives.

St Mungo's: Counselling through Narrative Therapy

This Pilot provides group work sessions for socially excluded individuals in Lambeth, delivered in situ – in homelessness hostels, at day centres, and on wards. These are facilitated by a trained peer facilitator and a psychotherapist and supported by an individual psychotherapist who also provides support and training to the wider staff group working with these individuals. The aim of the group work is to enable

beneficiaries to manage their emotions and their interactions with others so that they can use services better.

The Pilot enables more effective use of existing services across the health and social care and education/training spectrum. It also focuses on increasing the benefit to individuals and groups of individuals – beneficiaries will exit the Pilot with enhanced abilities across the range of their interactions from personal relationships to aspirational achievement.

Hard outcomes sought include an increase in take up of employment and training opportunities and a decrease in offending and antisocial behaviours, and St Mungo's has an extensive provision of employment and training support under the auspices of its Pathways to Employment programme.

Calderdale Women's Centre (multi-agency panels)

The Pilot aims to identify those women who are experiencing chronic social exclusion as a direct result of domestic violence. Using a multi-agency risk assessment conference to identify those at risk, the Pilot focuses on the most serious and chronic domestic violence cases and provides the earliest possible interventions and support to women and their children.

The Pilot aims to develop a Common Assessment Framework and bring together a multi-agency team of health, social care, criminal justice and third sector professionals in order to develop an integrated approach and response to victims and perpetrators. The Pilot addresses complex issues such as: homelessness, substance misuse, child protection concerns, debt and finance, mental health, rape and sexual assault, which are often manifestations of domestic violence.

The project includes, among its objectives, an intention to encourage engagement of women in employment, education or volunteering opportunities.

Fairbridge

The project works with 100 adults, aged 19-25, over three years in Bristol. It proposes to guide them through a personalised development programme falling into five phases:

- **Engagement:** Beneficiaries are identified through collaborative working with partners' agencies and focusing on key transition points, including leaving care, mental health inpatient units and prison.
- **Diagnosis:** All beneficiaries start with a residential 'access' course, designed to provide a high sense of achievement. This enables key workers to start developing personal action plans when beneficiaries are away from their home environment and in a positive frame of mind.
- **Stabilisation:** A key aim of the project will be to enable people to stabilise their lives, through key worker support, to an extent where they are able to develop the skills and attitudes to start to manage their own development.

- **Development of protective factors:** With the support of their key worker, clients identify a personal development goal for each activity which relates to the outcomes framework provided and could include interpersonal skills or the skills needed for employability and independent living.
- **Progression:** As beneficiaries progress through the project and develop the ability to manage their own development, key workers also support beneficiaries to access specialist agencies, to address other factors such as housing and healthcare services.

Employment outcomes are not specifically emphasised in this Pilot, but Fairbridge offer access to in-house job-brokering and jobsearch support through their 'Jobwise' module.

A.2.4 Transition points

Helping people to negotiate difficult times in their lives such as leaving prison, leaving care and fleeing domestic violence, the Pilots are:

Thamesreach (employment for people who are homeless)

The Pilot works with floating support schemes in the London Boroughs of Southwark and Lewisham, to reintroduce adults facing chronic exclusion to employment. The experience of working with this group is that they have little recent positive experience of work. Given the prolonged worklessness of the group, the move back to work is not seen as straightforward but rather, may involve periods of unstable employment and of renewed unemployment should beneficiaries lose work. The Pilot will support beneficiaries through this period of transition with motivational support, specialist advice and a financial safety net to remove barriers to work and protect beneficiaries from the negative aspects of the transition to work.

The Pilot provides: (1) a period of group training which integrates both skill development and the development of peer support; (2) motivational action planning for each participant including ongoing support for an agreed period (around one year), during which they will be encouraged to take risks around employment and training; and (3) provide individual budgets to remove barriers to work. The Pilot expects that 60 per cent of the project beneficiaries will find sustainable employment within one year of completing the training course.

Tyneside Cyrenians (peer-led outreach for the chronically excluded)

Based in central Newcastle, this Pilot project uses day and night outreach to seek out chronically excluded individuals including rough sleepers, sex workers, prolific offenders and those with drugs, alcohol and mental health problems, enabling them to access an entire system of integrated support on one site through a non-threatening single point of entry. An important lesson learned from an earlier successful peer support project, Trading Places, was that those who have themselves experienced chronic exclusion are the people with whom the target

group are most likely to engage and are also excellent role models. Thus, a unique feature of this Pilot is that all those employed on the project are ex-service users. This provision of peer support, integrated with joint agency working, is presented by the Pilot as a pioneering method to meet the needs of adults with chronic exclusion.

The project's objectives therefore are to: (1) engage with individuals who have become excluded; (2) address the underlying issues which resulted in that isolation; and (3) to empower and motivate individuals to take advantage of opportunities to become fully integrated within society. This third objective includes pathways into training and employment, nested among others relating to health, housing, substance abuse and personal development.

After Adoption

Working with HMP Low Newton and HMP Styal, this pilot project is designed to engage with parents in prison, on remand and subsequently in the community whose children have been removed from their care – or who are at risk of this happening.

The trauma of losing children through this route and the resulting, often unrecognised, grief leaves parents vulnerable to mental health issues whilst in prison; on their release it is likely to result in a return to addictive and offending behaviour. This increases the risk of subsequent children being removed and placed in the Looked After system. Recognising the impact of adoption and addressing the vulnerability it can create will help prevent further trauma both for parents and subsequent children.

This project, therefore, aims to reduce the number of parents from the target group who have subsequent children taken from their care and thus, help break the cyclical patterns of disadvantage and poor outcomes for children. It will promote more healthy, positive relationships within families, promote positive coping mechanisms to the target group with a view to reducing the prevalence of addictive behaviour and rehabilitate the target group into the community and help forge positive, accessible networks to help break negative patterns of behaviour. It aims also to develop services in partnership with relevant agencies from both voluntary and public sectors.

Other objectives include the aim of improving the level of active participation in society of the target group (training, employment, community opportunities taken up, etc).

Counselling in Prisons and HMP Holloway (therapeutic intervention in HMP Holloway and through the prison gate)

This project aims to effect recommendations in the Corston Report (Home Office, 2007) by developing a 'prison without walls' counselling and psychotherapy programme. The model is a novel, integrated partnership approach to women's mental health in custody. Counselling in Prisons (CiP) and Holloway healthcare aim, therefore, to provide group therapy to women prisoners. The interventions will be modular and aim to increase life skills, emotional literacy, individual autonomy, self-esteem and confidence. Interventions will be offence-focused and aim to reduce self-harm, re-offending and to protect the public.

It is intended that transition from prison will be eased by one-to-one therapy commencing prior to release. This continues with the same therapist, for up to one year post-release, in a unique 'through the gate' follow-on programme. Group and one-to-one interventions are delivered by qualified clinicians and the Pilot's honorary (i.e. volunteer) practitioners in a new partnership developed for the programme. It is also hoped that training for prison officers will effect a cultural shift in managing 'difficult' women in custody. Practitioners will facilitate women's access to external agencies.

A.3 Experience to date

At the time of writing (Q1 2009) the Pilots are only about half way through their three year programme and so outcomes are strongly overlaid with formative considerations. Furthermore, the variety in the objectives and institutional settings of the 12 Pilots has produced considerable variation in their experience to date.

This applies also to the programme's planned evaluation, which, to date, has been much focused on establishing appropriate measures and baseline assessment methods. This evaluation, undertaken by Matrix Insight, has sought to monitor and measure the impact made by the Pilots on the lives and circumstances of those whose needs they have tried to serve. Given that this involved the attempt to measure possibly quite small, and often rather intangible, partial improvements, it represents an ambitious objective and one which, to date, has not been obviously successful. There have been serious problems in the design and more particularly, in the implementation, of a suite of assessment questionnaires to track individuals' progress through the Pilots and the effects of such progression on their actual and potential movement towards a more inclusive place in society. To date, we have seen no evidence derived from this source but it may be that this will only be produced towards the end of the Pilots' timeframe.

For these reasons, the Pilots' experiences, to date, are unlikely to be much more than a partial indicator towards the kinds of lesson which they will produce when operating for some time at full tempo and with the advantage of some movement up their individual learning curves.

Nevertheless, at this point, their collective experiences are worth assessing as they contain some important indicators about the kinds of problems they are working to address, plus a baseline perspective of provision for their target client group(s) as they begin their work. No doubt any early lessons which can be drawn from their early activities will be modified by subsequent experience and this should be kept in mind in reviewing what follows. Despite this, some common themes and experiences are beginning to emerge and it is worthwhile to capture them at the outset.

A.3.1 Capacity building

Broadly speaking, the early, initiation and capacity-building phase of the ACE initiative seems to have been extremely successful, with a generalised pattern of quite rapid and successful implementation of the different work plans. This is not to say that there have not been delays and difficulties in individual Pilots but these have been the exception rather than the rule.

Good choice of delivery organisations

A key factor which seems to us to explain and underpin this relatively smooth and quick initiation lies in the choice of the delivery organisations. It is evident that the successful ACE proposals come from organisations with established track records of work with the particular target group(s) on whom the ACE initiative focuses. Consequently, most have enjoyed rapid access to existing physical infrastructure (such as offices, equipment, managerial resource, staffing, etc.) which is appropriate for the Pilot. None of these Pilots has had to start from scratch and to a large degree they have been able to make use of existing capacity which is appropriate to their needs.

Impressive though this general speediness and fit-for-purposeness of the roll-out has been, it is probably worth noting that it may also contain an element of weakness when a broader canvas is considered. To the extent that potential replicability on a much larger scale is a facet of the Pilots' work that will need to be assessed later in the day, then it could be that the restricted deployment of such specialist organisations will prove a future constraint as much as it has provided a current advantage.

Deployment of appropriately skilled staff

For broadly the same reasons, most of the Pilots have experienced relatively little difficulty in getting trained/experienced staff in post. Whether the staff in question have been professional employees or ex-service users, whether on a paid or volunteer basis, the Pilots have mostly used inward transfers from related activity elsewhere in their organisations, with the consequent advantages of speed and appropriate skill-sets. Where they have resorted to specific external recruitment, three-year funding has provided an attractive basis for filling job vacancies.

Working from a familiar template

Finally, although to varying degrees the Pilots are trying something new, their innovations are nevertheless generally embedded in, and often derived directly from, a whole set of tried and tested (general) working procedures which are already in place and which (being derived from extended prior experience) are appropriate to the client group and operational context which the Pilots are now concentrating on.

A.3.2 Client engagement

Arising from a similar source, we have observed that the Pilots generally enjoy an established and positive relationship with their respective target groups and additionally, with other agencies who are also working with them. The depth of these roots, their location in exactly the right place (spatially in communities or institutionally in organisations) and their past record of success, mean that the visibility and credibility of the Pilots was already partly established, both with the client groups directly and with other organisations also working with them. Some of the Pilots represented extensions of the host organisation's usual work; thus, clients who might be attracted by, say, the organisation's provision of housing, can be identified through this and passed on to the Pilot through an internal referral. Clients might readily be encouraged to make use of the further support offered by the ACE Pilots if they had found the support provided by the organisation's core activities to be helpful.

Discussion with representatives of the Pilots suggests that it takes a considerable time to build up such working links so that they are effective conduits of client referrals. Externally, ad hoc contacts give way to informal partnership working, and subsequently to more formal partnerships and most of the Pilot organisations could show examples of all three. There appears to be a similar progression from one-off to sustained engagement with direct contacts with clients too.

As a result, the capacity of these particular organisations to reach out to, and engage with, their broad client groups, has generally been strong. The Pilots showed a wide range of methods through which they would implement outreach, involving assertive outreach (active searches for particular individuals or groups of individual), inter-agency networking and passive, i.e. via a drop-in or daycentre. This has provided the Pilots generally with a very good base which they can extend to engage with the particular groups and individuals on whom their ACE work intends to focus.

There had been some delays and difficulties reported from some of the Pilots in this respect but on the whole these were circumstantial and not systematic. Problems around the passage of data from one agency to another was, however, much more prevalent.

A.3.3 Eligibility and client buy-in

One of the defining characteristics of the ACE Pilots' target groups is that they often experience difficulty in complying with and/or maintaining the formal processes inherent in mainstream agencies. Furthermore, it is important to remember that their co-operation with the Pilots is entirely voluntary on their part. This has led some of the Pilots to lay stress on a relatively informal referral process whereby the eligibility of potential clients might be recognised by a number of quite general 'core conditions' and their 'participation' in the Pilot marked by relatively informal procedures around assessment and compliance, in the belief that overt formality might be off-putting to the client and counterproductive in reaching a beneficial outcome for the individual.

Other Pilots believed that a certain level of formality would be positively helpful to clients, in that it would prepare them for engagement with significantly more demanding environments in the future. Others also believed that some clients, for example, ex-offender clients, had already had a structured lifestyle imposed on them, and so compliance ought not to be such a great difficulty.

However, in practice this seems to be largely a matter of fine tuning. Whatever their precise mix of informality and precision, all the Pilots offered a significantly more comfortable and supportive environment than their mainstream counterparts and were acutely aware of the danger of client drop-out brought about by too challenging an atmosphere.

A.3.4 Provision

Despite their diversity in their target groups and the key features of the interventions they had devised, it is clear that there is some coherence among the Pilots in respect of the types of intervention that they provide, for example, all seem to address, in some way, their clients' needs to navigate the system and to provide some level of advice, guidance and personal support.

However, it could be argued that such coherence is the lowest common denominator and that a lack of consistency between the Pilots is a weakness. For example, the ACE Evaluation Interim Report, produced by the Pilots' evaluation team at Matrix Insight (16 February 2009) suggests that:

'There is no unanimity amongst the projects in providing services that deal with "system change" and "transition points"... if all the Pilots in the programme were able to deliver interventions that are tackling all three types of intervention, then the programme would be more coherent and the individual Pilots more intensive....

The coherence of the programme appears to be further undermined when the Pilots are characterised as being either pragmatic or programmatic. Here the Pilots were almost evenly split between those that are programme based and those that deal practically with the needs of the clients as they arise.... Whilst there was no seeming consensus amongst the Pilots, this does point

once again to the Pilots being accommodating and flexible to their clients and responding to their needs individually.... Such flexibility could confound whether the theory of change could be tested in a consistent manner at either a programme or Pilot level.’ (P.35)

Whatever the balance of advantage and disadvantage over these design and implementation features, in so far as the Pilots sought to provide employment-oriented support and guidance, we can observe a certain consistency and convergence. It is our view that if such commonality can be discerned across extremely varied client groups and between the different ‘specialisms’ of the organisations working with them, it is likely to have a certain common utility and widespread relevance. In what follows then, we focus explicitly on what practices unite the Pilots’ efforts to promote employability, rather than on what distinguishes them.

It is important first to point out that most of the ACE Pilot respondents felt that their clients faced extremely lengthy and difficult transitions to move them to a point where they were employable. Some pointed to the fact that some of their clients would have experienced almost their whole lifetimes enmeshed in chaotic and restrictive lifestyles, with profound consequences for both their present circumstances (health, mental health, human capital, etc.) and their potential progression to something better. Others pointed to the very common patterns of alternating progress and regression as clients were unable to sustain improvements in the face of their often extreme exposure to ‘events’. Still others pointed to the extreme distance between present circumstances and the requirements of employability.

As a result, virtually all our respondents in these Pilots felt that almost all of their clients would take a considerable period of time before they would achieve employability in a regular commercial environment. Many felt that employability would be beyond the reach of some clients. Some felt that some would never attain it and that intermediate outcomes were all that were realistically possible.

Insofar as these Pilots sought to prepare at least some of their clients for entry into employment, the key means through which they tried to do so were as follows.

Stabilisation

Most ACE respondents stressed the necessity for stabilisation of client circumstances and behaviour as a pre-condition for constructive work with them leading to employment outcomes. There seems to be a distinction between initial stabilisation (often involving getting the client off the streets or away from potential hazard) and subsequent efforts to address their main problems. Some respondents made a clear distinction between core stabilisation (usually addressing homelessness and/or substance abuse and ‘sorting out’ the client’s benefit eligibility and receipt) and a more individualised, secondary stabilisation (which would vary considerably from one person to the next but might involve health concerns, mental health problems, debt, etc.). Whatever the individual specifics and whatever the particular approach to stabilisation favoured by

different organisations, the importance of this phase can hardly be exaggerated, nor should the difficulty of securing it be overlooked.

For many of the organisations delivering the ACE Pilots, this stabilisation phase represents their core or historic function. This is what they were often set up to do; it is what they tend to specialise in; it is the area that soaks up most of their money and staff resource. Our initial discussions with them suggest that their specialised insight into, and provision to deal with, subsequent phases of the long transition to employability are generally less well developed; tend to be developed in smaller adjuncts to the core organisation; have been less well funded over time; etc. Of course, it is part of the ACE initiative precisely to help some of them to test out routeways which extend beyond their core functions but in so doing they are tending to move off their principal area of expertise and to work with a minority of their core client group.

Assess employability and devise action plan

Although the timing of this assessment and planning phase varied somewhat from Pilot to Pilot, it usually involved the identification and articulation of specific and individual goals to which clients aspired, the assessment of the skills which they had and which would help them attain these goals and conversely, the ones they lacked which they would need to secure to do so. There are strong parallels here with the intention to introduce widespread mandatory skill health checks for all new Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) recipients.

Encouraging positive activities

Several of the Pilots were encouraging clients to engage in various activities, at the very least to break down a possible habit of passivity and inactivity, and either directly or indirectly to develop their own skillset. Such ambitions are usually split up into separate, credibly achievable pieces, which build from behavioural/attitudinal facets, through basic employability skills, and towards key skills.

Keyworker support

This was widely regarded by the Pilots as a vital aspect of their provision, extending from the initial stabilisation phase, through the capacity-building phases, and into employment (actually beyond initial job-entry in two cases where in-work support was being piloted). Staff-client ratios were generally low. Several of the Pilots had opted to deploy ex-service users as keyworkers in this way; emphasising rapport and insight. Others had gone for professionally qualified staff, emphasising perhaps broader perspectives.

Most of the Pilots were aware of the need for, and committed to providing, relatively high ratios of key worker support on an individual basis to clients at all stages on this journey. One area where several saw considerable potential was in ensuring the compliance of clients with the actions agreed in their Action Plan. Thus, for some of them, real value added lay less in devising novel or sophisticated things for their clients to do and more in making sure that they did the simple and straightforward things effectively.

The Tyneside Cyrenians ‘Refer and Accompany’ model may be instructive here, with its strong emphasis on ensuring that clients complied with such referrals as had been made for them, particularly where these were mandatory (e.g. probation, signing on, etc.) or of considerable importance for their well-being (drug treatment, health appointments, etc.).

Benefits

Getting clients onto the correct benefit was widely seen as an important facet of stabilisation, which would help clients to establish the basics of independent sustainable living through having a reliable source of personal income.

Transitional moves towards employment

An important element in moving clients towards regular employment is the creation (or use) by some of the Pilots of quasi-employment environments where clients can experience and get used to the kinds of disciplines which regular employment will require of them and so simultaneously build their capacity and self-confidence. The Pilots were variously making use of several different forms of quasi employment, as Table A.1 shows.

The Pilots have some advantage in their varied access to such arrangements and practice in making them work. However, they also face an important challenge in maintaining the progression of individuals, essentially from left to right across the table, from less to more challenging environments and from dependent to independent status. The ratio of programme entrants to job entrants cited above suggests that without some means of ensuring progression, such provision might easily get clogged up, even with the relatively modest throughputs which the Pilots envisage.

Table A.1 Progression through work environments

In-house		Supported		Regular	
Pre-employment	Sessional	Intermediate	Supported	Trial	Sustained
Community involvement or recreational activities. Unwaged activities, e.g.: volunteering, training programmes, development opportunities.	Specific short term roles for service users; e.g.: auditing, recruitment panels, peer support. Remain on benefits work does not affect. Funded through specific streams.	Intermediate labour market; set up for service users to gain employment. Commercially viable but may be supported/ established by additional funding.	Distinct projects to train and support service users – such as traineeships and mentoring programmes.	Work trial, Placement, usually with ongoing support from keyworker.	Regular paid employment. In some cases with regular and ongoing support from keyworker.

Source: Derived from Thamesreach.

End game: joining the real labour market

Several of the Pilots had made internal provision for in-house jobsearch training and job-broking support for clients approaching the end of their provision. In some cases, they already had some experience of delivering this (e.g. Fairbridge's jobwise suite) or were experimenting with employment-focused courses and caseworker support (Thamesreach).

What is perhaps more surprising is the rather limited use the Pilots had made of Jobcentre Plus' services in this respect. Several of the Pilots reported unfortunate experiences in accessing Jobcentre Plus' programmes for their clients. In part this may reflect a different perspective on expectations held by the Pilot staff and Jobcentre Plus staff, with the former used to operating in a client-centred mode, with things progressing in a direction and at a pace that maintains the client's comfort. This is simply not the way that jobcentres operate and the Pilots had encountered problems in several related areas in this respect, as follows:

- The assumptions held by Jobcentre Plus staff about the capacity of customers to implement independent jobsearch effectively often do not apply to the ACE client group.
- The requirement for regularity, sustained effort and evidence of it with which mainstream jobseekers can readily comply is more difficult for ACE clients to attain/sustain.
- ACE Pilot clients are not always able to comply with expectations about their inter-personal behaviour and demeanour.
- The staff which ACE clients are most likely to encounter at the jobcentre are rarely specialised in dealing with a group for whom Jobcentre Plus makes no 'priority group' provision and are often the most junior/least experienced/least time-free staff.

Furthermore, the presence of Pilot caseworkers accompanying their clients does not seem to have been a wholly satisfactory way to bridge this expectations gap.

A few of the Pilots had made some headway in building formal links with Jobcentre Plus through local partnerships and it seems to us that this 'top-down' approach might yield better dividends than futile exchanges at the signing-on desk. However, in other cases, for example Thamesreach, where this groundwork had been laid, the prospects for collaborative working seemed much enhanced.

A.3.5 Employment outcomes

We conclude that most clients entering ACE-like provision are likely to face an extended period of intervention and support before there is much chance of their becoming employable. This implies the need for an extended chain of provision, sequentially addressing clients' varied and multiple problems and moving them closer to employment.

Many may not make it at all, either because they drop out of the programme at some point or simply because they are unable to cope with the demands which employment would place on them. This implies that there will be other, earlier, non-employment stages of provision, which for some are just milestones but for many are outcomes.

Although some of the Pilots have produced ad hoc accounts of their progress in this respect, there has been no overall estimate of the numbers of individuals who have entered and remained in employment as a result of the Pilots' work. Indeed, it is difficult to see how such an account might reliably be produced, since the questionnaire on which such measures must be based asks only whether the individual 'is currently unemployed' at several different stages of their progression through one or other of the Pilots. Not only is this question susceptible to considerable misinterpretation (i.e. does it mean in receipt of JSA or simply not working but looking or altogether inactive?) it is also undermined by the several different features of being 'unemployed' which testify to quite different levels of employability and intentions to work. This lack of attention to measuring job outcomes is quite consistent with the broad thrust of the Pilots towards achieving outcomes other than paid work.

Appendix B

The Next Steps test bed Regional Pilots

This appendix focuses on the Next Steps test bed Regional Pilots. It provides a more detailed account of test bed activity than was given in the interim report, which was written at a time when implementation of test bed activity was not yet underway.

This appendix sets out the following:

- a brief summary of Pilot objectives and activities;
- test bed implementation;
- test bed activities;
- lessons from the Pilot;
- prospects for the future.

The appendix draws on a number of in-depth qualitative interviews with key test bed stakeholders from a number of different agencies, that were conducted throughout the life of the Pilots, as well as wider evidence where appropriate. Interviewees are referred to as 'stakeholders' or simply 'interviewees'.

B.1 Pilot objectives and activities

The Next Steps test bed Regional Pilots were established in the East of England and West Midlands region in October 2007 to help drive forward the proposals set out in: *Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment* (DfES, Home Office, DWP, 2005). This made a number of commitments about the work of the test bed regions but the Next Steps document specified three broad aims of the test bed Pilots and detailed a number of objectives within these.⁶

⁶ DfES, Home Office, DWP (2006). *Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment: Next Steps*.

These broad aims were to:

- engage employers through the Reducing Re-Offending Corporate Alliance and make use of mechanisms such as Work Trials and Job Developers (where they are in place) to move beneficiaries of the Pilot closer to work;
- use the development of the campus model to build on the new offender learning and skills service;
- build on the new emphasis on skills and jobs in prisons and probation.

The two test bed regions have focused on a select number of objectives within these three broad aims, predicated on existing regional strengths around skills and employment provision, on what can realistically be achieved within the two-year life span of the test bed Pilot and on the relatively low level of Pilot funding (£250,000 per year, per region). The test bed Pilots were set up explicitly to draw on, and be sustainable within, existing resources. Officials took the view that although earlier pilots had been able to do great things because of extra money, they were often unable to sustain them when the money ran out.

The interim report found broad consensus among test bed stakeholders that the test bed Pilots would attempt to better co-ordinate existing provision to deliver an 'holistic' skills and employment offer, rather than attempt a significant increase in skills and employment delivery. This view of the Pilot's overarching aim has not changed during the course of the Pilots, although stakeholders have increasingly regarded this kind of 'system change' as a longer-term vision as their understanding of what would be needed to achieve this goal has developed.

B.2 Test bed implementation

As noted in the interim report, test bed implementation has drawn largely upon the existing regional infrastructures and organisational arrangements to deliver a more holistic model of support. Test bed implementation has therefore concentrated on re-engineering existing provision of skills and employment support (some of which was already working towards various aspects of test bed goals), rather than on wholesale systemic change.

Some important aspects of test bed work, however, have been implemented through new elements – namely the deployment of employability compacts and the use of ICT in the delivery of client learning and jobsearch. In the very early days of the test bed Pilots, it was thought that these elements might form part of the 'campus model' (a concept described in more detail below) but as the Pilots have progressed, so has the concept of the 'campus model' itself, although it would be fair to say that stakeholders had not always found this concept particularly helpful.

These methods of implementation are described and assessed in more detail below.

B.2.1 Building on existing regional infrastructures and organisational arrangements

Drawing on existing regional infrastructures, partnerships and organisational arrangements formed the basis of both the initial regional bids to become test bed regions. This was regarded as a necessary approach among test bed stakeholders given the two-year timescale of the Pilot and the modest level of Pilot funding.

In both regions, they were able to draw on well-established and relevant partnerships that were already in place to secure early buy-in to aspects of test bed development, such as the the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) Regional Reducing re-offending Board and the Offender Learning and Skills Regional Boards. In one region, existing regional partnerships and groups were subsumed by a test bed Management Group and a test bed Board, which at once established a degree of accountability for test bed activity and usefully brought together representatives from the key test bed agencies who were already members of these groups. The test bed Pilots were also able to draw on existing sub-regional groups and partnership arrangements to ease co-ordination at the local level. This was important as both regions piloted some of their initial development work around skills and employment support in specific prisons and probation areas. Finally, the test bed Pilots were able to draw on existing streams of funding in the region to take forward promising pieces of work under the test bed Pilots. For example, the European Social Fund (ESF)-funded EQUAL Engage projects in the East of England proved particularly successful work for the test bed to build on; the *Seeing is Believing* events run under EQUAL were well received so the region ran further events using test bed funding.⁷ EQUAL Engage also allowed the funding of the cross-prison matrix development which worked towards ensuring common standards of Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) provision in a number of prisons in the region.

With the modest level of Pilot funding, only three new, full-time posts were created within the test bed Pilots: two test bed managers to co-ordinate overall test bed work and one Assistant Manager in the East of England region to take a lead on communications and publicity. The Pilots then sourced staff from relevant agencies (prisons, probation, Jobcentre Plus, etc.) by buying in their expertise part time (i.e.: a few days per week), or through seconding them into test bed activity for the duration of the Pilot.

B.2.2 Re-engineering existing provision

Existing provision of skills and employment support for clients in both test bed regions is provided by a variety of contractors that are managed by the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS), which has remained at the core of managing skills and employment provision during the course of the Pilots. The continuing role for OLASS in contracting, managing and co-ordinating provision has allowed

⁷ Events which provide employers and partners with the opportunity to see, first hand, the training delivered to help offenders become more employable.

the test bed Pilots to effectively build upon existing skills and employment provision in the region to pilot new ways of working within the time and resource constraints of the Pilot. At the same time, it also allowed the test bed Pilots to consolidate some of the work that had already begun in the region. The focus of the test bed Pilots, therefore, has not been on increasing provision, or introducing new programmes of skills and employment support, but about making sure this provision is used in the most effective way by improving the processes for client referral, progression and support in both custody and the community.

In both regions, the test bed work built on elements of a number of time-limited and local projects that were already underway.

In broad terms, the existing provision in the test bed regions aimed at delivering sustained employment for clients in both custody and the community. To this end, most skills and employment programmes were working towards getting clients into training, paid employment, work trials, work placements or unpaid work experience. This often involved some combination of basic skills and employability training along with additional support for clients who were received back into custody or the community.

The test bed work was aimed at re-engineering much of this provision to:

- **improve working links** between agencies and procedures to provide a seamless system of skills and employment support for clients, drawing on provision such as regional and local partnerships and the Job Developer;
- **build a new emphasis on employability and skills in prisons and probation;**
- **engage employers** to better integrate vocational skills and employment opportunities for clients.

Under the test bed Pilots, further work on skills assessments, mentoring, and enhanced information, advice and guidance (IAG) was developed which consolidated some activity which was already underway in the region (more details of these activities are described in the section on 'test bed activities' below).

B.2.3 The campus model

The broad aim of the campus model, as set out in the Next Steps document, is: *'to sharpen the focus on skills and employment to reduce re-offending'* with a longer-term vision of the campus model outlined as a seamless system of holistic support built around the client. In the interim report, there was evidence that the campus model had caused a degree of initial confusion among key stakeholders regarding what the campus model was, and what its constituent activities might include. However, most key stakeholders broadly interpreted the campus model as the means by which to facilitate and develop an 'holistic offer' regarding skills and employment provision and support. In practical terms, it was thought that this would involve a number of component activities in the first instance: probable use of ICT to facilitate client learning, the use of employability compacts, aspects of tailored support (mentoring and IAG) and employer engagement.

In practice, the test bed Pilots have progressed work in all these areas (detailed in Section B.3), although they have not explicitly considered this to be part of a 'campus model', or constituent of 'campus activity.' Instead, it would appear that the test bed Pilots have always viewed the larger, grander vision of the campus model (as outlined in the Next Steps document), as a much more long-term goal of system change that stretches beyond the two-year timeframe and resources of the Pilot. As such, references to the 'campus model' or 'campus activities' did not feature in stakeholder interviews, working plans or progress reports and stakeholders found it more useful to refer to individual components of work, rather than 'campus activities'.

B.2.4 Summary of implementation

The implementation of the test bed Pilots can be summarised as that which has involved:

- building on and consolidating existing regional infrastructures and organisational arrangements;
- re-engineering existing skills and employment provision; and
- to a lesser degree, some new elements of test bed work.

To a large extent, implementation of the test bed Pilots has been determined by relatively short timescale of the Pilot and the low level of pilot funding, which has meant that the Pilots have had to draw on existing provision in their respective regions and further limit their work to those sub-regional areas where provision is already available. In this regard, their choice of approach has been constrained and they have sensibly contained test bed activity to within realistic goals.

This approach has had other strengths too. Drawing on regional infrastructure has allowed the test bed Pilots to quickly establish governance arrangements for the Pilots and a degree of accountability for pilot activity. Many stakeholders also reported that this approach helped to quickly establish a test bed 'agenda' and to a lesser degree a test bed 'brand', among relevant agencies and individuals who were already involved in similar agendas. This helped secure early sign up to the test bed agenda at an early stage and consolidate the idea that this was an agenda that they all had collective ownership of, and accountability to. This early sign-up to the test bed agenda proved to be important as the Pilot progressed because it helped facilitate much of the cross-agency working that was often necessary to 'make things happen', as one stakeholder put it. This is discussed in more detail in Section B.1.

Although it made sense to draw on existing regional infrastructures, organisational arrangements and provision, arguably one inevitable drawback was that it also meant that the test bed Pilots had to work with existing problems. Most of these problems centred around multi-agency co-ordination and a lack of data sharing protocols – both of which acted as significant constraints upon the Pilots. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

B.3 Test bed activities

As mentioned in Section B.2.2, the test bed regions broadly aimed at re-engineering much of their existing provision to:

- **improve working links** between agencies and procedures to provide a seamless system of skills and employment support for ex-clients, drawing on provision such as regional and local partnerships and the Job Developer;
- **build a new emphasis on employability and skills in prisons and probation;**
- **engage employers** to better integrate vocational skills and employment opportunities for clients.

The test bed regions focused on all three elements in their work, although for the most part this did not involve any new programmes or provision. This is because, in a number of areas, there was not necessarily an issue with the provision itself but with how it linked up to other components in the wider system of support and resettlement pathways. As a result, a lot of initial work centred around how to iron out problems in the link-up of provision and support and how to ensure that standards of provision and support were more consistent across prisons and probation areas.

The main areas of test bed activity across the two regions are summarised in Table B.1, with key activities highlighted in bold.

Table B.1 Summary of key test bed activities across the two regions

Objective	Key activity across both regions
To improve working links between relevant organisations and agencies	<p>Improving processes and referral procedures</p> <p>Review of current operating models to identify what needs to be improved</p> <p>Regional events and meetings to examine how agencies can work better together</p> <p>Ongoing work to establish co-operation and build practical working relationships between agencies</p>
To tailor and target support to beneficiaries	<p>Identifying those clients who would benefit from a programme of employment-focused skills and training</p> <p>Sector-based approach to identifying potential job vacancies for clients</p>

Continued

Table B.1 Continued

Objective	Key activity across both regions
To engage employers and develop and more demand-led approach	Establishing and Employer Leadership Group Ongoing development of links with employers, sector skills councils and recruitment agencies through networking, workshops and one-off events Referral and information sharing protocols Enhanced communication arrangements between key stakeholders Co-ordinating employer engagement Securing work trials, work experience and unpaid work Using employer input to develop demand-led, employment-focused skills training
To build a new emphasis on employability and skills in prisons and probation	Employability compacts in custody and community Identifying and developing sector skills projects National test bed workshop showcasing ongoing employability and skills work in one test bed prison Virtual Campus Pilots

Source: IES.

B.3.1 Improving working links

Improving the working links between organisations and procedures was always regarded by the test bed regions to be critical to delivering a more coherent system of skills and employment provision. While the provision itself was often good, across both regions as a whole, it was patchy in its availability, variable in its content and design and often ineffective when not effectively sequenced alongside other necessary interventions or when not picked up ‘through the gate.’ System navigation, therefore, is complex and arguably the most significant barrier to helping clients move towards the labour market.

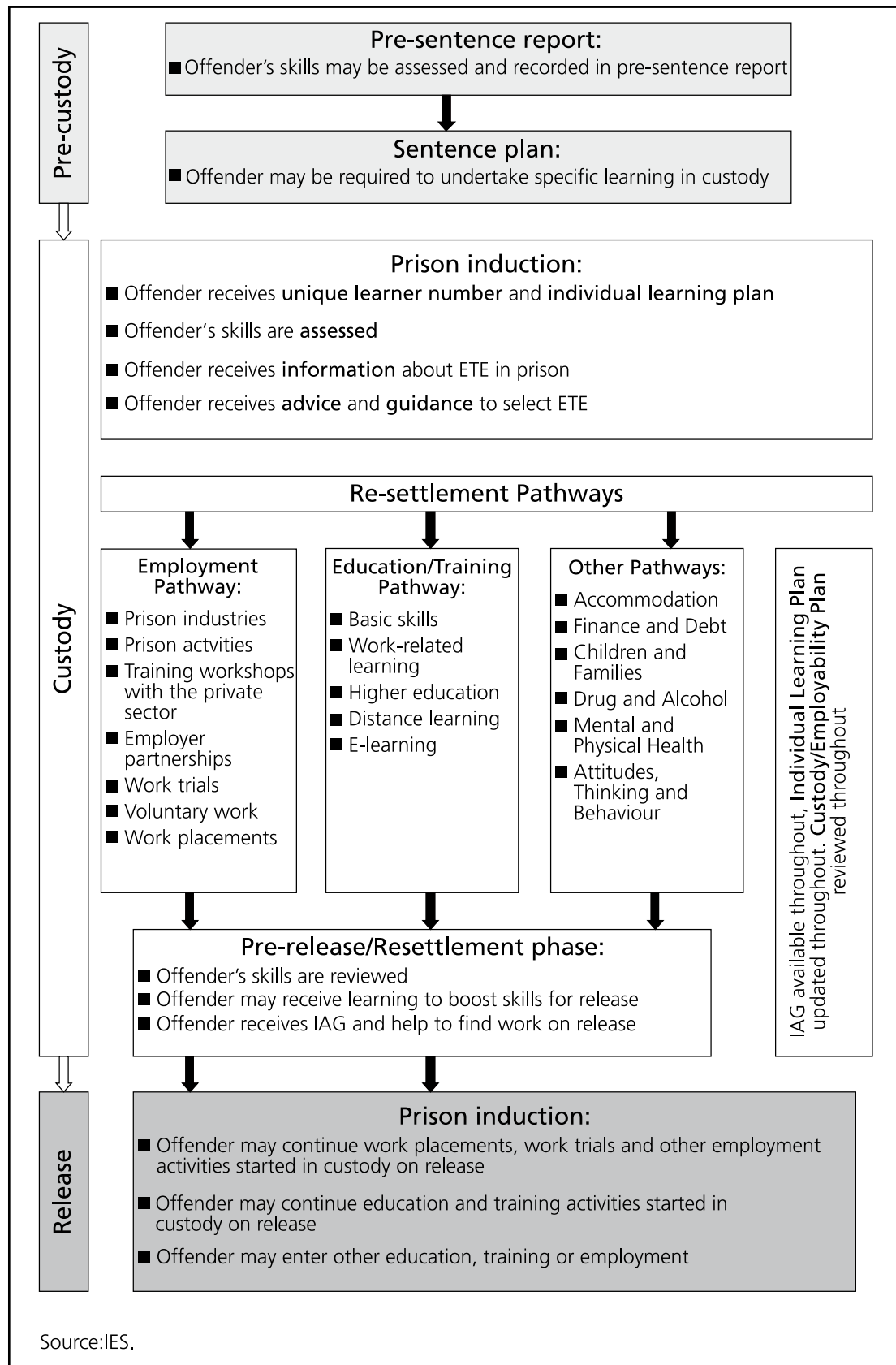
Figure B.1 maps what a current skills and employment ‘journey’ for clients might look like alongside other resettlement pathways and interventions. It illustrates current skills and employment options for clients and gives some idea as to how important it is to have effective working links between the different stages of the journey.

In this sense, Figure B.1 remains very much a map for illustrative purposes because in many prison and probation areas, the actual skills and employment ‘journey’ looks a lot more fragmented, with some skills and employment options not currently prioritised or even available and with poor existing links between the various stages of the journey.

Test bed work concentrated on improving the links between the various components of the client journey through custody (highlighted by the black arrows in Figure B.1). The test bed Pilots did this through a number of activities: First, there was a degree of activity around **auditing and reviewing existing processes and in the regions** – identifying existing delivery mechanisms and how well they were working in prison and probation settings. From this, test bed staff were able to identify a lack of standard operational models across the region's institutions for many key procedures, and inconsistencies in how particular data was being recorded and collected. Second, test bed Pilots worked to **improve key skills and employment processes and procedures**. This focused around improving induction and referral procedures and models as these were seen as key to how well learners can progress. These efforts were mostly trialled in particular prisons and probation areas first before being considered for broader roll out. Lastly, test bed Pilots worked to **build practical working relationships between the key agencies** involved in delivering skills and employment provision: Jobcentre Plus, prisons, probation, the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), skills and employment providers and the Regional Offender Management (ROM)'s office. Some of this was started by the work around the first two activities, which necessarily involved a degree of multi-agency co-operation and contact but a lot of this work was also done through regional events aimed at bringing organisations together to better understand their respective roles and how they work to progress skills and employment support for beneficiaries. A huge amount of this work was also done through 'behind the scenes' activity, where test bed managers worked to get a particular individual or institution on board to further test bed work on a practical level. This was important because although many organisations, such as prisons and probation, had signed up to the test bed agenda at the regional level, this did not always translate into co-operation at the sub-regional level. This meant that there was sometimes a lack of co-operation at the local level to solve some of the practical operational barriers that impeded the effective delivery of skills and employment support – for example, getting laptops into prison settings for use by Jobcentre Plus advisers.

A key outcome for one test bed, as a result of all three of the above activities, was the development of cross-prison Matrix standards for IAG services in four prisons. This ensured that any organisation offering IAG in these four prisons was delivering their work to common standards and co-ordinating their efforts more effectively to avoid duplication. The process of working towards a common Matrix standard in these prisons highlighted the different working practices between organisations who offered IAG across the various resettlement pathways and the lack of knowledge about their different roles. This, in turn, got staff from across the prison and all organisations working together and focused their attention on the quality of delivery and Service Level Agreement (SLA) requirements.

Figure B.1 Mapping skills and employment options for offenders in custody



It would be fair to say that the test bed Pilots have made good progress over the duration of the Pilots in improving working links between organisations and procedures – albeit more in terms of ‘preparing the ground’ for better working links in the future, than in terms of tangible products. Despite the *‘lack of tangible test bed products’*, as one stakeholder described it, there was a strong sense among all test bed stakeholders that preparing the groundwork for realising the longer-term vision of a more joined-up system of skills and employment delivery was possibly one of the most positive developments to have come out of the test bed Pilots. The relationships built between particular organisations and agencies, the conversation that emerged out of test bed activity, and the learning gained from the levels of stakeholder engagement that the test bed Pilots facilitated, have all been critical in laying the foundations for further work around broader aspects of system change. As one stakeholder put it, when describing the ongoing challenge of trying to improve cross-agency co-ordination: *‘We’re doing the hard bit’*.

Moreover, through painstakingly reviewing some of the key skills and employment-related processes across the region’s prisons and probation areas, the test bed Pilots were able to identify exactly where these processes were the weakest/strongest; where they were completely lacking in some cases; where they were working well and why; and what more needed to be done to improve them in particular areas. Many of these outputs may not have been tangible, and may have not always have been without their difficulties but they all seemed to be important and necessary ‘first steps’ from which test bed work could progress.

In this sense, it would seem that these activities were no less important than some of the more tangible test bed products because they involved some of the much harder tasks of trying to negotiate and achieve cross-agency engagement, co-operation and understanding of test bed goals.

B.3.2 Build a new emphasis on employability and skills in prisons and probation

The test bed Pilots worked towards building a new emphasis on employability and skills through three key activities. The first was the introduction of the **Virtual Campus** into a small number of prisons. This is a secure IT-based integrated learning and information environment that offers resettlement and learning opportunities to clients and draws in open market vacancies from on-line recruitment sites.

Of the three activities, the progress on the Virtual Campus has been particularly successful in the two regions. Although this is still relatively small-scale, both in terms of the number of prisons that have this facility and in terms of the number of beneficiaries who have access to it, establishing the Virtual Campus has been no mean feat for the test bed regions. Aside from managing the practical implementation of the Virtual Campus, the test bed Pilots have also had to address security risks and concerns around providing internet access in a prison setting. Having managed the implementation of a secure IT platform, the test bed Pilots have been able to facilitate the first kind of IT-based skills and employment provision of its kind in a UK prison setting.

The second key activity was the **piloting of employability compacts** in a select number of prisons and in particular areas of the community. These compacts offered vocational training to a select number of prisoners who met certain requirements. The employability compacts in both regions have had a positive response to date, although again, these were relatively small-scale Pilots which dealt with small numbers of beneficiaries in the first instance. At the time of writing, the Pilots were still being evaluated, however stakeholders reported positive response from the parties involved to date, including many clients who were keen to sign up as part of the compacts. The main value of the employability compacts would appear to be their potential to usefully bring together a number of different organisations, as well as the beneficiaries themselves, to progress the beneficiary's journey towards work in a very practical way. In their current form and scale, their overall impact may be minimal but the Pilots have at the very least demonstrated the potential for multi-agency co-operation in this regard and also the potential of involving the beneficiary in the process too.

One stakeholder described a streetworks project that had encouraged organisations to work together under an employability compact. Under this project, beneficiaries in custody or community received licences to work on the highway, with two providers offering IAG and training in return for the beneficiary signing up to meet the project's requirements (for example, promising to stay alcohol free). Prison and probation were also necessarily involved, as was an employer if they could offer a guaranteed interview. In this instance, stakeholders reported that there were some observable benefits to empowering learners to take responsibility for their own learning:

'It works because it's about all parties signing up to what they are offering and it is a two-way street. The learner is part of that two-way street too and I think that's very effective. Obviously where you can get an employer on board as well, that's the icing on the cake.'

(Stakeholder interview)

The third key activity was **sector-based approaches to identify job vacancies** for beneficiaries. Both test bed regions took a **sectoral approach** in order to target employment opportunities for beneficiaries and engage employers. In the East of England, these sectors were: construction; logistics, retail and hospitality. In addition, there are some areas of horticulture, manufacturing and waste management which were also targeted for training and employment opportunities. In the West Midlands, these sectors were: construction, hospitality and catering, logistics, industrial cleaning and some areas within the public sector. These areas were targeted largely because of the high number of unfilled vacancies available, but also because of the potential to offer suitable jobs for beneficiaries, and previous employment opportunities that have arisen from employers in these sectors. In broad terms, these sectors are also closely aligned to those which are already the focus of broader regional partnerships and economic planning: for example, the seven priority sectors detailed in the East of England Regional Economic Strategy and the priority sectors of the West Midlands Corporate Alliance.

It is difficult to assess how well this aspect of the test bed work fared for two reasons: The first is because some of this work with employers and with particular sectors was already underway in the region before the test bed work started, making it difficult to distinguish the specifically test bed elements of this work in some cases. The second reason is because at the time of conducting the final wave of fieldwork (November/December 2008), the UK was on the brink of recession and stakeholders reported that this was making sectoral approaches and employers' engagement a lot more challenging.

Nevertheless, the test bed Pilots were both active on this front. In one region, the test bed seconded in a prison representative's time for two days a week. This representative then went on to approach a number of employers in a couple of sectors with a view to establishing employer skills needs and arranging work placements. As a result there was an increase in the number of beneficiaries on work placements, although a lot of time was spent following up offers of support from employers and tracking down the right people to speak to.

B.3.3 Employer engagement

As the interim report noted, both test bed Pilots placed a heavy emphasis on **employer engagement**, with an intention to both embed existing activity in existing structures and partnerships; to drive forward this work to provide for further employment opportunities for beneficiaries; and to advance a more demand-led approach to vocational skills training for beneficiaries. Further employment opportunities through this route in the East of England were to include work trials; Recruit, Train and Guaranteed interview 'packages'; and more opportunities for self-employment. In the West Midlands, work opportunities through employer engagement were to include work trials; opportunities for voluntary work or work experience; more opportunities for self-employment; Recruit, Train and Interview packages; and aspects of the mentoring scheme which aim to draw on employers' staff for potential mentors.

It would be fair to say that this was arguably the least successful aspect of test bed work. Both test bed Pilots spent a great deal of time during the Pilot trying to co-ordinate employer engagement between the key agencies in the region as an initial first step (Jobcentre Plus, NOMS, prisons, probation and LSC). This was intended to avoid multiple approaches to the same employer and usefully build a database which all the agencies could access and use as a resource in their employer engagement work going forward. In both regions this was being led by Jobcentre Plus. However, eventually, this piece of work stalled, reportedly because of Jobcentre Plus concerns around data protection issues surrounding the sharing of employers' names and other information. Some stakeholders in both regions expressed a great deal of frustration that this work had stalled and many were confused as to what precisely the data protection issues were. However, data protection issues aside (whatever they might have been, and however, legitimate), the attempts to co-ordinate employer engagement also encountered another problem: a reluctance among some agencies to share information about 'their'

employers. This stemmed from the fact that many organisations felt they were fishing in the same pool of employers and this was not helped by the fact that many of these organisations had their own targets around employment engagement.

Employer engagement did continue in the test bed regions but little of this could be called test bed activity and by October 2008, one test bed had withdrawn the test bed element of employer engagement from their remit. In the other region, the Jobcentre Plus had begun to link employer engagement to their LEP activity but it was too late to have any impact on the test bed work.

B.4 Constraints experienced

B.4.1 Pilot-specific constraints

It is possible to identify two significant constraints on the operation of the test bed Pilots:

- **A lack of strong data collection and sharing mechanisms**, to enable the test bed Pilots to establish a quantitative baseline for impact assessment and evaluation, has acted as a notable constraint. This has stemmed almost wholly from the fact that robust data for tracking employment outcomes for clients is not available. This has caused difficulties for the independent evaluators who were to set a quantitative baseline as one of their initial tasks. What MI does exist is held by individual agencies and tracked very much for their own institutional and procedural purposes. Since identifying the problem, a cross-Government group at national level has been set up to try and resolve this problem. This is yet to report, but the test bed work has flagged this up as a potential issue that needs to be resolved.
- More broadly, **the two-year timescale of the Pilot and the low level of pilot funding** also acted as a constraint on the Pilot. While these factors did not have so much of an impact on individual, smaller components of work that were perhaps already underway in the region, they significantly constrained what the Pilots could achieve in terms of broader system change and delivering a more coherent skills and employment offer to beneficiaries in the region. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that more substantial changes will be supported by the new OLASS contracts, which will build on the lessons of these test bed Pilots.

Apart from the Pilot-specific constraints discussed above, there are also a number of wider factors that have constrained test bed work. These constraints pre-dated test bed Pilots but continued to impact considerably on their progress because of the systemic and ingrained nature.

- First, there was a **lack of coherent skills and employment provision ‘through the gate’**. As many interviewees acknowledged, the movement of clients from prison to probation has not historically been accompanied by a smooth transfer of skills and employment support. As a result, much of the good work that may have been started in prison is not picked up upon release into the community/probation. This problem is further compounded by the fact that many clients are released or taken back into other regions, making the transfer of appropriate support even more difficult. In the East of England region, for example, it is estimated that 60 to 70 per cent of clients who are in custody are from outside of the region at any one time, while 40 per cent of clients from the region serve their sentence elsewhere. Despite considering ways by which to minimise prisoner transfer and working to build links with providers in regions where clients are released, the capacity in prisons and probation severely restricts the ability to track these movements on a larger scale between the regions. As a result, the test bed Pilots found it easier to start test bed work in prisons because they offered more direct control than the environment of the wider community. What this did mean, however, was that some elements of test bed work were more concentrated in prisons than in the community.
- Second, existing problems around the **lack of multi-agency co-ordination** in the regions constrained a great deal of pilot activity and meant that test bed managers and other key partners spent a great deal of time trying to secure the co-operation of sub-regional and local partners and relevant heads of agencies.
- Thirdly, many stakeholders reported that the **economic downturn** was making the employability aspects of their work more challenging. For individual aspects of test bed work, such as the employability compacts, stakeholders reported that securing sign-up or guaranteed interviews was increasingly proving difficult. In terms of the broader picture, other stakeholders expressed concern that the recession would negatively impact on the priority and resources invested in the area of client resettlement and skills and employment provision. *‘My concern is the test bed Pilots will just slide away. The end of the test bed Pilots and its resource could not have come at a worse time given the economic downturn.’*
- Finally, **prison population pressures** were mentioned by most stakeholders as a significant wider constraint to test bed work.

This is not a definitive list of the wider constraints operating on the test bed Pilots. For example, some interviewees highlighted current skills and employment provision as a wider constraint, in that it only represented ‘small steps’ on the client journey towards employment. However, these sorts of issues were perceived to be easier to improve upon through the test bed Pilots than some of the more embedded and systemic constraints discussed above, most of which would rely on a much greater degree of institutional linkage than that which exists at present.

B.5 Lessons

B.5.1 Internal lessons (i.e. Pilot-specific)

There are eight pilot-specific lessons that have emerged from the test bed Pilots:

- First, it is clear, and was perhaps so at the very outset, that **achieving system change requires a longer timescale and more resources than the test bed Pilots had to offer**. While good progress has been made in the test bed regions, it would seem that this has been relatively concentrated in nature – concentrated in local projects, individual skills and employment programmes or targeted interventions in specific prisons and probation areas. As discussed previously, this concentrated and relatively piecemeal approach made sense for the test bed Pilots, partly because it built on individual pieces of work that were already in place before the test bed Pilots, and also because it sensibly restricted the margins for ‘trial and error’, before broader roll-out could be considered. It was also a realistic approach given the modest level of pilot funding and two-year timescale. What this has meant, however, is that the more difficult job of joining up these projects and innovative pieces of work on a larger scale and across institutions has only just begun.
- Second, it is evident from the test bed Pilots that **the first steps in achieving this kind of system change are necessarily time consuming and piecemeal in nature** because of the need to first address problems with existing organisational arrangements and infrastructures. Given that much of this work centres around a lack of multi-agency co-ordination between organisations that do not all prioritise skills and employment support, and have not historically worked well together, it is inevitably going to prove time-consuming and piecemeal to build practical working relationships and links between key agencies. As one stakeholder stated: *‘getting past organisational silos will be critical to longer-term success’*.
- **Multi-agency support and co-ordination is key to facilitating the client journey**. The test bed work has demonstrated that this is not just important in delivering a system of seamless skills and employment provision but in effectively **sequencing** skills and employment interventions alongside other resettlement pathways. Although the test bed Pilots focussed most of their work on work-ready customers, there was a ready acknowledgement that in the longer-term, skills and employment support would have to be sequenced alongside other interventions for the majority of beneficiaries who had multiple difficulties/barriers to work.
- Strong regional partnerships need to be cemented by **actual buy-in at sub-regional level to achieve proper working relationships** in order to guarantee co-operation beyond formal sign up at the regional level. As discussed, the lack of buy-in among some sub-regional prisons and probation areas seriously delayed and in some cases, stalled the development of test bed work. Existing partnerships, structures and working arrangements (even if coupled with

a measure of resolve and purpose), are just the starting points for building the practical, effective and substantial working links between institutions that are necessary to an holistic system of support. It is only these sorts of working relationships and links that enable key activities, such as the sharing of information, data (where appropriate), good practice etc.

- **Consistency of skills and employment provision within and between regions** is important to prevent 'drop out' and ensure 'pick up' when clients are moved or released into another area. Consistency in the quality of provision is also important in ensuring that standards of provision are relatively similar across the board. A lack of standard operating models in delivering skills and employment support in some institutions, (or in some cases, the lack of any kind of delivery model), also hinders the roll out of good practice and the potential for a more consistent approach to delivery of skills and employment support.
- **The role of ICT in expanding learning provision** has successfully demonstrated the potential for a secure IT-based integrated learning and information environment that offers resettlement and learning opportunities to beneficiaries. The Virtual Campus (although small scale at present) offers online courses, jobsearch, help with CVs, and information on job opportunities and constitutes the first kind of IT-based skills and employment provision of its kind in a UK prison setting.
- **Strong data collection and sharing mechanisms** were absent in the test bed Pilots but yet key to co-ordinating employer engagement in the test bed Pilots and to demonstrating test bed outcomes.
- Having a **test bed 'brand'** or common test bed agenda (that was not perceived as being 'owned' by any one organisation) was reported by stakeholders as having helped secure initial sign-up, prioritised the skills and employment pathway (for agencies that had not prioritised skills and employment support before); got everyone working to a common agenda (test bed work plan); and secured a degree of accountability to this agenda. This in turn, has helped embed some test bed activities in wider work that continues beyond the life of the Pilot.

B.5.2 Broader lessons

To date, the Pilots have demonstrated two broader lessons:

- First, they have highlighted the extent to which **multi-agency support and co-ordination across the regions is lacking**, and how this impedes progress towards coherent and holistic support for clients facing significant barriers to the labour market. Supporting clients from custody to community requires multi-agency support and co-ordination, because no one agency or organisation is specialised enough to address all barriers. In the interim report, we highlighted what one interviewee described as a ‘silo-based horizon’ and this problem seems to have persisted throughout the life of the Pilots, although progress has been made in individual cases, where individuals and organisations have been successful engaged with the test bed agenda. In these cases, it would seem that the test bed managers have been instrumental, taking on a time-consuming and ongoing task.
- Second, the test bed Pilots have illustrated **how data protection can, in the current climate, act as an obstacle** to ‘information age government’ despite being an objective of it. The test bed Pilots have usefully flagged this issue at the national level and at the time of writing, the Cabinet Office is currently looking into this in more detail.

Appendix C

Exit to Work Pilot

C.1 Introduction

This appendix presents findings from a study of the Exit to Work national demonstration project, which aimed to test out the role of Job Developers in improving employment outcomes for offenders and ex-offenders. The Pilot began in October 2006 and became fully operational in April 2007. It was managed by Working Ventures UK (WVUK), and co-financed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). Originally a one-year project, funding was later extended for a second year to March 2009.

The following sections cover:

- the policy background to the Pilot;
- the Pilot aims and implementation;
- the main Job Developer activities and outcomes;
- key lessons from the Pilot.

The main findings from this research were based on a total of 55 in-depth qualitative interviews with Job Developers, WVUK and stakeholders from a number of different agencies linked to the project, including representatives from NOMS, regional Employer Coalitions, prison and probation services, Jobcentre Plus and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC)/Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS). In addition, the research has been informed by quantitative Management Information (MI) data from the pilot sites, centrally collected and processed by WVUK.

C.2 Background to the Pilot

In the Next Steps document presenting the five-year strategy for reducing re-offending⁸, the Government identified employer engagement as a key priority for action in improving training and employment outcomes for offenders. The document underlined a commitment to:

'...engage employers in designing and delivering programmes so that offenders gain skills and experience to meet employer needs.'

The influential report on reducing re-offending produced by the Social Exclusion Unit (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002) indicated that the vocational training and employment opportunities available in prisons failed to match current labour market needs. Although there were some isolated examples of good practice in employer involvement in prisons, there was little of this kind of work being systematically carried out in the UK context.

In order to address this gap in services, the DWP, through the National Employment Panel (now WVUK) introduced the Exit to Work demonstration project in April 2007, to pilot the role of Job Developers in:

'...providing employers with a new, individualised service and working to break down real and perceived barriers to employing offenders.'

(DfES *et al.*, 2006)

C.3 Pilot aims and the Job Developer role

The overall aim of the Pilot was to improve job opportunities for offenders and ex-offenders through more effective employer engagement. In order to achieve this, the key objectives of the Job Developer role were to:

- identify and work with employers willing to employ or work with offenders;
- provide employers with an improved level of pre- and post-placement support;
- work in partnership with key agencies (prison and probation services, Jobcentre Plus, OLASS, NOMS etc.) to match individual offenders with jobs;
- identify local labour market needs and give strategic advice to partners about developing offenders' employability skills to meet these.

Early interviews with Job Developers confirmed that their role would have a dual focus: although primarily employer-facing, it would also require active engagement with a number of other agencies involved in the reducing re-offending agenda, in order to encourage a more 'employer-led' approach to offender training and employment.

⁸ DfES, Home Office, DWP (2006). *Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment: Next Steps*.

C.4 Implementation of the Pilot

The Exit to Work Pilots were established in six locations across five regions: West Midlands, London, Manchester, Merseyside, South Yorkshire and Tees Valley. These locations were selected because of: (a) their alignment with Employer Coalition and Jobcentre Plus areas; and (b) the presence of large prisons with high numbers of offenders released back into the local community.

The seven Job Developers themselves (there were two in the London region) came from different backgrounds, both public and private sector, but with certain key qualities and attributes in common: in particular, a background in employer engagement and in-depth knowledge of the local labour market. The selection criteria for Job Developers, therefore, clearly gave precedence to their ‘employer-facing’ role, and placed less emphasis on a thorough knowledge of the ex-offender ‘terrain’ or of the other organisations already operating on it.

Various forms of support were available to the Job Developers including: line management by WVUK; regular team meetings; a project co-ordinator within each pilot area to provide administrative and other support functions; and a website designed as a cross-pilot resource tool to match up job-ready candidates to appropriate vacancies.

C.4.1 Building the Job Developer concept

Each Job Developer had to take responsibility for a wide geographical area, usually including numerous prisons and other key sites, as well as an extensive network of existing organisations. Therefore, the approach within each pilot site focused on tapping into existing developments ‘on the ground’ and adapting project activities in line with local needs. The first task within each pilot area was to build a visible and credible operating platform from which more tangible outcomes could be pursued. Despite the challenges inherent to being a small-scale, recent and short-term initiative in a large and already crowded field, most of the Job Developers were fairly successful in making their presence felt within a short space of time.

Initial capacity building activities included:

- mapping of existing skills and employment services and projects for ex-offenders in the area; becoming more familiar with the key players in the reducing re-offending field, ex-offender issues and barriers to employment; developing links with key agencies (Regional Offender Management (ROM), prison and probation services, Jobcentre Plus, LSC/OLASS, employers and employer organisations);
- active membership of strategic level groups (such as regional Employment Learning and Skills (ELS) groups), in order to influence decision-making processes. In line with national policy, employer engagement had become established as a priority within Regional Reducing Re-offending Action Plans (RRAPs) and this was reflected in the establishment of employer engagement sub-groups or forums in each of the Pilot areas. Representation at these groups provided Job Developers with an opportunity to embed themselves within the formalised regional structure and to become more visible to key players;

- developing links with prisons across the region. The original remit for the Job Developers had been to work primarily with the main large prisons in their regions (usually Category A, B or C), on the assumption that these would provide a sufficient flow of ex-offenders back into the local community. However, most of the Job Developers made a strategic decision early on to work with a wider range of offender institutions, such as open prisons and those more focused on vocational training, which they found to be more flexible in their working practices and potentially a more fruitful source of job-ready candidates.

The following account presents a brief profile of each of the six Pilot locations, the Job Developer backgrounds and some examples of the types of activities in which they became involved.

West Midlands

The Job Developer resided within the Jobcentre Plus Sutton Coldfield District Office and was linked to the Birmingham Employer Coalition. She came from a Jobcentre Plus background and through previous experience of employer engagement, had developed an in-depth knowledge of the local labour market and key employer networks across the city.

A distinctive feature of the Birmingham Pilot was its location within the West Midlands test bed region (see Appendix B). The Job Developer was to some extent embedded within the test bed structure but, nevertheless, faced challenges in terms of making an impact on employer engagement activities in the region. In the second year, the Pilot was moved to the West Midlands NOMS office to increase its visibility with prison and probation services. Towards the end of the project, there was some progress reported in terms of better networking and sharing of information between different agencies involved in employer engagement across the region.

London

There were two Job Developers based in the Government Office for London (GOL) office, within the NOMS team. This proved to be a useful two-way relationship. For example, on the one hand, the Job Developers were able to develop more insight into the inter-relationship between employment and other pathways within the reducing re-offending agenda. On the other hand, the NOMS team provided a useful platform for engaging with a range of offender-facing services.

The two Job Developers came from different backgrounds: one had experience both in IT recruitment and as a personal adviser with long-term unemployed people, including ex-offenders; the other was seconded from Jobcentre Plus and had many years' experience of employer engagement work. In the second year of the Pilot, the roles of the two Job Developers became more clearly demarcated. While one took on a more strategic role in relation to employer engagement issues within the NOMS team, the other focused more on the operational side and the setting up of routeways for offenders in vocational areas such as construction, customer services and waste management.

Greater Manchester

The Job Developer was located within the Greater Manchester Coalition and alongside Jobcentre Plus, and had good links with both. She had a background in retail management and recruitment, and was also a manager with 'progress2work' in the Greater Manchester area. Through this previous experience, she acquired an in-depth knowledge of the local labour market as well as an understanding of employer engagement issues for disadvantaged groups.

The Job Developer was pro-active in developing 'through the gates' pathways in collaboration with local prisons, probation and employers in vocational areas such as fitted interiors for social housing, painting and decorating and environmental work. Two of these initiatives were located in the community and were targeted at Prolific and other Priority Offenders (PPOs).

Merseyside

The Pilot was situated within the office of the Merseyside Employer Coalition. The Job Developer came from a private sector background, having had many years' experience as a recruitment manager. In this role, she had developed a wide experience of working with disadvantaged groups, including ex-offenders and people with mental health problems.

Prior to the Pilot, the Employer Coalition had been involved in setting up a Transitional Employment Programme⁹, which had provided work experience and jobs for ex-offenders in the construction industry. The Job Developer was able to build on this initiative and worked collaboratively with four local prisons to develop routeways into employment in construction and utilities. She also took a lead role in developing the capacity-building programme for skills and employment practitioners working with offenders, which was delivered at most of the pilot sites.

South Yorkshire

The Job Developer for South Yorkshire was located within the Chamber of Commerce in Doncaster. His previous experience was in recruitment sales and employer engagement in the private sector. The Job Developer initially focused attention on mapping employer engagement activity locally, trying to co-ordinate the various employer engagement initiatives across the area and providing advice and guidance on taking a more commercial approach to recruitment. He also worked across the project as a whole to develop marketing materials and the Exit To Work website. The Job Developer left the post in year two but was not replaced, due to the limited time left for the project to run.

⁹ Transitional Employment Programmes offer support to disadvantaged groups and the long-term unemployed through measures such as work trials and subsidised employment.

Tees Valley

The Job Developer was located within the North East Employer Coalition (NEEC) in Stockton-on-Tees. He worked closely with a member of the NEEC, who was also represented on the Education, Training and Employment (ETE) Pathway Board. Previously he worked with Jobcentre Plus in Tees Valley on employer engagement within disability services. From his previous work, he was already familiar with the Tees Valley context and employer networks.

The Job Developer established good working relationships with key partners across the region and worked collaboratively with three local prisons to develop ‘through the gates’ employment pathways, for example, into construction, roadworks and horticulture. He was also instrumental in setting up the capacity-building training programme for skills and employment practitioners. The Job Developer left the post late in the second year and was replaced by two part-time staff (from prison and probation) to focus on developing a post-project strategy for the region.

C.5 Main pilot activities and outcomes

The very different contexts within which each individual Pilot operated (e.g. in terms of offender populations, partner agencies and labour markets) led to marked variations in approach and the ways in which Job Developers prioritised different aspects of their work. However, across the Pilot as a whole, there emerged a fairly common set of ‘baseline’ activities and ways of working which could be categorised under three broad headings: job-brokering activities to secure specific job outcomes for offenders; partnership working with other agencies in the reducing re-offending arena; and employer engagement strategies.

C.5.1 Job outcomes for offenders

In the first year of the Pilot, there was a strong focus on the job-brokering aspect of the Job Developer role and on developing appropriate job opportunities for ex-offenders at the individual level. However, MI data collected from the pilot sites towards the end of the first year, indicated that the numbers of job starts across the Pilot as a whole were fairly modest, despite a reasonably positive response from employers in offering vacancies.

**Table C.1 Employer engagement and job entries,
July 2007-January 2008**

Exit To Work pilot area	Employers engaged	Interviews	Job offers	Job starts
1	61	26	16	15
2	38	4	4	4
3	40	8	8	8
4	29	19	16	15
5	27	1	1	1
6	58	0	0	0
Total	253	58	45	43

Source: Exit to Work, January 2008.

These figures confirmed the Job Developer view expressed in interviews that, despite their relative success in engaging with employers who were positive about recruiting ex-offenders, the rate at which this engagement was leading to job offers and job starts was relatively low. According to the Job Developers themselves, these disappointing results were due to two main problems: Firstly, there was an initial slowness of response from the main referral agencies, possibly due to the newness of the Pilot and its relative invisibility to referral staff at the operational level. Secondly, a significant number of the candidates referred were perceived as not sufficiently job-ready and in many cases potential applicants were 'screened out' by the Job Developers as unsuitable to be put forward for the vacancies which had been offered.

As a result of this slow rate of progress, a collective decision was made by the Job Developers, in consultation with WVUK, to place more emphasis on strategic work with project partners in year two and less on specific job outcomes at the individual level. In particular, concerns which had been raised about the variable quality of referrals from partner agencies led to plans to address this issue through a new training programme tailored to the needs of provider staff and frontline advisers (which is discussed in more detail in a later section).

Table C.2 presents the final MI data, reflecting the Pilot's performance up to March 2009.

Table C.2 Employer engagement and job entries

Exit To Work pilot area	Employers engaged	Interviews	Job offers	Job starts
1	*	63	54	54
2	*	28	21	23
3	*	41	37	37
4	*	49	34	35
5	*	5	5	5
6	*	0	0	0
Total	350+	186	151	154

Source: Exit to Work, March 2009.

* figures from individual Pilots not available.

This table indicates a similar pattern to year one: although there was a promising increase in the rate at which individuals were being supported into jobs in year two, hard outcomes in terms of numbers of interviews and job starts were still relatively small across the project as a whole.

More interestingly, this data highlights a growing divergence between the Job Developers' performance in different pilot areas. On the one hand, while four of the Pilots continued to secure outcomes from their job-brokering activities (despite putting less time and energy into this aspect of the work), two had made little or no progress at all. This would appear to support findings from the qualitative research that four of the Pilots had, by year two, been reasonably successful in making their presence felt locally, while the other two had struggled to make an impact and had effectively become marginalised. In one case, the Job Developer left the post during the course of the second year, due to this marginalisation and lack of tangible outcomes.

Response from referral agencies

Table C.3, based on data from November 2008, indicates the various sources of the candidates referred to the Job Developers for their vacancies. Although these figures only represent a 'snapshot' of the position towards the end of the Pilot, they are useful in providing a picture of the links established by the Job Developers and the principal routes they had managed to open up with a range of different referral agencies.

Table C.3 Inwards referrals to the Job Developers

Exit To Work Pilot area	Jobcentre Plus	OLASS	Prison Service	Probation Service	Progress 2work	Other	Total
1	19	13	11	28	0	4	75
2	47	49	49	33	11	9	198
3	1	0	38	8	24	20	91
4	4	0	2	11	42	4	63
5	0	1	47	29	1	12	90
6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	71	63	147	109	78	49	517
Row %	14%	12%	28%	21%	15%	9%	100%

Source: Exit to Work, November 2008.

From Table C.3 it can be seen that the prison service, probation service and OLASS together constituted over half of all referrals (61 per cent), with the prison service as the source of the highest number of referrals overall (28 per cent). This probably reflects the increasingly productive collaborative work which was taking place between the Job Developers and various prisons in their regions, for example through the development of 'through the gates' employment routeways for offenders.

The proportion of referrals coming from Jobcentre Plus (14 per cent) appears to be relatively modest in comparison with prison and probation services. In two pilot areas, Jobcentre Plus referrals comprised around a quarter of the total, whereas in the other four areas referrals from this source were minimal or non-existent. Anecdotal evidence from the Job Developers suggested that the majority of these referrals would probably have come from Jobcentre Plus advisers based in prisons or specialised staff working with ex-offenders in Jobcentre Plus offices. The apparent lack of referrals coming through mainstream Jobcentre Plus services underlines the problem which the Job Developers said they faced in gaining support from Jobcentre Plus for the Pilot and their impression that ex-offenders were not really regarded as a priority group by Jobcentre Plus staff in terms of access to additional support into employment.

Another significant source of referrals for the Pilot was progress2work contributing 15 per cent of the total. Progress2work operates in about half the Jobcentre Plus districts in the country and is designed to assist various disadvantaged groups back into employment, including ex-offenders. Thus, it is possible that many of these referrals to the Pilot were also Jobcentre Plus customers. The 'other' category of referral agencies included a wide range of organisations, including Business Link, ex-offender support groups, community organisations and training providers.

Profile of ex-offenders referred to the Pilot

The Exit to Work database also provided some insight into the personal characteristics of the individuals who were referred to the project. The main characteristics were as follows:

- predominantly male (94 per cent);
- largely white (72 per cent);
- mostly in the prime age group for employment: 58 per cent were aged 25-49 but with a significant minority of younger people in the 18-24 age group (29 per cent);
- about 47 per cent of those referred were on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), with another seven per cent taking part in one or another of the New Deals (most of them while also on JSA); a small number were on Income Support (IS), Incapacity Benefit (IB) or some other benefit; while a significant proportion (around 32 per cent) appeared not to be in receipt of any benefit at all;
- a wide range of convictions were represented, from driving offences at one end of the spectrum, to violent crimes, including armed robbery and murder, at the other.

C.5.2 Improving skill formation and vocational training in prisons

During the first year of the Pilot, some Job Developers had also become involved in the development of some promising new employer-led 'through the gates' employment pathways for offenders in some of the local prisons. It was decided in year two to direct more of the Pilot resources into this approach, which was likely to have more of an impact in the longer term than securing job outcomes at the individual level. By the end of the project, 11 such employer-led training routeways had been developed across the Pilot regions, which included:

- an NVQ Level 2 training course for fitted interiors organised in collaboration with a large social housing organisation. By the end of the Pilot, at least nine offenders had moved into employment from this initiative;
- an NVQ Level 2 training course in scaffolding to address an identified labour shortage in the region, including work trials and Intermediate Labour Market (ILM) funding for wages;
- a community-based street-cleaning pathway (NVQ Level 2) with guaranteed vacancies for ex-offenders successfully completing the programme;
- two initiatives resulted from partnership working with a large national retail company: the first was a routeway for women offenders to work in customer services; the second was the development of NVQ-accredited training in bakery skills, which had led to the employment of nine offenders within the organisation.

Although these initiatives had only led to a small number of employment outcomes by the end of the Pilot, their significance lay in the establishment of more productive links between offender-facing services and particular employment sectors within the Exit to Work regions. By working in this way, the strategic aims of the Job Developers were: firstly, to demonstrate that such employer-led initiatives could lead to successful job outcomes for offenders and secondly, to encourage the continuation of such partnerships on a longer-term and more sustainable basis.

C.5.3 Partnership working

The more strategic direction being taken in the second year of the Pilot was also evidenced by the increased focus on partnership working, with the overall aims of embedding a more employer-led approach to offender training and more co-ordinated strategies with regard to employer engagement.

Capacity-building training programme for frontline staff

A key development in year two was the decision to adopt a cross-pilot approach to addressing the issue of the variable, and often poor, quality of the referrals being put forward by partner organisations. According to the Job Developers, too much of their time had been spent in screening potential candidates and sifting out those with an inadequate CV or who were obviously not job-ready. It was this experience which led to some of the Job Developers designing a ‘capacity-building’ training programme targeted at practitioners offering skills and employment services to offenders from a number of different agencies including prison and probation, OLASS, Jobcentre Plus, progress2work and other training providers.

The two-day training programme was designed and delivered in partnership with Nacro and the course content included: approaches to employer engagement; employer needs; labour market knowledge; jobseeker preparation; and disclosure issues. By the end of the project, the programme had been run at least once within each Pilot area, with positive feedback having been received from beneficiaries. This programme has continued to be jointly developed, post-project, by WVUK and Nacro.

Bringing more coherence to employer engagement

Secondly, the role of the Job Developers in providing a ‘strategic voice’ on employer engagement appeared to have become more established in some of the pilot localities. Many of the stakeholders interviewed indicated that there was a need for this kind of role, given the number of different organisations involved in employer engagement and the potential for confusion in this area. Sharing of information at the regional level, through employer engagement forums, was therefore viewed as another key aspect of the work.

Some respondents from the prison and probation services could see the benefits of Job Developers acting as a ‘link person’ between themselves and employers and representing the employer perspective. It could be argued that the impact

of such a positive relationship beginning to develop in some of the pilot areas was reflected in the higher percentage of referrals from these sources. Through this collaborative work, there was a growing recognition that prison, probation staff and training providers needed feedback from employers so they could adapt vocational training and pre-release programmes in accordance with the needs of the labour market. The business background of Job Developers was appreciated as an important attribute in this respect and they were viewed by some stakeholders as a valuable source of up-to-date labour market intelligence.

C.5.4 Employer engagement strategies

The key aim of the Pilot was to develop and test out new ways of engaging and supporting employers willing to work with ex-offenders and by the end of the second year, over 350 employers had been actively engaged over the project as a whole. At the start of the project, WVUK adopted a formal definition of employer engagement, which identified activities as taking place at three different levels:

- employers who were signed up to the local network and were maintained as contacts (e.g. signed up to receive the Exit to Work newsletter or referrals from existing network members);
- employers more actively involved in Exit to Work/WVUK-related activity (e.g. attending events or seminars, newsletter enquiries, offering upskilling events for advisers);
- employers involved in outcome-generating activity (e.g. developing a routeway, working with providers, getting people into jobs, involvement in Local Employment Partnerships (LEPs), etc.

The main employer-focused activities included:

- developing a customised approach to employer engagement and, in the initial stages, identifying those employment sectors which were most appropriate for the types of offenders in their area. For example, where the offender population was predominantly male and working class, the key areas targeted tended to be construction, warehousing, utilities, etc. In areas where links had been developed with women's prisons, there was more of a focus on jobs in call centres, hospitality, catering and cleaning. Other targeted sectors included retail, street cleaning, waste management and customer services. The Job Developers pointed out that some prison and probation services had already established strong links with particular employers in the region and they had to be careful not to duplicate this work;
- building or extending links with key employer networks (e.g. Corporate Alliance, Business in the Community) to promote awareness of ex-offenders as a potential source of labour. Some of these strategies were tried and tested, such as organising prison visits or networking events and carrying out mail shots. Other approaches were more innovative. For example, one of the Job Developers organised a UK Skills Challenge competition in cleaning, with a

number of prisons across the pilot areas taking part and competing against industrial cleaning organisations. The aim was to raise awareness of the high quality standards of industrial cleaning achieved in many of the country's prisons and to engage the interest of potential employers. The organisers reported that 100 cleaning jobs had been pledged across the country as a result. The Skills Challenge operated successfully again in 2009, and there were plans to make it an annual event. This initiative also provided another interesting example of cross-pilot co-operation;

- in some areas, the Job Developers identified and worked closely with employers committed to this agenda who were willing to contribute a lot of time to the project and to act as 'champions' for the recruitment of ex-offenders. As one Job Developer observed, this 'peer-to-peer selling' approach could be particularly effective in persuading more reluctant employers to become engaged with the Pilot;
- providing a job-brokering service for employers who had shown their willingness to employ ex-offenders, which included: screening and matching suitable candidates to vacancies; offering a post-employment support service; and assisting employers to review their recruitment and HR processes in order to be more 'user-friendly' to potential ex-offender employees. This was a unique feature of the Job Developer role, since all other employer engagement workers in this arena were offender-facing. One employer, interviewed for this research, felt that the main advantage of the Job Developer role was as an 'honest broker' who could handle the relationship management side of things for employers willing to work with offenders. The employer then only had to deal with a 'single point of contact' rather than a bewildering array of offender-facing services, with their different bureaucratic procedures, thereby reducing their contact saturation;
- finally, Job Developers were also tapping into a wider range of services which employers might be able to offer besides jobs, particularly those who supported the reducing re-offending agenda, but for some reason were constrained from employing offenders within their organisations. Examples of the different types of employer support offered to the project included: training provided to prison and probation services in HR issues; interview practice for offenders; or free training equipment for prison workshops. Some employers, who had observed the training taking place in prisons, had given advice and guidance to skills and employment providers about more up-to-date techniques within their area of expertise. Mentoring was another service which some employers were able to offer. For example, one of the Job Developers had been involved in developing a business enterprise scheme in a local prison for offenders who were interested in going into self-employment. Individuals taking part were helped to develop business plans and present them (at a 'Dragon's Den-style' event) to a panel of business representatives. They were also being offered ongoing professional mentoring support to encourage them on the journey to self-employment after release from prison.

C.5.5 Challenges and constraints

The Job Developers encountered a number of constraints and challenges over the course of the Pilot. Some of these difficulties were specific to the Pilot itself, while others related to the broader context of offender training and employment.

Internal (Pilot-specific) challenges

- Lack of capacity was identified by all the Job Developers and many stakeholders as a major issue. It was generally felt that one Job Developer was insufficient to cover a whole region; one respondent suggested that ‘a Job Developer for each prison’ would be more realistic. One apparent consequence of this was that the Job Developers were unable to undertake much work in the community, where the majority of the offenders serve their sentences. The duration of the Pilot (initially one year) was considered by many respondents to be too short. Although the extension of the Pilot to a second year provided the Job Developers with an opportunity to consolidate and build on their earlier capacity-building work, it was still considered to be too short a timeframe to have a more meaningful impact and bring about more sustainable outcomes and relationships.
- The original remit of the Job Developers to focus on the larger prisons within major urban areas was viewed by some stakeholders as short-sighted. In more than one region, strong concerns were expressed about the lack of prior consultation with offender management services about the Pilots and some initial tensions about where the Job Developers could best be placed. Some stakeholders with a regional remit for the reducing re-offending strategy would have welcomed an invitation to contribute to the development of the Pilot and regretted that they were not offered this opportunity. Other respondents felt there were real problems with the sole focus on the offender populations in large prisons as the majority tended to be on short-term sentences, on remand or released to other parts of the country. The fact that most of the Job Developers quickly changed their original remit in order to work with other prisons in their region reinforced this point.
- Another challenge to the Pilot was getting the balance right between strategic and operational objectives. There appeared to have been some ambivalence initially as to whether the key aim should be to focus on developing longer-term strategies for employment of ex-offenders or securing short-term job placement outcomes. According to one of the Job Developers, interviewed in year one, the role should ideally incorporate both perspectives:

‘You could just be a strategic person but I feel you’ve got to have a grasp of what’s happening operationally to influence strategically...so it works both ways.’

However, as already discussed, the general consensus in the second year moved towards more strategic work with project partners, as the best way of securing more sustainable outcomes from the Pilot.

- There was a general frustration among the Job Developers that the lack of IT support and delays in getting the Exit to Work website up and running had hampered their progress in the first year of the Pilot:

'When we see the employers we say it's an account-managed service and we have this database to help us do it. The reality is that we haven't...I find it quite unprofessional...it's going to be three or four months before you've got the most important tool that you need to do the job.'

Unfortunately, this situation did not improve in the second year, and the high hopes which had originally been invested in the database as a tool to support the Job Developers in matching applicants to vacancies, were never realised. Inevitably, this was another factor which hampered the job-brokering aspect of the Pilot.

Broader challenges

- As already discussed, there was a clear consensus among the Job Developers that the quality of pre-release job and CV preparation was very variable across the pilot areas and this had confronted them with a major problem in identifying a pool of job-ready candidates to offer to employers. In some areas, the Job Developer had to develop a greater reliance on a limited number of providers, whom they considered to have good practice in preparing offenders for employment. The development of the capacity-building programme for provider staff and frontline advisers was another way of addressing this issue. However, the experience of the Job Developers points to the need for a more systematic and widespread culture change within vocational training services for offenders, if they are to become more genuinely responsive to employer needs.
- Another challenge to the Pilot (and to offender-facing services more generally) was the high rate of 'offender churn' and mobility of the prison population across the country. Persistent re-offenders and those on short-term sentences were found to be particularly difficult to engage in the Pilot. Added to this problem, prisoners were frequently being moved around from one prison to another, making it very difficult to track their progress or support needs, either in prison or when they had left custody. This highlighted two structural problems, which would need to be addressed in the longer term: firstly, the lack of cross-site training within the prison system; and secondly, a general lack of co-ordination and communication between prison-based services and services in the community. Job Developers commented that insufficient data sharing between agencies was making it more difficult to provide effective 'through the gates' support for training and job opportunities.
- In terms of partnership working, there were tensions reported from some of the pilot regions around the potential conflict between the Job Developer role and other partners' roles in relation to employer engagement. Although there was general recognition of the Job Developer role at regional level, there could be more resistance at the operational level to 'sharing' employers and to a more co-ordinated approach to employer engagement:

'...there's just that mistrust – organisations have 'their own' employers that they've always worked with and they're very reluctant to share. So it's building trust and getting them to look at the bigger picture...'

(Job Developer)

It seems likely that this mistrust and competitiveness from other agencies might well have contributed to the consistently low numbers of referrals in two of the pilot areas, where the Job Developers faced an uphill task in persuading existing services of the 'value-added' nature of their role.

- The issue of disclosure was considered to be a sensitive one, particularly for staff within the prison and probation services. Generally, the Job Developers were pushing for a strategy of early and open disclosure of an offender's history, on the grounds that this approach was likely to reduce the pressure on an individual at the interview stage and would also mean that neither the employer nor the applicant would be wasting their time. On the other hand, some prison and probation staff tended to be more cautious and saw a need to tread carefully around this issue. Professionals working with ex-offenders cannot disclose information about them: it has to be up to the individual ex-offender to be willing to disclose to a potential employer. In some of the pilot areas there had been moves towards developing a strategy for 'positive disclosure' in collaboration with Job Developers, for example through disclosure forms or individual 'letters of disclosure'. Another advantage to early disclosure was that it would entitle an ex-offender to be 'flagged' and so potentially available for any enhanced service offer.

C.6 Key lessons from the Pilot

There are some key lessons to be drawn from the Exit to Work Pilot which could usefully inform future policy and practice in this area, both in relation to employer engagement and to the employability agenda for offenders.

C.6.1 Employer engagement issues

The Exit to Work Pilot, to date, has given some useful insights into strategies for employer engagement and as well as providing a clearer understanding of employer attitudes towards recruiting ex-offenders. Some of the key issues were as follows:

- Job Developers successfully identified a number of employers in their regions who were receptive to the idea of employing ex-offenders. In some of the Pilot areas, links between prisons and certain employment sectors were already well-established and the Job Developers were able to build on these.
- Evidence from the Pilot showed that employers might be motivated to employ ex-offenders for different reasons. Whereas, in some cases, this might be in line with their Corporate Social Responsibility policies, other employers might be motivated more by labour shortages or high employee turnover in their sector.

Some Job Developers identified financial incentives as a useful lever in engaging employer interest, such as New Deal subsidies and training grants through 'Train to Gain'.

- Some respondents reported that 'positive' employers tended to be less interested in an individual's offending history than in recruiting someone with the right skills and attitude for the job. It was for this reason that the Job Developers placed such a strong emphasis on employability and 'soft skills' when liaising with project partners. However, for many employers, the nature of the offence was significant, e.g. theft-related offences in relation to retail; and a general reluctance to employ arsonists, sex-offenders or those convicted of violent crimes. Whatever the offending background, it was considered crucial that any individuals put forward for employment should be 'job-ready' or there was a risk of losing credibility, even with an employer well disposed towards engaging with ex-offenders:

'If we were going to send people who weren't job-ready then it's going to harm relationships with that employer – he's not going to want to come back to employing ex-offenders. If he gets a good service...then he's going to want more.'

(Job Developer)

- Inevitably, the Job Developers also came across employers with a more negative perception of ex-offenders. Within many employment sectors, there was reported to be a widespread lack of awareness of the diversity of the offender population and of the fact that the majority of sentences were for less serious offences, served in the community. The primary Job Developer role in relation to these more reluctant employers was to raise their awareness of ex-offenders as a potential pool of labour and to promote the advantages of taking on individuals who had been appropriately trained, screened and risk-assessed. Within this aspect of their work, the services of 'employer champions' prepared to commit time to the project and persuade their peers of the benefits of recruiting ex-offenders, proved to be invaluable.
- Through their employer engagement work, Job Developers were also beginning to learn more about the specific types of pre- and post-employment support that employers most required when recruiting ex-offenders. Employers engaged through the Pilot were keen to know what forms of support were available, for example in terms of access to training allowances or financial incentives. Some Job Developers reported offering support with disclosure issues and with reviewing organisational recruitment and HR policies and procedures to make them more 'user-friendly' for this particular target group. It was also considered important to keep in touch with employers in the post-recruitment phase, to monitor and deal with any problems which might have arisen.

C.6.2 Employability issues for offenders

In addition to offering some lessons about employer engagement, the Pilot's experiences provided insights into factors which could constrain the progress of offenders into employment, as follows:

- Many offenders have multiple problems to deal with (e.g. accommodation, finance, drug or alcohol dependency) and thinking about employment may not be a priority; addressing the full range of offender needs could be a challenge for prison staff, particularly where there were limited resources. Another constraint was the large percentage of prisoners on short-term sentences, who consequently did not come within the 'offender management' system. For example, in one large prison, only one-third of the population had 12 month-plus sentences and had been allocated an offender manager. The remainder of offenders on short-term sentences were considered by the respondent (a senior prison manager) to be at higher risk of re-offending.
- There were comments both from Job Developers and other stakeholders that, historically, preparing offenders for employment had not been a priority goal within prison and probation services and that one of the key challenges was in changing this culture. Changes were beginning to happen, particularly following the roll out of OLASS in 2006, with the key aim of integrating offender learning into the mainstream but it was generally acknowledged that this would be a long-term process.
- There were some concerns expressed about the role of Jobcentre Plus in relation to improving employment outcomes for offenders. Although, at the strategic level, Jobcentre Plus had a high profile within the reducing re-offending agenda (representation on regional Reducing Re-offending Action Plan Boards, chairing ETE Pathway groups, etc.), there was a general perception that Jobcentre Plus staff were less pro-active at the operational level. For example, although there were Jobcentre Plus advisers based in most prisons, it was widely reported that they tended to focus more on opening up and closing down benefits claims, rather than entry into employment. In the community context, ex-offenders might not be considered a sufficiently high priority category for Jobcentre Plus staff to be targeted for enhanced services and some Job Developers felt that too many clients were 'slipping through the net' in this way.

C.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented findings from a study of the 'Exit to Work' project which was introduced to pilot the role of Job Developers in improving job opportunities for offenders and ex-offenders through more effective employer engagement.

A number of interesting 'soft' outcomes emerged from the Pilot, including: the potential role of Job Developers in providing a 'strategic voice' on employer engagement and acting as a useful link between prisons and employers; the development of new employer-led 'through the gates' training and employment

pathways for offenders; awareness-raising activities to promote offenders and ex-offenders to a wider pool of employers; and an innovative training programme targeted at skills and employment workers and frontline advisers working with offenders.

Despite facing a number of constraints and challenges, the Pilot provided some valuable insights into employer engagement and the employability agenda for offenders, which could usefully inform future policy and practice in this field.

