Evaluation of Partners Outreach for Ethnic Minorities (POEM): Final report

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Abbreviations

BME  Black and Minority Ethnic
CRB  Criminal Record Bureau
DWP  Department for Work and Pensions
EEA  European Economic Area
EMO  Ethnic Minority Outreach
ESOL English for Speakers of Other Languages
EU   European Union
FE   Further Education
GP   General Practitioner
HB   Housing Benefit
IAG  Information, Advice and Guidance
IB   Incapacity Benefit
IES  Institute for Employment Studies
IS   Income Support
JSA  Jobseeker’s Allowance
LA   Local authority
MI   Management Information
NARIC National Recognition Information Centre for the UK
NI   National Insurance
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>NRPF</td>
<td>No Recourse to Public Funds</td>
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<tr>
<td>ONS</td>
<td>Office for National Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>POEM</td>
<td>Partners Outreach for Ethnic Minorities</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSA</td>
<td>Public Service Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIA</td>
<td>Security Industry Authority</td>
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<td>WTC</td>
<td>Working Tax Credit</td>
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Summary

Introduction

The Partners Outreach for Ethnic Minorities (POEM) programme began in February 2007 (London contracts began in March 2007), and was initially funded for one year, although it was later extended to run for a second year. POEM was designed to support people of working age who were not in contact with Jobcentre Plus services, who were neither working nor claiming benefits. Support was to be targeted towards non-working partners in low-income families, from ethnic groups who faced particular barriers to employment, and who lived in areas of high disadvantage. POEM was primarily targeted at the Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali communities, but was open to people from all ethnic minority groups. The programme focused on outreach as the most effective way of engaging with these communities.

The ultimate aim of POEM was to help clients into work, however, it was recognised that some of the target clients would be a considerable distance from the labour market on entering POEM, and that some may not have entered employment by the end of the programme.

The programme operated in 430 wards within the cities of Birmingham, Bradford and Leeds, Leicester, London and Manchester, and support was provided through ten provider contracts, six of which were in London.

The evaluation of POEM was conducted over two years, and the Year 1 interim findings have been published separately as Aston et al. (2009)¹. The evaluation methodology comprised:

- a familiarisation stage, including interviews with DWP staff who had designed POEM;
- three rounds of case study work with providers (two in Year 1 and one in Year 2);

• 101 face-to-face interviews with clients (50 in Year 1 and 51 in Year 2);
• analysis of POEM Management Information (MI).

The providers

During Year 1, POEM was delivered by eight providers operating in the ten POEM areas, with three of the London areas covered by one provider. Some of the providers were already familiar with the Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities, but working with the Somali community was a new departure for most. In the past, providers had usually worked with clients who were closer to the labour market than their typical POEM clients. POEM was delivered to clients by outreach and adviser staff, but providers had found in Year 1 that local partnerships were also important both in finding eligible clients, and in providing them with training and employment opportunities.

In Year 2, the providers themselves remained largely unchanged, but most reported some staff changes over the course of the programme. Many had recruited new staff from the target communities to enhance their delivery capacity. Some staff had left toward the end of Year 1, on the basis that the programme would be ending after the pilot year, and other staff left during Year 2 for similar reasons, which caused providers some continuity and capacity difficulties. Nonetheless, there was a fair degree of continuity in providers’ approach to delivering POEM throughout its life, and most had, in Year 2, been able to build constructively on their Year 1 experiences. Staff had become more skilled and confident over time and had a better understanding of the client group, and their needs. Most providers reported that the work they had put in during Year 1 on community engagement had paid off in Year 2.

Partnership working emerged as a crucial aspect of effective POEM delivery. None of the partnerships were formally contracted. Most of the key POEM partnerships had been established by POEM staff during the life of the programme, although some arrangements preceded POEM. In Year 2, partnership working became more strategic as providers focused on what they had found to work best.

The key factors for successful partnership working were:
• shared organisational goals;
• good communication, co-operation and sharing of information;
• trust and goodwill between the partner organisations and the staff who established and maintained the partnerships.
Engaging and recruiting clients

The evaluation identified a number of key engagement and recruitment strategies. Using multilingual outreach workers from the target communities was vital in accessing the potential client groups, and in gaining their trust. Outreach strategies included: publicising POEM at various venues and locations in the target wards such as shopping centres, supermarkets, libraries, schools, mosques and GP surgeries; holding stalls or having a presence at community events such as family fun days, jobs fairs and cultural celebrations and festivals; distributing marketing materials in community languages; media coverage in community newspapers and on radio stations; and knocking on doors in targeted wards.

Providers had learned in Year 1 that partnerships were a crucial addition to the outreach work conducted by POEM staff, and many had needed to increase their community networks to gain access to eligible clients. Most providers had made changes to their choice of outreach venues in Year 2, based on lessons learned in Year 1. Over the course of POEM, word of mouth emerged as an increasingly powerful recruitment tool.

The community-based nature of the outreach was vital in accessing eligible clients in the target communities. However, it was important to also tailor the outreach activities to fit the local demographics and dynamics. Where target communities were highly concentrated in relatively small areas, strategies such as door knocking, delivering flyers to homes, and conducting outreach in generic venues such as shopping centres, and libraries proved effective. Providers found it more difficult to find eligible clients from the target communities where their populations were more dispersed, as these methods did not allow them to reach sufficient numbers of clients. It was particularly important to tailor outreach strategies to where the target populations congregated outside their homes (and these were different for each of the target groups). Examples included outreach activities in mosques, at cultural events, and enlisting the help of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community partners to provide venues and referrals.

The key lessons on engaging and recruiting clients to programmes of this nature are:

• outreach at a local community level is key to accessing harder to reach BME communities;
• outreach workers should mirror the ethnic and linguistic background of the target clients;
• providers should be allowed sufficient start-up time to test out what methods work best for each of the target groups, and in which localities they are most appropriate;
• given sufficient build-up time, word of mouth has the potential to be an effective recruitment tool in the target communities.
POEM clients

Overall, 32 per cent of the POEM clients were black African, with Bangladeshi and Pakistani clients each accounting for around 14 per cent of the total. One-tenth of all POEM clients were from other white backgrounds. These proportions were reasonably consistent in Years 1 and 2.

Fifty-five per cent of all POEM clients were women and 45 per cent were men. Slightly higher proportions of women were recruited in Year 1 compared to Year 2. Overall, there were many more male POEM clients than had been anticipated. POEM clients were a range of distances from the labour market on joining POEM, however, in Year 2 it appeared that clients were in general, a little closer to the labour market on joining, than had been the case in Year 1.

Clients’ key barriers to work were:
- lack of confidence and self-esteem; low awareness of transferable skills;
- lack of UK work experience; having been out of the labour market for many years (for example, to look after family); or never having worked in the UK at all;
- low levels of English language;
- childcare responsibilities and lack of access to appropriate, affordable childcare;
- unfamiliarity with the UK labour market and lack of appropriate job search skills; not knowing how to sell themselves to an employer;
- social and cultural barriers, for example, family resistance to women entering the labour market or restrictions on the kinds of jobs they could do;
- unrealistic expectations about the types of jobs they were likely to access;
- lack of qualifications or non-UK qualifications; difficulty in gaining recognition of overseas qualifications;
- social isolation; lack of awareness of services available for Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) or support into work.

POEM support and activities

The key feature of POEM was the tailored and flexible one-to-one support, and over the life of POEM, there was a shift towards providing support and activities on a one-to-one basis, rather than through group activities. By Year 2, all but one provider delivered the majority of their activities to clients in this way, with other activities put in place around this. One-to-one support principally included:
- pre-application preparation, general coaching to build confidence, CV preparation, and job search skills;
- assessment of English language competency and referrals to training, if appropriate;
• assessment of basic skills and referrals, if appropriate;
• support in completing application forms, and in telephoning employers;
• interview preparation and coaching;
• arranging work experience placements;
• signposting to specialist advice and services outside the remit of the provider;
• aftercare for clients who had entered employment.

A notable feature of one-to-one support in Year 2 compared to Year 1, was that it was often more job-focused from an early stage in the POEM process. A few providers offered one-to-one support on an appointment-only basis, but most offered a combination of pre-booked appointments and drop-ins. Clients particularly appreciated the tailored and flexible nature of the one-to-one support on POEM.

Some group activities were also provided through POEM, such as interview techniques, job search skills, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and specific vocational training, although in general, they became less frequent in Year 2. Clients were also referred to support and activities provided by other organisations, principally skills and vocational training at local colleges, childcare provision, and advice and guidance on non-employment matters.

Turning to what worked best for particular groups, it was important to tailor support according to clients’ starting points and individual circumstances. Clients who were close to the labour market could begin looking for work within the first few appointments with their advisers, after their barriers to work and job goals had been defined, and their CV compiled or updated. Clients who were further away from the labour market presented a more diverse range of barriers to work and required a wider range of support to address these. More time had to be spent on building confidence, and clients with limited English had to be encouraged to practise speaking it in their appointments and in their everyday lives. Some required ESOL classes before they were willing to consider applying for work. They also needed more guidance on their career options, and some needed coaching in UK business culture.

Outcomes and impact of POEM

Recruitment
• Overall, 9,614 clients were recruited onto POEM (against a target of 11,368). This was 85 per cent of the recruitment target.
• In Year 1, POEM achieved 80 per cent of its starts target (4,884 starts, against a profiled start target of 6,101).
• In Year 2, POEM achieved 90 per cent of its starts target (4,730 starts against a target of 5,267).
There was a slow start to recruitment during the first three to six months of POEM, during the implementation period, and a tail-off during the last few months of POEM as the programme drew to its close.

The programme reached people from a wider range of circumstances than was originally envisaged. A few providers acknowledged that they were not reaching many from the hardest to reach groups, such as economically inactive Bangladeshi and Pakistani women who had cultural barriers to work including family resistance to their spending time away from the home. They thought that to reach such clients in any number would require a programme of longer length.

**Employment**

- Overall, POEM helped 2,835 clients into employment, which amounted to 85 per cent of the target (of 3,323 job entries).
- In Year 1, 58 per cent of the job entry targets were achieved across all providers.
- In Year 2, 116 per cent of the target was achieved, hence, job entry targets were exceeded by providers in the second year.

The overall conversion rate of starts to job entries was 29 per cent, but many more starts were converted to jobs in Year 2 than Year 1 (39 per cent and 21 per cent respectively). Providers attributed their better job entry performance in Year 2 to the following reasons:

- staff had a better understanding of the client groups they were working with, their barriers to work and ways to overcome them;
- advisers had built up expertise in identifying the kinds of work, and finding suitable vacancies, for their clients;
- providers had forged new employer partnerships, and strengthened existing ones, which had created some reliable, ongoing routes into employment for POEM clients;
- some had increased their job matching/job brokering activities, and had built or strengthened their employer arrangements which provided their clients with bespoke training and guaranteed interviews.

There was also some evidence to suggest that in Year 2, a greater proportion of clients were closer to the labour market than had been the case in Year 1.

Over the life of POEM the majority of jobs obtained by POEM clients were in fairly low-skilled, entry-level work. They typically included jobs in retail, cleaning, office and administration work, hospitality and catering, social care, security, driving, and in factories and warehouses. In Year 2, a number of the providers had, at an earlier stage in the POEM process, concentrated much of their effort in assisting clients to become job ready for specific sectors. Some had found that security work was suitable for male Somali clients, after they had obtained the prerequisite
Security Industry Authority (SIA) licence, which the provider could fund. Part-time work, and working with children was requested by many female clients, resulting in part-time jobs being commonly sought as lunchtime supervisors in schools and as childminders in nurseries. Some clients obtained work in the social care sector after entry-level training and Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks funded by the provider, and some clients had taken work with agencies supplying cleaners to private homes and businesses. These too provided clients with opportunities to work the hours which suited them. Finding work for clients in their own communities was also an important source of suitable employment for POEM clients at some providers.

Towards the end of Year 2, most providers reported that the recession meant that they had fewer vacancies to offer clients, especially in sectors such as retail and hospitality. Some noted that former clients had returned to them after redundancy, or that increasing proportions of their new clients were men who had recently been made redundant.

Soft outcomes and distance travelled
The key soft outcomes from POEM were:
- greater confidence and motivation;
- increased awareness of suitable work opportunities;
- job search, application and interview skills;
- improved English language.

All of these were important measures of distance travelled, although there was often considerable overlap between them as progress against one measure would often bring about changes in others.

Other positive impacts of POEM included increased capacity amongst providers to deliver similar programmes in the future. They had increased the range and number of community and employer partnerships in order to deliver POEM, and had learned much about the POEM target groups (and about clients from other ethnic backgrounds), including how best to engage with them, and how to overcome their barriers to work and help them into suitable employment.

The main negative impact of POEM was as a result of its limited lifespan, and of the uncertain nature of the contract during the pilot year. Some of the key POEM staff could not be retained, and providers reported that the momentum and goodwill in the target communities that POEM had created would also be lost when POEM ended.
Conclusions

Over the course of the two-year programme, POEM worked with 9,614 clients, and helped 2,835 clients into employment; a conversion rate of 29 per cent. POEM achieved 85 per cent of its targeted starts, and 85 per cent of its targeted job entries. These figures compare favourably to many other labour market programmes. Most providers’ starts dropped markedly in Year 2 as they focused on finding jobs for their existing clients, rather than on recruiting new clients. The conversion rates were 21 per cent in Year 1, and 39 per cent in Year 2, hence, there was considerable progress over time with regard to helping clients into work. Overall, the conversion rates for the three target groups were very similar (29 per cent of Bangladeshi clients, 32 per cent of Pakistani clients, and 32 per cent of black African clients). The conversion rate was higher for male clients than female clients, at 33 per cent and 26 per cent respectively, but was similar for the age groups 18 to 24, 25 to 35 and 35 to 49; with around one-third of the starts in each of these groups being converted to job entries.

While the majority of POEM clients had not entered employment by the end of POEM, many of these were closer to the labour market as a result of the programme. The four key soft outcomes for clients on POEM were: greater confidence and motivation; increased awareness of suitable work opportunities; job search, application and interview skills; and improved English language. A lack of confidence was the most widely identified barrier to work, and it was also found to be one of the easiest to address. Other soft outcomes as a result of POEM included providers’ increased capacity to deliver similar programmes in the future, and new and improved community partnerships.

In Year 1, providers focused on trying to reach clients who were varying distances from the labour market, including female non-working partners from the target communities who had considerable distance to travel before they would be able to consider work. In Year 1 they did reach some of these clients, although there was less evidence of this in Year 2. A few providers commented that the focus of DWP appeared to change over time, favouring job entries over distance travelled.

There were some clients on POEM who, had the criteria been strictly applied, would not have received its support. These appeared to principally include women and men who did not have partners, whose partners lived overseas, or who had been married but were now separated from their partners. POEM eligibility criteria were devised to encourage engagement with clients who were furthest from the labour market, however, these criteria may be less appropriate for a similar programme in the future, as the labour market conditions at the end of POEM were very different from those at its start.

Key factors to ensure successful engagement included knowing the local demographics, and the preferences of the target groups, and having outreach staff who culturally reflected the target communities. Word of mouth can be a key recruitment tool, given time to build sufficient momentum.
With regard to what worked best in supporting clients, providing a tailored and flexible one-to-one service was the core aspect of POEM, which drew all other elements of support into a coherent whole. It was bespoke for each client but there was some commonality according to clients’ starting distance from the labour market. Providing a service that was culturally aware and sensitive was also a key feature of POEM, and one which clients valued highly. Over the life of POEM, there was a general move towards providing support that was very job-focused from an early stage.

Partnerships were key in engaging clients, and in helping them into employment. A notable feature of the partnerships on POEM was their informal and fluid nature. The most successful partnerships were based on shared goals, co-operation and ongoing communication, and trust and goodwill.

A future ethnic minority outreach programme would benefit from being funded for a longer term. This would enable providers sufficient start-up time, allow momentum to build up across engagement and delivery models, and would capitalise on the potential for word-of-mouth referrals and community interest. It would also enable providers to operate at capacity for a greater proportion of the length of the programme than was seen on POEM.
1 Introduction

1.1 Partners Outreach for Ethnic Minorities

The Partners Outreach for Ethnic Minorities (POEM) programme began in February 2007 (London contracts started in March 2007) and was initially funded for a pilot year. Towards the end of the pilot year, the programme was extended, and ran for a second year, ending on 31 March 2009. POEM was designed to support people of working age who were not in contact with Jobcentre Plus services, who were neither working, nor claiming out of work benefits. Hence, it focused on outreach as the most effective way of engaging with this group. Support was to be targeted towards non-working partners of low-income families, from ethnic groups who faced particular barriers to employment and who were living in areas of high disadvantage and high ethnic minority population.

This initiative is part of a wider strategy to increase ethnic minority employment, which will contribute to the:

- Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) objectives of:
  - promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age, while protecting the position of those in greatest need;
  - ensuring the best start for all children and ending child poverty by 2020; and

- Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets to:
  - significantly reduce the difference between the employment rates of people from ethnic minorities and the overall rate;
  - increase the employment rates of disadvantaged groups;
  - reduce the proportion of children living in workless households by five per cent.

The programme operated in 430 wards within the cities of Birmingham, Bradford and Leeds, Leicester, London and Manchester. Support was provided through ten providers, six of which were in London. Nine of the providers remained in place for the two-year programme, however, one of the London providers was replaced at
the end of the first year\(^2\). POEM operated in some of the same areas as the Ethnic Minority Outreach (EMO) programme, but it was a smaller scale initiative which was originally conceived to be shorter in length.

### 1.1.1 POEM aims

The ultimate aim of POEM was to help clients move nearer to the labour market, and into work. However, it was recognised at the programme's conception that some of the target clients would be a considerable distance away from the labour market at their point of entry to POEM, and that some may not have got a job by the end of the programme. As a result, POEM was also concerned with helping clients to move towards being job ready, if not actually into work. Hence, in addition to producing hard outcomes of employment, understanding more about target clients’ barriers to work, and how to overcome them, was one of the underlying aims of POEM. In addition, the ways in which POEM clients could best be helped to move closer to the labour market, the distance travelled during their time on the programme, and the soft outcomes they achieved through POEM were also seen as potentially important indicators of success.

The programme aimed, through the ten providers, to provide clients with access to the following services:

- job search support;
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and key skills training, where appropriate;
- soft skills training, for example, confidence-building sessions;
- mentoring and help preparing for interviews;
- culturally sensitive childcare.

At its start, one element of the programme was also to give each client an ‘Action Plan’ which would be reviewed with the provider at least monthly.

### 1.1.2 POEM eligibility

Although POEM was directed towards all ethnic minority groups, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Somali women constituted the programme’s primary target clients, as these groups have some of the lowest rates of economic activity in the UK, often face considerable disadvantage, have complex barriers to work, and are hence, at risk of poverty and social exclusion. To be eligible, clients had to meet the following criteria:

\(^2\) One of the London contracts was with a different provider than had been the case in Year 1. Delivery in this area in Year 2 was subcontracted to one of the providers outside London. This new contract began in May 2008, and hence, ran for a slightly shorter time than the other nine contracts which continued unchanged from Year 1 until the end of Year 2.
• have recourse to public funds, and also the right to work;
• be a non-working partner, of working age;
• not be in full-time education;
• be a partner of someone in work and on a low income;
• not be in receipt of out of work benefits in their own right or as part of a joint claim;
• not be in contact with Jobcentre Plus.

1.2 The evaluation of POEM Year 1

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) carried out the evaluation of the first year of POEM during 2007 and 2008. The evaluation began with a familiarisation stage, including interviews with DWP staff who had formulated the POEM initiative, and an initial examination of the Management Information (MI). After this, the evaluation comprised three main strands:

• case study work with providers, and other stakeholders and partners involved in delivering POEM in each of the ten areas, conducted in two waves;
• 50 face-to-face interviews with POEM clients;
• analysis of POEM MI.

The evaluation of the first year of POEM has been published as Aston et al. (2009), and is referred to in the main body of this report as ‘the report on POEM Year 1’.

1.3 Year 2 evaluation methodology

IES carried out the evaluation of the second year of POEM from April 2008 until the programme ended on 31 March 2009.

The methodology was similar to that used in the evaluation of POEM Year 1, and comprised:

• case study visits to each of the ten providers;
• 51 interviews with POEM clients;
• analysis of MI.

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1.3.1 Case study visits to providers

POEM operated in six cities, through ten providers, as follows:

- six providers in London, three of which were part of the same organisation;
- one provider in Birmingham;
- one provider in Bradford and Leeds;
- one provider in Leicester;
- one provider in Manchester.

Case study visits were carried out at each of the ten POEM providers in Year 2, during November and December 2008, and in January 2009. The visits were timed so that the evaluation team could meet with providers towards the end of the operation of the programme in order to gather as much data as possible. However, it was important to carry out the case study visits to providers at a time when POEM would still be operating at full capacity, and before any reduction in POEM staff or activities offered, prior to closedown at the end of March 2009.

Wherever possible we spoke to the same provider staff as in the Year 1 visits, although there had been staff changes at a number of the providers, and at these, in Year 2, we met some of the newer POEM staff for the first time. In total, the evaluation team met with 30 POEM provider staff, including strategic and operational managers, and staff who worked on the ground with clients and potential clients. The POEM provider staff interviewed were in the following roles:

- POEM project, operations and strategic managers;
- POEM advisers – also known as personal advisers, client consultants, and employment coaches at the different providers;
- POEM outreach workers and engagement officers;
- POEM job brokers.

The evaluation team also met with eight organisations working in partnership with providers for the purposes of POEM. The partner organisations included:

- a Somali youth organisation;
- employers from the target communities who had taken on a number of POEM clients and had also referred people to POEM;
- a housing office;
- a Somali education organisation;
- an ESOL and IT provider;
- an Asian community centre.
The purpose of these visits was to explore a number of issues following on from the discussions with providers in Year 1. The key topics explored included:

- the ways in which POEM was operating during Year 2;
- determining any key changes in approach since the last visit in Year 1, and the reasons for these changes;
- performance to date on starts and job entries, compared to Year 1 performance;
- the engagement and recruitment methods which providers had employed during the life of POEM, and the relative successes of these;
- the clients they were recruiting in Year 2, their barriers to work, and their labour market aspirations on joining;
- what worked best when working with clients on POEM, and what worked well for which types of clients;
- working in partnership, and which models proved particularly useful and successful;
- employment, other outcomes and aftercare for clients who had left POEM;
- general reflections on the POEM programme, with a view to future provision.

1.3.2 Client interviews

In Year 2, the evaluation team also undertook 51 client interviews across the ten providers, with between three and seven clients interviewed at each provider, comprising in total:

- 43 interviews with Year 2 POEM clients;
- eight follow-up interviews with Year 1 POEM clients who were interviewed as part of the Year 1 evaluation.

The 43 Year 2 client interviews were arranged with the help of providers, and were carried out face to face at provider premises.

When it was announced early in 2008 that POEM, and the evaluation, would continue for a second year, the evaluation team began to collect ‘permission to re-contact’ from the clients who were then left to interview as part of Year 1. This resulted in 20 clients giving their permission to be re-contacted for POEM research in the future. Using an opt-out process, re-interviews were secured with eight of these Year 1 clients. Five of these interviews were carried out face to face at provider premises, with the remaining three conducted by telephone.

For Year 2 clients being interviewed as part of the evaluation for the first time, the interviews covered:

- background information, including ethnicity and migration history;
- previous education, any qualifications held, and previous work experience;
- how they found out about POEM, and why they decided to join;
• clients’ circumstances when they started POEM, including whether they were already looking for work at that time;
• clients’ main barriers to work, and whether POEM had been helping to overcome these;
• the support and guidance they had received through POEM;
• any particular activities or training they had received through, or as a result of, POEM;
• use of Action Plans;
• the outcomes of POEM, including soft outcomes such as increased confidence, as well as hard outcomes of employment;
• clients’ views of the POEM programme and how it could be improved;
• clients’ plans for the future.

For Year 1 clients who were re-interviewed in Year 2, the purpose of the interview was to see how they had fared in the intervening months. Background information collected previously was checked at the start of the follow-up interview, and then the client’s current status, and the events over the last year were explored, including:

• if they had already left POEM and were working at the time of the last interview:
  – were they still in work, and if so, were they in the same or a different job?
  – if they had left their job or it had ended, what did they do next? Did they find another job?
  – had they been in contact with POEM since they left during Year 1?

• if they were current POEM clients at the time of the last interview:
  – were they still with the programme, and if so, what were they doing on it now, what progress had they made over the last year?
  – had they found work through POEM and left the programme?

• had any clients left POEM and returned later for more support?

As with Year 2 clients interviewed for the first time, re-interviewed clients were asked to give feedback on POEM.
The interviewed clients

The main characteristics of the interviewed clients are shown in Table 1.1, split into clients interviewed in Year 2 only and clients interviewed in Year 1 who were re-interviewed in Year 2.

As in the Year 1 evaluation, there was a considerable spread in terms of age, gender, migrational background, and prior qualifications held by the clients interviewed. Compared to the spread of clients interviewed for the Year 1 evaluation (detailed in the report on POEM Year 1), the clients interviewed in Year 2 comprised: a slightly greater proportion of men (37 per cent in Year 2 compared to 24 per cent in Year 1); a greater proportion of Bangladeshi clients (24 per cent in Year 2 compared with 10 per cent in Year 1) and a smaller proportion of Pakistani clients (25 per cent compared with 34 per cent in Year 1). A smaller proportion of clients interviewed in Year 2 held overseas qualifications compared with those interviewed in Year 1 (25 per cent and 46 per cent respectively).

In terms of migrational background and labour market status at the time of the interview, the clients interviewed in Year 1 and Year 2, were, overall, very similar. However, a greater number of the clients interviewed in Year 2, were interviewed in English than had been the case amongst clients interviewed in Year 1. Interpreters were used in nine of the 50 of the Year 1 interviews, but in Year 2 (including the follow-up interviews with Year 1 clients), this figure was lower, at three out of 51.
Table 1.1  Client characteristics of POEM clients interviewed in Year 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Year 2 clients</th>
<th>Year 1 clients re-interviewed in Year 2</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somali</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other ethnic group¹</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Migrational background</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
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<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK qualifications – degree and above</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POEM status</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left POEM</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still a POEM client</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returned to POEM after having left</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IES client interviews, POEM Year 2 evaluation.

¹ Clients in the ‘other ethnic group’ included a number of Indian origin clients, clients from Sri Lanka and the Philippines, a few other black African clients (from Ghana, Zambia, Nigeria and Congo), and white clients (from Poland, Germany, and Cyprus).
1.3.3 Analysis of Management Information

As in Year 1, the POEM providers were required to return figures on their POEM client starts and job entries on a monthly basis. The evaluation team had access to these monthly data reports, which enabled monitoring of progress throughout the second year, and informed the case study fieldwork with providers.

The MI detailed the numbers of starts and job entries against the profiled targets which were given to DWP by each provider before the start of Year 2. It also contained breakdowns of POEM client starts and job entries by age, ethnicity, gender, and disability. This data could be viewed across providers as a whole, by city, or by each provider area.

In this report, MI data for Years 1 and 2 is provided in tables in Chapters 4 and 6. To enable comparisons to the report on POEM Year 1, it has been aggregated to the level of ‘Providers in London’ and ‘Providers outside London’, and also shows the data for all ten providers as a whole.

1.4 Overview of this report

This report presents the key messages from the two-year evaluation of POEM. Detailed findings from the first year of the evaluation of POEM have been published by DWP in an interim report on POEM Year 1 (Aston et al., 2009)\(^4\).

In this final report, Chapters 2 to 5 begin with a brief summary of the Year 1 evaluation findings, but concentrate on the key messages from the Year 2 evaluation. Chapters 6 and 7 consider outcomes, impact, and conclusions of POEM in its entirety, and are based on data from both years of the POEM evaluation.

The rest of this report is set out as follows:

• Chapter 2 looks at the providers and the partners involved in delivering POEM, including any major changes to providers, and the types of partnerships that providers had set up or continued to use as part of delivering POEM.

• Chapter 3 considers the ways in which the providers engaged and recruited clients to POEM, in particular the ways in which they engaged with the three target client groups.

• Chapter 4 turns to look at the POEM clients themselves, providing a brief profile of the clients, their distance from the labour market, their key barriers to work, and their aspirations on joining POEM.

• Chapter 5 outlines the support and activities delivered by or through POEM providers, including working with employers and other partners, as well as presenting some client feedback on the services they received.

• Chapter 6 turns to the outcomes and impact of POEM, drawing on MI data from Year 1 and Year 2 of operation to show the overall recruitment and employment outcomes, and the extent to which the providers were working with clients from the target groups. This chapter also presents qualitative data on hard and soft outcomes and distance travelled as a result of POEM.

• Chapter 7 draws out the conclusions from the two-year evaluation of POEM, and presents some recommendations for future EMO programmes.
2 Providers and partners

This chapter presents a profile of the Partners Outreach for Ethnic Minorities (POEM) provider organisations. It draws mainly on qualitative fieldwork with POEM providers and partner organisations. In particular, the chapter considers:

- key changes to provider arrangements in Year 2 of the project;
- the partnership models adopted by POEM providers;
- factors for successful partnership working on POEM.

2.1 Summary of findings from Year 1

During the first year of POEM, delivery was by eight providers operating in the ten POEM areas, with three of the London areas being covered by one provider. Some providers were already familiar with the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, but working with the Somali community was a new departure for most. In the past, providers had usually worked with clients who were closer to the labour market than their typical POEM clients in Year 1. Some were more used to delivering mandatory programmes which relied on referrals from Jobcentre Plus, than a voluntary programme such as POEM, which required more intensive outreach work in order to find and recruit suitable clients.

POEM was delivered to clients by adviser and outreach staff, but providers emphasised the importance of working in partnership with other organisations in the community, in order to find clients who would be eligible for POEM, and to be able to refer them to appropriate provision at a later stage. Most providers had to extend their community networks in order to recruit sufficient numbers to the programme, and the extent to which they had needed to do this had adversely affected their start figures during the early months of POEM. Employer networks were also viewed as a key part of POEM, and most providers drew on existing contacts, as well as developing more through POEM.
2.2 Key changes to providers in Year 2

2.2.1 Provider changes

Most of the provider organisations that had delivered the project in Year 1 in the ten POEM areas remained the same in Year 2, although there were two significant changes.

Firstly, the contract of one of the London providers was not renewed in Year 2, due to their poor performance in meeting targets, and this contract was taken over by one of the providers outside London. This contract began in May 2008, hence there was a short gap in provision in this district. Secondly, a non-London provider had gone into administration towards the end of Year 1, and was bought by another company which took on the remainder of the POEM contract. These two providers faced particular challenges in terms of having to establish themselves in the POEM areas and also in meeting recruitment and employment targets within a relatively short time frame. In this respect, they saw themselves as relatively disadvantaged, compared to the other providers, who were better placed to build on their achievements and experiences from the previous year.

One of the new contractors had started off in the same location as their predecessor, but then found that this was not working well in terms of recruitment, as so many people from the target Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities in that area fell into the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)\(^5\) category. They had moved the project base to a different location, which they found worked better in terms of accessing the right target groups. They had also had to recruit an entirely new POEM team from scratch. The project manager said they felt under a great deal of pressure in having to ‘hit the ground running’ and deliver 12 months’ worth of targets within nine months.

The other provider, which was operating from the same base as the previous contractor, reported that the main impact of the change for them had been in terms of staff turnover. They had hoped to be able to retain the same team in the second year, but had lost four key staff members, who had been familiar with the POEM model of delivery. They felt that this change of personnel had had a negative impact in terms of client retention:

\(^5\) When someone from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) is allowed to reside in the UK for a limited period, one of the conditions attached to the leave may be NRPF. Public funds include a range of income-related benefits, and housing and homelessness support, but do not include benefits that are based on National Insurance (NI) contributions. In most cases, a person with no recourse to public funds will not be able to claim any of the benefits, tax credits or other support that count as public funds, including support from programmes such as POEM. More information on NRPF is available on the Home Office website: www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/ukresidency/rightsandresponsibilities/publicfunds
‘…this affected the quality of provision, especially regarding the job brokers, as many clients had built up a relationship with job brokers that then ended. Some clients didn’t show up again when their job broker was no longer there.’

(Provider outside London)

This point emphasises the importance to the POEM model of the one-to-one relationships built up between project workers and clients (see Chapter 5).

2.2.2 Staff changes

Many of the other POEM providers had dealt with staff changes since the Year 1 evaluation visits. In some cases these changes had the effect of enhancing programme delivery, while in others, the impact was more negative. On the positive side, some new staff members had been recruited to various teams in order to improve outreach and recruitment in areas where gaps had been identified. For example, one provider had taken on a full-time community engagement officer, which had meant being able to develop a broader network of contacts with local communities, and this had led to better recruitment results. Another provider had employed a new adviser from a Somali background and this was improving their recruitment of clients from the local Somali community, which they had previously had difficulty in reaching. Other providers had continued, as far as possible, to recruit or retain staff from the same ethnic and linguistic backgrounds as the POEM target communities and felt that this was a key good practice lesson from the project as a whole.

Conversely, the fact that POEM was coming to an end after the second year had had a negative impact on staffing levels within some providers, with team members moving on before the end of the project to find work elsewhere. One non-London provider had lost the project manager to another organisation halfway through the second year. As there was not enough time left to find a replacement, a more senior member of staff was having to take on a more ‘hands-on’ role with the project, which was placing constraints on their resources. However, despite these difficulties, they were confident that they had built up enough momentum in Year 1 to help them meet their Year 2 targets.

2.2.3 Continuity and progress in Year 2

Despite some staff changes since the Year 1 evaluation visits, there was a fair degree of continuity in the approach to delivering POEM in Year 2 across most of the providers. They had been able to build constructively on their experience of delivering POEM in Year 1, and this had made delivery of the programme easier in Year 2. Project managers commented on some of the qualitative changes that they had observed amongst their teams, principally that POEM staff had become more confident and skilled over time; they now had a better understanding of the client group and their needs (also see Section 6.6 on other impacts). They were working ‘smarter and faster’ at carrying out skills assessments and helping clients to prepare their CVs and become job ready. A number of POEM managers felt that
such developments had added value in ways that could not be captured by the Management Information (MI) data:

‘If you simply looked at the performance figures, you would be missing something – there are many, many things those figures don’t capture.’

(Provider outside London)

Most providers commented that the groundwork that they had put in during the previous year, particularly in terms of community engagement, was now beginning to pay off. They had noticed that a higher percentage of new clients were coming to them through word of mouth, having heard about POEM through friends or relatives (also see Chapter 3 on engaging and recruiting clients). It was thought by some providers that the profile of the project was also higher amongst partners and other key organisations in Year 2, such as local authorities, and they were keen to take advantage of this in terms of accessing more employment opportunities for their clients. One provider reported that they had had an increasing number of requests from organisations wanting to work with them.

A few providers indicated that they were focusing more of their resources on employment outcomes in Year 2 of the project. For example, one provider had employed a full-time recruitment manager to strengthen their performance in terms of employer engagement. Another provider made a strategic decision to shift the main focus of their provision towards employability training and the job-readiness of clients in Year 2. Although they had focused more on the earlier stages of ‘the client journey’ in Year 1, they felt that the message coming through from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) was that POEM should be mainly about job starts for the target communities and so they had changed their approach accordingly:

‘We laid on all these extra courses but got no recognition for this or additional resources from POEM, so we cut these to focus on employability support to meet the job starts target.’

(London provider)

2.3 Partnership models

Partnership working was highlighted as a crucial aspect of effective POEM delivery in the report on POEM Year 1, and partnerships continued to be one of the keys to success in Year 2. None of the partnerships in Year 2 were formally contracted, although there were some service level agreements, usually where partnerships involved the use of outreach venues, which set out the general terms of the arrangements. Nonetheless, all of the partnerships were fairly informal in nature, and most had been established by POEM staff, during the life of POEM, although some arrangements preceded the programme.

On the whole, informal arrangements have worked very well on POEM, relying on trust, co-operation and communication, a shared understanding of aims, and
a degree of goodwill on both sides. More often than not, partner organisations recognised the mutual benefits of working with POEM providers, for example, if recruitment partners were able to refer clients to providers for more advanced support and assistance than they were able to offer themselves. Referrals often worked in both directions, with clients being referred by providers to partners for support beyond their remit. In a few cases, POEM partners reported that they had learned a lot from working with a more experienced and larger provider.

Many providers saw partnerships come to fruition in Year 2, after spending a significant amount of time in Year 1 building trust and establishing the grounds for co-operation.

‘As time goes on, you build trust and recognise mutual benefits. In Year 1, partners didn’t know about POEM, but towards the end of Year 1, they wanted to be involved.’

(London provider)

Whereas in Year 1, the focus had been mainly on building up as many partnerships as possible, in Year 2, some providers reported that they had decided to take a more strategic approach to partnership working in order to make the best use of their staff resources. For example, they were closely monitoring which partnerships were proving most fruitful in terms of new referrals to the project and they would then devote more time and effort into working with those particular partners.

### 2.3.1 Recruitment partnerships

POEM providers’ experience in Year 1 in building relationships with community-based organisations within the target neighbourhoods had demonstrated the value of this approach in engaging and recruiting clients. As a result, most providers were strengthening and extending these partnerships in Year 2. Partnerships for the purposes of recruiting clients were most commonly with the following organisations:

- BME and faith groups in the local communities;
- local authorities;
- healthcare providers;
- training providers;
- schools;
- children’s centres.

Recruitment partnerships are discussed in more detail in Section 3.3.

### 2.3.2 Training partnerships

The partner networks established by POEM providers with local training providers had enabled access to a wider range of education and training provision for clients than would have been otherwise possible. Courses at local education and training partners to which POEM clients were commonly referred included courses in:
• vocational training in security, health and social care, childcare, health and safety, and food hygiene;

• English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL);

• IT and basic skills.

In some cases, partner organisations had also made their premises available for POEM activities, such as marketing and outreach work.

External training activities are also discussed in Section 5.4.

2.3.3 Employer partnerships

Employer engagement was considered by the majority of providers to be critical to the success of POEM, particularly in terms of finding suitable opportunities for clients, and in helping providers to meet their job entry targets. Most providers had been working to extend their networks of employers in Year 2, particularly with organisations offering work which they knew many of their POEM clients could do in the short to medium term, with little or no training required first.

This model had been particularly successful at a number of the providers in Year 2, as it was based on both provider and employer having shared compatible goals, and, when managed well, the outcome was mutually beneficial. The employers required a supply of suitable employees, sometimes with particular BME backgrounds, and often at relatively short notice, and they had found POEM providers to be a valuable source of such recruits. Providers were willing to respond quickly to employers’ requests for new staff, as it helped them achieve job starts for their clients. As such, providers often gave considerable support to employers during the recruitment process, for example, pre-screening suitable clients for the employer, doing joint interviewing, or assisting with client training, which helped to strengthen the partnerships and build trust and goodwill for the future.

Some providers were able to draw on their mainstream employer engagement services and networks, which were a resource available to all of the programmes that they delivered, to support POEM clients into employment. For example, one London provider, a large, well-established recruitment company, had access to a pan-London team, which sourced bulk vacancies from large (mainly national) employers, which were then circulated to all local offices. They could also take advantage of the services of two recruitment managers, who found vacancies at a local level, including in the POEM wards. Another London provider was able to access the services of their dedicated recruitment sales and employer engagement staff. At the time of interview, they were also planning to allocate an account manager to the project, who would support the project workers in securing job outcomes and act as a key link-person between the POEM workers and local employers.

Working with employers is discussed in more detail in Section 5.5.
2.3.4 Contact with Jobcentre Plus

It appeared that a few providers had established reasonably positive links with their local Jobcentre Plus offices with regard to POEM, although most had very little contact. For example, one provider had received some referrals through Jobcentre Plus and had given the occasional presentation to Jobcentre Plus staff about the project. Another provider was receiving vacancies from Jobcentre Plus on a daily basis, which were available to POEM clients. However, there appears to have been minimal Jobcentre Plus involvement with the project overall, other than carrying out eligibility checks on clients, to confirm whether or not they were on benefits. One project manager commented on the increased profile of POEM amongst Jobcentre Plus staff in their area and said that they would have liked to refer clients to POEM, had the eligibility criteria been open to people on benefits:

‘There is a growing awareness amongst Jobcentre staff of POEM. They think it’s an excellent programme and they get very good feedback but they cannot refer their clients. That’s why I think that, if it were widened to include people who were on benefits, the numbers would go through the roof.’

(Provider outside London)

2.4 Factors for successful partnership working on POEM

According to the providers, with regard to POEM delivery, there were three main elements necessary for successful partnership working, which are discussed in the following sections.

The first key factor, which enabled successful partnerships to be built was establishing the shared organisation goals of each partner. This often centred around working for the benefit of a particular community, including helping people from the target communities into work, as in the case of partnerships between BME community resource centres and providers. One provider commented that the POEM model of delivery, with its focus on one-to-one support, based on individual client need, had helped to facilitate positive working relationships with their partners, as it tended not to duplicate existing services. Hence, it was able to offer something new and of great benefit, to organisations with whom some common ground was shared.

The second important factor in ensuring successful and sustainable partnership working was good communication, co-operation and sharing of information between the partners concerned. One provider emphasised the importance of taking time to engage with staff in a partner organisation and to establish clear channels of communication:

‘You cannot just put up posters and leave it at that. You have to create trust and develop a referral system so that people know your number and how to reach you.’

(London provider)
It was usually important for POEM providers to be proactive, keeping in regular touch with partner organisations. Another provider described how their community partners liked to receive regular feedback from them on how clients they had referred to POEM were progressing.

The third factor which was key in building and maintaining fruitful partnerships between providers and other organisations was **trust and goodwill**. This was dependent on the first two factors for success being met effectively. Partnership arrangements often appeared to work best when an individual member of staff took responsibility for maintaining the relationship with the partner organisation, on behalf of the POEM team. The commitment of individual members of POEM staff in forging partnerships was strong in many cases, and this commitment had, in time, fostered substantial goodwill and trust between partners, and brought about levels of POEM starts and job entries which would have been extremely difficult to achieve by the provider working alone. The potential downside of this approach was that if the POEM staff member left the provider, some of the goodwill and trust that had been built between provider and partner left with them. However, careful management, including a proper handover of the maintenance of the partnership to another member of staff, who would commit to build on all that had been achieved so far, could minimise these risks, and ensure that key partnerships were preserved for the future.

The following two examples of successful partnerships established by POEM providers serve to illustrate how good communication, and working towards shared goals, operated in practice. The first is an example of a recruitment partnership model, the second of an employment partnership model.

**POEM partner: An Asian community centre outside London**

The community centre was established in 2005, and the main clientele were women of Pakistani origin. Most had very basic English language skills and no qualifications, and they came to the centre for ESOL and IT classes. The majority had school-aged children and were looking for work, but not claiming benefits. Generally they were either married with working husbands, or were single parents.

The centre first became involved with POEM early on in Year 1, when they were approached by POEM staff. They had never been engaged in any similar partnerships before, nor had they ever had any involvement with Jobcentre Plus. The partnership was informal and based simply on verbal agreement and goodwill. It was arranged for two POEM advisers to visit the centre on a weekly basis so that clients could see them for drop-in sessions there. The centre referred to these advisers anybody who met the POEM eligibility criteria and was thinking about finding work. Staff at the centre felt that this support had been highly beneficial to clients. Several had successfully secured jobs and many others had received help with preparing CVs, which had boosted their confidence in applying for jobs. The partner organisation would have liked to see POEM continue, as they felt it was an excellent programme and that there was high demand for their services from the client group.
POEM partner: A London-based Somali employer and refugee organisation

A London provider had a successful partnership arrangement with a local employer providing domiciliary and care workers for a range of contracts around the city. It also provided some support services for Somali refugees. A well-established working relationship with the provider already existed, but this was strengthened through more active engagement as a result of POEM. The partner organisation provided the POEM provider with client referrals and also recruited and trained some of their job-ready clients, before placing them in work contracts.

According to the organisation’s director, employment opportunities were very scarce for newly arrived people with ESOL needs, but they had an ongoing demand for more care workers, and language was less of a barrier to their employment in this sector than in many others. The POEM provider paid for clients to undergo the initial training needed before they could start work as carers, and after job entry, they also had the opportunity to work towards NVQ Level 2 in Health and Social Care with the support of the employer.

To the employer, the key benefit of working with the POEM provider was that they provided a steady stream of work-ready people. This compared favourably with referrals of potential employees from other community organisations, who were generally not job ready.

‘For [our organisation], the benefits of partnership with [the POEM provider] are tremendous. We’re constantly in need of new staff in our big contracts like hospitals and with help from POEM we easily fill 10-15 vacancies…[the POEM provider] get us instant people to employ, they’ve vetted them, and they’re CRB [Criminal Record Bureau] checked.’

(Director of partner organisation)
3 Engaging and recruiting clients

This chapter outlines:

• the key engagement and recruitment strategies adopted by Partners Outreach for Ethnic Minorities (POEM) providers; how this has changed since Year 1 of POEM and why;

• what worked well in terms of engaging and recruiting clients, and why;

• future lessons for engaging and recruiting clients in the delivery of similar programmes.

3.1 Summary of findings from Year 1

The evaluation found a number of key engagement and recruitment strategies in play at most of the providers in Year 1. Using a team of multilingual outreach workers, some of whom were from the same ethnic backgrounds as the target client groups, was seen to be vital in accessing potential clients and in gaining their trust. Providers’ outreach strategies included: knocking on doors in targeted wards; publicising the event at various community venues such as shopping centres, libraries, mosques and GP surgeries; holding stalls at community events such as family fun days and jobs fairs, and at festivals and events held by the target communities; and distributing marketing materials in community languages.

Strategic partnerships in the community were considered crucial to successful client recruitment. For some providers, this became increasingly apparent during the first few months of delivery, when they realised they would need to increase their community networks in order to gain access to the clients who would be eligible for POEM. Once suitable community partners had been found, they were often able to refer suitable clients directly to providers, and provide community venues where provider staff could do outreach work. The extent to which providers were able to locate, build and maintain suitable links in the community was one of the key factors which determined their success in delivering POEM in Year 1.
3.2 Recruitment strategies

There were no major changes in the outreach strategies adopted by providers in Year 2, compared to those taken in Year 1. Some providers, building on lessons from Year 1, had changed the location of their outreach activities, or prioritised one strategy over another less successful one, but overall, the range of outreach activities in Years 1 and 2 was very similar. Having outreach staff who reflect the demographic of the target communities has continued to be an important factor in the success of outreach in Year 2, as has the use of informal partnerships to extend the reach of POEM to potential clients through providing outreach venues and referrals. Although not formally an outreach ‘strategy’, word of mouth has emerged in Year 2 as a powerful driver of recruitment onto POEM, as the programme has become more established and its reputation more widespread among community networks.

3.2.1 Project staff reflecting the target communities

In the report on POEM Year 1, it was noted that a key strategy for engaging with the target communities was through using a team of multilingual outreach workers from the same or similar cultural backgrounds as the clients. It was felt that this strategy had been critical to gaining access and the trust of some of the harder-to-reach clients, such as Asian women, or those who had recently arrived in the UK, including many men and women from the Somali community.

The use of outreach workers who reflected the demographics of the target communities, remained a key strategy throughout Year 2 of the POEM programme. A few providers, who in Year 1 had achieved only limited success in reaching clients from the Somali community, recruited Somali outreach workers to address this. This had yielded positive results in Year 2, with a reported increase in Somali clients joining POEM.

This strategy was not just important in terms of gaining (physical and linguistic) access to clients, and in gaining their initial trust. A shared cultural background was also important after initial engagement, when, on occasion, outreach workers and advisers had to reassure their clients about what the programme involved, or explain the benefits of POEM to partners and families. When POEM staff shared a cultural background with clients and their families, they were able to do this in a way which was culturally sensitive, supportive and encouraging, as they were already aware of many of the potential issues of concern, and were familiar with ways in which they could be overcome.

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6 The Management Information (MI) also shows a modest increase in black African clients recruited by the providers from Year 1 to Year 2 (see Table 4.1). It is not possible to determine how many of these clients were Somali.
3.2.2 Outreach strategies

The types of outreach strategies adopted in Year 2 did not differ greatly from those adopted in Year 1, although some approaches were refined in Year 2. Hence, the main outreach strategies which had been used over the life of POEM were:

- publicising POEM at various venues/locations within the target wards, such as shopping centres, supermarkets, libraries, schools, mosques, GP surgeries, etc;
- holding stalls, or simply having a presence at community-based events such as job fairs, family fun days, cultural celebrations and festivals;
- distributing marketing materials which had been translated into various community languages;
- media coverage, for example, through community newspapers, or Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) community radio stations;
- knocking on doors in targeted wards;
- distributing promotional materials at BME community and other local events.

Key to most of the above strategies was that outreach workers were continuing to work at a grassroots level, engaging with the target communities and maintaining their presence and reputation there. Across the ten providers, a number of creative approaches were adopted when conducting outreach, which enabled them to reach a wider range and number of clients than would otherwise have been the case.

Creative approaches to outreach

A number of providers detailed the benefit of conducting outreach in places where potential clients could regularly be found, such as supermarkets, libraries and mosques. Some reported that this engagement strategy had been stepped up in Year 2, compared to others which they had found, over time, to have more limited success, such as holding ongoing surgeries in partner venues where they had found that client demand dropped off over time. Similarly, some providers varied their approach seasonally to capitalise on school holidays, when parents in the target communities would take their children to recreational events in the community.

One provider reported the success of a mobile recruitment unit in helping to promote the POEM ‘brand’ and raise awareness of the programme in the target communities.

Another provider conducted regular outreach in a shopping centre, and noted that they had become well known there, to the extent that some of the shops passed on information about POEM to people who might be helped by the programme:

‘We even get referrals from The Pound Shop downstairs.’
The client interviews also provided evidence of the success of outreach strategies adopted by the providers:

‘I found out about POEM through a POEM worker who had visited the Islamic course I attend.’

(POEM client, Bangladeshi woman in her 30s)

‘I found out about POEM through a job fair. I approached their stand and took their number. Since then, I’ve been using them.’

(POEM client, Nigerian woman in her 20s)

Refinement in Year 2

Although there were no major changes to the outreach strategies adopted in Year 2, compared to those used in Year 1, there were some lesser changes and refinements, which are worth detailing here.

One notable change to the outreach strategies in Year 2 of the POEM programme was that a number of providers made changes in their choice of outreach locations, based on lessons that had emerged from Year 1 of the programme. Often, this was because they had found other, or new outreach locations which placed them in a better position to reach clients from the target communities. In this way, Year 1 of the POEM programme seems to have been key in allowing some room for ‘trial and error’ in terms of where outreach should be conducted, particularly for those providers who were less experienced in dealing with one or more of the target communities, or had not delivered programmes requiring such intensive outreach, prior to POEM. Even for those providers who were experienced in undertaking outreach to the target communities, it would seem that Year 1 still had some lessons to offer in terms of honing their outreach strategies to reach potential POEM clients.

Another notable feature of Year 2 outreach was the greater enhancement and targeting of outreach strategies. This was often the result of positive results from outreach that had been conducted in Year 1, or of accumulated local and experiential knowledge that had been gained over the same period. Many providers reported that their experience in Year 1 was paying off in Year 2, because they were now in a position to identify the most successful outreach methods and sites, and focus in on these in Year 2. For example, in some areas, providers had learned that door knocking yielded more success in some neighbourhoods, where BME communities were heavily concentrated, than in others. In some London areas, however, where the target communities tended to be more transient and dispersed, providers learned that it was more productive to engage clients outside of their immediate homes and instead focus on community settings and events.

While in most cases, providers were able to build upon Year 1 lessons and insights to enhance their outreach strategies in Year 2, for a minority of providers, this momentum slowed or stalled as they went into Year 2 of POEM. This was because
of uncertainty surrounding whether the POEM programme would be continued for a second year. In the final few months of Year 1, this uncertainty meant that a few providers lost key outreach staff to other posts and lost momentum in their outreach work.

Taking an overview of the whole POEM programme, it is clear that Year 2 did not see major changes to the outreach strategies adopted by providers in Year 1. However, Year 2 did provide an important opportunity to build upon some of the lessons learned from Year 1 and modify outreach strategies accordingly, as experience and local knowledge grew. The main modifications in outreach strategies centred mostly around changes in target locations or changes in the types of outreach activities being prioritised, rather than that any new outreach strategies had emerged, or that any activities were completely dropped in Year 2. In most cases, this was evidence of providers responding positively to local demographics and dynamics, and tailoring their outreach strategies accordingly. Hence, what worked best tended to differ in each provider area, and also often differed over time.

3.3 Use of partnerships

The report on POEM Year 1 highlighted partnerships as a crucial addition to outreach work conducted by POEM staff. This was particularly the case for those providers who realised that they would need to increase their community networks in order to gain access to eligible clients, or clients from a particular target group. With the right links in communities, POEM providers were able to further extend their reach into the target communities in Year 2, so that partnerships continued to be a useful source of referrals, outreach venue space and potential joint working at community events or job fairs.

Most providers benefited more from their partnerships in Year 2 than in Year 1, usually as these partnerships were now better established and good levels of trust and communication had been established. In particular, many providers noted that they were able to draw on their partnerships in Year 2 for a greater volume of referrals. One provider noted that as many as 40 per cent of their clients had come through partner referrals in Year 2. Referrals worked best for providers when partners had initially screened clients to check their eligibility for the POEM programme.

‘You need strong partnerships or your programme won’t work. Finding eligible clients is not easy, so partnerships are key.’

(London provider)

As well as being a fruitful source of referrals, the right partnerships proved to be increasingly useful in providing access to the target communities, or specific sub-sections within them (e.g. women or young people). This was particularly the case among partnerships that had been established with community organisations that were well known and regarded within the target communities. As highlighted
in Chapter 2, mutual trust and a good working relationship between partners and providers were also vital, and outreach workers were key in fostering this.

‘I like [name of POEM outreach adviser]. She is trained, committed and very active in the community. I only really have a relationship with her. She has the trust of these people and the sensitivity to handle them.’

(POEM partner outside London)

In Year 2, providers also drew more on local partners’ expert knowledge of the target communities and the local labour market in some cases. In these instances, partners were sometimes able to offer advice to providers on which areas to target and which recruitment methods would be most appropriate for particular groups, as the example below illustrates.

**Adapting an outreach approach on the advice of a community partner**

One partner of a provider outside London, advised the POEM provider that the local Somali community, like much of the Somali community, more generally, valued oral communication far more than written communication. As a result of this advice, the POEM provider chose to conduct outreach with the Somali community less through literature and more through face-to-face engagement. They had found this to be a far more successful strategy in gaining the interest and trust of potential Somali clients.

In a few cases, partners were also able to provide key links to local BME employers who had job vacancies available in the local community. Partnerships also offered more opportunities for partners and providers to hold more joint events, or to host more joint stalls in local markets and job fairs.

### 3.4 Outreach: what worked well?

The outreach strategies adopted by POEM providers to reach the target communities, raise awareness of POEM, and drive recruitment, were in general, working well by the end of Year 1, and their success increased in Year 2. It is possible to identify four characteristics of POEM outreach which contributed to this success.

Firstly, the community-based nature of much of the outreach enabled providers to effectively reach clients within their target communities. The variety and range of different outreach strategies at local levels allowed providers some flexibility to test which methods worked best and to then focus on those methods more in Year 2.

Secondly, the ability to tailor their outreach strategies to better fit the local demographics and dynamics proved effective among many providers. Again, Year 1 appears to have been important in allowing providers to learn lessons with regards to which strategies worked best, where and why:
’What works in one area doesn’t necessarily work in another, and we have found that only time will tell what works best.’

(Provider outside London)

There was huge variation in the demographics of the local areas in which the ten providers operated. However, it appeared that the extent to which the target communities were concentrated or dispersed in the providers’ POEM wards played an important role in determining which approaches would be most successful. Where communities were highly concentrated in relatively small areas, and where communities were fairly settled, strategies such as door knocking and delivering flyers door to door yielded positive results, particularly in ‘conservative’ communities where people tended to remain within clearly defined neighbourhoods. In localities with relatively concentrated target communities, to engage with potential target clients outside their homes, it was a matter of identifying where they could often be found in their local communities, and conducting outreach there. Examples included venues such as shopping centres, libraries, adult learning centres, Children’s Centres, and schools. These enabled POEM staff to engage with potential clients from the target groups in relatively large numbers, even though these venues were not geared to a particular BME community.

Such approaches were far less successful in the areas where target communities were more dispersed and/or more transient. On the whole, providers found it more difficult to find eligible clients in areas where people from the target communities lived in lower concentrations, and they had to work hard to reach them in sufficient numbers. Door-knocking approaches, and using generic outreach venues such as shopping centres simply did not reach enough target clients, and so in such areas it was even more important to tailor outreach strategies to focus on the places where the Bangladeshi, Pakistani or Somali communities congregated outside their homes (and these would be different for each of the target groups). Conducting outreach in venues, and at events, which were focused on, or exclusive to particular communities proved the most successful ways of reaching potential POEM clients where the communities were more dispersed or transient. Examples included mosques, cultural festivals and events, and enlisting the help of BME community partners to provide outreach venues and referrals. While these approaches worked well across POEM as a whole, and were adopted by most providers, they were particularly important in the areas where people from the POEM target communities were relatively dispersed.

Thirdly, the cultural background, languages spoken and outreach skills of POEM workers were critical to engaging clients, gaining their trust and explaining the benefits of the programme. The majority of providers had recognised this by the close of Year 1 and some had made changes to their outreach staff as a result.

Lastly, informal partnerships with the right partner organisations also worked well, because in most cases partners could recognise the benefits of joint working for their clients. Shared goals, trust, commitment, goodwill and clear communication
were key in the success of informal partnerships. However, the heavy reliance on co-operation and support from non-contracted partners for successful POEM delivery also posed some challenges for POEM providers. For example, there were a few cases reported of less successful partnerships where a number of ineligible people had been referred to the project, who then had to be turned away, and this could have a negative effect on the credibility of POEM within some communities. Hence, recruitment partners who offered to check the eligibility of clients before they were referred on were a particularly rich source of referrals for providers, as were those partners who were able to offer advice and guidance on the best ways and places to target outreach strategies to access eligible clients.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the intensive outreach strategies adopted proved to be most beneficial to those clients who were furthest from the labour market, as evidenced by a greater proportion of these clients reporting that they had heard about POEM through an outreach worker in the community. This is in comparison to clients who were closest to the labour market, among whom there was a much less consistent response, with some being made aware of POEM through outreach but some also having found POEM through their own, proactive job search activities.

The importance of word of mouth

While all of the outreach strategies deployed by POEM providers helped promote the POEM programme to the target communities, by far the most successful method of ‘outreach’ was conducted via word of mouth.

‘The best publicity is word of mouth. Success breeds success.’

(London provider)

Word of mouth was the most widely reported way in which clients (from all three target communities) came to find out about POEM. This was either through friends, family or friends of friends. It would appear that this method picked up a particular momentum as the programme became more established and known in some areas, and amongst the tight-knit target communities there, and while it was widely reported in Year 1, it had become an even more important recruitment tool in Year 2.

‘Word of mouth creates its own momentum. People come to us now through word of mouth. Initially people were sceptical but now they trust us and are confident that we will help them.’

(London provider)

One provider estimated that as many as 60 per cent of their clients had come to find out about POEM through word of mouth.

‘The grapevine among past clients is very strong. If you were doing a bad job, it would soon be made known.’

(Provider outside London)
Word of mouth as an increasingly important recruitment tool was also evident from the clients interviewed for the evaluation. A number reported that they had heard about POEM from a friend or family member who had previously gained help from POEM, and had successfully completed a course or gained employment as a result.

‘I heard about POEM through a family friend who had successfully found work through them.’

(POEM client, Pakistani woman in her 20s)

‘I first heard about POEM from my wife, who approached a stand they held at a jobs fair. I decided to join straight away.’

(POEM client, Pakistani man in his 20s)

3.5 Future lessons on engaging and recruiting clients

It is possible to identify three lessons that POEM could hold for the future design or delivery of a similar programme, targeted at similar groups.

The first is that outreach at local community level is key to accessing harder-to-reach BME communities who are not in touch with Jobcentre Plus or currently in employment or training. A particularly key feature to this is having outreach workers who reflect the demographic and linguistic background of the target communities. Having relevant experience and the right soft skills is also useful in being able to build trust with the communities; being able to address any concerns they may have; and being able to explain to them the benefits of the programme.

The second key lesson from this programme is the value of Year 1 in allowing the providers to test out what methods of outreach work best, or bed-in their outreach activities. While the activities themselves did not differ across the two years of the programme, the sites at which they were targeted and the extent to which some were prioritised over others did vary as the pilot progressed and as providers accumulated local knowledge and experiential insights.

Finally, POEM demonstrates the potential of word of mouth as a useful vehicle for recruitment and promotion among communities that have strong social and cultural networks. As with outreach and recruitment strategies in general, word of mouth as a recruitment tool takes some time to gain sufficient momentum and bring tangible rewards in terms of the numbers.
4 POEM clients

This chapter outlines:

- the profile of the Partners Outreach for Ethnic Minorities (POEM) client population by ethnicity, gender, and age;
- eligibility issues;
- clients’ distance from the labour market on joining POEM;
- key barriers to work;
- clients’ work aspirations on joining POEM, and their expectations of the programme.

4.1 Summary of findings from Year 1

4.1.1 Client profile

During the pilot year, providers recruited a total of 4,882 clients to POEM. The largest group was black African clients, accounting for 30 per cent of recruits. Pakistani and Bangladeshi clients accounted for a further 17 and 15 per cent of the total respectively. Greater proportions of black African clients were recruited by London providers (39 per cent of the London provider total), with the providers outside London recruiting more Pakistani clients (36 per cent).

Fifty-seven per cent of the clients were women, 43 per cent were men, and the gender balance remained fairly consistent across the London providers and those outside London. Thirty-six per cent of clients were aged 25 to 34, 30 per cent were aged 18 to 24, and 26 per cent were aged 35 to 49. Clients recruited by the providers outside London had a younger profile than those recruited by the London providers.

The levels of qualifications amongst clients joining POEM varied considerably, but there appeared to be a majority with few or no qualifications, or with qualifications from outside the UK. A few of the younger clients had degrees from the UK.
4.1.2 Distance from the labour market, and barriers to work

Providers considered most of their Year 1 clients to be a long way from the labour market on joining POEM. They faced a wide range of barriers to work, including: unfamiliarity with the UK labour market and where to access support and advice; lack of job search skills and interview techniques; lack of UK work experience; few or no UK qualifications; low levels of English language; low confidence and self-esteem; and social and cultural barriers, including some family resistance to women entering the labour market. POEM clients therefore took longer to be job ready than clients on other programmes providers had run.

Many clients had young children and childcare was cited as a major barrier to work. Family responsibilities tended to determine the types of jobs which female clients with children would consider, and also restrict the hours they were willing to work, and the distances they would travel. The fact that childcare could be provided through POEM presented a valuable opportunity to clients who would not otherwise have been able to access this kind of provision. However, many clients had access to some informal childcare through their extended families, and some preferred not to use formal childcare.

4.2 Profile of Year 2 clients

This section outlines some of the key characteristics of the project client group in terms of ethnicity, gender, age and disability, using the POEM Management Information (MI). There is also some information, based on provider interviews, of eligibility issues, characteristics of men on POEM, and further demographic details of the black African clients and clients from other white (non-UK or Irish) backgrounds. In Tables 4.1 to 4.3, figures are shown for London providers, providers outside London, and all providers.

4.2.1 Ethnicity

Table 4.1 shows the ethnicity of the clients recruited to POEM in Year 1, Year 2, and in total. Overall, 32 per cent of all clients recruited to POEM were black African. Of the other two target groups, Bangladeshi and Pakistani clients each accounted for around 14 per cent of the total. Individuals from other white backgrounds (non-UK or Irish) comprised ten per cent of POEM clients.

When comparing the client profiles of the London providers with those from outside London, a different picture emerges. London providers recruited a larger proportion of black African clients (42 per cent overall) with Bangladeshis forming 13 per cent and Pakistanis only seven per cent of the total. Outside London, however, Pakistanis formed the largest client group (34 per cent), Bangladeshis the second largest (17.8 per cent) and black Africans the smallest of the target groups (8.7 per cent).
Table 4.1  Starts by ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>London providers (6)</th>
<th>Providers outside London (4)</th>
<th>All providers (10)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Bangladeshi</td>
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<td><strong>Total Year 1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
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<td><strong>Total Year 2</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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The proportions of clients recruited by ethnicity, by the London providers and providers outside London, were reasonably consistent in Years 1 and 2 of POEM. The recruitment profiles broadly match with the proportions of Asian and black African communities in England, with a higher proportion of black Africans living in London than elsewhere in England. Most providers reported, when interviewed, that their client group reflected the local demographics.

Providers were asked what proportion of their black African clients were Somali. Responses varied from very few to almost all. The other black African clients included clients from Nigeria, Angola and Ghana.

From the provider interviews it was also apparent that the ‘other white’ group was very diverse, including Europeans and clients from Central and South America. There were also high numbers of Eastern Europeans who, although not targets of POEM, were often very proactive and found out about POEM themselves.
### 4.2.2 Gender

#### Table 4.2 Starts by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>London providers (6)</th>
<th>Providers outside London (4)</th>
<th>All providers (10)</th>
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</thead>
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<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>672</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1,603</td>
<td>47.2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3,399</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>1,331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3,795</td>
<td>55.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3,092</td>
<td>44.9</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,887</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>2,721</td>
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Table 4.2 shows the POEM clients by gender. Slightly higher proportions of women than men were recruited in Year 1 than was the case in Year 2, and this was consistent for the London providers and the providers outside London. In Year 2 proportions of men and women recruited were roughly equal. Overall, 54.7 per cent of POEM clients were women, and 45.3 per cent were men.

As stated in the report on POEM Year 1, the programme worked with a far greater proportion of men than had been anticipated, as the programme was originally intended to be targeted towards women. Some men were recruited through general outreach in the community, but as time went on, increasing proportions of men came to POEM after hearing about it through family and friends. Case study visits to providers in Year 2 revealed that the men on POEM were a very diverse group and that it would be difficult to generalise about their characteristics, particularly as their ages varied widely, for example:

- some were born in the UK and had been through the UK school system;
- others came to the UK after marriage;
- some had no qualifications, some had a few UK qualifications from school and/or college. A small number had UK degrees;
- others were highly qualified in their countries of origin but had difficulty getting UK employers to recognise this.
Some providers commented that, in general, the diversity of the men on POEM reflected that of the target client group as a whole. Some of the men on POEM had come to the UK from abroad to join their UK-born wives and were looking for work in the UK for the first time. Some of the men recruited in Year 2 had previously been working in the UK, but been made redundant in the recession, and joined POEM as their partners had either been on POEM in the past, or knew of it already. Others had learned of POEM through family members or friends who had used POEM or had heard about the programme. A few of these men preferred to access POEM support rather than claim Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) in the first instance, as they were reluctant to accept benefits and/or go to Jobcentre Plus. A notable difference between male and female clients which almost all providers commented on, is that men were more flexible in the employment they were willing to consider, as they were, in general, far less restricted by their caring responsibilities. In contrast, women with children were often only prepared to work during school hours.

### 4.2.3 Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>London providers (6)</th>
<th>Providers outside London (4)</th>
<th>All providers (10)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 and under</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>925</td>
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<td>551</td>
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<td>25–34</td>
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<td>Year 2</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>17 and under</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–24</td>
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<td>485</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,887</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>2,724</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 shows the recruited POEM clients by age. The largest age group across all providers was 25 to 34 years (35.2 per cent), with 31.8 per cent of clients aged 18 to 24 and 25.8 per cent aged 35 to 49. This represents a fairly young age profile overall, with the majority of the client population aged under 35. There was little difference between recruitment in Years 1 and 2 with regard to age. However, in both Years 1 and 2, the providers outside London had a slightly younger client profile than was the case for clients recruited by the London providers (the largest client age group for the providers outside London was the 18-24 category; for the London providers, the largest client group by age was 25-34).

4.2.4 Eligibility issues

All providers reported that they used the client eligibility criteria set by DWP and that they did all they could to enforce these. Most had links with Jobcentre Plus for confirming non-receipt of benefits and they were able to ask for proof of recourse to public funds. However, most reported that they found it difficult to confirm whether clients had partners and, in general, simply took the clients’ word for this. Some providers said they did not want to come across as intrusive by delving too deeply into clients’ personal lives at the recruitment stage. As in the evaluation of Year 1 of POEM, and as noted in the report on Year 1, a number of the clients interviewed in Year 2 (at both London and non-London providers) freely admitted that they did not have partners, and were not aware of this criteria, suggesting that it was not always strictly adhered to by some providers.

The evaluation also found isolated examples of clients who, on joining POEM, were in full-time education (for example, they were studying for their A levels at local colleges), and of clients who appeared to have been working part-time when they had joined the programme. There was clear evidence that these clients had benefited from POEM, gaining confidence and a clearer career direction, as well as employment outcomes, more quickly than they would have without the programme. However, they were not strictly eligible for the level of support that it offered.

All providers believed that the eligibility criteria were too stringent, particularly with regard to receipt of benefits. They reported that many potential clients had to be turned away because they were receiving some type of benefit, usually JSA or Income Support (IS) (a London provider reported that they had to turn away as many as 80 to 90 per cent of those they initially engaged with, on this basis). One provider noted, however, that clients were permitted to sign on to receive benefits after they had registered with POEM, and that advisors encouraged them to do so. The client interviews also revealed a few examples of this.

Most providers felt that the programme should have been open to anyone from an ethnic minority background, and that there were many people who would have greatly benefited from the support of POEM but were not able to access it. In theory, many of those who providers turned away would have been able to
access mainstream Jobcentre Plus programmes. However, providers and clients alike reported that many would find them unhelpful (or had in the past) as these programmes were not particularly sensitive to their cultural backgrounds. An example given was that of Somali wives who come with their children to the UK for safety, whilst their husbands stay behind to look after their property. These women struggle to find employment and are forced to claim benefits to survive. Although there are programmes for lone parents which could help them, a service targeted specifically at Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups would be far more suitable.

All providers reported that, if existing clients were found not to be eligible for the programme after they had signed up, their files were closed. Staff found this difficult to do, but understood that it was necessary. Where possible, they transferred ineligible clients to their other programmes, or referred them to other local provision, although alternative provision was not always available.

4.3 Clients’ distance from the labour market on joining POEM

The interviews with POEM clients and the case study work with providers revealed a more detailed picture of the client population in terms of their starting points when they joined POEM. The remainder of this chapter provides some typologies of clients’ distance from the labour market on joining POEM, their main barriers to work, and their expectations and aspirations on joining the programme.

Some providers reported that the clients they worked with in Year 2 were very similar to the clients they had worked with in Year 1 in terms of their distance from the labour market, and their barriers to work. Other providers believed that the clients they had worked with in Year 2 were, in general, closer to the labour market, and this was, in part, reflected by the client interviews undertaken for the evaluation. Some providers reported that, as the programme went on, DWP appeared to become more concerned with job outcomes than the client journey, and since it had become apparent to providers that those who were furthest from the labour market were unlikely to be able to find work within the lifetime of the programme, they had taken some steps to recruit clients that they would be able to help into work within the life of POEM.

In the following sections, we outline the typical characteristics, and provide examples, of clients who were:

• close to the labour market;

• an intermediate distance from the labour market;

• far from the labour market.
4.3.1 Clients who were close to the labour market

Clients who were close to the labour market on joining POEM were job ready, or almost job ready, and were likely to find work quickly with the help of the programme. They generally needed only limited support to enable them to move into employment, such as a few sessions with an adviser, to prepare or refine their CV, and to provide assistance with conducting job searches and/or filling in application forms. Many had had recent work experience in jobs which were on temporary contracts or from which they had been made redundant due to the economic downturn. Many were born in the UK and had been through the UK school system, and they usually spoke fluent English. However, they often lacked confidence, particularly with regard to interacting with employers.

Client starting point: close to the labour market on joining POEM

A 35-year-old Bangladeshi woman who was married with two children, had been born in Bangladesh but came to the UK when she was three. After leaving school aged 16, she had done clerical work in the NHS for five years, until she went to Bangladesh to get married. After this she had to spend time in Bangladesh to help her husband obtain his UK visa. When she came back to the UK with her husband, he found work and she stayed at home and looked after their home and children. Both her children are now at school.

The client found out about POEM through provider outreach at a college where she had taken part-time courses in IT and cake decorating. At that point she was considering looking for work but was daunted by the prospect, as she had lost confidence through being out of the labour market for some years. POEM encouraged her to apply for jobs, which raised her confidence and she soon found paid work as a medical secretary at a health centre. Without POEM she did not think she would have had the confidence or motivation to apply seriously for jobs. She had kept her skills up to date through her college courses, but needed someone to help her with applications and to coach her in interview techniques.

4.3.2 An intermediate distance from the labour market

Clients who were an intermediate distance from the labour market on joining POEM needed a reasonable amount of support to build confidence, refine or alter their aspirations, and to identify and apply for jobs effectively. It was likely to take a few months for them to find work. Typically, they had little or no UK work experience, had not worked for some time, or had worked in sectors which were in decline. Many had no UK qualifications. Their English was often fairly proficient, but they were not always confident enough to speak it. These clients often had low confidence in general, and sometimes had unrealistic work aspirations which were a barrier to their obtaining employment. However, on joining POEM, they had clear work aspirations, rather than a desire to improve their English or basic skills in the short term.
Client starting point: an intermediate distance from the labour market on joining POEM

A man in his 30s was born in Somalia, but travelled to the Netherlands with his parents when he was very young. He completed basic school-leaving qualifications in the Netherlands, and then did warehouse work. On arriving in the UK in 2004 he was able to secure more warehouse work, but after his contract ended he was unable to find more work in this sector and could only find part-time cleaning work which did not bring in enough money to support his family.

He believed his main barriers to work were a lack of language skills and job search skills, and a lack of vacancies due to the recession. He joined POEM at a London provider, where he had regular sessions looking through current vacancies with an adviser, and he had recently gained a security certificate with a view to finding work in the security industry.

4.3.3 Far from the labour market

Clients who were far from the labour market on joining POEM needed considerable support from the programme, and were likely to take some time to become job ready; perhaps longer than the lifespan of POEM. Many had never worked in the UK or had been economically inactive or disengaged for some years, while others had arrived in the UK more recently, and were keen to find work as soon as possible, but lacked most of the tools to achieve this. These clients often had limited English language.

Client starting point: far from the labour market on joining POEM

An Indian woman in her 40s arrived in the UK in 2005 via a spouse visa. She spoke Punjabi and Hindi but very little English. She completed her GCSE equivalents in India, but had never worked. Before joining POEM, she had received no formal education, training or employment in the UK. She had tried to find work in the UK but had found her lack of English to be a significant barrier.

She heard about POEM through a friend who had used the same provider, and joined POEM to take up English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, which she had found very useful. She reported that POEM had helped her confidence levels, but most of all, it had helped her improve her English. She was now able to understand more English and was more able to fill in job applications. Without POEM, she thinks she would still be a housewife at home. Her short-term plans were to continue to improve her English, while her longer-term plans were to find work, perhaps in cleaning or catering.
4.4 Barriers to work

4.4.1 Key barriers to work

Providers reported that clients’ main barriers to work were, in general, the same in Year 2 as in Year 1. These were:

- lack of confidence and self-esteem; low awareness of transferable skills;
- lack of UK work experience; having been out of the labour market for many years (for example, to look after family); or never having worked in the UK at all;
- low levels of English language;
- childcare responsibilities and lack of access to appropriate, affordable childcare;
- unfamiliarity with the UK labour market and lack of appropriate job search skills; not knowing how to sell themselves to an employer;
- social and cultural barriers, for example, family resistance to women entering the labour market or restrictions on the kinds of jobs they could do;
- unrealistic expectations about the types of jobs they were likely to access;
- lack of qualifications or only having non-UK qualifications; difficulty in gaining recognition of overseas qualifications;
- social isolation; lack of awareness of services available for Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) or support into work.

These barriers were discussed at some length in the report on POEM Year 1, however, the key features of the most commonly reported barriers in Year 2 are outlined below, drawing on the evidence collected from providers and clients in Year 1 and Year 2.

**Low confidence** tended to be a particular problem for women, especially those born outside the UK and those with limited English language skills, who often had many fears about working. It was also a common problem amongst those who had recently arrived from Somalia, as their confidence and motivation had been eroded by the experience of living in a war-torn country.

Many female clients had been out of the labour market for many years to raise their families and hence, had a **lack of UK work experience**. Some clients had no work experience at all, others had work experience overseas but not in the UK, or in sectors in which it was now more difficult to find employment in the UK.

Some providers reported that some of their clients were eager to work but had **limited English language**. Opportunities for them in the labour market were rather limited until their basic ESOL needs had been addressed, as most jobs, aside from those in the target communities, required sufficient English to be able to understand, for example, basic health and safety regulations.
In Year 2, as in Year 1, it was found that, for women, the biggest barrier was often childcare and a desire for work with flexible hours (usually during school hours only). Many women were reluctant to make use of formal childcare facilities and preferred to find work which would fit in around their family. Many, therefore, wanted to work part-time or close to home or were only prepared to work during school hours (for example, as lunchtime supervisors or teaching assistants). This obviously limited the opportunities available to them. Others were willing to use formal childcare but the facilities in their local area were oversubscribed.

Job search, and application and interview techniques were, to a greater or lesser extent, barriers for most clients, but particularly for clients who lacked the English language and IT skills necessary to search for jobs and complete application forms.

Those who had recently arrived in the UK, including male Somali clients in particular, were unfamiliar with the UK labour market. They were very keen to work, but needed help to navigate UK systems and processes, as well as encouragement to persevere with job search and job applications, after having met with little success in the past.

Cultural and religious restrictions, which applied to Muslim clients in particular, were reported by providers and a few clients. It is important to note that these could not be assumed for Muslim clients in general, as clients’ willingness to work in particular environments varied enormously from individual to individual. Working with pork or alcohol could be problematic for some Muslim clients, with some not wishing to do this at all, while other clients were more flexible, depending on the exact nature of the work. For women, ‘free mixing’, or working in environments where men also worked could be a barrier. Working in the evenings or doing certain types of work (including beauty therapy, or cleaning work, which could be seen as degrading) could also be problematic for some women. One provider reported cases of some clients having become more religious in recent times, and thus, needing to move to more suitable work.

As in Year 1, unrealistic job aspirations were a barrier to work for some clients on joining POEM. Providers reported that they had to work with many clients to lower their immediate expectations about the kinds of work they could realistically expect to obtain, given their current experience and qualifications. Occasionally, providers had difficulty convincing clients that they needed to start at a lower level and work their way up.

A lack of qualifications or only having non-UK qualifications which were not recognised by UK employers continued to be an initial barrier to work for many clients on joining POEM in Year 2.

Social isolation, and where and how to access relevant services, was a barrier for some clients who were furthest from the labour market, although there appear to have been fewer of these clients in Year 2 than Year 1.
4.4.2 Additional barriers reported in Year 2

Three additional barriers were also reported in Year 2 by providers, and they are worthy of mention here. Although they applied to smaller numbers of clients than was the case for the main barriers outlined in the section above, their impact on those individuals could be significant. They were: lack of awareness of UK work culture; health problems; and having experienced domestic violence.

Lack of awareness of UK work culture

Those who had never worked in the UK were often unaware of what was expected of them in terms of, for example, timekeeping, dressing suitably for work and for interviews, and how to interact with other communities. This was highlighted as a particular problem for those from the Somali community, as it is a relatively new community in the UK compared to the other target groups, and there are many cultural differences between Somali and UK work culture which can prove barriers to work. For example, it is considered rude to make eye contact, which can pose problems for Somali men and women in job interviews.

There were also cases cited by providers of Somali clients arriving late to job interviews simply because that culture has a very different view of timekeeping. Similarly, there were occasional examples given by providers, of employers terminating Somali clients’ employment because of irregular attendance, and of Somali clients leaving jobs they had found through POEM because they felt patronised by their employers. Providers with the most experience of working with the Somali community emphasised the importance of working closely with them to ensure that they knew what was expected of them in the UK workplace.

Health problems

Health problems were reported to be a particular problem for older men on POEM. They typically had physical health problems such as bad backs, which prevented them from doing the kinds of work they had done in the past, or from taking up some of the most commonly available work opportunities (such as warehouse or retail work that involved moving stock around). However, some female clients also had health problems which were barriers to work. Their health conditions tended to be more varied and included a range of physical conditions which restricted the work they could take on, as well as a history of mental health problems, most commonly depression.

Domestic violence

A minority of female POEM clients had experienced domestic violence, and required welfare support to help them to get their lives back on track, in addition to employment-related support. There is a great deal of shame regarding domestic abuse and dysfunctional marriages in the target communities and women who have experienced this find it very difficult to talk about, not least as the community traditionally supports the husband rather than the wife. While domestic violence
was not, reportedly, a widespread barrier, it did exist, and had a wide reaching, negative impact on the lives of those who had experienced it.

4.5 Clients’ expectations and aspirations on joining POEM

4.5.1 Expectations of POEM

In Year 1 providers had spent considerable time and effort making links and building relationships with the target communities. By Year 2, knowledge of POEM, and the range of support on offer, had become more widespread. Many new clients were coming to POEM after having heard about it from family and friends, and they usually had accurate expectations about the type of support they might receive through the programme. They were aware that it would be distinctive from support available from Jobcentre Plus, and from recruitment agencies, as they would get one-to-one support, it would provide support for people not in receipt of benefits and more tailored than that available from Jobcentre Plus, and it would offer clients an opportunity to improve their English. Others were told about the key elements of POEM by referral organisations, or by outreach workers.

One-to-one support

Many clients lacked confidence and were attracted to POEM due to the offer of one-to-one support, including some in-work support after entry into employment. In addition, some of the female clients knew that they would be able to talk to POEM staff about the barriers they faced, including cultural barriers, particularly when their adviser worker was from the same cultural background.

Support for unemployed people not on benefits

Some clients (particularly male clients), who were out of work or had been made redundant, had come to POEM rather than Jobcentre Plus for help, even though they were entitled to benefits and assistance from Jobcentre Plus.

‘Signing on was a last resort for me. I did not want to sign on...Taking government money. I want to stand on my own feet, earn my own money. I don’t want to be given money that’s not worked for.’

(POEM client, Pakistani man in his 20s)

There were two main reasons for this, firstly because clients did not feel comfortable going to their local Jobcentre Plus office, and secondly because they did not want to claim benefits. Both of these reasons can, at least in part, be attributed to cultural preference. According to one provider, this highlighted a potential need for Jobcentre Plus advisers to receive cultural awareness training, or that specialist staff should be recruited to work with clients from different BME and cultural backgrounds, particularly in areas where there were large Pakistani, Bangladeshi and/or Somali communities.
Support for people with little or no UK work experience

Providers reported that significant numbers of POEM clients, both men and women, were fairly recent arrivals in the country, often having entered on spouse visas. Typically, they came to POEM for help with all of the processes involved in finding work in the UK; the kinds of work available to them, where to look for work, and how to apply for jobs.

Improving English

For many others, the main reason for participating in POEM was in order to improve their English language skills, both spoken and written:

‘You know she tried so many jobs but for all of the jobs they need good English and communication skills, so that is why she came over here, to improve her English.’

(POEM client, Indian woman in her 40s, through an interpreter)

Options regarding overseas qualifications

POEM staff often encountered clients with non-UK qualifications, who wanted to know whether they could be of any use in the UK. It was generally acknowledged by providers that the lack of value attached to qualifications or work experience gained outside the UK was a barrier for some clients.

4.5.2 Work aspirations

Clients’ work aspirations were very similar to those detailed in the report on POEM Year 1. They included finding work to boost their family income, or in the case of younger clients, to earn some money for themselves, for support in finding part-time work, and to find out about potential career options and alternatives.

Boosting family income

Most providers reported that one of the main incentives among POEM clients for finding employment was to boost the family income, especially in households where no-one was claiming benefits. For this reason, some clients who had little or no UK work experience just wanted ‘any job’ as soon as possible, and were happy to be supported to look for ‘survival’ or entry-level jobs that would provide some additional money for their family.

Part-time work

As in Year 1, there was a strong preference expressed by many women clients for part-time work with flexible hours which was close to their home and fitted in with their family responsibilities, and they came to POEM for help with this. For some of the female clients interviewed, working towards employment was a way of building up their confidence.
'I was looking for somewhere to be registered where I can get into a placement at a school or something…I want to get back to teaching assistant position. They invited me to attend all these workshops, confidence building.'

(POEM client, Indian Caribbean woman in her 40s)

There were also reported to be growing numbers of young men looking for work with similarly flexible hours, for example, night shift jobs, because they were looking after the children while their wives worked during the day.

‘My wife is working full-time like I said, so I tend to be the carer as well of them because the eldest is 16, then a ten-year old and then a nine-year old…I’m the one who’s getting them ready in the morning, bringing them to school and picking them up at 3pm.’

(POEM client, Filipino man in his 30s)

Seeking career alternatives

Some clients, with previous UK work experience, had come to the project looking for a new career direction or to update their skills, for example if they had recently been made redundant or if they had not been in work for some time. A few clients expressed their willingness to seek employment in a different field if it would help them to keep their skills up to date.

‘...you know my first priority is a job within my degree and if not then I am prepared to look elsewhere as in admin based...What I am thinking of doing is if I get into an admin job or any kind of clerical job, I am prepared to do kind of voluntary work on the side...because new things are happening and you need to keep updated, don’t you?’

(POEM client, Pakistani woman in her 20s)

In a few cases, clients talked about the negative impact of the economic climate on the employment sector in which they had previously worked (such as the restaurant business) and how this had motivated them to look for an alternative form of employment, through POEM.

‘The restaurant trade, because of this credit crunch...everywhere is quiet. Everyone is being made redundant. It is quite hard to get a job. When you work in a restaurant and you’ve been busy and now you’re not even doing half of that. We understand it’s very quiet and we’ve applied for so many different jobs.’

(POEM client, Bangladeshi man in his 20s)
5 POEM support and activities

This chapter examines:

- support and activities available through Partners Outreach for Ethnic Minorities (POEM);
- use of employer networks;
- use of Action Plans;
- the prevalence and nature of aftercare for those who have left the programme;
- views on the range of support and activities on offer.

5.1 Summary of findings from Year 1

A wide variety of activities and support were on offer through POEM, although there was considerable variation between providers. Across all providers, the range of activities included:

- flexible, one-to-one support;
- pre-application preparation, including CV writing, job search advice, help completing application forms, interview skills training, help with overseas qualification recognition and confidence-building activities;
- English language and basic skills assessments;
- work experience and self-employment advice;
- group sessions on, for example, interview techniques, confidence building, talks and training focused on entry to a specific industry, and basic IT training.

When clients were initially signed up to POEM, the first step was usually for an adviser to meet with each client on a one-to-one basis and complete an Action Plan. This set out the client’s starting point, including qualifications and previous work experience, their aspirations, barriers to work, and the actions which would
be needed to overcome them. The Action Plan informed the activities undertaken on POEM, and it was updated regularly as particular barriers were overcome.

Other professionals, such as English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and basic skills tutors, self-employment advisers and job coaches were used by some providers to provide further in-house assistance to clients. Clients were also referred to partners to access services beyond the remit of the providers. These included local training organisations and colleges, or childcare through arrangements with local Children’s Centres and nurseries.

5.2 One-to-one support

As detailed in the report on POEM Year 1, tailored and flexible one-to-one support set POEM apart from the other provision in the areas in which POEM operated. One-to-one support for clients was available from all of the POEM providers, albeit to different degrees.

Over the two-year course of POEM, there was a shift towards providing one-to-one support and guidance from advisers, as opposed to group activities, and all but one provider delivered the majority of their activities to clients in this way. One-to-one support had increasingly emerged as the core aspect of POEM provision, around which other activities were put in place, as appropriate.

Providers reported that this aspect of provision was critical, as it allowed them to focus on the needs of individual clients, and to tailor their support accordingly. One-to-one support was widely praised by clients as they felt advisers were taking a personal interest in them, and were taking time to understand their circumstances and requirements. As already reported in earlier chapters, many POEM clients had low confidence, coupled with little or no experience of the UK labour market and had found help through other avenues, including Jobcentre Plus, and employment agencies to be impersonal, and/or not intensive enough.

‘In Jobcentre Plus it’s a screen, you look at applications, you print them off and you can ring. Here they train you on what to say and how to go about it. It’s more one-to-one here. It’s much more effective.’

(POEM client, Pakistani man in his 20s)

Only one of the providers did not focus their POEM provision on one-to-one support for clients throughout their time on the programme, with other activities added as appropriate, on an individual basis. It was notable that clients at this provider reported that they would have found more one-to-one sessions useful.

5.2.1 The range of one-to-one support

The range of one-to-one support on offer was similar to that provided during the first year of POEM. The key feature of the one-to-one support was that it was intensive, flexible, and tailored to client need. The most common model of provision, and the one which clients found most useful, assigned a personal
POEM support and activities

adviser to each POEM client, who would stay with them throughout their time on POEM. The one-to-one support provided encompassed a wide range of activities, which built confidence, skills and employability. It principally included:

- pre-application preparation, including general coaching to build confidence, CV preparation, and job search skills;
- assessment of English language competency, and referral to training if required;
- assessment of basic skills and referral, if appropriate;
- support in completing application forms, and in making telephone calls to employers;
- interview preparation and coaching;
- self-employment advice;
- arranging work experience placements;
- job coaching;
- signposting to specialist advice and guidance elsewhere, including advice on health issues, benefit entitlements and debt problems;
- aftercare for clients who had entered employment.

A notable feature of provision in Year 2, compared to Year 1, was that more providers were delivering one-to-one support that was very job-focused from an early stage in the POEM process.

Client feedback on POEM generally reflected satisfaction with the fact that the support had been on a one-to-one basis, and that it had been tailored to their circumstances, as this was in contrast to any support they had received in the past. However, a few Year 2 clients commented specifically on the job-focused nature of the one-to-one support they had received, including being encouraged to apply for jobs straight away, assistance with interview techniques, and being helped to find work experience opportunities. They felt that these aspects had helped them to progress more quickly than they would have otherwise been able to.

5.2.2 Method of delivery

One-to-one support was almost always delivered face to face. There was some telephone contact between advisers and clients, when advisers thought this would be particularly helpful in keeping a client motivated and on track. Typically, clients met with their advisers on a weekly basis during their time on POEM.

Often the relationship between client and adviser was more formal at the start of the client journey, and was based around pre-arranged appointments, most commonly once a week. As time went on, and clients were more able and confident to make progress on their own, the client-adviser relationship became more fluid. Pre-booked appointments could become less frequent, but it was common for clients to drop in for help with a specific job application or to use the providers’
facilities, in between their regular appointments. A few providers offered support on an appointment-only basis, but most offered a combination of appointments and drop-ins, and in general, advisers were flexible, and did all they could to make time to see clients whenever they came in for assistance.

5.2.3 Location and facilities

One-to-one support was almost always delivered at the offices of the provider and clients were generally happy with this. Most clients interviewed for the evaluation reported that the provider’s premises were close to their home, and those who had a slightly longer journey thought it was worth the effort to travel there.

A few providers had made changes to the location they delivered POEM activities from during the two-year course of the programme. One provider had a town centre office that was found to be unpopular with POEM clients, so they adapted their approach to provide more of their one-to-one appointments and activities in community locations. Another provider moved offices from an area where people living nearby often had no recourse to public funds, to a different location slightly further away, where more people eligible for POEM lived.

Clients interviewed for the evaluation were, in general, very happy with the facilities on offer at the provider premises. They particularly appreciated the use of IT facilities, and photocopying equipment that they did not have at home.

5.2.4 Use of Action Plans

As noted in the POEM Year 1 report, the exact form and use of the Action Plan varied from provider to provider. Some had produced their own modified versions of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) template, but they were similar in terms of content. Two providers were using an Individual Learning Plan that was already being used in the delivery of other provision.

Typically, an Action Plan or Individual Learning Plan contained the following information:

- the client’s personal details;
- education, training and qualifications;
- work history;
- barriers to work;
- short- and long-term goals, and the activities needed to overcome the client’s barriers to work.

In Year 2, it appeared that Action Plans were increasingly becoming a tool for POEM staff to keep track of clients and their progress, rather than for clients to use in between their visits to the provider. Although some clients interviewed had received copies of their Actions Plans, others had not, and some clients were unaware of Action Plans, although they knew that their adviser completed some paperwork or input information into a computer, particularly during their first
few sessions, and that this was often updated at subsequent meetings with their adviser. None of the clients interviewed reported any problems with the provider keeping and updating a record of their progress, and those who received copies of their Action Plans found them fairly useful. However, compared to the value of the one-to-one support they received through POEM, it was viewed as a fairly minor benefit.

‘Quite helpful. When you write things down and look at it you see more what you’re supposed to do and if you’re getting somewhere. It’s quite good.’

(POEM client, Indian woman in her 40s)

‘There is an Action Plan. She [adviser] fills it out for me. I left it to her and follow her lead. It’s to keep on top of where I am, what I’m doing, if I’m sticking to it...It keeps you on track. You know what you have to do. We update that regularly. It’s OK.’

(POEM client, Pakistani man in his 20s)

5.3 Group activities at the providers

Both the provider visits and the client interviews provided evidence that group activities were being used less often in Year 2 than in Year 1 of POEM. In Year 2, the focus of provision had moved towards providing more activities through one-to-one meetings between advisers and clients, and in particular, towards providing one-to-one support that was very job-focused from an early stage. As in Year 1, one provider principally worked with clients in groups, and there was very little one-to-one support available for clients. Clients who had participated in group activities through POEM had found these useful, but the general opinion from clients interviewed for the evaluation was that there was no substitute for one-to-one support. One client explained their experience of having had group training, compared to the one-to-one support they received, which typified the sentiments of many:

‘It was like a group [interview techniques]. At the time you think “oh yeah I can do this, I can do that” but when it actually comes to the crunch, you know, I start panicking. So I still needed that one-to-one at the end of it.’

(POEM client, Bangladeshi woman in her 30s)

Over the two-year course of POEM, providers became increasingly aware that group activities were not usually the most suitable route to obtaining job outcomes for clients. They had found, for example, that some clients were joining POEM to access training (most commonly ESOL and IT) rather than with a view to obtaining employment in the short to medium term. While some activities were usefully provided to clients in groups, particularly during their first few weeks on POEM, as they provided practical assistance and opportunities for social networking with other clients, as they progressed, the focus shifted to finding employment, and for this, one-to-one support proved more suitable.
The group activities provided in Year 2 were similar to those seen in Year 1, but there was more evidence of vocational sessions, tailored to a specific industry or employer, to increase the focus on gaining employment. Several providers had introduced one-to-one activities and short courses on UK business culture for some clients, to familiarise them with the expectations of UK employers, regarding, for example, timekeeping, attendance and suitable dress, as they had found an increasing need for this in Year 2.

The main group activities provided were:

- confidence building;
- interview techniques;
- job search skills;
- basic IT training;
- English language skills;
- talks about specific industries and from recruitment managers;
- specific vocational training (delivered by external trainers on the provider premises) e.g. food hygiene, security, care work, customer service;
- UK labour market and business culture;
- self-employment workshops.

5.4 Support and activities provided elsewhere

Many clients had only taken part in activities at their provider, and some providers delivered most or all of their core activities at their premises, using their own staff. However, some providers had a wide range of activities on offer through local partners, or signposted clients to specific provision elsewhere in the community.

The key activities and provision available through POEM, but not offered by the POEM provider were:

- skills and vocational training;
- childcare;
- advice and guidance on non-employment matters.

These are discussed in turn in the following sections.

5.4.1 Skills and vocational training

As in Year 1, skills and vocational training at local colleges and training providers continued to be the most common feature of external activities. In Year 2 there was a shift towards client referrals to short-term vocational training with a view to gaining employment in a specific sector, such as security, and health and social
care. Some clients were also referred to childcare and food hygiene courses at local colleges. An issue reported by some providers was the availability of relevant training in the providers’ areas. In particular, a London provider reported that they were having problems in accessing childcare courses, that were much in demand from their female clients but were oversubscribed in their area.

Referrals to non-vocational skills training were less common in Year 2 than in Year 1, although some clients were still referred to IT and basic skills courses. Referrals to ESOL courses at local colleges were also fewer in Year 2, as fewer clients recruited in Year 2 appeared to have ESOL needs than had been the case in Year 1. (As noted in earlier chapters, there was some evidence that providers recruited clients who were closer to the labour market as the programme progressed.) There was one notable exception to this, as at one provider, ESOL classes were a key recruitment tool, and the primary activity available to POEM clients.

5.4.2 Childcare

Most POEM providers had established links with local childcare providers in order to help POEM clients access suitable, culturally sensitive childcare. This was done through the Children’s Information Service, local nurseries, and Children’s Centres. There were also some examples of providers helping clients to access respite care to allow them to attend training courses and other POEM activities.

5.4.3 Signposting to other services

POEM clients were signposted to a range of other advice, guidance and services which included:

- counselling;
- housing support;
- legal advice;
- immigration advice;
- debt management;
- benefits advice;
- local youth groups.

5.5 Working with employers

This section looks at the relationships POEM providers had established with employers, and their role in contributing to employment prospects and outcomes for POEM clients (which are discussed in Chapter 6).
Most providers reported that they were providing more activities and opportunities for POEM clients, in partnership with employers, during Year 2 of the programme. Employer partnerships provided a range of valuable opportunities for POEM clients including:

- bespoke industry-specific training;
- work trials with a view to permanent employment;
- work experience;
- group interviews;
- mock interviews.

During Year 1 of POEM, providers made links with many local employers. However, they increasingly found that working harder on a few key relationships at any one time was the most efficient way of achieving sustainable job outcomes for POEM clients. In Year 2 they were targeting employers who had a more regular supply of suitable vacancies, including local supermarkets, factories or care agencies. Working with local employers in the target communities had also been proved to be very successful in securing employment for POEM clients.

**Working with employers in the target communities**

Some of the providers had formed close ties with local employers who were very keen to recruit people from the target communities. Examples included a Somali employer who provided cleaners to Somali-owned businesses in the area, and agencies that supplied carers and domestic staff to people from a range of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds who were living in the community.

One employer, who provided domiciliary and social care to people living in the community, had recruited about 45 clients from the provider (from POEM and other programmes). She explained how important it was for her staff to be from the same communities as the people they cared for:

> The biggest find for me has been from the Bangladeshi community – you just can’t find Bangladeshi men and women to do this work, but Bangladeshi elders need looking after. They may have dietary, cultural and spiritual issues and [the provider’s] clients can understand and meet all those needs…We have new business coming in all the time, people being released from hospital, and if I take on that work, I have to recruit. I contact [the provider] with the vacancy, application form and the person spec…and we shortlist together.

(POEM employer partner, health and social care sector)

These employers stressed that it could be difficult to find the right staff to fill their vacancies, however, when they contacted POEM, they had always managed to fill their vacancies with staff who had been pre-screened by POEM advisers to ensure their suitability.
In Year 2, a number of providers had stepped up the level of employer partnerships to offer more bespoke pre-employment training, followed by mock or guaranteed interviews to clients, and another provider had created work trials opportunities for clients at a number of employers. These job broking models proved very effective and had resulted in successful job entries for POEM clients, some in considerable numbers.

**Pre-employment training**

One provider outside London had worked collaboratively with a large retail company and a leisure centre in the locality to design and deliver a bespoke pre-employment retail training package, with guaranteed interviews for participants. The provider had contributed work-focused ESOL and training in health and safety issues. This initiative had resulted in 28 POEM clients gaining employment with the retail organisation.

Similarly, a London-based provider had organised a pre-employment training programme with a security firm which also offered guaranteed interviews to clients, on completion.

**Work trials**

A London provider was working with local retail employers to persuade them to offer POEM clients one-day work trials and they had achieved this for around 20 clients. The aim of this strategy was to give clients a taste of work experience and to build their confidence, and to demonstrate to employers that the POEM clients were willing to work and willing to learn.

### 5.6 Aftercare

This section looks at the prevalence and usefulness of aftercare, or the contact from providers, once clients left POEM to enter employment.

There was an increase in aftercare activity in Year 2, compared to Year 1, due to more job starts having been achieved (see Chapter 6 on outcomes). While providers were not obliged to provide any aftercare to POEM clients as part of their contract with DWP, most were very keen to ensure that a good standard of aftercare was in place, and only one was carrying out very little aftercare. Advisers had often built up close relationships with their clients, and were genuinely concerned about their well-being after they left POEM. They also wanted to do what they could to help POEM clients sustain their employment. Crucially, they also wanted to protect their reputation with employers, to maintain their successful employer partnerships, and to ensure that clients were satisfied with their service.
'The last thing we want is for people to get a job and then bounce out again. Once you’ve built up that relationship with people, you care about them and you want them to do well and progress. We get letters. We get cards. It is very gratifying to see a transformation in somebody.’

(Provider outside London)

‘It’s good customer service and it’s about keeping our reputation.’

(London provider)

In some cases, aftercare involved a few phone calls to clients, at the discretion of their adviser. Other providers had a more structured approach to aftercare, particularly the larger providers that delivered the POEM contract alongside other related contracts. One such organisation had a dedicated in-work support team. Other aftercare provision included giving clients a card when they found employment, that entitled them to return to the provider at any time to use their facilities. Aftercare had occasionally involved providers negotiating with employers over issues such as pay or timekeeping. Regardless of the approach to aftercare, providers generally had an open-door policy, so that clients could return to them for additional support if they needed to.

Example of a formal 13-week aftercare policy

A provider offered post-employment support for 13 weeks after completion of POEM, the intensity of which they reduced gradually over this period. The adviser would make contact with their ex-client by phone at least five times within this period. Travel costs were also covered for four weeks from the date the client started work to assist with their expenses prior to getting paid. If there were any specific issues causing problems for the employer or employee, the provider would work with the employer to try to overcome these with them. Clients were also free to visit their provider if they had any issues they wanted to discuss.

Almost all interviewed clients who had left POEM reported that they had received aftercare from the provider, mostly in the form of phone calls. Some clients had visited the provider offices to let their advisers know how they were getting on, and some clients were still attending the provider after they had started work as they wanted to find full-time, higher paid or more rewarding work than they had managed to find so far through the POEM programme. Clients appreciated the aftercare they had received, and most said they would return to the provider if they needed any further help with employment in the future.

‘They do follow up what happened. How did I get on? How did I settle in? Was it ok? I do still pop in here even when I was working just to say hello.’

(POEM client, Filipino man in his 30s)
5.7 Flexibility and demand-led provision

This section looks at the factors that allowed providers to offer flexible and demand-led provision. This was dependent upon two main factors:
- the range of activities and support;
- the ability of the adviser to understand the needs of the client.

5.7.1 Range of activities and support

Some providers had a wide range of support and activities on offer, while at other providers, the activities available to POEM clients were more limited. Those with the widest range of activities (which were usually available to both POEM clients and clients on their other contracts) were able to offer a highly demand-led service.

The providers which appeared to be most effective in meeting the needs of their POEM clients provided:
- one-to-one support which was tailored to each client;
- group activities that were offered when appropriate (and this was distinct from and preferable to offering group activities because they were easier or cheaper to deliver than one-to-one activities);
- had strong partnerships and links with employers which built on the activities on offer at the provider offices.

In addition to these core elements, some providers were able to offer innovative services to clients through building partnerships with a range of local authority and community organisations, as the example below illustrates.

**Health advice and support for POEM clients**

A provider outside London had launched a new initiative in Year 2 of POEM delivery in the form of a health programme made available to POEM clients through the Expert Patients Programme. This was a way to target clients who might ordinarily be reluctant to seek medical advice but whose health could be a barrier to finding employment (and therefore, was part of the client Action Plan). Health support workers would visit the provider offices and provide impartial advice on health conditions. It was also available in community languages.

5.7.2 Understanding clients’ needs

The ability of POEM advisers to understand their clients’ needs and identify which activities would be most suitable for each client was as important to the delivery of flexible, client-centred provision as the range of activities on offer. Providers that were best placed to do this had empathetic advisers, many of whom shared cultural backgrounds with their clients. Also crucial was the ability of the
adviser to be sympathetic to practical issues such as the time of day they had contact with the client, and being flexible regarding meeting with clients; offering both drop-in sessions and pre-arranged appointments.

The shift in focus towards most activities being delivered on a one-to-one basis over the life of POEM meant that staff were increasingly able to tailor POEM activities to each client. This meant that the specific barriers to work faced by each could be tackled. Unless carefully selected, the delivery of activities in a group meant that clients could receive too much or too little information, or that the provision would be at too high or low a level for them, as was reported by some of the clients interviewed at the provider that delivered most activities in groups. Clients’ starting points on POEM were very varied, and so flexible and demand-led provision was key to keeping clients engaged and moving forwards.

5.8 What was most useful?

This section will look at provider and client views of which activities were most useful, and whether they were of particular use to different types of clients.

Providers and clients generally agreed that, of the provision on offer through POEM, the one-to-one activities were the most useful, and in particular:

- general support and encouragement from POEM staff, which improved overall confidence;
- CV preparation;
- help with searching and applying for jobs;
- interview technique training and coaching for specific interviews.

However, activities in partnership with employers, such as work experience placements, bespoke training, and interviews with employers were also an effective aspect of POEM provision, especially in Year 2. Providers saw these as key to achieving job outcomes, and clients saw them as a chance to prove themselves with employers.

There were no activities that providers or clients thought were of marginal benefit, although some activities were seen as more critical for some clients than for others.

5.8.1 What worked for particular client groups?

Tailoring provision according to clients’ distance from the labour market

As already noted (in Section 5.2.1), there was a general move amongst most providers towards providing support that was very job-focused, at an early stage in the POEM process. However, at the providers that appeared to be offering the most effective and tailored service to clients, there was still some variation in the support provided to clients, according to their distance from the labour market.
Clients who were close to the labour market on joining POEM were usually able to begin their job search activities and start applying for jobs within the first few appointments with their advisers. As with all clients, the first appointment would involve completing their Action Plan (whether for the provider’s records, or for both the provider and the client) which outlined their barriers, and immediate goals and longer-term career aspirations. Their CV would also be compiled or refined during this appointment or the next. After this, most of the subsequent activities would be focused on finding and applying for jobs, with interview preparation and coaching added at an appropriate stage. If necessary, clients would be referred to a short vocational course or bespoke training, to prepare them for interviews with employers in a particular sector, or to provide the necessary certification to work in that field, but often this was not required. While many clients had low confidence on joining POEM, it was not usually necessary to introduce specific activities to boost confidence and self-esteem for those who were relatively close to the labour market. Many providers reported that for this client group, building a CV, learning how to search for and apply for suitable jobs, and having interviews with employers provided them with tangible evidence in their own abilities, and boosted their confidence as a matter of course.

Clients who were further from the labour market presented a more diverse range of barriers to work, and required a wider range of activities and support from POEM in order to overcome them. More time had to be spent on building their general confidence in one-to-one sessions and group activities. Clients with limited English often needed to be encouraged to practise speaking it in their POEM appointments and elsewhere, as some were very reluctant to do this. Some clients required ESOL classes before they were willing to consider what their career options might be, and to help them to meet others in similar situations, which also raised their confidence (although this scenario was more common in Year 1 than in Year 2). Such clients were also likely to need support on a range of issues outside the remit of many of the providers, for example, on health issues, benefits or debt, or regarding respite care, and the best-equipped providers were able to signpost them to relevant sources of support. Regarding employment, clients who were further from the labour market often needed guidance in what their options were, and some needed coaching in UK work culture.

Clients who were further from the labour market on joining POEM often benefited greatly from job broking support, in the form of work placements, work trials or bespoke training with guaranteed interviews. It is important to note that some clients, who were an intermediate or a long distance from the labour market were able to begin applying for jobs within a few weeks of joining POEM, particularly if they could be guided towards working in a particular sector in which the provider had forged a fruitful employer partnership, or if they were able to gain an industry standard entry qualification. Another scenario in which clients who were a fair distance from the labour market, on the basis of having limited English language, could be moved quickly towards employment, was by helping them to apply for work with employers from their own communities, where limited English was less
of a barrier. However, in general, more time had to be spent in initial confidence building, defining goals, and other preparatory activities to overcome key barriers to work, before job search and applications could begin in earnest.

The final sections in this chapter detail some of the key POEM activities which were most useful for particular groups of clients.

**One-to-one support**

One-to-one support was seen to be important for all clients, however, there were some clients who clearly benefited from it more than others. These included POEM clients with no work history, or no experience of the labour market in the UK, those who had only worked within their own community and those who had been absent from the labour market for a long time. For these clients, intensive one-to-one support was key to improving their confidence, and in supporting them to look for jobs and apply for them, which was for many, a very daunting prospect.

**Broadening aspirations**

There were some clients who had work experience from overseas, often in a professional capacity, who were struggling to find work of a similar level in the UK. In these cases, providers worked with clients to broaden their work aspirations in the short term. Similarly there were clients born in the UK who had unrealistic expectations about the work they could realistically gain. Providers encouraged clients to job search outside their preferred field, or at a lower occupational level as a first step towards the employment they were ideally seeking.

**Job broking and work trials**

Clients with little experience of the UK labour market found job brokerage and work trials very beneficial. They often had the skills and knowledge to efficiently search and apply for jobs but had not been successful in gaining employment and in some cases, getting an interview with an employer. POEM links with employers provided them with a valuable means in which to form a new relationship with an employer.

**ESOL**

For those not born in the UK or with little experience of society outside their local community, ESOL provision was particularly useful, both in building language skills, and in boosting clients’ confidence. This was less prevalent in Year 2 than it had been in Year 1, however, as fewer Year 2 clients had ESOL requirements.
6 Outcomes and impact of POEM

This chapter turns to the outcomes and impact of Partners Outreach for Ethnic Minorities (POEM), drawing on Management Information (MI), and the qualitative work with providers and clients. It presents:

- recruitment outcomes in Years 1 and 2 of POEM, and overall;
- employment outcomes in Years 1 and 2, and for POEM as a whole;
- data on the extent to which providers were recruiting and working successfully with the programme’s target groups;
- soft outcomes and distance travelled as a result of POEM.

N.B. Throughout this chapter, recruitment is also referred to as ‘starts’, and employment outcomes are also referred to as ‘job entries’. Recruitment and employment targets are also referred to as ‘profiled starts’ and ‘profiled job entries’.

6.1 Recruitment

6.1.1 Headline recruitment figures

This section provides the headline figures on recruitment (starts) achieved by POEM providers over the two-year programme. Table 6.1 shows the numbers of starts, set against the respective targets (profiled starts):

- Overall, 9,614 clients were recruited onto POEM (against a target of 11,368). The ten providers achieved 85 per cent of the recruitment target, and there was little difference in this figure between the London providers or the providers outside London (85 and 84 per cent respectively).

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As POEM began in March 2007, with Year 2 beginning in April 2008, the data presented under Year 1 of POEM contains 13 months of data, running from 1 March 2007 to 31 March 2008. Data for Year 2 of POEM includes 12 months of data from 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009.
In Year 1, POEM achieved 80 per cent of its start target (4,884 starts, against a profiled start target of 6,101). Providers outside London performed slightly better than the London providers (as 85 and 78 per cent of their respective targets were achieved).

In Year 2, POEM achieved 90 per cent of its start target (4,730 starts against a target of 5,627). In its second year, the London providers performed slightly better than the providers outside London (92 per cent, compared to 84 per cent of achieved starts).

### Table 6.1 POEM starts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>London providers</th>
<th></th>
<th>Providers outside London</th>
<th></th>
<th>All providers</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Starts</td>
<td>Profiled starts</td>
<td>Starts</td>
<td>Profiled starts</td>
<td>Starts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>3,490</td>
<td>4,463</td>
<td>1,394</td>
<td>1,638</td>
<td>4,884</td>
<td>6,101</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of target achieved</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>3,399</td>
<td>3,675</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>1,592</td>
<td>4,730</td>
<td>5,267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of target achieved</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (Years 1 and 2)</td>
<td>6,889</td>
<td>8,138</td>
<td>2,725</td>
<td>3,230</td>
<td>9,614</td>
<td>11,368</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage of target achieved</td>
<td>85</td>
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In general, providers performed better in Year 2 than in Year 1 with regard to starts to POEM, as had been anticipated by providers during the case study visits as part of the evaluation of Year 1. As highlighted in the report on POEM Year 1, there was a slow start to the delivery of this programme, for the London providers in particular. Lower performance in Year 1 was attributed, in the case of starts, to largely unanticipated difficulties in accessing eligible clients from the target communities.

By Year 2, the providers were performing well against their start targets, although they were not quite meeting them. The difference in performance between the London providers and the providers outside London seen in Year 1 had reversed, to bring overall start performance across the two years by providers in and outside London almost into line at 85 and 84 per cent respectively.

### 6.1.2 Performance over time

We now turn to more detailed MI to illustrate providers’ performance over time with regard to client recruitment, set against the targets for Years 1 and 2.

Figures 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 show the numbers of starts and profiled starts for all providers, the London providers, and the providers outside London respectively.
All three figures depict a slow start during the first three to six months of the programme during the implementation and start-up period, and a tail-off during the last few months of POEM. Performance in the intervening months, from summer/autumn 2007, until the end of 2008, tended to hover around the month-to-month profiled starts. There was some seasonal variation within this, for example, performance was lower in December 2007 and 2008 for the providers outside London in particular. Indeed, after a promising start amongst providers outside London, performance on starts suffered from a number of troughs in the middle and later months of the programme, suggesting that after initial successful recruitment strategies had been established, resources were pulled towards working with existing clients rather than recruiting new ones.

**Figure 6.1 Starts and profiled starts, by month – all providers (10)**

Figure 6.2 Starts and profiled starts, by month – London providers (6)


Figure 6.3 Starts and profiled starts, by month – providers outside London (4)

Table 6.2 shows the extent to which performance fluctuated over the different stages of POEM (start-up, full operation and closedown), by dividing performance into six-month blocks. Across all providers, performance was lowest in the first six months of Year 1 (63.3 per cent of starts were achieved) and highest during months seven to 13 (92.5 per cent) and months one to six of Year 2 (98.8 per cent). As anticipated, performance on starts dropped during the last six months of the programme’s operation (to 81.1 per cent), although not to the levels seen in the start-up period.

As was shown in Figure 6.3, although providers outside London did not achieve their start targets in the first two to three months of POEM, by the third and fourth month they were exceeding them, meaning that in the first six months of Year 1, they reached 96.8 per cent of their recruitment target (Table 6.2).

The performance of the providers outside London began with 49.6 per cent of starts achieved in the first six months, from where it increased, peaking in the first six months of Year 2 at 104.1 per cent. In the last six months of the programme, performance dropped to 81.6 per cent as POEM began to wind down before its close at the end of March 2009.

Table 6.2   Overview of starts achieved against targets (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>London providers</th>
<th>Providers outside London</th>
<th>All providers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage achieved Year 1 months 1–6</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>63.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage achieved Year 1 months 7–13</td>
<td>98.4</td>
<td>75.1</td>
<td>92.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage achieved Year 2 months 1–6</td>
<td>104.1</td>
<td>87.0</td>
<td>98.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage achieved Year 2 months 7–12</td>
<td>81.6</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>81.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall percentage achieved Years 1 and 2</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>84.4</td>
<td>84.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figures 6.4 and 6.5 show the cumulative actual and profiled starts for the London providers, and the providers outside London over the life of POEM. These show that the trajectories observed during Year 1 of POEM (and in the report on Year 1) continued in Year 2, with London providers actual performance continuing to track profiled performance in Year 2, at a slightly lower level than targeted. Performance across the providers outside London was, by the end of Year 1, showing a slight decrease against cumulative start targets, and this continued, with the gap between actual and profiled starts performance widening slightly during Year 2.

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8 Seven months in the case of the second half of Year 1, due to Year 1 beginning on 1 March 2007 and ending on 31 March 2008.
Figure 6.4  Cumulative actual and profiled starts – London providers (6)


Figure 6.5  Cumulative actual and profiled starts – providers outside London (4)

6.1.3 Who did POEM not reach?

The evaluation of POEM in Year 1 and Year 2 has provided evidence that the programme reached people from a wider range of circumstances than was originally envisaged when the programme was conceived. This raises the question of the extent to which POEM has failed to recruit from the hardest-to-reach groups around whom POEM was designed.

The providers had mixed views regarding the extent to which they were not reaching the target groups, and within them, the kinds of clients for whom POEM was originally intended. A few stated that they were reaching all key groups, but most providers reported that they had not found it easy to recruit from all three target groups. To a certain extent this was a reflection of the numbers of clients from those communities living in their catchment areas, but this did not appear to be the whole explanation. The importance of outreach workers being from the communities from which they hoped to recruit also played a part, with initial access proving difficult in the absence of this.

A few providers acknowledged that they were not accessing many from the hardest-to-reach groups, including the typical target group around whom POEM had been originally designed; that is, economically inactive Bangladeshi and Pakistani women who typically had considerable barriers to work, including cultural barriers such as family resistance to their spending time away from the home and family. Providers thought that to reach substantial numbers of such clients would take considerable time and effort, and would require a programme which ran for longer than two years. Some providers observed that they were not reaching many older people in the target groups.

With regard to recruiting the hardest-to-reach clients, and the fact that they had not achieved this in the main, one provider explained that at the start of Year 1 they had understood a key aim of POEM to be learning more about the client journey, and moving clients towards the labour market, with a lesser focus on moving clients into work. Their initial recruitment and support strategies had reflected this, and they recruited many clients who were some distance from the labour market, and found ways to help them travel towards it. However, later in Year 1 the provider changed their approach, and tended to recruit clients who were closer to the labour market, as they perceived that DWP had become more interested in the job outcomes achieved on POEM, and less interested in the client journey.
6.2 Employment

6.2.1 Headline employment figures

This section presents the headline figures on employment (job entries) achieved by providers over the two-year life of POEM\(^9\). The headline figures on numbers of job entries, set against the respective targets for these (profiled starts and job entries), are presented in Table 6.3.

- Overall, POEM helped 2,835 clients into employment, which amounted to 85 per cent of the target (2,835 job entries, against a target of 3,323). The providers outside London performed better than the London providers with regard to employment outcomes (achieving 115 per cent of the target, compared to 73 per cent, respectively).

- In Year 1, 58 per cent of the job entry targets were achieved across all providers, but the providers outside London performed notably better than the London providers (108 per cent, compared to 41 per cent).

- In Year 2, 116 per cent of the target was achieved, hence, job entry targets were exceeded by providers as a whole. The providers outside London continued to perform better than the London providers, although the difference was less marked than in Year 1 (they achieved 122 and 113 per cent of their targets, respectively).

Table 6.3 POEM job entries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>London providers</th>
<th>Providers outside London</th>
<th>All providers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job entries</td>
<td>Profiled job entries</td>
<td>Job entries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>1,296</td>
<td>491</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of target achieved</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>1,206</td>
<td>1,070</td>
<td>613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of target achieved</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>58</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (Years 1 and 2)</td>
<td>1,731</td>
<td>2,366</td>
<td>1,104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of target achieved</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^9\) As POEM began in March 2007, with Year 2 beginning in April 2008, the data presented under Year 1 of POEM contains 13 months of data, running from 1 March 2007 to 31 March 2008. Data for Year 2 of POEM includes 12 months of data from 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009. Any outcomes after 31 March 2009 are not included.
Performance on job entries in Year 1 was lower than performance on starts, and as detailed in the report on POEM Year 1, this was attributed to many POEM clients being further from the labour market than clients they had worked with on other programmes in the past. In Year 2, the providers outside London continued to perform better than London providers in Year 2, although both groups exceeded their employment targets. Across all ten providers, over the two-year programme, the progress against job entry targets was good, at 85 per cent, and was the same level of performance against targets observed with regard to starts on POEM.

6.2.2 Performance over time

More detailed MI data on job entries is presented in this section, to depict providers’ performance on a month-to-month basis, over the life of the two-year programme.

Figures 6.6, 6.7 and 6.8 show the numbers of job entries and profiled job entries for all providers, London providers, and providers outside London respectively. Figure 6.6 depicts a general increase in job entry performance from the start of POEM in March 2007, which continued for the whole of Year 1. Job entry performance across all ten providers peaked in March 2008, at the halfway point of the programme. During Year 2, job entry performance across all ten providers remained, in the main, above the month-to-month target.

During the early months of POEM, the London providers had lower job entries for a longer period of time than was the case for the providers outside London, whose performance rose more quickly during the first six months. After the first year however, the London providers’ Year 2 performance, month to month, was, on the whole, above or just below but close to their target.
Figure 6.6  Job entries and profiled job entries, by month – all providers (10)

![Graph showing job entries and profiled job entries by month for all providers.]


Figure 6.7  Job entries and profiled job entries, by month – London providers (6)

![Graph showing job entries and profiled job entries by month for London providers.]

Table 6.4 provides an overview of job entry performance over time, by dividing the two years of POEM’s operation into six months blocks. Looking at the data for all providers, job entry performance was low in the first six months at 26.1 per cent of the target. However, the providers outside London were reaching 87.1 per cent of their profiled job entries, while the London providers were achieving hardly any job entries, reaching only 3.8 per cent of their target. Job entry performance picked up in the second half of Year 1 and continued to rise during the first six months of Year 2; this was particularly dramatic in the case of the London providers. There was a dip in job entry performance during the last six months of POEM’s operation, but this was slight compared to the observed dip in starts (see Section 6.1). Towards the end of POEM, many providers were clearly concentrating their resources onto helping their existing clients into work, and their recruitment activities were scaled down as the programme drew near its end.

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10 Seven months in the case of the second half of Year 1, due to Year 1 beginning on 1 March 2007 and ending on 31 March 2008.
Table 6.4  Overview of job entries achieved against targets (percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>London providers</th>
<th>Providers outside London</th>
<th>All providers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage achieved Year 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>months 1–6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage achieved Year 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>months 7–13</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>125.7</td>
<td>84.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage achieved Year 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>months 1–6</td>
<td>118.6</td>
<td>128.2</td>
<td>121.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage achieved Year 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>months 7–12</td>
<td>107.2</td>
<td>116.0</td>
<td>109.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall percentage achieved</td>
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<tr>
<td>Years 1 and 2</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>115.4</td>
<td>85.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figures 6.9 and 6.10 depict cumulative actual and profiled job entries for the London providers and the providers outside London. The actual job entries achieved by the providers outside London tracked the profiled job entries closely for the life of POEM, aside from the first few months and the last few months of the programme’s operation (Figure 6.10). However, Figure 6.9 shows that the London providers’ relatively slow start put them at a disadvantage with regard to job entry performance for the remainder of the programme, and they were not able to fully recover from their slower beginning.

Figure 6.9  Cumulative actual and profiled job entries – London providers (6)
During the case study visits, providers attributed their better job entry performance in Year 2 to the following reasons:

- staff had a better understanding of the client groups they were working with, their barriers to work and ways to overcome them;
- advisers had built up expertise in identifying the kinds of work, and finding suitable vacancies, for their clients;
- providers had forged new employer partnerships, and strengthened existing ones, which had created some reliable, ongoing routes into employment for POEM clients;
- some had increased their job matching/job brokering activities, and had built or strengthened their employer arrangements which provided their clients with bespoke training and guaranteed interviews.

### 6.2.3 Employment destinations

The common employment destinations for POEM clients in Year 2 remained similar to those in Year 1; hence, over the life of POEM the majority of jobs obtained by POEM clients were in fairly low-skilled, entry-level work. They typically included jobs in retail, cleaning, office and administration work, hospitality and catering, social care, security, driving and in factories and warehouses.
In Year 2, a number of the providers had, at an earlier stage in the POEM process, concentrated much of their effort in assisting clients to become job ready for specific sectors. They had found, for example, that after having undergone the training necessary to obtain the prerequisite Security Industry Authority (SIA) licence, security work had been shown to be suitable for many of their male Somali clients, and this had become a popular route into employment for this group.

‘Men from Somalia who have arrived here have gone through wars there and have had jobs in their country. They feel their skills are useless here, but they change their minds after doing the SIA course [which enables them to obtain security work].’

(POEM adviser, London provider)

As in Year 1, part-time work, and working with children continued to be requested in Year 2 by many female clients with young families, resulting in part-time jobs being commonly sought as lunchtime supervisors in schools and as childminders in nurseries. There were examples of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali clients entering work in the social care sector after some bespoke entry-level training and Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks, both funded by the provider, and some clients had taken work with agencies supplying cleaners to private homes and businesses, which provided opportunities for them to work the hours which suited them, so that mothers could still take their children to school and pick them up, and those who were studying were able to work flexibly around their courses.

Finding work for clients in their own communities was, as discussed in the report on POEM Year 1, an important source of suitable vacancies for clients in Year 2, although providers relied on this route to varying extents. One provider reported that up to half of their clients went on to find work in SMEs in their own communities.

6.2.4 Sustainable outcomes

While most of the providers supplied some form of aftercare for clients who had entered employment (see Section 5.6), data on sustainable outcomes from POEM were not formally collected for DWP. Nonetheless, most providers got back in touch with clients after they had started work, and this was in part to do with doing what they could to ensure that the employment obtained was sustainable, and to iron out any difficulties which may be emerging for employee or employer. Providers commonly reported that clients and advisers established a strong bond while working together on POEM, and that some ex-clients returned to see their advisers from time to time, to report on their progress. Through this, providers were able to provide some anecdotal evidence of sustainable outcomes.

In the second year of POEM, the economic climate changed dramatically (see Section 6.2.5) meaning that sustainable outcomes are likely to have become more difficult to achieve. Nonetheless, the interviews with Year 1 clients who were re-interviewed in Year 2 provided some, albeit limited, evidence of sustainable outcomes, as a result of POEM.
Evidence of sustainable outcomes from the client interviews

Eight POEM clients interviewed in Year 1 were re-interviewed as part of the Year 2 evaluation. At the time of the Year 1 interviews, four were in work and four were still with POEM.

By the time of the Year 2 interviews, of the four clients in work, two were still in the same jobs. The third client had progressed to a better job in the same field, and the fourth had remained in her job for 16 months before leaving to study in order to increase her future employability and earning capacity.

Of the four clients still on POEM at the Year 1 interview, one had obtained work through POEM shortly afterwards, and was still with the same employer at Year 2, although he had moved to a different role with different and more suitable hours for him. A second client was still on POEM in Year 2. In Year 1, she was taking ESOL and IT courses, which had helped to lift her out of depression and become much more confident. In Year 2 she had progressed to a Level 2 childcare course with work placements, and intended to look for work on its completion. The improvement in her English between the interview in Year 1 and Year 2 was notable.

The other two clients who were on POEM at Year 1 had stayed on POEM for a time, but for different reasons, it had not suited them and so they had left. At the Year 2 interview, both were still looking for work.

6.2.5 Impact of the recession

Most providers said that the recession was having an impact on their operation, as they had noticed a reduction in the numbers of vacancies in recent months, especially in sectors such as retail and hospitality. Some were already experiencing the negative effects of this on job outcomes for harder-to-help clients facing barriers such as long-term unemployment and language problems, as employers had a larger pool of potential recruits on which to draw.

Some providers noted that small numbers of clients had returned to them after having been made redundant, and a few predicted that increasingly, retraining to equip people to work in different sectors where vacancies still existed, would be needed. One provider observed that they had recruited a greater proportion of men in the later months of Year 2 as increasing proportions of men in the target communities were out of work.

Nonetheless, at the time of the case study visits (most of which were in November and December 2008), most providers were reasonably optimistic about helping their clients to find work in a shrinking labour market, during the remaining three or four months of POEM. They were focusing on the vacancies which did exist, and were committed to working to help their clients secure the jobs which were still available.
6.3 Converting starts to job entries

Figure 6.11 shows the conversion rates achieved (job entries achieved as a percentage of starts) by London providers, the providers outside London, and by all providers. The conversion rate achieved by all providers across POEM in its entirety was 29.4 per cent, but performance against this measure was better in Year 2 than Year 1 (38.5 per cent compared to 20.8 per cent).

The providers outside London converted a higher proportion of their starts into job entries, compared to the London providers. Across Years 1 and 2, providers outside London converted 40.5 per cent of their starts into jobs, while London providers converted 25.1 per cent. Both groups performed better in Year 2 than they had in Year 1.

Figure 6.11 Job entries as a percentage of starts

![Bar chart showing conversion rates]  

6.4 Impact on target groups

This section examines the impact of POEM with regard to working with the primary target groups; clients of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali origin. It presents data on the ethnicity, gender and ages of clients recruited to POEM, and of the clients who entered work whilst on the POEM programme.11

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11 Total numbers of starts and job entries are slightly lower than those in earlier tables in this chapter, due to slightly incomplete MI with regard to ethnicity, gender and age.
6.4.1 Ethnicity

Table 6.5 presents the MI data by ethnicity. It shows numbers of starts, numbers of job entries, and job entries as a percentage of starts for London providers, providers outside London, and all providers. These data are presented for Year 1 and Year 2 separately, as well as for POEM as a whole.\(^\text{12}\)

Across all providers, and for Years 1 and 2 together, Pakistani clients accounted for 14.7 per cent of all POEM clients, Bangladeshi clients accounted for 14.4 per cent, and black African clients accounted for 32.4 per cent. Other white clients formed 10.6 per cent of the total client numbers. They included Europeans (e.g. Italian and Portuguese clients), Eastern Europeans (e.g. Polish and Czech clients) and clients from Central and South America. Other ethnic groups accounted for a further 27.9 per cent.

The London providers recruited large numbers of black African clients to POEM with smaller proportions of Bangladeshi and Pakistani clients. As noted by several London providers during the case study visits, this was in the main a reflection of the demographics of the districts in which POEM operated, rather than due to any difficulties in recruiting from the other target groups. London providers were also more successful at helping black African clients than clients from the other two target groups into work (31.5 per cent conversion rate compared to 15 per cent for Pakistani clients and 18.3 per cent for Bangladeshi clients, over the life of POEM).

The providers outside London recruited larger numbers of Bangladeshi and Pakistani clients and smaller proportions of black African clients. Again, this was largely a reflection of the demographics in their catchment areas. Their conversion rates were above 30 per cent for all target groups in both Year 1 and Year 2. Overall, they had the most success in converting starts to job entries amongst Bangladeshi clients, but this was mainly due to the performance of one provider which, in Year 2, had placed the majority of their Bangladeshi clients into employment.

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\(^{12}\) It should be noted that the MI did not provide data on numbers of Somali clients, and so the data on black African clients is presented, which includes Somali clients. From the qualitative work with providers and clients, we know that while many of the black African POEM clients were Somali, some were not (provider estimates regarding the proportion of black African clients who were of Somali origin ranged from ‘very few’ to ‘almost all’). The black African category in the MI provides an indication of the proportions of Somali clients on POEM, but it should be remembered that these data include clients other than those of Somali origin. Black African clients who were not of Somali origin included those from Ghana, Nigeria, Congo and Zambia.
6.4.2 Gender

Table 6.6 shows starts and job entries by gender. In Year 1, 57 per cent of all clients recruited to POEM were women, although in Year 2 this had fallen to 52.2 per cent. There was very little difference by gender between the London providers and the providers outside London. Overall, women accounted for 54.7 per cent of POEM clients, however, conversion rates were almost always slightly higher for male than female clients (33.3 per cent compared to 26.3 per cent overall). This is unsurprising, given that one of the aims of POEM was to increase the economic activity rates of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali women, and the acknowledgement that some of the women recruited to POEM would be a considerable distance from the labour market. In practice it was found that male clients also often had some distance to travel before they were job ready, however, the barriers faced by some of the female POEM clients, who had been out of the labour market for years or perhaps decades, while they raised their children and cared for their families tended to be particularly deeply rooted, and took longer to overcome than the barriers presented by male clients.

6.4.3 Age

Starts and job entries by age are shown in Table 6.7. Across all providers, and over the two-year programme, the 25 to 34 age group accounted for 35.2 per cent of clients. The 18 to 24 age group was almost as large, accounting for 31.8 per cent of clients, while those aged 35 to 49 accounted for 25.0 per cent. The clients recruited by the providers outside London had a slightly younger profile than those recruited by the London providers.

Looking at conversion rates by age, providers found it hardest to help clients in the youngest and oldest age groups into work. Across all ten providers, clients in the 18 to 24, 25 to 34 and 35 to 49 age groups had conversion rates of 32.1, 29.2 and 28.6 per cent respectively, far higher than for the youngest and oldest clients on POEM. However, while the providers outside London had the most success in assisting clients aged 18 to 24 into work, across the London providers, the conversion rate was highest for clients aged 35 to 49.
Table 6.5  Starts and job entries, by ethnicity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>London Providers (6)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Providers outside London (4)</th>
<th></th>
<th>All Providers (10)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Starts</td>
<td>Job entries (%)</td>
<td>Starts</td>
<td>Job entries (%)</td>
<td>Starts</td>
<td>Job entries (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>1,372</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other White</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>35.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ethnic groups</td>
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<td>92</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>32.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Year 1</td>
<td>3,488</td>
<td>525</td>
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<td>1,394</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistani</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>36.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladeshi</td>
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<td>112</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>79.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>1,505</td>
<td>592</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other White</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>31.4</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ethnic groups</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>40.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Year 2</td>
<td>3,399</td>
<td>1,206</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>613</td>
<td>46.1</td>
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<td>284</td>
<td>58.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>2,877</td>
<td>906</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>44.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other White</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>243</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>30.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ethnic groups</td>
<td>1847</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,887</td>
<td>1,731</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>2,725</td>
<td>1,103</td>
<td>40.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Table 6.6  Starts and job entries, by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>London Providers (6)</th>
<th>Providers outside London (4)</th>
<th>All Providers (10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Starts</td>
<td>Job entries as a percentage of starts</td>
<td>Starts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1,999</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1,489</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,488</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1,796</td>
<td>618</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1,603</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,399</td>
<td>1,206</td>
<td>35.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,795</td>
<td>838</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3,092</td>
<td>893</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,887</td>
<td>1,731</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Table 6.7 Starts and job entries, by age

| Age       | London Providers (6) | | | Providers outside London (4) | | | All Providers (10) | | |
|-----------|----------------------|---|---|-----------------------------|---|---|------------------|---|
|           | Job entries as a percentage of starts | Starts | Job entries as a percentage of starts | Starts | Job entries as a percentage of starts | Starts | Job entries as a percentage of starts |
| 17 and under | 52 | 9 | 17.3 | 1 | 1 | 100.0 | 53 | 10 | 18.9 |
| 18–24 | 925 | 130 | 14.1 | 551 | 226 | 41.0 | 1,476 | 356 | 24.1 |
| 25–34 | 1,261 | 189 | 15.0 | 504 | 166 | 32.9 | 1,765 | 355 | 20.1 |
| 35–49 | 1,006 | 160 | 15.9 | 275 | 83 | 30.2 | 1,281 | 243 | 19.0 |
| 50 and over | 244 | 37 | 15.2 | 62 | 14 | 22.6 | 306 | 52 | 17.0 |
| Total | 3,488 | 525 | 15.1 | 1,393 | 490 | 35.2 | 4,881 | 1,016 | 20.8 |

| Year 2 | | | | | | | |
|--------|----------------------|---|---|-----------------------------|---|---|------------------|---|
| 17 and under | 51 | 10 | 19.6 | 6 | 2 | 33.3 | 57 | 12 | 21.1 |
| 18–24 | 1,091 | 358 | 32.8 | 485 | 265 | 54.6 | 1,576 | 623 | 39.5 |
| 25–34 | 1,140 | 426 | 37.4 | 475 | 206 | 43.4 | 1,615 | 632 | 39.1 |
| 35–49 | 906 | 347 | 38.3 | 291 | 118 | 40.5 | 1,197 | 465 | 38.8 |
| 50 and over | 211 | 65 | 30.8 | 74 | 22 | 29.7 | 285 | 87 | 30.5 |
| Total | 3,399 | 1,206 | 35.5 | 1,331 | 613 | 46.1 | 4,730 | 1,819 | 38.5 |

| Total | | | | | | | |
|--------|----------------------|---|---|-----------------------------|---|---|------------------|---|
| 17 and under | 103 | 19 | 18.4 | 7 | 3 | 42.9 | 110 | 22 | 20.0 |
| 18–24 | 2,016 | 488 | 24.2 | 1,036 | 491 | 47.4 | 3,052 | 979 | 32.1 |
| 25–34 | 2,401 | 615 | 25.6 | 979 | 372 | 38.0 | 3,380 | 987 | 29.2 |
| 35–49 | 1,912 | 507 | 26.5 | 566 | 201 | 35.5 | 2,478 | 708 | 28.6 |
| 50 and over | 455 | 102 | 22.4 | 136 | 36 | 26.5 | 591 | 139 | 23.5 |
| Total | 6,887 | 1,731 | 25.1 | 2,724 | 1,103 | 40.5 | 9,611 | 2,835 | 29.5 |

6.5 Soft outcomes and distance travelled

This section presents the evidence on soft outcomes and distance travelled as a result of POEM, drawing on the qualitative work with clients and providers.

6.5.1 Key soft outcomes

In the report on POEM Year 1, the key soft outcomes for clients were identified as:

- greater confidence and motivation;
- increased awareness of suitable work opportunities;
- job search, application and interview skills;
- improved English language.

All of these were felt to be important measures of distance travelled, although there was often considerable overlap between them, as progress against one measure would often bring about changes in others.

The qualitative work with clients and providers in Year 2 confirmed that these four indicators were still the main soft outcomes brought about as a result of POEM in Year 2. These key soft outcomes were discussed at some length in the report on Year 1, however, Section 6.5.2 provides some further evidence of these, based on clients’ starting points and distance travelled as a result of POEM.

6.5.2 Starting distance from the labour market, and distance travelled on POEM

This section considers the POEM clients interviewed in Year 2, who were:

- close to the labour market on joining POEM;
- an intermediate distance from the labour market on joining POEM;
- far from the labour market on joining POEM.

It outlines the distance these three groups were typically able to travel as a result of POEM, and highlights the soft outcomes that were commonly reported. (Clients’ distance from the labour market on joining POEM is also discussed in Section 4.3.)

It was notable that regardless of starting point, the soft outcomes as a result of POEM were similar for most clients.

Clients who were close to the labour market

Clients who were close to the labour market on joining POEM usually had some work experience and/or UK qualifications from school, college or university. They had typically been born in the UK or had lived in the UK for many years, and had good English. They usually required support and encouragement from their provider, over a relatively short time period.
While POEM was not devised with these clients in mind, many such clients went through the programme and were helped into work by it. From the interviews carried out as part of the evaluation, most were convinced that they would have not found work, or found work so quickly, in the absence of POEM. Although these clients appeared close to the labour market, they usually reported that prior to POEM, their confidence was low, and that they did not really know how or where to look for work. POEM gave them the emotional and practical support they needed to progress into employment.

‘I think if she [the adviser] hadn’t pushed me, you know, if she hadn’t been there for me I probably would still be looking for a job now, because every time I had an interview I was panicking, I gave her a lot of grief…I needed somebody to say, you know, “you’re good enough, you can do it”.’

(POEM client, Bangladeshi woman in her 30s)

Such clients tended to leave the programme within a few weeks or a couple of months, to take up work. They generally reported that POEM had helped their confidence, self-esteem and motivation, as well as their job search and interview skills. Some of these clients had remained in their jobs, however, there were a number for whom the work obtained was not suitable, or they were made redundant as the recession began to take hold. Most of these clients had returned to their POEM provider, but were very optimistic about their chances of finding work again soon, with provider support.

Clients who were an intermediate distance from the labour market

Clients who were an intermediate distance from the labour market on joining POEM generally had little or no UK work experience, or had work experience which was outdated or increasingly obsolete. Those who had arrived in the UK in recent years usually had no UK qualifications. Some needed assistance in understanding the UK labour market, and work culture. Their English was usually fairly good but they were not always confident about speaking it. They often had low confidence more generally, and sometimes had unrealistic work aspirations which were a barrier to their obtaining employment. However, on joining POEM, they had clear aspirations to work in the short to medium term.

Most needed a reasonable amount of support from POEM and/or some vocational training in order to find work. Some found work within a few months, although some found work sooner, and some who were more fixed on finding work in a particular sector took longer than this. Clients in this group were usually helped into entry-level, low-skilled work, but they were glad to have found employment, and saw it as a stepping stone to better future prospects. A POEM client who had been on the programme with her sister, who had never worked in the UK, and was not entirely confident in speaking English explained:
'In the summer we went to [the adviser] and she searched for a job and found us care work with training...It was “we will take you if you do the training first”. It was nice having someone to encourage and help us. We had to do that training and it took two weeks then we had to wait for the CRB check to come in...We started a job in September. I like the way they support us. I wouldn’t have a job by now, I’m not the type of person who pushes...Now my brother is searching for a job here as well.’

(POEM client, Somali woman in her 20s)

Whether they had obtained employment through POEM or not, such clients reported increased confidence and motivation, and more knowledge of the UK labour market and how and where to look for work, and were more active in doing so as a result.

‘POEM has helped me a lot. Every week I’ve got a chance to fill in an application form...I can say I feel more confident now…’

(POEM client, Congolese woman in her 30s)

Clients who were far from the labour market

Clients who were far from the labour market on joining POEM fell into two main categories: The first were women (usually Pakistani and Bangladeshi women) who had had been economically inactive for many years while they cared for their families. Although they had typically been in the UK for many years, their English was often limited, and many had not seriously considered the possibility of work prior to POEM. The second group of clients had arrived in the UK relatively recently. While they were keen to find work, they needed help with their English, with finding their way around UK systems, and help in understanding the kinds of work available to them in the UK.

Clients who were far from the labour market on joining POEM usually needed considerable support and training over a longer period of time. They needed one-to-one support to build their confidence and to define their work aspirations with a view to locating and applying for suitable work in the future.

The key short-term outcomes of POEM for this group were improved English and confidence, as they received encouragement from their provider, and met others in a similar situation to themselves through ESOL classes. While it was relatively rare for clients who were far from the labour market to find work during the life of POEM, there were examples of job entry, particularly amongst those who had arrived in the UK more recently and whose motivation to find work was very high. A more common outcome was clients’ increased awareness of work options, and raised employment aspirations for the future, which meant that these men and women felt able to seriously consider employment in the future.

‘Now I talk more. Before every time I am very silent. [Now] I talk about everything...First I finish this course and after I find a good job and I build my home.’

(POEM client, Sri Lankan woman in her 30s)
I went there and they helped me. [The adviser] always helps me. Now I have loads of ideas of how I’m going to do the work. Before I didn’t know. Now I know what I could do.’

(POEM client, Bangladeshi woman in her 30s)

6.6 Other impacts

This section outlines the other key positive and negative impacts observed as a result of the POEM programme.

6.6.1 Positive impact

Building providers’ knowledge and capacity

As a result of delivering POEM, most providers reported that they had learned much over its two-year life, and were far better placed to deliver similar programmes in the future. The key areas in which POEM had assisted providers in developing their future capacity can be summarised as:

• the development of relevant and effective community partnerships, with regard to recruiting, supporting and finding employment for clients of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali origin, as well as for clients of a wide range of other ethnic backgrounds;

• establishing what worked well in engaging clients from the target groups, including the need for very intensive effort to be focused on recruitment;

• training people from the relevant communities to be advisers, which increased their capacity to engage and work with those clients on POEM. This was seen to be a particularly positive legacy from POEM;

• gaining more insight into the barriers faced by men and women in the target groups, and recognising the need to have at least some provider staff from the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities they were working with;

• establishing the best ways to overcome clients’ barriers to work, which would then move many clients quickly towards and into work;

• effective routes into initial, entry-level employment for POEM clients, which took into account their requirements and preferences, as well as their levels of experience and qualifications, and English language proficiency;

• understanding the need for flexibility throughout the programme, with ongoing changes to recruitment and employment strategies in particular.

Finally, a number of provider staff commented on the personal satisfaction they had gained from helping POEM clients progress, particularly so when they had been able to assist people from their own communities. Being able to make a difference to individuals and communities had provided many POEM staff with the motivation needed to continue to work creatively and with enthusiasm, for the
benefits of clients for as long as they were able. It had also done much to foster the successful partnerships that were so important in achieving POEM starts and job entries. This sentiment was summed up by one of the London providers:

‘We are so happy that we’ve placed so many people in work and to know that we have helped them to change their lives, we’re thrilled. And the people we’ve helped are very grateful for what we’ve done for them.’

(Business Manager, London provider)

A point made by several providers was that the meetings where all POEM providers came together to discuss progress, and to share ideas and good practice, had been very useful in Year 1. They thought that such meetings would still have been useful in Year 2. In any similar programme in the future, it may be useful to build in regular opportunities for providers to meet, with the purpose of sharing good practice and lessons learned as the programme beds in and progresses.

### 6.6.2 Negative impact

**An uncertain and limited contract**

One of the main difficulties reported by providers was the uncertainty of the programme, having been initially for one year but then extended to two. While most were used to working with short-term contracts, this situation had still presented them with some difficulties. Many providers reported that had they known that the programme would run for two years, they would have made different choices in the ways in which they managed and delivered the contract, for example, some would have chosen new or additional premises, which would have been feasible when delivering a two-year programme, but not when delivering a programme lasting only one year.

Providers observed that a programme of longer length would have enabled them to operate POEM at full capacity for a greater proportion of the overall contract, and to continue to build on and improve their delivery and their partnership networks. It would also have enabled them to continue to capitalise on the goodwill that they had sparked in the target communities they had successfully worked with. One provider made the point several times during the evaluation of POEM that in order to build sufficient momentum and to assess sustainable outcomes, provision of this nature should last a minimum of three years.
Loss of momentum and goodwill in target communities

After the first six months of the programme in Year 1, word of mouth became an increasingly important recruitment tool, as potential clients came to POEM providers after hearing about the programme from family and friends.

Several providers reported that POEM had, for the first time, provided tangible evidence to the target communities that DWP were concerned about their welfare and their future, in a way that prior experience with Jobcentre Plus had generally failed to do. The relatively short-term length of POEM was felt to be a missed opportunity to capitalise on the goodwill and enthusiasm that POEM had created in target communities, as providers anticipated that this would diminish after POEM ended.
7 Conclusions

The evaluation of Partners Outreach for Ethnic Minorities (POEM) was carried out over the two-year course of the programme itself, which began in March 2007, and ended in March 2009. For much of the first year, POEM ran as a one-year pilot programme, with funding confirmed for a second year, early in 2008. An interim report on the evaluation of POEM Year 1 has been published as Aston et al. (2008), and this presented the interim findings in some detail, together with interim conclusions, based on the operation of POEM in the first year. This chapter presents the final conclusions of the evaluation of POEM, based on the two-year evaluation in its entirety.

7.1 Impact against hard targets

Over the course of the two-year programme, POEM worked with 9,614 clients, and helped 2,835 clients into employment; a conversion rate of 29 per cent. POEM achieved 85 per cent of its targeted starts, and 85 per cent of its targeted job entries. These figures compare favourably to many other labour market programmes. Performance was markedly better in Year 2 than in Year 1 with regard to job entries in particular, indicating that the programme gained considerable momentum over time.

7.1.1 Starts

Despite a slow start in Year 1, by the end of the first year, 4,884 clients had been recruited to the programme (80 per cent of the target for Year 1). In Year 2, a further 4,730 clients were recruited (90 per cent of the target for Year 2). Hence, over the course of the two-year programme, 9,614 clients took part in POEM (85 per cent of the overall target). Providers did well to overcome their initial engagement difficulties to recruit these numbers of clients to POEM. Regarding the proportions of the target client groups recruited, 14 per cent were Bangladeshi, 15 per cent were Pakistani, and 32 per cent were black African (although it is not possible to determine how many of the latter were Somali). Fifty-five per cent of the POEM clients were women and 45 per cent were men. Two-thirds of all POEM clients were aged 18 to 34, and one-quarter of clients were in the 35 to 49 age bracket.
In the early months of Year 1, it was notable that the providers outside London performed better than the London providers with regard to starts. By the end of Year 2, these differences had disappeared, indicating temporary bedding-in problems, rather than any permanent performance issues amongst the London providers as a whole. Most providers’ starts dropped substantially during the last few months of Year 2, as the two-year programme neared its end. This did not appear to reflect a dearth of potential new clients in the localities, particularly as the recession was, by that time, causing increased levels of unemployment in the target communities, as elsewhere. Rather, it was due to providers’ active outreach work being scaled down in favour of working with clients on the programme (as well as past clients returning to providers after redundancy) in order to assist as many POEM clients as possible into work by the end of the programme.

7.1.2 Eligibility issues

It was clear to the evaluation team that there were some clients on POEM at most, if not all of the providers who, had the criteria been strictly applied, would not have received its support. These appeared to principally include women and men who did not have partners, whose partners lived overseas, or who had been married but were now separated from their partners.

Clearly, providers were sometimes rather lax about applying this particular eligibility criterion. Providers reported that they asked clients whether they had partners, but did not ask for proof, as it was difficult for clients to provide this. Providers also reported that they did not wish to be too intrusive about questioning potential or new clients too closely about their partner status in case they were put off the programme altogether. However, it seems likely that providers had additional reasons for skimming over this criterion, including a desire to bring in as many clients as possible to count towards their start figures, and because they believed that such clients were as worthy of assistance through POEM as many of those with partners.

POEM was not devised with such individuals in mind, however, the client interviews for the evaluation revealed that such clients who had obtained employment through POEM, were adamant that they would have taken longer to find work, or that they would not have found work at all in the absence of POEM. Those who had not found employment were very positive about their chances of doing so in the near future and highlighted the benefits of the programme to them, usually in increased confidence and motivation to find work, with the help of their provider.

One of the reasons for the ‘partner’ eligibility criterion on POEM was to encourage engagement with women in the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) target communities who were furthest from the labour market. However, it should be remembered that

13 The replacement of the lowest-performing London provider with a new contract overseen by one of the providers outside London also contributed to this better performance across the London providers as a whole in Year 2.
POEM was conceived after more than a decade of sustained economic growth, and when new sources of labour were required for the medium- and long-term future. By the end of POEM, the recession had taken hold, with unemployment rising month on month. The labour market conditions at the end of POEM were very different to those witnessed when POEM was designed, and during its first year of operation. The exact POEM eligibility criteria may be less appropriate for a similar programme in the near future, due to a vastly different economic climate.

7.1.3 Job entries

Overall, POEM helped 2,835 clients into employment, converting 29 per cent of starts on the programme into job entries. The conversion rates were 21 per cent in Year 1, and 39 per cent in Year 2, hence there was considerable progress over time with regard to helping clients into work. In Year 1, providers assisted 1,016 clients into employment (58 per cent of the Year 1 target), while in Year 2, they achieved job entries for 1,819 clients (116 per cent of the Year 2 target). Overall, the conversion rates for the three target groups were very similar (29 per cent of Bangladeshi clients, 32 per cent of Pakistani clients, and 32 per of black African clients). The conversion rate was higher for male clients than female clients, at 33 per cent and 26 per cent respectively, but conversion rates were very similar for the age groups 18 to 24, 25 to 35 and 35 to 49; with around one-third of the starts in each of these groups being converted to job entries.

Providers attributed their increased job starts in Year 2 to the following reasons:

- on the basis of their work in Year 1, staff had a better understanding of the client groups they were working with, their barriers to work and ways to overcome them;
- advisers had built up expertise in identifying the kinds of work their clients could do with little or no training, and in finding suitable vacancies;
- providers had forged new employer partnerships, and strengthened existing ones, which had created some reliable, ongoing routes in to employment for POEM clients;
- some had increased their job matching/job brokering activities, and had built or strengthened their employer arrangements which provided their clients with bespoke training and guaranteed interviews.

However, in general, the providers also appeared to be working with a greater proportion of clients who were closer to the labour market in Year 2, compared to Year 1.

7.1.4 The ultimate aim of POEM: Job starts or working with harder to reach clients?

In Year 1, many providers focused on trying to reach clients of varying distances from the labour market, including female non-working partners from the target communities, who had some considerable distance to travel before they would be
able to consider work, and around whom POEM had been designed. The client interviews in Year 1 provided evidence that such clients were being reached, along with many other clients who were, by varying degrees, closer to the labour market. Clients who were furthest from the labour market on joining POEM, such as women who had, for many years, been looking after their families, often presented a combination of cultural barriers, very low confidence, and ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) needs, and were unlikely to gain employment during the life of the programme.

During the case study visits in Year 2, a few providers suggested to the evaluation team that the focus of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), had to them, appeared to change over the life of POEM. They reported that at its start, POEM included a strong focus on soft outcomes, the client journey and the distance travelled towards the labour market, as well as employment outcomes. However, they thought that, as time went on, DWP appeared to have become more interested in hard outcomes, and less in softer ones. Some appeared to have adjusted their engagement strategies accordingly, to recruit clients who would be more likely to help them meet their employment targets as well as their start targets. Eligible clients who were closer to the labour market were both easier for the providers to recruit, and easier to assist into work, and in Year 2 there was less evidence that the hardest to reach clients, with the furthest distances to travel into employment, were being recruited, than had been the case in Year 1. A few providers acknowledged that they were reaching few of the very hardest to reach clients, and that a longer programme would be required to both reach and work effectively with this group.

7.2 Clients’ soft outcomes

There were four key soft outcomes for clients that were identified by the POEM evaluation:

- greater confidence and motivation;
- increased awareness of suitable work opportunities;
- job search, application and interview skills;
- improved English language.

The report on POEM Year 1 highlighted the importance of raising clients’ confidence as a key interim conclusion, and this remains the case in the conclusions of the evaluation as a whole. A lack of confidence was the most widely identified barrier to work, and it was also found to be one of the easiest to address.

There were two ways in which providers raised the confidence of the POEM clients they worked with: For clients who were further from the labour market, one-to-one support and, on occasion, group activities too, were done with the specific and primary aim of building client confidence. This was accompanied by finding ways to provide practical support to clients in the areas of their lives in which
they felt least confident, and that were, hence, proving to be barriers to work, for example, speaking English. This would be sometimes done through ESOL classes, but also more informally than this, by encouraging clients to practise their English in their POEM appointments and in their day-to-day lives. For clients who were closer to the labour market, confidence was best raised by developing their CV and in supporting them to search and apply for jobs at an early stage in the POEM process.

As outlined in the report on Year 1, progress against any of the four key soft outcome areas, usually resulted in progress against one of more of the others, as a matter of course.

While the majority of clients on POEM had not obtained employment by its end, there was substantial evidence to suggest that most of the clients had made progress against several of the soft outcomes identified above, and were, as a result more likely to find employment in the future, although the current recession may delay this more than would otherwise have been the case. At the very least, it appeared to the evaluation team that many of the clients on POEM, and particularly those further from the labour market were, as a result of POEM, less at risk of social isolation and exclusion in the longer term, and in turn, less at risk of succumbing to long-term mental health problems such as depression.

Other soft outcomes for clients (which were related to the four main ones identified) included parents being better able to support their children at school and with their homework, and having better relationships with their partners and their families, as their own lives were more fulfilled and they felt more optimistic about their futures. These longer-term benefits to an intensive support programme like POEM should not be forgotten.

7.3 POEM legacy

The legacy of POEM for providers centred on their increased capacity to deliver POEM as time went on, and their capacity to deliver similar programmes in the future. They had learned more about the target groups, where they were to be found in the localities, and how to engage with them effectively. Although many had considerable knowledge about some of their clients’ key barriers to work at the start of POEM, this too was enhanced over time, with more awareness of the specific and differing barriers commonly faced by Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali women and men living in their catchment areas. They also learned much about the fastest ways to build clients’ confidence and help them to be job ready at an early stage in the POEM process, and which routes into employment were likely to be successful for particular groups, according to their cultural background and other individual circumstances. The increased capacity of provider staff to reach, work with and respond to clients from a wide range of backgrounds and circumstances is a key legacy from POEM. However, the end of the programme has meant that some of these staff have been lost to providers as their contracts had to end at the same time as POEM.
Potential POEM legacies were also observed with regard to the partnerships built and strengthened as a result of POEM, as well as providers’ understanding of how important these were at both the POEM entry and exit points. Recruitment partnerships and employer partnerships were both critical in helping providers to achieve sufficient numbers of starts and job entries, as well as in being able to provide appropriate opportunities and a wide range of support for clients on the programme. It seems likely that many of these partnerships will continue beyond the life of POEM, although in the absence of funding for similar provision in the future they may not be as productive. Nonetheless, it is to be hoped that at least some of the new and improved partnership arrangements created through POEM will benefit other labour market programmes operated by the providers and their partners in the future. In addition, having established the necessary shared goals, communication channels, and trust, capitalising on the individual commitment of POEM and partner staff, the capacity of partner organisations at local levels to pull together for the good of communities has also been increased. It is to be hoped that these too will be legacies from POEM which endure after the programme itself has ended.

7.4 Models of engagement

In Year 1, recruitment was slow in the first few months for many of the providers, and this was attributed to largely unexpected difficulties in accessing clients from the relevant communities who met the eligibility criteria. Hence, providers learned in the early months of POEM that they needed to spend considerable time and effort to tap into the target communities. Key in this was a realisation that community partners would be a vital part of their ongoing recruitment strategy, in brokering access, and providing outreach venues and referrals.

By the end of Year 1, a wide range of approaches had been adopted by most of the providers, many of which were proving to be successful. Principally, these were: publicising POEM and conducting outreach at a wide range of generic and BME community-specific venues in the local communities; holding stalls and having a visible presence at community and cultural events; distributing marketing materials tailored to each of the target communities, and in relevant community languages; using local media coverage, and knocking on doors in some of the wards in the areas in which POEM operated. Community partners were important in many of these approaches, particularly in helping outreach workers to gain the trust of the target communities. Year 1 was important in allowing providers to test out what worked best in their areas, and with the three target communities. Year 2 saw a continuation of the outreach and engagement approaches that had been adopted by the second half of Year 1, but most providers had streamlined their outreach strategies, to suit the particular wards in which they operated. Over time, they continued to reflect on what worked best for each community, and within their different POEM wards. On this basis they put more resources into the methods that had proved to work well and reduced the approaches which were yielding fewer eligible clients.
7.4.1 **Know the local demographics, and the preferences of the target groups**

Providers’ experience of conducting outreach in the areas in which POEM operated showed the importance of having a detailed knowledge and understanding of the demographics of their catchment areas; which target groups lived in those areas, exactly where in those areas they lived, and the relative concentrations of the target groups in the different neighbourhoods. Some had found that the target communities lived in high concentrations in particular wards, while others had found that the target communities were more dispersed throughout their catchment. The relative concentrations of each of the target communities within the localities in which providers operated played a vital role in determining which approaches worked best between and within the ten POEM districts. Door knocking proved effective in areas where target populations lived in high concentrations, as did holding stalls in generic venues such as shopping centres. Where target populations were more dispersed and transient, these approaches did not work, and providers had to identify the places where target communities congregated outside their homes in sufficient numbers, for example, cultural events and festivals, mosques, and BME community centres. Regardless of the concentration of the target communities, the exact approaches taken had to be adapted according to whether the potential clients were Bangladeshi, Pakistani or Somali, as each community had different preferences and expectations, although these were sometimes quite subtle.

7.4.2 **Outreach staff must culturally reflect the target communities**

The report on POEM Year 1 highlighted the importance of a shared cultural background and language between POEM staff and clients. This is also a key conclusion of the evaluation as a whole. However, a shared cultural background and language between POEM staff and their target communities was particularly critical at the engagement and recruitment stage. A shared language was important in being able to engage with clients in the first place, but a shared cultural and community background was also important in developing trust between individuals and partner organisations who could be suspicious of POEM, particularly as it was a central government-funded initiative.

Many providers already had multiethnic and multilingual staff at the start of the programme, but most recruited more during the life of POEM, as needs became apparent. There were several examples given of the Somali community being particularly difficult to access, until the recruitment of a Somali outreach worker, who was able to establish the trust of that community and explain the benefits of POEM, at which point, engaging and recruiting clients from that community became much easier.
7.4.3  Word of mouth – a key recruitment tool

Word of mouth was noted as an increasingly successful way of recruiting clients during the course of Year 1, and this gained more momentum in Year 2. Towards the end of Year 2, many providers reported that substantial proportions of their clients came to them after having heard how POEM had helped a family member or a friend. The target communities were often very close knit and, once POEM was known about, and was seen to be helpful and successful, word travelled fast. POEM providers observed that once the programme had become trusted in the target communities, it gained its own momentum, and they had to spend fewer resources engaging and recruiting clients, as new clients came to them. This word-of-mouth momentum was also observed amongst community partners, some of whom were mistrustful of POEM during its early months, but by Year 2, were very keen to become involved. This in turn further spread the word in the wider community about the programme and what it offered.

One of the most unfortunate aspects of POEM’s limited lifespan is that this word-of-mouth momentum will be lost, and will need to be built up again on the introduction of any similar programme in future. It seems likely that the more time which elapses between POEM and any similar successor, the more time will need to be spent rebuilding this momentum.

7.4.4  Did POEM recruit the intended target groups?

It was originally envisaged that the majority of POEM clients would be female, non-working partners in low income families, typically Bangladeshi and Pakistani women who had been looking after the family and home for some years. The Somali client group was added at a later stage when it was recognised as being similarly worthy of intensive support, and again, the intention was that the majority of Somali clients would be female. Hence, one of the original policy intents of POEM was to start to raise the economic activity rates of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Somali women, which are very low compared to those of most other groups in the UK labour market.

It was clear that the clients on POEM were a more diverse group than had been anticipated. Contrary to DWP’s expectations that most clients would be women, almost half were men, and clients were from a wider range of BME communities than had been anticipated, although the primary target groups comprised the majority of clients at most of the providers. The client profile was also younger than had originally been envisaged, with many clients in their 20s, and some in their late teens, as well as clients in their 30s and 40s.

The fact that so many POEM clients fell outside the typical client model around which the programme had been designed, proved that there is, in the cities in which POEM operated, a considerable demand for the kind of support offered through POEM, from people from a wide range of BME and cultural backgrounds and ages.
7.5 Models of delivery

There were some elements of POEM which set it apart from the other provision available in the area, or that clients had been able to access in the past. The most successful delivery models included one-to-one support, culturally sensitive provision, and appropriate employer partnerships.

7.5.1 A tailored, flexible, one-to-one service

As highlighted in the report on POEM Year 1, the core aspect of POEM was its flexible, tailored one-to-one provision. It drew all other elements of support provided by and through POEM, into a coherent whole. It also gave the clients a focus for their journey on the programme, and confidence in their provider. Tailored, flexible, one-to-one support set POEM apart from other provision available to clients in the area, and from what they had received before. Nine of the providers based their POEM provision on one-to-one provision and added in other elements as appropriate, for particular clients. Only one provider did not take this approach and provided a more ‘one size fits all’ service that consisted primarily of group sessions, ESOL and basic skills provision. This model did not appear to be as appropriate, given the range of clients on POEM, their starting points and skills, and the benefits that clients at the other providers received from more intensive and tailored support.

While the one-to-one support was bespoke for each individual, there was some commonality in one-to-one provision according to clients’ starting distance from the labour market. Clients who were close to the labour market on joining POEM were able to begin their job search activities and start applying for jobs within the first few appointments with their advisers. While many clients had low confidence on joining POEM, it was not usually necessary to introduce specific activities to boost confidence and self-esteem for this group, as meeting with their advisers and performing job-focused activities raised their confidence as a matter of course. Clients who were further from the labour market presented a more diverse range of barriers to work, and required a wider range of activities and support from POEM in order to overcome them. More time had to be spent on building their general confidence, and defining their goals, before job-focused activities could begin. Clients with limited English often needed to be encouraged to practise speaking it in their POEM appointments and some required ESOL classes. Regarding employment, clients who were further from the labour market often needed guidance in what their options were, and some needed coaching in UK work culture.

There was a general move, over the life of POEM, towards providing one-to-one support that was job-focused from an early stage. In part this reflected some providers’ perceptions that DWP had, over time, become increasingly interested in job outcomes and less interested in the client journey, and they had adapted their recruitment strategies to engage with clients who were closer to the labour market than had initially been the case. However, it also appeared to be as a result of providers finding ways to fast track some clients into employment, with the use of appropriate employer partnerships and job-broking activities.
7.5.2 Culturally sensitive provision

Providing a culturally aware and sensitive service was a key feature of POEM, and one which clients valued very highly. As such, it was felt by providers and clients to have been crucial to its success. Clients felt comfortable visiting their provider frequently, were able to openly discuss their barriers to work, including cultural barriers, without fear of being misunderstood or of feeling coerced into courses of action which they felt were unsuitable for them. The provision of, or signposting to, culturally appropriate childcare was also a vital element of POEM. Many clients interviewed for the evaluation had not used Jobcentre Plus or accessed employment support from other sources, but those who had, greatly favoured the provision they had received on POEM as being more suitable, in part on the basis of their cultural needs.

While the provision of culturally sensitive provision was crucial, it was less important for adviser staff to culturally and linguistically mirror the clients they worked with, than it was for outreach workers to do so. Where clients were very nervous about POEM and what it would mean for them and their families, and where there were considerable barriers such as family resistance which had to be overcome, a shared cultural background between adviser and client was still very helpful, at least in the early stage of the process. However, in many cases, it was felt to be preferable that, after recruitment, POEM clients worked with advisers from a different community to their own in order to help them to step out of their comfort zones and practise their English, in preparation for employment at a later stage. This practice also contributed to building the knowledge, skills and confidence of POEM staff, who, over the course of POEM learned much about the particular issues, needs and preferences of all three POEM target communities, as well as the other BME communities with whom they worked.

7.5.3 Employer partnerships

Over the life of POEM, there was a general shift towards providing support that was very job-focused from an early stage in the process. As part of this shift, employer partnerships and compacts became an increasingly important feature of POEM as time went on. Such arrangements provided opportunities to place larger numbers of clients in work than would otherwise have been possible. In Year 2 some particularly successful routes into employment had been established that appeared to fast track clients into employment. Many of these clients appeared, at first glance, to be some distance from the labour market due to low confidence and self-esteem coupled with a poor understanding of the UK labour market and what would be expected of them by an employer. However, appropriate familiarisation, combined with work trials or industry-specific training, and job broking, proved effective in moving clients towards and into the labour market.

A strength of POEM was that it assisted clients to define their short- and longer-term aspirations, and raised their confidence so that they believed that both were achievable. As a result, through the employer partnership route, even clients
who had needed to lower their immediate aspirations were able to enter fairly low-level employment without being demoralised by this, instead, seeing it as a stepping stone towards their longer-term employment goals. Successful routes into employment for such clients included funding entry-level qualifications which allowed access to particular sectors, and working in partnership with employers to offer bespoke training programmes followed by guaranteed interviews.

Partnerships with employers in the target communities were particularly effective in overcoming barriers to work which would otherwise have prevented many from entering employment for some time. This was most notable with regard to clients with limited English language. In the past they had often assumed that unless or until their English improved markedly, they would not be able to find work, at least, not without the assistance of a government-funded programme.

There were also a number of very fruitful employer partnerships forged over the life of POEM with employers working on an agency or contract basis, that provided, for example, cleaners, carers, or nursery nurses in a range of different settings and venues around the cities in which POEM operated. These employers were typically experiencing a higher demand for suitable labour then they could easily supply to fulfil the demands of their new contracts, but they had found POEM providers to be a very responsive source of suitable recruits. Some employers, while not from the target BME communities themselves, were looking for staff who reflected the demographics of their own client group, and wanted suitably trained Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Somali women and men to fill their vacancies. Some of these vacancies could arise at short notice, and they had found in the past that it had been very difficult to source, recruit and train new and suitable staff quickly enough. However, once a suitable partnership had been forged with the POEM provider and an effective process had been established, these employers were able, with the help of the provider, to access clients who had been screened for suitability by the provider and, on occasion trained to the minimum entry level they required, using the flexible funding available on POEM.

The aftercare given to clients in employment, while being important in good service provision to clients, was also seen to be important in maintaining the reputation of providers amongst their employer partnerships.

7.6 Partnership models

The importance of partnerships was highlighted in the conclusions to the report on POEM Year 1, and has been discussed earlier in this chapter with regard to both engaging clients, and in establishing successful routes into employment for substantial numbers of clients.

A notable feature of the vast majority of the partnerships on POEM was their informal and fluid nature. This allowed providers to adapt and change the partnership arrangements over time, in response to need (a practice that was observed with regard to many aspects of engagement and delivery). While there
were some service level agreements between providers and community partners, in the main, the most successful partnerships were based on the following:

- shared goals, common ground and mutual understanding of the aims of each partner organisation;
- openess, co-operation and ongoing communication;
- trust and goodwill.

Individual POEM staff and individuals at the partner organisations were instrumental in creating and sustaining productive partnerships. In this aspect of POEM (as well as in the support given to clients on a one-to-one basis) many POEM staff demonstrated that their commitment to POEM and the clients they worked with went well beyond the call of duty. Individuals at providers and at partner organisations were often very committed to helping people from their own communities as well as others in similar circumstances, and this drive to ‘give something back’ was very much in evidence with regard to partnership working on POEM. In fact, this was one of the reasons why such informal partnerships often worked so well on the programme.

7.7 Suggestions for future Ethnic Minority Outreach programmes

The evaluation pointed to a number of lessons that could be learned with regard to the future shape of Ethnic Minority Outreach (EMO) provision:

- There is a demand for culturally sensitive, tailored provision from a far wider range of clients than had originally been envisaged by POEM. In addition, the labour market conditions are now markedly different from those when POEM was designed, and during its first year of operation. As a result, some of the eligibility criteria, which encouraged providers to engage with women and men who were furthest from the labour market, may be less appropriate.

- Unless providers already have significant experience in engaging with the target groups, the development of successful engagement strategies takes time. A slow start to recruitment should not be seen as an indication of likely poor performance throughout. Instead, sufficient time should be allowed for providers to establish the detailed demographics of their catchment areas, and to develop successful outreach approaches in the wards within them.

- It is vital that outreach workers reflect the communities they seek to recruit, both linguistically and culturally.

- Provision should centre on flexible and tailored one-to-one support, with other aspects added in as appropriate. One-to-one support is best offered in a combination of pre-arranged appointments, and ad hoc drop-ins, to cater for and be responsive to client needs.
• Any future programme should recognise that one of the most widespread client barriers to work is likely to be confidence. Building clients’ confidence should, therefore, be a key part of any future provision, whether in the form of specific confidence-building activities for clients who are further from the labour market, or whether this is more implicit in general job search, application and interview support for those who are more job ready.

• Providing or signposting clients to culturally sensitive childcare should be built in to any future programme as a matter of course.

• Informal partnerships can work very well, provided there are shared goals, mutual understanding of each organisation’s aims and purpose, good ongoing communication, and committed staff who are able to establish, build and maintain trust and goodwill. Such partnership models can include those with community organisations, local authorities and employers.

• A wide range of creative and informal partnerships should be encouraged as they enable providers to signpost clients to a wide range of support outside the remit of the programme. In some cases, clients may need very active support and practical assistance to access these.

• Establishing the right employer partnerships, and forming contacts that can provide suitable and ongoing opportunities for the client group is vital in achieving employment outcomes for many. With these in place, even clients who are some distance away from the labour market, for example, those with limited English, can be moved into work relatively quickly.

• The ultimate aims of the programme should be explicit and consistent throughout the programme; for example, whether the aims are to reach the people furthest from the labour market, or whether they are to help large numbers of people from the target groups into employment.

• A future programme would benefit from being funded for a longer term, for example, at least three to five years, and this should be made clear to providers at the start. This would enable them to plan their premises and staffing arrangements most effectively. It would also allow sufficient momentum to build up across engagement and delivery models, so that the programme could operate at capacity for a greater proportion of its total length than was seen on this occasion. It would also capitalise on the potential of word of mouth as a highly effective recruitment tool, a lever for successful partnerships, and would create more sustained goodwill in the target communities.
Appendix
Data used in the figures in Chapter 6
Table A.1 Data for Figures 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3

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<th>London providers (6)</th>
<th>Providers outside of London (4)</th>
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### Table A.5  Data for Figure 6.11

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