Employer engagement in Jobcentre Plus: Qualitative research of the employer engagement strategy

Lucy Joyce, Andrew Thomas, Emma Green and Ruth Rajkumar

A report of research carried out by BMRB Social Research on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions
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## List of abbreviations and acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Benefits Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDT</td>
<td>Business Development Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BME</td>
<td>Black Minority Ethnic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCS</td>
<td>Customer Contact Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEA</td>
<td>Disability Employment Adviser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DM</td>
<td>District Managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ED</td>
<td>Employer Direct Contact Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDM</td>
<td>Employment Diversity Manager, Specialist Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMD</td>
<td>Employer Marketing Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EES</td>
<td>Employer Engagement Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES</td>
<td>Employment Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESD</td>
<td>Employer Services Directorate, Jobcentre Plus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAM</td>
<td>Field Account Manager, NST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FD</td>
<td>Field Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAM</td>
<td>Government Account Manager, NST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSM</td>
<td>Group Sales Manager, NST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAM</td>
<td>Healthcare Account Manager, NST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>Incapacity Benefit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSA</td>
<td>Jobseeker’s Allowance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMS</td>
<td>Labour Market System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAM</td>
<td>National Account Manager, NST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ND</td>
<td>New Deal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NST</td>
<td>National Sales Team, ESD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODR</td>
<td>Operational Design Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRA</td>
<td>Public Resource Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRM</td>
<td>Partner Relationship Managers, Specialist Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEA</td>
<td>Specialist Employment Adviser, Specialist Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SM</td>
<td>Sales Manager, NST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME</td>
<td>Small and Medium Enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMM</td>
<td>Sector Marketing Manager, Employer Marketing Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRM</td>
<td>Sector Relationship Managers, Employer Marketing Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VFE</td>
<td>Vacancy Filling Executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VFM</td>
<td>Vacancy Filling Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VS</td>
<td>Vacancy Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VSM</td>
<td>Vacancy Service Manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

Jobcentre Plus operates an Employer Engagement Strategy (EES), which aims to provide a high quality and consistent service to employers and to get customers into work, particularly those at a disadvantage in the labour market. The EES is primarily carried out by Employer Services Directorate and the Field team. As part of a wider evaluation of Jobcentre Plus, BMRB Social Research was commissioned to examine elements of the EES, particularly focusing on the services provided by ESD and the Field, and this report outlines the findings from this study.

The research comprised a total of 197 interviews and was divided into two main stages: an initial mapping stage with managerial staff working in ESD; and a main stage of research which comprised interviews with key staff from ESD, the Field and employers who had used the service. The research aimed to provide descriptive evidence of the organisation and operation, specifically exploring how the individual parts of the EES link together; experiences of delivering and receiving the service; views and attitudes towards the service provided and received; the impact of the EES on employers, vacancies and customers; and suggestions and recommendations for how the service (and strategy) could be improved.

Life of the vacancy

The employer contacts made by the National Sales Team (NST) tended to be pre-existing, recently generated, or were handed over from colleagues. Employer Diversity Managers were generally passed onto employers via the National Account Managers (NAMs) or they made their own contacts. In addition, contacts were also made by the Field staff. Other staff, such as the Sector Marketing Managers and the Small Medium Employer Channel Manager (SME CM) were thought to be effectively supporting the process of making contact by providing information to colleagues.

1 At the outset of this research ESD was responsible for delivering Jobcentre Plus’ EES, although the structure and organisation of this has changed as a result of the Operational Design Review (ODR) and the service has now been reintegrated into Jobcentre Plus.
The adopted approach to working with employers by national and local account managers was not standardised and varied according to the frequency, medium and nature of the contact made. Nationally, it was usual for a face-to-face meeting to be set up in order to discuss overall strategy. The types of issues discussed included: the basic level of service offered; additional services; the diversity agenda; current recruitment policy and procedures; and potential vacancies. Both the EDM and the Specialist Employment Advisers worked in a supporting capacity to promote diversity to employers. Once agreements were brokered nationally, the account would be passed down to the relevant Field Account Manager (FAM). Similarly to the NAMs, FAMs worked locally to develop a strategy regarding how they would work with local employers. Employers were usually handed over to the Field staff once the vacancy was submitted.

The personalised account managed service was viewed positively by employers. However, some problems were noted, specifically, the lack of communication occurring during the handover process and the perceived inability to translate local agreements due to this lack of communication and inconsistent local resources. The latter was thought to occur as a result of the lack of communication but also as a result of available local resources. Notwithstanding this, a number of FAMs and Vacancy Service Managers (VSMs) had worked hard to improve communication and had developed strong and effective working relationships.

Employers typically submitted vacancies via the Employer Direct (ED) Contact Centres. A number of variations were noted, which included employers placing vacancies via Jobcentre Plus staff or uploading vacancies via ‘Jobs warehouse’ or ‘Edon’. Overall the service offered by the Contact Centres was thought to have improved. Employers were generally positive about the ease with which they were able to make contact; how quickly the vacancies went live on the system; and the advice and information they received. Notwithstanding this, the quality of the service provided was still thought to vary according to the individual staff member taking the call and the Contact Centre accessed. Specifically, the quality (in terms of accuracy) of the advertisement placed was often criticised.

Typically, once a vacancy had been submitted it was maintained on a day-to-day basis locally by the VSM. VSMs carried out a range of tasks in relation to the management of vacancies, including the checking of vacancies and adverts; the delivery of specific services, such as sifting and matching; and the general on-going maintenance of the vacancy and the account itself. The level of contact and service provided by VSMs varied enormously, ranging on a continuum of high to very low activity and in some cases, no service at all.

For the most part, employers were positive about the services they received from the Jobcentre, as they were generally thought to have been executed effectively and professionally. Importantly from a company perspective, the Jobcentre was also seen as being labour saving and cost effective. The centralised and clustered VSM service was viewed extremely positively as it provided a network of support on which VSMs could draw. Moreover, the ring-fenced nature of this centralised service was
thought to improve the service offered to employers as it allowed the VSM to carry out and concentrate exclusively on the role of the VSM.

When the follow-up date agreed with the employer or the submission limit was reached, the vacancy was automatically suspended and ED contacted the employer to carry out follow-up. Overall, the advisers working at the Contact Centre were positive about the level of service they provided regarding follow-up. In contrast, the National Sales Team (NST) and the Field were often less positive and queried the consistency of the service; the skill of advisers in gathering the information required; and the ability of the Contact Centre to be sufficiently flexible.

Meeting the key aims

It was felt that the quality and consistency of the service provided to employers had improved as a result of the EES and employers were thought to have received a good quality service overall. However, a number of problems were still thought to exist and it was felt the service would benefit from further improvement. The quality and level of service received was said to vary considerably both between and within areas and over periods of time. Consistency was identified as a particular problem, with the level of service decreasing as it progressed through the life of the vacancy.

On the whole, respondents felt that although progress had been made regarding diversity, it tended to be slow and rather limited overall. Nonetheless, the strategy was said to have successfully raised awareness of the diversity issue. It was also felt that the strategy was more successful in selling certain groups of customers, for example, lone parents and older customers. In terms of the success of the strategy in creating vacancies per se, it was anecdotally felt that EES was working to increase the number of vacancies placed.

Overall, the strategy was not said to have effectively met its aim of matching the right job to the right person at this stage, with the main area of concern being the quality of the submissions made to vacancies. It was argued that this occurred primarily as a result of a mismatch between vacancies and customers and also as a result of frontline activities, which were impinged upon by a lack of time and resources.

Key operational issues

Overall communication problems and a lack of clarity and understanding about the strategy was said by respondents, to have resulted in a degree of ‘working in chimneys’ such that information did not always flow across the structure. This meant support and services were not always being fully utilised and roles and actions were being duplicated and this impacted on the quality and consistency of the service provided. Variable local Jobcentre resources were also thought to have impinged on the service offered and resulted in inconsistent levels of service being offered between Jobcentres and also over time. Certainly, a general reduction in the level of resource had been noted by employers and staff throughout the course of the research.
1 Introduction

Jobcentre Plus is a key part of the Government’s strategy for welfare reform. The forming of Jobcentre Plus bought together the services of the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency to provide a single integrated service for all benefit claimants of working age; helping those who can into work and supporting those who cannot\(^2\). Jobcentre Plus aims to bring more people into the labour force and also increase the range of people who are in a position to move into work\(^3\).

Jobcentre Plus operates an Employer Engagement Strategy (EES), which aims to provide a high quality and consistent service to employers; to get customers into work, particularly those at a disadvantage in the labour market, such as lone parents, sick and disabled and long term unemployed; and to match the right job vacancy to the right person. Elements of the Employer Services Strategy continue to roll out until 2007.

The EES is primarily carried out by Employer Services Directorate (ESD)\(^4\) and the Field team. The specific teams operating within the ESD include: the National Sales Team (NST), Specialist Services, Employer Direct (ED) and Employer Marketing Division (EMD). The Field team are primarily responsible for delivering the service at a local level and the strategy is carried out in the Jobcentre by designated Vacancy Service Managers (VSMs) (and in some instances Employer Engagement teams and Vacancy Filling Managers (VFM}s). The Field level service is overseen by regional and district level managers and business development teams.

Account managed services are offered to employers nationally and locally according to a number of eligibility criteria, such as the size of the company and the number of


\(^3\) Employer services business strategy 2003 – 2007, Jobcentre plus, Department for Work and Pensions.

\(^4\) At the outset of this research, ESD was responsible for delivering Jobcentre Plus’ EES, although the structure and organisation of this has changed as a result of the Operational Design Review (ODR) and the service has now been re-integrated into Jobcentre Plus.
vacancies it produces. The top 100 companies in the UK will be account managed on a national level and account managers will also work strategically with the NHS and Government employers, including both local and central Government. Locally based employers who meet the specified criteria of creating between 250 and 300 job entries per year will be entitled to receive a local account managed service. Employers who do not meet the criteria either nationally or locally receive the standard service managed primarily via the Field team within the Jobcentre. It should be noted that since the research was carried out the criteria for organising accounts has changed. Details of the new Customer Contact Strategy model are outlined in the appendices (Appendix A).

The introduction of the Employer Direct Contact Centre network in 2001 centralised vacancy taking and aimed to provide employers with a more consistent and efficient service. ED continues to develop its services to meet employer demands and includes EDon, Apply Direct and Jobs Warehouse. Customers can access vacancies via the Internet Job Bank and on Jobpoints that are available in every local office and at some outstationed locations (such as Tesco Stores). In addition to this, vacancies are accessed by customers via the 12th region, known as Jobcentre Plus Direct.

As part of a wider evaluation of Jobcentre Plus, BMRB Social Research was commissioned to examine elements of the EES, particularly focusing on the services provided by ESD and the Field, and this report outlines the findings from this study.

The report is divided into five chapters: Chapter 1 provides background to the research and outlines the design and methodological approach adopted; Chapter 2 focuses on the organisation of the teams delivering the service, particularly looking descriptively at the nature of their role and how they link and work together. The life of the vacancy is explored in Chapter 3, starting with a look at how contact is made with employers and tracking the vacancy chronologically from this point, including a discussion of account management, placing the vacancy, maintaining the vacancy and following up the submission. Chapter 4 considers how far the strategy has met its specific aims and finally Chapter 5 provides a summary of the key research findings, it outlines the main conclusions and also makes recommendations for change as suggested by respondents.

1.1 Methodology

The research comprised a total of 197 interviews and was divided into two main stages: an initial mapping stage with managerial staff working in ESD; and a main stage of research which comprised interviews with key staff from ESD, the Field and employers who had used the service. This report incorporates findings from both stages of the research. A breakdown of the research design is outlined in the following sections.

1.1.1 Mapping study

A mapping study was carried out ahead of the main stage of research in order to familiarise and develop researchers’ understanding of the complex strategy and to provide essential process and operational information of the internal organisation. The findings from the mapping study were subsequently used to guide the design of the main stage research and the substantive findings are integrated into the main body of the report.

Specifically, the mapping stage aimed to provide descriptive evidence of the organisation and operation of the EES, including details on the:

- organisation of the teams involved;
- linkages between and within teams;
- operation of the teams overall and on a day-to-day basis; and
- changes to the structure and operation of the service.

The mapping stage comprised a total of 19 telephone interviews with senior staff working with ESD, including managerial staff from the NST; Specialist Services; and EMD. The respondents were picked to ensure breadth of understanding across the strategy, as well as to provide information on a national, regional and district level. The telephone interviews lasted between 30 to 45 minutes and they were carried out in February 2005.

The exact sample breakdown is outlined in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Telephone interviews – senior staff working with ESD, including managerial staff from the NST; Specialist Services; and EMD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jobcentre Plus</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Sales Team</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Accounts Sales Manager</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare Account Managers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Sales Managers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Manager</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMCD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of sector relationship</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner and Affinity Manager</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Diversity Team Leader</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist Employment Advisers Team Manager</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National SME Channel Managers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.1.2 Main stage research

The main stage research was carried out between April and July 2005 and sought to explore the EES, from the perspective of ESD staff (NST, Specialist Services, ED); the Field staff (regional and district tier) and employers who had used the service (national, regional and district tier). Overall, the research aimed to:

- provide descriptive evidence of the organisation and operation of the EES;
- explore how the delivery of the individual parts of the EES link together both across Jobcentre Plus and outwards to employers and customers;
- uncover experiences of delivering and receiving the service, from the perspective of Jobcentre Plus staff and employers;
- explore views and attitudes towards the service provided and received, focusing on what aspects of the service work well and what aspects work less well;
- explore the impact of the EES on employers, vacancies and customers. Specifically, views on how the strategy impacts on: providing a quality and consistent service to employers; placing disadvantaged customers into work; and matching the right customers with the right job; and
- explore suggestions and recommendations for how the service (and strategy) could be improved or honed to improve its effectiveness and efficiency.

Research with Jobcentre Plus staff

A total of 98 interviews were carried out with Jobcentre Plus staff engaged in the EES. This encompassed 51 interviews with NST, Specialist Services, EMD and ED staff; and 47 interviews with the Field staff working at both regional and district level. Data collection methods utilised included face-to-face and telephone depth interviews, 45 and six respectively, and eight mini group discussions. The interviews and groups lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. The exact sample profile is outlined in Table 1.2.
Table 1.2  Telephone interviews – Jobcentre Plus staff engaged in the EES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jobcentre Plus</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>National Sales Team</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Account Manager</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare Account Manager</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Account Manager</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Account Managers – six per region</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Centre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager; team leaders; inbound and outbound advisers; observations – in two Contact Centre areas</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Diversity Manager</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional SME channel Manager</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer Marketing Division</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sector Marketing Manager – one group</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Directors – one per region/Regional BDT</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District managers – one per district</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacancy Service Manager – two groups each region at least five staff per group (one group South West)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research was carried out within four case study regions, which included: Scotland; West Midlands; London; and the South West of England. Within these regions the research primarily concentrated on eight districts (two in each region).6

Due to the number of staff available to take part in the research in certain areas, particularly Field Account Managers (FAMs), it was sometimes necessary to extend the research into other districts within the four case study regions in order to meet the quotas set.

Research with employers

In addition to research with Jobcentre plus staff, we also carried out **80 telephone interviews with national and district tier employers** – 48 with those who have experience of working with VSM/Vacancy Filling Executives (VFEs) and ED and 32 who have experience of working with the NST and EDMs, including those who work with National Account Managers (NAMs), Healthcare Account Managers (HAMs) or Government Account Managers (GAMs) and those who work with FAMs.

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6 The specific districts have not been named to protect anonymity.
Table 1.3   Telephone interviews – national and district tier employers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer interviews</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>District tier</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employers working with VSMs/ED</td>
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<td>National tier</td>
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<td>Employers working with NAM, HAM, GAM</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers working with FAMs</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.2 Conduct of the research

Respondents were purposively selected by our in-house team of specialist field recruiters, using the sample criteria outlined above and agreed with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Respondents were recruited from a sample list provided by the DWP which included contact details of ESD and District Managers (DMs). Once contact had been made with these staff, they supplied BMRB with the sample lists necessary to recruit both VSMs and employers.

All the depth interviews, group discussions and observations were undertaken by experienced qualitative researchers, using non-directive interviewing techniques. They were exploratory and interactive in form so that questioning could be responsive to the views, experiences and circumstances of the individuals involved. Interviews for each stage were guided by a topic guide developed by BMRB, in close liaison with the DWP. Although topic guides ensure systematic coverage of key points across interviews, they were used flexibly to allow issues of relevance to the respondents to be covered.

All the depth interviews and group discussions were digitally recorded in stereo. The verbatim transcripts produced from the digital recordings were subject to a rigorous content analysis, which involved systematically sifting, summarising and sorting the verbatim material according to key issues and themes, within a thematic matrix. Further classificatory and interpretative analyses were then derived from the analytic charts and these formed the basis of the findings reported in subsequent chapters.

The findings reported have been illustrated with the use of verbatim quotations and examples. Where necessary the details of the contributors or their subjects have been moderately changed to protect anonymity.

Adopting a qualitative approach has made it possible to report on the range of views, experiences and suggestions reported by Jobcentre Plus staff and employers. The purposive nature of the sample design as well as the sample size, however, means that the study cannot provide any statistical data relating to the prevalence of these views, experiences or suggestions. Further details about our analytical procedures can be found in the appendices.
2 Organisation of the Employer Engagement Strategy

This chapter aims to provide a descriptive overview of the organisation of the Employer Engagement Strategy (EES). The chapter begins with an overview of respondents’ views on the purpose and nature of the strategy and then focuses on the organisation of teams engaged in the development and delivery of the strategy, specifically outlining the specific roles undertaken and the links and relationships occurring between the various players. Finally, current changes occurring to the organisation of the EES are briefly considered, namely the Customer Contact Strategy and the Vacancy Strategy.

During the course of the research, the organisation of the teams and individual staff involved in the strategy changed considerably. Consequently, it is important to note that the descriptions provided in this chapter primarily reflect observations made at the time of the original mapping exercise in February 2005 but also include any changes identified regarding the organisation during the main stage research undertaken between April and July 2005.

Specific details regarding the role of individual teams operating within the strategy are included in the organisational glossary in Appendix C.

2.1 Understanding and perceptions of Employer Engagement Strategy

As part of the research, Jobcentre Plus staff were asked to consider what they viewed as the main purpose and goal of the strategy overall. Overwhelmingly, the

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7 Since the completion of the research the ‘Vacancy Strategy’ is now referred to as ‘Vacancy Planning’.

8 The organisational glossary was developed by BMRB following the mapping stage of the research. It was subsequently undated following the main stage research.
EES was said to signify a move away from a wholly customer-led approach towards a more employer-focused service that considered the needs of employers in addition to those of customers. More recently the strategy was also said to have increasingly focused on the targeting of specific employers and specific types of vacancies, particularly through the use of strategies such as the Vacancy Strategy.

One of the key aspects of the strategy was said by respondents to be the obtaining of vacancies for Jobcentre Plus customers, particularly those suitable for priority customers, such as lone parents, or those on Incapacity Benefit. It was said this was achieved by both effectively marketing Jobcentre Plus to employers; and by working with employers (at the national and the local levels) to develop relationships that would lead to recruitment policy and procedural changes. It was also suggested that the EES aimed to provide a more consistent service to employers by adopting a more standardised and structured approach.

2.2 Key links

With a wide range of job roles and services, the operational and communication links involved in the EES become inevitably complex. Figure 2.1 outlines the key players in the EES together with the main links between them and these links are the subject of this section of the chapter. For the purposes of clarity, the diagram omits minor, or weaker, links but these are discussed in the text.

Figure 2.1 Key players in the EES with the main links between them
2.2.1 Specialist Services

Employer Diversity Manager

The main aim of the Employer Diversity Manager (EDM) is to promote diversity and bring about changes in attitude and recruitment behaviour amongst employers. Initially, EDMs worked on a regional/district level but this had previously changed and at the time of the research, EDMs operated on national basis and worked with the top 100 companies. In total there were ten EDMs operating nationally.

The shift toward working nationally resulted in a closer working relationship between EDMs and National Account Managers (NAMs). When the shift took place, there was some initial concern about how the two teams would manage relationships with the same employers, by the EDM and the NAM. As a result of this, in some instances, the EDM and NAM met to develop a protocol of how they would work together, particularly how they would exchange information, make contact, and support employers. The experience of making contact with employers is discussed in Section 3.1.

There was sometimes felt to be duplication in the roles of the EDM and the NAM in terms of the promotion and development of the diversity agenda, as it was felt that NAMs often took on this role and did not fully utilise the EDM. This and other aspects of ‘working with employers’, are discussed in more detail in Section 3.3.

There was limited evidence of EDMs working with Field Account Managers (FAMs) to promote diversity among employers (as might be expected) since the EDMs moved to being a national resource. However, there was evidence to suggest that links had occurred previously when the EDMs worked regionally. Since the move to national working, links between EDMs and FAMs generally only occurred in situations where the national and regional/district accounts overlapped. This was primarily the case in London, where many of the national accounts were based. Notwithstanding this, certain links with FAMs were still on-going in cases where the FAM and EDM had previously developed relationships.

Regarding the link between the EDM and the FAM, there was a general feeling at the district level that the move from regional to national working had not been well communicated, such that FAMs were now unclear whether they were able to utilise the service of the EDM. Moreover, they were unsure as to the alternative mechanism through which they should obtain support and advice on the diversity agenda if not.

Other links were made with GAMs and HAMs on an ad hoc basis when these stakeholders were working on an account which required a diversity input.

The EDMs and Specialist Employment Advisers (SEAs) also linked together, but primarily in cases where the EDM and the SEA operated in the same area. Where EDMs had a regional focus there was sometimes felt to be duplication in the roles of EDMs and SEAs, however, since the shift to national working, it was felt that the duplication issue had been resolved.
There were examples of the EDM linking with Employer Direct (ED), for example in one area the EDM had visited the Contact Centre in order to provide diversity training.

**SEAs**

SEAs aim to reduce the gap in unemployment levels between White and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) customers and they achieved this by working with employers to improve work opportunities for BME customers in the area and also by developing good practice guides and systems to be adopted more widely by Jobcentre Plus.

There are seven SEA teams, comprising a total of 30 SEAs and these are located in the seven conurbations with the highest BME unemployment levels, including Manchester, Bradford, Nottingham, London, Birmingham and Wolverhampton. Specifically, the SEA teams focus on Black Caribbean, Black African and South Asian (Bangladeshi and Pakistani) communities.

A protocol had been drawn up for how the National Sales Team (NST) should engage with SEAs, in the same way that a protocol had been drawn up for how the sales team should engage with EDMs. It was said that the protocol suggested that the sales team should engage with the Specialist Services regarding diversity once an account plan had been developed.

‘Just very simply it says the sales team must have an account plan…they must do some analysis of what the potential is for talking diversity to an employer. And once they have gone through that process they must engage with the relevant parts of specialist services to see how they can make that happen.’

(SEA)

SEAs reported that they had not cultivated particularly strong links with NAMs and it was thought by SEAs that this was because NAMs were of the opinion that SEAs and EDMs were effectively doing the same job, albeit EDMs operating at the national level.

They did, however, use Healthcare Account Managers (HAMs) as an information service, in instances where HAMs were located in their area. SEAs explained that they had tried to forge links with the FAMs located in the areas where they operated, in order to make contact with employers, however, these relationships were in some instances said to have been blocked. As with EDMs, these issues are discussed in more detail in Section 3.1. **For the most part, it was felt that communication between the specialist services and NST was beginning to improve.**

SEAs also linked with business managers and District Managers (DMs) from the Field team to discuss the needs of the district. They reported that the Field team appeared to be confused about the role of the SEA and they also identified a level of ‘mistrust’ of Specialist Services in general. The SEAs suggested that the Field
team were often preoccupied with other issues, such as rollout of Jobcentre Plus and cuts in local resources, and the working relationship with SEAs was not always thought to have been seen (understandably they felt) to be a priority locally.

‘Certainly the SEAs are fairly new and with the best will in the world the...operations are so big across the field network it just takes time to get everything understood and embedded. And then when you overlay that with the modernisation programme that is kicking in...if they are cutting offices down from 8 to 4 and losing x hundred amounts of staff the last thing we want is...a SEA...saying “oh we really want to work with you on whatever XY and Z” and it is not number one on their [the field’s] priority.’

(SEA)

Partner Affinity Manager

At the time of this research, Partner Affinity Managers (PAMs) were focused on the development of relationships with private recruitment agencies. Specifically, they were creating a model and tool kit for partnership working with private agencies, by making links with agencies and learning to understand their business. They were also setting up and marketing Job Warehouse to employers. The development period for the PAMs is time-limited, ending in March 2005.

In total there were five PAMs, four in London and one in Birmingham, which reflected the geographical location of the top 100 private recruitment agencies with whom they worked.

It was suggested that, ultimately, the new channel set up by PAMs would be delivered through the NST and would potentially change the way the NST approached account management in the future. As this channel had not been fully developed at the point of the research, the PAMs explained that it was not yet necessary to engage fully with other teams working in the strategy and certainly where contact had been made, relationships were not thought to have been fully developed.

‘Because we haven’t yet got a song to sing...we are not actively engaging nationally with...account managers yet.’

(PAM)

A lack of understanding of the PAM role was exhibited across the strategy by both ESD and Field staff, although as might be expected, other members of the Specialist Services demonstrated more awareness. ESD and Field staff did not tend to understand that the PAMs were developing a new channel or the fact they were not account managing agencies.
‘I think they absolutely can’t understand at all what it is on this earth we are doing. And I think they think that we are account managing agencies. And I think they think that we should be adding value and I think they really struggle to understand that we are actually developing a brand new channel. I think part of the reason for that is we are not in a position to communicate any more than we can about it. Part of the reason is that a lot of them are actually already account managing agencies and they can’t understand why we are developing channels that they already are operating.’

(PAM)

This lack of understanding had, it was suggested, resulted in a degree of uncertainty and wariness amongst the other staff regarding the PAM and certainly other staff were often unable to identify the added value of the PAMs. It was also suggested that the development of the new channel was seen by the NST as being potentially threatening, according to PAMs, as a result of the possible impact it could have on the way they work.

‘Set against the backdrop where it threatens potentially the jobs of their colleagues and the national sales team because it is such an efficient channel.’

(PAM)

It was felt by PAMs that the relationship with NAMs on a national level were often working more effectively than their relationships with FAMs locally, as it was suggested that NAMs had a better strategic understanding of what PAMs were doing. However, despite difficulties on a professional level, it was felt that personal relationships between PAMs and FAMs were often more positive. In addition to NAMs and FAMs, PAMs also linked with ED, as well as with the marketing division of ESD, regarding the advertising of vacancies on Jobs Warehouse.

Small Medium Enterprise Channel Manager

Small Medium Enterprise Channel Managers (SME CMs) aim to increase awareness and usage of Jobcentre Plus among small and medium sized employers. This is achieved by promoting and marketing the service directly to SMEs and also by linking and working with key stakeholder groups such as Business Link, Chambers of Commerce and with intermediary networks, such as the national bodies of accountants and solicitors. There are 11 SME CMs working on a regional basis and they are geographically spread across the same areas as the key stakeholder groups. Although SME CMs currently work on a regionally basis, it was said that as they were not tied to a regional operational framework and they could potentially also be used as a national resource. As with the PAMs, the SME CM team are currently focusing on the development of a channel, rather than on delivering a service.

The main links made by SME CM were with partners and Field. In practice, the SME CM linked closely with strategic partners such as Business Link and the Learning and Skills Council and this relationship involved running events for
small and medium employers. The SME CMs explained that they would pass on information from these events to the field district to keep them abreast of what was happening with employers.

‘Our link with the VSMs either through the one who’s nominated as the SME Champion for that District or through the groups of VSMs that we go and talk to in each District. We have a dialogue and we understand what their issues are and we feed intelligence to them about what we are doing, and what the market is looking like.’

(SME CM)

Contact was also made directly with Field Directors to ensure they were creating opportunities that would be beneficial to the district overall, thereby ensuring that the marketing opportunities were correctly targeted for the locality. Furthermore, they met with BDT managers and Employer Engagement Teams from the Field regularly, to discuss the overall business plan for the area and also to promote the services they offered. At the Field level they also worked on an ad hoc basis with VSMs, Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) and lone parent advisers, in order to pass on information and advice about local initiatives that might be of interest to their job-seeking clientele.

‘A lot of what we do it’s trying to create the awareness that pushes that vacancy to us, so we want to make sure that we dovetail in with the needs and the wants of the Districts and the Regions, to make sure that we create opportunities that they can then pick up on.’

(SME CM)

In addition to links made with the Field, SME CMs also made links with staff from ESD, for example, they linked with Regional Sales Managers (RSMs) as a means of gaining local stakeholder information; they liaised with EDMs in order to gain information on diversity, such as advice on legislation; and they worked with SEAs to promote Black Minority Ethnic (BME) groups amongst SME.

2.2.2 The National Sales Team

National Account Managers

NAMs managed the accounts for the top 100 employers within the chosen business sectors in the UK. The service was provided by 11 NAMs in total.

It was said that initially, the national service had been organised into two virtual clusters (one in the north and one in the south of the UK), however, the team was said to have been moving towards a more sector-based organisational structure, but with each NAM retaining a twinning arrangement with an individual region. Although the change to the team structure had been halted as a result of the Operational Design Review (ODR), the intention was to organise the NAMs around three key sectors: retail, hospitality, and ‘other’, defined as the Contact Centre, security and transport.
NAMs made a number of links across ESD, including links with the NST, Specialist Services, marketing and ED, however, primarily they interacted with the RSMs, FAMs and EDMs. They tended not to forge close links with the Field.

The NAMs reported making links with RSM in order to cascade information to the FAMs as this was said to be the protocol for communicating with FAMs. For example, if a new supermarket was opening in a particular region, it was said the NAM should communicate with the RSM in the appropriate region to make them aware of what was happening. Each NAM was said to be twinned with a region and attended regional sales meetings on a monthly basis.

‘I seem to spend a lot of my time communicating…to Regional Sales Managers to say this is happening and it’s happening near you, you know you need to be aware of this, this is the broad terms of the agreement we have agreed with company x, have a look at what it means for you, here’s a forward schedule of their recruitment needs, we will need to talk at ABC times.’ (NAM)

NAMs did, however, link directly with the FAMs to discuss the services that could be offered to employers locally; the national service level agreement; and also during the handover of employers. The link between NAMs and FAMs was particularly effective in instances where individuals were located in the same office, as this facilitated more effective communication.

As already discussed in Section 2.1.1, one of the key links made by NAMs was with the EDMs, particularly as the EDMs moved toward working nationally. NAMs and EDMs linked together in order to promote the diversity agenda. There were examples of NAMs introducing EDMs to employers to talk about diversity or handing over specific diversity related tasks to EDMs on particular projects. NAMs and EDMs would sometimes attend meetings with employers together to discuss the subject of diversity. The relationship between the NAM and EDM is discussed in more detail in Section 3.2.

In addition to links made with RSMs, FAMs and EDMs, NAMs also linked to a lesser extent with ED, Sector Marketing Managers (SMMs), HAMs and Government Account Managers (GAMs). Primarily, they linked with ED regarding issues relating to follow-up, specifically in instances when national employers would not provide follow-up information. They interacted with SMMs in order to help understand the needs and issues of employers from different sectors and for strategic information relating to the alignment of the national team by key sectors. Contact with HAMs and GAMs was generally limited as they were effectively carrying out the same job in different sectors, however, they did come together during regional FAM meetings and also to share best practice.

NAMs did not tend to link directly with SME CM, SEAs or PAMs and nor did they link directly with the Field. In the case of the Field, issues were generally said
to have been communicated indirectly through other teams, such as RSMs and FAMs, aside, again, from occasions where the individuals were physically located in the same office. Communicating through other teams was described by NAMs as being on occasions a ‘cumbersome communication method’ and the lack of direct contact was also said to impact on the overall effectiveness and consistency of the service received by employers. Problems with communication are discussed in more detail in Section 3.2.

**Government Account Managers**

**GAMs work with Government public sector employers to broker agreements and create vacancies for Jobcentre Plus.** There are 14 GAMs and they were divided between central and local Government accounts. GAMs responsible for central Government tended to work at the national level; whereas GAMs who were responsible for local authorities generally worked at a regional level. The GAMs’ role was a hybrid role involving sales work and liaising with sector bodies such as the Office for Public Reform and the Cabinet Office and in this way they saw that they were doing similar work to the SMM.

**Regionally-based GAMs often worked alongside FAMs on local Government accounts. In contrast, GAMs working on a national level with central Government accounts tended not to work so closely with FAMs as a result of the national nature of their role. In these latter cases, the main purpose for contacting FAMs was to cascade information to them and they generally did this by email.**

**As Government organisations often already had diversity managers and strategies in place, the services of EDM were not often required and consequently links were often minimal.** Interestingly, other GAMs suggested they would have liked to use these services for advice about local councils for example, but suggested that EDM were only supposed to service large national accounts and they had, therefore, been unable to work with them. There was an example of a GAM linking with a SEA in conjunction with an EDM in order to address the recruitment needs of people from BME groups. In this instance, they attended a conference together to broker the relationship with the employer and following this contact the GAM passed over the account to the EDM and SEA as it was deemed to be their area of expertise.

**There was also evidence of links between GAMs and PAMs,** according to the GAM. The GAMs were conscious that the employers they were working with were outsourcing to private agencies and were consequently looking at ways to keep the agency work and the department work together.

In the initial stages of the EES, GAMs explained that they linked with DMs. However, it was suggested that this contact ceased as RSM became the face of ESD and the main link with the Field.
Healthcare Account Managers

HAMs work strategically with the NHS to develop relationships and broker agreements regarding the use of Jobcentre Plus. More widely, they aim to develop a partnership between the DWP and the Department of Health (DoH) regarding the use of Jobcentre Plus for the recruitment of specific types of personnel. HAMs were described as being a national resource, although they also had the capacity to operate regionally.

The HAM and GAM roles appeared to be, in principle, very similar but dealing with different public sector bodies. However, there did appear to be some difference in focus, with HAMs emphasising a more strategic role and GAMs placing the emphasis of their role on gaining vacancies.

Like GAMs, the HAMs worked closely with RSMs (as a gateway to other staff) and they also worked closely with FAMs who dealt with healthcare employers at a local level during the hand over period. There were examples of HAMs attending monthly FAM meetings and both HAMs and FAMs attending employer meetings together. As with other relationships, the links between HAMs and FAMs were often tenuous, with the strength of the relationship reliant on proximity and personal relationship. As a consequence of this, there were FAMs who indicated that they did not have access to HAMs and this tended to negatively colour their view of the role.

HAMs reported working with SEAs regarding diversity to good effect, in particular they mentioned using SEA as a source of gathering information and advice on diversity issues. Links were also made with ED to help improve the quality and consistency of taking health sector vacancies (in areas where this occurred), HAMs were linking with ED regarding Scottish Health on the Web (SHOW), which was a recruitment website set up specifically for health-related vacancies. HAMs were also said to communicate with PAMs regarding Jobs Warehouse.

HAMs appeared to work more closely with the Field. There were examples of good links with DMs and Business Development Teams operating on a regional and district level and there were instances of HAMs attending vacancy strategy meetings at a district level. In some instances, HAMs suggested they wanted to forge stronger links within the Field in order to be kept informed about changes to IB and New Deal.

Regional Sales Managers and Field Account Managers

RSMs formally and informally link with other divisions and teams at national, regional and district level and act as an important communication gateway between teams. They also perform a strategic role within the regions and manage the FAMs in the districts.
**FAMs are based in the districts and manage local employer accounts. They are managed by the RSM and aim to enhance the service provided to employers and provide greater returns for customers.** At the time of the research, there were a total of 134 FAMs, with the number in each region varying between seven and ten according to the size of the region and the density of employers. The number of FAMs per district varies between one and three.

Although FAMs were organised on a district basis, they were often also said to specialise in specific employment sectors for example, in retail. In these cases, FAMs had developed specialist knowledge in this sector and they attended conferences and provided information and advice in this area to colleagues. Some FAMs also operate as champions for other teams within Jobcentre Plus, such as a Contact Centre Champion.

Overall, the role of the FAM was considered to be well defined and the activities undertaken were varied, ranging from developing relationships with employers; maintaining the account; and checking on the progress of submission at the latter stages. The role of the FAM is discussed in more detail in Section 3.4.

**Primarily, FAMs linked with VSMs and they were often seen as the main conduit between ESD and the Field.** Although the relationship between the FAM and VSM was close, the quality of the relationship was said to vary and once again this was said to depend on the effort made by individual staff and on the proximity of staff to one another. It should be noted, that FAMs and VSMs often suggested that they worked hard to develop and improve their relationship. In addition, the FAM would link with the DM if there was a significant employment opportunity in the area, for example, the opening of a new superstore.

A cross-over of roles between the FAM and the VSM was noted, with VSMs in some districts carrying out a number of activities also undertaken by the FAM, such as working with employers to generate vacancies or organising events. As VSMs were generally seen as being experienced for the most part, according to FAMs, this was not always seen as being problematic, however, it was said that it could cause confusion amongst employers and also resulted in duplication of effort.

### 2.2.3 Sector Marketing Managers

**SMMs gathered industrial occupational knowledge (IOK) and also produced sector marketing material to support the strategy overall.** They worked with key stakeholders (such as the professional and occupational councils and bodies) to gather knowledge of the sectors and subsequently disseminated this information to the NST and the Jobcentre advisers in a variety of forms to help them carry out their roles. Primarily, the information was circulated via the intranet, email and in some

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9 It is expected that the number of FAMs operating in the district will reduce following the ODR and segmentation of the service. It was evident that this had already begun to happen by the latter stages of the research.
instances face-to-face. The material produced, while providing key information about the sectors, also offered specific guidance about identifying potential employers and it also aimed to update the NST and adviser on changes in legislation for example.

There were five SMMs operating at the time of the research and they worked across seven sectors (retail, hospitality, construction, manufacturing, engineering, security and Contact Centres), with three SMMs having responsibility for one sector and two SMMs with responsibility for two sectors.

At the time of the mapping research, knowledge and understanding of the SMM team and their role was relatively minimal amongst EES staff. However, the IOK pack published on the Intranet was generally well recognised, although the source of its production was not. Nevertheless, the sector-specific knowledge that the team had produced was often described as ‘invaluable’ as it resulted in account managers being better informed about issues facing their sector(s) and it also provided hints on how best to manage these. This information was usually held on the intranet. As will be seen in Chapter 3, the information and marketing leads provided by the SMMs were also viewed positively.

Primarily, the SMMs work with the NAMs, RSM and the FAMs, although it was recognised that the relationship between the SMMs and the NAMs, GAMs and HAMs had yet to be fully developed.

2.2.4 Employer Direct

ED operates as a virtual Contact Centre network through which employer vacancies are placed. When an employer telephones ED their call is automatically routed to the nearest Contact Centre in their area. Should this Contact Centre be busy, the call is re-routed to another ED Contact Centre. Contact Centres also carry out follow-up activity with employers to establish whether their vacancies have been filled through Jobcentre Plus. The role of the ED was clearly understood by other staff involved in the strategy.

As would be expected, Contact Centre staff primarily communicate with employers at the point of placing and following up vacancies. In addition to this, ED staff primarily mentioned liaising with VSMs.

In terms of internal links, Contact Centre managers linked with other parts of the strategy during a range of meetings, including, monthly pipeline meetings with VSMs and RSMs which allowed the Field to raise any issues they had with the quality of vacancies and issues relating to follow-up (FAMs also often attended these meetings) and quarterly ED managers’ meetings where managers from the different Contact Centres came together to share information and discuss pertinent issues.
2.2.5 Vacancy Service Managers, Vacancy Filling Managers and Employer Engagement Teams

TheVacancy Filling Managers (VSMs), Vacancy Filling Managers (VFES) and the Employer Engagement Teams (EETs) were responsible for delivering the service to employers at the local level. Overall, ESD were responsible for designing the VSM policy and strategy, however, the VSMs provided an essential part of the EES on the ground locally in Jobcentres. Responsibility for the VSM function and resourcing of the service fell under the remit of the Field team; with DMs determining the district VSM resource and the business managers allocating the resource locally.

Across the regions and the districts, the Field resource allocation varied. It was usual for there to be one VSM in each Jobcentre. However, this was not fixed and varied according to the size of the Jobcentre and the local allocation of staff resources locally. For example, in some areas, one VSM worked across a number of Jobcentres and in other cases the role was only carried out on a part-time basis. Typically, VSMs were located in the Jobcentre to which they were assigned, however, in certain areas the VSM teams was centralised or clustered. In these instances, VSMs worked across a number of offices, but usually from one location. Where teams were centralised they operated as a cohesive team. The role of VSM was ring-fenced in situations where the VSMs were centralised; in other areas, staff could potentially be reallocated to manage different tasks within the Jobcentre, for example taking fresh claims.

Primarily, the VSM worked to maintain the account locally, carrying out such activities as sifting and matching vacancies and conducting the 48 hour follow-up call to employers. The main role of the VSM is outlined in Section 3.4. In addition to the VSM, Scotland also has a small number of VFMs operating in the Jobcentre. In these instances, the VFM took many of the day-to-day tasks delivered by VSMs in the Jobcentre, such as sifting and matching vacancies, while the VSM concentrated on working with the employer to maintain the account.

VSMs primarily linked with employers externally and within Jobcentre plus with FAMs, and local frontline staff.

In some areas EETs were also in operation. These existed in addition to the VSM and, in some instances, VSMs were part of the EET. The purpose of the EET varied: In some areas the EET has a strategic role, while in others it carried out administrative tasks relating to the management and handling of vacancies. EETs usually comprised a mix of VSMs, marketing and administrative staff.
2.3 Key issues arising from the organisational mapping

It was widely and consistently acknowledged by respondents that the organisational structure of the EES was highly complex. This in itself was not seen as problematic, as many systems were seen as being both operationally complex and efficient. However, it was clear that there was a marked lack of clarity and understanding about the structure and organisation of the strategy, specifically regarding the role of certain teams operating within it, particularly those provided by the Specialist Services. Lack of clarity and understanding was said by respondents to result in a range of outcomes, including:

- a degree of ‘working in chimneys’ such that information did not always flow across the structure in the manner in which it was intended. This meant that links made between staff were often reliant on personal relationships and proximity, rather than overarching strategy;

- being suspicious of other teams; fearful for their own jobs; and in some instances, guarded about who they would communicate and work with;

- repetition of roles, which was said to result in duplication of effort and confusion; and

- inconsistent delivery as it was argued that teams worked to different agendas. This was further aggregated by repetition of roles.

At the mapping stage it was said that the relationship between ESD and the Field team was distant, with communication between the two teams being of a variable nature. This said, the main stage of research showed that FAMs and VSMs had often worked hard to develop good working relationships, but again, these were the result of personal effort and proximity.

2.3.1 Changes

Within the EES two key changes were taking place during the course of the research, namely the Customer Contact Strategy (CCS) and the Vacancy Strategy (VS). The research did not aim to explore these new strategies in depth, however, respondents were briefly asked to describe the strategies and outline their views on the principle of each. These findings are outlined below.

The Customer Contact Strategy

Awareness of the CCS was very high amongst staff and it was generally spontaneously raised during the course of the discussion. It was generally accepted that the CCS would be implemented and that segmentation would be determined by the number of vacancies delivered by an employer, as well as the number of Public Resource Agreement (PRA) points this resulted in. It was said that the CCS would result in the current teams being remodelled to create new ones, which would include Senior Account Managers (SAMs); Account Managers (AMs); and Telephone Account Manager (TAMs) – which it was said would be operated via the Contact Centre (for a detailed breakdown of segmentation see Appendix A).
It was suggested that segmentation would undoubtedly change the overall structure of the NST. Specifically, the HAM, GAM, and NAM would become SAMs and local account managed employers would be divided between AMs and TAMs according the key criteria set. It was said this was likely to impact on the number of employers case loaded by AMs and would ultimately have a knock on effect on the number of staff operating in an account managed capacity, particularly by AMs.

Despite the possible negative impacts on the individual teams, in principle it was typically seen as a positive step forward as it was seen as a much more efficient and businesslike approach to recruitment. In addition, the consequent reduction in the number of employer accounts was thought to make the job of account management easier within each individual team.

‘Spot on as a concept, absolutely spot on, seriously. In fact I am not too sure I can add much more. You know it’s given us a focus, given us segmentation… classify, categorise, reconfigure some of our operations, and do all that with a reduced head count. So I think it is spot on.’

(SEA)

However, some concerns were noted, principally relating to the TAM role, with respondents questioning how effectively an account could be managed over the telephone as opposed to face-to-face, as well as the ability of ED to operate this considering some of the difficulties they were said to experience with their other roles (see Sections 3.3 and 3.5).

Furthermore, the appropriateness of this structure for working with public sector employers was also noted. Primarily as it was felt that not only did NHS and Government employers require a certain degree of specialist skill and approach, but because of the nature of these organisations it was feared they would not qualify for a national account managed service (in terms of the number of vacancies they brought in). For example, it was suggested that the long lead in time required to develop relationships and create vacancies and the historically poor follow-up record, meant vacancies could appear far fewer than in reality. The possible impact of segmentation on other non-public sector employers who might lose their account managed service was also highlighted. This was seen as being a greater problem at district level, rather than at national level where it was suspected they would keep most of the employers they worked with closely.

Moreover, concerns were also expressed regarding the impact of this on staff morale, particularly in light of the other changes occurring within Jobcentre Plus, such as the ODR.

The Vacancy Strategy

The VS was ultimately said to enable districts to become more efficient regarding the type of employers and vacancies they targeted. It was said to work by helping districts to understand the types of vacancies they filled and the type of jobseekers they moved into work, by providing information on performance within the region.
or the district. For example, the VS would provide information on the types of vacancies districts had been historically successful in filling and this would allow districts to be more focused in terms of the employers and vacancies they targeted.

At the time of the research, the VS was being piloted in five areas: Brent; Harrow and Hillingdon; South London; Wigan; Hull and East Riding. However, it was found to have been implemented (in some form) across other regions. Where implemented, the VS was generally using district level information, although with some information provided from the region.

The principle of the strategy was overwhelmingly viewed in a positive light and for some was seen as being overdue; as it was felt the information provided would have a number of positive outcomes. For example, it was argued that it would improve the efficiency of the service and enable Jobcentre Plus to be ‘smarter’ and more ‘streamlined’ by focusing on well defined business sectors and linking only the most appropriate customers to an employers’ vacancy.

‘I mean we need something that focuses us all on getting to the right jobs, the right sectors you know we can, we will no longer have the head count and the resource and the money to just service anything and everything that moves.’

(SEA)

Furthermore, it was felt it would act as an effective guide or tool to be used by Jobcentre Plus staff, not only to target employers and vacancies, but also to inform training initiatives, to help guide customers on the frontline and to sell the Jobcentre Plus recruitment service to employers.

Despite the very positive views about the VS, there was some limited concern expressed by employers about segmenting employers and focusing only on those sectors where Jobcentre Plus have traditionally been very successful, as it was thought this might foster a narrow vision of the types of suitable vacancies, which would prevent the development of further markets and not take account of changes to the labour market. Furthermore, it was felt aside from focusing on the VS, it was also important to focus on the training of customers to fit more effectively into the labour market (this is discussed in more detail in Section 4.3).
3 Life of the vacancy

The vacancy travels through five key stages from its conception through to being filled and this chapter considers each stage of this process in turn, looking at the process of making contact with the employer; the management of accounts prior to the submission of a vacancy; placing a vacancy; working with and maintaining a vacancy; and the process of follow-up.

The process if explored from the perspective of employers who experienced the service, as well as from Jobcentre Plus staff including both ESD staff (National Sales Team (NST), Specialist Services and Contact Centre) and those working in the Field (Field Director (FD), District Manager (DM), Business Development Team (BDT), Vacancy Service Manager (VSM)). Figure 3.1 outlines the ‘life of a vacancy’ diagrammatically and indicates the key players involved in this at each stage.
3.1 Making contact

Contact was made with employers on both a national and local level by a wide range of EES staff, including staff from the NST, Specialist Services, marketing and the Field. In addition to this, contact was often initiated by employers.

Although individually, the process of making contact worked well, problems occurred across the strategy more widely as a result of different teams duplicating effort and contacting the same employers in order to market Jobcentre Plus services. Overall, this replication was thought to undermine consistency; portray a negative image of Jobcentre Plus to the employer; and in some instances, was also thought to alienate and confuse employers.

3.1.1 Contact made by NST

The NST tended not to adopt a fixed or consistent approach to contacting employers; rather contacts had been created in a variety of ways. For the most part,
contacts tended to be pre-existing, recently generated, or were handed over from colleagues.

National Account Managers (NAMs)’ caseloads were generally said to comprise both new and previously existing accounts. As although NAMs did build links with employers and generate new business, a number of the employers on their lists had on-going relationships with Jobcentre Plus and, in some instances, with the account managers themselves. More exceptionally, accounts were passed up to NAMs from the local level.

Field Account Managers (FAMs) had typically developed their employer caseload in three main ways, including: accounts being passed or handed over to them by NAMs, Government Account Managers (GAMs), Healthcare Account Managers (HAMs) or from the Field, including VSMs and marketing; inheriting pre-established on-going Jobcentre accounts from predecessors; and by directly marketing and generating new employer contacts.

NAMs and FAMs reported keeping ‘abreast’ of local labour markets and new businesses from local press, word-of-mouth from colleagues (such as the Sector Marketing Manager (SMM)) and via the internet. New business developments in the local area were researched prior to initial contact being made and in the case of the FAM, this often involved contacting the NAM to establish whether or not a relationship already existed with this employer. In the case of new contacts, account managers usually contacted potential new employers in the initial stages via telephone or email.

Similarly, the GAMs and HAMs were also responsible for identifying and establishing relationships with employers working within their chosen sectors, for example, the NHS or Government. Relationships were usually said to have been established with employers at a more senior level than contact made by NAMs, including human resource managers and chief executives of companies. Initial contact was usually made by emailing the chief executive of a company for example, in some cases using a pre-designed template to introduce their services. At the outset, email contact was generally viewed as being a more effective, as it could be difficult to contact senior level staff via the telephone or face-to-face, aside from ad hoc instances where they were introduced at events.

### 3.1.2 Contact made by Specialist Services

The Employer Diversity Managers (EDMs) generally made contact with employers in one of two ways: either they made their own contact or they were passed onto employers via the NAM. During the initial stages it was suggested that EDMs were perhaps more likely to initiate their own contacts, however, over time this was thought to have reduced as it was decided that the standard approach would be for NAMs to refer EDMs to employers.

Although this latter approach was generally seen as the standard model, EDMs often felt that it would be beneficial to establish their own relationship with
employers in some instances. Not only because it was said EDMs were not always being introduced to employers by the NAM, but also due to the level at which NAMs made contact within organisations, which EDMs suggested were not always ideal for discussions regarding diversity. For example, it was suggested that it would be preferable for EDMs to engage with employers on a more strategic and senior level in order to build a strong working relationship, rather than at the recruitment level at which NAMs were said to work.

‘What’s happened in the past is that the National Account Managers have engaged with the employer, and this is for all the right reasons, at a level where the recruitment is required. I think they would admit themselves is that what they haven’t done is gone in at a strategic enough level to…evolve a stronger working relationship with an organisation and a more sustained relationship.’

(EDM)

It was suggested that Specialist Employment Advisers (SEAs) attempted to contact employers by forging links and ‘piggy backing’ contacts already made by FAMs located in areas where they operated. However, it was felt that in some instances, FAMs were being territorial about their contacts and were not introducing SEAs to their employers. Protocols had been set up in order to try and prevent this obstruction and SEAs were subsequently making their own links with employers in cases where the channel via the FAMs was blocked. Where SEAs made their own links, they suggested they were passing this information back to FAMs. SEAs also mentioned making contact with employers via the links they made with GAMs.

‘Part of the employment engagement strategy is that the account managers form the relationship with employers…and they are the face of this directorate…so essentially we have had to go in through their route if you will. And if that referral or that route is not as clear or as open as it could be then that is a bit of a blockage. You know we are fairly driven and fairly operational…I have already [told] the team to say look if that door is closed open it yourself.’

(SEA)

3.1.3 Contact made by the Field

In addition to contacts being made by account managers, contact was also being made by the Field staff, primarily VSMs and marketing teams working locally in the Jobcentre. The Field staff made direct contact with employers at the local level and contacts were guided by information gathered from the local press, via the internet and as a result of new developments emerging in their local area, for example, the opening of a business.

In some cases, the Field passed these new contacts onto the NST where relevant, such as in the case of larger organisations, however it was suggested that in other instances the Field were reluctant to give up their contacts and preferred to work with the employer themselves (as they had done previously). Notwithstanding this, it was felt that this approach had shifted and increasingly the Field were said to be handing over contacts where appropriate.
3.1.4 Supporting roles

Other players operating within the Employer Engagement Strategy (EES), such as the SMM and the Small Medium Employer Channel Manager (SME CM) were thought to be effectively supporting the process of making contact both nationally and at a local level, by providing information to colleagues, for example, providing names of potential employer and details about the organisation. This information was generated either directly through the SMM or the SME CM as a result of events and conferences they attended or organised; but also indirectly via key partners and stakeholders, such as Business link, Learning Skills Council, Chambers of Commerce, ACAS and other contacts introduced at events. Certainly, findings from the employer study uphold this, as employers suggested they had been introduced to the service at events organised by key stakeholders such as Chamber of Commerce and the Scottish Executive.

It was said specifically, that SMMs provided support to NAMs and the SME CM to the local office and in some case to FAMs also. However, links with FAMs were somewhat undermined as it was thought too few contacts had been developed for it to be truly successful at the point of the research.

3.1.5 Employer contact

Employers were often said to have initiated the contact with Jobcentre Plus themselves in order to either gain information on programmes such as New Deal, or to request a particular service. This occurred in the case of both large and small employers and amongst employers who had and had not previously worked with the Jobcentre. Where employers had not previously worked with the Jobcentre, they mentioned hearing about the service through events (as outlined above); through specific Jobcentre Plus marketing; and also via word-of-mouth from friends and colleagues.

Initial contact with Jobcentre Plus was usually made by telephone or face-to-face at the local branch. Contact details were established from a range of sources including the Jobcentre Plus website; telephone directories; and simply by visiting the Jobcentre. Where pre-existing relationships were established, employers often contacted staff they had worked with before and in some instances these contacts were made with frontline advisers rather than with those operating the strategy directly.

3.2 Working with employers

This section of the chapter considers how Employer Engagement staff work with employers prior to vacancies being registered with the Contact Centre. It considers the role of national and local account managers, as well as that of the Specialist Services, primarily the role of the EDM.
3.2.1 Account management

The approach adopted by national and local account managers was not standardised and often varied according to the frequency, medium and nature of the contact made. Differences in approach occurred both within and between teams in different areas and these variations were usually based on needs of the individual employer, as well as on the preferred approach of the staff, with for example, some staff promoting diversity to employers upfront and others preferring not to.

The level and frequency of the contact varied at different stages of the process, with contact becoming more intense during key periods, such as during the brokering of agreements, the setting up of services and during the life of an active vacancy. The level of contact ranged from daily and weekly contact during the more intensive periods to monthly, quarterly or bi-annual contact during other times.

Contact was made via a range of mediums: face-to-face; telephone; email; and video conference. It was usual for a face-to-face meeting to be set up initially in order to discuss overall strategy, especially at the national level, and thereafter, for regular monthly or quarterly face-to-face meetings to take place. In between face-to-face contacts, ad hoc contact occurred primarily via telephone or email, although in some instances account managers made visits to the employer in order to discuss issues and learn more about the business.

“You’ll be having, I say regular but not regular as in frequent meetings with the senior people within the organisation to make sure that you’ve got a plan together at strategic level, what you want to be doing with the organisation, what they want to get from it, agree some sort of target, some KPIs and then probably quarter, something like that, you will meet at that level to make sure everything’s on track and look to the future.”

(NAM)

National account management

As suggested, an initial strategic meeting was usually set up in order to broker an agreement between the employer and Jobcentre Plus regarding the services offered and the specific needs of the employer. It should be noted that the brokering of agreements was usually said to be a longer process for healthcare and Government employers and therefore, both HAMs and GAMs were said to invest more time in this aspect of the account management. A range of issues were discussed at these initial meetings, as well as subsequently during follow-up discussions. The types of issues discussed included:

- the basic level of service offered by Jobcentre Plus, such as placing, advertising and maintaining the vacancy locally. These services were usually promoted as the guaranteed minimum service that could be expected from Jobcentre Plus;
• **additional services** were discussed and, in some instances, set up and utilised at this stage of the process. These services incorporated specific marketing events, such as open days or job fairs; New Deal programmes; bespoke training, designed and operated in liaison with local training providers and colleges; and local services such as distributing, sifting, matching applications and the use of interview rooms within the Jobcentre for recruitment;

• **the diversity agenda.** Diversity was usually discussed at the initial strategic meeting and, in some instances, this took the form of a formal presentation undertaken by either the NAM or the EDM. However, in some cases account managers suggested they preferred to use a more ‘light touch’ initially and would simply raise the issues of diversity at the first meeting and offer the service of the EDM to be brought in at a later time.

Essentially, the discussions focused on promoting disadvantaged customers to employers and outlining the services available to support this, such as selling the use of the EDM to employers or promoting specific programmes like New Deal, work placements or work trials. Furthermore, account managers also highlighted current labour market trends as a reason for needing to consider diversity, specifically decreasing unemployment levels. It should be noted that employers often already had diversity policies in place, particularly Government and health-related employers, as it was said public sector organisations were expected to be ‘exemplar’ in terms of diversity;

• **exploration of recruitment policy and procedures** currently being used by the employer and those they intended to use in the future. Where relevant account managers offered advice on policy and procedures, such as on application forms or selection criteria used, although it was thought that employers were not always open to this level of change. In one instance, the NAM had helped revise an employer’s application form with a view to making it less discriminatory. Discussions regarding specific policy and recruitment procedures were more prevalent at the local level between the FAM and the employer;

• **potential vacancies and the type of applicants required.** Account management usually also involved discussions regarding the volume and type of vacancies the employer thought they would filter through Jobcentre Plus; as well as regarding the type of applicants they would require. Specifically, the type of skill, experience, or qualifications they would expect them to possess. Methods of preparing Jobcentre customers and equipping them with the correct skills were also explored as part of the type of additional services offered, where this was deemed appropriate.

Once agreements were brokered nationally, the account would be passed down directly or via the RSM to the relevant FAM – who was usually decided according to their geographical location rather than as a result of sector expertise. The handover process varied according to when the FAM would be introduced to the employer, as well as regarding the nature of the contact, for example, in some instances the FAM would be introduced early on in the process and would attend strategic meetings
alongside the national staff. Whereas in other cases, they would simply be emailed or telephoned by the national level account manager informing them of the account and providing details of the handover. FAMs were usually only introduced at the outset of strategic discussions where a high number of vacancies were expected and where the NAM was aware of the geographical location of the vacancies, such as in the case of supermarket store openings. In exceptional cases, as will be discussed in Section 3.3.2, FAMs stated they were not informed at all of the handover and were only made aware of accounts when they were contacted by the employer.

Following the handover of accounts from the national to district level, the contact between the NAM and the FAM was minimal for the most part, although the NAM did maintain a degree of on-going contact with the national employer and also often kept a distant watch over the local activities of the account from afar, using quarterly Management Information (MI) and also via informal feedback from the employer. This was particularly the case where it was felt a number of subsequent vacancies were likely to be forthcoming.

Both the EDM and the SEA (where operating in the area) worked in a supporting capacity to promote diversity to employers, either working alongside or in addition to the NST. Aside from attending meetings and carrying out presentations they also worked on specific policy or procedural-related tasks, such as helping to identify problems with current recruitment procedures, by looking at company workforce statistics and working with the employer to revise these, for example helping to design a new application form.

‘One of the most recent examples that I’m working on with the EDM, it’s an example of a good joint working one which is ****, they’ve had their application form as it stands for quite some years now and they asked us to have a look at it. I got the EDM involved and one of our regional psychologists that look at stuff for us, they’ve gone through the application form, identified all the areas they’re on risk now under discrimination, which they wouldn’t have done when they produced it.’

(NAM)

Furthermore, EDMs also delivered employer diversity awareness training for employers, which provided an overview of diversity and also specific courses which focused on issues such as disability.

‘Yes, there’s different kinds of training. We find more and more that it’s not just the HR Managers and the personnel staff that need diversity awareness training. But really they really need to be working with Store Managers, store supervisors. Anybody at all that has influence over staff, and works with staff, need to be aware of diversity.’

(EDM)

EDMs suggested that it could take a long time to make an impact on employers in terms of diversity (up to a year). However, they felt this could be ultimately successful, if the possible social, commercial and financial benefits of embracing...
diversity were communicated clearly, for example, emphasising the need to increase the pool of available labour in light of the decreasing labour market.

**Local account management**

Account management at the local level closely reflected the service carried out at the national level and hence, that outlined in the previous section. As with NAMs, FAMs worked to develop a strategy regarding how they would work with the employer and this occurred even where national agreements had been developed. This said, formal service level agreements were not always constructed; rather, employers’ needs were discussed, such as the nature of services they required and the services available in the local area, and account management moved forward on this basis, sometimes following an action plan.

Account management at the local level typically involved marketing the services offered by Jobcentre Plus to employers (including the internet and Jobpoints) and a discussion of recruitment procedures and diversity.

However, it was suggested that FAMs were often less likely to focus strongly on diversity upfront in comparison to their national counterparts, rather, they preferred to develop a relationship with the employer first before seriously broaching the issue of priority customers and in some cases did not broach diversity at all. Employers mentioned receiving advice on how to advertise vacancies to attract working mothers and lone parents and they also mentioned being advised against using photographs as part of their application at is was said to be discriminatory. FAMs suggested they promoted diversity through New Deal and also by offering work trials and pilot training courses, particularly if the employer was uncertain about considering priority customers.

FAMs also worked locally to maintain the account by providing specific information to the employer, such as information on the local labour market and by organising specific services, such as training. For example, one FAM worked with their local council to set up a course that trained customers for care assistant positions. In particular employers mentioned the involvement of the FAMs in organising and operating training or events, such as job fairs or workshops.

The employer was usually handed over to the Field staff (either EET or VSM) once the vacancy was submitted, although it was quite usual for the VSM to have been introduced prior to this during the early strategic stages of the process in order to improve consistency. For the most part, FAMs took a back seat regarding the maintenance of the vacancy at this stage, monitoring the progress remotely by checking submission levels for example and occasionally liaising with the Field staff. Nevertheless, ongoing contact between the FAM and the employer was evident and this tended to occur where FAMs were involved in the organisation and operation of events; or in situations where specific problems occurred, such as problems with the level and quality of submissions. It was said that employers often contacted FAMs when problems arose as they were seen as the main point of contact for the account. Like NAMs, FAMs would also contact the
employer sporadically in order to check on progress, particularly if they were likely to submit further vacancies.

3.2.2 Views on working with employers

The personalised account managed service was viewed positively by employers according to the NST and employers themselves. Employers liked dealing with a single point of contact as it enabled them to build rapport and more importantly, meant the account manager was able to develop an understanding of their business needs. Furthermore, the specialist sector knowledge held by account managers, particularly the HAM and GAM, was thought to further enhance this relationship and the service offered overall.

Although employers were generally happy with the account managed service they received, some problems were highlighted by Jobcentre Plus staff and employers alike and these generally related to internal communication, resources and marketing diversity.

A lack of communication was said to have occurred between teams and also between employers and staff and this was thought to have impinged on the service delivered overall. Specifically, the quality of handover of accounts between NAMs and FAMs was thought to have been negatively affected by poor communication, with FAMs suggesting they were not always made aware of the handover of national accounts in advance and in some instances not at all, only finding out once they were contacted by the employer. This was also the case with the FAM to VSM handovers; although a number of FAMs and VSMs had worked hard to improve communication and had developed strong and effective working relationships.

In addition to handover issues, there was also said to be a lack of communication and discussion regarding the agreements brokered (nationally and at a local level), particularly the feasibility of the agreements. Certainly, it was suggested that agreements made by NAMs and FAMs were not always translating effectively on the ground and although this was primarily seen as a result of the resources available in the Jobcentre, it was felt more effective communication might help develop more realistic agreements at the outset.

‘If it’s come from the FAM sometimes the service level has already been agreed, even though the FAMs are supposed to check with the VSMs that they can deliver this isn’t always the case. But it’s the National Sales Team that cause them the most problems…It would be better out of courtesy to check with the local office that the service agreement was feasible.’

(VSM)

Notwithstanding this, local resources were widely identified as being problematic as increasingly it was felt districts were unable to provide the services required by employers, such as distributing, sifting and matching applications; organising events; and offering bespoke training programmes, and this was felt to
undermine the service account managers were able to offer employers. Increasingly, account managers suggested they had ceased to offer services over and above the very basic and instead only highlighted these as possibilities. They suggested they did this rather than renege on agreements made, as this impacted negatively on their relationship with the employer and also on employers’ views of Jobcentre Plus more widely.

‘I can’t really and never have been able to go out and sell a service with confidence. But in anywhere in the country it will be delivered to a certain minimal standard, and I think that’s probably the key bugbear for me personally. I can go out and I can talk very, you know broad brush approach, and then we can talk specifics in any one location…in terms of going out to a company and saying well this is what Jobcentre Plus can do, and this is the service you will get anywhere up and down the land, well I can’t and I wouldn’t say that because I’m not confident enough to say that and never have been you know.’

(NAM)

As mentioned in Chapter 2, poor communication had often resulted in a lack of understanding about the role of the Specialist Services and as a result it was felt they were not always being fully utilised. Specifically, it was felt that the EDM was not being used to work with employers as extensively as they could be and this was acknowledged by both EDMs and NAMs. EDMs felt that not only were they not being introduced to employers at the outset in some instances, as described in Section 3.2, in some cases they were not being used at all.

Certainly, NAMs often felt they were capable and sufficiently knowledgeable to broach issues of diversity themselves during meetings and for this reason did not always use the EDM service. Moreover, it was felt that national employers were often already well versed in diversity issues and, therefore, did not require the service. This view was to some extent substantiated by account managed employers, who believed they were already aware of diversity issues. In addition, it was also felt that introducing an EDM to employers might be confusing and work to undermine the single point of contact.

‘I’m taking one of the national EDMs with me. Now I think that’s confusing for the employer, I’m the National Account Manager here and I’m bringing another account manager who’s going to talk diversity, I’ve already talked diversity. For the Nationals particularly, I see value in Diversity Managers working regionally and district level…changing hearts and minds.’

(NAM)

EDMs were often familiar with the views of NAMs regarding the EDM service and in response emphasised the complex nature of diversity which they felt other staff working in the strategy often failed to understand. In contrast to the views of the NAM, EDMs did not believe that the sales force had sufficient specialist knowledge to discuss diversity in detail.
‘Well the current sales force doesn’t have the capacity, training development, or understanding of the diversity to be able to go in and talk to an employer with any sense of confidence.’

(EDM)

More positively, there was a strong sense that the relationship between the NAM and EDMs was improving, as communication and understanding between the teams increased and in some instances the relationship was said to have been working effectively.

‘National sales team and specialist services, it was very difficult to get that close working relationship. I would say its probably only now, a couple of years on that we’ve actually got it, and its taken a number of joint meetings with National account manager team and ourselves to get that together.’

(EDM)

Marketing priority customers to employers was also found difficult by staff, particularly those working at district level, as they felt simply that employers were only interested in identifying the best candidate for the job rather than employing disadvantaged customers. Certainly, they felt it was necessary to strike a balance offering non-disadvantaged customers alongside those who were disadvantaged, in order to prove that Jobcentre Plus could successfully fill vacancies with the right people. Schemes such as New Deal, work trials, bespoke training were thought to be effective in encouraging employers to work with priority customers, as New Deal and work trials gave employers the opportunity to try customers without committing and pre-work training provided a ready skilled workforce.

3.3 Submitting vacancies

3.3.1 Medium for placing vacancies

Employers typically submitted vacancies via the nine Employer Direct (ED) Contact Centres that make up the virtual network. Vacancies were placed through all three channels operating within the system – telephone, email and fax.

Staff and employers also highlighted a number of variations to using this standard model to submit vacancies, which included employers placing vacancies via Jobcentre Plus staff, such as their VSM, AM and in some instances frontline Jobcentre staff. These variations usually took place in situations where special arrangements had been previously agreed with the employer, primarily as a result of the high volume of vacancies expected; or because they disliked using the Contact Centre and had requested an alternative approach be applied.

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10 Nine Contact Centres were operating at time of the research. Two of the original 11 had been closed – Bromley and Portsmouth.
In addition to this, employers were also using (or were planning to begin using) ‘Jobs warehouse’ or ‘Edon’ to upload their vacancies. In these instances, it was said that employers would access the service using a pin and then upload their vacancies onto the system electronically. Similarly, health-related/NHS vacancies were also submitted via an electronic system (which would ultimately be uploaded onto Jobs warehouse). Employers and NST mentioned both SHOW and Sure Site.

3.3.2 Placing the vacancy

When vacancies were submitted via the telephone, advisers had a target of eight minutes during which to collect the information and input this into the relevant screens and boxes on the computer system. Prior to taking the vacancy, advisers generally checked whether the employer had previously placed an advertisement with ED and if so, they would search through the employer records to identify this. Where appropriate, the previous advert could be used as a template for the new vacancy.

‘The only difference it can make, if they want to place a vacancy and they’ve had one before, it would be on our system, so we can copy it. It could make things quicker.’

(Contact Centre Adviser)

In some cases, employers had previously agreed ‘special considerations’ and this usually meant that a template had been pre-developed for use on a particular recruitment drive, for example, they would have the job description already inserted. Where employers were recognised as having ‘special considerations’ (companies with special considerations were usually placed on a list), advisers would access and use these templates to take the vacancy. At the point of taking the vacancy, advisers also mentioned updating the notes page screen.

A wide range of information was gathered regarding the vacancy at the point of placing the advert, including information on:

- **practical issues and recruitment arrangements**, including the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) code; follow-up date; vacancy closing date; the level of submissions, and whether to apply direct or not. It should be noted, that while it was said to be compulsory to take a follow-up date it was not seen as being necessary to take a closing date at this stage. Furthermore, observations undertaken at the Contact Centre showed that submission levels were not always discussed and agreed with employers, rather they were often set at a level decided on by the advisers, for example, at 50 submissions; and

- **the nature of the vacancy**, such as wording of the advertisement; vulnerable groups involved (options as part of drop down menu); qualifications and skills required; hours of work and wages; the geographical area including the postcode. When postcodes were taken, advisers suggested this often flagged up details of the local VSM, and in some instances the advisers would pass on this information
to the employer. Advisers also suggested they attempted to gather meaningful and specific descriptions of the vacancy, as they understood the importance of this in improving the quality of submissions made to employers further down the line.

‘At the end of the vacancy you’re meant to give them the VSMs name and number, like if you need any other help, queries or...When you place the vacancy, you put the postcode in of where the work is, that will put in the local Jobcentre to the place of work, and the VSMs name. You can then click into it and it will have the name and number of the VSM.’

(Contact Centre Adviser)

In addition to taking the required information, advisers also offered advice to employers regarding the vacancy they were submitting, for example, advice on the wording of the advert. Contact Centre staff said they advised employers on the type of language used, particularly if this was felt to be discriminatory and employers also recalled being offered advice about the vacancy and specifically regarding the use of certain phrases, such as ‘women only’ or ‘morning person’. In contrast, other employers did not recall receiving this type of information. Advisers also offered advice on the level of wages, especially if they felt they were too low for a particular area.

Once the vacancy had been taken, it was usual for the advisers to email or fax the advert to the employer in order for them to check the details of the advert. However, employers suggested they were not always receiving this, despite being told it had been sent.

In addition to their contact with employers, Contact Centre advisers also regularly receiving calls from VSMs and the Jobcentre requesting system updates, primarily amendments to an advert or in order to close it. The reasons for this were questioned by some Contact Centre advisers and others suggested it was because Jobcentre staff were not able to close vacancies, which they felt was ‘tedious’.

3.3.3 Views of submitting the vacancy

Overall, the service offered by the Contact Centres was, according to Jobcentre Plus staff, thought to have improved, specifically in terms of the consistency and efficiency of the service they delivered and it was described by some as ‘progressive’. Certain aspects of the service were also viewed positively by employers; in particular they were positive about the ease with which they were able to contact the Contact Centre and also how quickly the vacancies went live on the system. Furthermore, employers were generally positive about the advice and information they received from Contact Centre advisers when placing the vacancy in situations where this had been provided.

Notwithstanding this, the quality of the service provided was still thought to be rather ‘hit and miss’ according to NST, Field and employers, with the quality
of the service varying according to the individual staff member taking the call and the Contact Centre accessed via the virtual network. Regarding the latter point, it was not that certain Contact Centres were necessarily perceived as being less effective than others, rather, it was simply felt by employers that they received a more personalised and accurate service when they got through to a local Contact Centre, as they were seen as having greater local knowledge. In contrast to this, the virtual network was often viewed positively by staff, primarily Contact Centre managers, and in one instance it was described as being ‘brilliant’ as it was thought to have improved the speed of the service.

Problems noted with service

A range of other problems were noted by NST, Field and employers regarding the Contact Centre, these included:

- **principle of using a Call Centre.** In some instances, employers suggested they simply did not like using a Call Centre to place vacancies as they found them to be frustrating and generally impersonal;

- **quality of the advertisement placed.** Staff and employers often questioned the quality of the advertisement particularly in terms of the quality of the job description itself. The job descriptions were often criticised for being too long and insufficiently detailed, which they felt impacted negatively on the submissions made to the vacancy, as it made it more difficult for advisers to match customers to jobs and also meant unsuitable candidates were more likely to apply;

- **accuracy of the advertisement placed.** Adverts were overwhelmingly criticised for being inaccurate in terms of spelling mistakes or typos, as well as the information included, such as geographical area or telephone number. In one instance, the employer suggested their personal mobile number had been included on the vacancy by mistake. Employers suggested that adverts were often placed live on the system before they had the opportunity to check the their accuracy and once they were live it was said to be difficult to amend the details. It was argued that if the checking of vacancies was more consistently applied, this problems could be reduced;

- **inaccurately identifying employers with special considerations.** Both employers and Contact Centre staff highlighted difficulties recognising the ‘special considerations’ when they contacted the Contact Centre. It was felt that the lists were not only long, but that it was easy to become confused between companies with similar names, particularly as some organisations called themselves by their local company names, for example Burtons, when the special consideration was recorded by the company group name, such as Arcadia\(^\text{11}\);

\(^{11}\) It should be noted that Burton and the Arcadia group are examples and were not included in this study.
• **not agreeing submission levels and closing dates.** Advisers were not consistently discussing and agreeing submission levels with employers, nor were closing dates being agreed in all cases;

• **continuing to receive vacancies after the position was filled.** Employers often continued to receive applications after the vacancy had been filled and this was viewed negatively as it was said to waste time and resources. Although this might be, in part, a result of the submission levels set and the closing date, it was said by advisers to be difficult to control how quickly customers would respond to the advert and place their application.

**A number of the problems highlighted with the Contact Centre were acknowledged by Contact Centre managers and they were often thought to be a result of the inexperienced nature of the staff operating the system,** which occurred as a result of high level of staff turnover. It was suggested that the nature of the role naturally precipitated a relatively high turnover of staff, however, it was felt this was exacerbated by the short-term six-monthly contracts currently being offered. This not only had wider impacts on the quality of the service, but also on resources as it meant new staff where continually being recruited and trained, in what was viewed as a multifaceted and skilled role. In addition to inexperienced staff, it was also felt that the gap in the service offered by different Contact Centres in the past would have skewed the overall picture of their effectiveness.

### 3.4 Working with the vacancy

**Typically, once a vacancy had been submitted it was maintained on a day-to-day basis locally by the Field team, primarily the VSM.** However, there were instances where vacancies would be managed by either account managers or by local Jobcentre advisers. Contact Centre staff suggested that where special arrangement had been pre-arranged, they were usually flagged up on the IT system. **Certainly, employers who took part in this study did not always follow the standard model in terms of who maintained their vacancies and they mentioned working with local Jobcentre advisers,** including New Deal advisers, as well as account managers. It should be noted, however, that respondents were often unclear about who had managed their account at least in terms of their job title.

#### 3.4.1 Activities undertaken

VSMs carried out a range of tasks in relation to the management of vacancies, including the checking of vacancies and adverts; the delivery of specific services, such as sifting and matching; and the general ongoing maintenance of the vacancy and in some sense the account itself. The tasks undertaken by the VSM and Field colleagues are outlined below:
Forty-eight hour call

New vacancies were notified to VSMs via their electronic inbox, following which, VSMs generally made a 48 hour call to employers in order to discuss the vacancy. In cases where the employer was identified as being new, the call was often fast-tracked and made at 24 hours rather than at 48. The 48 hour call was not, however, always being carried out on time and in some instances, was not carried out at all. This was said to be a result of the lack of resources available locally, which meant the Field had insufficient staff to carry out this service. This was substantiated by employers who suggested they were not always receiving this call.

‘The less staff you have, and it’s very much an admin staff role, the more difficult it is to meet that requirement of the 24-48 hour call. If you’ve got a big recruitment going on it is one of the things that, you’ve got to way up the pros and cons of the priority and that does have an impact.’

(VSM)

Where the 48 hour call was carried out it usually encompassed a range of activities, including:

- **checking the information placed on the system.** VSMs checked details of the advert overall (including the wording of the advert, the geographical area, the wages and submission levels), in order to check for inaccuracies, such as spelling and grammar mistakes. The job description was also checked to ensure it was sufficiently detailed and meaningful and if not, employers were encouraged to amend this in order to make it more specific. It was suggested that although vacancies were often sent out to employers and checked by the EDM, these amendments were not always being made;

- **explaining the service to employers.** VSMs outlined the service offered to the employer and introduced themselves at this stage of the process. This was seen as particularly important for non-account managed and new employers;

- **covering the issue of diversity.** The issue of diversity was not consistently covered by VSMs at this stage, rather the approach varied according to whether or not it was covered at all and how this was approached if it was included. Certainly, it was clear that some VSMs chose not to cover diversity at this stage, preferring to broach it further down the line. Although in other cases it was not covered as part of the VSM role at all and this was often because they felt it would have been covered previously by account managers or because it was thought special services such as SEA (where they were operating in that area) would undertake this role. In line with this, non-account managed employers in this study often suggested they had not received any information on diversity from their contact with Jobcentre Plus.

In contrast, diversity was approached by VSMs at this stage and although this differed in terms of the breadth and depth of the discussion, it often included a discussion of the social and commercial benefits of employing priority customers, the skills possessed by customers in these groups; and the services available to support this, such as New Deal subsidies, training and partnership working.
Interestingly, the approach appeared to differ according to area; with diversity being mentioned either variably, consistently or not at all;

- **organising a subsequent date for contact.** Before closing the discussion it was usual for VSMs to check the date arranged for follow-up and then build in an additional interim appointment for a progress check.

Following the 48 hour call, in some cases VSMs followed up this contact with an introductory letter, which they felt welcomed new employers and provided them with key details such as the name and contact details of the VSM, as well as details of the discussion they had.

**Visits to employers**

**As part of their role, VSMs also carried out visits to employers.** These were carried out in order to gain better knowledge and understanding of the employer and the needs of the business and to add variety to the VSM role, in some instances it was seen as being an integral part of their role. Employers also mentioned having received visits from Jobcentre staff in order to discuss their business and various Jobcentre initiatives such as New Deal. For example, one respondent, mentioned their adviser visiting their weaving company in order to get a better sense of the needs of the business.

**Services provided**

**VSMs and Field colleagues, such as the VFMs**, were primarily responsible for organising and delivering services to employers on the ground locally and this, therefore, often meant implementing agreements made by account managers (nationally or locally). The services delivered by VSMs reflected those outlined in Section 3.3.1 and included the distribution and collection of application forms; the sifting and matching of applications; providing interview rooms; organising and running events, such as open days and job fairs; and setting up and providing assistance with training, work placements or other programmes, such as New Deal, in collaboration with partners or Jobcentre colleagues.

Employers also recalled receiving services of this nature. For the most part, the services highlighted by employers tended to be more standard services such as distributing and collecting application forms and utilising interview rooms in the Jobcentre.

‘We have a maximum of four individual interview rooms and two conference rooms that can be used by employers, so we could have employers on the premises interviewing every day. Our interview rooms and the conference rooms are always in use, so a lot of our contact with our employers are face-to-face. We get to know the employers and the employers get to know us.’

(VSM)

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12 In Scotland, VFEs worked in the Jobcentre in liaison with the VSM to deliver service on the ground, such as sifting and matching of the vacancies.
However, additionally they also mentioned sifting and matching services being utilised and a number of employers suggested they were involved in events, such as open days, although this tended to be the larger employers. In one instance, an employer explained how a member of the Jobcentre had worked in their office for a period of time overseeing the recruitment process and sifting and matching applications on site.

It should be noted that the level of services provided to employers varied and tended to depend on the size of the employer and the number of vacancies, but more importantly (as with the 48 hour call) on the resources available locally. A reduction in the services being offered was highlighted by employers, who suggested they had been told by staff they were no longer able to provide certain services they had been receiving due to resource issues.

Follow-up contact
Aside from providing services, VSMs also maintained the account on a day-to-day basis and would engage in follow-up contact to check on progress of the vacancies. This contact would usually occur every seven to ten days or more regularly if they were in contact as a result of services they were providing. These conversations would usually include a general discussion of progress of the vacancy, focusing on the number of submissions, quality of the submissions and the overall satisfaction with the service. As will be seen, (Section 3.6.1) these discussion often led to follow-up information being collected.

“We would discuss how many people have been submitted to the vacancy and agree a contact date for us to get back to them, just to check the progress. Obviously at that time you don’t know if the vacancy is going to fill itself easily or whether it’s going to be a hard to fill vacancy. Generally we pick a date maybe...whatever they want.’

(VSM)

Liaising with Jobcentre advisers
As well as working with employers to manage the vacancy, part of the role was to liaise with Field colleagues, such as Jobcentre advisers. This contact occurred for a number of reasons, namely to provide:

• details of forthcoming vacancies and the types of skills and qualifications required for the role;

• feedback on the services being delivered at the frontline, particularly the quality of submissions and also regarding the behaviour of customers, for example, not turning up for interviews; and

• general advice and information regarding job matching, particularly the idea of making quality submissions rather than concentrating on the quantity. In some districts, industrial occupational knowledge (IOK) courses were being run for advisers to help improve their knowledge of certain sectors, in order for them to improve the matching of customers to vacancies on the frontline. These courses were often run in tandem with local partners. The matching of customers to vacancies is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.
3.4.2 Views on working with vacancies

The level of contact and service provided by VSM varied enormously, with the level of activity ranging on a continuum of high activity to very low activity and in some case no service at all and this was generally said to be a consequence of local resources. The Field staff were concerned about the future of the service, particularly how they would be able to provide services with seemingly ever increasing resource cuts occurring. Importantly, they were concerned about how they would manage the transition with employers without damaging the relationship, especially with companies currently used to receiving the ‘Rolls Royce’ model of service.

In line with the variable service received (as might be expected), employers’ views on the services varied too and interestingly were often dichotomous in nature, for example, both liking and disliking similar aspects of the services as a result of their differing experiences.

Employers’ views regarding the level of contact they experienced with the Field staff varied, between those who thought the contact was sufficient; and those who deemed it to be generally inadequate, as a result of perceiving it to be either too little or too much. Certainly, employers were often unhappy about the fact they were required to initiate contact between themselves and the VSM and thought this should be the role of the VSM. In contrast, other employers complained they were contacted too much, for example, in one instance the employer suggested the VSM contacted them regarding every application that was submitted and although they appreciated the dedication of the service provided, they felt it was rather time consuming to be contacted so regularly.

For the most part, employers were positive about the services they received from the Jobcentre, as they were generally thought to have been executed effectively and professionally, particularly the promotion and marketing of organisations through events and administrative tasks, such as distribution of applications and the use of interviews rooms. Using interviews rooms at the Jobcentre was said to be effective for two main reasons: firstly because it was more accessible for customers in terms of the location, but also because being in a familiar environment made them feel more comfortable.

Importantly from a company perspective, the Jobcentre was also seen as a good recruitment partner as it was seen as being both labour saving and cost effective, particularly compared to other recruitment mediums, such as the local press, who it was said charged between £150 and £200 per advertisement placed. In this respect, the service was described as being ‘wonderful’. Notwithstanding this, the overall labour saving and cost effectiveness of the service was questioned in cases where the overall outcome was deemed to be unsatisfactory, with the main criticism being the level and the quality of submissions made to

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13 The Jobcentre was a free service to taxpayers.
vacancies, which were often said to be lacking (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4). In addition to this, the service was criticised for being inflexible, for example, not allowing employers to take part in recruitment fairs because they were said to be in the wrong sector and not allowing employers to put up posters in the local office in order to market their company. Moreover, as already mentioned, the erosion of services offered on the ground was also seen as a problem.

‘I wasn’t allowed to go [to the job fair] because I’m not retail and that…I was told it wasn’t their decision, it was a decision made by somebody that it was only retail outlets that were allowed to go, well I’m looking for the same sort of people who are going to work in our *****, they’re the same demographic people who will come and work in a call centre.’

(Employer)

The centralised and clustered VSM service was viewed extremely positively as it provided a network of support on which VSMs could draw when required, for example, when they needed help organising events or in order to cover sickness or annual leave.

‘I just think the support…because I mean I have done the job for a long time and I’d feel quite isolated on occasions because I never really had anyone that you know I could speak to. If I did have a big recruitment I never had the support of anybody else. A local office relying on the other staff and if diaries are full and everyone else is tied up with other jobs, whereas this support mechanism even if it isn’t even for my own site I know I have always got support from other sites.’

(VSM)

Moreover, the ring-fenced nature of this centralised service in specific areas was thought to improve the service offered to employers as it allowed the VSM to carry out and concentrate exclusively on the role of the VSM, which understandably impacted on the level and quality of service they were able to provide to employers. Moreover, the ring-fenced role was thought to facilitate a much closer relationship between staff and employers as they had time to develop relationships and build rapport; and it also enabled the VSM to foster better working relationships with other staff carrying out the strategy, particularly with the FAMs and this was thought to further improve the service provided and reduce duplication.

3.5 Follow-up

3.5.1 Details and nature of follow-up

When the follow-up date agreed with the employer or the submission limit was reached, the vacancy was automatically suspended and ED contacted the employer to carry out follow-up. Employers requiring follow-up were automatically listed in a follow-up inbox and advisers worked through the automated list. Follow-up was usually carried out by specialist ‘follow-up’ teams operating within the Contact Centre. These teams had a specific responsibility for conducting follow-up, however
follow-up staff did cross over and take inbound vacancies during busy periods or to cover sickness for example.

Although follow-up was usually carried out by the Contact Centre, this was not the case universally with follow-up also being carried out by other NST and Field staff on occasions. More exceptionally, employers suggested they initiated the follow-up by contacting the Contact Centre or their VSM in order to provide this information.

Follow-up was said to have occurred on an ad hoc basis during the course of general contact between VSMs/Jobcentre advisers and employers, which often naturally led to discussions regarding progress and, in some instances, information on successful job entries. Furthermore, follow-up was also carried out intentionally due to a concern that this information would not be conducted by the designated team (in some instances as a result of their workload) or following requests made by the employer as a result of not wanting to liaise with the Contact Centre. In cases where the Field staff obtained information regarding job entries themselves, they subsequently contacted the Contact Centre and placed this information on the system.

‘The VSMs have got used to targeting which employers they contact. Because the contact centres are under so much pressure, they can’t, they haven’t got the resource to be calling people more than about once a month.’

(VSM)

In contrast, alternative follow-up arrangements were, in some instances, prearranged at the outset with the employers and this is often the case for larger organisations and public sector bodies such as the NHS and also for specific recruitment campaigns where a large number of vacancies have been placed.

Prior to carrying out follow-up, staff would prepare by checking through the details of the vacancy: Initially advisers checked why follow-up was occurring at this stage, for example, whether the submission level or the follow-up date had been reached. Following this they also explored the history of the vacancy by looking at the employer records and the notes pages, as this provided them with information on how to approach the call, for instance, details on previous contacts and discussions and information on the number of submissions made to the job. In addition to this, advisers also checked on the progress of any subsequent vacancies placed to ensure the employers did not receive too many calls within a short period of time. Where it was seen that other vacancies were nearing follow-up, advisers suggested they might postpone the follow-up until this point.

Once advisers successfully contacted the employer, follow-up focused on:

• gathering information regarding the progress of the vacancy. Advisers checked the submission/applications made to the vacancy with employers in terms of both the quantity and quality of the submissions made. Advisers took details of all applications made and looked at whether or not the vacancy had
been filled and if it had been filled, by whom. Employers often recalled being asked for this information. This data was collected either by telephone or by posting or faxing a list to the employer to complete. It was said that a list was usually sent to the employer in cases where a large number of applications were made or where they were following up on a number of vacancies, in order to make the process less onerous for the employer.

At this juncture, vacancies were closed if the position had been filled and if not, the employer could continue with the recruitment process by either raising the submission levels set or by reviving the vacancy if it had closed. In cases where the vacancy had been filled, Contact Centre advisers suggested they also enquired as to the progress of the new employee and employers also recalled this discussion;

- **offering any relevant advice to the employer.** Advisers also explored any problems with the employer regarding the service they received at this stage and if necessary passed information onto the VSM in order for them to deal with the issue. This said, Contact Centre advisers suggested they did assist wherever possible and employers recalled being assisted by Contact Centre advisers. In addition to this, if employers were not receiving sufficient submissions or the quality of those received was questioned, Contact Centre advisers looked over the advert and made suggestions regarding how it could be amended. It was said they might suggest increasing the wage level in order to be more competitive or changing the wording of the advert to make it more specific, for example rather than say ‘wholesaler’, one Contact Centre adviser suggested they would encourage the employer to say what type, such as grocer or tobacconist.

  ‘Yes, we go through everything. The purpose of the call is to make sure that they’re happy with everything that’s gone on. And then automatically, you’ll say, were you happy? Do you want us to go through the advertisement with you? It might be down to the salary that they pay, or they may have not put any salary. So you can advise, we can’t tell them, but you can talk them through it. And then what you can also do is then say, right, okay, you’ve not had much success, perhaps then we should get the vacancies service manager involved in your area. Get them involved, cue him on and say, this company’s had no response to their advertisement. Is it possible that someone can give them a call from the jobcentre?’

  (Contact Centre outbound team)

According to Contact Centre advisers, it was not always possible to carry out follow-up at the initial point of contacting the employer as they were not always contactable or willing to provide information. In these latter cases, advisers simply made a note of the refusal on the system and did not re-contact them. Where employers were unobtainable rather than unwilling, advisers usually updated the notes and re-arranged the follow-up for another day on the system. If this contact was also unsuccessful, a number of contacts would be subsequently made in an attempt to gather the information from the employer (contact said to be made every two weeks), it was suggested that advisers often adhered to a three strikes principle.
If advisers ultimately failed to contact the employer, a closure letter was sent out to the employer explaining the need to provide follow-up in information in order for the service to continue.

‘A closure letter saying, we’ve tried on numerous occasions, these are the procedures. If we don’t hear from you in the next amount of days. So, we all try to follow, there are rules and regulations that you must abide to.’

(Contact Centre outbound team)

3.5.2 Views on follow-up

Overall, the advisers working at the Contact Centre were positive about the level of service they provided regarding follow-up. They saw the importance of gathering job entries for the Field staff and account managers and suggested they did their best to provide this information. In contrast, NST and the Field were often less positive about the service provided and queried the consistency of the service, the skill of the adviser in gathering the information required and the ability of the Contact Centre to be sufficiently flexible when trying to make contact to obtain the information they need.

Employers’ recall of the follow-up process varied and in particular, they were often confused or unclear about whether they had been contacted and who by. However, where it was recalled it was not identified as being overly burdensome or problematic, although some employers experienced difficulties gathering the required information. This was usually a result of the large number of vacancies advertised or because applicants did not always provide (or the employer did not collect) information on where applicants had heard about the vacancy. Others thought the process of providing the information by a faxed list rather disorganised, describing it as ‘haphazard’.
4 Meeting the key aims

This chapter of the report considers the impact of the Employer Engagement Strategy (EES), looking at how far the service has reached its overarching aims and objectives. Specifically, looking at how effective the service has been in providing a quality and consistent service to employers; helping disadvantaged customers back into the labour market; and matching the right job to the right person.

Views on the impact of the strategy were generally consistent amongst respondents who took part in this study, including Employer Services Directorate (ESD) staff, Field staff and employers, although views on the quality and consistent of the service were more varied overall. The key aims are discussed in turn.

4.1 Consistency and quality of service

For the most part, it was felt that the quality and consistency of the service provided to employers had improved as a result of the EES. This said, a number of problems were still thought to exist and it was felt that although the service was moving in the right direction in terms of effectiveness, it would benefit from further improvement, particularly relating to the consistency of the service received. As quality and consistency of the service were seen as being inextricably linked, the problems experienced with consistency were thought to undoubtedly undermine the quality of the service delivered overall.

According to employers and Jobcentre Plus staff alike, employers were thought to have received a good quality service overall and in some instances it was described as ‘excellent’ by employers. This was thought to be particularly true for those employers who received an account managed service, especially larger employers as they often received a ‘gold star service’ throughout the duration of the vacancy.

In line with respondents’ views on the purpose and aim of the strategy (Section 2.1), the service received was said to be more employer-centred than in the past with a greater focus being placed on the needs of employers. Both the account managed service and the maintenance of accounts via the Vacancy Service Manager (VSM), were thought to have enabled staff to foster a closer relationship with employers.
and this was said to have enhanced the service received by employers overall. Certainly, employers were extremely positive about having a single point of contact and the relationship between the employer and staff was seen as being crucial to the success of the service.

Account Managers (AMs), Employer Diversity Managers (EDMs), and local staff suggested they had developed effective working relationships with local partners, including local organisations and training centres and private recruitment agencies, which were said to have widened their local customer base. Where employers had received this service they were usually extremely positive about it, particularly bespoke training programmes. Additionally, a number of the specific services offered, such as sifting and matching, were also looked upon favourably. Furthermore, the marketing of Jobcentre Plus, by supporting services, such as the Sector Marketing Manager (SMM) and the Small Medium Employer Channel Manager (SME CM) were thought to have improved the image of Jobcentre.

Jobcentre Plus staff (including the National Sales Team (NST), Employer Direct (ED), Field and Employer Marketing Division (EMD)), were generally positive about their own performance and were confident that they offered a good service to employers.

‘I think they do [employers] get a good service from us really, especially when we’re dealing with the larger employers and we’re really getting involved.’

(VSM)

Researcher experiences uphold these views and suggest individually, teams worked well, adhered to the strategy and were motivated to provide the best service they could. However, it should be noted that in the latter stages of the research, staff (especially those working on a local level) became demotivated as a result of the Operational Design Review (ODR), which resulted in insecurity and uncertainty about their positions.

Although in some respects the consistency of the service was thought to have improved across all stages of the process as a result of the EES, a number of criticisms were raised. The quality and level of service received was said to vary considerably both between and within areas and over periods of time. For example, one employer explained how they received a variation in the quality of the service provided between recruitment drives, receiving an excellent service at one point then, subsequently, receiving a very poor service. Others mentioned experiencing a very good service when they liaised with one Jobcentre regarding the opening of a superstore and a less good service when they ran a similar operation in another area.

Consistency in the level of service was also thought to decrease as it progressed through the life of the vacancy, with employers receiving a much more consistent service at the account management stage and less so as the vacancy moved through ED and into the Field. The handover of employers between teams was also thought to have resulted in a break in the quality of service
(if only temporarily) with the level or type of service offered, changing or being redefined at these points and also simply as a result of dealing with a number of different people.

'It’s about that continuity again with an employer that’s missing. They’ll take the vacancy, we do the first follow-up call, then Employer Direct will phone them and do the follow-up. From an employer’s point of view, where’s the continuity?'

(VSM)

Generally, employers suggested the service was most inconsistent in terms of the quality of the job descriptions, in particular, inaccuracies such as spelling and grammar mistakes; the level of service offered/ carried out locally; and the quality of submissions (discussed in Section 4.3).

The inconsistencies mentioned were generally thought to have occurred for three main reasons:

• **lack of local resources.** A lack of local Jobcentre resources was thought to have impinged on the service offered and resulted in inconsistent levels of service being offered between Jobcentres and also over time, depending on the current resource situation. Certainly a general decline in the level of resource had been noted by employers and staff;

• **lack of communication between teams.** Lack of communication was thought to have undermined the consistency of approach both between and within teams, particularly in terms of the type and level of service offered and received by employers throughout the life of the vacancy. Furthermore, lack of communication also resulted in duplication and cross-over of roles and this worked to further undermine the consistency of the service; and

• **differing priorities and targets.** It was said that the priorities and, more specifically, the targets of teams involved in the strategy differed, particularly the priorities of those working in ESD compared to those working in the Field and also between parts of the Field team, such as the VSMs and frontline advisers. As a result of this the concept of a ‘standard operating model’ was felt to be intrinsically flawed and it was said that the service was consequently bound to vary between teams.

In contrast to this, the centralisation of the VSM services was thought to have worked to improve the consistency of approach, as closer working and liaison between the team and the pulling of resources meant they were able to provide a ‘smarter’ and more efficient service.
4.2 Getting disadvantaged customers back to work

Views regarding the success of the strategy in placing disadvantaged customers into work were generally consistent. On the whole, respondents felt that although progress had been made regarding diversity, it tended to be slow and rather limited overall and staff suggested that management information reflected this. One EDM likened it to ‘chipping away at the cliff face’, as a result of the very gradual pace at which diversity could be broached and developed. As mentioned previously, Jobcentre staff often felt it was important to develop a relationship and levels of trust regarding the quality of the service provided before you could effectively begin to change attitude and behaviour of employers regarding diversity. In some respects it was felt this process was slower than initially anticipated.

‘I think this is a journey and I think we are literally just getting into the car with our suitcase on. I don’t think we are at the other end that says the account management and relationship building dramatically increased the disadvantaged clients. I think we are at the start of the journey. I think the infrastructure is there to do it. And I think the account management functions with specialist services and other things underpinning it will promote that. But probably earlier days than we thought.’

(EDM)

Nonetheless, some progress had been made and the strategy was said to have successfully raised awareness of the diversity issue and in some instances also begun to widen the views of employers about the type of customers they should, or indeed would, consider for their vacancies. For example, one EDM worked with a bus company and challenged their recruitment policy that stated that only men should be employed in the role of a bus driver. As a consequence of this, the company moved to employ a number of women drivers, including a number of lone parent customers. Similarly, an SEA had taken a number of local SMEs to a local mosque in order to raise their cultural awareness of the local area and following this it was said that a ‘flood’ of vacancies had been placed by these employers.

The services offered by the EDM, SEA (where they operated) and account managers were seen as being particularly successful in encouraging employers to engage with the idea of diversity and Jobcentre Plus priority groups. Assistance with the development of application forms; New Deal; and bespoke training schemes offered were thought to have been of particular value and were said to have acted as a real ‘carrot’ for employers of all sizes.

Overall, the strategy was said by staff to have been more successful in changing the views and behaviour of larger employers, primarily as they had the resources to invest in this type of initiative and also because it often linked in with their own wider diversity agenda and targets. In this sense, employers worked with the Jobcentre to develop policies they were already considering or implementing.
It was also felt that the strategy was more successful in selling certain groups of customers over others, for example, lone parents and older customers (50+) as a result of employer perception of the value these customers could add to their business. Changing perceptions of IB customers was seen as being more difficult as a result of employers’ preconceptions about this customer type. Staff suggested they found it harder to promote this group and exceptionally, felt this was exacerbated by a general lack of awareness and knowledge of this group.

‘Lone parents seem to be easier to sell, because you know employers appreciate that lone parents who have decided they want to come back to work can bring a lot of value to a workforce, they’re already managing a household with young children potentially, so they’re an easy one.’

(NAM)

‘Fifty Plus is another one because they have life experience. But the youngsters might be a wee bit, you know they’re seen as, have they got the right, can work attitude, want to work attitude. And disabled people, people with disabilities is potentially another more problematic area to sell, because again some employers still perceive disabled as someone in a wheelchair.’

(NAM)

Promoting diversity and changing the attitudes and recruitment policies of employers was said to be extremely difficult as, for the most part, employers simply wanted to fill their vacancies with the best person for the job and this sentiment was echoed by employers. In addition to this, employers were often said to have longstanding recruitment policies and procedures which they were often unwilling to change. Furthermore, it was felt that employers were often unlikely to identify the benefit of considering disadvantaged customers if they were not experiencing any difficulties recruiting, conversely where the local labour market was dwindling in terms of numbers, it was much easier to sell disadvantaged customer.

‘So our objectives are to help the more disadvantaged into work, and I’m not really sure that that’s what the employers’ objective is. The employers’ objective is to get the best person for the job. Obviously as labour markets shrink, then our role is to try and convince the employer that people who are on these benefits are the labour pool that’s left. However with the introduction of migrant workers, they tend to prefer those to the people that we’ve got on longer term benefit, and whereas you would think there is a lot of resistance to migrant workers, when you actually speak to employers they absolutely love them because they have the right attitude and are prepared to work hard and perhaps work for a little bit less money. So again I think some of our aims and objectives are slightly awry from employers.’

(FAM)
Staff identified specific areas regarding diversity where they felt the service needed to improve, this included: building better local relationships with employers and partners in order to understand the needs and to develop groups who they could work with; more strategic working of the EDM and SEA, account managers and the Field staff regarding diversity; and to promote diversity more effectively across the whole of Jobcentre Plus, including frontline staff.

**In terms of the success of the strategy in creating vacancies per se, it was anecdotally felt that EES was working to increase the number of vacancies placed.** This was primarily seen as a result of the promotion of Jobcentre plus amongst employers and the time spent working with employers prior to submission of vacancies, via account management. Certainly, it was felt that as a result of the strategy, Jobcentre Plus was increasing its market share and also that the e-channels would work to increase this further. However, these assumptions were based on perceptions of staff rather than on any statistical research carried out as part of this study and, therefore, it is not possible to draw robust conclusions for this research.

> ‘We’re in a position at the moment where we seemed to have narrowed our catchment of employers, although we’re getting more vacancies out of those employers’

(FAM)

4.3 Matching the right job to the right person

**Overall, the views expressed by both Jobcentre Plus staff and employers suggest that this aspect of the service was not being delivered effectively and the targets set were generally not said to have been met.** Although in some instances employers suggested the matching of customers to vacancies had improved, for the most part this was the main criticism levelled at the Jobcentre service. Similarly, staff also felt this was the key area in which the Jobcentre service was letting customers down.

Although the number of submissions received could be problematic, the main area of concern was the quality of the submissions made to vacancies. Employers questioned the appropriateness of applicants in terms of their characteristics, skill levels and qualifications; the reliability of customers based on the fact that they were often said not to turn up for interviews; and also their general attitude was also questioned, particularly their desire to work. For instance, one employer approximated that three in every five candidates who attended an interview, acted as though they did not want to be there. It was assumed in these cases that the customers had been ‘forced’ into attending the interview by the Jobcentre and staff also received feedback to this effect.

> ‘If you’re talking about the right person for the right job, that could just be Joe Bloggs coming in off the street or something like that, that’s been sent to an employer but they’re maybe not what the employer’s looking for. The employer might come back and say “well you sent this person, he’s obviously got a hygiene problem, how do you expect them to work in a kitchen” or something like that.’

(FAM)
‘The people on the frontline that are really dealing with that. And you still get feedback from employers, that you know, they feel that maybe it’s someone that’s just been sent because there’s been pressure put on them by you know, the Jobcentre staff.’

(FAM)

It was suggested by employers that as a result of the quality of submission, they often experienced far greater success recruiting through other channels as opposed to the Jobcentre, such as the local press, or simply by placing adverts in the window of their premises. As one employer stated: ‘The Jobcentre aren’t very successful, compared to advertising via the press’.

It was argued that poor quality submission occurred for two key reasons: firstly as a result of a mismatch between vacancies and customers; and secondly, as a result of frontline activities.

**There was seen as being a disparity between customers’ skills and the type of vacancies available within the Jobcentre.** Added to this, the vacancies were also not thought to match the work aspirations of the customers as a whole, with a number of jobs held on the system being unpopular, such as call centre and shift work. It was felt that overall, more needed to be done to fill the vacancies placed on the system and it was suggested this could be achieved by both targeting the vacancies being registered in the first instance and by more effectively preparing and training the customer base to fit the types of vacancies being offered. Certainly it was felt that the former issue would be in part improved by the introduction of the Vacancy Strategy (VS) and although this had not been officially rolled out at the point of the research, it was being utilised in some form and was generally viewed positively by staff (see Chapter 2).

The activities of frontline staff were seen as being fundamental to the problems of poor quality job matching. It was felt that staff simply lacked time and resources to consistently dedicate sufficient time to the process of matching customers to vacancies. Comparatively, it was suggested that private agencies were able to devote much more time to this activity and were consequently able to screen people more effectively. It was felt lack of resources and time had been exacerbated by a general feeling of demotivation which was said to have occurred as a result of the changes occurring to the organisation more widely, for example, the ODR.

‘If nobody is challenging those clients about their skills then there’s always going to be a mismatch…I think we don’t prepare our advisors to do that properly, we don’t provide them with the IOK that they need and we certainly don’t provide the resource.’

(FAM)

In addition to this, the perceived existence of 100 per cent submission targets14 was thought to have further undermined the quality of submissions, as the adviser

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14 Across areas, respondents who took part in the research mentioned 100 per cent submission targets/benchmarks. It should be noted that this is not an overarching Jobcentre Plus policy and might be a policy implemented locally.
focused on quantity rather than on quality. It was felt these targets were at odds with the principle of quality matching as advisers were under pressure to submit customers on the one hand; and on the other advisers were being asked by VSMs to concentrate on quality.

*I think they’ve got pressures on them to submit people to vacancies that…I think local office level it seems there’s not enough time to do everything that has to be done especially with targets to keep up. It used to be to be quantity was better than quality because…whereas we really tried to change this but it’s still pretty difficult to educate people, they’re so used to working that way. Like anybody if you’re under pressure your job entries come first. So it’s kind of hard to say what the advisers are doing, because they’re being held more accountable for submissions…but it is very difficult for the advisers. Well not just advisers but anybody who works on the front line at all and submit the vacancies.’*

(VSM)

The poor quality of some job descriptions were also thought to impact negatively on the ability of frontline staff to carry out their role, as it made it more difficult for them to sift the customers and match them effectively to the role, if they lacked specific information about it.

Although it was acknowledged that elements of the EES contributed to these problems, such as the poor quality job descriptions and the type of vacancies being brought in, it was felt overall that these problems were outside the remit and control of ESD and VSM roles and, in some cases, they believed their was little they could do (beyond what they were already doing) to improve this. ESD and the Field staff suggested they were taking positive steps towards improving aspects of the service they had control over in order to increase the quality of matching overall. For example, they mentioned: checking the job description more closely; liaising with and providing training to Jobcentre staff to improve their knowledge and skills; working with employers and partners to train customers; and increasingly targeting suitable vacancies.

‘*Sometimes when you get bad experiences, employers will come back and say well you’ve sent the wrong people. If they invest in a pre-recruitment training, and they’re involved in it, it eliminates, or it reduces the chances of employers saying to an adviser you’re sending all the wrong people.’*

(EDM)

It should also be noted that poor submission were, in some instances, said to be out of the remit of even frontline staff in instances where adverts were apply direct as customers would identify the vacancy of jobpoints and refer themselves.
5 Conclusions

5.1 Summary of findings

5.1.1 Organisation of the EES

The Employer Engagement Strategy (EES) was said to signify a move away from a wholly customer-led approach towards a more employer-focused service. The strategy was also said to focus on obtaining vacancies for Jobcentre Plus customers, particularly priority customers and on providing a more consistent service to employers.

With a wide range of job roles and services, the operational and communication links involved in the EES are highly complex. The EES is operated primarily by the Specialist Services, National Sales Team (NST), marketing and the Field team. They work between, within and outside of these teams (to employers and other groups and agencies) to deliver the service.

Within the EES, two key changes were taking place during the course of the research – the Customer Contact Strategy (CCS) and the Vacancy Strategy (VS). Awareness of the CCS and the VS were very high amongst staff and they were generally viewed positively.

5.1.2 Life of the vacancy

Making contact

NST contacts tended to be pre-existing, recently generated, or were handed over from colleagues. National Account Managers (NAMs) and Field Account Managers (FAMs) reported keeping ‘abreast’ of local labour markets and new businesses from local press, word-of-mouth from colleagues, such as the Sector Marketing Manager (SMM) and via the internet. Employer Diversity Managers (EDMs) were generally passed onto employers via the NAM or they made their own contacts. In addition to contacts being made by account managers, contact was also being made by the Field staff. In some cases, the Field passed these new contacts onto the NST where relevant; however, in other instances, the Field were reluctant to give up their contacts and preferred to work with the employer themselves.
Conclusions

Other players operating within the EES, such as the SMM and the Small Medium Employer Channel Manager (SME CM) were thought to be effectively supporting the process of making contact by providing information to colleagues. Employers were often said to have initiated the contact with Jobcentre Plus themselves in order to either gain information on programmes such as New Deal or to request a particular service.

**Working with employers**

The approach adopted by national and local account managers was not standardised and often varied according to the frequency, medium and nature of the contact made. Nationally, it was usual for a face-to-face meeting to be set up in order to discuss overall strategy. The types of issues discussed included: the basic level of service offered; additional services, such as specific marketing events or New Deal programmes; the diversity agenda; current recruitment policy and procedures; and potential vacancies and the type of applicants required. Once agreements were brokered nationally, the account would be passed down to the Regional Sales Manager (RSM) or the relevant FAM. Both the EDM and the SEA (where operating in the area) worked in a supporting capacity to promote diversity to employers, either working alongside or in addition to the NST.

As with NAMs, FAMs worked locally to develop a strategy regarding how they would work with the employer. Account management at the local level typically involved marketing the services offered by Jobcentre Plus to employers and a discussion of recruitment procedures and diversity. The employer was usually handed over to the Field staff once the vacancy was submitted.

The personalised account managed service was viewed positively by employers. Notwithstanding this, some problems were noted with internal communication and resources, specifically, the quality of handover procedures and the effective local translation of the agreements brokered (due to available local resources, but exacerbated by lack of prior discussion regarding the agreement). However, a number of FAMs and VSMs had worked hard to improve communication and had developed strong and effective working relationships.

Poor communication was also said to have resulted in a lack of understanding about the role of the Specialist Services and as a result it was felt they were not always being fully utilised. Specifically, it was felt that the EDM was not being used to work with employers as extensively as they could be. More positively, there was a strong sense that the relationship between the NAM and EDMs was improving, as communication and understanding between the teams increased and in some instances the relationship was said to have been working effectively.

Marketing priority customers to employers was also found difficult by staff, particularly those working at district level, as they felt simply that employers were only interested in identifying the best candidate for the job rather than employing disadvantaged customers.
Submitting the vacancy

Employers typically submitted vacancies via the EDCCs that make up the virtual network. A number of variations were noted, which included employers placing vacancies via Jobcentre Plus staff. In addition to this, employers were also using ‘Jobs warehouse’ or ‘Edon’ to upload their vacancies.

A wide range of information was gathered regarding the vacancy at the point of placing the advert, including information on recruitment arrangements and the nature of the vacancy. Advisers also offered advice to employers regarding the vacancy they were submitting, for example, advice on the wording of the advert or wage level. Once the vacancy had been taken, it was usual for the advisers to email or fax the advert to the employer to be checked, however, employers suggested they were not always receiving this.

Overall, the service offered by the Contact Centres was thought to have improved. Employers were generally positive about the ease with which they were able to contact the Contact Centre; how quickly the vacancies went live on the system; and the advice and information they received. Notwithstanding this, the quality of the service provided was still thought to be rather ‘hit and miss’, varying according to the individual staff member taking the call and the Contact Centre accessed via the virtual network. It was suggested that a more personalised and accurate service was received when a local Contact Centre was accessed as they had greater local knowledge.

A range of other problems was noted regarding the Contact Centre, including: the principle of using a Call Centre; quality of the advertisement placed – in terms of accuracy of the advertisement; not identifying employers with special considerations; not agreeing submission levels and closing dates; and continuing to receive vacancies after the position was filled.

Working with the vacancy

Typically, once a vacancy had been submitted it was maintained on a day-to-day basis locally by the Field team, primarily the VSM. This said, employers who took part in this study, often mentioned working with local Jobcentre advisers rather than Vacancy Service Managers (VSMs). VSMs carried out a range of tasks in relation to the management of vacancies, including the checking of vacancies and adverts during the 48 hour call; the delivery of specific services, such as sifting and matching; and the general on-going maintenance of the vacancy and, in some sense, the account itself. This often included visits to employers and follow-up contact to check on progress of the vacancies. VSMs also liaised with Jobcentre advisers.

The level of contact and service provided by VSM varied enormously, with the level of activity ranging on a continuum of high activity to very low activity and in some cases no service at all. For the most part, employers were positive about the services they received from the Jobcentre, as they were generally thought to have been executed effectively and professionally. Importantly from a company perspective, the Jobcentre was also seen as a good recruitment partner as it was seen as being both labour saving and cost effective.
The centralised and clustered VSM service was viewed extremely positively as it provided a network of support on which VSMs could draw. Moreover, the ring-fenced nature of this centralised service was thought to improve the service offered to employers as it allowed the VSM to carry out and concentrate exclusively on the role of the VSM.

Follow-up

When the follow-up date agreed with the employer or the submission limit was reached, the vacancy was automatically suspended and Employer Direct (ED) contacted the employer to carry out follow-up. Prior to carrying out follow-up, staff would prepare by checking through the details of the vacancy: Although follow-up was usually carried out by the Contact Centre, this was not universal and was also carried out by the NST and the Field staff on occasions. Where the Field staff obtained information regarding job entries themselves, they subsequently contacted the Contact Centre and placed this information on the system.

Follow-up consisted of gathering information regarding the progress of the vacancy and offering any relevant advice to the employer. According to Contact Centre advisers, it was not always possible to carry out follow-up at the initial point of contacting the employer as they were not always contactable or willing to provide information.

Overall, the advisers working at the Contact Centre were positive about the level of service they provided regarding follow-up. In contrast, NST and the Field were often less positive about the service provided and queried the consistency of the service, the skill of advisers in gathering the information required and the ability of the Contact Centre to be sufficiently flexible when trying to make contact. Employers’ recall of the follow-up process varied and in particular they were often confused or unclear about whether they had been contacted and who by. However, where it was recalled it was not identified as being overly burdensome or problematic.

5.1.3 Meeting the aims of the EES

For the most part, it was felt that the quality and consistency of the service provided to employers had improved as a result of the EES. Employers were thought to have received a good quality service overall and in some instances it was described as ‘excellent’. This was thought to be particularly true for employers who received an account managed service. Both the account managed service and the maintenance of accounts via the VSM, were thought to have enabled staff to foster a closer relationship with employers and this was said to have enhanced the service received overall.

Jobcentre Plus staff were generally positive about their own performance and were confident that they offered a good service to employers. Researcher experiences uphold these views and suggest individually teams worked well, adhered to the strategy and were motivated to provide the best service they could. Furthermore, there was evidence of good partnership working being developed between account
managers, EDMs, local staff with local partners, including local organisations, training centres and private recruitment agencies.

However, a number of problems were still thought to exist and it was felt the service would benefit from further improvement. The quality and level of service received was said to vary considerably both between and within areas and over periods of time. Consistency was identified as a particular problem, with the level of service decreasing as it progressed through the life of the vacancy, with employers receiving a much more consistent service at the account management stage and less so as the vacancy moved through ED and into the Field.

Views regarding the success of the strategy in placing disadvantaged customers into work were generally consistent. On the whole, respondents felt that although progress had been made regarding diversity, it tended to be slow and rather limited overall. Nonetheless, some progress had been made and the strategy was said to have successfully raised awareness of the diversity issue. It was also felt that the strategy was more successful in selling certain groups of customers over others, for example, lone parents and older customers. Promoting diversity and changing the attitudes and recruitment policies of employers was said to be extremely difficult as employers generally wanted to fill their vacancies with the best person for the job and this was echoed by employers. In terms of the success of the strategy in creating vacancies per se, it was anecdotally felt that EES was working to increase the number of vacancies placed.

Overall, the strategy was not said to have effectively met its aim of matching the right job to the right person at this stage, with the main area of concern being the quality of the submissions made to vacancies. Employers questioned the appropriateness of applicants’ in terms of their characteristics, skill levels and qualifications; the reliability of customers based on the fact that were often said not to turn up for interviews; and also their general attitude was also questioned, particularly their desire to work.

It was argued that poor quality submission occurred for two key reasons: firstly as a result of a mismatch between vacancies and customers; and secondly, as a result of frontline activities. It was felt that staff simply lacked time and resources to consistently dedicate sufficient time to matching customers to vacancies and poor quality job descriptions were also thought to impact negatively on the ability of frontline staff to carry out their role. Employer Services Directorate (ESD) and the Field staff suggested they were taking positive steps towards improving this aspect of the service in order to increase the quality of matching overall.

5.2 Key operational issues

Although the strategy was operating effectively in a number of respects (as outlined already) and had improved the quality and the consistency of the service delivered, it was clear that a number of overarching issues negatively impinged upon the effective operation of the strategy, namely communication and resource.
Communication within the immediate teams, such as within the NAM team, was usually found to be working effectively, however, communication within the wider team (such as the NST) or between teams (NST and Specialist Services, or between ESD and the Field) was more problematic.

It was felt that communication difficulties occurred for a range of reasons including: the complexity of the structure and the number of teams involved in delivering the strategy, which naturally made effective communication difficult. These problems were felt to have been enhanced by the division (managerial) between ESD and the Field, which meant that these teams often appeared to have different priorities and policies. As a result of this, the concept of a ‘standard operating model’ was felt to be intrinsically flawed. In part, communication problems were also thought to stem from, and be exacerbated by, a lack of awareness and understanding of the other teams operating within the strategy, particularly, confusion regarding the Specialist Services, but also between ESD and the Field.

Lack of communication resulted in a range of outcomes:

- a degree of ‘working in chimneys’ such that information did not flow across the structure in the manner in which it was intended;
- repetition and duplication of roles and tasks;
- not fully utilising the available services and support, especially Specialist Services or marketing; and
- suspicion between teams operating in the strategy.

These outcomes interplayed and reciprocally impacted on one another and ultimately, they affected the overall quality and consistency of the service provided. Importantly, communication was often said to be improving between teams, however, this was generally occurring on an ad hoc basis as a result of proximity and individuals working hard to improve relationships.

In addition to communication, the resources available at the frontline were thought to have impinged on the service offered and had resulted in inconsistent levels of service being offered between Jobcentres and also over time, depending on the current resources available. Certainly a general decline in the level of resource had been noted by employers and staff and although this decline was not specifically explored, it was perceived as being a result of a general reduction in expenditure.

5.3 Recommendations for change

As part of the interview we asked the respondents (Jobcentre staff and employers) to make suggestions regarding how they believed the EES could be improved. These recommendations generally related to communication; streamlining the service; and improvement of specific services provided overall. It should be emphasised that these suggestions are based on the views of respondents and not those of the researchers. The recommendations are outlined in the following sections.
5.3.1 Communication

It was widely felt amongst staff that overall communication within the EES could be improved, including communication between ESD and the Field, but also within individual teams too, for example, within the NST, Specialist Services and the Field. It was felt increased communication would help the service move towards being more ‘joined up’ and would reduce duplication of effort between teams.

In order to improve communication it was suggested that more regular meetings could be held amongst teams, the VSM resource could be centralised; and information could be disseminated more effectively. In particular, staff wanted to receive more information on key policy changes, they wanted the importance of diversity to be explained across Jobcentre Plus; and it was thought that industrial occupational knowledge (IOK) could also be circulated more extensively, rather than expecting staff to look on the intranet for this information.

In addition, employers called for greater communication between themselves and the VSM during the period of maintaining the vacancy.

5.3.2 Streamlining the service

A more careful consideration of resources was also called for by staff, particularly regarding the nature and extent of the services offered to employers. It was felt that Jobcentre Plus needed to make an overall decision about the level of resource available in Jobcentres and if resources were not sufficient to maintain services offered, services needed to be amended in light of this. Importantly, it was felt this needed to be a wider decision in order to improve consistency across Jobcentres. Certainly, it was felt that more effective communication between teams regarding the services available on the ground would work towards improving this.

It was suggested that another way to improve the consistency and the level of service, was to introduce a peripatetic team within regions, whose job it would be to troubleshoot and provide services where local resources were low. Furthermore, it was suggested that careful consideration should be given to who the service should be aimed at and what vacancies it was appropriate to take. Finally, staff suggested bringing together ESD and the Field under one line of management as it was felt this would improve communication and make the service more consistent.15

5.3.3 Improving services

It was felt by respondents that a number of service provided should be improved. Employers suggested that the service should:

- increase the number of words that can be used in the job description;
- improve search facility on jobpoints – currently suggested by employers that the search often brought up vacancies in a wide geographical area even when specific areas were input.

15 Since the completion of this research, ESD and the Field have been reintegrated.
Additionally, Jobcentre staff suggested that improvement should be made to the:

- quality of follow-up carried out by ED or specifically, they felt the follow-up process could be improved if VSMs were able to update submissions and job entries on the system, rather than having to contact ED in order to do this, as it was thought to be time consuming and annoying for ED;
- supporting promotional and marketing material available, particularly regarding diversity and to the marketing of specific services, such as the E-channel;
- overall quality of the sifting and matching provided.
Appendix A
Segmentation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current accounts</th>
<th>Very high value</th>
<th>High value</th>
<th>Medium value</th>
<th>Low value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Channel</td>
<td>Senior Account Managers</td>
<td>Account Managers</td>
<td>Tele-Account Managers</td>
<td>VSM/other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target minimum PRA points</td>
<td>4,500</td>
<td>450</td>
<td>72</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target minimum Job Entries</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum qualification criteria for entry to channel * Figures not agreed</td>
<td>300 JEs per yr, 1,000 PRA points per yr</td>
<td>35 JEs per yr, 150 PRA points per yr</td>
<td>10 JEs per yr, 45 PRA points per yr</td>
<td>1 vac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports the National Vacancy Strategy</td>
<td>Jobs we can fill, Clients can aspire to</td>
<td>Jobs we can fill, Clients can aspire to</td>
<td>Jobs we can fill, Clients can aspire to</td>
<td>Accounts in maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approx. No. of current users including agencies</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>400,000+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B
Analysis

BMRB Social Research are always committed to producing a thorough analysis of the data and set procedures are in place to ensure analysis is undertaken in a systematic and comprehensive manner and that the findings are based on the raw data rather than on a researcher’s impressions. The interviews are all transcribed verbatim and then analysed by experienced members of the BMRB team.

Material collected through qualitative methods is invariably unstructured and unwieldy. Much of it is text-based, consisting of verbatim transcriptions of interviews and discussions. Moreover, the internal content of the material is usually in detailed and micro form (for example, accounts of experiences, inarticulate explanations, etc.). The primary aim of any analytical method is to provide a means of exploring coherence and structure within a cumbersome data set whilst retaining a hold on the original accounts and observations from which it is derived.

Our method involves a systematic process of sifting, summarising and sorting the material according to key issues and themes. We use a set of content analysis techniques, known as ‘Matrix Mapping’, to ensure an optimum synthesis of findings from the verbatim data.

The first stage of ‘Matrix Mapping’ involves familiarisation with the data (in the form of the audio tapes or verbatim transcripts) and identification of emerging issues. Based on this preliminary review of the data as well as the coverage of the topic guide and the researchers’ experiences of conducting the fieldwork, a thematic framework is constructed.

The analysis then proceeds by summarising and synthesising the data according to this thematic framework using a range of techniques such as cognitive mapping and data matrices. The thematic matrix comprises a series of subject charts displayed either in Word, Excel or Insight qualitative software. In this case, Excel software was utilised.
The subject headings included in the charts used on this project were as follows:

1 Perception and understanding;
2 Organisation of EES;
2 Operation of EES;
3 Changes and views;
4 Impact and suggestions;
5 Principle of sanctions and suggestions for change.

Data from each interview transcript will be summarised and transposed under the appropriate subject heading of the thematic matrix. The context of the information is retained and the page of the transcript from which it comes noted, so that it is possible to return to a transcript to explore a point in more detail or to extract text for verbatim quotation. When all the data have been sifted according to the core themes, the analyst begins to map the data and identify features within the data: defining concepts, mapping the range and nature of phenomenon, creating typologies, finding associations and providing explanations.

The mapping process is similar whichever of the above features are being considered. The analyst reviews the summarised data; compares and contrasts the perceptions, accounts, or experiences; searches for patterns or connections within the data and seeks explanations internally within the data set. Piecing together the overall picture is not simply aggregating patterns, but of weighing up the salience and dynamics of issues, and searching for structures within the data that have explanatory power, rather than simply seeking a multiplicity of evidence.

The key issues, and the features that underpin them, are then used as the basis for constructing, in this instance, the oral presentation and the written report. Verbatim quotes are also used throughout in order to illustrate and illuminate the findings.

We have used, and refined, our analytical procedures over many years. They are highly respected by our clients and are noted for their ability to extract the maximum information from qualitative data. Our methods are very robust and demonstrably able to stand up to public scrutiny. They have been used, for example, in the analysis of difficult and sensitive topics and have provided the analytical structure for many high profile pieces of work.
Appendix C
Employer engagement research: mapping glossary

Specialist Services

Employer Diversity Manager
- The Employer Diversity Manager (EDMs) aim to promote diversity and bring about change in attitude and recruitment behaviour among employers.
- EDMs work with senior level employers to influence the diversity agenda and to agree a diversity strategy with the company.
- EDMs work on a national level with the top 100 companies (previously worked on a regional level. But moved to work nationally).
- EDMs are passed onto national employers via National Account Managers (NAMs) and also make their own contacts with employers.
- There are a total of ten EDMs currently operating. The EDMs are currently regionally based, but there are plans to relocate the teams to London.
- The EDM primarily links with NAMs and National Employers.

Specialist Employment Adviser
- Specialist Employment Advisers (SEAs) aim to reduce the gap in unemployment levels between White and Black Minority Ethnic (BME) clients. They aim to achieve this by working with employers to improve work opportunities for BME clients and also by developing good practice guides and systems to be adopted more widely.
• The SEAs focus specifically on target BME groups, including: Black Caribbean, Black African and South Asian –Bangladeshi and Pakistani.

• SEAs work with Field Account Managers (FAMs) and District Managers in the areas where they are located. Healthcare Account Managers (HAMs) also link with SEAs in order to gain information and advice on diversity.

Partner Affinity Manager
• Partner Affinity Managers (PAMs) are currently developing relationships with recruitment agencies. Specifically, they are developing a model and tool kit for working with agencies, by making links with agencies and learning to understand their business and to help them understand Jobcentre Plus. They are also setting up and marketing Job Warehouse to employers. The development period for PAMs ends in March 2006.

• PAMs work on a national basis, but also link with regions (staff are given responsibility for specific regions).

• The PAMs main links are with the NAMs and the Regional Sales Manager (RSM) who act as the main gateway to the regions. PAMs also link with a marketing campaign manager16.

Small Medium Enterprise Channel Manager
• The Small Medium Enterprise Channel Managers (SME CMs) aim to increase awareness and usage of Jobcentre Plus among Small Medium Employers (SMEs). This is achieved by promoting and marketing the service to SMEs and also by linking and working with key stakeholder groups, such as Business Link, Chamber of Commerce and with intermediary networks, such as accountants and solicitors.

• The team are currently developing the channel and are not delivering a service.

• Primarily the team links with: key stakeholders, to make links and to promote the service; Field Director and District Manager to discuss business plan for the area; and with SEAs to promote service to SME in areas with high BME unemployment.

• Additionally, the SME CM links with the EDM for advice on diversity; the RSM for local stakeholder information; and on an ad hoc basis with Field staff, such as Vacancy Service Managers (VSMs), Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) and Lone Parent Advisers (LPAs) in order to pass on information and advice.

16 This role is not detailed on the map.
National Sales Team

National Account Managers
- NAMs manage accounts for the top 100 employers within the chosen sectors.
- The NAMs were structured in two virtual clusters: one in the North of the UK and another in the South. However, this structure was moving towards organisation by sector\(^{17}\) and currently rested between the two positions.
- Primarily, the NAMs link with national employers and EDMs (who they hand over employers to). Some links are also made with RSM and FAMs during the handover of accounts from national to regional/district level.

Healthcare Account Manager
- HAMs work strategically with the NHS to develop relationships and broker agreements regarding the use of Jobcentre Plus for recruitment within the NHS. They also aim to help form a partnership between the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Department of Health (DoH) regarding the use of Jobcentre Plus for recruitment.
- Primarily, the HAM links with FAMs (to hand over accounts), SEAs (to gather advice and information), the Contact Centre (to help improve the quality and consistency of taking health vacancies) and with PAMs (regarding Job Warehouse).
- The handover of employers to FAMs occurs once the strategic planning has been completed and the agreement has been brokered. At this point, the HAM will either bring the FAM to meet the employer or will hand over the account virtually.

Government Account Manager
- The Government Account Managers (GAMs) aim to work with Government public sector employers to broker agreements and create vacancies for Jobcentre Plus.
- The HAM and the GAMs role is closely aligned, however staff working with central Government work on a more national basis than those working with local Government.
- Links are made with public sector Government employers; with RSM and FAMs (to hand over accounts); with the Contact Centre (to help improve the quality and consistency of taking Government vacancies); and with the EDM (for advice on diversity). The link with the EDM may have changed since the EDM moved to working on a national basis.

\(^{17}\) Transport, Security, Finance/Contact Centre Operations and Utilities
Regional Sales Manager and Field Account Manager

- RSMs formally and informally linked with other divisions and teams at national, regional and district level and act as an important communication gateway between teams. They also perform a strategic role within the regions and manage the FAMs in the districts.

- FAMs work in the districts and manage local employer accounts. The aim is to enhance the service provided to employers and work to provide greater returns for customers.

- Some of the activities they undertake on a day-to-day basis include:
  - developing relationships with employers;
  - marketing Jobcentre Plus and encouraging use of the service;
  - providing information to employers and encouraging a commitment to diversity;
  - drawing up agreements, for example, the number of vacancies, type of vacancy, vacancy advertising methods, and job specifications;
  - offering support to employers with hard to fill vacancies; and
  - reviewing the type of service being offered to employers.

- FAMs are organised on a district basis, although some FAMs have employment sector specialisms and responsibilities and this would usually involve the FAMs developing specialist knowledge in a particular sector and attending conferences and spreading good practice in this field. Furthermore, some FAMs act as a champion for other teams within Jobcentre Plus, such as a Contact Centre Champion.

- FAMs’ main links are made with VSMs in the district and local employers. They may also link with NAMs, HAMs and GAMS during the hand over of employers and vacancies.

Employer Marketing Division

Sector Marketing Manager

- Sector Marketing Managers (SMMs) gather industrial occupational Knowledge (IOK) and to produce sector marketing material to support the strategy. Specifically, they work with key stakeholders to improve their knowledge of key sectors and they provide sector based information and advice to Jobcentre advisers and to the National Sales Team (NST) to help them carry out their roles, for example, information on changes in legislation. They pass the IOK virtually via the intranet and email.

- Primarily, they link with key stakeholders and in some cases have a virtual relationship with FAMs.
Employer Direct

Contact Centre

• All employers notify their vacancy requirements via Employer Direct (ED), who operate a national service. When an employer telephones ED they are directed to the nearest Contact Centre in their area. If the local Contact Centre is busy, the call is automatically diverted to another ED Contact Centre and this is known as the virtual network.

• Contact Centres also carry out follow-up activity with local employers, to establish whether their vacancies are filled through Jobcentre Plus.

• Their main links are with employers.

Field

Vacancy Service Managers and Employer Engagement Team

• VSMs are responsible for delivering the service to employers at the local level once the account has been handed over from the account managers. VSMs work with employers to fill vacancies and can provide a number of services to employers, for example, contacting the employer at 48 hours, sifting and matching vacancies, providing interview venues, and providing assistance with arranging interviews. The type of service offer is known to vary across and within regions and districts.

• ESD are responsible for designing the VSM policy and strategy and the service VSMs provide forms; an essential part of the EES. However, responsibility for the VSM function (and how this resource is allocated within the district and individual Jobcentres) falls to the Field. District Managers determine the district VSM resource and the Business Manager allocates the resource locally.

• Across the regions and districts resource allocation varies: It is usual for there to be one VSM in each Jobcentre. However, this is not fixed and varies according to the size of the Jobcentre and the local resource allocation more generally. For example, in some areas, one VSM will work across a number of Jobcentres. The VSM role is generally not ring-fenced and staff can potentially be pulled off to manage other tasks.

• Employer Engagement Teams (EETs) operate in some areas. These exist in addition to the VSMs and in some instances the VSM will be part of the EET. The purpose of the team varies: in some areas it works on a strategic level and in others it carries out administrative tasks relating to the managing and handling of vacancies. EET comprise a mix of staff including: VSMs, marketing and administrative staff.

• Within the remit of the strategy, VSMs link with: FAMs; local frontline staff, such as Personal Advisers; and local employers.
The Vacancy Strategy

- The Vacancy Strategy helps districts to understand the types of vacancies they fill and the type of Jobseekers they move into work by providing information on performance within the region or the district. For example, it provides information on the types of vacancies districts have been historically successful in and this allows districts to be more focused and efficient regarding the type of employers and vacancies they target.