The Young Foundation

No Wrong Door

How an integrated employment and skills system can support Londoners

Full report

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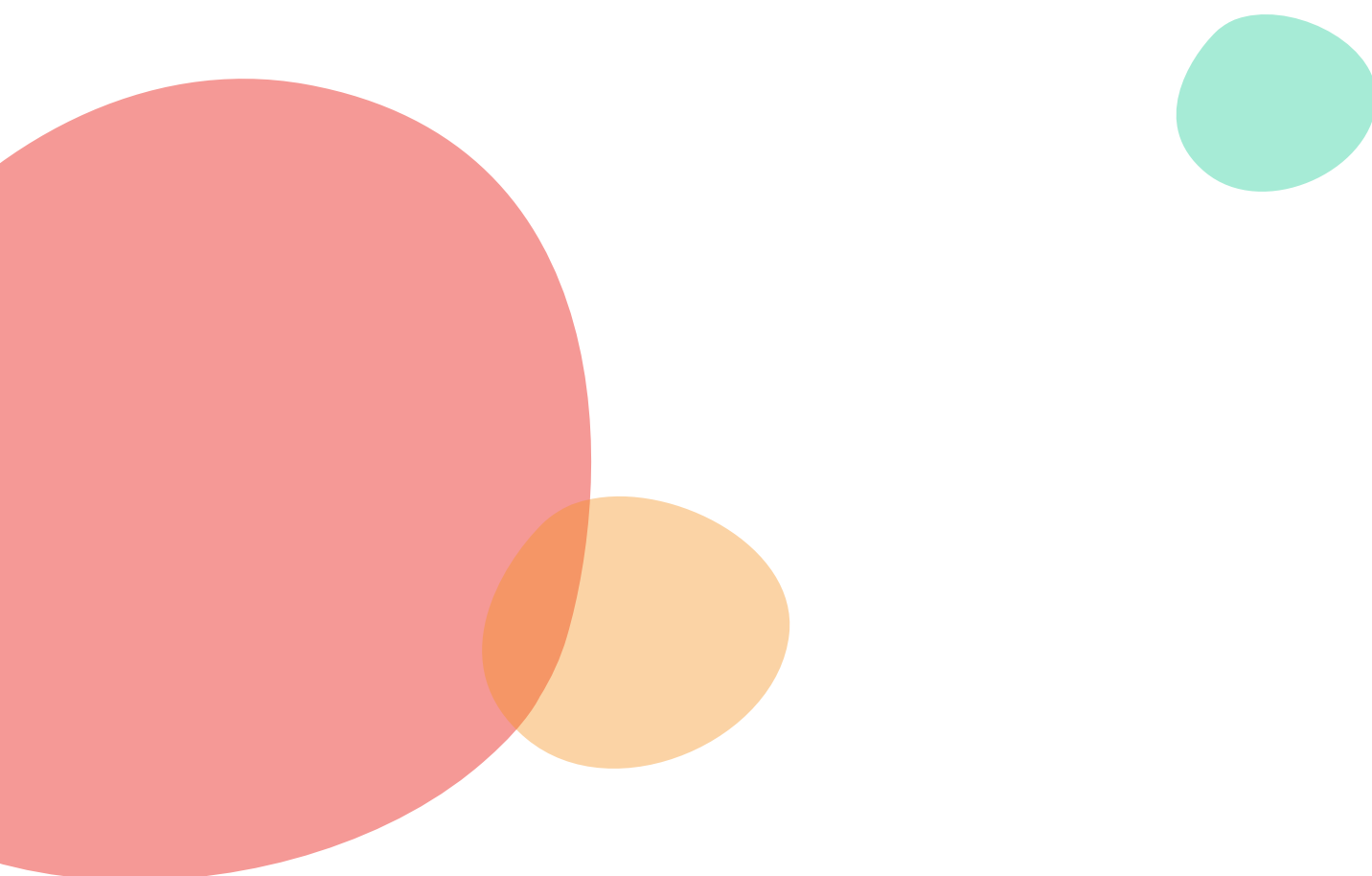
MAYOR OF LONDON

The Young Foundation

The Young Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation driving community research and social innovation. We bring communities, organisations, and policymakers together, shaping a fairer future through collective action to improve people's lives.

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Foreword

'A roadmap for tangible action'

The successful devolution of London's Adult Education Budget (AEB) has helped Londoners increase their earnings, learn new skills, progress in their chosen field, and build confidence in the workplace. However, the prevailing cost-of-living crisis means it's even more important that Londoners get the skills they need to move into good work.

I am delighted to present No Wrong Door: how an integrated employment and skills system can support Londoners, which represents a significant milestone in our ongoing efforts to integrate London's skills and employment services and connect Londoners with the right type of support at the right time in their training and employment journey.

Delivered in partnership with London boroughs, London Councils and Jobcentre Plus, the Mayor's No Wrong Door programme aims to strengthen joint working across London to ensure that skills and employment services deliver for Londoners who are disproportionately affected by labour market inequalities. This report provides an evidence base on the barriers and challenges that Londoners face when accessing skills and employment services.

The challenges set out in the report are complex and interconnected. We have heard from both Londoners and providers who feel the existing system is not working well for them. The recommendations set out clear areas for action, where we can strengthen community connections,

provide tailored support to Londoners, and bring new partners to the table, amongst others. I encourage all our partners to engage with this report in a spirit of collaboration and help contribute to the successful implementation of its recommendations.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the team at The Young Foundation who led this research, our partners at the Department for Work and Pensions, London Councils, and those leading the No Wrong Door Integration Hubs, and to the practitioners, providers and Londoners who have contributed their time, expertise, and insights to produce this report. Their commitment to improving the experiences and outcomes for Londoners is commendable as the report findings and recommendations provide a roadmap for tangible action.

We look forward to continuing our work with our No Wrong Door partners and the Integration Hubs, to build on the programme's success and deliver a more integrated, accessible and equitable skills and employment service for London.

Jules Pipe CBE
Deputy Mayor, Planning, Regeneration & Skills

Executive summary

As part of the Greater London Authority's (GLA) overall mission to support Londoners into good jobs, the No Wrong Door (NWD) initiative was set up to integrate development and training opportunities across London's skills and employment support landscape.

The NWD initiative includes a research strand (the focus of this report) which seeks to build an evidence base on the existing employment and skills support system, and to better understand the diversity of needs across a range of priority groups trying to access skills and employment services across London. Drawing on the research findings, this report presents recommendations that will be instrumental to supporting the integration of employment and skills services across the capital so that they meet the needs of Londoners trying to secure good work.

Recommendations to improve integration of employment and skills services

Detailed recommendations are included on page 91 and fall under the following key headings:

1. Making funding and targets more human-centred

The need to tailor targets and funding to better-enable service providers to meet the requirements of Londoners seeking employment, training and skills was highlighted by several stakeholders. For the GLA and its commissioning partners, there is an opportunity to develop and test new ways of funding and measuring outcomes. Suggestions included finding ways of capturing success on an individual's journey into an employment opportunity, for instance measuring whether someone is satisfied in their new post, the job 'fit', and whether they have accessed mental health support as part of pre-work readiness preparation.

2. Building skills and knowledge among service providers

Both service providers and service users said frontline staff need better training and continuing professional development support to provide holistic and service user-centred support. The success of employment and skills support services rests on targets and funding being adjusted to provide more time and space for service providers to focus on the individual needs of jobseekers, rather than rushing them into jobs or training to meet targets. There is an opportunity for the GLA and its strategic partners, including London's boroughs and JobCentre Plus London, to commission and pilot a holistic training package for frontline staff that integrates modules including; understanding mental health, supporting people with SEND and trauma-informed approaches.

3. Offering personalised support for service users

Services that focus on making customer appointments with employment advisors or work coaches more accessible and service user-centred were recommended. This ranged from basics such as remembering a service user's name, to having one main contact for each service user at their point of entry into the skills and employment system, and giving them longer appointments with coaches.

4. Tailoring support to specific groups

Solutions focusing on the needs of young people were highlighted as a priority by service providers including providing in-school and college support for students not going to university, for instance through CV development workshops, and post-school support once young people are in work. Service providers proposed the need for more research and training to understand the job types that young people are being steered into and what good work looks like for different priority groups. This should go hand in hand with the evaluation of services to assess whether they meet the needs of priority groups and address the challenges they face

5. Sharing data and information better

Sharing information and data effectively between services was identified as a key enabler to integration. Service providers at the sub-regional and borough-level proposed the creation of an online portal for service users and service providers that could provide a live view of services and organisations available in a local area. There are opportunities for Integration Hubs to have oversight over skills and employment provision in London, including mapping services available, and working with providers to ensure there is no duplication.

6. Working more closely with employers

There is clear potential for service providers to create and strengthen links with employers. Some solutions could be facilitated by Integration Hubs engaging employers in existing initiatives such as the Mayor's Good Work Standard and the Disability Confident Scheme. Bigger investments may be required to implement some of the solutions put forward by service providers such as offering supported apprenticeships and opportunities for work experience or subsidising businesses to take on employees.

7. Strengthening community connections

Personal and community networks play a key role in supporting many people seeking work in London, particularly those with English language needs. There is potential for formal service providers to establish and strengthen links with community organisations, who often have access to the 'harder to reach' groups. With additional funding, service providers could collaborate with community groups to hire 'navigators' or peer supporters who can reach new customers and refer them to employment and skills support.

Research design

A qualitative research approach was adopted over two phases to engage with key stakeholders and this included:

- an online service provider survey which received 101 responses

- in-depth one-to-one interviews with 17 staff working in employment and skills provision

- focus groups and one-to-one interviews with 136 people with experience of trying to access skills and employment services in London.

From the outset of the research programme, The Young Foundation and the GLA agreed to focus on seven key service user groups to understand their specific needs, and to identify barriers in the current employment support and skills provision offer. There are seven priority groups:

1. **Young people**

2. **Young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)**

3. **People aged 50 and over**

4. **People from BAME backgrounds**

5. **People with disabilities**

6. **People with experience of the criminal justice system**

7. **People earning below London Living Wage or qualified at Level 2 or below**

Following the first phase of research, four co-creation workshops were held with service providers and local authority staff from each of the London sub-regional partnerships. The workshops were used to identify opportunities to enhance integration of employment support and skills provision services at a sub-regional level. Finally, a pan-London workshop with attendees from the four sub-regions was held which identified and prioritised a range of both local and London-wide recommendations and next steps.

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Summary research findings

The definition of 'good work' depends on your employment history

'Good work' means different things to different people and often depends on whether someone is taking their first steps into the job market or has been looking for work for a period of time. When asked to define 'what good work means to them, responses from respondents ranged from; expectations of being paid fairly; to more aspirational hopes for jobs tailored to an individual's skills, abilities and interests.

Those who had been looking for work over a long period of time were more likely to lower their aspirations about what constitutes 'good work', *"meaningful work is probably unrealistic, as long as it lets you get by, it's enough" (Antony, 56).*

A recurring definition for 'good work' was employment that provided financial stability while doing something that matches a person's skills and that they feel passionate about. *"A good job is a job that suits you and that is adaptable to your needs. Money matters as well" (Ludo, 18-24).*

For service providers, some defined good work as employment with a minimum six month duration, with some stipulating that this work must be paid at the London Living Wage. Other service providers were less clear on their definition of good work, identifying only that sometimes service users needed to take work as a stepping stone, even if it wasn't in their field of interest.

Londoners across the city face different challenges to securing good work

Most of the service users that took part in the research were seeking employment, rather than training or skills-building. This was due to a need for regular income, whereas training is usually unpaid and was perceived as a challenge to undertake for many. The value of practical, hands-on work experience over training was stressed as important by many respondents, particularly those who had migrated to the UK and were trying to find roles similar to those held in their countries of origin.

This research has shown that the system supporting Londoners into work faces a range of challenges, and service users across the priority groups often struggle to access employment, skills, and training that responds to their needs.

A lack of work experience and other challenges prevent **young people** getting a foot on the employment ladder. And **older people** reported finding themselves being disregarded by employers in favour of younger workers.

Some service users experienced direct and/or indirect discrimination in relation to age, race, ethnicity, and disability in the workplace, but challenging this was cited as difficult, and self-advocacy was almost a job in itself.

People with a disability find it particularly challenging to find good work or enter training. When finding out about services that can support disabled people into good work, disabled respondents said they often have to self-advocate and seek out opportunities alone. Some respondents shared that the easiest solution was to hide their disability from employers, as they feel it will work against them and prevent them from getting a job.

Young people with SEND face additional barriers as they leave supportive school and college environments and find it difficult to access work in the traditional manner, often without knowledge of their rights and the support they are entitled to.

For **refugees and some migrant workers subject to immigration restrictions**, their immigration status is an additional barrier to work. Many reported that previous work experience and qualifications gained outside the UK not being recognised by employers was a barrier to good work. In addition, having English language needs further reduced access to good work and support. As a result, many had taken entry-level jobs, often in service sectors and were struggling to make ends meet.

People from minority backgrounds shared instances of discrimination and racism in employment. Issues raised included feeling like they were offered lower-skilled jobs than white jobseekers, not having the same networks to tap into, and hitting a glass ceiling when trying to progress into senior positions.

People with experience of the criminal justice system were found to face unique challenges and experiences, including significant stigma from society and employers, which inhibits their ability to reintegrate into society. This is exacerbated by a lack of effective employment and skills provision in the prison system and when going through the probation system.

Londoners with low-skills or stuck in low-wage jobs can find themselves trapped in a cycle that leaves them struggling to make ends meet. Whilst training offers an opportunity to upskill and enter higher-paid roles, taking time off work was cited to have cost implications that most cannot afford. Furthermore, a lack of in-work support makes it difficult to make the transition to better paid work and this means that service users can be stuck in low paying jobs. The approach of getting service users to take any job without a package of ongoing support does not align with getting people into 'good work'

The research has highlighted that service users in the different priority groups do face significant challenges in accessing employment and employment support, and often rely on personal and community networks for help.

Service providers feel the integration of services could be improved

Most providers surveyed (79%) reported that their organisations are involved in improving the integration of employment and skills services, locally or sub-regionally. However, less than half (41%) reported that their service is already integrated or quite integrated through sustained service collaboration with the wider employment and skills system in the area(s) they operate.

While service providers were often much more positive about the current system than service users, there was still a recognition amongst service providers that the system is not working as well as it could. The appetite from service providers for a system that is integrated and working well is clear, and many talked about the potential for employment, skills and training providers to better collaborate.

Providers frequently cited that a refocussing on supporting service users to make the best decisions was needed, rather than the current dominant focus on meeting numerical targets.

Despite the challenges and limitations, there is evidence of good practice when it comes to integration, with many service providers having strong links to community organisations, colleges, charities, employers and external agencies to best support Londoners.

There are gaps, challenges and opportunities that could be addressed to enhance integration

There are clear opportunities to strengthen and better-integrate services in the employment and skills provision system and support for Londoners trying to find good work. Service providers were found to be frustrated and constrained by current funding structures and targets that often fail to value progress made on an individual's journey to finding good work. This could involve seeking support for mental health or finding reliable accommodation.

Targets that focus on getting jobseekers into jobs quickly have, in some places, led to competition rather than collaboration between services. Employment advisors were cited as being disincentivised from offering tailored support, and service users felt powerless and undervalued in the current target-driven culture. This operating environment was found to be stressful for frontline staff and dehumanising for people seeking support.

While there are numerous challenges to integrating the parts of what is a complex system, there is clearly an appetite for change and improvement.

There are also examples of good practice to build on and a willingness to share learning between service providers. Where colleges, charities and employers are integrated with frontline employment services, jobseekers benefit through better and more sustainable outcomes, and 'hard to reach' groups are offered better support to get them closer and into the job market.

In finding solutions to help the system become more human-centred, one core challenge will be keeping sight of the ambition to support people into good work while also grappling with targets and funders who might have different priorities.

Without addressing the key challenges of the existing system, namely targets and the funding structure, it will be very hard to truly shift outcomes for Londoners in a sustainable way.

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Introduction

Purpose of the research and background to the programme

As part of the GLA's overall mission to support Londoners into good work, the No Wrong Door (NWD) initiative aims to integrate development and training opportunities within the region's skills and employment support landscape.

The research strand of NWD seeks to build an evidence base and understand the diversity of needs across different priority groups and geographical locations. This can inform the design of future support, to ensure it better reflects the needs of people trying to secure good work in the capital.

Research objectives

The Young Foundation led research, focused on the following questions:

1. How do key target groups access information about support relating to skills, employment, and careers?

2. What are the key gaps and support challenges Londoners face in their user journey with the employment, skills, and career services, as well as wider support services such as those relating to health and housing?

3. What are the key user needs and what mechanisms can be used to:
   - better support people who are already engaging with the system, and
   - motivate excluded groups to engage with the system?

4. Which organisations are already delivering more coordinated service provision and how can project interventions build on existing capacity?

5. What are good practice examples of integration and coordination of provision, and how can these be scaled across London and used to provide guidance for further project interventions?

Methodology

This research used a mixed methodology that would build understanding of the integration of service provision from multiple angles, bringing in-depth insights from the personal experiences of people trying to access employment, training and skills support in London. This methodology included:

- a service provider survey, completed by 101 service providers

- in-depth one-to-one interviews with 20 members of staff working in service provision related to employment, skills and training

- qualitative research with 136 service users in focus groups and individual interviews

- four co-creation workshops with service providers and local authority staff from sub-regional partnerships to identify opportunities to enhance integration at a sub-regional level

- a pan-London workshop in October 2022 with attendees from the four sub-regions, to identify localised and city-wide recommendations and next steps based on research findings

In total, the survey, interviews and focus groups heard from at least 254 research participants. In addition, more than 100 professionals attended the five workshops.

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The research represents a range of perspectives

To get a holistic picture of service provision on offer and people's experiences accessing skills, training and work, as well as the integration of services on offer, The Young Foundation conducted research with both service providers and service users.
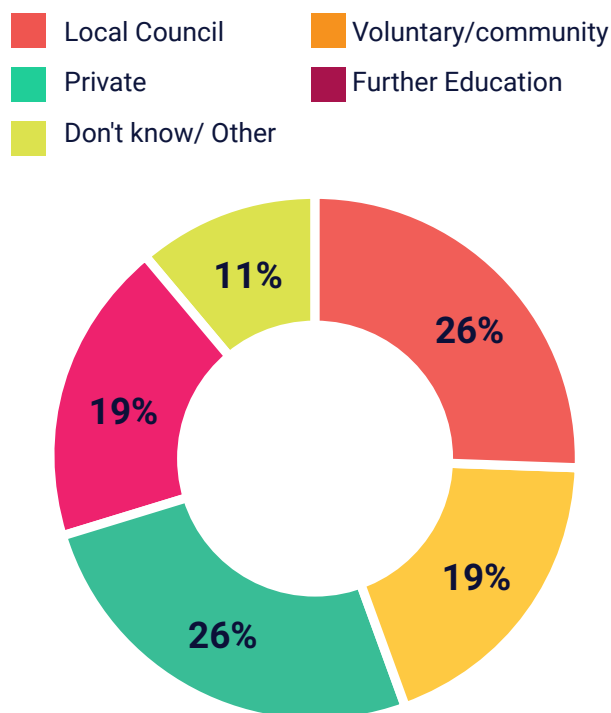
Service provider survey

Between 11 May and 7 June 2022, 101 employment and skills service providers across London completed a 25-question survey. Respondents primarily work for local councils (26%), private sector organisations (26%), voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations (19%), and further education (FE) colleges (19%) (figure 1), which deliver services to Londoners across all 32 boroughs (figure 2).

Half (50%) of respondents work for pan-London organisations, which operate in boroughs across multiple sub-regions; while 17% work solely in Central London Forward boroughs, 16% in West London Alliance, and 9% in South London Partnership and Local London (n = 70 respondents).

Survey sampling approach

The survey was primarily shared through networks of the GLA, sub-regional partnerships (SRPs), London Councils and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), with targeted messaging to ensure a good spread of responses across the London boroughs and different types of organisations. Multiple people from the same organisation could respond to the survey, recognising that people with different roles may contribute views from different vantage points. While some respondents were in frontline roles, most had managerial or strategic positions and responded on behalf of their organisations.

Legend:
- Local Council
- Private
- Don't know/ Other
- Voluntary/community
- Further Education

Figure 1: Sectoral distribution of respondents
Base: all respondents (n= 70 respondents) Q34. What sector is your organisation?

Service provider interviews

Semi-structured interviews with 17 staff working within service providers complement findings from the service provider survey. These individuals held a variety of roles in local authorities, charities and third sector organisations, as well as for private sector companies with DWP contracts to deliver service provision. Their roles included Head of Adult Skills and Development, Employment Service Lead and Local Integration Lead.

Service user research

An understanding of service user needs and lived experiences of trying to find work in London was gained by speaking to a total of 136 people. This included 95 respondents involved in focus group discussions and 41 respondents interviewed on a one-to-one basis. Representation covered each sub-region.

- 43% of participants lived in Central London Forward boroughs
- 20% in Local London boroughs
- 18% in both West London Authority
- 18% in South London Partnership boroughs

Participants were from a range of pre-defined key groups, who had been identified as facing particular challenges when trying to access training, skills and jobs. They included:

- 52 (38%) young people (18 to 25 years old)
- 25 (18%) of the young people had Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- 26 (19%) people were 50 years of age and above
- 96 (71%) people were from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds
- 51 (38%) people had disabilities or long-term significant health conditions (physical and/or mental health)
- 12 (9%) people with experience of the criminal justice system
- 38 (28%) people who were employed and earning below London Living Wage or were qualified at Level 2 or below (equivalent to GCSE and O-level grades A*-C / 9-4 or CSE grade 1 or an intermediate apprenticeship)

In addition, researchers spoke to at least

- 13 (10%) people with experience of insecure immigration status. This included people seeking asylum, people who could not evidence their permission to stay in the UK and refugees.
- 26 (19%) people who spoke English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL)
- Four (3%) people with experience of the care system

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Limitations

While engaging a wide range of Londoners, the research is qualitative in nature and, therefore the findings should not be generalised to speak for the experiences of all Londoners. However, the section below explains that when looking for differences between sub-regions, these were not obviously identified by service users.

Recruitment approaches and inclusion

Due to time and budget restrictions, we were only able to include a small number of respondents who could not take part in an interview conducted in English. Our community engagement officer conducted interviews with Bangladeshi Sylheti speakers, and we were able to use Language Line to interpret for a Syrian respondent who spoke Arabic.

Respondents were recruited with the support of a recruitment agency, alongside our community engagement officer who advertised the opportunity via community organisations and networks. As such, it can be assumed that very few of our respondents were completely unsupported by community networks or organisations.

Differences between sub-regions

Providing a snapshot of provision, rather than systematic mapping, means there are gaps in our knowledge of what services exist across London. This also makes it impossible to comment on specific differences between sub-regional provision, because services that exist may not have been included in or encountered during this research.

However, respondents were asked whether their location (eg the borough in which they work or lived) had any specific impact on finding good work or providing employment, skills and training services. Neither service provider nor service user findings pointed to any particular differences.

Explanations for this include the following:

- Service providers and users are usually in contact with services and customers at a borough-level, and service users rarely have awareness of sub-regions.

- When looking at provision between boroughs, researchers did not identify any particular trends that would highlight differences between sub-regions. This could be due to the nature of this research, which asked providers and users directly about their experiences, rather than systematically mapping all provision available across sub-regions.

- While asking all service users whether where they lived had an impact on their experiences, the responses given never referred to the sub-region. Many responses highlighted the importance of good public transport to reduce their commute to work or time needed to attend appointments, and some people mentioned the stigma attached to living in certain areas, even though this referred to ward-level or even smaller areas (eg living on a particular estate), rather than whole boroughs or even sub-regions.

Most importantly, the lack of differences identified between sub-regions may indicate that the issues experienced and key areas to focus on are not sub-region specific. In fact, the key themes outlined in this report rang true across the whole sample and, where differences were experienced, these related to individual service providers or the service users' personal circumstances and background.

Findings on training and skills support

While all participants in the research were prompted to talk about their experiences seeking support for training and skills development, the majority were looking for employment, rather than training and skills development. While this report includes findings of those taking part in or looking for training and skills support, its findings are more extensive regarding experiences of employment support, as this was generally more widely experienced and discussed.

Opinions on Job Centre Plus (JCP)

When service users talked about their experiences of getting into work, they often fore fronted their interactions with the JCP, as this was usually their entry point into the employment support system and their most regular point of contact throughout their journey. As a result, there is a skew in the findings towards this element of service user experience. Researchers were able to include staff working in senior JCP and frontline roles through interviews and a focus group, with staff from the JCP Group Partnerships team and attendance by DWP representatives at sub-regional co-creation workshops.

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Employment in context

London unemployment rates are falling, but are still higher than the rest of the UK

During the Coronavirus pandemic, in the three months ending February 2021, London's unemployment levels increased substantially, and disproportionately to other UK regions [1]. However, since then, unemployment in London has returned to pre-pandemic levels. As of September 2022, London's unemployment rate was approximately 4.2% (compared to the UK average, 3.6%), down almost two percent from the previous year.

The latest data for August 2022 shows that the number of people claiming unemployment-related benefits in London has also decreased, compared to 2021 (a decrease of 30.6%).

The decline in unemployment can, in part, be attributed to the marginal increase in employment and the increase in economic inactivity in London [2]. Employment rates in London (74.8% for May to July 2022, compared to the UK average 75.4%) saw a marginal increase of 0.1% compared to the previous year. For May to July 2022, economic inactivity was approximately 21.7% (the same as the UK average), an increase of 1.4% from the previous year [3].

The cost-of-living crisis will hit low-income households in London hardest

While there has been a positive uplift in unemployment following the pandemic, a recent report by Learning and Work Institute, in collaboration with Trust for London, indicates that London currently faces challenges relating to the cost-of-living crisis and the decrease in real-term wages.

Inflation is at a forty-year high and is due to hit low-income households in London the hardest as they spend a larger proportion of their household income on energy, which has seen the largest price increases. Many do not have savings to support them [4].

Further to this, Trust for London highlighted in their recent London Poverty Profile, that more than two in three Londoners reported increases in their cost of living, mostly due to rising food prices and rising energy bills. As a result, 50% of Londoners said they are spending less on non-essential items. With this in mind, it is also important to remember that prior to the pandemic, many Londoners were already facing poverty, with London having the highest poverty rate in the UK [5].

Supporting Londoners to find good work and develop their skills is crucial at this time to help individuals combat the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis.

Integrated employment support

The aim of integrated employment support is to bring together existing services, including employment, housing, finances and debt, physical and mental health, and provide streamlined and holistic employment support. Existing services and providers can work with numerous key players including local councils, local charities and training providers.

While this form of support is an effective and efficient 'whole system' approach, it is important to note there are barriers to implementing integrated employment support. First, integration can be inhibited by localised provision within individual areas having limited flexibility over single programmes and timings, given they are often negotiated within

central government. A second barrier to integrating employment support relates to budget and funding decisions, particularly as there is often a mismatch between local areas and central government power in funding decisions [6].

Seeking support and searching for work: Londoners' perspectives

The research with service users involved interviews and focus groups with 136 people from four sub-regions, involving people from each group in the full list of priority groups referred to on page 2. Participants included a range of people at different points on their journey through the employment support system including those who were looking for work, currently in low-paid work and out of work due to health conditions.

How do people find jobs, training and skills development opportunities?

When asked how they access information about jobs, training and skills development, many respondents said they find opportunities online. Sources included websites such as Total Jobs, CV Library, Indeed, and LinkedIn. For those who are digitally excluded, including many older people and some who have English language needs, personal networks via Facebook and word-of-mouth are used more often. In a small number of areas, a local newsletter was circulated that included job opportunities, or a key worker shared jobs they had seen.

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How is 'good work' defined by Londoners?

'Good work' means different things to different people and often depends on whether someone is taking their first steps into the job market or has been searching for work for a period of time. When asked to define what good work means to them, responses from respondents ranged from expectations of being paid fairly to more aspirational hopes for jobs tailored to an individual's skills, abilities and interests, *"so it should be sort of matched [to you]" (Fatima, 34-44).*

Those who had looked for work for a period of time were more likely to lower their aspirations about what constitutes good work, *"meaningful work is probably unrealistic, as long as it lets you get by it's enough" (Antony, 56).*

A recurring definition for good work was a role that provided financial stability while doing something that matches a person's skills and that they feel passionate about. *"A good job is a job that suits you and that is adaptable to your needs. Money matters as well" (Ludo, 18-24)*. A salary and long-term contract were seen as essential components of a good job.

Young people with SEND talked about the importance of employers being understanding and inclusive, as well as being offered support in the workplace. *"Support is good when they are kind to you and make you feel special" (Gemma, 19)*.

Respondents who had migrated to the UK talked about the credibility that comes with having a 'white collar' job, such as working for the police. As well as providing stability and the possibility of owning your own home, this type of job was seen as providing social capital that would lead to greater respect in the community.

Being treated with respect and valued by an employer also emerged as a key aspect to good work, particularly for those who had experienced working for an employer or manager who mistreated them.

Grace, aged 36, arrived in the UK from Nigeria 13 years ago and had no recourse to public funds or right to work until she was granted leave to remain in 2017. Almost immediately she started working in a cleaning job, but after three months found a job in hospitality via Indeed. Her new boss was more understanding than the previous one, although she described having to act as a spokesperson for colleagues who were less confident - making requests for colleagues who needed time off work or different hours. For Grace, good work means *"having a boss who treats you well and will listen to requests...having someone who is understanding if you are late (although you should let them know when you're running late)"*.

Having development opportunities, a fun and friendly work environment and perks and incentives on top of salaries were important to those who had more experience of established employment. In contrast, young people entering the job market were more likely to focus on pay and ease of getting to work. Latoya, aged 18, said being able to travel to work easily was a major concern, particularly as transport costs could cost a considerable proportion of a day's wages when on minimum wage (£6.83 for an 18- to 20-year-old).

For service providers, some saw good work as that which was sustained for at least a six-month period with some stipulating that this work must be paid at the London Living Wage. Other service providers, such as the DWP, were less clear on their definition of good work, identifying only that sometimes service users needed to take work as a steppingstone, even if it wasn't in their field of interest. The differences in understanding of good work can be a point of contention between the service user and the service provider.

"It isn't just simply about getting someone into a job, but did they have a beneficial experience?... so it's about people sort of progressing beyond support and beyond the service" (Private employment service provider).

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What are Londoners looking for from training and skills-building?

Most people that took part in this research were seeking employment, rather than training or skills-building. This was due to needing a regular income, whereas training is usually unpaid. Some jobseekers who had been offered training courses worried that they would be low-quality or not lead to employment. Chris, for example, explained that job coaches at the JCP offered the same courses to everyone, removing the 'edge' they were supposed to give you over other candidates. He felt training was pointless and wanted more focus on getting into a paid position.

For those who had been out of work for long periods, particularly in the over-50s group, fatigue had set in and there was cynicism that training would ever lead to employment, particularly if lots of unemployed people were being offered the same training while in competition for the same jobs. Yasir said, *"I know the government have given courses out there for people to learn stuff, but they're just very basic courses, aren't they? They're not something that's going to make you stand out or shine on paper and be like, okay, you can get a decent job."*

The value of practical, hands-on work experience over training was stressed by many respondents, particularly those who had migrated to the UK and were trying to find roles similar to those held in countries of origin.

Akanksha gained degrees in biotechnology and engineering in India and then worked as a research analyst and software test engineer there. After moving to the UK, she wanted to work in a similar field but says she is constantly turned away by employers because she has no experience of working in the UK. She has been in the UK for five years and says, *"they are only looking for people who have worked in the UK. So, I continuously applied for jobs, and I couldn't find a job at that time."* She is now being supported by a local charity after being put in contact via the Work and Health programme at her Job Centre and is hopeful that with a dedicated job coach she will be able to find training to move into healthcare if she's not able to pursue her ambition of working in IT.

The overall finding - that service users are predominantly seeking work rather than training - aligns with the findings from the service provider survey, where respondents described the most impactful training as being that which led to specific qualifications (eg CSCS or SIA licence). In addition, training programmes that lead to work in a particular sector, such as construction or care work, are seen as more effective than general skills-based training.

Two groups were an exception and wanted more training or skills-building opportunities. Firstly, young people who had recently graduated or were in part-time or temporary employment considered taking up training further down the line, particularly where they felt their university study had not equipped them for the job market. This was, however, not the case for those who were currently unemployed as they generally wanted to get into paid work. Secondly, women who had been out of work for a period of time wanted the opportunity to take part in training in order to rebuild confidence about their professional skills and re-enter the workplace.

Experiences among priority groups

What specific needs do different groups identify as important?

From the outset of the research programme The Young Foundation agreed a focus on seven key service user groups in order to understand their specific needs, and to identify barriers regarding integration of employment support and skills provision:

1. Young people

2. Young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

3. People aged 50 and over

4. People from BAME backgrounds

5. People with disabilities

6. People with experience of the criminal justice system

7. People earning below London Living Wage or qualified at Level 2 or below.

In addition, the research found some groups encountered particular difficulties when looking for employment support and skills provision:

Migrants, including:

- People with English language needs

- those with insecure immigration status

- skilled migrants with non-UK qualifications

- Those in transitional life phases, including:

- care-leavers

- recent graduates

- newly unemployed with high education or skills level

- people, particularly women, returning to work after maternity leave, full-time childcare, or caring for other family members

- the newly disabled or long-term ill who need adjustments to work

Those who need to address other needs before seeking employment also struggled:

- Additional challenges were faced by people deemed not 'fit for work' who still wanted to find employment, including those with disabilities and long-term health conditions.

- People who had been out of work for a long time struggled with low confidence and little belief in their own skills, which inhibited their ability to apply for and start new jobs.

Intersectionality and impact on experiences

While the focus on specific target groups helps gain a deeper understanding of experiences that are linked to a particular identity or background, it's also important to acknowledge the intersectional nature of these identities. In fact, the combination of identities or backgrounds experienced by individuals created a large range of different experiences for service users. For example, Sunita said she felt anxious about returning to work after being on maternity leave for longer than she initially expected. Having been diagnosed with a mental health condition, she was seeking support to build her confidence and prepare for eventual employment. She would fall into three key service user groups – people from BAME backgrounds, women returning to work, and people with disabilities, due to her mental health condition.

The seven key service user groups sketched out below should therefore not be seen as mutually exclusive or representative of the experience of all people who fall under one particular category, but rather as an indication towards the large spectrum of experiences and barriers that people from different backgrounds and with different identities face.
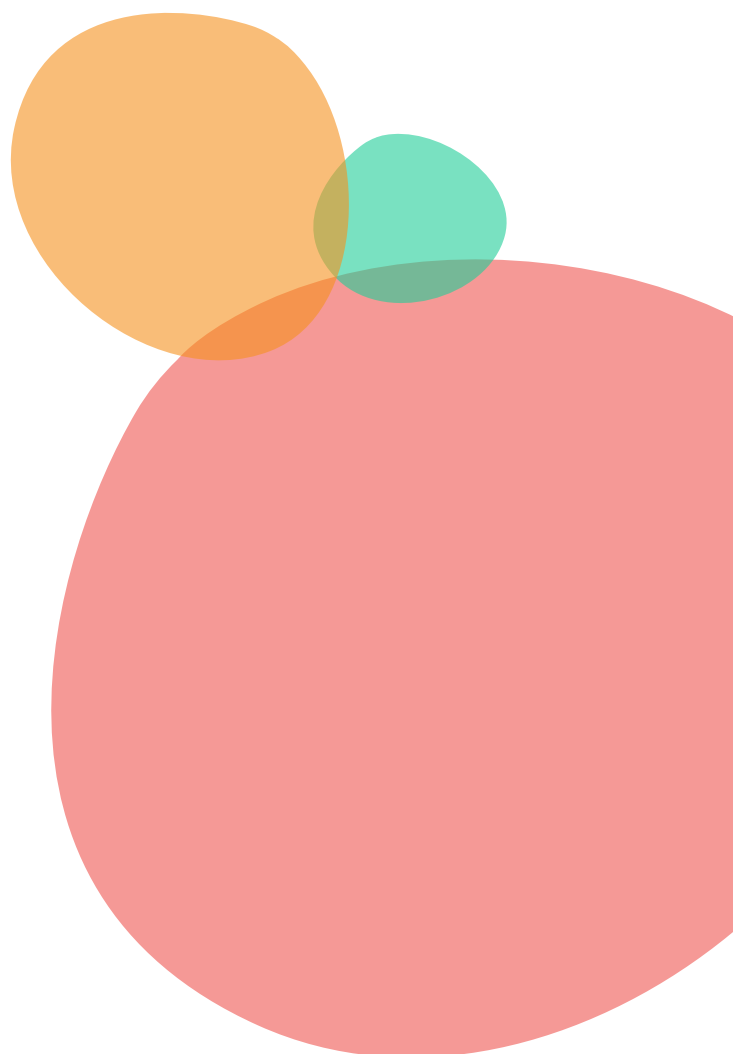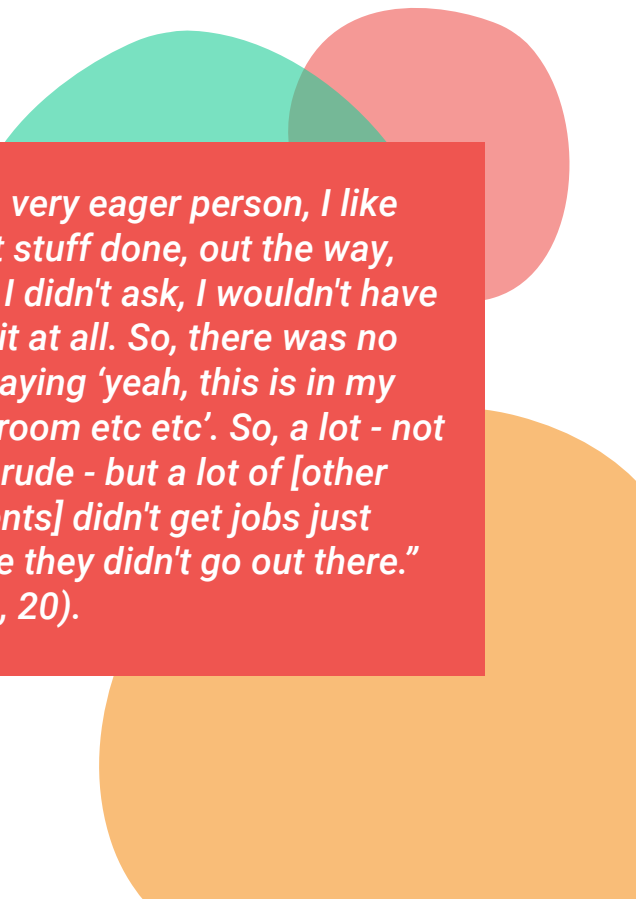
Findings by priority group

Young people

Young people are often entering the job market for the first time. In some ways, this can make the experience of finding work easier, as they are usually seeking entry-level jobs to get a 'foot on the ladder'. At the same time, young people in our research described leaving school or college unprepared to create a CV or attend a first interview. One 18-year-old, Latoya, said her school had been very supportive for those who wanted to go to university, with workshops and individual support with personal statements. However, there was little to no support for school-leavers wanting to enter the job market, and she had created her own CV using a template she found on Indeed.com.

Nate, 20, is just finishing the first year of a degree apprenticeship to become a quantity surveyor with a housing developer. He was supported by a career counsellor at his college in Richmond to improve his CV. Despite this, he was still rejected by nine companies who gave generic feedback alongside saying he needed more work experience. He believes that gaining work experience earlier would have made the process of finding an apprenticeship easier. He ended up asking his college to help him find a placement and they allowed him to spend one day a week for six weeks on a building site at the college campus. Nate believes he's now one of the only students from his course who has found employment as others were less proactive about securing work experience and he took the initiative to ask for it.

Young people leaving university reported feeling unsure of their skills and how to market themselves. Vihan, who had recently graduated from university and then been employed for six months through the Kickstart programme, felt he had been "sold a dream" about walking into a job. He expected university to be a guaranteed route to upward mobility but was disappointed when he was unable to find jobs in a field related to his degree.

He was referred to the Kickstart role by his JCP work coach and while he was happy to be employed, felt like he had compromised his capabilities by taking a role that paid minimum wage. His experience of being on Universal Credit and having to interact with a work coach had been demoralising and he recommended having work coaches who were more understanding and able to take the time to refer individuals to jobs that match their skills. This was a common complaint among young people with more experience, who said they were offered low-skill roles (similar to retail or hospitality jobs they did while in school) when they had higher expectations and ambitions for themselves and were seeking 'good work' rather than any work.

"I'm a very eager person, I like to get stuff done, out the way, but if I didn't ask, I wouldn't have seen it at all. So, there was no one saying 'yeah, this is in my classroom etc etc'. So, a lot - not to be rude - but a lot of [other students] didn't get jobs just 'cause they didn't go out there." (Nate, 20).

Young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

Young people with special educational needs and disabilities say they face specific challenges when transitioning from school or college into the world of work. These challenges arise because of the extra support that they need during this change.

These extra challenges present in a variety of ways. In one focus group, we spoke with young people near the end of their time at a college which supports students with SEND. The group discussed a variety of issues they fear they will face in their search for employment without the existing support from their college and teachers.

Tyler, 19, said they were worried about *"competition because you're competing with other people for that one job"* and whether their additional needs may make them less desirable. Their teacher, who assisted in the focus group, also relayed concerns about other challenges to finding employment, such as completing applications or forms, stating that *"it's not accessible"* for students with special needs without the support of the college. This was echoed in a follow up interview with Marie, 19, who stated they found applications hard as they don't *"have blocks in them to make it easier … [and I need] more time to apply for the application"*. Sometimes, young people with SEND may decide not to disclose their additional needs or disability at all as they believe it is *"better to not take the risk […] like a strategic decision"* as they worry that they may have to spend time educating their employers, or that they may be viewed differently by colleagues.

Where young people feel uncomfortable disclosing their needs, they are less likely to get the support they need to get into work, with no consideration given to what

'good work' could look like. Even when needs are disclosed, service providers often lack the training and skills to offer tailored support. Gabriel, 20, has a physical disability which makes it hard to use his hand as well as a learning disability. He is currently being supported by Shaw Trust, a charity supporting people into work, while also seeking work via the Job Centre. Although he can travel independently to the Shaw Trust office and feels confident in attending sessions with his support worker alone, he takes his sister with him to the Job Centre saying he gets nervous and worries he won't understand the questions they are asking him. He says, *"Every time I talked, I was a bit...embarrassed. I was a bit nervous…" (Gabriel, 20).*

Some participants discussed how they often felt they were not given a chance during the application process, leading to lower self-confidence. Billy, 23, said he was not *"the most clever person ever"* but that he deserved to be given a chance in employment: *"everyone should be given a chance no matter what"*. This lack of confidence can also be a result of limited knowledge about the support which is out there for people. Sam stated, *"because none of that [information] was given to me, I think [it] would have made it less scary"* and that knowing about this support earlier meant they would be "more prepared" to deal with the workplace.

However, when employers were able to meet young people with SEND at their level, in a comfortable environment, their self-confidence was positively impacted. An example of this came from Bobby, 19, who was able to meet a staff member from his new job before starting. They came to his college and in this known environment, Bobby felt relaxed about introducing himself and learning more about what would happen on his first day at work, which he then felt confident about undertaking.

Tyler

Tyler has autism and a visual impairment. He is currently in a college for young people with Special Educational Needs but will graduate this month. Speaking of the support he receives at college, he says *"It is fantastic. People here understand me, I get extra support which makes me feel special."*

The school works with a network of partners, including community kitchens and charity shops to secure a placement for their students once they graduate from college. Outside of this network, the school doesn't work with the Job Centre or other employment and skills services. The college offered him a one-year placement with one of their partner employers but together with his mother, Tyler decided he wanted to find a job in the "real world" instead.

Tyler is now looking for employment and has been with the Job Centre for the past seven months without being offered any potential jobs. He says *"it's not easy to find a job [as a person with special needs] because you're competing with other people for that one job."* His teacher fears that her student will be excluded from an already competitive market.

There's a general lack of understanding from employers regarding what adjustments are needed and to identify the skills of people with SEND. Tyler has experienced employers thinking that he can't *"do anything because of [his] special needs."* His teacher says *"[My students] are very clever, have lots of energy and want to work. But I worry about them because I don't want them to not do anything. But you send them off on programmes, and once they end, employers don't want to know about them."*

"Making things easier to understand for people with autism would be important"

"I feel sorry for people with more autism than me because that is even more difficult."

People aged above 50

Those aged over 50 were found to encounter challenges in the process of finding and gaining employment. While they have more experience than the younger people interviewed, their age is often cited as a barrier to them entering or progressing in employment.

Emma, 59, who had worked in the creative industries, said she experienced stigma when accessing support, as a result of her age and a disability. Along with other older respondents, she felt work coaches saw her as incapable of doing anything other than entry-level work, particularly because needs workplace adjustments to accommodate a disability that was the result of a spinal injury.

Gary, 53, said he felt that when he walked into a building for an interview, he would immediately be seen as too old for the role saying, *"I've been to a couple of interviews and just get the impression that they're not really interested as soon as you walk through the door. Maybe, is it because of your age? They are probably thinking 'well, you're coming up to retirement, you know, we'll give it to someone younger'. I still want to work even when I reach state pension age"*.

This feeling was echoed among other interviewees, such as Henry, 55, who felt that he was often not put forward to work on specific machinery within his job and felt overlooked in favour of younger colleagues: *"[it] just seemed like they weren't interested anymore. Because of my age"*. Henry was eventually made redundant but described how the process of job hunting was a *"nightmare"*. He explained how when he signed up for Universal Credit and went to the Job Centre, he received little support in job-hunting and found they were only *"interested in how many jobs you've put down in your journal"*. He would be referred

to jobs that required physical labour, but due to his age often felt these were inappropriate and not suitable for him and were *"a young man's game"*. He eventually joined an independent employment agency and felt fortunate to now be receiving jobs that feel suitable for his age and skill set.

Ageism can leave some older people feeling they have no choice but to access work via agencies, due to the barriers to accessing employment through direct applications. Nathan had signed up to a 'zero hour' cleaning contract through an agency and travelled into central London five nights a week in the hope of picking up shift work at a large office. Often, he only managed to secure two nights' work a week, wasting time and money on the travel for the nights he wasn't selected to clean.

Older people who have been out of work for some time, or are attempting to find new roles, were reported to be worried about the digitisation of workplace systems and being 'left behind' by technology. Being able to keep up with a fast-paced and increasingly digital work environment was a concern for Sanah, who had a wealth of experience working in the health sector. As she got older, she found that she didn't have the same energy to keep up with the changes in technology and ways of doing things, even when training was offered.

The rigidity of the DWP system, especially for older people nearing retirement age also raised concerns for service providers who were trying to support people: *"I do have questions about some suitability, it was a lady yesterday, she's 64 who retires in two months, and she's been referred and it's being asked to come in to restart appointments for her you, because if they don't turn up to our appointments, they can face sanctioning and a loss of benefits"*.

Conny

Key words: 50+ years old; unemployed; looking for work; ageism

Conny is in her early 60s and has worked in secretarial jobs and at a large supermarket in the past. During her time at the supermarket, she felt that younger colleagues were put forward for certain trainings and that she wasn't considered because of her age which made her less motivated to stay at the company: *"So in the end, I didn't mind when I was made redundant. But trying to get back into full-time work is a nightmare."*

Looking for jobs since, she has experienced younger people with less experience being offered roles instead of her. She explains that whilst she understands that for some people her age, certain jobs will not be possible to do anymore, she is tired of automatically being treated as unfit for a job because of her age. She describes one experience of ageism when she signed up with an agency and asked to be put forward for a job that she was interested in. She says: *"I signed up for an agency to get a temporary job. They asked me my age and when I told them my age, the advisor said 'maybe that isn't the job for you. But if I hadn't felt fit for the job, I wouldn't have gone for it! Not all 62-year-olds aren't fit or strong."*

After years of search, she is disillusioned and has lost hope that she will be able to find a job: *"The thing is, unless you're young or middle-aged, you don't stand a chance."* Her frustration is seeing her trying to make the case for older employers, as she describes. *"There are pros of employing older people, we don't go clubbing anymore, we don't have childcare problems. So, we're more reliable, really."*

"There's definitely age discrimination. Once you get to a certain age, you're finished."

"They tell you that if you're on benefits it's because you don't go out there and look for a job but I've found that the people are really desperate. And you're putting up hoops, stopping you from getting a job. It doesn't make sense, there are so many vacancies and so many people looking for jobs, why are there any vacancies?"

"They want youth over experience. If you're over 50, they think why waste money on me if retirement is coming."

People from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds (including those with ESOL; insecure immigration status; refugees; and people seeking asylum)

While the term Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (sometimes abbreviated to BAME) is frequently used to describe this group, it includes an incredibly diverse group of people, with a range of experiences and needs. Interviewees shared both common experiences (such as racism) and experiences that are specific to particular groups (eg skilled migrants trying to find work in the UK for the first time).

People from BAME backgrounds, those with insecure immigration status, refugees, and those seeking asylum, shared many similar challenges when looking for good work within London. Racism was regularly experienced when job-seeking, sometimes overtly and sometimes in the form of more subtle comments and microaggressions.

Experiences of racism in relation to job-seeking can start early. An example from the research included Aneeta, who has a disability and felt that she was not given adequate support to succeed in school. She believed this led to teachers thinking she wouldn't go on to achieve much in life. When she was eighteen she had a meeting with a career advisor about future jobs. She described being shocked when her career advisor said, *"Hey, you're Muslim. You're Asian. I know what you could do. You should go back to your country and marry one of these men and let him look after you"*.

Racism and discrimination was described as a source of anxiety for many respondents of colour when applying for jobs. Some pre-empted this at the application stage and chose to tick the 'Mixed' or 'Other' box rather than 'Black' as it was felt this would result in more positive responses. Other service users spoke about low expectations and stereotypes of poor work ethic on account of their racial background. For example, Aisha, a PE teacher who wears a hijab, spoke about the lack of representation in her chosen field and the feeling in interviews that she wasn't what the schools were looking for: *"I'm from a Pakistani background, I wear a hijab, and I'm teaching PE…The way that people's reactions have been when I go into jobs, and they see what I look like, I think it has been [clear], the fact that I don't look like a typical PE teacher in terms of what I'm wearing in terms of my background"*.


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Some young people spoke specifically about the structural and network issues they faced in progressing in their chosen field of academia: *"as people of colour in a predominantly white environment, we don't have the networks or the necessary resources to get the jobs that, you know, our white counterparts will get, because there's some systemic racism and institutional barriers that we face in looking for jobs"*.

There are also cultural reasons that prevent people from some BAME communities accessing support to get into work. For example Jasminder described the shame felt when her husband had to go on Universal Credit. She believed this stopped members of the Sikh community she was part of from accessing the Job Centre and benefits they were entitled to. *"last year before we went into the pandemic, for a short time, my husband had to take Universal Credit. And because everybody else was doing it as well... that decision wasn't taken lightly. But it was something that we didn't share with other people in our family. Because from a cultural point of view, it was seen as quite shameful. And so I think a lot of people, maybe in my family, and in my friends network, wouldn't access the Job Centre, because the only way they got to the Job Centre, is if they were getting benefits. So then they're denied certain opportunities, like to get skills and look for jobs and that kind of thing, because it's not a route that we kind of go down"*.

Different barriers were faced by migrants who had recently moved to the UK and were now seeking work. Nasima told us about her experiences of searching for work in the UK, and how even though she had *"20 years of experience in my country […] and actually have degrees"* and a very good CV, she still struggled to find work in the UK as she had no experience working in the UK. She shared her frustration of being trapped in a situation where she could not find employment without first having work experience saying, *"How do you want me to work? If they didn't give me a chance to have an experience?"*

Nasima decided to find voluntary work to boost her CV and experience within the UK, while also taking time out to study and improve her English. However, despite these efforts, she has yet to find fulfilling work in London. She is working in a nursery but is frustrated at having a low-skilled, low-paid job. *"I go to the nursery just for two hours. And for nine pounds, which is low even with my experience."*
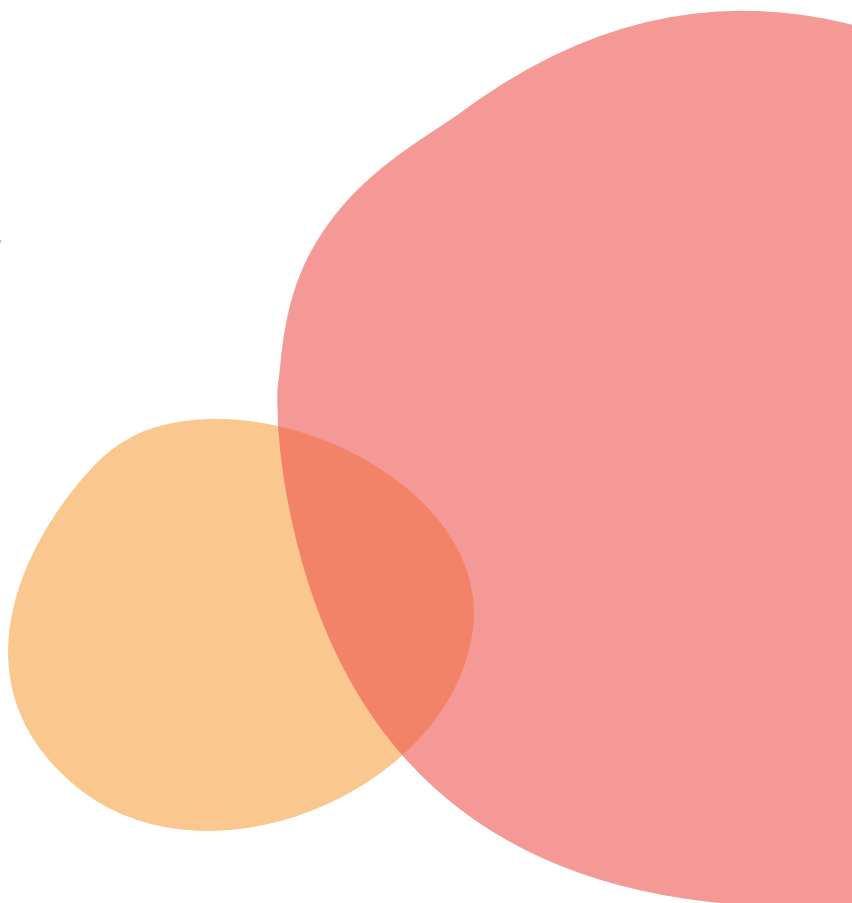
Frustration is often felt by migrants trying to get recognition for professional qualifications gained outside the UK. Ian, a current MSc clinical pharmacology student, previously practised as a pharmacist in Nigeria. He completed his qualifications in Nigeria and worked there for eight years prior to moving to the UK. On arrival, he was put on probation, meaning he is unable to work as a pharmacist until he passes certain protocols. He says, *"for me to practise as a pharmacist here, I have to undergo at least another one-year conversion programme, I have to do a lot of registrations, I have to do a lot of other things, I have to have so many skills. Why? Why all this?"* Due to this, he has had to accept a lower-paid job in a healthcare agency, working a job that *"doesn't fit my own professional skills"*. However, he struggles as he must battle for his shifts each week and is often left wondering whether he'll be able to afford to feed himself next week.

For those with English language needs, there are extra frustrations in trying to access jobs. Farrah, whose first language is Arabic, has struggled to find work within the UK. When attending the Job Centre, she often had to bring *"a friend or somebody who speaks English"* to help translate for her so she can fully understand what is being said. She also needed this help to complete her visa and assessments, which she found *"somewhat difficult to do alone"*. She is in the process of attending ESOL classes to help boost her understanding of English but has not yet found work in the UK as she wants to pass her classes before applying for jobs.

Finally, some people are unable to access any form of support in the UK due to their immigration status. Riley discussed how, as a migrant subject to immigration restrictions, they found it difficult to get onto work schemes to help support them into the workplace. They stated that it was *"really difficult, like [I] can't access them*

at all" and if they did manage to get onto a scheme *"partway through they're like 'oh, actually, we can't accommodate you because you're a migrant'"*. Therefore, they were turned away from receiving any help to get them into good work within the UK. They have managed to enter part-time work in an LGBT+ charity through their own connections.

There was also concern for women of colour who are minoritised, in more than one way, and have the added responsibility of childcare: *"But women of colour face double oppression, double discrimination, because they are not given opportunities, because they are women of colour… Because as a woman, most women because of their childcare responsibilities, they're not given the same opportunities as their male counterparts "* (Funmi, 25-34).
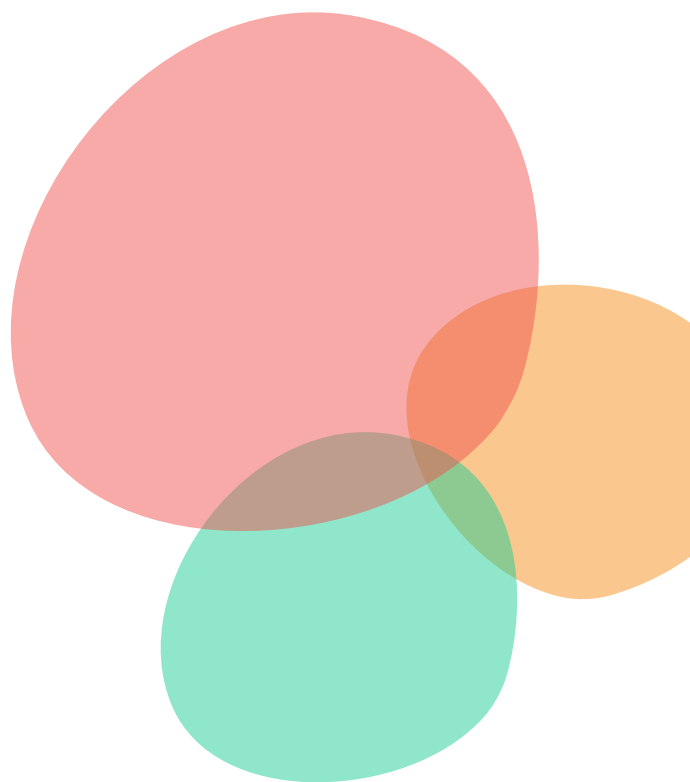
Nayyara

Key words: Woman returning to work; BAME

Nayyara is a professional who had built up a career as an occupational therapist. Four years ago, she went on maternity leave and gave birth to a son. She was planning to be on maternity leave for one year, but in the end didn't feel ready to send him to nursery yet after her maternity leave finished, so she decided to be a stay-at-home parent for some more time.

During this time, she reflected on her previous employment and how a previous employer had been unsupportive during a time when her mental health was suffering and how she had previously felt stigmatized at work for being an Asian woman. This made her consider a career change and she decided that whatever her next job, it would have to be with a considerate employer that understands her circumstance and puts an emphasis on employees' health.

Nayyara describes that the longer she was out of work, the more she started doubting her skills and expertise which cumulated in a mental health crisis with severe levels of anxiety which led her to seek the help of her GP.

"Maybe my anxiety also had to do with my particular work as an occupational therapist, going back to work for the NHS during a pandemic, having a young child and trying to negotiate hours around drop-off and pick-up and all of that."

Her confidence levels had reached rock bottom and she was not sure where to turn to for support.

"My biggest barrier to getting back into work was that I wasn't prepared for the knock in confidence. I had expected to have lost some confidence, but I didn't expect a knock like that, and my anxiety spiralled."

The GP helped her with her general mental health but neither her GP nor any other services referred her to any further employment support or advice. With her mental health improving, Nayyara remembered a breastfeeding network in her local community that offered activities she had previously attended. She saw an online course they were offering and decided to take part in it. The online course slowly helped her build some confidence which led to her taking up a volunteering role in the organisation after completion of the course.

"I did a short online course with a local breastfeeding network and later volunteered for them. This made me realise that I have skills and things to offer, that I can do this."

Without immediate financial pressures, she enjoyed the volunteering work and the way it helped her build professional confidence, but it also made her observe how many other mothers with a career who took extended maternity leave were in a similar situation, describing it as *"almost a given"* that mothers having to go through a period of volunteering, even if they would have preferred to immediately get back into paid work.

With her professional and personal confidence increasing, Nayyara started to look for paid employment and secured a part-time job with a charity that *"is big on wellbeing"* and offers the flexibility she needs as an employee with care responsibilities, for example by allowing her to work from home.

"We need to strip back to basics of support of entering the workforce, I needed help with my mental health before anything"
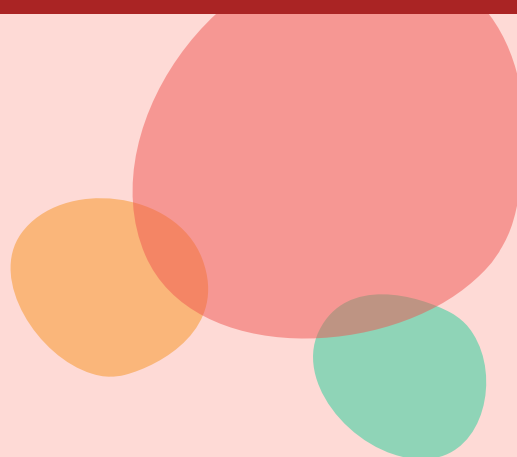
People with disabilities, physical, and mental health conditions

Having a disability can prevent individuals from finding good work or entering training. While there are legal implications for discriminating against a disabled individual, there are still many ways in which discrimination covertly plays out during the process of finding and gaining employment.

Support for disabled people entering the workforce begins in compulsory education, with a school's career advisor. Aneeta, a woman with a visual impairment, found her school was not able to support her to learn new skills, and did not expect her to enter gainful employment. She was determined to prove them wrong and taught herself a variety of skills, such as the ability to use a computer despite her limited vision.

Aneeta entered the job market, but eventually found herself receiving Universal Credit and attending Job Centre meetings. It was here that she encountered another barrier to gaining employment. During her scheduled meetings with a job coach, she was often left on her own, seated at a computer, to search for jobs. Aneeta has a progressive eye condition, which means that unless a computer has software designed to assist a blind person, she is unable to use it on her own. When she raised this with her job coach, she was sent to the job board in the building, and once again left on her own to look at the job applications. She says, *"I remember them sending me somewhere. And all the job adverts on the wall. How am I gonna see to read that?"*. She felt disrespected and mistreated during her appointments at the Job Centre and felt she did not receive adequate support and was often left on her own *"waiting around for people who were free"*. She often felt they had not considered how to support her needs

saying, *"you haven't thought about this, you should have been ready to meet, give me an appointment just for me. Don't just tell me to rock up"*.

People also spoke about the challenges of navigating a system that is rigid and not designed with flexibility in mind: *"Job Centres are very, like I said, very rigid, and they will, I think they'll ask me formal questions. And they interrogate me and make me feel like I'll have to do the, there's so many boxes and red tape that have to go over I don't know, like I said, I've got health condition. So it's like, I don't have to work. But necessarily, I need to do something at the same time"*. Fatima wanted to work but because of the DWP programme she was on, there were often more barriers to helping her progress into meaningful activity. Often it was recognised that this was due to a lack of awareness from work coaches about what some service users with disabilities were able to do.

When finding out about services that can support disabled people into good employment, respondents said they have to self-advocate and find them on their own. John said he had contacted numerous charities to find out his rights related to having a disability. He was tired of having to advocate for himself saying, *"I felt really alone in the journey [...] no one told me" (John, 26)*.

The process of finding information, for many disabled people, was described as incredibly draining. If a disabled person is lucky enough to gain adequate support in the process of finding work, they often lose this when entering the workplace due to a lack of knowledge on the part of employers regarding adjustments and accommodations that can be made to make the workplace more accessible.

It is often up to the disabled person to inform their employer what changes need to be made. However, if you are newly diagnosed or have a chronic, progressive condition, this can be hard, as you may not fully know what adjustments are necessary. Sam, 49, was diagnosed with MS eight years ago and is starting to find it harder to work. He says he has struggled to know how to engage his employer with his needs. *"I'm completely unaware of what's available to me… my employer has been no help whatsoever"*. Unfortunately, some described the easiest solution is to hide their disability from their employers, as they feel it will work against them and prevent them from gaining employment. Hailey, 46, said, *"I've had numerous times in my life where I have disclosed and then I've been let go, you know, so I generally don't tell employers"*. These people are left to hide and self-manage their disability in the workplace, which can be both challenging and draining, sometimes resulting in having to leave a role when 'masking' becomes too difficult. This was particularly the case for respondents with autism and ADHD.

It was identified that whilst there were legal protections in place for people with disabilities, in practice people still face discrimination but it often goes unnamed which prevents legal ramifications: *"It's happened to me many, many times be let go from a job, and they would never ever, in a million years say this is because of your disability, because they know you would sue them" (Sharon, 45-49)*.

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Aisha

Key words: person with disabilities; BAME; self-employed; looking for work; experience of racism

Aisha remembers her years in education as far from ideal. Teachers often overlooked her which she thinks was because they were not equipped to support a young person with a visual impairment. A little older, she experienced overt racism when visiting a careers advisor who said to her: *'hey, you're Muslim. You're Asian. I know what you could do. You should go back to your country and marry one of those men. And let him look after you.'*

These negative experiences made Aisha more determined to teach herself the necessary skills to gain employment and after learning essential computer skills, she found a job working at a till.

A lack of support from employers for her visual impairment made her leave the job and go to the Job Centre to be put on Universal Credit.
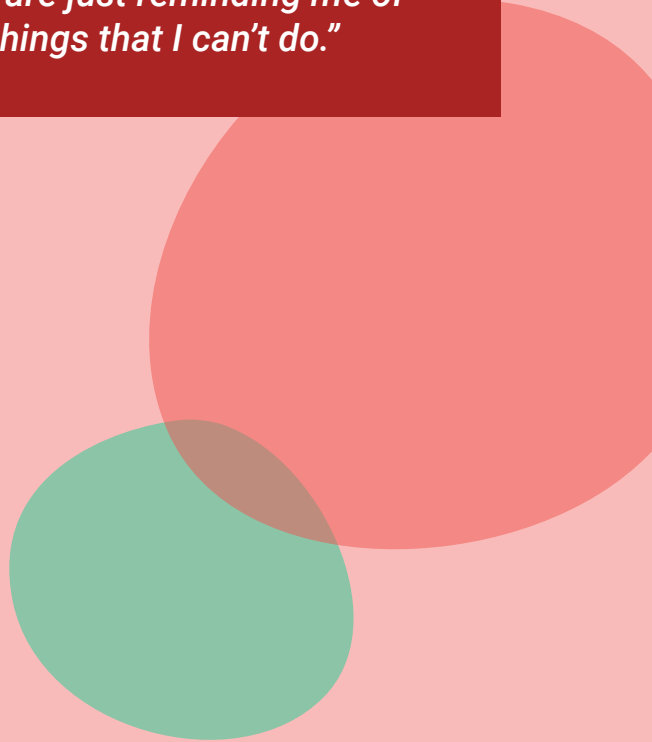
At the Job Centre, she experienced a service unable to provide the appropriate support for her as they asked her to look at a job board or do job searches on non-accessible computers. When asking for support for these tasks, she was often left for extended periods of time before she was given any support. Despite being described as job ready, she struggled finding a job able to make reasonable adjustments for her. As she knew of charities that support Visually Impaired or Blind individuals, she eventually became self-employed as an advisor for Visually Impaired or Blind people searching for employment.

After years of working for herself, she is now considering getting a full-time job, as it would be more consistent and secure than her current work. However, she is concerned about support and accessibility as she knows through her current work that it can be difficult to get the correct adjustments.

"At the Job Centre, I don't think they realised I didn't have enough vision to do certain things. It wasn't accessible. Even when I told them, they didn't fully understand."
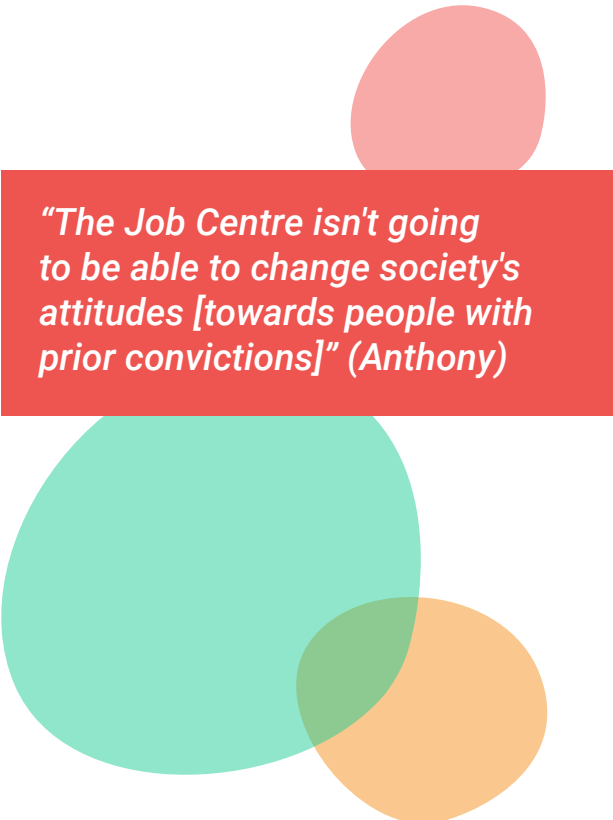
"I just felt like I was waiting around so long for people who were free. It was so degrading. I felt like 'I don't want your money, I don't want your help.' I felt like they are just reminding me of the things that I can't do."

People with experience of the criminal justice system

People with a criminal conviction may be restricted from taking up certain jobs, depending on what they have been convicted for. While this is an important measure to enhance the safety of communities who could be affected if the person convicted was to reoffend, it also creates barriers to finding employment for those who have experience of the criminal justice system.

Beyond 'hard' barriers such as DBS checks, people with prior convictions described how societal stigma made them feel uncomfortable explaining their circumstance to a work coach. As a result, none of the participants we spoke to had disclosed their conviction to their work coach at the Job Centre. This was either because of the stigma and fear attached to it or because they felt like disclosing this information wouldn't help them anyway as it wouldn't reduce barriers further down the line, and was unlikely to change employers' attitudes.

"The Job Centre isn't going to be able to change society's attitudes [towards people with prior convictions]" (Anthony)

Many had experienced not hearing back about an application after disclosing their prior conviction. Michael described his disappointment when finding out he was ineligible for a job after making it through several application rounds saying, *"I've had job interviews in the past and actually got to the last stage and then they ask for a DBS check and I can't do it."*

This experience had led to some participants only applying for jobs that they were confident would not require a DBS check. Michael continued saying, *"You go for the ones that are not going to ask for a DBS. So then you might see something that you really want to do. But then you might not want to take the chance because you might think you just might not get it."*

Many of the people the researchers spoke to were unsure which roles might be available to them, resulting in a possible waste of potential as they may not take up a role that best fits their skills, interests and experience for fear of rejection.

For those with experience of imprisonment, particularly for longer periods, they faced additional challenges reintegrating back into society, and the lack of support to do so was a considerable issue for many. Tommy said a lack of support when being released meant he was not able to rehabilitate for a long time. *"But each time I came out of prison, I came out to being homeless, I didn't have like, a place to stay, or support network around me. And so I came out to the same situation that I went in".*

Olu, who had been imprisoned for several years in the early 2000s, said he found it difficult to catch up on advancements in society once he was released: "When I came out of prison, like all of this technology, it wasn't as advanced… before I went into prison.'

Lastly, participants described employment and skills provision in prison and during probation as not matching their skillset and being too focused on basic skills. *"There was no more education after a certain level and that was quite basic. It was for people who couldn't read or write. I've got good maths and English" (Olu)*.
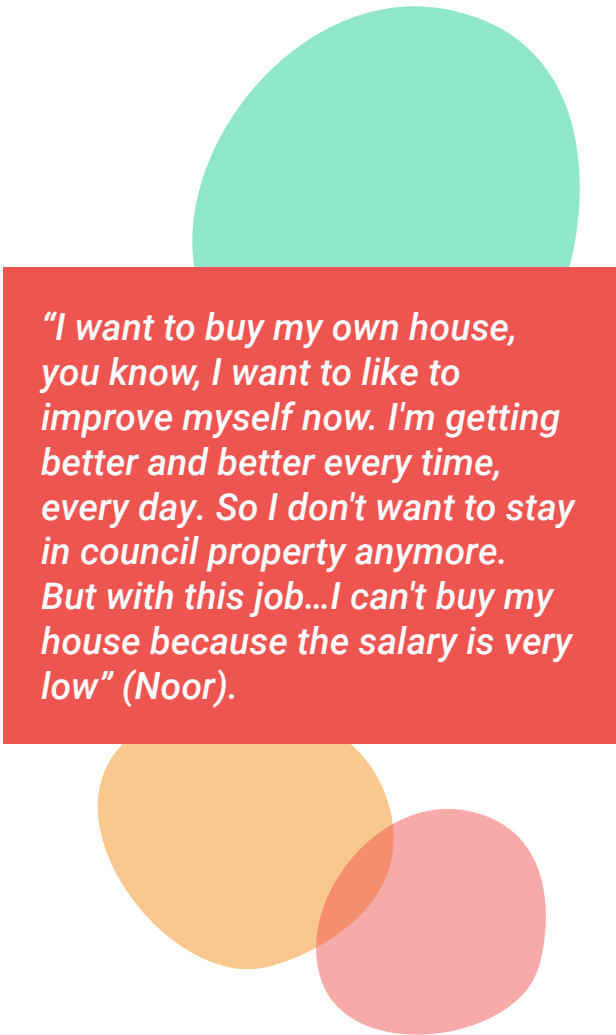
People with low skills and/or low wage

Service users with low skills, often without qualifications or with basic qualifications, can find themselves stuck in a cycle of low-paying jobs. While they may be in work, there are circumstances where that isn't necessarily the most financially beneficial option.

For low-waged service users, the cost of transport can take a significant chunk from their wages, as was the case for Vihan: *""In London, everything is just so expensive. And yeah, even to get to work... I'm paying at least like, half what I get from this Kickstart scheme to travel into work"*.

The impact of travelling costs was shared by Simon, a young person, who said it was a barrier to accessing employability support and stressed the financial burden of travelling to the Job Centre. While some service providers offered expense claim processes, it often relied on service users having disposable income in the first place and being able to navigate that system and wait for a period of time for reimbursement.

This cost-of-living crisis will impact those on low incomes more significantly. This was already a concern for Grace, who was struggling to make ends meet each month. She said, *"by the time I work, I remove council tax, lighting, gas... I don't have nothing to live, I'm just struggling to live"* This can impact on service users' ability to plan for the future, even if they have aspirations and are making steps in the right direction.

"I want to buy my own house, you know, I want to like to improve myself now. I'm getting better and better every time, every day. So I don't want to stay in council property anymore. But with this job...I can't buy my house because the salary is very low" (Noor).

Kerry, a student and parent, identified how the cost of childcare prevented her from returning to work: "If I was to get a job now, it wouldn't really actually doesn't make no financial sense, because you have to pay for daycare. And then they won't help you with your rent. So right now it's not. It's not, I'm not in a place to really get a paying job".

The cost of transport and other work-related costs, such as work clothing and childcare, can be significant barriers for those who are low-skilled and have lower levels of disposable income. These barriers affect access to jobs as well as training opportunities, which could increase their earning range. Furthermore, the focus of some service providers on jobseekers taking any job and subsequently not being entitled to employment support, can trap people in a low-wage cycle.

Conclusion: priority group experiences

From racism and ableism, to ageism, there is evidence that the system supporting Londoners into work faces a range of challenges. As a result, service users across the priority groups often struggle to access employment, skills, and training that responds to their needs.

For **young people**, a lack of work experience and challenges in gaining significant and relevant work experience prevents them from getting a foot on the ladder. At the other end of the spectrum, **older people** found themselves being disregarded by employers in favour of younger workers. Many service users experienced direct and/or indirect discrimination in relation to age, race, ethnicity and disability, but challenging this was found to be difficult, and self-advocacy was a job in itself.

People with a disability find it particularly challenging to find good work or enter training. When finding out about services that can support disabled people into good work, disabled respondents said they often have to self-advocate and seek out opportunities alone. Some find the easiest solution is to hide their disability from employers, as they feel it will work against them and prevent them from getting a job.

Young people with SEND find additional barriers as they leave supportive school and college environments and face challenges accessing work in the traditional manner, often without the knowledge of their rights and the support they are entitled to.

For **refugees and some migrant workers** subject to immigration restrictions, their status provided an additional barrier to work, alongside previous work experience and qualifications gained outside the UK not being recognised by employers. On top of this, having additional English language needs further reduced access to good and well-paid work. As a result, many had taken entry-level jobs, often in service sectors, and were struggling to make ends meet.

People with experience of the criminal justice system face unique challenges and experience significant stigma from society and employers, which inhibits their ability to reintegrate into society. This is exacerbated by poor employment and skills provision within the prison system and when going through the probation system.

Londoners with low-skills or stuck in low-wage jobs can find themselves trapped in a cycle that leaves them struggling to make ends meet. Whilst training offers an opportunity to upskill and enter higher-paid roles, taking time off work has cost implications that most cannot afford.

Service users in the different priority groups continue to face significant challenges in accessing employment and employment support, and often rely on personal and community networks for help.
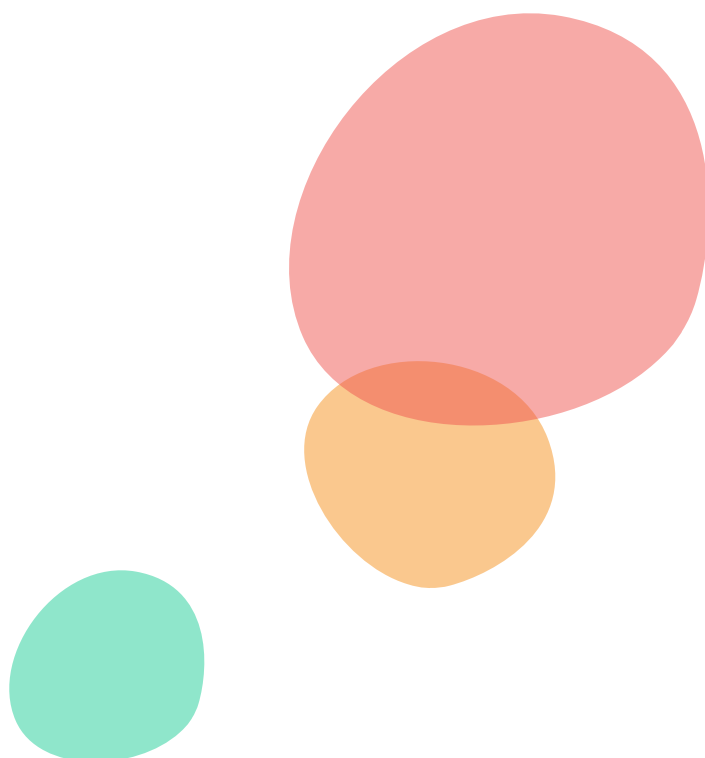
Grace attended parenting and ESOL classes before finding work

Grace came to London from Nigeria, where she owned her own hairdressing salon and employed a small team. When she moved to the UK, it was several years before she was granted leave to remain and the right to work. During this time, she was living in Greenwich and found out about different courses through leaflets posted through her door. She attended ESOL and parenting classes advertised through her daughter's primary school. As part of the ESOL classes the local authority provided childcare, which enabled her to attend. Whilst she felt her English was already good enough when she took the ESOL classes, the parenting course had a massive impact on how she interacts with her daughter and new baby. She also ended up attending interview preparation sessions delivered by Greenwich Local Labour and Business (GLLaB), which helps local people get training and matches them with local job opportunities. This gave her confidence about what to expect when applying for jobs once she was granted leave to remain. Grace now works as a cleaner in a large restaurant and is positive about her job:" *it's a good job. I've been there like two years... Yeah, two years and six months..."*

Grace is motivated to continue to seek out training opportunities, especially since her GLLaB has started training again, having paused during the pandemic. She aspires to do a health and social course so that she can work with children in the future.

Noor found work through personal networks

Noor worked in a community-facing role for 14 years before finding herself out of work. She tried to apply for jobs online but found it wasn't the most efficient way to secure a job as employers took a long time to respond after submitting an application. Often, she didn't receive any response at all. Noor went to the Job Centre but described the experience as *"horrendous'"*. *"Couple of years back I tried to look for a job and I went to the Job Centre, and I just felt like it was so dated. And the approach was so bad that it made me have anxiety. I could not go for it. I couldn't go for an interview or a conversation in a place like that."*

Noor reached out to colleges and universities for training and conducted her own online searches. She was able to attend some free courses provided by her local council but found the cost of most training to be a barrier as she had to pay for courses herself if she wanted to retrain in a different field. After her experience at the Job Centre and the futility of online job searching, Noor was able to find work through her informal contacts and network. Her friend helped her create her social media presence and supported her in applying for roles. For Noor, word of mouth was a more efficient way of getting a job.

Understanding the current landscape of employment and skills provision in London: service providers' perspectives

Service provider survey responses provided a 'snapshot' of the training, skills and employment services currently on offer to Londoners: reflecting the sample of providers taking part and the specific moment in time when the survey was live. While mapping service provision in this way dates quickly, as new services begin, and others end, it is valuable to contextualise findings and understand the prevailing landscape of training, skills and employment provision in London.

Types of services

A wide range of support services are provided to Londoners (figure 3). When asked about the categories of services their organisation delivers, the majority of responses (45%) indicate that support for jobseekers is most common, followed by education and training support (18%) and support to improve accessibility to the job market (12%). A few responses also mentioned the provision of general careers advice (9%), in-work support (8%) and other specialist support services (1%) (n= 888 responses).

| Service	Percentage
Support to gain new skills and/or improve skills	10.1%
Interview preparation/coaching	9.9%
Help with CV and job applications	8.9%
Signposting to local job vacancies	9.2%
Employment advice	9.2%
Careers advice	9.1%
In-work support	7.9%
Signposting to other job vacancies	7.7%
Support around apprenticeships	7.6%
Support and advice to employers	7.6%
Free/reduced rate training courses	7.5%
Support to access funds and benefits	4.4%
Other specialist services	0.7%
n/a	0.2%

Figure 2: Types of services delivered to Londoners

Base: all respondents (n= 888 responses) Q33. How would you categorise the employment and/or skills services your organisation provides? Select all that apply.

Mode of delivery

Services are delivered through a combination of online and in-person formats, with hybrid delivery models most prevalent (figure 4).

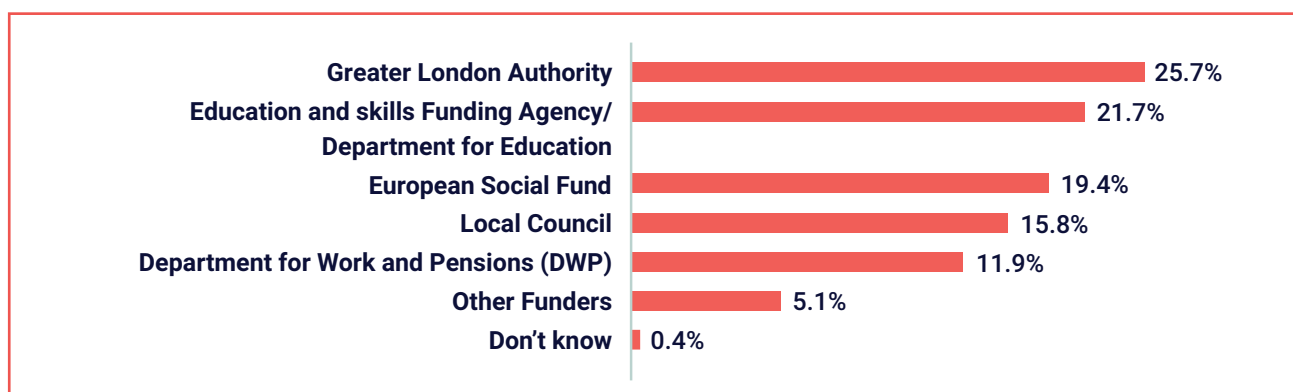**■ In-person** **■ Online** **■ Hybrid**
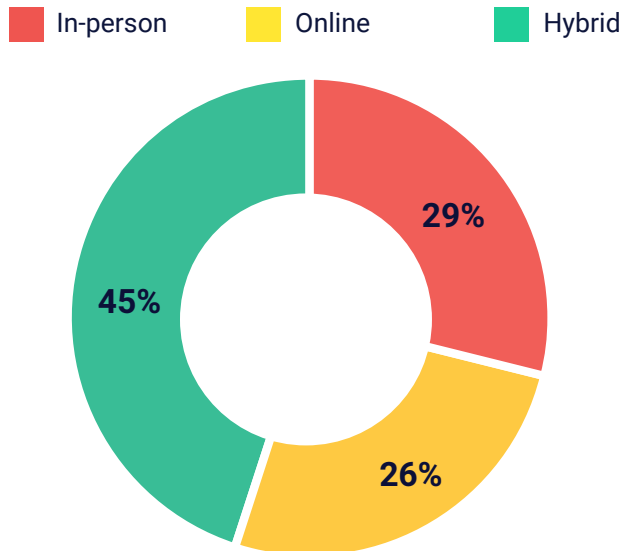
Figure 3: Modes of service delivery

Base: all respondents (n= 194 responses) Q2. How does your organisation deliver services? Select all that apply.

Funders

There are several key funders of employment and skills services across London (figure 5). Other funders include the National Lottery Community Fund, Office for Students, Heathrow Airport, and other private and third sector funders.

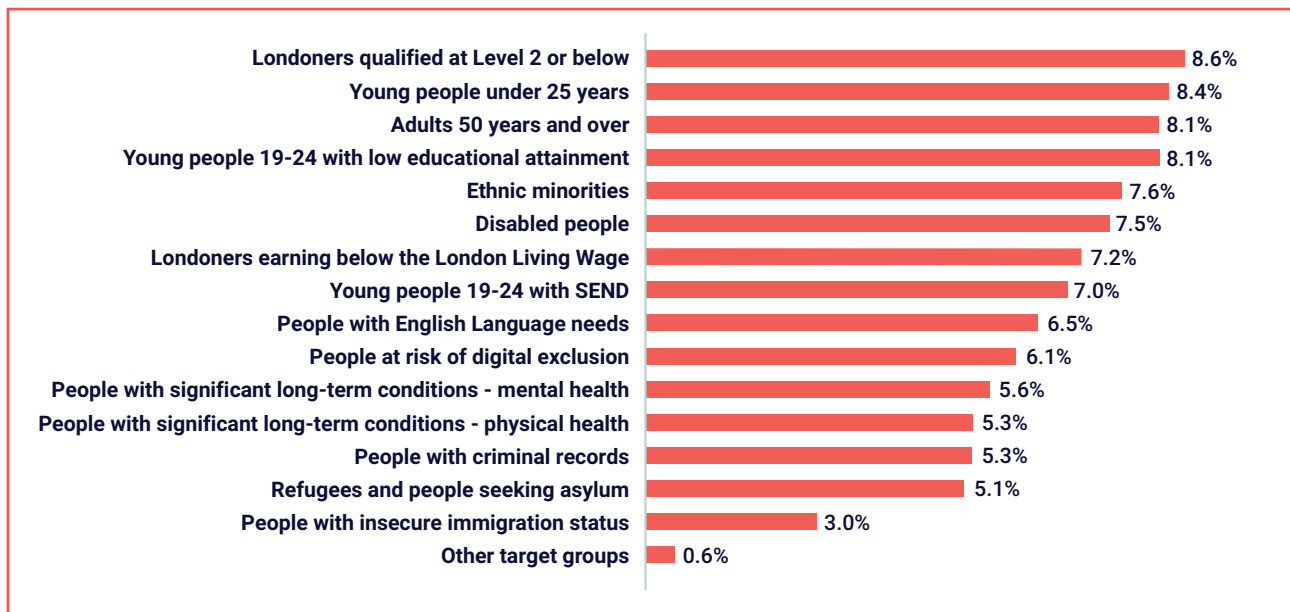|	
Greater London Authority	25.7%
Education and skills Funding Agency/ Department for Education	21.7%
European Social Fund	19.4%
Local Council	15.8%
Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)	11.9%
Other Funders	5.1%
Don't know	0.4%

Figure 4: Funders of employment and skills services in London

Base: all respondents (n= 252 responses) Q3. Which organisation(s) funds the services provided? Select all that apply.

Targeted support

While 68% of respondents' organisations provide services with a universal offer available to any Londoner (n= 101 respondents), targeted support services are widespread, and cater to a diversity of groups (figure 6). Other target groups include women, those with experiences of substance misuse, and individuals at specific levels of education or training (eg graduates).

Group	Percentage
Londoners qualified at Level 2 or below	8.6%
Young people under 25 years	8.4%
Adults 50 years and over	8.1%
Young people 19-24 with low educational attainment	8.1%
Ethnic minorities	7.6%
Disabled people	7.5%
Londoners earning below the London Living Wage	7.2%
Young people 19-24 with SEND	7.0%
People with English Language needs	6.5%
People at risk of digital exclusion	6.1%
People with significant long-term conditions - mental health	5.6%
People with significant long-term conditions - physical health	5.3%
People with criminal records	5.3%
Refugees and people seeking asylum	5.1%
People with insecure immigration status	3.0%
Other target groups	0.6%

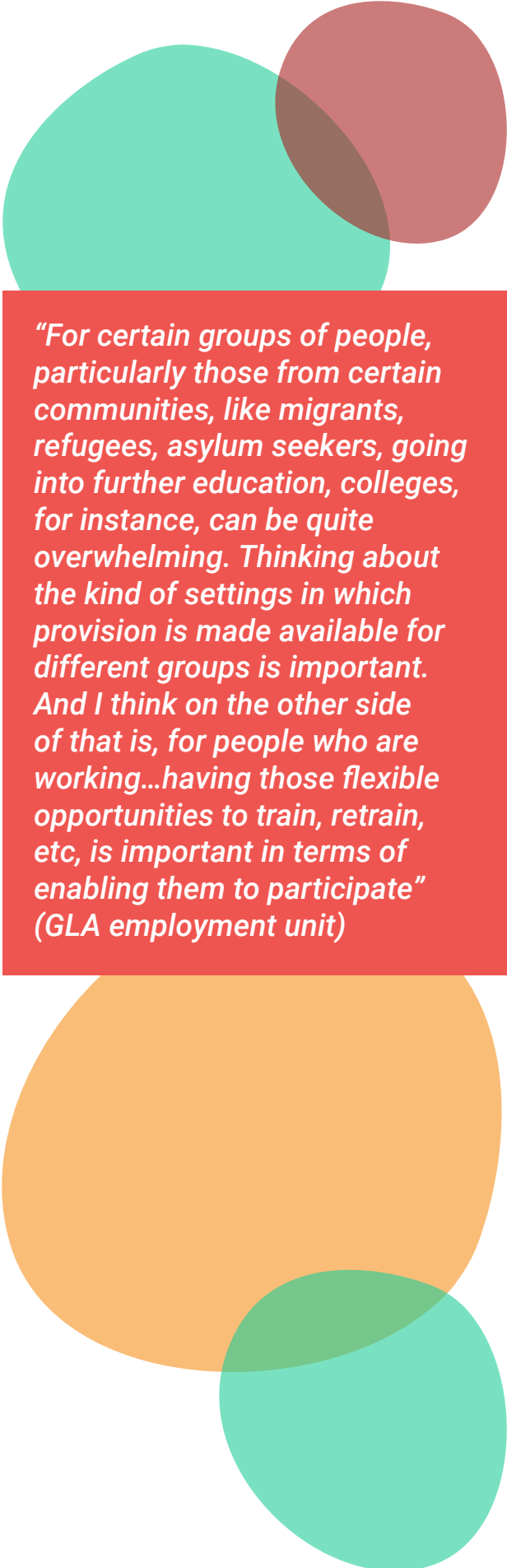**Figure 5: Provision of targeted employment and skills support**

Base: respondents whose organisations provide targeted support services (n= 625 responses) Q4. To which group(s) do you provide targeted support? Select all that apply.

Effective programmes

Providers were asked to describe up to five of the biggest or most impactful employment and/or skills programmes their organisation offered. Some key activities were identified:

- Training in a specific industry such as construction, HGV driving, healthcare, childcare and hospitality. Often these courses lead to a qualification such as a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card or Security Industry Authority (SIA) licence. Skills training, including English and maths, ICT, entrepreneurship and personal development training as well as training to gain confidence.

- Collaboration with other services. In particular, collaborating with employers either to do lobbying work or to co-create programmes.

- Specific programmes: Restart, Kickstart, Jets, Barclays Life Skills Programme, GLA Good Work for All, Construction Youth Trust, Heathrow Essentials Programme and European Social Fund (ESF) training.

Many providers said training and support tailored to specific groups was most impactful. This included training for people with English language needs, people with SEND, care leavers, single parents, young people who have committed or are at risk of committing a crime, and people with mental health problems. Sometimes training in specific skills for a group was mentioned, for example, self-employment training for people with disabilities.

"For certain groups of people, particularly those from certain communities, like migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, going into further education, colleges, for instance, can be quite overwhelming. Thinking about the kind of settings in which provision is made available for different groups is important. And I think on the other side of that is, for people who are working…having those flexible opportunities to train, retrain, etc, is important in terms of enabling them to participate" (GLA employment unit)

Exploring examples of good practice

Examples of good practise regarding integrated employment support include the MyGo initiative in Ipswich and the Working Well Early Help (WWEH) health-led employment support programme for residents in Greater Manchester.

MyGo is an integrated employment and skills programme that was developed to tackle youth unemployment in Ipswich. One of the key elements of this programme is the integration of a range of partners including Job Centre Plus (JCP) support, as well as careers, skills, apprenticeship and other local public and voluntary services. Young people are assigned a MyGo coach, who can refer them to the services they require based on their action plan. An evaluation of the scheme noted how positively participants responded to this process. The evaluation also emphasised that this referral process works best where coaches provide sufficient information about what the service provision would involve.
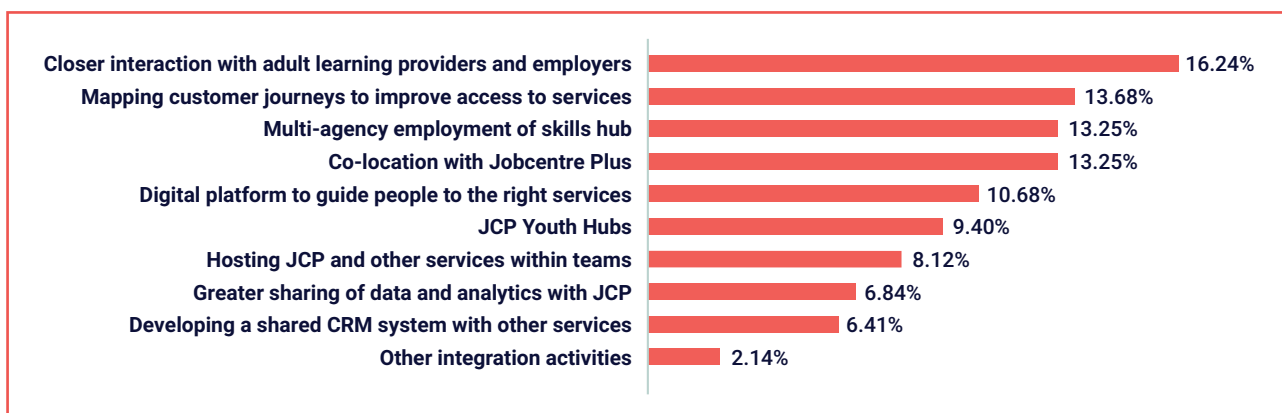
The integration elements of MyGo underpin the success of the programme, however the joining-up of provision has challenges. For example, the effective sharing of information and data was a challenge experienced across services which, to an extent, inhibited efforts to deliver coordinated and long-term support. In addition, there were funding pressures felt by all services that limited onward referrals [7].

The Working Well Early Help (WWEH) programme, in contrast, aims to support individuals with a health condition or disability, who have either recently become unemployed or taken medical leave from an existing job, back into sustainable work. As with MyGo, one of the key aims of this programme is to integrate local services, across work, health and skills, to ensure a seamless and coordinated package of support for participants. Once participants are referred to the scheme, they complete an assessment, and a decision is made about what support is needed. Their assigned key worker will then refer them to the services they require. An evaluation of this programme found that the most common forms of support used included vocational rehabilitation, coping strategies and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. The evaluation notes 'on balance most participants were positive about WWEH, including some who were highly effusive', with the range of emotional and practical benefits identified including emotional support, an ability to identify and address the causes of mental health issues and having an impartial source of information and advice on returning to work. However, some participants did flag that, at times, they felt that their referrals were not appropriate for them [8].

Current levels of integration

Most providers (79%) reported that their organisations are involved in improving the integration of employment and skills services, locally or sub-regionally (n= 80 respondents). This is being enabled through several different types of activities (figure 7).

Integration activity	Percentage
Closer interaction with adult learning providers and employers	16.24%
Mapping customer journeys to improve access to services	13.68%
Multi-agency employment of skills hub	13.25%
Co-location with Jobcentre Plus	13.25%
Digital platform to guide people to the right services	10.68%
JCP Youth Hubs	9.40%
Hosting JCP and other services within teams	8.12%
Greater sharing of data and analytics with JCP	6.84%
Developing a shared CRM system with other services	6.41%
Other integration activities	2.14%

Figure 6: Integration activities across respondents' organisations

Base: respondents say their organisations are involved in integration (n= 234 responses) Q16. Is your organisation involved in improving the integration of employment and skills services, locally or sub-regionally? Select all that apply.

Service providers' perceptions of integration

Experiences and perceptions of integration are mixed, and service providers generally feel the integration of services could be improved.

- Around one-third (30%) of providers see that 'there are formal and informal networks for sustained service collaboration'. Yet almost two-thirds (60%) either believe 'collaboration between services is ad hoc and/or limited' (44%) or 'provision of services is fragmented' (16%) (n= 80 respondents).

- Less than half (41%) say their service is already integrated or quite integrated through sustained service collaboration, to the wider employment and skills system in the area(s) they operate (n= 80 respondents).

- Where integration has happened, the majority said it was working well, with two thirds saying that integration was going 'very well' or 'well' (67%) and 21% saying it was working 'somewhat well'. (n= 33 respondents).

Where respondents say integration was working very well, well or somewhat well, most say this is due to having established partnerships, for example with employers or other services in the area. Others say it is due to being part of a network, such as a sub-regional working group. One person said integration was aided by the geographic proximity of referral services, and another said an effective strategic and operational taskforce had been set up specifically for this work.

Several providers mentioned gaps in the integration of their services and identified places where progress has been made alongside places where it is not happening, sometimes due to a lack of staff capacity with one respondent noting, *"We rely on working with the sub-regional partnership, DWP and our internal teams but would benefit from a full-time job" (Service provider survey*).

While service providers were often much more positive about the current system than service users, there was still a recognition that the system is not working as well as it should for a number of reasons. Through the service provider interviews, the fragmented nature of the system became much more apparent with comments on the informal nature of integration often relying on the networks of individual staff members. A service provider could be integrating well with others based on personal relationships, but the departure of a staff member could grind this to a halt.

Furthermore, the delivery of provision is often tied to funder-specific targets and key performance indicators, and is impacted by the political landscape. This means that changing political ambitions can suddenly pull local authority employability services in one direction, and shorter-term contracts mean larger providers prepare to exist for a three-year period before disappearing once their contract has finished. Smaller providers and community organisations are often filling the gap for 'hard to reach' groups but with limited resources and funding. The top-down approach means these people feel alone and, when they aren't able to provide what is a much larger task than they can resource, they tend to blame individuals and each other for what is a system-wide problem.

The appetite from service providers for a system that is integrated and working well is clear, and many talked about the potential for employment, skills and training providers to better collaborate. In order to do so, changes must be made so the focus is always on making the best decisions to support service users, rather than meeting numerical targets. These are often seen as inadequate measures of success, or as one service provider said at a co-creation workshop *"bums on seats is, unfortunately, still often the focus"*.

In spite of the challenges and limitations, there is evidence of good practice when it comes to integration, with many service providers having strong links to community organisations, colleges, charities, employers and external agencies to best support service providers.

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Case study – iWork, Islington Council

iWork is an Islington Council employment service that supports unemployed residents into the work that they want to do. Traditionally, iWork relied on printed publicity for residents to hear about their programme, but are increasingly utilising community outreach, including via staff who engage with harder to reach populations living locally. Originally, they worked with residents who were out of employment for a year but are now supporting people at different points in their journey to work. While they primarily focus on Islington, they do have a programme that reaches out into other boroughs.

iWork has several programmes targeting different priority groups with a range of partnership formats, including joint commissioning. There are specific referral networks with adult social care, social services and the Job Centre. While getting people into work they want to do is the primary focus, there is also a focus on bringing people closer to the labour market:

"a team that works with people who are very complex… maybe they experience gang membership, that kind of thing. And they kind of get some work experience. And obviously they do get some people into work, but sometimes that's just getting them closer"

Additionally, iWork benefits from recruiting staff with different lived experience so they can better support their service users.

"So we've almost got a strategy now that our contact agents have the lived experience, and it does seem to really help. So the first woman we had was absolutely outstanding, and she'd come to us from a mental health support agency."
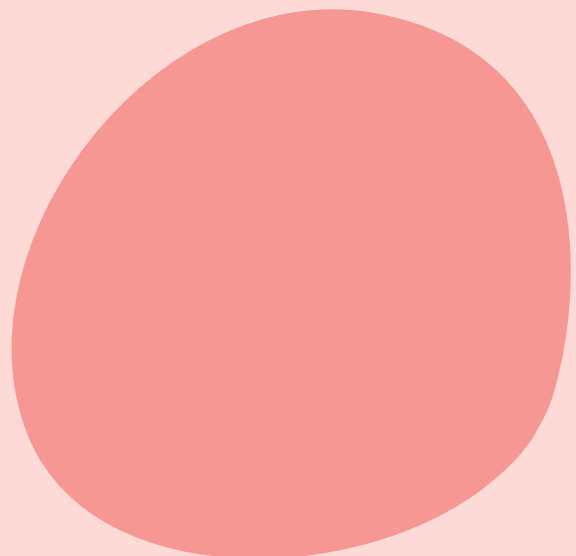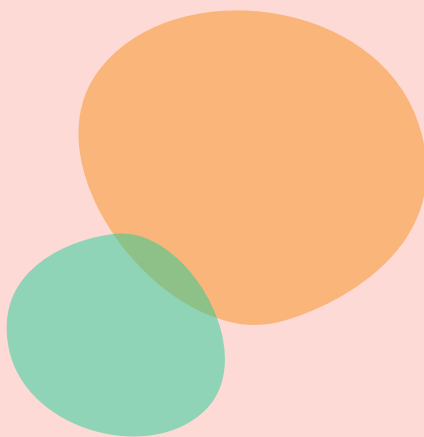
Case Study - Shaw Trust

Shaw Trust is a charity working with 3,000 employees and 700 volunteers across the UK to support people with complex needs into good work. They are the UK's largest not-for-profit social enterprise in the employment sector. Shaw Trust collaborates with West London Alliance to deliver support to residents seeking employment.

Shaw Trust delivers a number of programmes to support people into work, including the government-funded Job Entry Targeted Support (JETS) programme and the Work and Health programme. JETS started in 2020 as an immediate response to Covid and aims to support people who have been out of work for at least three months. The six-month programme focuses on helping jobseekers refresh and realign their skills for the current job market through support from a dedicated advisor. The Work and Health programme targets people who face more significant barriers in returning to the workplace, and who will require higher levels of support:
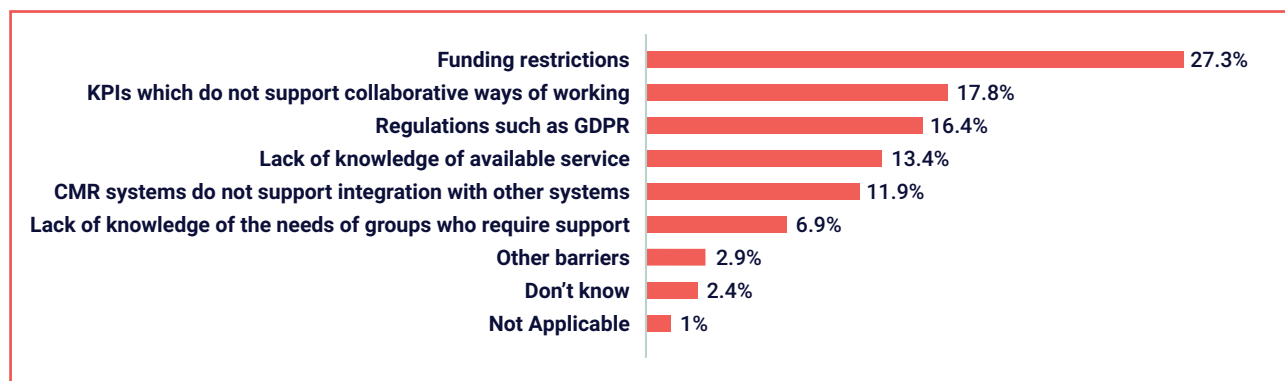
"The Work and Health programme… we've got individuals who come to us with various barriers, whether it be psychological, whether it be physical, whether it be actually, something's changed in their life"

Shaw Trust has partnerships with several organisations so they can provide targeted support to groups of people entering or returning to the workforce. These include care-leavers, refugees and settlers, and people with experience of homelessness. These partnerships help bridge gaps for service users, for instance those who might not have the right documentation, enabling them to access programmes run by the Job Centre. Collaboration with other community-based organisations like the Salvation Army, local food banks and libraries, means they can help reach jobseekers who do not traditionally engage with formal services. Their staff attend outreach events to reach communities who might not know of their service otherwise. By building trust they can refer service users who do not have national insurance numbers and other documentation, which other service providers are not able to engage.
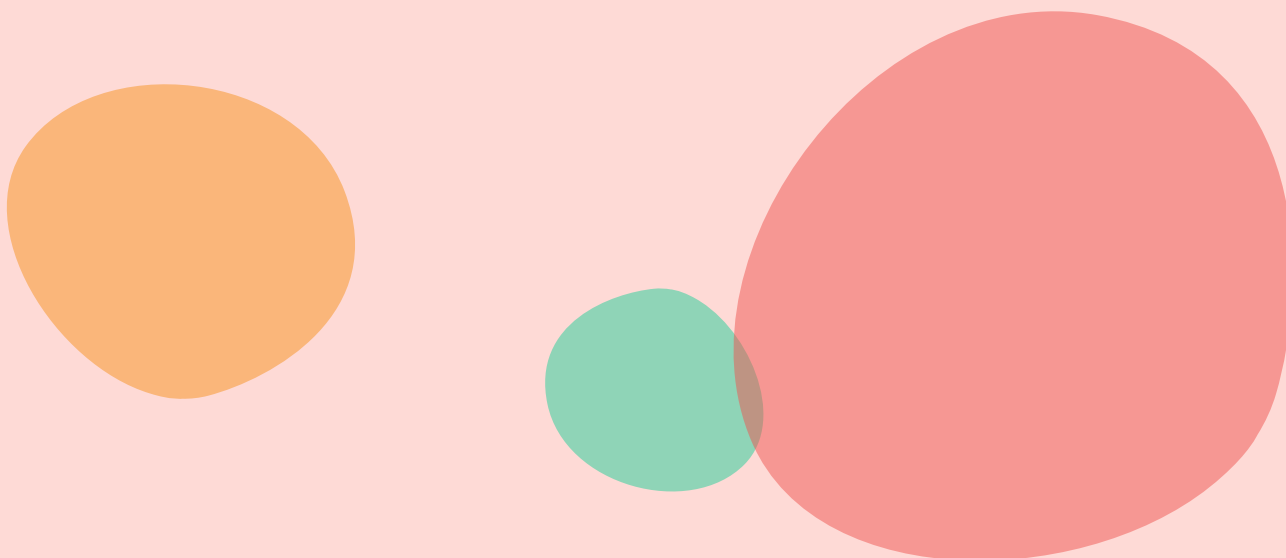
Barriers and facilitators to integration

Providers highlight several barriers preventing the effective integration of London's skills and employment provision (figure 8). Funding restrictions are the most commonly experienced barrier. Others include concerns and problems related to data-sharing, KPIs that undermine integration, competition, and a lack of willingness to collaborate by fellow providers, lack of knowledge about eligibility, and the need to rebuild relationships after staff leave.

| Barrier	Percentage
Funding restrictions	27.3%
KPIs which do not support collaborative ways of working	17.8%
Regulations such as GDPR	16.4%
Lack of knowledge of available service	13.4%
CMR systems do not support integration with other systems	11.9%
Lack of knowledge of the needs of groups who require support	6.9%
Other barriers	2.9%
Don't know	2.4%
Not Applicable	1%

Figure 7: Barriers to integration experienced by providers

Base: all respondents (n= 202 responses) Q21. Which of these barriers, if any, to effective integration does your provision experience? Select all that apply.

How are referrals working?

People seeking jobs and skills development enter services largely through self-referrals or Job Centre Plus. Other referral pathways include social services, council welfare support teams and housing providers. Less frequently mentioned sources of referrals included academia, local organisations, charities, voluntary groups and unions.
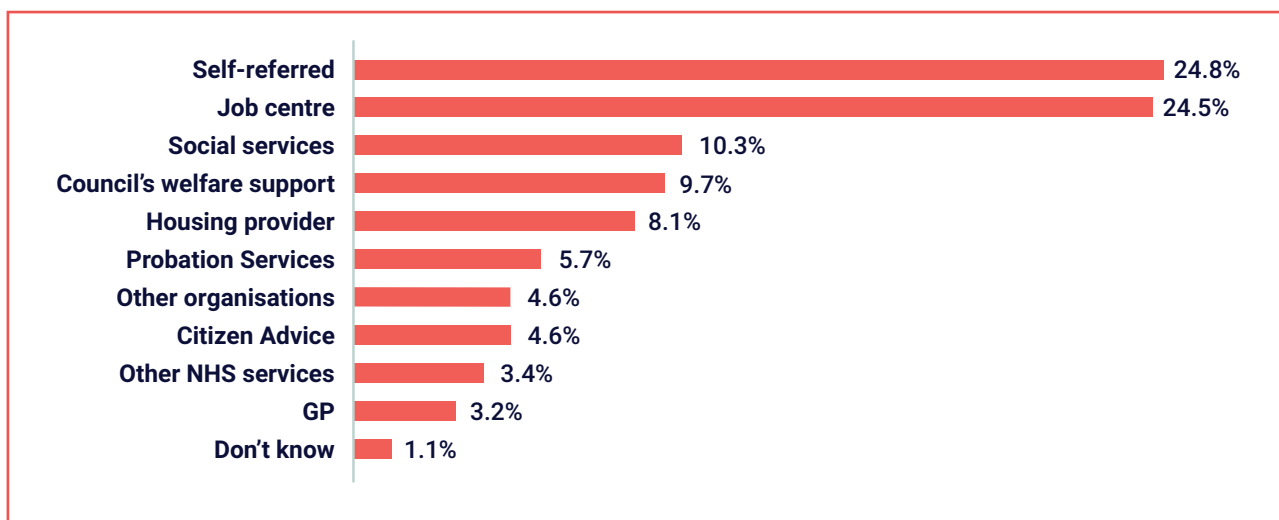
Figure 8: Mechanisms for referrals into respondents' services

Base: all respondents (n= 283 responses) Q10. How are people most commonly referred to your service? Select all that apply.

80% of service providers signpost their users to other employment and skills services (n= 83 respondents). Their responses (n= 99) suggest:

- Organisations frequently refer service users to education and training (20%), including universities, colleges and training providers. They also refer service users to apprenticeships (3%) and employers (8%).

- Service users are often referred on to further support, including to the Job Centre (9%), DWP (4%) or local authority (5%), as well as specialist services (9%) such as mental health support, debt management, and family and childcare support.

- Several providers mentioned referring users to local organisations (7%). However, the realm of these organisations was often unclear (eg referral to 'local community partners', 'local provision', or 'Borough-wide services'). Voluntary and community sector organisations were also mentioned (6%); as well as a number of specific organisations, including National Careers Service, Shaw Trust, and Ingeus (28%).

- Referrals tend to happen via email to known organisations or informal connections, or by signposting, providing information about opportunities or supporting customers to complete job applications. A few providers mention using a specific referral service or process, for example a nominated referral route or an Adult Education Service within their organisation.

Providers also shared a range of points of view on what facilitates a good quality referral. Their responses suggest these can be dependent on:

- The approach taken – most favour a formalised and standardised process, while some prefer personal referrals. Other elements highlighted include the working ethos of the practitioner and the importance of following up with a customer after referring them on.

- Being well-informed – this includes having a good understanding of the service user and their needs but also understanding the support and services available, so users can be matched to the right opportunity.

- The service user – some suggest that good referrals require a service user to be informed about the opportunity they are signposted to, as well as motivated and committed to it. In some cases, success will be shaped by the service user's preparedness or readiness for the job market.

- Working well with others – providers highlighted the importance of collaboration with other service providers, through which they receive or make referrals. They mention established partnerships, relationships with counterparts in other organisations, and being part of a network, as well as having data-sharing agreements in place. A few mentioned the importance of advertising opportunities to the right organisations, so service users can be signposted.

Where integration is working well, the service user should not feel part of a 'system'. The Head of Employment and Skills at a local authority described this as hiding the 'wiring' from service users, so they have a seamless transition through services they are referred to based upon their needs. This is achievable when referral systems work together without the service user needing to chase or feel as though they are being sent from one place to another.

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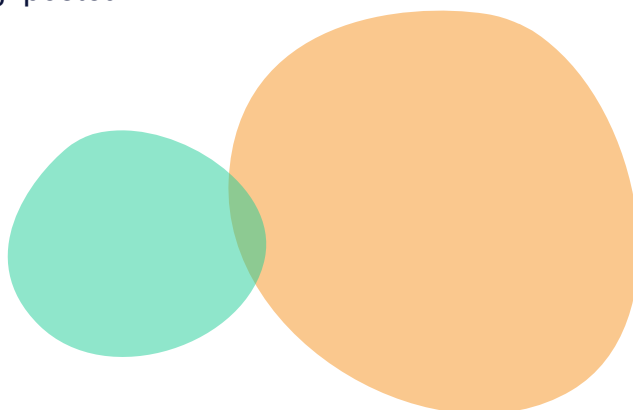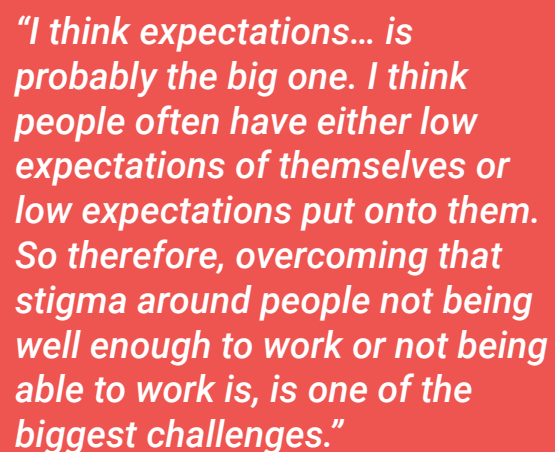
Attitudes and experiences of service providers

Service provider attitudes towards service users

For some service providers, the success of a referral hinges on both the attitude and abilities of the person being referred.

In addition to support, attitude and abilities are also often seen as the key to unlocking employment. A lack of English language skills, for instance, can be seen as a major barrier to accessing a job. Lacking essential or 'soft' skills, such as confidence, can also hinder a person's journey into work.

Finally, some say service users themselves can lack motivation or can be seen as too picky when it comes to jobs. One employment coach described a conversation with a jobseeker who didn't want to take a job at a fast-food restaurant because it was not in line with her career aspirations and previous experience. Her coach explained that she should take the role as a steppingstone into the work she wants in the future saying, *"it's a job, then it's a career"*. However, the lack of in-work support makes it hard for jobseekers looking to move into higher-skilled work to make that transition. This can result in service users being stuck in low-paid jobs with few opportunities for progression and development, increasing the likelihood of in-work poverty. The approach of getting service users to take any job without a package of ongoing support does not align with getting people into 'good work'. Changing this focus to 'good work' would not only improve the outcomes for service users but also reduce the likelihood of cycles of unemployment and improve relations between service users and service providers.

Kylie works for a charity supporting people with disabilities, mental health challenges and neurodiversity into sustainable employment. She said the biggest barrier to getting her clients into work was confidence and self-belief, with people being 'stuck' in a negative mindset that prevents them from embracing opportunities.

"I think expectations… is probably the big one. I think people often have either low expectations of themselves or low expectations put onto them. So therefore, overcoming that stigma around people not being well enough to work or not being able to work is, is one of the biggest challenges."
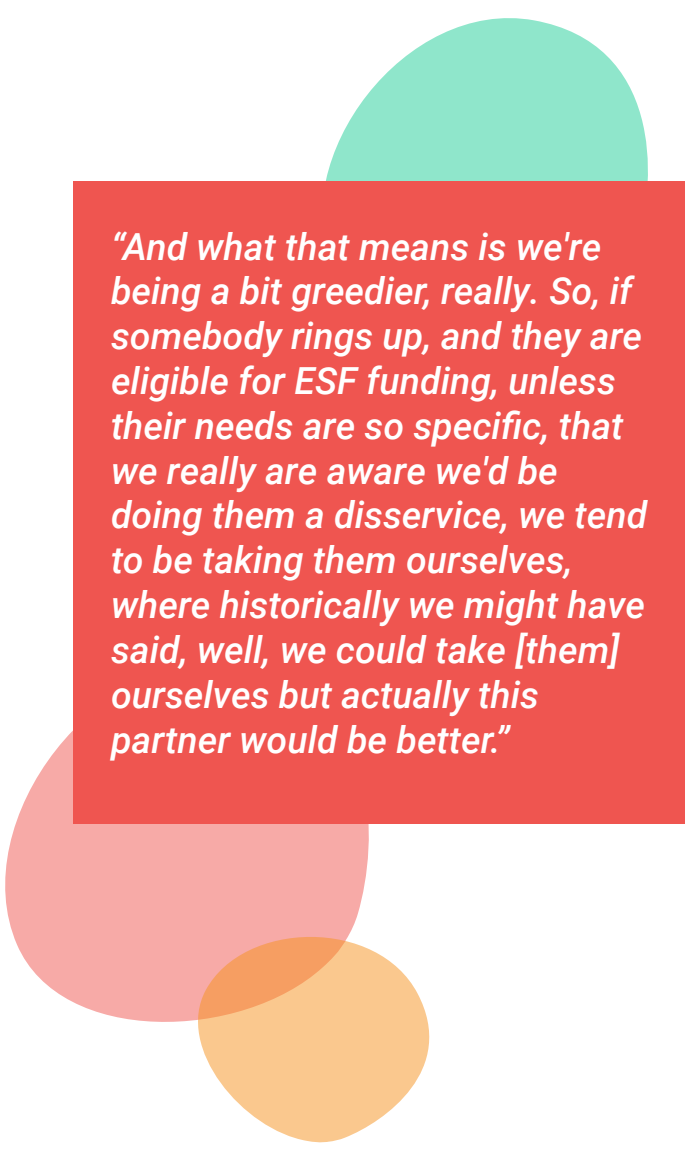
When describing service users, service providers used various terms including 'customer', 'client', 'claimant' and 'community members'. The term they used often reflected the type of service they provided but also hinted at their attitude to jobseekers, with 'claimants' sometimes described in negative terms and more human-centred services referring to their users as 'customers'. Shifting away from negative language can improve the relationship between service users and service providers. By using the terms 'customer' or 'client', a more positive framing can reduce the stigma associated with accessing employment and skills support.

Pressures facing service providers

A target-driven culture

The biggest challenge in providing a good quality and integrated service to their customers is delivering against unmanageable targets and having a caseload that forces rushed appointments, or perversely incentivises them to retain service users, rather than refer to other organisations.

The head of an employment and skills service described how funding had influenced the way they collaborated with partners, particularly where targets were high and inflexible:

"And what that means is we're being a bit greedier, really. So, if somebody rings up, and they are eligible for ESF funding, unless their needs are so specific, that we really are aware we'd be doing them a disservice, we tend to be taking them ourselves, where historically we might have said, well, we could take [them] ourselves but actually this partner would be better."

Focusing on helping jobseekers into 'good work' is difficult when targets set by funders are concerned with getting them into 'any work'. Unrealistic targets can also lead to high-pressure work environments, staff burnout and turnover. One woman who had formerly worked in a frontline role at a council-run jobs service described how, as she was seen as a high performer, she was given more and more customers to support. As a result, her caseload became unmanageable, and she ended up quitting her job due to stress. In a discussion with a range of service providers from across London, a group talked about staff "quietly quitting" because of the pressure to deliver against targets. A staff member from a service provider said, *"the focus on KPIs impacts staff confidence and sense of accomplishment… we should have KPIs but not excessively… [we need] less time on paperwork"*.

Service provider staff also explained that KPIs prevented people from upskilling, and some had withdrawn from training courses due to the need to get on with the day job of "delivering against targets".

Alongside high caseloads and a culture of blame created when targets are not being met, service provider staff also described impacts on mental health from having to offer psychological support to customers experiencing challenges in their own lives. While some service providers offered employee assistance programmes, it could be hard to find the time to take these up when pressure to meet targets was high.

One staff member said having some flexibility in targets and outcomes would stop the 'revolving door' of jobseekers coming back repeatedly, enabling the provision of tailored support and ensuring that issues around basic needs (for instance, related to housing or health issues) were addressed before jobseekers were pushed into jobs.

How success is measured

Many service providers described frustration with how success in programmes is measured, with outcomes heavily focused on whether someone gets into work or reaches a threshold of earning in their first few months of a new role.

Service providers who attended the pan-London workshop suggested that expanding the focus of measurement to include qualitative measures to capture whether customers have found good work would be a better way to evidence the effectiveness of support. This could be collected through longer-term in-work follow ups, as normally tracking a customer's progress ends once they are in work. *"The only thing I would probably need to do better is to measure when people go into employment." (Skills Adviser in Waltham Forest)*

Similarly aiming to reduce the number of numerical targets and create new ways of measuring success, like 'the quality of job referred to' rather than output measures like 'number of referrals', would increase the value placed on offering holistic, tailored support to customers.

One service provider said, *"there is a KPI attached to everything"* explaining that targets sometimes hinder providing personalised support as they don't reflect the real journeys that people go on when becoming work ready. A Partnerships Director at an Adult Education College concurred that "KPIs do not always reflect the reality of outcomes." This reality is that for some customers who access training or employment support services, getting a job may not be a realistic outcome during the timeframe they are eligible to access support. This is especially the case for those who have been out of work for a long time.

"And for some, you know, just be dipping their toe back in after a very long time or an illness or, you know, it's been at home with their children for three or four years" (Programme manager for local authority jobs service)

A job adviser at Ingeus described her work to support women who speak English as a Second Language who had been referred after accessing benefits during the pandemic. She said that normally customers would be expected to find a job after a year of support, but for women who were still building English language skills, they may not have the confidence to apply for jobs at the point where they 'graduated' from Ingeus support.

"So my perfect outcome would be to see a participant progress within the time that we've had them. So they may not be in sustainable employment. But if they have come a long way, and they're able to, you know, show confidence that they may not have done when they first went to the programme, or they're able to be independently active and have sort of goals in mind of coming on to the programme or aspirations, I think that would be a successful outcome as well."

Expanding measures to better reflect a person's journey into work

The idea of personalised outcomes, or a set of outcomes you could draw on to measure progress for everyone was an idea discussed in workshop sessions. An Employment Development Manager from Skillsbuilder said having, *"Clear outcomes which are practical and applicable to the stage of employment for that participant"* would help service providers offer more tailored and effective support as they would not solely be measured on whether they got a customer into a job.

An employee at Southwark Works described how they had introduced four questions to track the wellbeing of people newly registered for employment support. This enabled them to better capture the impact of coaching and mentoring on a customer's progression, which was not measured by 'hard' outcomes.

A member of the GLA Skills and Employment team said the GLA was measuring both social and economic outcomes of success for jobseekers, whereas central government was interested only with economic outcomes, such as the cost of getting someone into work. "So there is a bit of a challenge in terms of the Mayor's priorities and those of central government who hold the majority of the funding". This tension was present where other service providers were reporting outcomes to DWP or larger scale programmes like ESF, alongside trying to capture success according to their own understandings of customer progress.

"So there's just four questions about how happy and confident people are feeling about getting a job…and then they can be asked again in a few months time, and then asked again, and a few months after that, just to see whether or not any of the interventions that are happening, or things that are happening in their lives are improving, really, and, you know, feeling their wellbeing is being improved, as well as the job prospects."

The Shaw Trust had also found ways to capture a range of quantitative and more qualitative measures when supporting customers into work. Whilst they report success to DWP-funded programmes based on getting someone into work and then earning their first £4,000 in income, they also carry out mid-point reviews to understand what might be stopping people from finding work. Employment advisors see this as an opportunity to flex their approach based on a qualitative discussion, for instance changing their support manager or the organisations they are being referred to for tailored support. Despite having internal processes to allow flexibility in the support offer, one staff member explained that measuring indirect outcomes on a person's journey into work was still not seen as strategically important.
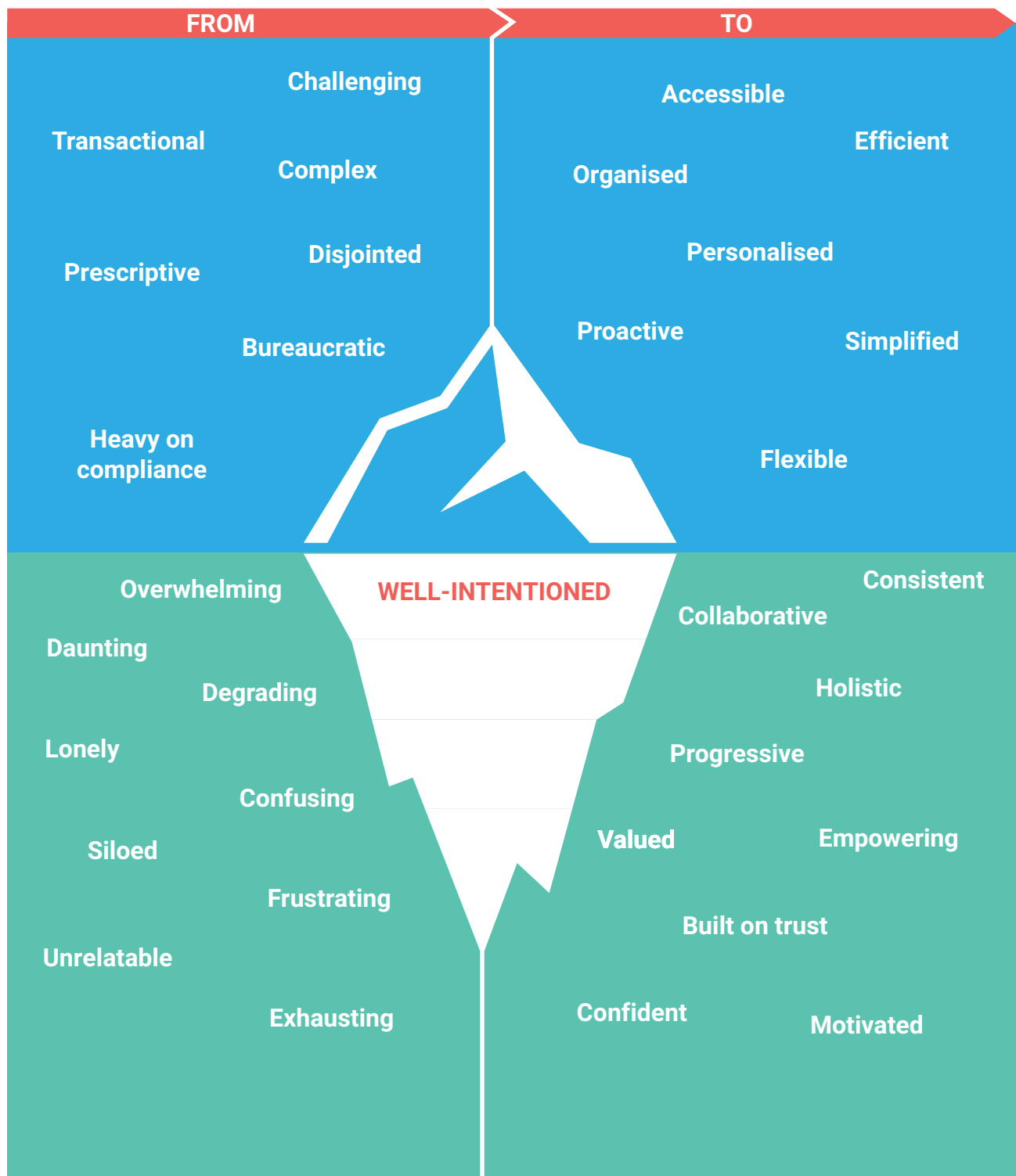
"...if you leave me but if you haven't found work, but you leave me in a better place to manage your depression. I can't really measure that. I can't really quantify that. I can't really say 'this person says I can manage my depression better'. But we don't ask those questions. So that to me is probably unquantifiable... probably never be able to track it. But it's always now in my head. You know, if they're leaving 10% more confident then actually we have done something right. But I can't quantify that in a number... if I gave that to my boss she'd be like 'really!?'" (Shaw Trust)

Length of funding and support

Longer-term funding for programmes was identified by service providers to achieve greater impact. Restart was described by one as having a realistic timespan (30 weeks), compared to other short-term courses. Support for some jobseekers takes at least a year and having clear milestones along this journey could capture progress beyond simply getting someone into a new job. An ambitious outcome for some customers might be securing a first interview or finding a volunteer opportunity. For some who have been out of work for a long time, or who have complex needs, getting closer to the job market by the end of a programme of support is an achievement. However, using current measures of success, there is no way to capture this progress. For those who have mental health needs but have never accessed support, making a connection to a service and attending appointments would be a huge step towards employment. Again, this is not currently captured in funder metrics. One service provider concluded that, with funder targets, it feels like "if it's not a job, it doesn't get measured".

What describes the experience for staff and users now, and what is the experience we want to move towards

Service providers in sub-regional workshops were asked to describe the current employment and skills system, from the perspective of a service user, in one word. The words on the left describe the system as it is now, with words on the right representing how it would feel if it worked effectively for Londoners. Words under the iceberg represent how the system makes users feel.

FROM	TO
Challenging	Accessible
Transactional	Efficient
Complex	Organised
	Personalised
Prescriptive	Disjointed
Bureaucratic	Proactive
	Simplified
Heavy on compliance	Flexible

WELL-INTENTIONED

Overwhelming	Consistent
Daunting	Collaborative
Degrading	Holistic
Lonely	Progressive
Confusing	Valued
Siloed	Empowering
Frustrating	Built on trust
Unrelatable	
Exhausting	Confident
	Motivated

Identifying gaps and opportunities for London's employment and skills system

The following section explores the current state of service provision as well as areas of opportunity where improvements could be made to enhance integration, enabling more people to get into good work. A combination of co-creation workshops with local partners in each sub-region, a Pan London workshop and servicer users' perspectives have helped inform this section. The findings are organised under three key areas where challenges, gaps and opportunities for integration were identified by service providers:

- Putting people at the centre
- Strengthening referral systems
- Enhancing collaboration between services

These areas act as headings for six core recommendations made later in the report:

- Putting people at the centre
  » Making targets and funding more human-centred
  » Offering more effective support to customers
  » Building skills and knowledge among service providers

- Strengthening referral systems
- Data pooling and information sharing

- Enhancing collaboration between services
  » Working more closely with employers
  » Strengthening community connections

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1. Putting people at the centre: gaps and challenges

Putting people at the centre: gaps and challenges

Being customer-centred emerged as a key need and priority for the integration of employment support and skills provision in London to work. Most respondents in both service user and provider groups, however, describe a system that currently adopts a 'one size fits all' approach. As a result, service users' individual needs are often not being met. Service providers say this can be due to pressure to meet numerical targets from external funders.

The current system takes a 'one size fits all' approach
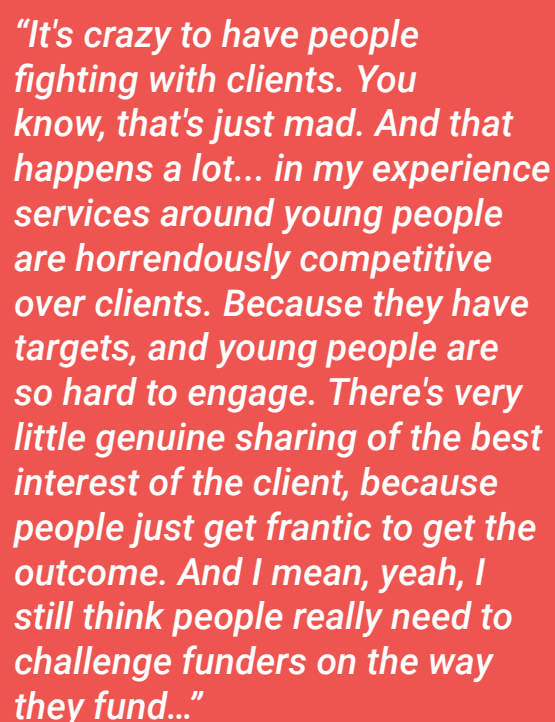
Many respondents included in this research had accessed Job Centres when trying to find work. They described the Job Centre as rarely taking a customer-centred approach and felt that work coaches had to start the job seeking process from scratch, rather than understanding and building on existing skills. This was particularly felt by those who spoke English as an additional language, who were repeatedly referred to ESOL or numeracy courses, despite having demonstrated sufficient English and numeracy skills to meet recruitment requirements for jobs on offer.

Some service users said work coaches didn't listen to their interests and sometimes failed to remember their name. Latreece describes how their specific circumstances weren't taken into account: *"I was being referred to a Christian charity which was in conflict with being LGBTQ"*.

Unsuitable referrals reinforce the feeling that support is not personalised, and that skills and experience are overlooked and undervalued. As Abdul describes, *"I explicitly told them I didn't want a cleaning job but that was all I got referred to"*.

There's a moving target for support

Work coaches expressed frustration that targets and priorities are constantly changing, with one describing how the big push to support young people via Kickstart suddenly shifted to post-Covid recovery support. Staff working within service providers also described how targets impacted their ability to integrate with other providers. The head of a local authority employment support service said targets set by funders left them competing with other local support providers for clients:

"It's crazy to have people fighting with clients. You know, that's just mad. And that happens a lot… in my experience services around young people are horrendously competitive over clients. Because they have targets, and young people are so hard to engage. There's very little genuine sharing of the best interest of the client, because people just get frantic to get the outcome. And I mean, yeah, I still think people really need to challenge funders on the way they fund…"

People interviewed feel devalued by the Job Centre and other authorities

A feeling of 'it's me versus the DWP' was common among respondents' experiences with Job Centres and several described taking friends or family members along to advocate for them. Those with additional needs or English language needs sometimes took a relative to help interpret or offer support with understanding written forms or terminology.

Visiting the Job Centre was stressful for many respondents. This was particularly true for those who had found benefits and government systems hard to navigate. Jim described his experience of interacting with the Job Centre as "terrifying", describing his fear that they would sanction his benefits if he did not comply.

"The Department for Work and Pensions used to terrify me. I never found them welcoming, engaging, caring, and empathetic, those kinds of things. To me, my experience was always the punitive measures, you know...I found it quite difficult to explain to them that I was having these difficulties and found it difficult to explain to them. But I never thought they really heard what I was saying...it was never, never about the people. [It was] a one size fits all approach. And I found that quite overwhelming. And I always worried that they would take what little I had off of me... it was more like me versus them".

Matthew, 53, complained about having to see a different person every time he visited the Job Centre saying:

"It's a bit like having a family doctor who sees you for years. But then you go back and you see a different locum every two or three weeks. There's no relationship, there's no knowledge, no backstory. And as other people said, they're probably under pressure as well" (Matthew, 53).

Lack of staff expertise frustrates jobseekers

Across the sample, Job Centre staff are perceived as having a lack of appropriate training or experience to support service users competently. Some lament the lack of specialist knowledge, others feel the turnover of staff is too high to retain knowledge.

William described his Restart advisor as lacking sufficient experience: *"My Restart advisor [is] very friendly and everything, but I mean, she worked at a travel agency, and was made redundant when Covid happened, the same as me. [...] There's not really much that she personally can tell me"*.

Alongside positive experiences, one older respondent said Ingeus' young staff were more enthusiastic and engaged than JCP staff but lacked the knowledge to match higher-skilled candidates to specialist roles, for instance in the creative industries.

There is stigma associated with job seeking and accessing benefits

"I've been to a Job Centre and honestly, it's quite horrendous… I just felt like it was so dated. And the approach was so bad that it made me have anxiety. I could not go for it. I couldn't go for an interview or a conversation in a place like that… they just treated you like a number; they didn't really have compassion, they just wanted the work done… it wasn't very nice. I just thought, like, with Job Centre, they just looked down at it sometimes" (Noor)

Jobseekers interviewed described feeling "judged" and "looked at" when they attended the Job Centre, saying it was not "a neutral environment" which made it an unpleasant place to visit. For some, there was such a stigma associated with being on benefits and visiting the JCP that they avoided telling family members, which resulted in an even greater feeling of being unsupported and alone.

Others simply saw no added value of the Job Centre and they would only go when they had to. Sanjay believed jobseekers searching for work via the Job Centre were so stigmatised that some employers avoided advertising their jobs there: *"that's why employers, and I've been on that side of the fence as well, stay away from the Job Centre, from DWP. It's almost stigmatising [the people looking for jobs via the JCP]"*.

Equality, diversity and inclusion within the system needs strengthening

Respondents of racial minority communities and those with disabilities - whether physical, learning or related to neurodiversity - all described facing stigma and discrimination when trying to find and access jobs. This happened when seeking employment support as well as when in interviews or in employment. More detail is included in the section above on 'Priority Groups'.

Mental health and neurodiversity present additional challenges

Servicer users with disabilities frequently spoke about encountering discrimination when trying to access jobs. Low expectations were raised numerous times, especially in relation to seeking employment support, with poor understanding of disability often being the issue. Even when service users did progress into employment, poor communication on their support needs made it difficult to remain in employment - as highlighted by Nora: *"I feel like that's why I've had a found it quite hard to retain those jobs that I got through the Job Centre, because there wasn't the line of, I guess, direct communication about my needs."*

For service users with autism and neurodiversity, there was even less understanding from employers on how it could present in interviews, and so they felt judged on behaviours directly linked to their disability. While, the stigma surrounding mental health means the real barriers that it presents are not well understood, especially in relation to employment.

Intersectionality means people can fall between the gaps of support

Intersectionality also presented a challenge for those 'ticking more than one box' when it came to protected characteristics. Riley, 30, described the complexity of being a trans migrant woman with mental health challenges, saying support services could usually help with one or two aspects of her identity, but never all of them. She has a student visa and is struggling to find work, particularly as staff at the service providers she has spoken to struggle to understand her unique and complex circumstances. She says: *"So either I'm like put on a pedestal or I'm like something they don't want to deal with"*.

When interviewed, Riley was being supported by an LGBT rights charity, but as they only have two transgender employees, there is little understanding of their specific needs, particularly as they are also a migrant and struggling with anxiety and depression.

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Case study: experiences with Job Centres

Most respondents who had sought employment for a longer period of time described Job Centres as their main point of contact for employment and skills. Unfortunately, the majority had negative perceptions of JCP, seeing it as a place they had to visit in order to access unemployment benefits. A range of factors fed into these feelings.

The physical environment

Service users describe the physical environment of the Job Centre as both unwelcoming and hard to navigate. This experience could start at the door, which was often overseen by a security guard, and continue into the building where some people found it challenging to find their way around, particularly for those with access needs who struggled with stairs, for instance.

One participant described the intimidating nature of entering the Job Centre saying: *"[there is] so much security it is like you're at an airport, security is telling you to sanitise your hands, and then you go over here, sanitise this over there and stand there" (Imran).*

Inside Job Centres, people said open plan offices sometimes made it difficult to talk openly with a work coach - for example, about mental health - as there is a lack of privacy and others can overhear conversations. For some, the noisy environment made it difficult to concentrate during job searching.

Perceived lack of empathy and support from work coaches

The majority of participants felt their work coaches were not interested in understanding their needs and sometimes they forgot to pass on important information. This was apparent in a discussion where several participants shared how their work coaches failed to tell them about the reduced-cost travel passes they were entitled to. Franklin, however, was one of a few that had a more positive experience:

"While my job coach has been really good, she hasn't gone as far as actually finding me a job. What other people in this group mentioned didn't happen to me, my advisor, she couldn't stop reminding me of the reduced travel pass".

The short length of appointments was described as another barrier to getting to know the jobseeker and understanding their situation. Olu says: *"If I was in there for 10 minutes, I was there for a long time".*

Job Centre perspective

For Job Centre staff, the sheer volume of people they are supporting in Job Centres across London each week means that there are logistical barriers and time constraints impacting on their ability to provide a personalised service. However, Job Centre staff are conscious of the need to put people at the heart of what they do:

"I think we do have an obligation to the people that we serve to make sure that we're putting them in the right circumstances that it's going to be beneficial for them"

Putting people at the centre: opportunities for change

Move from 'one size fits all' to tailored support for each customer

Service providers and users alike say the best support is tailored to the needs of the service users, with one staff member describing their vision for the service provision as, *"Holding the customers at the centre of what we're doing"*.

Service users describe good job coaches or employment advisors as people who see you as a person and consider your circumstances, which works best when they are assigned to you long-term.

Some service users described positive experiences - for example at Reed in Partnership, where they had a dedicated employment advisor who helped them identify skills and interests and had good knowledge of the programmes and jobs available. Aiya, for example, said she was provided with tailored support and recommended training and job opportunities that felt relevant: *"I've just started with Reed and they are quite good. If you don't know [something], they help you, they make you understand. Like, they've helped me to start my English and maths in September. So they guided me in the right direction. They tell you what sort of job is suitable for you, and then help you find a job"*.

Staff at Ingeus were praised for trying to match people with good-quality training and jobs that matched their skills. Abdul was referred to Ingeus by his Job Centre and said: *"I actually done a training programme with Ingeus...I've done a security course and it was really good... [Ingeus] helped us out a lot"*.

Sarah at Ingeus said being able to spend more time getting to know their customers added value and allowed customers to explore potential job paths:*"...what sets us apart is the amount of in-depth support and one-to-one support each participant has. They have sort of protected time with their advisors where they can really speak about their career goals"*.

Being able to tailor support for candidates with different needs and spend time with them on a regular basis was seen as the key to successful referrals and support. Jeremy, who has been disabled since an accident three years ago, described the support he received from a disability charity: *"I was able to access a specialist Employment Advisor who actually advised me on the skills I have and matched my skills with opportunities available. And it was very good because it was not really like a formal setting, like the Job Centre, it was more informal and very tailored, accommodating to my personal needs, especially for a person with disability. And I was successful to secure a job"*.

Provide customers with wraparound, holistic support

As well as struggling to offer tailored support, the Job Centre is unable to offer - or refer to - appropriate wrap-around support, such as mental health support or advice with housing and debt. Yasir, whose family business folded during the pandemic, talked about the impact of job seeking on his confidence and self-belief. He recommends integrating mental health support into the offer for those seeking work. *"I think I would have [benefitted from mental health support], and I think it would have put me in a position where I wouldn't have settled for a low[1]paying job. I would have aimed higher because I would have been strong within myself to say no, I am capable..."*

Offer consistent, high-quality training for all service provider staff

Many service users perceived staff as lacking training and said becoming more knowledgeable of services currently available to users would enable them to make more suitable referrals. Others flagged the importance of staff training to work with service users and gaining a higher capability to work with the diverse needs of their customers.

In both cases, specialist advisors could provide better tailored support - for example, advisors that are experienced in particular needs (eg supporting people with a criminal record into employment or a robust knowledge of the immigration system). The other suggestion was advisors that are specialists in a particular industry helping service users find training and employment in this area.

Service providers were wary of initiating new training for frontline staff without a shift in targets and therefore workloads. They worried that without making top-down changes, staff would feel under even greater pressure to deliver and complete additional training, leading to stress and burnout.

Ensure funding and targets are person-centred

For services to become customer-centred, it is crucial that funding models are designed to allow service providers to put customers at the centre of their service. This includes creating customer-centred funding targets and KPIs, which allow job coaches and employment advisors to have more time with customers and measure progress along the journey to finding a job, not just at the point when a job is secured.

Jobseekers often said work coaches saw them as 'targets to be met' rather than a whole person with individual needs and skills that could be matched to a suitable

role. This meant that, once in a job, JCP support ceased with little to no follow-up by work coaches. This makes it difficult to transition from a low paying job that has been taken on the understanding that it is a 'short-term fix' to a higher-paid, higher-skilled job.

The negative atmosphere at the Job Centre, combined with a 'target culture', finds people describing the Job Centre as a service that grinds them down and dehumanises them. Yasir says: *"They just want to get the job done as quick as possible and want you to take any job"*.

From the provider side, high targets that do not value outcomes for a person on their journey into work, lead to high pressure working environments for job coaches and employment advisors, resulting in stress, burnout and high staff turnover.

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Remove structural barriers to improve access to support and jobs

Service users highlight various structural barriers preventing them from accessing the support available as well as to gaining suitable employment.

- **Make information more accessible**

Participants say information about opportunities is not always accessible, especially for those with SEND. Trent said he finds it difficult to find the 'jobs' page on websites. "If website were clearer, [with] more bold headlines, it would be easier for me to find out about jobs".' Despite speaking English fluently, Michael describes his difficulty finding information: "The government website is like an encyclopaedia; you need to know what you're looking for".

- **Offer payment for taking part in training**

Financial pressures can be a barrier for people to take up training as they often need to get into work immediately even if it is in a low-paid role. This then prohibits them from building their skills through training.

- **Identify job opportunities that are flexible**

Participants said they struggled to find a job that works for them, for example part-time roles for those with childcare responsibilities, with flexible hours and childcare support. Fatima, for example, says that having children with long-term health issues is a barrier: "I believe organisations are too rigid, and too not welcoming because I've got children that have health issues. So I have to sort of bear in mind what I can and can't do".

- **Consider the effect of exclusionary policies**

Being sanctioned by DWP can be a further barrier preventing people from taking up low-paid or part-time work if it would reduce their benefits.

Different types of discrimination further hinder service users from gaining suitable work, particularly racism and ableism. This is experienced through exclusionary practices, for example employers not being willing to make reasonable adjustments for those with SEND, but also the Job Centre not always being able to support the different needs of its users.

- **Consider the importance of trust and meeting people 'where they are'**

Integration can be inhibited by a lack of trust in services, particularly by those with insecure immigration status or who have had negative experiences with DWP or local authorities in the past.

There is some good practice of service providers bringing their service to the users, for example a private employment provider *"delivering skills programmes in community venues depending on the request of the community"*. Others had worked with outreach staff who had access to groups who might traditionally be defined as 'harder to reach', these included racial minority and migrant communities, religious minorities. There was a noted benefit in having staff who could share information about services with potential service users in local languages and in trusted community spaces. *"It could be in a church hall, or it could be in a library or, you know, a local community centre, depending on the request of the community"*.

2. Strengthening management systems to support referrals

Strengthening management systems to support referrals: gaps and challenges

The referral process needs standardisation

In our research with service providers and users, a key tension emerged. The need for processes to become standardised (and potentially digitised or supported by technology) was identified; opposingly, many describe a personal approach as most impactful.

This dilemma ties into issues with funding and the drive to improve the efficiency of services, while providers describe already working at maximum capacity. This highlights the need to identify which aspects of the system would benefit from standardisation and digital solutions and which aspects require a more personalised approach.

The referral process provides a good example of the tension between standardisation and personalisation. Most service providers say following a standardised process makes the referral process easier for them, for example by submitting a correctly filled referral request: *"[A good quality referral is] when providers support the person to complete the online application form" (Kingston Adult Education*).

Alternatively, *"warm referral[s] where the client is effectively handed over to us"' (Islington Council)* are highlighted as most effective by many.

Providers also highlight the importance of having direct contact with other providers: *"We have close contacts with all our local key training providers, colleges and [a local university]. This enables smooth referrals, and we undertake outreach in some of these places too" (Southwark Works)*. This highlights the importance of collaboration between service providers to make successful referrals.

Making personalised referrals more consistent across programmes through standardisation would be positive for both service providers and service users, reducing the risk of disengagement by service users and subsequently allowing service providers to meet targets more effectively.

A lack of data-sharing leads to duplication of effort

Data-sharing is a challenge that, at times, inhibits collaboration and blocks an integrated system. GDPR concerns, especially the legal ramifications of not being compliant, mean that service providers identify it as a key barrier:

"I think there's a lot of anxiety around GDPR, and how much information can be shared and what should be shared. So I think that's another challenge or a barrier" (Status employment).

Service providers having their own customer relationship management systems further exacerbates the challenges associated with data-sharing and leads to frustrations on the service user side, most being asked to submit their details every time they are referred to a new provider.

Digital processes are hit and miss

Much has been said about the pros and cons of digital systems across service provider and user interviews, as well as in the four co-creation workshops with Sub-Regional Partnerships. When they work, people see huge value in digital systems for record keeping, data-sharing and data management and great opportunities for technology to assist skills and employment support provision.

However, there were also concerns raised by service providers that building digital platforms like directories of services are expensive and often quickly become out of date if there aren't staff dedicated to keeping them updated.

When asked about where people look for jobs, searching online (on job advertisement platforms such as Indeed or social media sites like LinkedIn) was mentioned in most responses. Equally, employment support and skills providers are making increasing use of technology, for example through gamified online learning platforms.

People also acknowledged that many programmes are too reliant on sometimes poorly-functioning technology. Not exclusively but particularly in the group aged 50 and over, many prefer in-person support, with some feeling digitally excluded.

"I'm one of these guys that are not tech-savvy. And I don't know what support is out there. I don't know where to turn to. For me, I'm just trial and error. So I can't be bothered, because I get frustrated because I haven't got the skills to do it" (Olu).

Those with more digital skills often get frustrated when technology doesn't work properly, with one participant said this had become a running joke between Job Centre staff.

"The Restart system, for me, it just doesn't really work that well. One of the people [at the Job Centre] actually called it "Don't Start". Because it just, you know, it crashes. They've got little video players that you've got popping up on screen to watch, like a little lecture, and it just doesn't load. And apparently, you know, it's not just me with my dodgy computer, there's a few people that have the same problem" (William).

Kevin said high street Job Centres that people used to 'pop into' to find a job had disappeared and been replaced with "a machine that advertises jobs". He wanted a personal relationship with a job coach, rather than be told to "sit in front of a computer" and search for jobs or do a course. Franklin said he looked for jobs online but preferred meeting in person with his work coach to find jobs as she had more experience of this.

"Actually I've got quite a good advisor... I do kind of browse online, but I kind of still prefer that interaction with other people when you're actually looking for employment and so forth".

Although Franklin also said he had been provided with a Chromebook by his work coach to help online job searches, older respondents and those with access needs described struggling to access jobs and information online without support.

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Strengthening management systems to support referrals: opportunities for change

The core need for service provision involves identifying which areas can be standardised and digitised and where a personalised approach brings added value. This ties in with tailoring the support to specific target groups as, for some, a digital approach might be most useful (ie young people), whereas others may appreciate a personal approach (ie those aged 50 and over).

Improve knowledge and data-sharing

Across research with service providers, a strong need for data-sharing between services emerged. This will require establishing thorough data protection agreements, as well as finding suitable ways to explain data rights to service users and gaining their informed consent. Where data-sharing agreements are already in place, this has huge benefits to service users as it can make the referral process easier.

Harvey was not initially aware that the two different services he is in contact with, the Job Centre and an autism charity, were in communication - but has found it useful that they share information about his situation: *"When I go to the Job Centre, they already know what I've been up to from the autism charity. But I don't know how they communicate"*.

Coordination of services would also facilitate more standardised approaches across the whole of London, or across one sub-region. This could be achieved by greater communication through integration hubs as well as having services designed to work together. This would avoid duplication of services, reduce competition between providers, and could introduce a quality control function to assess the standards of delivery of specific services, training offers, or employers that users are being referred to.

Retention of service provider staff and, in particular, Job Centre staff was highlighted as important in order to retain knowledge. The Head of Skills at a council-run employment service said, *"When you have this turnover of staff and JCP officers, it's very hard to get someone who understands what we offer, understands all the different nuances and the eligibility criteria. That for me would be something that you know, we could improve upon"*.

Others highlighted the desire to have a central platform for all information on current provisions and opportunities that service providers could access. They flagged that having knowledge of all programmes available to customers is impossible for staff. A participant at one of our co-creation workshops explained how, in this way, employment advisors could focus on the needs of a customer during their face-to-face appointment, and then research suitable opportunities for the user - rather than doing both at the same time. It is important to acknowledge that, even in this scenario, the employment advisor would still need to be well-trained and have basic knowledge of the provision in order to know where to get the right information and provide the appropriate advice.
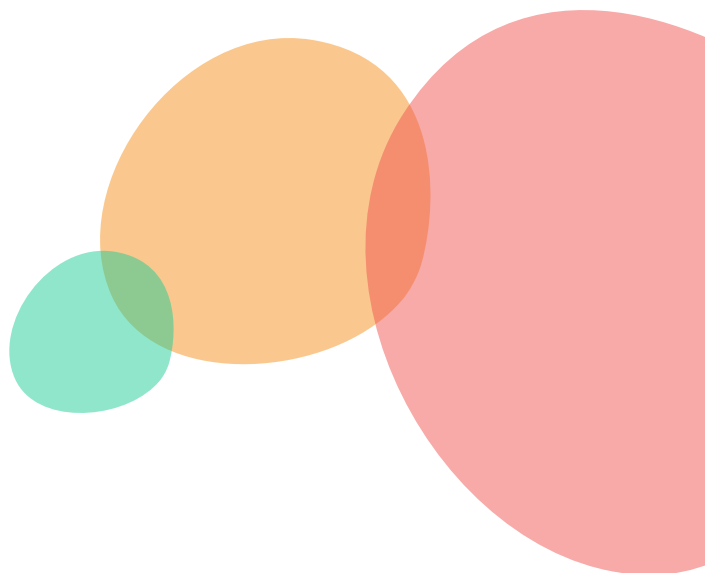
Balance digital solutions and personal support

At the front end, service users are keen to have all information on current job opportunities, employment support, and skills provision in one place. The preferred location for this place, however, differs depending on the user group.

Some service providers describe having found a good balance between a data-led and personalised approach, for example by combining automated and personal referrals: *"[Job Centres] have inbuilt in the system to identify clients that would be eligible for Restart. But we've also given the Job Centres the power to make discrete referrals. So they can, if they think that someone may not fall within the criteria, […] but they still think that Restart would be a really good fit, they can still make the referral" (Ingeus staff member).*

Young people in particular have a desire for a website or online platform that stores all information. Some mentioned that an app with user-friendly, smooth user interface would be of interest and help them find information. Michael said an app that tailored support would ensure young people felt listened to:

"They could create an app where they ask you specific questions about what you've done, what you've studied, what you'd like to do, and then it can present you with potential jobs that seem suitable for you. That will be more fulfilling for people because it's like they've at least tried to actually genuinely see what people want to do, how they can actually help them and all the rest of your mental health and everything".

While a digital solution will be useful to some, others prefer a central service or 'hub' where they receive personalised support. In the cohort of people aged more than 50, many would prefer this service to be a physical place rather than a digital tool and some shared frustration resulting from meetings with their job coaches moving online during the pandemic. Those who are older and people with disabilities or additional needs and those who are digitally excluded need more support than just access to the right information. A Job Centre that felt more human-centred could meet this need.

It is also important to understand the added value of in-person support for more tech-savvy service users who would usually look for jobs on the internet. Faye had this experience when she received support from Reed: *"They show you jobs that aren't on the internet. So, it's a bonus to come here every week to get that. [Through them], I got offered a few jobs in the local area".*

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Shirley, 49, said having a point of contact to guide her through the journey to finding a job would help:

> *"I mean, what I really need is like someone to hold my hand throughout the whole process, you know, because I can easily get to a point where I think I can't do something or I'm not going to call that person or, you know, get sort of put off. But, yeah, sadly, I don't think there is people to hold your hand along the process".*

These illustrate that firstly, there is a need to understand service users and their exact needs better - for example, who will benefit from digital solutions and for whom a more personalised approach is more suited, tying into the first topic of customer-centeredness. Secondly, an expert analysis is needed to understand which areas of skills provision and employment support can be, and would benefit from being, standardised - and ensuring digital solutions are commissioned by experts who understand the requirements to identify the best-suited provider.

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3. Enhancing collaboration to increase impact

Enhancing collaboration to increase impact: gaps and challenges

Service providers say outcomes are best for their customers when they are able to offer holistic support, both in terms of length and for the user's wider needs (eg mental health). Being able to collaborate with other service providers to fully meet an individual's needs is the key to unlocking sustainable employment.

Collaboration needs to be context specific

Collaboration is undoubtedly a challenge, especially when considering the geographical scale of London, even when divided into sub-regions. Each sub-region is made up of a number of different boroughs, each with diverse employment and skills strategies and which, politically, might be pulled in different directions. This diversity was discussed by two service providers working at Reed in Partnership, who identified a range of challenges:

"The challenge that presents is the Commissioner is effectively who we're delivering a contract for... But the different boroughs clearly have different employer and skill strategies. They've got very different demographic sets of participants. And equally, because they're geographically diverse, infrastructure transport, and all of that is very different as well. I think that coupled with each of the boroughs is a different colour in terms of the political spectrum. And each of the different colours of the political spectrum has differing approaches to intervention partners and provision, sector and otherwise, across each of the barriers means that it is there isn't a consistent approach to the contract overall. So, we have to be really quite agile" (Reed in Partnership).

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Those furthest from the job market need support from many providers

The need for additional support that goes beyond traditional employability support often came up in relation to various priority groups, particularly for people who might be facing challenges in their lives related to health, wellbeing, housing and finances. Service providers recognised that sometimes people need a lot of support to feel ready to even think about employment. For instance, if they were living in temporary accommodation or dealing with a mental health crisis.

The Job Centre particularly was seen as struggling to offer or refer to appropriate wrap-around support, such as mental health support to its service users. Conversely, an Ingeus staff member said wraparound support was a core part of their offer to people who had been out of work. They described an in-house support system including housing and debt advisors, mental health support, and IT provision of devices, including iPads that enable people to access information and search for training and jobs.

Some service providers who did not have the capacity or skill to provide holistic support already referred their service users to external agencies who could provide this targeted support. Jamie, the head of a council-run employment service in Central London Forward said her service referred people who had been long-term unemployed to a central London support programme. She also said they had good links with a service to support deaf people into work.

Some service providers specialised in providing employment support to service users with mental health and neurodiversity needs and had existing referral networks with other mental health provision. However, there were limitations in these partnerships, which reduced the effectiveness of the support they could provide:

"Our advisors are not sat in those clinical team meetings, talking to health professionals, because that's not what we're commissioned to do. So yeah, that can sometimes be a challenge" (Status Employment).

From the point of view of the service provider, not being in the meetings related to the service user's mental health reduced their ability to provide wrap-around support.

Working with charitable and community organisations is key

Service providers of various sizes emphasised the importance of community connections and working with organisations that are rooted in communities, especially those seeking to engage people deemed 'hard to reach'. Good connections to community groups that can support people holistically can make a huge difference to whether individuals will find and stay in work.

Many service providers spoke about actively trying to increase engagement with communities they didn't previously have relationships with, particularly through outreach officers who could connect with specific groups. In Waltham Forest, Somali and Eritrean women, as well as Chinese and Traveller populations had been identified as harder to engage. A dedicated Outreach Officer was trying to target these groups in different ways.

"I have an Outreach Officer... and she's fantastic and goes out to lots of different communities and has plotted where community halls and... community groups are across the borough, and has been tasked with going to the ones that we don't traditionally have a relationship with and trying to build a relationship with them" (Waltham Forest Adult Learning Centre).

The importance of community engagement was further stressed by a service provider who used local community connections in order to develop a better understanding of what communities want and need in relation to employment support. This knowledge was used to tailor programmes and plans so the right support was provided. For example, a community respiratory physician relayed the need for an ESOL course because people in the community were trying to access healthcare but didn't speak English.

"One of the things that we found is that it's so important to be involved with what's going on in the community. Because, for example...the ESOL course, we know about it, because we're involved with the respiratory physician that's in the community, we know about the health and social care, because we're working with those particular employers, if we didn't get involved with them, they will be really hard to reach" (Nescot College).

Charities continue to play an important role in supporting service users and service providers, especially in relation to the wraparound support that many people need when seeking employment but are unable to get through a provision that is stretched to capacity. Some participants accessed support from charities after finding mainstream provision was unable to meet their needs. Referring to charities allows service providers to help build better wraparound support for participants.

Colleges want to tailor their offer to better reflect job market needs

Schools and colleges were seen as mainly serving young people or adults who wanted to take longer courses, rather than with shorter, targeted courses to get people quickly back into employment. However, some colleges are working closely with the DWP to shape their course offering:

"I have bimonthly meetings with the DWP so that I can see where their needs are... I try to keep it as flexible as possible. So that, you know, it's got to be learner focused for our department" (Nescot college).

Waltham Forest Adult Learning Centre was also referring to the local college, with reciprocal referrals happening from the college to council. The relationship with the college was so well established that the Learning Centre described them as a 'critical friend' who would offer advice and guidance when new initiatives happened.

"So if I'm doing something around quality, I might ask one of the members of their team to come in and have a look at what we're doing and then we might go and see what they're doing".

There is potential for college curriculum development across London to be informed by evidence of job market need across the sub-regions and city. A senior college staff member in South London was in the process of working with curriculum managers to better ensure that courses offered to students were related to local economic need. He wanted to make better links with employment services to understand what skills employers are looking for locally. He also asked; "how do we get students referred to us?" suggesting a need to better integrate with service providers who could link the college with potential students.

Case study: London South East Colleges tailoring courses for the local job market

London South East Colleges (LSEC) have sites in Bromley, Bexley, Greenwich and Orpington, and work closely with local communities in each location, supporting businesses with their skills needs, creating strong partnerships with schools and local authorities and inspiring students to achieve excellent results.

LSEC runs a number of programmes focused on getting Londoners into work. These include cross industry sector-based work academies, which are designed with key employers who have more than 10 job vacancies. They have also developed training programmes for learners in collaboration with specific employers, including the 'Prepare to Care' intensive five-week course designed with NHS service provider, Bromley Health Centre. This targets people wanting to go into the health and social care sector that do not have the experience or qualifications to access the sector. At the end of the course learners are offered an interview with Bromley Health Centre, which could lead to employment.

Businesses are not always part of the system

Service providers, especially those delivering training, spoke about addressing skills gaps. This was often through understanding the needs of people within specific communities, especially in different localities, which allows training providers to tailor their offer to the needs of local people and identify the needs of local employers.
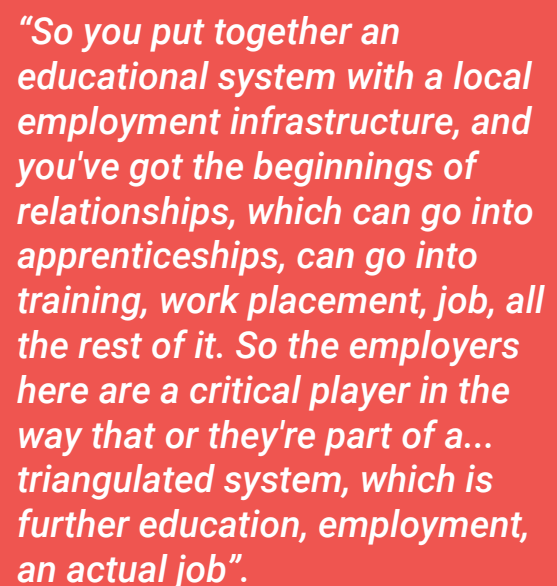
However, providers stressed that while they are doing some work through the DWP to identify local employment training needs, they wanted to have better connections to employers. A charity offering employment support in one borough said employers were key - but it could be hard to build relationships if they only saw the employment of 'non-traditional' hires as part of their Corporate Social Responsibility programmes, rather than core business.

Building better connections with employers would help bridge the gap between training provision and employment. This gap was identified as a frustration by service users, who described 'training fatigue', especially when the training they received did not help them to secure a job.

Nigel, the director of a charity supporting people into work in West and Central London, talked about the importance of building relationships between education and training providers and local employers, seeing the involvement of employers as vital to creating successful pathways for jobseekers into work.

"And the critical factor here are employers… we've worked with a lot of employers over the years. But employers will work from their own interests…"

"So you put together an educational system with a local employment infrastructure, and you've got the beginnings of relationships, which can go into apprenticeships, can go into training, work placement, job, all the rest of it. So the employers here are a critical player in the way that or they're part of a… triangulated system, which is further education, employment, an actual job".

Enhancing collaboration to increase impact: areas of opportunity

Recognise the importance of personal networks and support in the community

Many people who are out of work do not know that support is available to them. This is especially true for support provided by less known organisations, or those targeted at specific groups. The main source of support people used to find jobs was their own personal networks. Olu, for example, says, *"support from family, friends and teachers helped me gain employment"*.
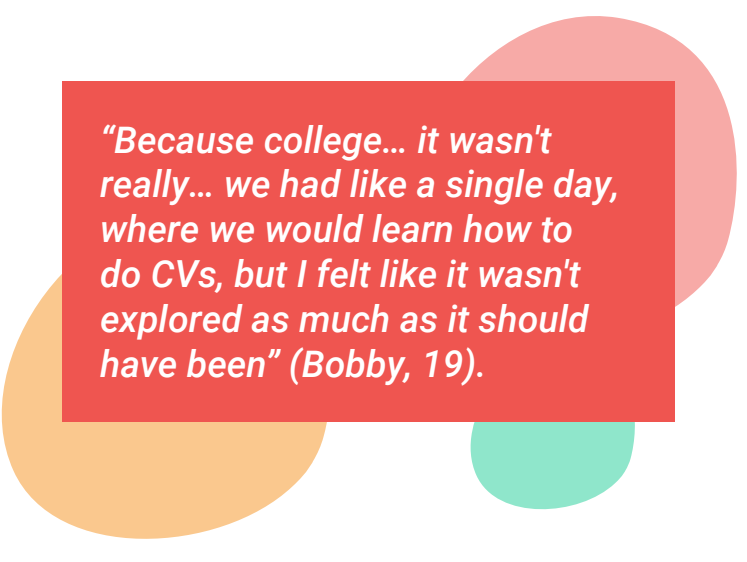
However, reliance on who you know can lead to nepotism in certain sectors (eg. creative industries) or mean you are trapped in your own network, inhibiting social mobility - for instance, taking a cleaning job because everyone you know does cleaning. The reliance on informal networks also means that, at times, people get unhelpful advice if people don't have accurate or up-to-date information on issues. For instance, this research heard from several young people being encouraged by their relatives to hand out CVs to shops, when many employers now recruit online.

This shows the importance of ensuring people get the right information through communication strategies that not only involve jobseekers, but also engage those close to them. Another issue to address through targeted communication strategies is to create awareness of services available. Many people that participated in this research said they would turn to their family and friends for help because they did not know of other services available to them.

Both charities and community groups that understand the needs of users - for example, because they offer tailored support to a specific target group, or have staff who share a similar background - are mentioned as effective at sharing information and supporting jobseekers. Fatima says, *"I am part of a women-only support group in my community where we share job opportunities".'*

Work with education providers: being aware of key transition points

A key transition point for employment support is when young people leave school, college or university. Schools were found to be good at supporting students into university, but less so into vocational courses.

"Because college… it wasn't really… we had like a single day, where we would learn how to do CVs, but I felt like it wasn't explored as much as it should have been" (Bobby, 19).

Young people with varying additional needs described receiving good support in school but said it abruptly stopped when they left. None of the young people said they received transitional support into jobs when finishing school. There is an opportunity to work with schools and colleges and even universities to provide this transitional support and promote access to work experience and volunteering to boost experience on young people's CVs.

Work with employers: having good opportunities available

Working more closely with employers would allow service providers to advocate for the needs of their service users and establish better or broader relationships to refer service users to good jobs. For example, with employers who offer on-the-job training. Linking employers, colleges and employment advisors would also enhance benefits for jobseekers, particularly where information and data is shared to inform training that employers see as essential for future employees.

Work with wider provision: supporting service users before job-readiness

Some service providers flag issues around people not having sufficient skills to engage with their services, particularly around language skills. Other providers flag the service user's 'attitude' as being a barrier - for example, because they lack confidence, motivation or commitment. *"It depends on the participant entirely" (Private sector employment service provider).*

Both points tie in with the need for employment support to be holistic and meet the service user 'where they are' in their current employment journey. This includes being able to refer users to the most appropriate service for them at the time, whether this is language training, mental health support, or family support - among other things. Support doesn't need to be provided by one service, and would take pressure off frontline staff if they could refer onto high-quality services to support jobseekers:

"Rather than our advisors trying to give people advice and guidance about employment, housing and debt, if they work collaboratively with those specialist providers, it means that everyone can, can really sort of provide the support. So it allows us to be really targeted and focused on what we're employed to do and what we're good at, which is employment. I think it also improves the clients' experience as well. So rather than them simply being signposted to someone they can actually be supported. And, you know, they don't have to tell their story to 53 different people if those people are already in tune and working together (Status employment)."

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Build alliances to collaborate beyond political interests

To offer the best support for service users, it is important to have a shared vision amongst providers of what good that support should look like. This can be difficult as political interests differ between local and central government, with the latter often being in charge of contracts and therefore setting KPIs. Sometimes differences in political interests can emerge between boroughs or even within a local authority, which makes alignment more challenging.

Working with those in charge of commissioning work and setting KPIs is crucial to avoid targets that lead to competition between service providers for the same users, rather than collaboration. The current system disincentives collaboration as once the service user is moved on from the original service provider - they can no longer count them as having been helped into work, despite potentially making an important contribution. When the environment is more conducive to collaboration the necessary referrals can be made.

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Conclusions about the state of the system

Within the system of support for Londoners trying to find 'good work' there are clear opportunities to strengthen and better-integrate services. Service providers often cited being frustrated and constrained by current funding structures and targets that often fail to value progress made on a person's individual journey to finding 'good work'. This could involve seeking support for mental health or finding reliable accommodation. Targets that focus on getting jobseekers into jobs quickly have, in some places, led to competition rather than collaboration between services. Employment advisors are disincentivised from offering tailored support, and customers feel powerless and undervalued in the current target-driven culture. This environment is stressful for frontline staff and dehumanising for people seeking support.

While there are numerous challenges to integrating parts of a complex and disjointed system, there is clearly an appetite and energy for change and improvement. There are also examples of good practice to build on and a willingness to share learning between service providers. Where colleges, charities and employers are integrated with frontline employment services jobseekers benefit through better and more sustainable work outcomes, and 'hard to reach' groups are offered better support to get them closer to, and into, the job market.

In finding solutions to help the system become more human-centred, one core challenge will be keeping sight of the ambition to support people into 'good work' while also grappling with targets and funders who might have different/ competing priorities. Without addressing the 'top' of the existing system (ie targets and funding structures), it is difficult to truly shift outcomes for Londoners in a sustainable way.

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Recommendations

Recommendations outlined below include those generated through the core research as well as at sub-regional workshops throughout the summer, and a final pan-London workshop held in October 2022. Attendees at sub-regional workshops and the pan-London workshop included staff providing services related to employment, skills and training. Invitees were from:

- Integration Hubs
- Borough councils
- Greater London Authority
- Department for Work and Pensions
- Job Centre Plus
- Private employment providers (including Ingeus, Maximus, and Reed)
- Further Education Colleges
- Independent Training Providers
- Adult Community Learning

Focus of the Integration Hubs

Providers outlined key roles they hoped the new Integration Hubs could play to better link services for Londoners in each sub-region.

- Sharing a vision of what integrated support should look like for a customer seeking skills and employment in each sub-region

- Coordinating services: providers want the Integration Hubs to lead and take responsibility for coordinating different services. They believe Hubs should have oversight over skills and employment provision in London, including mapping what is available, and working with providers to ensure

there is no duplication. This would focus on their strengths rather than aiming to provide a range of services. There was also a strong desire for the Hubs to provide a single platform for learners and jobseekers to find out about opportunities.

- Convening services: providers want the Integration Hubs to bring service providers together to form a community of practice and share relevant learnings, for instance via sharing data with training providers about skills development needed locally. Several providers expressed a desire for Hubs to create connections with employers, which would increase the pool of potential jobs they could refer service users to.

- Improving processes: providers want the Integration Hubs to improve processes through which services are designed, funded and delivered. This includes embedding user voice into the planning of service provision; reducing funding restrictions; improving procurement processes; and support for service providers to access funding.
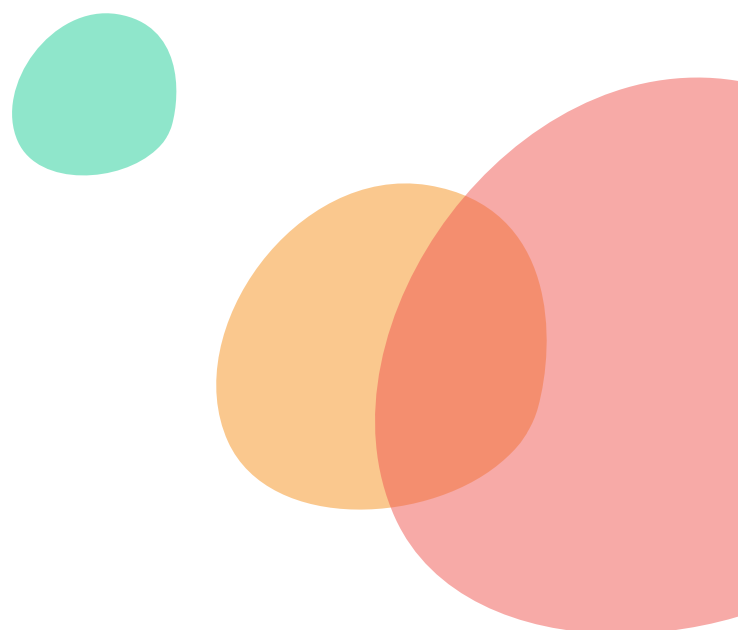
Emerging solutions

During workshops, attendees listened to interim findings on the state of integration across services, as well service users' perspectives on navigating the system. Groups were asked to generate potential solutions that could address barriers to integration revealed by the research.

Once the sub-regional workshops were completed The Young Foundation team consolidated similar ideas and found they naturally grouped into seven high-level, interconnected areas where recommendations were made and are captured below.

The first three themes (in red above) were explored in more detail at the pan-London workshop and detailed suggestions from discussions have been integrated into the relevant sections.

1. Making funding and targets more human-centred

2. Building skills and knowledge among service providers

3. Offering personalised support for customers

4. Tailoring support to specific groups

5. Sharing data and information better

6. Working more closely with employers

7. Strengthening community connections

1. Ensuring funding and targets are more human-centred

> *"We should be able to put the customer at the centre, rather than see the funder as the customer."*

A quarter (26%) of the service providers who responded to the initial scoping survey receive GLA funding. This provides an opportunity for the GLA to review whether the targets and funding it oversees and monitors could be made more human-centred.

A number of suggestions were made for tailoring targets and funding to better-enable service providers to meet the needs of Londoners seeking employment, training and skills. For the GLA, there is an opportunity to model new ways of funding and measuring outcomes. Suggestions include:

- **Identifying the right outcomes over an appropriate timescale**, finding ways of measuring outcomes that capture success on a person's journey to work eg:
  - » Job 'fit' for candidates referred by a service provider
  - » Satisfaction with new job once in post
  - » Whether the jobs people are entering meet the Mayor of London's definition of 'good work'

- **Make funding and targets more flexible**, with some room to allow a small proportion of service users to fall outside of eligibility criteria at the discretion of frontline staff, for instance age limits.

For all service providers **shifting away from negative language**, would reduce the stigma associated with accessing employment and training support. A clear example would be moving from 'claimants' to more neutral language such as client or customer.

Additional suggestions would require significant shifts in how funders and central government operate. These include:

- **Funding programmes for longer**; eg moving from six-month funding to three years

- **Increasing JCP funding** and reducing targets to allow more time per customer

- **Considering personal budgets** and alternative commissioning models

- **Service providers finding alternative funding sources** to enhance their existing provision eg using S106 and regeneration money to invest in local employment and support services

How could success be measured?

Service users attending the pan-London workshop were asked to identify measures to capture whether solutions had been successful against this theme. They identified:

- Funders agree to new measures of success for jobseekers

- Interim outcomes on the journey into work are valued and captured as part of funder reporting

- Programmes are funded for two years or more

- Outcome measurements on the way to getting into work could include:

  » securing a first interview

  » starting a volunteering position

  » accessing mental health support

- In-work measurements could include:

  » job 'fit' for candidates referred by a service provider (potentially linked to their skills and experience)

  » satisfaction with new job once in post

  » whether the jobs people are entering meet the Mayor of London's definition of 'good work'
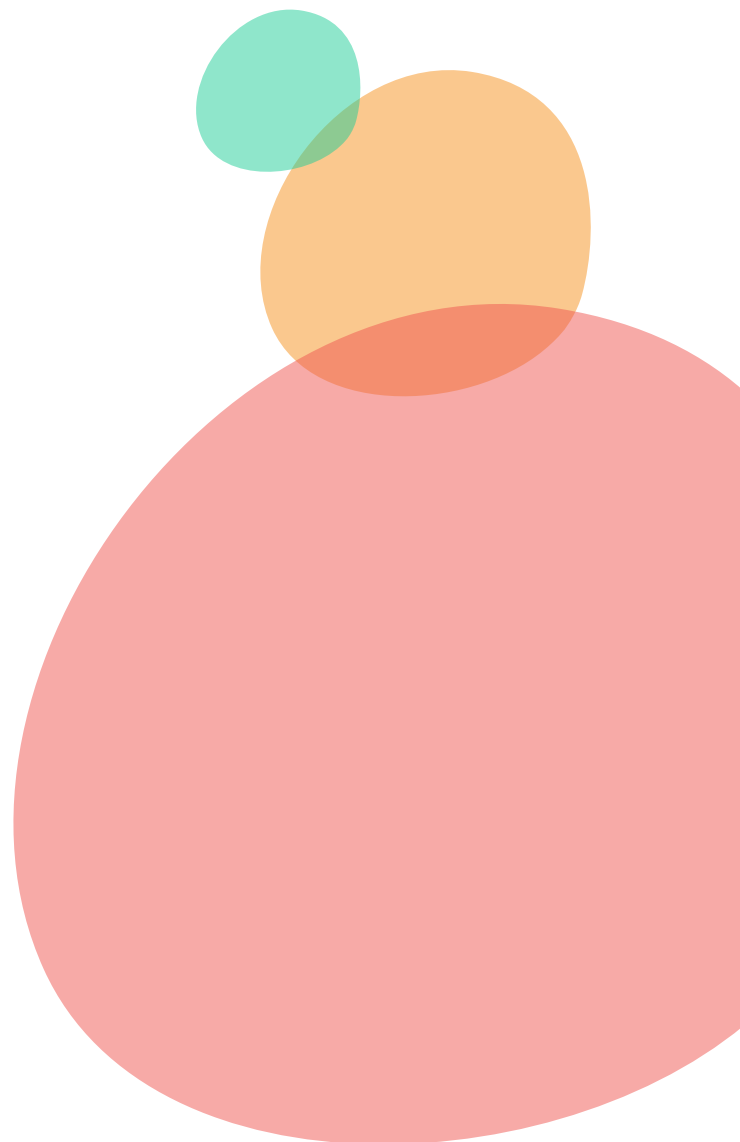
2. Building skills and knowledge among service providers

While both service providers and service users said frontline staff need better training and support to provide holistic and customer-centred services, there is a risk that putting increased pressure on staff to deliver more will lead to burnout and, ultimately, increased staff turnover, resulting in poorer outcomes for jobseekers. The success of the suggested solutions rests on targets and funding being adjusted providing more time and space for service providers to focus on the individual needs of jobseekers, rather than needing to rush them into jobs or training to meet targets.

Staff training:

- Build better training and specialisms into programme design to improve the quality of support offered without adding additional pressure to staff on already stretched programmes

- Offer practical training to new staff in frontline roles and regularly 'top up' with refresher training by experts including those with lived experience.

  » Information advice and guidance (IAG) training at minimum Level 2.

  » Training to understand and respond to mental health challenges experienced by customers (Mental First Aid training an option)

  » Training to support people with special educational needs and disabilities so all staff are well informed with current knowledge and skills to support jobseekers with SEND

  » Unconscious bias training – EDI training

  » Sales and customer service training, to ensure that people seeking work do not feel like they're being pushed into roles but feel understood and respected

  » Training to understand how to work in a trauma-informed way

- Staff who are supporting young people need time and skills to understand the wider context for each individual, for instance gang culture or intergenerational unemployment, which might affect ability to take up jobs

There is an opportunity for the GLA to commission and pilot a holistic training

package that integrates modules related to the recommendations above.

For service providers, there was a suite of recommendations made in relation to staff professional development. These include:

- Clear professional development pathways for frontline staff with continuous professional development being seen as a core part of the role by managers

- Peer mentoring for frontline staff to encourage consistency and best practise. This could incorporate elements of peer inspection to see how services are delivered and offer support to strengthen where there are gaps

- Employee assistance programmes and mental health support for staff particularly as cost-of-living crisis affects customers and frontline staff are supporting people in difficult circumstances

For integration hubs, there is a potential role to play in convening and facilitating networks to support frontline service provider staff through:

- Forums for service providers to share information and source support from other local organisations

- Regional networks for service provider staff to meet and share learning

"When I started my job I had to do Prevent and safeguarding training and I should have done mental health and SEND – it would allow a better support network around people and everyone should be trained when they start". (former JCP work coach)

How could success be measured?

- Increased staff capacity
- Increased staff wellbeing
- Increased staff satisfaction with jobs
- Longer appointment times with customers
- Reduced staff turnover
- Proportion of training courses completed by staff (compared to drop-out)
- Both generalist and specialist advisors operating in services
- Quality of support and delivery improved for customers
- Help for customers with mental health needs identified earlier
- Improved support for customers with mental health needs
- Customers have higher confidence in their own abilities
- Customers in sustainable work
- Improved community support for jobseekers

3. Offering more effective support to customers

"Sometimes you have your goals – you lose sight of a candidate or you hold onto a candidate when you should let them go"

From a practical perspective, solutions were focused on service providers making customer appointments with employment advisors/work coaches more accessible and customer-centred:

- **One point of contact** for each customer at their point of entry into the system and **giving customers longer appointments** with coaches (reliant on targets changing to allow more flexibility).

- **Creating a standardised way to enrol customers in services for the first time and assess their needs**, allowing them to be referred to the right services rather than having to identify support themselves.

- **'Warm' handovers** between services so clients know who they will be meeting when they are referred (and are therefore more likely to take up the referral). This was particularly important for the first day at a job, which can be incredibly daunting for those that have been out of work for a long time, or have never had a job.

- **Optional in-work support** for those who need it, ensuring it is supportive and personalised rather than transactional.

- **'Graduation' processes** which identify the end point of a customer's journey and ensures a 'good ending' is met where jobseekers graduate from support, rather than have it abruptly cut.

- **Onsite childcare**, including outside of normal hours for shift workers.

Tailored support for jobseekers with specific or additional needs was also an area identified as having potential to offer solutions:

- **Essential skills programmes** for customers focusing on self-reliance, confidence and life skills as a precursor to job-readiness training.

- **Information packs** to pass on details about entitlements and benefits eg half price travelcards. This should be combined with an accessible easy-to-use calculator that service provider staff (particularly JCP and private providers) can use to work out the impact on a jobseeker's benefits if they are employed.

- **Sector specialists** connected to staff in job services (eg arts and creative skills, mental health, construction etc.) that relevant jobseekers can be referred to.

- **A dedicated service or contact for people who have 'limited capability' to work** but want to work, eg those with cognitive issues or severe mental health concerns.

How could success be measured?

- Increased engagement from customers
- Increased trust between service providers and customers
- Customers have higher confidence in the system
- Customers are referred to appropriate services
- Support identified for individuals is tailored to their needs
- Reduced time taken to match customers to good work
- Increase in number of customers who feel they have been matched to an appropriate job
- Customers in work they report as 'good'

4. Tailoring support to specific groups

Many of the solutions identified by service providers focused on the needs of young people including:

- **In-school and college support** for students not going to university, for instance through CV development workshops, and post-school support once young people are in work.

- **Mentors to support young people into good jobs** – ideally employing 'near peers' who are young people with similar experiences, providing support and coaching with their job search.

- **Open days for parents in secondary school** to let them know about routes out of school including college, university, jobs and apprenticeships, which are accessible to parents who have additional or English language needs.

- **Closer collaboration between service providers and adult learning providers/ colleges**, eg advertising employment services, offering in-house workshops and supporting colleges/adult learning providers to create networks with employers to refer their students directly.

- **Advertising jobs and skills building** in alternative ways for instance via YouTube and TikTok and in places young people visit.

Some of the solutions related to young people were location-based, particularly for young people who may not be able to travel to a particular area because of their situation or gangs. There is an opportunity to explore **digital solutions** to support young people into work and training, which would remove the need for them to travel to a particular place to receive support.

Generally, service providers said **services should be offered at places that feel welcoming and accessible**, including places with high footfall that people use regularly,

such as the supermarket or in pop-up shops near popular spots for young people and families - for example, a trampoline park. Further **research and evaluation** was identified as necessary to fill gaps in knowledge and ensure services could be tailored and offer quality support to 'harder to reach' groups. This is an area that could be supported by the GLA in future.

- Service providers wanted more **research and training** to understand who is pushed into what type of jobs and what 'good work' looks like for different groups. This could explore whether BAME candidates are being pushed into jobs such as care work, ex-offenders into construction, etc.

- **Evaluation of services** to assess whether they meet the needs of priority groups and address the challenges they face

- Better understanding of how **Youth Hubs** are currently working

- Understanding **pathways from volunteering into jobs** and identifying ways for jobseekers to make the jump

How could success be measured?

- Young people feel confident about applying for jobs

- Mentors or peer supporters reach young people

- Parents feel confident about routes for young people after school or college

- Young people have good-quality CVs and skills to write cover letters

- Young people have greater awareness of opportunities available locally

- Young people access training and skills support

- Youth Hubs, where they exist, are well-attended by young people

5. Sharing data and information better

Sharing information and data effectively between services was identified as a key barrier to integration. Many staff at sub-regional and borough-level suggested the creation of an **online portal** that could provide a live picture of services and organisations available to service users and service providers locally. A number of these are being built, including through West London Alliance, or have recently launched (Start London and Local London Work Connections).

Other suggestions to enable better sharing of information were highlighted:

- Ensuring that information shared is in plain English, translated into community languages where relevant, and targets people in a job seeker's network (eg family members) and not just the individual.

- Finding a way to know what support a person has been offered and build on that. There are lots of considerations around data protection, but solutions could include:

  » **Consent processes** that can be used by service providers across the system to ask if customers are happy for information to be passed on to other service providers.

  » **Job passports** as a way for job coaches and service providers to remember a customer's name and information, which could track the services a jobseeker has had contact with and avoid having to repeat information.

  » **Process maps or triage for customers** at first point of contact with system and then using this to refer them down a prescribed pathway.

- **Flow charts** for customers when they enter the system, so they know what to expect along the way- and who to contact if they go off-journey.

- **Standard checklists** for service providers to ensure they cover all elements of support and follow referral processes in a consistent way.

- **Collecting data** on whether people consider they are in 'good work' via in-work follow-ups by frontline staff.

- **Sharing best practice** and 'what works' across sub-regional partnerships.

- **Avoiding jargon** in documents shared with service providers and customers.

- **Utilising data to inform decision-making** among service providers - Integration Hubs establish working relationships with colleges and training providers and regularly sharing data on the state of the job market to inform curriculum development.

How could success be measured?

- Data is securely shared between service providers

- Jobseekers report that employment advisors remember their name

- Customers know what will happen on their journey to work

- Customers know where to turn if they have problems

- Customers report that they are in 'good work' or an appropriate training course during in-work follow-ups

- Service providers are informed by best practice

- Decisions are informed by data shared by Integration Hubs and partners

6. Working more closely with employers

There is clear potential for service providers to create and strengthen links with employers, and this would be achievable with little resource. Bigger investment would be required to implement some of the solutions put forward by service providers.

'Quick win' solutions, some of which could be facilitated by **integration hubs**:

- Guidance and training for employers on how to **hire and support employees with additional needs**, for instance young people with SEND. This is especially important for local SMEs.

- Guidance and training for employers on **migrants' employability entitlements** and the other systems they have to navigate through in the UK.

- Guidance for employers on how to share job adverts in accessible language and **encourage diverse applicants** through more flexible working practices

- **Engaging employers with existing initiatives** such as the Mayor's Good Work Standard, Disability Confident Scheme, etc.

- **Disability rights awareness raising**: service providers supporting customers with SEND should raise awareness about employees' rights and available support related to employers and making reasonable adjustments. Service providers could also follow up once people with SEND are in jobs, to review their progress and the employer support provided?

- **Making sure people know their employment rights**, achieved through an information pack for service users or training for advisors.

- **Virtual internships** for young jobseekers to build experience eg Bright Network virtual internship.

Longer-term solutions requiring investment of significant resource and engagement with DWP:

- **Engaging developers and master planners** responsible for regeneration schemes to employ people, provide work experience and apprenticeships for local young people.

- **Subsidise or fund businesses** (particularly small businesses) to hire new employees they wouldn't traditionally hire, for instance those switching career paths or people who have been out of work for a long time. This might involve funding the first month's salary for the new hire, or subsidising until they pass a probation period and are formally hired by the employer.

- **Setting targets** for how many people with SEND, young people, etc, are recruited by local businesses.

- **Supported apprenticeships and opportunities for work experience**, potentially through relationship-building with local employers.

- **Working with employers to establish 'sector routeways'** so individuals can gain experience with an employer or new sector before committing to a permanent role.

How could success be measured?

- Available opportunities are accessible to more customers

- Employers hire more people with SEND

- People with SEND feel confident disclosing needs to employers before starting jobs

- People with SEND feel supported at work

- More employers sign up to Good Work Standard, Disability Confident Scheme, etc

- Increased number of young people accessing internships

- Increased number of people accessing apprenticeships and work experience
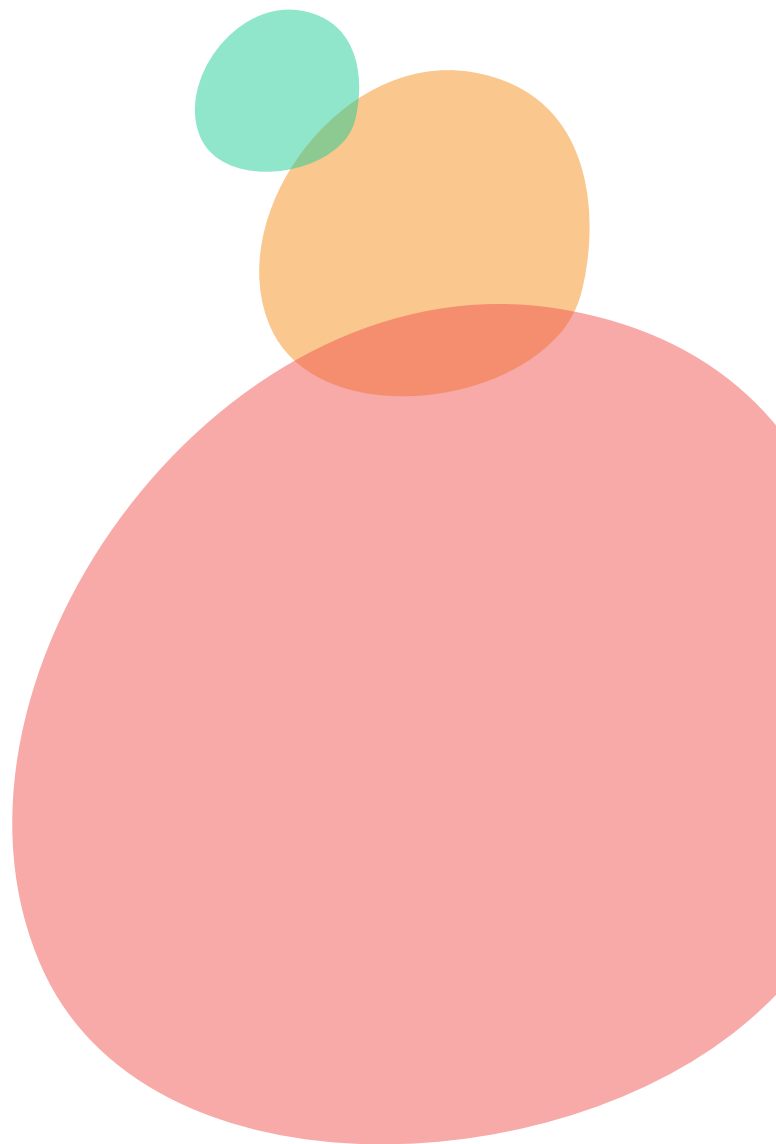
7. Strengthening community connections

Service users rely heavily on personal and community networks to find jobs and related opportunities. There is potential for formal service providers to establish and strengthen links with community organisations, who often have access to the 'harder to reach' groups they struggle to engage.

- Integration hubs **mapping the community organisations** within their sub-regions and sharing information with service providers.

- Service providers working closer with VCS sector to **identify gateway organisations** that can reach particular groups and are trusted to offer guidance or refer on.

- Service providers making time for **job coaches to understand what is on offer** in their communities, enabling them to better -support people and organisations.

- Service providers **linking with GPs** to confidently refer customers with mental health needs.

- Employers and service providers **consistently advertising employment services at colleges** and reiterating these to students at key points during the year (eg as students are graduating from courses).

Additional funding required:

- **Funding community groups to hire 'navigators'** or peer supporters who can reach new customers and refer them to service providers. They may need to accompany customers to new appointments, particularly if they have English language needs ('warm handovers').

- Community employment support that is less focused on targets but has **stable funding from a local authority**, which could help certain target groups to reach job readiness.

How could success be measured?

- Relationships with community organisations built by 'formal' service providers

- Increased numbers of students access employment and skills support

- Decrease proportion of people who have never engaged in learning or skills training or employment before.

- Job coaches have greater awareness of community offer

- Stronger links established between service providers and GPs

- 'Harder to reach' groups access skills, training and employment

- Community navigators bring new customers into services

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