

Case study: enhanced employment support

A4E

A4E is a DWP prime contractor. Its Recruiting Older Workers (ROW) project explored the benefits of 'streaming' an older customer group (unemployed people over the age of 50 in the Thames Valley) during the earlier stages of unemployment.

Customers were recruited mainly from Jobcentre Plus and the Probation Service and through direct marketing to support services across the sub-region, with a number of customers self-referring. All the customers were 'voluntary' either because they wanted to get back into work or due to strong persuasion from advisers in Jobcentre Plus or other referral organisations.

Against a background of heavy demand for the service, the advisers, while supporting all their ROW customers, concentrated most of their effort on the 'harder to help'. These included the low skilled, longer term unemployed, people with significant health problems and those with criminal records.

The advisers worked with Employer Partnership Officers who brokered job opportunities with employers. As a result of the recession, a large proportion of vacancies were in administration, but there was high demand also in security, driving, factory shift work and IT roles such as data entry.

Support included:

- personalised assessments and individual action plans
- identifying and helping overcome barriers to employment
- group and individual development sessions
- identifying job opportunities
- work experience placements (including voluntary work)
- arranging accredited and non-accredited training (most often in information technology)
- and in work support and guidance for both the individual and the employer.

The key differences between this 'streaming' approach and A4E's main services were:

- an exclusive focus on the older customer group
- advisers, coaches and recruitment staff with specialist knowledge and skills relating to this group
- more flexibility, including the ability to spend more time with harder to help customers
- and an in-work support model, including a strong element of advice, guidance and mentoring for those most at risk of 'falling out of employment again'.