



SHARED INTELLIGENCE

East of England Development Agency Work Limiting Illness Learning Network

SUMMARY AND ACTION PAPER

INTRODUCTION

There is widespread concern in the UK about the rising prevalence of long term limiting illness, and the growing number of people who are unable to work because of sickness, injury or disability. In the East of England, only 57% of working age people with some form of disability are in employment, compared to 81% of those who are not disabled¹. In terms of numbers, some 180,000 people in the region are currently unable to work because of an illness or disability. Not only does this directly affect the lives of individuals and their families, it diverts significant amounts of public money into benefit payments and is a great loss of potential for the region's economy.

Tackling work limiting illness, therefore, continues to be a top government priority, recognised in Welfare to Work policy and programmes such as Pathways to Work and Workplace Health.

The Investing in Communities (IiC) Programme was established by East of England Development Agency (EEDA) in 2003 with the aim of providing a significant strategic and financial commitment to addressing the challenges faced by the East of England's most deprived areas. The vision for IiC was that 'the most deprived communities can achieve their full potential and therefore contribute to and benefit from sustainable economic growth'. The programme prioritised interventions in the areas of employment, skills and enterprise. The investment channelled through IiC was led by 9 sub-regional partnerships, with additional regional level research and programme activity.

These Investing in Communities Partnerships developed a number of programmes and projects which sought to address worklessness among the work limiting illness client group. Funded by EEDA, this provision complemented other partner activity, the mainstream support available via JobCentre Plus (JCP) programmes, and support provided via additional discretionary programmes such as European Social Fund (ESF).

The IiC Programme has now been transformed into a broader Economic Participation programme. However, to share the lessons learnt from previous initiatives and to promote good practice more generally in the region, EEDA in February 2008 established a work limiting illness network. The network brought together a range of practitioners and experts from across the region in a series of 'action learning sets' between April and June, to allow participants to share their experiences².

The process sought to identify lessons of good practice in tackling worklessness among the work limiting illness client group and establish an agenda for outstanding challenges to be shared with policy makers, funders and practitioners. Alongside the group discussions, there was a review of best practice from elsewhere and development of policy briefings. This document draws together the issues, lessons and challenges arising from this programme of work, and is published to inform future policy and implementation in the East of England.

¹ Annual Population Survey 2007

² Action learning is a method for individual, team and organisational development. Working in small groups (Sets), and in an environment of confidentiality and trust, action learning sets enable people to tackle important issues and problems and learn from each other and from practice elsewhere

2 OVERVIEW OF THE ACTION LEARNING PROGRAMME

In commissioning this work EEDA specified that they were looking for a programme of support which would see the successful contractor working with stakeholders, policy makers, practitioners and funders to explore successful interventions and effective delivery mechanisms for the work limiting illness client group. Specifically, the programme was asked to examine:

- Implications for successful delivery of the pathways to work programme;
- Success factors in achieving high and sustainable employment outcomes;
- Approaches which raise employment motivation and aspirations;
- Gaps and opportunities for adding value to the mainstream offer through liC;
- How to deliver a personalised, holistic approach through joined-up delivery;
- Strategies for influencing mainstream services.

Given the desire to have a strong focus on reflective practitioner led learning the Shared Intelligence approach focused on the delivery of an Action Learning Programme. The Programme commenced in February 2008 with a launch event, this event was attended by a range of key stakeholders involved in the worklessness agenda with regard to the work limiting illness client group. Stakeholders in attendance included funding agencies and policy makers and those practitioners working on the ground.

During the launch event, partners identified three priority issues for exploration:

- Client engagement: The active and willing participation of the 'client' group. i.e. Those first steps of contact or intervention with an individual client around employability.
- Employer engagement: The process through which employers directly participate in activity facilitated by an external organisations in pursuit of shared objectives.
- Joined up working and commissioning: Improving efficiency and effectiveness by minimising fragmentation, gaps in provision and duplication.

It was agreed that these three issues would be the focus for discussion at the three action learning sets. A summary of the issues and challenges raised in each of these priority areas that were focused on in the action learning sets are outlined below³.

³ A Full Report of the Programme is available on the EEDA website: www.eeda.org.uk

Client engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeting the hardest to reach clients; • The difficulties in assessing the economic benefit of programmes that deal with initial engagement but do not always lead to a job outcome; • The need for capacity building in grass roots organisations; • Linking with the LAA framework and the difficulties of influencing the (up to) 35 key indicators; and • The role of GP's and mental health workers as a way to engage with clients.
Employer engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to educate employers of the benefits of engagement; • The difficulties of engaging with small employers; • The role of employers in the retention of employees with work limiting illnesses; and • The potential role for social enterprises.
Joined up working and commissioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The importance of developing informal and formal networks and forums, as a means of getting organisations to work together; • Conflicts arising between organizational and partnership objectives; • Difficulties arising from different funding and outcome setting frameworks; • Improving referral processes and links with other agencies; • The best ways to join up services to reduce duplication and fragmentation of service provision; and • Coordinating the way organisations engage with both clients and employers to ensure a seamless delivery of service.

Two action learning sets were formed – one involving those from a strategic or funding organisation, the other involving those practitioners acting in a direct delivery role.

The action learning sets were very much focused on identifying solutions to problems raised and on agreeing practical ways forward to address the challenges and issues. In advance of each of the action learning sets practitioners were provided with relevant briefing papers that incorporated examples of how these issues and challenges were being address via interventions in the East of England and elsewhere in the UK. Following each Learning Set participants were also provided with a note of the discussion detailing outcomes and agreed actions.

In recognition of changes to the liC programme, the focus of the Action Learning programme changed from that initially envisaged. There was less opportunity to directly influence the liC funded employability projects and a greater need to rely on local authorities and other funders to take the emerging lessons on board.

The changes to the liC programme also impacted on attendance in that fewer individuals from the partnerships were able to attend and a greater focus was placed on engaging a wider range of stakeholders. Initially the sets were split into two groups a practitioner group and a strategic group, however, following the first meeting it was highlighted by participants that they would welcome the opportunity to join the groups to ensure wider discussion and views and to provide delivery practitioners with the opportunity to meet and discuss issues with strategic partners. There were also some concerns highlighted with regard to the timing of the programme given other operational commitments and developments

However, the Sets continued to: provide the opportunity to share and promote good practice; to learn lessons from previous initiatives; to support participants to address problems they were facing. The Sets also provided the opportunity for those involved to identify issues of common concern with regard tackling worklessness among the work limiting illness client group to be shared with policy makers, funders and practitioners.

Views from participants were very positive and showed that this type of learning opportunity was highly valued by those involved. The sets provided individuals with a trusting environment within which there was the space and time to work on issues and challenges at sufficient depth. The sets also allowed a supportive learning culture that provided the potential for them to have an impact on practice. The themed nature of the sets meant that individuals were learning useful things related to their role, regardless of whether or not they had a particular problem/issue to share. The sets provided individuals with support in moving forward with action in tackling complex tasks.

The Sets were very much action focused and while they did not provide a solution to all the issues and challenges faced they acted as a powerful approach for working on some of the key problems faced in tackling worklessness among the work limiting illness client group. The sets were also successful in sharing best practice that could then be taken back to the respective organisations for wider use.

For a lot of the participants one of the most important aspects of the Action Learning programme was that it provided the opportunity to work with peers to identify challenges and issues that could be fed back to policy makers and funders.

One of the main benefits that the participants highlighted from the programme was that through discussion with other peers, they were able to reinforce the progress they were making in addressing the challenges and issues identified. Feedback also indicated that the participants welcomed the sets as a useful forum for developing solutions and obtaining information that they could use to inform their local developments and for giving a better sense of the challenges that they were facing. As result of the action learning a number of participants stated that they has made new contacts; would be looking to enhance partnership working; and would utilise a larger number of partner organisations to support planning and delivery.

3 ISSUES AND ACTIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS, FUNDERS AND PRACTITIONERS IN THE EAST OF ENGLAND

The action learning sets raised a number of key issues and challenges which need to be addressed. Many of these are echoed by research and evaluation evidence around employability interventions for those with work limiting illness and disability.

A recent JRF review of initiatives to help workless people find and keep paid work highlighted a number of key lessons for future policy and practice. These can be summarised as:

- A holistic, individualised approach which addresses the range of barriers to employment faced by individuals is most effective and this requires a range of support agents working in partnership;
- Those who are “hardest to reach” need to be targeted and supported to help them change their perception of themselves from what they can’t do to what they can;
- Physical adaptations in the workplace and continued support from support agents and employers can have a marked impact on sustained employment;
- Personal advisors/case managers who have expertise in working with the work limiting illness client group are very effective in supporting individuals into employment;
- Those who have not worked for a long time need support in adapting to the workplace;
- Employers also need support to assist them in becoming less risk averse in terms of employing individuals from this client group;
- Efforts around both client and employer engagement need to be better co-ordinated and targeted.

The way in which interventions are funded, planned and delivered need to take into account the above points. The below list of next steps is based on stakeholder input and review of best practice and should inform the employability agenda in the East of England.

ISSUE 1: IMPROVE THE TARGETING OF THOSE THAT ARE HARDEST TO REACH

This was identified by participants as a significant issue. Targeting of individuals is very difficult and is not a key feature of current provision. Methods such as communications from JCP and other mainstream agencies advising clients of the supports available tend to have a low take up rate.

Local Intelligence and Connectivity

Participants identified a potential solution in the form of engaging with other partners, particularly grass roots VCS organisations that may have knowledge of and/or contact with individuals in specific localities. Therefore, local connectivity and informal engagement mechanisms emerged as a key area of importance, and strengthening these was frequently put forward as a solution to a number of the issues discussed. This would not only provide effective engagement, but would bring in a wider range of support agents to support the development of more tailored and flexible solutions.

However, because this process can be resource intensive, making these links and building these relationships is a key challenge, especially for those smaller organisations with less capacity. Therefore, the development of a forum or network to aid these relationships should be considered.

It will be essential to identify what mutual benefits are available to grass roots organisations that could attract them to a network, and to decide at what special level this should exist.

Given the importance of grass roots VCS organisations in engaging with those hardest to reach, it is essential to ensure that they are maintained and supported and don't miss out on funding. Participants identified the need for funding organisations to ensure that commissioning and contracting processes do not exclude VCS organisations from delivery and that local connectivity is recognised as key element in service specifications.

Data Sharing

Participants also highlighted that further difficulties in targeting the hardest to reach emerge from data protection issues which can hamper efforts to effectively engage individuals in the process of support. Potential solutions identified were:

- o the need to educate organisations about what can and can't be shared in terms of data to facilitate effective targeting of individuals;
- o to make efforts to develop shared assessment processes and robust data sharing protocols to make the process of engagement and referral quicker, better co-ordinated and less time consuming for organisations.

ISSUE 2: IMPROVE HOW WE MEASURE SUCCESS WHEN INITIATIVES DO NOT LEAD TO A JOB OUTCOME

Participants identified that a lot of first step engagement activity is lost due to the outcome frameworks of many funded programmes and a lack of recognition of the time and effort involved in engaging and encouraging an individual to commence a journey towards sustained employment.

Evidence gained via the programme also highlights a gap in the support infrastructure in terms of aftercare and retention services to support individuals once they have entered the workforce. This can reinforce rather than combat the concentrations of worklessness that exist among those with a work limiting illness. Evidence demonstrates that where funding is focused on jobs that are retained for a longer period greater success is achieved (Hasluck and Green 2007 and Griffiths et al 2007), indicating the need for outcome setting processes to place greater emphasis on sustained employment.

A range of different solutions were identified including use of social accounting, toolkits etc, a number of recent research studies have also produced suggestions for intermediate indicators of distance travelled (JRF, 2008). Overall, it was felt that:

- there is a need for more emphasis on engagement activity and the length of time needed to support an individual with significant barriers to employment, including suitable aftercare, within outcome setting, monitoring and evaluation frameworks;
- greater use is required of measures and systems to record 'softer outcomes' and 'distance travelled';
- funding agents to recognise the length of time required for some individuals to reach the stage of being 'ready for work';
- more rigorous monitoring of sustained employment is required;
- partners/funders should also look to evaluating the more qualitative process changes emerging from interventions that can often lead to increased net impact rather than having a sole focus on quantitative outputs.

ISSUE 3: ENSURE THAT STAFF RECEIVE THE CORRECT TRAINING AND ORGANISATIONS FOCUS ON STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Given that informal contacts can often carry more credibility and a stronger relationship with workless individuals than formal public services it is essential to involve a wider range of organisations in employability support.

However, there are challenges in establishing effective, joined up engagement and referral processes between these organisations and employability services, very often the staff will not have sufficient understanding of employability supports to allow effective referrals to take place. Therefore, additional training would further support these processes.

This was echoed by participants who identified that staff from a wide variety of organisations needed to be educated around the employability agenda and the benefits of engagement if they are to be able to engage with employers and clients successfully. This is further echoed by the research evidence (Taylor et al 2007 and McDonald 2003) which indicates that all members of partnerships need to have access to training to support delivery of joined up engagement and delivery of support.

ISSUE 4: ENSURE THAT LINK WORKERS ARE UTILISED TO MAKE EFFECTIVE REFERRALS

Targeting and tracking of individuals is a difficult issue for practitioners. In the past particular groups, particularly those with long term limiting illness; have been out of touch with the various employability supports in operation. It is important that:

- the correct individuals are targeted to receive the required support at the required point in time;
- once individuals are targeted they are effectively referred and tracked through the various stages of support to prevent them “falling through the cracks” between provision.

Link workers have been found to successfully aid the referral and tracking process for those with mental health problems, Suffolk PCT are using them and this is resulting in significant success. This is very pertinent given the concentration of mental health issues among the work limiting illness client group. However, other participants seemed unsure if they were available in their areas and what services and supports they provided. Therefore, there is a need to better explore the role and availability of Link workers and their contribution to the employability agenda and thus to ensure they are being fully utilised.

Funders and policy makers should also explore effective tracking and performance management systems which would allow practitioners to correct where the approach is not working at an early point and to identify what is working well.

However, a key challenge is to develop and implement systems and procedures which support effective tracking and performance management and to overcome associated issues, for example data sharing (as above).

ISSUE 5: HAVE A CLEAR STRATEGY ON HOW PRACTITIONERS AND POLICY MAKERS CAN EDUCATE EMPLOYERS

Employers are often unaware of benefits of employing an individual with a work limiting illness and can have very negative perceptions with regard to this client group. Therefore, it was identified that there is a need for a concerted regional effort to tackle these misconceptions and better inform employers of the benefits of employing individuals from the work limiting illness client group and of the supports available to them if they do so.

Methods suggested for meeting this need are:

- a series of targeted regional events focused on employers which consider recruitment, retention and progression;
- development of a clear strategy supported by a network/forum of employer champions;
- development of case studies that can be accessed easily;
- use of the public sector as an exemplar possibly through some form of East of England wide Public Sector Compact/Local Employment Partnership Commitment;
- enhanced efforts to ensure public sector organisations meet their legal duty to promote equality of opportunity.

Linked to this, given the large number of small employers in the East of England, it may also be useful to consider, possibly as an early pilot, a specialist programme of support for SME employers. This could build on and link with Local Employment Partnerships and Business Link Services.

Any employer strategy should be further underpinned by improved co-ordination of employer support services to tackle current fragmentation and duplication in the system which can prevent employers from engaging at all.

ISSUE 6: ESTABLISH A JOINED UP PLANNING AND COMMISSIONING FRAMEWORK

A key issue underpinning all of the discussions is that currently the range of agencies and organisations involved in providing employability support to those with work limiting illness commission and procure services in different ways and at different points in time. This is at odds with an integrated approach and can result in gaps, duplication and fragmentation in provision. It is also the case that the planning, commissioning and delivery of wider support services is undertaken in isolation from employability supports.

An underpinning element of future working, therefore, should be to explore the development of a joined up strategic planning, commissioning and delivery framework among key partners. Such an integrated framework would:

- improve the relevance and focus of provision on the work limiting illness client group;
- support the integration of the wider range of provision with employability to remove client's barriers to accessing, sustaining and progressing in employment;
- become embedded in the business plans of all relevant partners to ensure that they are maximising the input of mainstream activity and resources to shared objectives and outcomes;

- lead to the development of flexible and integrated procurement models that would allow providers to respond to the needs of individuals and employer demands;
- lead to the establishment of joint principles for commissioning differentiating between nationally driven programmes through regional and sub-regional services, to targeted services in the local areas.

Development of such a framework would support the approach outlined in the recent Command Paper, Work Skills, to piloting and rolling out an integrated employment and skills system. Work Skills highlights that partners should be coming together to plan and utilise discretionary activity and funding to complement core mainstream programmes. It also recognises the importance of other services, in areas like housing, childcare, health and social care, in assisting individuals to both entering and sustaining employment – especially those with more extensive needs.

The message from Government is that they are looking for more innovative ways to bring together an even wider range of providers and local partners, including health, childcare and youth services to support those with the most entrenched issues and that third sector organisations also have a unique contribution to make. They have committed to making the employment and skills system less top heavy and to devolve responsibility (in the context of Sub-National Review and Multi-Area Agreements) to collaborative local partnerships with employers at their centre. This presents a real opportunity for partners in the East of England if they can come together to plan, commission and deliver employment and skills services.