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New Deal for Partners: Qualitative Research

BMRB Qualitative were commissioned by the Employment Service to undertake an evaluation of the New Deal for Partners (NDP) programme. The study comprised 162 couples, reflecting a mix of participants and non-participants in the NDP programme as well as a range of demographic characteristics.

The broad picture of partners is one of leaving school without qualifications, practical skills that may be out of date and limited contact with the labour market. Couples also tended to reflect fairly traditional values about work in terms of sex roles.

In terms of motivation to work the study respondents divided into three categories: people who had ruled out the idea of working, before they had been invited to participate in NDP; people who were interested in work, but in the future; and people who had a definite interest in working now. Participation in NDP (defined as an initial interview followed by one case load interview) was dependent on four main features: a positive motivation to change their lifestyle, positive views about work, a 'good' self-perception and a flexible and optimistic view about any barriers that may present themselves.

Participation in NDP was typically associated with a range of positive outcomes which included a move into part- or full-time employment, training, increased confidence, an acceleration of work-focussed plans and

greater discussion with the jobseeker about employment. In some instances there was a small knock-on effect with jobseekers themselves changing the nature of the job search activities and thinking more positively about their partner working.

NDP participants were often positive in their views about the programme. Participants found the one-to-one discussion and job-broking facilities offered by Personal Advisers (PAs) very useful. However, NDP was often let down by inadequate marketing, poor follow-up of interested clients, a lack of any substance to the programme and delivery which could be of variable quality.

In order to improve NDP three specific changes are required:

- Improved marketing, such as ensuring that PAs are trained to 'sell' the NDP programme;
- Upgraded programme substance, such as a wider range of paid-for training opportunities, work experience and work shadowing opportunities; and
- Enhanced delivery, whereby PAs systematically demonstrate how each barrier presented might be overcome together with a full discussion of all forms of in-work support.



Executive Summary

Introduction

New Deal for Partners of Unemployed People (NDPU) was introduced on 26th April 1999 and targeted the dependent partners of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants. NDPU is a voluntary programme and was introduced to address the increasing number of workless households in Britain. The programme was renamed as New Deal for Partners (NDP) on 23 April 2001. As part of the overall evaluation of the NDP programme the Employment Service (ES) commissioned BMRB Qualitative to carry out a study of people who claim Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and their partners.

The study comprised 162 couples, reflecting a mix of participants and non-participants in the NDP programme, as well as a range of demographic characteristics including age, number of children, age of children, and people with disabilities. Fieldwork was undertaken in two phases - September to November 2000 and July and August 2001, to include respondents who had received a revised introductory letter.

About the couples

The broad picture of partners in this study is one of leaving school without qualifications, having practical skills that may be out of date and limited contact with the labour market. The length of time partners had spent out of the labour market could be as long as ten years (around a third of the sample), with the longest being twenty-seven years. Within the purposively selected sample, around a third had been out of the labour market over ten years. Couples tended to reflect fairly traditional values about work. Considering how work-related decisions were made, couples divided into three groups: those who made decisions with little or no reference to each other, those who checked their own decisions with their partner; and couples where each action would be discussed fully

and agreed together. Overall, there was relatively little discussion between partners about work and job search strategies.

Participation in NDP

Participation in NDP (defined as an initial interview followed by at least one case load interview) tended to be dependent on four main features: a positive motivation to change one's lifestyle, positive views about work, a 'good' self-perception and a flexible and optimistic view about any barriers that may present themselves.

In terms of motivation to work the study respondents could be divided into three categories: people who had ruled out the idea of working, or returning to work, before they had been invited to participate in NDP; people who were interested in the idea of work, but in the future rather than now; and people who had a definite interest in working now but did not necessarily participate in NDP.

Barriers to work faced by partners were broadly similar to those faced by jobseekers, but some barriers were more pronounced for partners; lack of confidence, views about household roles, and childcare issues featured more strongly for partners.

Participants' views about NDP ranged widely, from the positive to the negative. Where the process worked well, participants found the one-to-one discussion and job-broking facilities offered by Personal Advisers very useful.

Non-participation occurred for various reasons; they may have felt NDP to be unsuitable for them, not have realised what the programme was (with implications for marketing), or be put off by negative perceptions of the Jobcentre. Where they had attended one interview, they may not become participants due to a number of reasons; a lack of follow-up by PAs, a

feeling that NDP had nothing to offer them, or dissatisfaction with the approach of the PA in the interview they attended.

Taking the views of participants and non-participants together, NDP was felt to be let down by inadequate marketing, poor follow-up of potentially interested clients, a lack of any substance to the programme and variable quality delivery.

The impact of New Deal for Partners

Participation in NDP was typically associated with a range of positive outcomes - a move into part- or full-time employment, training, increased confidence, and an acceleration of work-focused plans and greater discussion with the jobseeker. Job-ready partners may have attained a positive outcome without the help of the NDP programme. There was a small knock-on effect with jobseekers changing their job search activities and thinking more positively about their partner working.

The most positive effects of NDP occurred when the partner had a positive attitude towards employment and planned to work in the future and when the partner-adviser interview was wide-ranging and covered all the issues from job search strategies through to in-work support.

Conclusions and recommendations

The following changes may improve NDP:

- Upgraded programme substance. Partners consistently requested paid-for training (with or without a recognised qualification), and work shadowing opportunities. Availability of these should increase participation.
- Improved marketing. This should reflect more of the local labour market and the introductory letter should provide a lead-in to a more sustained

programme of marketing. Improved marketing is unlikely to be effective without substantial changes in programme substance.

- Enhanced delivery. By report, there was very considerable variation in both the amount of time spent with NDP partners and the interview content and coverage.

The following would considerably enhance the delivery of the NDP programme:

- A work-focused approach that recognises that partners may have been away from the labour market for a very long time and will need a number of interview sessions before they are ready to contemplate employment.
- A full discussion of people's perceived barriers to work, with advisers taking each barrier in a systematic way and discussing how each may be overcome.
- A full discussion of people's deep-seated attitudes, particularly those concerning the care of children, the care of others and labour market issues such as the availability of relevant work, rates of pay, etc.
- A full presentation of the incentives, or in-work support, that is available to people, including a 'better off calculation'. This should include discussion of the Working Families' Tax Credit, financial support for child care and travel costs to training, as well as the discretionary monies available.

Although the changes should increase take up of the programme, it is beyond the scope of the research to comment on the likely extent of any increase resulting from such changes being made.