

Evaluation of Action Teams for Jobs

The Employment Service commissioned ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd, Insite and MORI to evaluate the Action Teams for Jobs initiative during its first year of operation (Phase I). The overall aim of the initiative is to increase employment rates among disadvantaged groups in deprived areas. Action Teams were advised to concentrate their efforts on areas and/or clients with the most disadvantages.

The evaluation (conducted between July 2000 and January 2002) focused on phase 1 of the initiative and synthesises the results from: case study research in ten Action Team areas; analysis of teams' delivery plans; monthly management information and narrative reports; surveys with clients, employers and all non-case study teams; and analysis of pertinent national statistics.

Key findings from the research:

- From a total of 37,887 clients, Action Teams have placed 15,084 jobless people into work, even though many clients were not 'the hardest to help'. It is not possible to identify penetration of the target groups/areas because for many teams precise data about them were not available at the onset of the initiative.
- As a new initiative, Action Teams took time to establish themselves, and the nature of the client group meant that extended periods of help were often needed. In future, similar initiatives need to run for a longer period of time, and have their roles clearly established before they are assessed.
- Action Teams have established themselves as key players in terms of into-work support, and have worked alongside other organisations (including Jobcentres) to provide services to clients from disadvantaged groups and/or deprived areas.
- Action Teams have worked with a range of employers, generally local to the area or client group served. Teams were more inclined to work with employers once clients' needs had been addressed and resolved, even where teams reported strong employer involvement.
- Target groups have become more focused over time. Many teams started with a broad client group comprising all jobless people within a geographically defined area. Latterly, specific groups within these areas have been targeted, often ex-offenders, homeless people, asylum seekers/refugees and people with drug/alcohol problems, although the focus has still remained on jobless individuals.
- Many clients who secured work had been jobless for less than six months and/or were claiming Jobseeker's Allowance. Fewer clients on inactive benefits, jobless for longer (or had never worked), or facing multiple barriers to labour-market participation secured employment.
- Action Teams' key successes relate to their ability to engage with clients and tailor appropriate support to meet their needs. Clients value the services received from Action Teams; this support has played a key role in their decisions to take work.

- Not all Action Team clients were looking for work when they first met up with the team. Overall, surveys shows that 18 per cent of clients were not, though for clients who were claiming passive benefits such as Income Support, this figure is higher at 40 per cent.
- Surveys suggest that just under 80 per cent of clients entering work stayed in their Action Team job for at least 3 months.

Executive Summary

Introduction

Action Teams for Jobs was launched in June 2000 in three pathfinder areas. In October 2000, the initiative was rolled out to 37 more areas across Great Britain. A sum of £1.5 million was allocated to 23 of the teams led by the Employment Service (ES) and £0.5 million to each of the teams operating in Employment Zone areas and Employment Service-led teams in the Highlands and Islands and Merseyside. Of the 40 teams, 25 were ES-led and 15 Employment Zone-led. The overall aim of the initiative is to increase employment rates among disadvantaged groups in employment deprived areas.

The Employment Service (ES) commissioned the Labour Market Partnership (led by ECOTEC Research & Consulting Ltd) to evaluate the Action Teams for Jobs initiative. The evaluation comprised: case studies of ten Action Team areas; analysis of teams' delivery plans; monthly management information and narrative reports; surveys with clients, employers and all non - case study teams; and an analysis of pertinent national statistics.

The 2001 Budget made provision for the initiative to be extended until 2004, and some new areas to be added. The evaluation findings reported on here are based upon research conducted in relation to Phase I of the initiative and took place between June 2000 and January 2002.

Client Characteristics

In all, 37,887 individuals became Action Team clients between July 2000 and the end of September 2001. The majority used ES-led teams as not only were there more of them but also the majority had higher funding and targets. Individual teams saw between 367 and 2,143 clients. Key characteristics of clients are outlined below:

- Two-thirds of the clients were men and more than half were aged 18-34.
- The majority of clients were white (70 per cent). There were noticeable differences in clients' ethnic breakdown in the two types of team. Three-quarters of clients in ES-led areas were white, but only 55 per cent of Employment Zone teams' clients were white because the Zone-led teams were mainly in areas with large minority ethnic populations.
- 62 per cent of clients had been jobless for less than a year. The duration of clients' joblessness varied considerably between ES and Employment Zone-led Teams: 65 per cent of ES-led Teams' clients had been jobless for less than a year, compared with 51 per cent of clients from Employment Zone-led teams.
- More than half of all clients were claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) when they first came into contact with the Action Team; a further 27 per cent were claiming no benefits. More than half of the clients claiming JSA or no benefits had been jobless for less than six months, while the majority

of clients claiming Income Support (IS) had been jobless for more than a year.

- The most common form of disadvantage faced by clients was their postcode (affecting 84 per cent of clients). Ethnicity, health problems and disabilities were also frequently identified as barriers to work.

Action Team Services

Outreach services (separate from mainstream Jobcentre services), based in the target communities, were a key feature of teams' approach, and were tailored to reflect the client groups and areas served. Some teams were based in community centres, while others used mobile facilities to reach dispersed communities or those with poor public transport links. All Teams adopted an outreach approach. Outreach service's success is shown in the 64 per cent of clients who agreed/strongly agreed with the statement 'I prefer to access the Action Team service in my neighbourhood rather than travel to the Jobcentre'.

Outreach sites and links with other local organisations helped teams to reach their potential client base. Referral from other organisations was also important for reaching the eligible population. Teams tried various ways to engage with their target groups. No single method stands out as better than others – different methods suited different target groups and areas.

Clients' needs were assessed on a relatively informal basis. Advisers secured a good understanding of clients' situation and the barriers to work they faced. The full extent of clients' needs was often only identified over a number of interviews.

In addressing barriers, teams successfully delivered a range of services:

- a portfolio of job-search advice and guidance
- support to overcome financial barriers to taking up work (e.g. childcare costs)
- a means of travelling to work, varying from travel cards for public transport, bicycles, mopeds or finance to repair or make roadworthy clients' own cars
- various types of training, some of which was certified and provided the evidence clients needed to take work (e.g. a site/track safety certificate).

Although teams focused strongly on support for clients, work with employers helped to establish a regular supply of vacancies and direct clients' job-preparation activities. Overall, work with employers was secondary to work with clients.

Job Outcomes

In all, 15,084 clients secured work following Action Team intervention between July 2000 and the end of September 2001. This represents 40 per cent of all

clients accessing Action Team services. Key characteristics of clients securing work:

- Approximately a third of all clients who secured work were aged 18-24; 44 per cent of clients from this age group entered employment.
- Two-thirds of all clients securing work were men. This reflects the gender make-up of the client caseload as the proportions of men and women who secured work were similar, at 40 and 39 per cent respectively.
- The majority of Action Team clients securing work were white (three-quarters of all clients entering employment). Overall, 43 per cent of white clients secured work, higher than the equivalent figure for each of the other ethnic groups. For Employment Zone-led teams, the proportion of Pakistani, Bangladeshi or 'black other' clients entering employment was higher than the proportion for white clients.
- Just under half the clients securing work had been jobless for less than six months. The longer clients had been without work, the lower their chance of entering employment.
- Clients claiming JSA when they first met with the team accounted for 59 per cent of clients securing work. Some 44 per cent of these clients secured work, compared with 38 per cent of clients not on benefits and 32 per cent of IS and Incapacity Benefit claimants.
- Postcode disadvantage was less of a barrier to work than other types of disadvantage. Some 41 per cent of clients with postcode disadvantage entered employment, compared with 37 per cent of clients with health problems/ disabilities and 36 per cent who were lone parents. Asylum seekers, refugees and clients with language problems were least likely to enter employment.
- 58 per cent of clients who entered employment found work within 30 days of first contact with the Action Team.
- Just over 80 per cent of clients who gained employment and were interviewed as part of the evaluation research remained in their Action Team job for more than three months

Research Recommendations

Recommendations arising from the research conducted during Phase I of the initiative include the following:

- revisit the policy aims and objectives and ensure that performance criteria reflect teams' intended activities and outputs
- where it is intended that the impact of initiatives be quantified attention needs to be paid to the way in which policy objectives are formulated and the datasets available for the purpose of assessment
- Jobcentre Plus and other policy initiatives can learn from the Action Team approach regarding outreach activities, engaging hard-to-help groups, and delivering tailored, flexible services for a wide range of clients
- there is a need to recognise that management capacity is of central importance in initiatives involving a high degree of local planning and development work, networking and partnership working

- review what monitoring data are available to inform any future evaluation. Data needs to be collected and collated on a consistent basis. Job-outcome data need to be improved, and data are required concerning change in status (i.e. clients moving from one benefit to another) and to measure the sustainable employment outcomes.
- additional research is needed on cost-effectiveness, deadweight and substitution, and better understanding of clients' perceptions of disadvantage (since many clients do not consider themselves to be disadvantaged), as well as the specific features of the Action Team approach that encourage them to take work
- future initiatives designed to meet the needs of 'harder to help' clients groups or those involving the establishment of new delivery arrangements need sufficient time to become established before the effectiveness of the approach is monitored and evaluated.