

IEP JOURNAL

ISSUE 01
JUNE 2020



Latest research • Current policy priorities • Good operational practice
dialogue and debate from the employability sector

In this issue

1. Introduction - **Scott Parkin FIEP**
2. A note from the Editor - **David Imber FIEP**
3. The importance of employment services as we navigate our way out of this crisis - **Tony Wilson FIEP**
4. The mental health implications for job seekers post COVID-19 - **Dr Kylie Henderson FIEP**
5. Improving business engagement - **Dr Jo Ingold FIEP**
6. Partnership working in employment services and responding to the current crisis - **Professor Dan Finn FIEP**
7. 3 things that must shape DWP's response to this recession - **George Selmer FIEP**
8. What works in helping people get into work? - **Sean Williams FIEP**
9. The coming recession - **David Imber FIEP**
10. Lockdown silver linings - **Liz Sewell FIEP**

A very warm welcome to the new IEP Journal. The aim of this publication is to continue the debate and discussion started at the IEP's inaugural Summit in March. We want to encourage the presentation of research and ideas to employability professionals everywhere and to increase contact between readers and authors enabling the sharing of good practice.

In line with the IEP's core objectives, we are seeking to reach all employability professionals by providing an opportunity to discuss important issues with fellow practitioners. We are also positively encouraging and welcoming wider contributions from across the UK and overseas.

Our focus, as always, is on enabling professionals to become even better practitioners, offering reading on research, current policy priorities and operational good practice.

You can read our full IEP Journal Purpose Statement [here](#) and the guidance for authors [here](#).

If you would like to comment in response to any of our articles (and we hope you do) please send your messages to IEPJJournal@iemployability.org.

Scott Parkin FIEP
Chief Executive of IEP

A note from the editor



**David Imber FIEP
Guest Editor**

Thank you for taking a look at the first issue of the new *Journal of the Institute of Employability Professionals*. We are very grateful to all our contributors, and hope readers will find valuable ideas, challenges and stimulation in these pages. Our *Journal*, to be published three times a year, exists to encourage the presentation of research and ideas, and thoughtful discussion between employability professionals.

The COVID crisis has focussed our thoughts on the need to expand and adapt employability practices. So we begin with Tony Wilson's look into the crystal ball, towards a prolonged recession worse than anything we have seen in our lifetimes. He reminds us that 'we will need to tip the scales in favour of those who are long-term unemployed and disadvantaged' and sets the context for much that follows: flexibility, agility, pragmatism and partnership.

Kylie Henderson brings forward the evidence about unemployment and mental health, showing the deep effects the recession can have on mental health. Her thoughts on how services should react deserve to be expanded: good mental health practices have never been more needed.

Jo Ingold shares her research findings about the quality of our employer relations, and about sharing with each other. Her lessons will surely be central to coming efforts, including her insight that employers need our support as much as we need their jobs.

Dan Finn has outlined the recent history of Jobcentre Plus and DWP. Their strategic input underpins all our services; Dan reminds us that DWP, Jobcentre Plus and local government will need to better coordinate and combine their efforts if they are to realise the benefits of partnership working.

George Selmer and Sean Williams' articles turn their attention to lessons from the last twenty years of

employability practice. Their proposals on programme and contract design, on provider flexibility and freedoms, and the investment needed, deserve discussion and elaboration. How do they fit with other evidence for 'what works' in the world that Tony Wilson predicts?

My own piece looks even further back to co-operation and innovation during an absolute shortage of jobs, when there was an emerging sense that employability services could help in the battle against disadvantage. Could some of that be added to the modern professional approaches described by other contributors?

But we wouldn't be the IEP if we could not appreciate our front line. Liz Sewell finds the silver lining and describes COVID-responses that are already making positive contributions to front-line work. Such thoughts are essential to our work. It can't be a coincidence that Liz and Jo both write about the importance of trust in relations with employers and clients, and that all contributors emphasise the need for partnerships in delivery.

I must end with encouragement to you to contact us with your letters, responses and suggestions for articles. The second edition will be in October, and the third around the time of the 2021 IEP Summit. You can find information and guidance for your contributions in these appendices - [IEP Journal Purpose Statement](#) and the [Guidance for Authors](#).

David Imber FIEP

As we navigate our way out of this crisis, the role of employment services has never been more important



Tony Wilson FIEP
Director
Institute for Employment Studies

@ tony.wilson@employment-studies.co.uk
in linkedin.com/in/tony-wilson-a31aab37/
t @tonywilsonIES

On 5 March, the IEP hosted its inaugural Summit, bringing together eighty people from across the employment and employability sector to reflect on where we were and the challenges for the future. The COVID-19 outbreak was already well underway by then, but with no European countries on lockdown and no (reported) deaths in the UK, virtually no-one – inside the room or outside it – was predicting the sheer scale of what was to come. Just three months on from that meeting, the recent past has never felt more like another country. So where are we now, and what does this mean for the future?

Before this crisis began, and as we met in early March, the labour market was in decent shape. The employment rate was the highest that it had ever been (at above 76%); employment was up by 3.5 million over the decade, with 85% of this growth in higher skilled jobs; permanent work was the highest that it had ever been; and the gap in employment rates for disadvantaged groups was beginning to close. At the same time though, a decade of slow growth weak wages and cuts to social security meant that for many people and in many places, it did not feel like Britain was booming. There was still work to do.

Fast forward three months however, and we are now in the foothills of an unemployment crisis that will likely be greater than any that we have faced. As at 9 April, there were 2.1 million people 'claimant' unemployed – up by 70% on the previous month, a faster rise than any point since 1947. Since then there have been more than a million further claims for Universal Credit, and we know that there will be at least half a million people unemployed and not claiming benefit. By the time you read this unemployment will already be well above three million – and may be higher even than it reached in the Great Depression.

The government's Job Retention Scheme (JRS) has prevented this crisis becoming a catastrophe – helping to protect the jobs and incomes of more than eight million workers and with a further two million self-employed workers receiving relief through a separate income support scheme, it's likely that right now fewer than half of the working age population are actually working. The speed and scale of this crisis has been staggering and it will unfortunately get worse before it gets better – with the JRS due to start unwinding in August, bringing with it a risk of a 'second wave' of unemployment (we estimate, based



“The speed and scale of this crisis has been staggering and it will unfortunately get worse before it gets better.”

on ONS survey data, that there are around 2.5 million furloughed workers in hospitality, retail and the arts who are likely to be particularly at risk); while long-term unemployment is going to start rising rapidly from the end of this year, bringing with it the risks of lasting damage to individuals, households and communities.

Faced with a crisis of this magnitude, following on from what has been a devastating public health crisis, it is hard to know where to start but we can and we must respond. So with twelve other organisations and experts, we have co-authored proposals for what this needs to include. First and foremost, in our view, this means ensuring that all of those who are out of work and who want work – including all of those unemployed – are guaranteed access to good quality, one-to-one help to prepare for and find work. The eleven thousand work coaches in Jobcentre Plus, most of whom are now back at their posts, will already be working hard to deliver this but we will need more – likely 8 to 10 thousand more – advisers and coaches in order to meet this challenge. So we would like to see employment services, recruiters, local government and the voluntary and community sector mobilised to deliver this.

This support needs to be mobilised now and must be put in place in the less-than-two months that we now have before the JRS starts winding down. To manage any second wave that follows from the winding down of the JRS, we should require employers receiving the subsidy to notify employment services if they intend to make redundancies and to ensure that in all parts of the country we have the resources to co-ordinate and then deliver the employment, skills and welfare response. This response needs to be open to all of those who are out of work in that area, and not just those at risk of losing their jobs.

“critically, we need to start to put in place the services that we will need in order to help those reaching long-term unemployment later in the year.”

Alongside this, critically, we need to start to put in place the services that we will need in order to help those reaching long-term unemployment later in the year. This will take time to set up, and we know that any new programmes will not hit their stride until early 2021. We cannot yet know what the jobs market will look like

by then, but we can say with certainty that we will need to tip the scales in favour of those who are long-term unemployed and disadvantaged.

We have a long and rich evidence base of what works in this space, including high quality employment services; personalised support; employer involvement; access to pre-employment training; support to address specific barriers like caring, basic skills, housing and health... We can all design our fantasy programme from a list like this – but flexibility, agility, pragmatism and partnership will be key as we try to respond at speed and at scale.

With nationally-procured employment services just one sixth of the size that they were going into the last recession, it is clear that no one part of government or one Department will be able to do this on their own.

Navigating our way out of this crisis and helping the millions of people who have lost jobs and income to find good quality and secure work, will define the work of employability services in the years to come. The role that IEP members will play in this response has never been more important.

References

¹ “Furloughing of workers across UK businesses: 23 March 2020 to 5 April 2020”, ONS, 23 April 2020; available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/furloughingofworkersacrossukbusinesses/23march2020to5april2020>

² *Help Wanted: Getting Britain Back to Work*, May 2020; available at: <https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/resource/help-wanted-getting-britain-back-work>

³ *IES analysis of DWP Annual Reports and Accounts*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tony has worked in employment for most of the last twenty years in a range of roles across DWP, Jobcentre Plus and the Treasury, and more latterly in independent Institutes. As Institute Director at IES, Tony leads a team of forty people delivering research, analysis and consultancy support on employment, skills, education and HR.



The mental health implications for job seekers post COVID-19



Dr Kylie Henderson BAPsych GDipProfPsych
DClinPsych MAPS GAICD FIEP
Founder & Managing Director
The Better Health Generation

[@ kylie@betterhealthgen.com.au](mailto:kylie@betterhealthgen.com.au)

[linkedin.com/in/drkyliehenderson/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/drkyliehenderson/)

[@TheBetterHealt2](https://twitter.com/TheBetterHealt2)

It is widely understood that people are better off when they have paid work (Zabkiewicz, 2010). The COVID-19 pandemic in the United Kingdom is a cause for concern, not only because of the physical health problems associated with the virus but because it has the potential to create a second wave of mental health problems, especially amongst the unemployed.

In this article, you will learn:

- Renowned social psychology pioneer Marie Jahoda's five beneficial functions of employment for wellbeing and mental health.
- The economic impact of COVID-19 and how this had led to a decrease in employment and an increase in associated mental health problems.
- How social distancing has detached many people from their personal and social supports, compounding the mental health problems from unemployment.
- The combination of unemployment and isolation and how this leads to an increased risk of alcohol abuse and domestic violence.
- How professionals working with unemployed populations will need to be prepared for these complicating factors when working with clients.

Countries worldwide have experienced the impact of COVID-19. In response, the United Kingdom declared a lockdown in March 2020. Results from the Business Impact of COVID-19 Survey suggest that around 25 per cent of the working population is now working from home, have been stood down, or have lost their job entirely (Office of National Statistics, 2020), and the possibility of further significant job losses is imminent. The combination of not being able to work and the lockdown has led to many people experiencing increased levels of stress and uncertainty, while

simultaneously losing their usual sources of routine, social connection, and purpose; all of which is having a significant impact on mental health.

COVID-19 has impacted more than just people's ability to go to work. It has also infiltrated multiple areas of wellbeing. Social psychology pioneer Marie Jahoda (as cited in Paul and Batinic, 2010) proposed the concept of five beneficial functions of employment that sustain wellbeing and mental health.

These functions are:

1. Time structure.
2. Social contact.
3. Participation in a collective purpose.
4. Status and identity.
5. Regular activity.

Jahoda argued that the absence of these psycho-social factors, typically due to unemployment, is harmful to people's wellbeing. When applied to the current pandemic, people tend to be working from home, or they have lost their work entirely. Thus, they are not fulfilling many of the five beneficial functions and are experiencing a decline in mental health.



“..around 25 per cent of the working population is now working from home, have been stood down, or have lost their job entirely.”

Before the impacts of COVID-19, the Mental Health Foundation (2016) stated that one in six adults in the UK experience symptoms of common mental health problems (e.g. depression and anxiety) at any one time. They also reported that unemployed people were significantly more likely to experience symptoms of common mental health problems compared to their employed peers. Perhaps more worryingly, two-thirds of those receiving Employment and Support Allowance reported suicidal ideation while 43 per cent of these recipients have attempted suicide. These results point to the prevalence of mental health issues in the broader population before COVID-19 but also demonstrates the significant mental health struggles experienced by unemployed people.

Since UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced social distancing measures throughout the country, there has been a 49 per cent increase in reports of depression and anxiety. There has been a 38 per cent increase in reports of less/worse sleep, a 35 per cent increase in unhealthy eating habits, and a 19 per cent increase in alcohol consumption (Duffy, 2020). These factors suggest a significant decrease in the mental wellbeing of the population due to COVID-19 - a decrease expected to be worse for the unemployed.

When considering the broader population, social distancing has removed several of the five beneficial functions (time structure, social contact, participation in a collective purpose, status and identity and regular activity). Research from the 2002-2003 SARS outbreak demonstrated that quarantine is associated with significant increases in symptoms of anxiety and depression, an outcome that is even more prevalent for low-income households (Hawryluck et al., 2004). This outcome is supported by Venkatesh and Edirappuli (2020) who have suggested that due to current social distancing measures, people are more detached from their loved ones, deprived of their liberties, and are devoid of their usual purpose and routine. When looking at this through the lens of Jahoda's theory, it's unsurprising that the removal of the five beneficial functions has led to increased experiences of boredom, frustration, low mood, depression, and anxiety (Venkatesh & Edirappuli). The results show a negative impact on the mental health of the broader population, including those who retain their collective purpose, identity, and regular activity by working from home. However, unemployed people are less able to

fulfil these functions, putting them at increased risk of mental health problems. They are also unable to access their typical social and personal supports or maintain some semblance of social contact and activity due to social distancing. This compounds all the mental health factors associated with unemployment, creating an even greater risk of mental health problems than either the recession or past viral outbreaks.

The risk of compounding mental health problems for unemployed people due to COVID-19 doesn't stop with common mental disorders or suicide. Evidence indicates that levels of alcohol consumption did not change for the general population as a result of the recession, but that unemployed people were shown to be at a high-risk of increased binge drinking between 2008-2010 (Harhay et al., 2013).

As the UK economy suffers, unemployment rises and as the stress associated with COVID-19 increases, there is

“it will be equally important to address the mental health problems experienced by jobseekers as a result of COVID-19 as it is to address their practical needs in gaining meaningful employment.”

an increasing worry that at-risk populations may display a dangerous rise in alcohol consumption (Clay & Parker, 2020) to cope with the increased stress, boredom, and low mood; and because social distancing prevents them from accessing their typical support, unemployed people may turn to alcohol.

There is some evidence to support this concern as in the month following the implementation of social distancing, UK alcohol sales increased by 67 per cent (Elay, 2020). This is worrying for unemployed people because greater alcohol consumption has been associated with poorer labour market outcomes (Johansson et al., 2007). It is also worrying for the



“in the month following the implementation of social distancing, UK alcohol sales increased by 67 per cent.”

community because reduced income, increased time at home and loss of purpose, as well as increased alcohol consumption are significant risk factors for domestic violence (Rajput et al., 2019). This indicates the possibility of poor mental health and other complicating factors amongst jobseekers.

All of the factors raised above point to the possibility of a second wave of mental health problems as a result of COVID-19 as it inhibits the ability for people, especially the unemployed, to fulfil the five beneficial functions. There is a clear link between poor mental health and difficulties in gaining employment (Evans-Lacko et al., 2013), which means that while unemployed people may experience the most significant declines in mental health, it will also make it more difficult for them to find work in an increasingly challenging labour market. Therefore, professionals working to gain employment for their jobseeker clients may face many complicating factors such as anxiety, depression, stress, alcohol use, and even experiences of domestic violence.

In the months to come, it will be equally important to address the mental health problems experienced by jobseekers as a result of COVID-19 as it is to address their practical needs in gaining meaningful employment. Increased competition for fewer jobs may mean that some people face extended unemployment even when social distancing begins to ease, a significant risk factor for further declines in mental health.

To address mental health issues, professionals may need to assist their clients with scheduling meaningful activity into each day. They may also need to be familiar with mental health and wellbeing services to refer their clients to should those clients require psychological support. Lastly, professionals may need to be familiar with appropriate drug and alcohol services and any reporting requirements for domestic violence.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kylie has more than 20 years experience in the employment services industry and worked for large, national employment services providers overseeing their health and employment programmes. She holds a Doctorate of Clinical Psychology and an Adjunct Research Fellow at the University of Southern Queensland in Australia.



References

- Barr, B., Taylor-Robinson, D., Scott-Samuel, A., Mckee, M., & Stuckler, D. (2012). Suicides associated with the 2008-10 economic recession in England: time trend analysis. *BMJ : British Medical Journal (Online)*, 345(7873), e5142. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.e5142>
- Clay, J., & Parker, M. (2020). Alcohol use and misuse during the COVID-19 pandemic: a potential public health crisis? *The Lancet Public Health*, 5(5), e259–e259. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(20\)30088-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(20)30088-8)
- Duffy, B. (2020). Life under lockdown: coronavirus in the UK. Retrieved from <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/life-under-lockdown-coronavirus-in-the-uk>
- Eley J. Record month for UK supermarkets as consumers spend extra £1.9bn. *Financial Times*, 2020. Mar 31. <https://www.ft.com/content/cf153651-09f3-4cf5-a012-e4f823b648be>
- Hawryluck, L., Gold, W., Robinson, S., Pogorski, S., Galea, S., & Styra, R. (2004). SARS control and psychological effects of quarantine, Toronto, Canada. *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, 10(7), 1206–1212. <https://doi.org/10.3201/eid1007.030703>
- Johansson, E., Alho, H., Kiiskinen, U., & Poikolainen, K. (2007). The association of alcohol dependency with employment probability: evidence from the population survey “Health 2000 in Finland.” *Health Economics*, 16(7), 739–754. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hec.1201>
- Mental Health Foundation. (2016). Fundamental facts about mental health 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/fundamental-facts-about-mental-health-2016>
- Office of National Statistics (2020). Business impact of COVID-19 survey [Dataset]. Retrieved from <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/economicoutputandproductivity/output/datasets/businessimpactofCOVID19surveybics>
- Paul, K., & Batinic, B. (2010). The need for work: Jahoda’s latent functions of employment in a representative sample of the German population. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 31(1), 45–64. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.622>
- Sara Evans-Lacko, Martin Knapp, Paul Mccrone, Graham Thornicroft, & Ramin Mojtabai. (2013). The mental health consequences of the recession: economic hardship and employment of people with mental health problems in 27 European countries. *PLoS ONE*, 8(7), e69792. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0069792>
- Sheeraz Ali Rajput, Muhammad Owais Aziz, & Muhammad A Siddiqui. (2019). Social determinants of Health and Alcohol consumption in the UK. *Epidemiology Biostatistics and Public Health*, 16(3). <https://doi.org/10.2427/13128>
- Stuckler, D., Basu, S., Suhrcke, M., Coutts, A., & Mckee, M. (2009). The public health effect of economic crises and alternative policy responses in Europe: an empirical analysis. *The Lancet*, 374(9686), 315–323. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(09\)61124-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(09)61124-7)
- Venkatesh, A., & Edirappuli, S. (2020). Social distancing in COVID-19: what are the mental health implications? *BMJ*, 369, m1379. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m1379>
- Zabkiewicz, D. (2010). The mental health benefits of work: do they apply to poor single mothers? *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 45(1), 77–87. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-009-0044-24-2>

Improving business engagement



Dr Jo Ingold FIEP
Associate Professor
Leeds University Business School

@ j.ingold@leeds.ac.uk

linkedin.com/in/joingold/

@JoIngold

The COVID19 pandemic is expected to lead to an economic crisis and to high unemployment. This will be a challenging context for the employability and skills sector. In this article, I present data from research on employer engagement and insights from practice to argue for the need for employer engagement to be central to employability practice.

Supporting jobseekers and supporting employers are two sides of the same coin. It is equally important to prepare employers to employ jobseekers on your caseloads as it is to prepare jobseekers for jobs. However, decades of supply-side focused programmes in the UK have been accompanied by a huge amount of supply-side focused studies. This has meant an abject neglect of the crucial demand-side (employers). Employability and skills providers should harness the opportunity the post-COVID19 context presents to work more effectively with businesses in order to improve their engagement in programmes and to improve workplace inclusion. Below I sketch out some key principles for how this might look, based on evidence and good practice examples.

At Leeds University Business School, we undertook [comparative research](#) about employability and skills programmes in the UK and Denmark involving a survey of over 1,500 businesses and over 100 interviews with businesses and providers. Our evidence adds to a small, but growing, evidence base from within Northern Europe, the US and Australia focused on employer engagement. Our research showed that overall participation in employment and skills programmes across the UK and Denmark was similar (around 70%). However, we measured employer engagement (rather than participation) and found that in Denmark 'relational' (repeated, sustained) engagement was 60%, double that in the UK (30%). Denmark has a much smaller range of employability (activation) programmes. By contrast, the complex number of programmes and multiple organisations targeting employers in the UK means providers simply have to work a lot harder to get in front of employers.

We followed up this research with a knowledge translation project in partnership with [ERSA](#) and have interacted with over 75 practitioners, providers and commissioners. There is no one model for employer engagement. It helps if you have dedicated staff to focus on employers. However, some organizations combine jobseeker support with employer engagement, and this is true of specific models of employment support such as Individual Placement and Support.

At root, though, employer engagement is about relationships. This requires good intra-organizational relations within employability organisations and good inter-organizational relations between providers and businesses. Good relationships with employers requires building of trust. The employability sector is different from the high street recruitment sector in two main ways. Firstly, your caseloads are fixed. Secondly, you are not providing a service in exchange for money, or as part of a contract. But the activities involved in servicing employers are extremely similar. However, you have to build trust with employers on the basis of what you will deliver with no recourse to a contract. Once you've delivered on your promise, this is a basis on which to build.

Employer engagement is also about sales. Not everyone is comfortable with the idea of 'selling' candidates to employers, but consultative selling is important. Employers do not always know what their needs are. The process of identifying these needs requires employer-facing staff to have good listening



“it is equally important to prepare employers to employ jobseekers on your caseloads as it is to prepare jobseekers for jobs.”

and diagnostic skills. Using these skills, you can put together bespoke packages of support for individual employers. Sometimes employers’ needs will be relatively simple, such as filtering of job applications. Other businesses will have requirements that may span more than one programme, or provider. I will return to this later on.

Some businesses will always require large volumes of workers to fill bulk vacancies. This can actually involve little employer engagement. However, repeat business and brokering of vacancies requires more nuanced employer engagement practices. Usually employers want two things: quality of service and quality of candidate to meet their needs. Honesty is a critical foundation. Inevitably, sometimes things go wrong. It is important to own mistakes and to work with the employer to put things right for next time. Again, this is about listening. It may be that the support provided to the jobseeker was not sufficient or was inappropriate. It may be that the job was inappropriate. Ensuring a good match for both requires managing expectations on both sides.

Sometimes staff will need to challenge employers. Unfortunately, not every employer has good practices. While employer needs are important, we need to be mindful of not perpetuating poor employment practices. For example, [our research](#) found that a critical barrier to moving jobseekers from programmes into employment was employers’ discriminatory recruitment and selection practices. The interview method is the most common method of recruitment but research, including ours, shows that it is regularly ineffective in producing a good match. Businesses tend to use familiar recruitment and selection practices because they don’t know of alternatives.

Additionally, for a range of jobseekers, including disabled people, parents, carers and those further from the labour market with multiple and complex needs, the COVID19 crisis has demonstrated new ways of working. Job roles that businesses previously considered inflexible or needing to be done ‘as they’ve always been done’ have overnight become flexible or are being done very differently. It is an opportune time for employability practitioners to think about how best to pitch their expertise to potential client businesses. This includes focusing on the business bottom line – businesses will be keen to save costs on recruitment in the post-COVID19 context – as well as inclusion or diversity ‘dividends’.

Employability and skills programmes are [important routes for businesses to increase their workforce diversity](#) and be more inclusive. But all too often they don’t know about programmes, what they can offer or are unconvinced of the ‘value proposition’ for their

business. The value proposition can be roughly divided into ‘[HR logics](#)’ and ‘[CSR logics](#)’ but there are clearly nuances to this. The employability sector is well-placed to not only be advocates for their jobseeking clients but also to articulate their expertise in employability and recruitment.

Crucial to effective employer engagement is a need for providers to think about more collaborative ways of working. Fulfilling employers’ needs or, crucially, not disappointing them, may require providers to work with other organisations. There are broader sectoral issues here about inter-organisational ways of working. However, [co-opetition](#) – collaborating amidst competition – is something that takes place at individual levels amongst employer engagement staff. Co-opetition involves working out who your competitors are and who your complementors are. Your complementors are people who can add to your offer; customers value your offer more when they have your complementor’s product than when they have yours alone.

For example, it may be that you have vacancies from an employer that you cannot fill. Not passing them to others risks disappointing that employer and wasting an opportunity. There is a principal agent problem here in that you will want to ensure that the employer receives a good service. This requires trust relationships between organisations and between individual staff both within and between organisations. More complex, and a key barrier to employer engagement, are the performance measures that individual staff have to fulfil. This requires some honest conversations within the sector about how to best service employers in this context but, critically, it also requires potentially different ways of working within provider organisations. The IEP is extremely well-placed to advocate for better and more effective employer engagement practices and to help practitioners to upskill their employer engagement practices, as well as to look at issues of reward.

Digital service delivery is likely to play an increasingly important role. However, face to face delivery (even if mediated through a digital format) will still be central. Employability professionals will continue to be critical to assisting people into good work and employer engagement needs to be central to this endeavour.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jo is an Associate Professor of Human Resource Management and Public Policy at Leeds University Business School. She holds a First Class Bachelor’s degree from the University of Bristol and a Master’s and a PhD from the University of Sheffield. Her academic specialisms are at the intersection of human resource management and public policy and her research and publications cover employability programmes; employer engagement; disadvantaged labour market groups; recruitment and selection; and evidence and policy-making.

Partnership working in employment services and responding to the current crisis



Professor Dan Finn FIEP
Professor Emeritus
University of Portsmouth

@ dan.finn@port.ac.uk

in linkedin.com/in/dan-finn-32525310/

www.researchportal.port.ac.uk/portal/

This article considers key findings from international research on partnership working between Public Employment Services and other labour market intermediaries and service providers, with a particular focus on Jobcentre Plus. Extensive and effective partnership working is now needed to build local capacity to meet the needs of employers and jobseekers whose prospects are being blighted by the pandemic recession.

Although structured differently a Public Employment Service (PES) exists in nearly all countries and acts as one of the major delivery systems through which governments respond to economic and natural crises and implement employment, labour market, and social policies. In most countries the PES is now playing a key role in providing emergency assistance and job matching services to employers and workers impacted by the Coronavirus crisis. They are also simultaneously adjusting their service delivery models to meet new 'social distancing' constraints, including an acceleration in the use of online digital services.

The success of each PES in meeting the challenges they now face will be shaped in part by how well they coordinate and conduct their relationships in partnership with employer organisations, other public organisations, including local government, employment programme providers and providers of complementary services ranging from skills training and child care through to social housing. A novel feature of the service delivery landscape is the growing potential to work with a wider and diverse range of commercial agencies providing in-person and online job matching, recruitment, training and temporary staffing services to employers and jobseekers.

In a recent study, commissioned by the International Labour Organisation, I reviewed the design and impacts of PES partnership working in both developed and developing countries, with a particular focus on

China, India, Colombia and South Korea¹. The results showed that PES engagement in partnership working had played a key role in enabling them to increase service coverage and provide support to employers and previously underserved groups especially young people and some of the vast populations of informal and irregular workers in the case study countries.

The findings from the report provide insights that are of interest to employability practitioners and may be useful for policy makers considering which partnership approaches to support as they develop PES services to meet the needs of job seekers and employers in the radically changed circumstances of the early 2020s.

Public Employment Service partnerships

PES partnerships can be strategic, operational or contractual. They take a variety of forms, from informal working groups established in response to a specific challenge such as a major plant closure, through to formal committees or boards and multilevel structures that have both a strategic decision-making body and an operational body. PES's are often involved in a range of strategic and/or delivery partnerships that may operate at national, regional, or local levels. In some partnerships the PES may be the lead organisation, in others the PES will be a contributing partner working jointly with other organisations.

“A novel feature of the service delivery landscape is the growing potential to work with a wider and diverse range of commercial agencies providing in-person and online job matching, recruitment, training and temporary staffing services to employers and jobseekers.”

There are multiple examples also of locally driven partnerships, that the PES might lead, or be part of, where organisations and stakeholders agreed to share information, collaborate and/or pool resources. Partnerships may therefore be 'top down' and mandated by national governments, or they may be 'bottom up' and developed voluntarily by the PES and/or other agencies, such as regional or municipal governments.

Partnership agreements can be formalised through a wide range of instruments. Agreements between public sector organisations often take the form of a 'Memorandum of Understanding' (MoU), which is not legally enforceable, but sets out agreed objectives and partnership arrangements. Some partnership arrangements, especially 'public private partnerships', take the form of legal contracts setting out clear 'terms and conditions'. Inter-organisational obligations are often set out in Service Level Agreements.

“There are multiple examples of locally driven partnerships, that the PES might lead, or be part of, where organisations and stakeholders agreed to share information, collaborate and/or pool resources.”

Many PES-related partnerships are, however, informal and these are especially important at local level, where recourse to informal arrangements is widespread and such local agreements can offer a low-cost way of meeting immediate needs for coordination and efficiency, as is emerging in many countries in response to the current crisis.

Jobcentre Plus and partnership working

Partnership working is central to the work of Jobcentre Plus and in each region DWP District Managers are typically supported by Partnership Managers who are expected to engage strategically with local employers and stakeholders, including local government, local employer partnerships and associations, skills providers and community organisations. Partnership Managers should also act as the redundancy single point of contact if the number of local employees being made redundant is low, and work with the DWP's ['Rapid Response to Redundancy Service'](#) when the numbers are over 20. The RRS service is co-ordinated nationally by the DWP's National Employer and Partnership Team and Jobcentres have a statutory responsibility to work with other agencies in tackling large scale redundancies.

In the past decade Jobcentre partnership working has increased following implementation of welfare reforms and Universal Credit, the wider devolution agenda, and the decision to [rationalise the Jobcentre network](#) which saw the closure of over 100 Jobcentres – about 15% of the



network – between 2016 and 2018. These changes have had a major impact on the ways in which Jobcentres, local government, and other providers, coordinate and align their services. The 'combined local authorities' also now exercise devolved powers that enable them to better coordinate aspects of employment, skills and health provision.

DWP partnership working, and service coordination has [always been largely voluntary](#), however, and local government, and even the combined local authorities, have only limited influence on the design or commissioning of Jobcentre support and on how resources are deployed to meet local needs. The DWP approach to localism remains constrained by the requirement to meet centrally defined national objectives and top-down performance management.

This highly centralised approach has been changing, however, as the DWP and Jobcentres have worked with partners to develop services for groups not well served by mainstream employment programmes, including 'troubled families', disadvantaged young people, new migrants and other jobseekers not claiming benefits, and those on disability benefits ineligible for mainstream employment services. Partnership working has also given Jobcentre managers an opportunity to influence how, and in support of whom, local complementary employment and skills programmes are targeted.

The pressure to better coordinate DWP provision with other local services has further increased as Jobcentres and Work Coaches have implemented UC work requirements and sought to become a gateway to complementary services for low paid workers, claimants with limited work capacity, lone parents

“Partnership working has also given Jobcentre managers an opportunity to influence how, and in support of whom, local complementary employment and skills programmes are targeted.”

“The necessity to provide for a more diverse and challenging caseload of working age claimants requires the DWP and Jobcentres to work more flexibly and collaboratively.”

with younger children and the partners and wives of benefit claimants. The necessity to provide for a more diverse and challenging caseload of working age claimants requires the DWP and Jobcentres to work more flexibly and collaboratively. This includes now also delivering DWP employment advisory services in over 1,100 external locations, which include community and child-care centres, prisons, health services, and so on.

In some parts of the UK Jobcentres are now part of more coherent partnerships, delivering better networked systems of local employment assistance and benefit services. These networks are found in varied localities, where local government, Jobcentres and other service providers agree strategic objectives on poverty reduction and increasing local employment. In some parts of the country local partnership agreements and cross-referral arrangements seek explicitly to better coordinate service delivery. This has already resulted in better aligned, and sometimes co-located, services where, for example, skills, careers, health, and money advice services, and DWP employment support are delivered alongside each other on a part-time or full-time basis.

Partnership working and responding to the current crisis

Local partnerships are now playing a key role in supporting employers and jobseekers affected by the recession and in relieving some of the pressures on Jobcentres and the DWP's RRS. In [Leicestershire](#), for example, a COVID-19 redundancy and recruitment service has been established by the Local Enterprise Partnership, bringing together local government, the

DWP, and skills providers. In another example, Greater Manchester's '[Employ GM](#)', is providing immediate job matching whilst coordinating partner networks to help businesses retain their current workers and/or help those losing employment access new jobs. Partnership interventions are also being supported by specialist redundancy services in [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and Northern Ireland. Such partnership approaches will need to accelerate further as the full unemployment consequences of the pandemic crisis emerge, especially when the 'Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme' and the 'Self-Employment Income Support Scheme' are unwound.

Partnership working is not a substitute for the investments in employment services and programmes that will be needed to tackle the consequences of the current recession, but it represents a way of amplifying the impacts from investments in such programmes and related services. The advantages of partnership working do not, however, arise automatically, and as in other countries, the DWP, Jobcentre Plus and local government will need to better coordinate and combine their efforts if they are to realise the benefits of partnership working. One starting point would be to swiftly update and republish the 2011 [RRS toolkit](#) for Jobcentres and local partners that helped focus and shape partnership working in response to the previous recession.

“Partnership working is not a substitute for the investments in employment services and programmes that will be needed to tackle the consequences of the current recession, but it represents a way of amplifying the impacts from investments in such programmes and related services.”



References

¹ Formal publication of the report has been delayed due to the crisis but a full preprint version can be accessed [here](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dan is an expert on the comparative design and delivery of public employment services. Over the past 30 years he has published extensively, supervised and managed a wide range of public employment services focussed comparison research projects and evidence reviews.

3 Things that must shape DWP's response to this recession



George Selmer FIEP
Business Development
Corndel

@ george@georgeselmer.com

in linkedin.com/in/georgeselmer/

🐦 @gselmer

The worst of times. We were always due a recession at some point soon. Just as Gordon Brown never really ended 'boom and bust' this government was never going to permanently achieve a state of 'full employment'. They don't call them economic cycles for nothing.

Many of us have been warning of this for some time - but none of us could have foreseen the scale, ferocity and unpredictability of the economic crisis generated by COVID-19.

April saw a rapid and record increase in the claimant count. Over 850,000 new claims within the space of a month (the previous monthly rise was 12,000).

There is no comparable spike in our lifetimes. In each of the recessions of the past 40 years, there has never been a monthly increase in excess of 200,000.

These numbers do not include the 8.4 million people furloughed in the same month. At present, at least a quarter of employers anticipate further redundancies once the protection of furlough ends.

These are scary and unprecedented times. Add in the economics and I quickly run out of adjectives.

What next?

In this situation, what will the government do?

Torsten Bell, of the Resolution Foundation, has shown the impact that active labour market programmes have had in shallowing out the trough and accelerating the way back up in previous recessions.

As we headed into the downturn of 2008, over £1bn per year was being spent on provision to help people back into work - on top of Jobcentre Plus.

Trouble is, right now, we've got a Public Employment Service that is a shadow of its former self. Since 2015, we've seen over 90% of the capacity stripped out of

organisations that help people back into work. Richard Johnson has recounted this in more depth: <https://buyingqq.com/2020/05/25/reducing-unemployment-a-simple-blueprint/>

Still, the anticipation seems to be - among those that know - that the DWP will seek to rapidly inject investment back into the employability sector.

In the short term, it seems certain that they will look to what they have - boosting capacity within the existing Work and Health Programme. In the medium term, it seems equally clear they have no option other than to commission new services, alongside increasing the capacity of the Jobcentre network.

But, in the midst of a tsunami of papers and proposals on what to do next, what must the DWP remain focused on?

There are three things. One at the macro-level, one at the micro-level and one at the money level.

3 things: macro, micro and money

1. Macro: Remember what works

There was a good deal of throwing baby out with bath water post-Work Programme. DWP must not forget that over the past 20 years, we have learned what works in commissioning back to work services. There are some basic principles that we know deliver results. These principles were formulated and delivered by the top performing employability providers, in partnership with the Department. We mustn't lose sight of them now, because they are unfashionable, off-trend or politically unpalatable. The right ideas never go out of style.

Sean Williams has written elsewhere recently on What Works When Helping People Get Into Work: 10 Lessons From the Past Two Decades. It's worth reading.

2. **Micro: Give providers freedom to deliver a service, not a programme**

We don't need a 'programme' designed in central government. We need to give the best providers space to deliver a service to people. DWP needs to be clear on the outputs it requires. It needs to create a national framework that identifies, incentivises and supports the best providers and enables them to rigorously manage the provider 'market' to deliver the outputs defined. I hesitate to use the phrase 'black box', but I know those of you of a certain vintage are all thinking it anyway.

As Polly Mackenzie of Demos argues: "We have to stop with the cookie cutter policies, imposed on everyone as if we were all identical... complicated and tricky is everywhere you look. One-size fits all policies designed in Whitehall can't possibly accommodate the infinite diversity of human experience."

This does not mean creating a centrally designed (or even locally designed) operating model (or models) of labyrinthine complexity.

It means creating a focus upon outcomes and giving providers - and front-line staff - flexibility and autonomy to find solutions for the individuals they serve.

3. **Money: be ambitious and invest**

We should be ambitious in our response to this recession.

If we are not, we are abandoning millions of people to 'sort themselves out'. The crisis is of such scale that a half-hearted response won't cut it. DWP should set itself and the employability sector stretching targets to change the shape of the curve.

But they need to remember - especially in their conversations with Treasury - that ambition is nothing without investment.



“DWP needs to be clear on the outputs it requires. It needs to create a national framework that identifies, incentives and supports the best providers and enables them to rigorously manage the provider ‘market’ to deliver the outputs defined.”

We know that every pound spent effectively on back to work services returns many pounds more in savings, tax revenue and economic growth.

DWP must not underestimate the capacity that has been stripped out of the sector in recent years. Not just in terms of numbers, but in terms of expertise also. Getting our Public Employment Service back to where it was wouldn't be easy, but they need to go further than that and get the Public Employment Service to where they need it to be now.

That means significant investment, in the order of billions over time. They need to build up capacity in the provider base again (public, private and third sector) so that it can deal with the volume of work required. If they ensure that investment is linked to performance (i.e. getting people back into work) then they can ensure that spending is effective.

With a rigorous, outcome-focused commissioning framework - that finds, incentivises, supports and manages the best providers to deliver what works, DWP should reassure their Treasury colleagues and themselves that the scale of investment will be at the level required and deliver the return they need.

There are, inevitably, a swarm of opinions on how to fix this problem. A lot has changed in the employability sector in the past half-decade. A lot that shouldn't have been forgotten has been. But the fundamentals remain true. DWP - and the sector - would do well to remember that.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George has spent his career designing and delivering some of the most successful employment programmes in the UK. In the early 2000s he specialised in community based projects and BAME unemployment. In 2007 he built a new model for Flexible New Deal, based on European best practice. He was part of the team that set up G4S Employment Support Services and went on to deliver the Work Programme and other DWP services. In 2015 he set up ThinkWinDo, to advise the sector on strategy, service design and bidding - supporting two successful Work and Health Programme winners. George now works for Corndel, where he is thinking about the next decade of employability services.

What works in helping people get into work?



Sean Williams FIEP
Chief Executive & Founder
Corndel

@ s.williams@corndel.com

in linkedin.com/in/sean-williams-88336225/

tw @corndel_ceo

What works in helping people get into work? In 1992 Bill Clinton launched an ambitious series of reforms aimed at supporting people to leave benefits and move into employment. In 1997 the New Labour Government leaned heavily on the Clinton Administration's programmes to launch the New Deal and Employment Zones in the UK. We are fortunate that we have two decades of experience and data about what works in employment programmes.

This article makes ten simple recommendations drawing on the evidence base from Employment Zones, Private Sector Led New Deal, New Deal for Disabled People, New Deal for Lone Parents, Action Teams for Jobs, Progress to Work, Flexible New Deal, ESF contracts, the Work Programme as well as lessons from the Australian Job Network. George Santayana famously said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it".

We do not need to repeat the past, or worse reinvent it but worse. We can build on the successes, and rectify the failures of previous employment programmes, to substantially mitigate the unemployment crisis that this current health crisis is about to unleash. By doing so we will save many hundreds of thousands of people from the misery of long-term unemployment.

What works in helping people get into work – 10 lessons from the past two decades...

- 1) The success of a programme designed to find people jobs is the number of people that find jobs and keep them. This is what needs to be measured and rewarded.
- 2) Multiple providers delivering services in the same geography provides the best way for benchmarking and improving performance. Competition drives innovation and forces organisations to deliver to survive. Providers can be from any sector.
- 3) Providers should be free to deliver what works. Centrally specifying a set of detailed interventions to be indiscriminately provided to jobseekers regardless of their individual needs is ineffective and wastes precious resources.

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”



“Providers need to be responsible for the whole journey from an individual being referred to the service through to them getting a job and staying in that job.”

- 4) Performance information should be published regularly. Performance information should be used to regularly reward top performing providers with more work and take work away from poorly performing providers. This moves jobseekers away from ineffective provision and into good provision, increasing the number of people finding work.
- 5) Providers need to be responsible for the whole journey from an individual being referred to the service through to them getting a job and staying in that job. Breaking up the journey means that no-one is responsible for the ultimate outcome and incentivises delivering the specific 'step' that part of the system is responsible for rather than delivering sustained jobs.
- 6) Financial rewards to providers should be based on the number of people that provider helps into employment and the number of people that stay in employment for a significant period of time. In Work Programme this caused significant financing challenges to the detriment of the diversity of the provider base. It does not have to. Funding should be provided up-front based on assumed performance levels and then recovered/increased based on performance data. A well-designed financial model can both be ruthlessly outcome-focussed and not create impossible funding demands.
- 7) Referrals of unemployed people to the programme need to be made centrally and not by providers competing for unemployed people to come onto their provision. In programmes where providers compete for referrals resources are diverted away from delivering job-finding services into sourcing people who are very close to having a job anyway.
- 8) In a world of limited resources those resources need to be best deployed to get the most people into lasting jobs. This means only giving really expensive interventions to those who cannot be helped into work more economically. Accelerating interventions should be used to increase the intensity (and hence cost) of the



“A well-designed financial model can both be ruthlessly outcome-focussed and not create impossible funding demands.”

provision available to unemployed people if they are not successful in finding work. At the beginning of a person's unemployment light touch support should be tried. If this does not work after a few months then more intensive support should be given. If this does not work then yet more intensive support should be provided. No provider should be allowed to deliver concurrent steps of support to take away the incentive to leave someone on the programme rather than to try and find them a job immediately.

- 9) Support for individuals to become self-employed should be embedded in all providers provision. Evidence for a successful self-employment outcome should show that there is genuine, sustained, external revenue coming into the new enterprise.
- 10) Providers need to be managed by a supportive, imaginative, tough, numerically literate local performance management team actively rewarding providers that are doing well and rooting out underperformers. This team should work with all stakeholders to evolve the ecosystem so that it supports continuous improvement over time supporting more people into sustained jobs.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sean is the Chief Executive and Founder of Corndel. He started his career in the employment support sector, working as a frontline Unemployment Advisor in Brent, London. Since then, he has worked in research, policy, business development and operational management for some of the largest, most successful public service providers in the UK. Programmes that Sean has designed and delivered have helped hundreds of thousands of people move from benefits into good, sustained jobs. Sean has a degree in Philosophy from Trinity College, Cambridge and is a Fellow of the IEP.

The coming recession: a lesson from the past



David Imber BA Cantab PVRA FIEP
Principal
The Good Employability Company

@ david.imber@good-ec.com

in linkedin.com/in/david-i-2600861b/

www.good-ec.com

The valuable paper from the Institute for Employment Studies 'Getting Back to Work: Dealing with the Labour Market Impacts of the COVID-19 Recession' (April 2020) discusses how deep the COVID-recession is going to be. By all accounts, even if the forecasts are out by a big margin, we are facing some big challenges. Whole industries and service sectors will be damaged for a long time to come. Traineeships and apprenticeships will be interrupted, curtailed, or closed. School leavers will be slow to find work, and the nasty epithet 'NEET' could affect most, for shorter or longer periods.

Improving the employment rates of disadvantaged groups will be harder than any of us have known, and it seems probable that exclusion and relative disadvantage will increase.

There will not be enough jobs to go around those who want to work. Shortage of jobs will increase competition and the number and frequency of personal failures. Failure will damage beliefs about availability of work and about ability to get work, which in turn will damage effort and resilience, magnifying pre-existing inequalities.

In this scenario, employability practitioners and service providers should not expect to achieve high placement rates though they will still have a role helping employers, trainers and job aspirants get matched up. But their role as builders of employability and confidence will be emphasised as much as their focus on outputs is reduced.

To limit any rise in inequality, we have to understand what equality is. I think it is the ability to compete fairly for a realistically chosen job. It has two main components: the behaviour of potential employers, and the beliefs, skills and confidence of jobseekers.

In the absence of enough jobs, our task is to develop and maintain jobseekers' competitiveness, while we also recognise that not everyone will get work right away.

To build confidence, and to encourage steps towards a suitable job and fair opportunity, I think we should aim for everyone to have

- A valued occupation that suits their abilities and that builds their self and others' esteem
- An immediate chance of work, supported by personal employability competencies, that is respected by their community and by employers.

Is this a new challenge? Not really. We have been here before. The recession of 1979 to 1988 saw the closure of coalmining, shipbuilding steel-making and the collapse of their supply chains. The UK employment rate fell from 75% to 65%, unemployment rose from 5% to 12%, reaching over 20% in economic decline areas.

How did we respond? Coloured only a little by rosy nostalgia, I'd like to mention some of the things that helped, hoping to inspire new and imaginative efforts today.

Public funds were mobilised to launch organisations to respond to the crisis. I was lucky to lead one and saw what people could do. There were, for example, many programmes of work in communities, some whose legacy is still with us. One great team set up the first home shopping delivery service. People with mobility problems could order from a supermarket catalogue, and have the food delivered to their home. No internet, e-mail, apps, booking slots – just clever people with good ideas, drivers, packers, personal assistants and supportive shops. And a forward-looking Borough Librarian, who was instrumental in making it work.

We set up a scheme to do the gardens of people who were unable to do it themselves: mainly elderly or disabled people. The Borough positively sparkled!

We helped the Council's landscape architect make a huge public park and planted thousands of trees on derelict land – you can see them now, fully grown, on google earth. He drew up plans for beautiful mini-parks

“We didn’t think anything was impossible: we built a computer keyboard so a new staff member, who could only move one finger, was able to do admin, stats and reports. It only cost £10 to make.”

and play areas on vacant lots, and they were quickly built, with support from the Council’s Trade Unions.

A forward looking group got Arts Council and Transport Authority support to give space for artworks in the new Metro system. We brought glass from Venice, and artists showed us how to make murals for the stations. One enterprising couple of school leavers left us to set up a mosaic business. I doubt (but don’t know) if they succeeded – but they did get a great start.

We set up an Information Technology Centre – Bill Gates wasn’t on the scene yet – and bought the latest kit: DEC word processors, an ICL network, all sorts of desktop computers including one of the first Apples, daisy-wheel and dot-matrix printers (remember?) and let local school-leavers loose on them. I remember one 16 year old who got hooked on COBOL programming and went off to be a junior programmer. Those who had used the whizzy new word processors quickly got jobs, even though the local businesses were still using typewriters, carbon paper and Roneo machines.

In some ways, our innocence helped: we didn’t think anything was impossible: we built a computer keyboard so a new staff member, who could move only one finger, was able to do admin, stats and reports. It only cost £10 to make.

When the Burton sewing factory closed, many were out of work. But quite a few went on to set up their own small sewing companies in the advance factories built by the local council. Turning our back on labour market statistics and listening to the new employers, we created a sewing training centre in a former school kitchen and couldn’t get the trainees into work fast enough to meet demand.

Work placements were much used, and I remember being inspired by the presence in our office of a young woman who suffered with epilepsy; I doubt if she would have had the experience or opportunity without that placement.

Trade Unions had a right, and were encouraged, to negotiate permission and conditions. Where I worked, we agreed that work placement people would not do the work of a post that had been made redundant. Trade Unions and employers were quick to object if what we planned would affect jobs or businesses – an important brake on some of our ideas.

What made this possible? A national plan under the leadership of the Manpower Service Commission. Strong Local Authorities contributed flexible and professional staff, sharing budgets and efforts, joining up the MSC funds, the Inner-cities Programme, Local Authority Departments, Regional Offices of Government, and NGOs and mobilising private contributions, such as the redundant engineering headquarters that became the main office for our own operation – and that was only part of the work in just one Borough of just one city.

Eventually the need, not just to occupy people and create opportunities, but also to get jobs, came to the fore. It was overdue: employment rates were rising and unemployment falling. The era of competition for contracts and funding by results was dawning. My perception is that the public sector was both decimated and atomised, and the sort of joint working that came naturally in 1980 will be hard to rediscover.

It wasn’t a golden age – far from it. There was criticism, and with hindsight we can see the weaknesses easily. Not everyone agreed with what we did, and a very few thought we did it for the wrong reasons. But there was innovation, experimentation, and rapid flexible responses to a crisis. If we have some of that approach in the coming crisis we should be able to help. If we also add what we have learned about employer relations, about the primacy of respect and trust between advisor and client, about building labour-market competitiveness and about choice, motivation and confidence, then we should be able to do more and better. But if all we do is scabble for jobs that aren’t there, if all we do is see unemployment as a threat to our performance and label our clients either as ‘outputs’ or ‘failures’, then we risk not rising to the challenges ahead.

And what if the forecasts are wrong and we return quickly to a booming economy? Even then, there would be many people excluded from the labour market by unfair disadvantage, discrimination or disability. Our 40 year record in reducing these social evils has not been too good, though our efforts have been praiseworthy. We will continue, whatever the outcome of COVID, to face issues of social and economic equality, and need to do better.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David is Principal of the Good Employability Company. He is a Fellow of the Institute Employability Practitioners. The Good Employability Company exists to enable practitioners to deliver equality of employment opportunity through Research, Consultancy, Training and Evaluation services.

Lockdown silver linings



Liz Sewell FIEP
Director
Belina Get Ready for Work

@ liz.sewell@belinagrow.co.uk

linkedin.com/in/lizsewell/

@BelinaLiz

Lockdown has been an odd phenomenon. For some lifechanging; bringing sickness, job loss and economic hardship. But for many who have not faced illness or job insecurity it has seemed like a groundhog few months of back to back Bank Holiday Mondays. It has been at the same time all-encompassing and a whole lot of nothing. During all of this employability organisations have had to rethink their services and look afresh at their clients and I want to argue that there are silver linings in what we have discovered about our clients and ourselves.

Phase one: What do you need right now?

The speed of the change, the impact of closing all offices in less than a week and the 'whatever-it-takes' approach were hallmarks of the national emergency. For us this led to the impossibility of face to face meetings, the removal of conditionality and the abolition of wet signatures taking away a cornerstone of most employability programmes. In its place many organisations took on a new role.

In the first couple of weeks, when nothing was clear and no-one knew what was happening, it seemed that

“I have heard many providers say that they have had the chance to do what they always wanted to do which was to stop having to ask so many questions that feel intrusive and irrelevant and be able to listen to what people want to say.”

advisers changed to one question when we spoke with people – ‘What do you need right now?’ With very few jobs available and most people confined to their house it was about putting people in touch with food banks, organising school meals vouchers, helping people with young children get through the day. This opportunity to be of direct service to people, of making them feel like they had a connected friend really built trust between staff and their clients.

I have heard many providers say that they have had the chance to do what they always wanted to do which was to stop having to ask so many questions that feel intrusive and irrelevant and be able to listen to what people want to say.



“Technology which had been beyond many people now started to become de rigeur. Facetime, online Zoom calls – words many people had shied away from - were acceptable because their children were now online all day and as home-educators they wanted to know what they were doing. Advisers spent time helping people to think about how to spend their time more productively.”

On a recent IEP Fellows call Gareth Matthews FIEP spoke passionately about the fact that contact time had increased exponentially during lockdown and that clients had engaged in a way they had not before.

Phase two: Resilience

As people got used to the new normal we started to challenge and surprise each other. Technology which had been beyond many people now started to become de rigeur. Facetime, online Zoom calls – words many people had shied away from - were acceptable because their children were now online all day and as home-educators they wanted to know what they were doing. Advisers spent time helping people to think about how to spend their time more productively.

Phase three: What's next

As we move out of lockdown many organisations are being creative. In my own we have produced homemade Lockdown Tutorial Videos using the Zoom record facility (Check it out [here](#)) and others are running IEP training for their staff to make sure they are ready for the coming deluge. Our candidates are asking for more too – in the first two weeks after we launched our online training programme 40 women joined up.

New Working Practices

We need to argue with our funders to maintain our new support methods as options for our clients. The idea that the best support for everyone comes from face to face meetings, especially for those who find it difficult to attend sessions due to childcare or disability can be challenged. We can show we can offer people more support if we can connect with them more often and focus on helping them at home rather than drag them across town.

Virtual groups can be just as empowering as real ones and we can now organise them with confidence. Interview practice can be done on zoom and CVs can be written together on shared screens.



Allowing people to manage caseloads in ways that suit their clients will free up time. For Staff teams working from home has to become a more widely available option. If you can do it during lockdown when you are also home educating and managing on one trip to the shops a week you can do it when the world moves on. Shorter working weeks should also be considered, a more flexible work option will also lead to a more diverse work force.

Keep up the good work

Another positive that we need to continue is the collaboration across the sector on policy. Sector gurus like Tony Wilson FIEP have shared their knowledge of the labour market and given us an understanding of how the pandemic will impact long term on people and organisations. Collaboration will help us come up with solutions as we move out of lockdown.

As part of the G4S supply chain I am part of the Senior Managers weekly best practice call for COVID-19. What has come through loud and clear is how committed everyone is to the wellbeing of both their teams and customers. As we leave lockdown let's make sure that the lessons we have learnt here are not forgotten.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Liz is the Director of Belina Get Ready for Work and runs their GRoW Programme which was Highly Commended for Innovation at last year's ERSA Awards, supporting hundreds of women across London to get ready for a job or start training. Liz is a former CEO of the Lone Parent Charity Gingerbread and a previous director of the IEP.

The IEP Journal is published by the Institute of Employability Professionals, 3rd Floor, 86-90 Paul Street, London, EC2A 4NE

020 3974 2033
IEPJournal@iemployability.org

myiep.uk
@iepinfo