



## Making Integrated Employment and Skills a reality in Slough

Monday 1<sup>st</sup> December

Held at Baylis House, Slough

### Outcome note

#### Purpose of the workshop

Partners in Slough are committed to taking forward the Government's aspirations for an integrated employment and skills (IES) system, including through the development and delivery of the Advancement Network Prototype. This workshop was facilitated by Open Agenda under a contract with the South East England Development Agency to support the development of IES in three 'test-bed' areas of the region (Slough, Urban South Hampshire and Thames Gateway).

The workshop was designed to:

- establish a shared understanding of what an integrated employment and skills (IES) system in Slough will look like in practice;
- explore what IES means for individuals, employers, providers and planning/funding agencies;
- identify and agree the actions and next steps to take forward the work.

At this workshop a wide range of service provider organisations used the JH Consulting Integrated Planning Matrix<sup>1</sup> to focus on how to meet the needs of three priority groups of out of work people – those with:

- poor skill levels.
- chronic physical health conditions
- mental health issues.

A second workshop is planned for the New Year to engage employers and focus on people who are in work but at risk of redundancy. The aim is to build up a series of delivery models for each priority group which will form the pillars of a **comprehensive employment and skills delivery framework for Slough**.

This outcome note draws together the key ideas and themes raised in our feedback sessions – drawing on the more detailed work that partners undertook in smaller groups, each focused on one of the priority groups.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a planning tool which is being developed by Open Agenda's sister organisation, JH Consulting, involving trials in a small number of areas of the country, and is **currently licensed for Slough IES development only**. Please contact Jo Hudek for further details.

## What we mean by an integrated employment and skills (IES) system

We began by exploring what an integrated employment and skills system should mean for the customers i.e. people in the selected priority groups. After discussing this in small groups, we came up with the following key propositions:

- The person should be at the centre of planning and service delivery: services should fit the person rather than people having to fit themselves around the services.
- Support should be flexible and 'holistic', embracing all kinds of employment-related issues (health, benefits and financial awareness, housing, etc) as well as skills development and job finding.
- The different agencies should work together to develop a highly effective referrals system and to support people along their individual employment journeys.
- A key part of the system should be mechanisms to 'bring employers and individuals together': these should include effective recruitment support and job brokering but also:
  - Challenging individuals' and employers' assumptions
  - Encouraging employers to develop flexible employment practices
  - Providing stepping stones for individuals who were far away from the jobs market through volunteering opportunities.
  - Building bridges between 'the parallel worlds of employment, skills and health', with particular reference to a refocusing by GPs and other health professionals on what people are able to do, as opposed to the traditional role of 'signing people off'.

We took the view that there would be common service requirements across all or most of the priority groups but that services would also need to cater for the specific needs of particular groups. This led to a key proposition that:

- **We should be aiming for a system that works for all groups but which includes different modes of delivery and types of services suited to particular groups.**

## The Integrated Planning Matrix

We went on to look at the components of the Integrated Planning Matrix. Key features noted were:

- The need to be clear about the goals and aspirations of different priority groups: for example, while the goal for someone close to the labour market would generally be a part- or full-time paid job, people further from the labour market might have less ambitious goals at this stage - e.g. English language training or work experience through volunteering - which could lead to paid employment at a later stage.
- It is important to identify barriers to employment early in the process of engagement - for example:
  - People worried about loss of benefits need to be made aware of in-work benefit entitlements and to be supported in making financial projections combining potential earnings and in-work benefits.

- Judgements need to be made about realistic employment options for people with criminal records.
- It is therefore right to adopt a wide definition of pre-employment training to include different kinds of skills development for people a long way from the labour market and generic employability skills, rather than more narrowly defined 'vocational training'.
- Using the Integrated Planning Matrix could help identify organisations who are not at the table as well as the respective roles of those who are.
- At present the Matrix focuses on employment and skills support, and on employer engagement: it would be useful to build in specific references to the health system.

We then broke into groups to start to use the Planning Matrix to map out provision for people in the three selected priority groups. The objective was to provide an opportunity for joint local planning that would result in a mix of provision that is more successful in engaging and supporting people in these groups. We also wanted to make sure that the IES system being developed enables individuals to progress: hence the need to consider the 'whole customer journey' to sustainable employment – not just engagement activity.

An essential part of our discussion was to identify how different types of funding and provision can support the mix of elements which we felt were needed to address the needs and goals of our priority groups. Our challenge was to find the most effective way of using existing resources, current provision and planned developments to maximise engagement and progression in ways that can contribute to the achievement of targets.

In feeding back on these group discussions before lunch, we noted that many of the propositions which had emerged were common to all three priority groups, while a smaller number were more relevant to a specific group. Key propositions were:

#### **Mental health issues group**

- Rather than just 'skills health checks', we need to include 'health and well-being checks'.
- There is a need to involve health and social care professionals, and specialist organisations such as Mind.

#### **Low skills group**

- There is a need to review the relationship between Jobcentre Plus contracted provision, Jobcentre Plus non-contracted provision and Learning and Skills Council contracted provision.
- This review process should identify both overlaps and gaps in provision.

#### **Chronic physical health conditions group**

- Ways should be found to introduce health expertise into the information, advice and guidance services.
- Occupational health services needed to be involved and their role strengthened.

## All three groups

### (1) Provision

- A key task for the partnership is to 'unravel what's out there', clarify this for the different groups of professionals and ensure that they can effectively signpost customers to other services. This will require:
  - A development programme for professionals of different kinds as part of a wider culture change programme.
  - 'Organisational ambassadors' whose job descriptions will include:
    - Communicating what their organisations can provide to partner organisations.
    - Being aware of what other partners can provide and sharing this within their own organisations
  - A 'managed' directory of services.
- It will be important to properly engage the customer in defining their goals, to avoid 'repeated assessments' and to ensure people feel ownership of their journeys. This will require:
  - Development of an 'employment and skills passport' to plan and record people's progress; provide a common basis for dialogue between individuals and different professionals; and enable progress to be tracked.
  - Commitment by partners to use this 'passport' and to develop protocols to share information and reduce repeat assessment processes to a minimum.
- Ramping up employer engagement activities in ways that:
  - Build on the Local Employer Partnership programme led by Jobcentre Plus.
  - Draw on a wider range of business-facing organisations including Skills South East (skills brokerage), Business Link (business support), Chambers of Commerce, colleges' business development units and training providers.
  - Engage representatives of voluntary and community organisations to identify volunteering opportunities.
- In-work support which goes beyond Train to Gain and other skills programmes and could (depending on the individual) include:
  - Mentoring/trusted adviser support.
  - Advice on continuing barriers to employment such as health and housing.

### (2) Partners

Partners identified as needing to be involved, ranging more widely than the partners represented at the workshop, included: GPs and other health professionals; Citizens Advice Bureau; voluntary organisations specialising in the needs of the particular priority groups; union learning representatives; learndirect; and the business-facing organisations referred to above.

### (3) Funding

There was a strong recognition that good projects had in the past come and gone because of time limited funding and that Slough's employment and skills delivery framework must overcome such 'short-termism'. To achieve this will require the development of a **sustainable funding strategy** based on:

- Partners sharing information on funding sources.
- Identification of funding overlaps and conflicts in partner objectives.
- Reviewing Local Area Agreement targets when they are next due to be 'refreshed' to ensure that they fully reflect the integration goal.
- Drawing on a range of funding sources, including:
  - The 'mainstream' employment and skills programmes.
  - LSC/JCP/SEEDA European funding.
  - Home Office European funding.
  - SEEDA/Berkshire Economic Strategy Board funding.
  - Fit for Work pilot funding (requiring a strong proposal to be put together).
  - Department for Work and Pensions Right to Bid funding (if a suitably innovative proposal emerges from further planning activity, including Advancement Network Prototype business planning).
  - Possible development of a personal budget model (drawing on the skills account and health & social care individual budget models).

### Planning for integrated delivery: next steps

In the first afternoon session, we considered the key propositions in the morning in greater depth with a view to establishing agreed programmes of action. Agreed accountabilities and timescales for **5 Action Proposals** were:

- (1) Directory of services/fact sheets
  - Advancement Network team to develop, led by Slough Borough Council.
  - Initial version to be available by end March 2009.
  - As part of this, Slough Borough Council to lead a data review of needs of people with chronic physical health conditions – to be completed by end December 2008.
- (2) Development of customised services
  - Development of suite of diagnosis tools and intervention for people with back/muscular skeletal conditions, based on a series of user focus groups – Slough Borough Council/Centre for Enterprise - by April 2009.
  - Employment and Skills Passport

- To be developed by the Slough Advancement Network for Employment and Skills (SANES) group
- Include in Advancement Network Prototype business plan (19 December); develop and pilot by Spring 2009; implement by Autumn 2009.

→ (3) Culture change/professional development programme

- Centre for Enterprise to gather agreements to participate as part of securing partner commitments to Advancement Network.
- Timetable to be included in Advancement Network Prototype business plan.

→ (4) Ramping up employer engagement

- LSC to consider how to reflect in development of the future combined business support/skills brokerage service.
- To be addressed at the second of these workshops planned for the New Year (which will be designed to engage employers).

→ (5) Review of JCP contracted/non-contracted and LSC provision

- A4E to lead review process with support from Jobcentre Plus and East Berkshire College.
- Initiate project and agree timescales at Hub and Spoke meeting on 17 December.

In discussion of next steps, we noted that timescales for a range of significant developments are very tight:

- Significant take-up of Skills Accounts by January 2009.
- Fit for Work invitation to tender early in the New Year.
- National invitation to tender for Adult Advancement and Careers Service in June 2009.

These timescales meant that there was a great deal of urgency to plan and test delivery models between now and June of next year. With this in mind, agreed **next steps** were:

- To develop a comprehensive timetable as part of the Advancement Network Prototype Business Plan (**Action: Learning and Skills Council**).
- To seek endorsement at the next meeting of the Skills Project Development Group for the 5 Action Proposals listed above (**Action: Slough Borough Council**).
- To review the outcome notes from this workshop and the one to be held in the New Year, together with the results of the Skills Survey, and decide whether to hold a joint employer/service provider event to gain commitment to implementing a comprehensive employment and skills delivery framework for Slough (**Action: SBC/LSC**).

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December 2008