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Dialogue and debate from the employability sector

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A note from the editor



Pat Russell MIEP
Guest Editor

Welcome to the Third Edition of the IEP Journal. Aiming to encourage the presentation of research and ideas, and thoughtful discussion between employability professionals, I am delighted to bring you, in this edition, a range of views that all have at their core the themes of collaboration and quality.

It goes without saying that 2020 was unlike any other year. And 2021 will bring challenges of its own. But it will also bring opportunities to show how the people who work in this sector are vital to regenerating the economy and helping to change the lives of many citizens who have experienced enormous change, upheaval and loss in their lives.

I am really pleased to be able to share a conversation that I had with Louise Doyle, CEO of mesma, a company whose aim is to help organisations gather honest insights into the quality of their provision, making sure their attention is focused on improving the things that are most important. It certainly took me back to some past experiences of trying to implement quality approaches and shining a light on why I hadn't got the outcomes I expected.

You will also get insightful contributions on how collaboration was a key part in the successful

delivery of innovative new IPS provision; on making quality systems work in a small organisation; on teamwork in education settings; on what a quality offer should be for young people post-pandemic; why data is so important in delivering a quality offer and how technology can be an enabler.

We are also really interested to see what policy makers think the world might need to focus on in future in an article from Angus Gray, Director for Employers, Health and Inclusive Employment in DWP.

I am convinced that by working together and focusing on delivering quality services, this profession will be seen as making a vital difference. No one writing for the Journal claims to have the full answer, but we want to be the vehicle for debate so if something here catches your eye send in your letter for the next edition - or indeed write an article.





We want to hear from you.

Pat Russell MIEP

Talking about quality...



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Your editor had a fascinating conversation with Louise Doyle, CEO at mesma, about how organisations approach the never-ending challenge of delivering a quality service. It triggered memories of previous experiences – good and not so good! And ultimately gave hope that there is much that we can all do.

Louise, let's start with the elephant in the room - how would you define quality management?

It's a good question as I hear lots of terms used interchangeably. Quality management encompasses effective governance, assurance, objective evaluation of service, improvement prioritisation and implementation. It moves us beyond compliance by not just asking if something is happening, but whether it's happening well.

Why is quality management important for our sector?

If I were presenting the business case for why senior leaders should prioritise quality management, I'd go with the positive impact of having a model that continuously improves the value of service customers receive, coupled with the removal of waste and cost from the operation.

Equally, the importance of safeguarding reputation can't be overstated. We can all recall examples of the negative effect when peoples' perceptions of an organisation were damaged irreparably. Quality management helps us to keep the customer at the forefront of our thinking and action.

Where would you start with establishing a quality management model?

There's a crucial first step to take and that's to interpret what your stakeholders determine 'quality' looks, sounds, and feels like, into your own organisation's purpose and success measures before deciding how best to manage quality.

This gets us on the path to establishing a golden thread from customer needs through to internal standards. In heavily regulated sectors, it's not unusual to see a direct line from external benchmarks or targets to internal measures and assurance activity. To stand out from other players in the ecosystem, there needs to be a process of breathing your own values and standards into them.

“Quality management helps us to keep the customer at the forefront of our thinking and action.”

How has your career led you to focus on quality?

I've had an interesting career in operational management in the airline industry, change management in telecoms and quality improvement in education and employability before co-founding mesma. I hope this means I can see quality management from the different perspectives of people in an organisation, using my experience to build software that supports our customers to deliver the best service for their customers. I've found that quality management-focused leaders are relentlessness, customer-focused, constantly curious with an eye on the journey, not just the result.

What learning can you share from your own experience?

I think I'd choose four things to share with sector leaders.

Firstly, this is a complex sector with multiple stakeholders. It's important to recognise that complexity because it's all very well me providing nice, neat definitions of quality management but implementing a successful model isn't easy. It needs to be driven by leaders to move it beyond a part-time, periphery activity, to a core principle of operation that's resourced properly.

Secondly, a good test of whether there's a strong leadership focus on quality, is to reflect on the tone and direction set when targets are or aren't being met. For example, when job outcome targets are exceeded, do

leaders avoid lifting the bonnet to check how they got there because they might not like what they see? When they aren't, do they push the quality model to one side because its 'getting in the way' of results being delivered? There's a bravery that comes with holding the quality line when results aren't coming in, knowing that a good QM model will help you to find the root cause, instead of sticking a plaster over the problem.

Thirdly, there's a tendency to measure too much. What are the questions you're asking of your performance and therefore, what impact is your quality management activity having on that performance? As the saying goes, weighing the pig doesn't make it fatter. Keep your review techniques under review, focus on fewer metrics, limit data gathering techniques to those that tell you the most and be ruthless in prioritising improvements. If an improvement plan ends up as a long to-do list, it becomes part of the issue.

Finally, data is the engine room for telling the story of customers, not the mirror. The interesting part is making sense of it all. Focus attention on data that is most useful to help objectively evaluate the quality of your provision. However, know that the process is pointless unless there's a culture of encouraging staff and partners to be honest about what they are good at and what they're not. We've been working with the National Innovation Centre for Data to develop our software to support clients' data analysis techniques.



“A too late strategy is a useless strategy.”

Technology advances are exciting but at the bottom line, if an organisation is unwilling to see, discuss and act on strengths and weaknesses, it's questionable if the investment is worth it.

I know from past experience that senior leaders often get excited about new tools and techniques which are brought in often at great expense. Are there any quality assurance or improvement techniques you would recommend?

I'm a bit of a magpie when it comes to choosing techniques that work. Culture and context matter. There are certain things we will encourage clients in our mesma community to consider by sharing ideas and research. Removing grading from observations of practice is an example of this.

I'm more interested in the impact of whatever techniques an organisation uses, than on encouraging them to invest significant sums of money in training everyone up in the latest QM technique. I've managed change teams with all kinds of accreditations, and I've found at times this has stifled their willingness to think outside of the methodology they're trained in. Ironically, they can become constrained by it instead of using it to be transformative.

The principles of lean improvement are sound – driving change from customer need, retaining value, and removing waste.



People in different roles understand the ideas and some simple techniques so it's not seen as a dark art. Equally, the simplicity of Deming's Plan Do Check Act cycle and practitioner action research enquiries works for me. I believe in a healthy dose of common sense if we want to engage all staff and partners in collaborative improvement. Above all else I'd say when it comes to the customer, frontline staff know best. They know the stuff that needs to be fixed because it gets on everyone's nerves. Their voices need to be heard and acted upon.

One of the most successful models of quality improvement I've worked with was during my time at Orange (now EE). We operated ongoing quality circles, involving frontline staff to evaluate our operating practices with senior process sponsors. My change management team took forward projects that required dedicated resource. It worked because it was consistently deployed, retained as a priority however busy the operation was, rooted in 'the way we do things around here', with an ongoing

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“Quality management succeeds or fails on whether you bring people with you.”

programme of improvements and senior managers held to account for driving change.

I learnt a great deal about the importance of focusing on current customer and staff feedback. A too late strategy is a useless strategy.

You mentioned earlier how important it is that staff can be honest about performance if quality management is to be successful. Can you explain more about this?

For a quality management strategy to fully engage staff and partners, in the words of the educationalist Mary Myatt, it must be underpinned by a culture of ‘high challenge, low threat’. We must be open to self-assess the value of what we are doing in a safe space. If there’s an undercurrent that people are worried to admit to failure, it’s dead in the water unless that’s addressed first. There’s a tension we need to balance.

Quality assurance and improvement judges the way we operate as an organisation and identifies ways to collectively get better. If that gets entangled with individual team member performance appraisal or sub-contractor performance management, particularly if linked to pay or reward, it will impact on people’s willingness to engage in QM activities.

Quality management succeeds or fails on whether you bring people with you.

The IEP wants to take the quality conversation forward as a sector and help the people we support to be the best they can be. We would love to work alongside mesma on this journey.

There are lots of exciting opportunities for the sector alongside a drive from DWP to elevate the quality management conversation. We look forward to seeing where this can go.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Louise is the CEO of mesma, Strategic Consultant with SDN, Academy Chair and College Governor.

Louise provides quality assurance and improvement solutions for education and employment support organisations. Working with education and employment support leaders Louise helps people to think, plan for improvement and make change happen.

Is there a recipe for delivering quality at scale within health and work settings?



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Having worked with 25 government bodies to help 1,000 people with a range of health conditions into work, we've learnt that the service model is only one ingredient to quality at scale. In this article we make four recommendations for employment services drawing on our experience of bringing multiple funders together to co-commission employment services around a core set of outcomes.

What we know:

The employment rate for people with severe mental illness is shockingly low. Just one in 14 people with this type of condition enjoy the financial independence and sense of purpose and fulfilment that comes with paid work¹. Employment is also one of the best ways to help people recover from mental ill health.

There are many areas of social injustice where a solution is not immediately evident: that is not the case here. There is abundant evidence from around the world that, with the right kind of support, people with serious mental illness can find and sustain work. This approach, called Individual Placement and Support (IPS), delivers tailored employment support to the individual and works quickly to find them a real paid job.

In 28 global Randomised Control Trials (RCTs), IPS has supported more than twice the number of

people into work than alternative programmes. It benefits from a very clearly defined fidelity scale – a set of principles that research shows deliver the best possible outcomes. IPS is that rare jewel: a well evidenced social programme with clear principles to deliver strong outcomes. Surely it should be simple to scale up this model to deliver quality...

Unlocking funding for mental health and employment support at scale

At Social Finance, we work to find scalable solutions to entrenched social problems. When we started to explore how to improve outcomes in health and work in 2015, we found that there was limited IPS provision in the UK, with small services buffeted by short term funding and limited data on outcomes achieved.



“Strong delivery partners and a supportive commissioning environment are crucial to success.”

We set up Mental Health and Employment Partnership (MHEP) in 2015 to tackle this.

Over the past five years, we have worked with 25 government bodies to help 1,000 people with a range of health conditions into work. We've learnt that a well evidenced service model isn't enough. Strong delivery partners and a supportive commissioning environment are crucial to success. Reflecting on what we've learnt, we have four recommendations for employment services to drive quality within the system and within service delivery:

Recommendation 1: Innovative financing models can align funders and grow services

A transformational programme like IPS can easily fall between government silos. Until recently, the NHS expected DWP to fund employment support, while DWP would not pay for employment specialists based in mental health teams.

What we did:

The Mental Health and Employment Partnership (MHEP) Social Impact Bond (SIB) was designed to create partnerships between agencies and combine both sources of funding into one pot on a payment-by-results basis. That meant that each funder, whether local or national, health or employment focused, could link their payments to the outcomes they're most interested in.

How did this work for us?

In 2019, we launched the largest pilot globally of IPS for clients with addictions in eight boroughs of West London. By allowing each commissioner to pay for the outcomes that impact their budget line, we were able to convene 18 different local and national funders. This led to the launch of a larger and more robust service than would have otherwise been possible.

Recommendation 2: Continuous learnings need to be shared to influence wider practice

Bringing together multiple funders all paying in a different way can get complicated quickly.


What we did:

The role MHEP plays is to manage that complexity away from stretched council officials and small charitable employment providers.

How did this work for us?

By specialising in one specific model 'IPS' and working with a whole range of different government agencies in different geographic areas, we brought a level of expertise to the table that no one funder would otherwise have available.

We also built up an evidence base for how the model needs to adapt to the needs of different cohorts, such as those with Learning Disabilities and Drug and Alcohol Addictions. We now have standardised performance metrics with a rich set of benchmarks that tell us what kind of cost per user and cost per outcome we should be able to expect. These are published for anyone to review as part of a recent [evaluation of the model](#).



“We know that the IPS employment model works. But as a person centred relational project it is only as good as the people delivering it.”

Recommendation 3: Strong service leadership is crucial

We know that the IPS employment model works. But as a person centred relational project it is only as good as the people delivering it. This requires strong service leadership; a capable, motivated, trained staff team with low levels of churn; and a supportive environment to generate referrals.

What we did:

Once we had services operating on the ground, we quickly found that achieving all of this consistently was going to be harder than we imagined. Some teams lost experienced staff while others struggled with effective leadership. To address this, we brought in a specialist operational adviser with decades of experience managing health and employment services. Our adviser was able to get under the skin of delivery problems and provide direct coaching, training and support. The IPS model itself can be inspiring for providers and staff because of the opportunities to provide meaningful, intensive, personalised support; and see first-hand the impact that it has on real lives.

How did this work for us?

High quality services are often provided by small but experienced third sector partners operating under significant financial pressure. Our initial contracts paid providers a meaningful proportion of funding on outcomes, in the expectation that this would

incentivise quality delivery. Over time we have learnt that lower risk and block funding gives providers the space needed to innovate and provide tailored support to clients. This, combined with high quality performance management, can improve outcomes. There is now a strong and growing leadership of high quality IPS providers that are committed to the model and delivering high quality support.

Recommendation 4: Strong performance management with a focus on outcomes is needed

Often when local councils or NHS bodies fund services, the contract managers responsible for them are stretched over dozens of projects with almost no time to sort out operational issues. Even getting basic data, like how many people got a job each month, proved tricky. The MHEP programme brought two innovations to tackle this.

What we did:

First, we structured the contracts on a payment by results basis, with the upfront service cost paid for with social investment from Big Issue Invest. Over time, that's amounted to £2 million of flexible capital that we could use to pay for services. When those services achieved job and health outcomes, our investor started getting repaid. By putting outside investors' money on the line, getting outcomes wasn't a nice-to-have – it was make-or-break.

Secondly, we built a performance team that was dedicated to tracking outcomes monthly and working with providers and commissioners to resolve issues quickly.

How did this work for us?

Throughout the first lockdown in 2020 when clients were less able to look for work, all of our services were able to pivot to provide wellbeing support, employment skills and tackle digital exclusion. This focus on

“A supportive system around the service model and the quality of the delivery provider can be the difference between success or failure.”

outcomes has also supported a quick recovery despite the challenging environment, with MHEP services supporting 312 people into work in 2020.

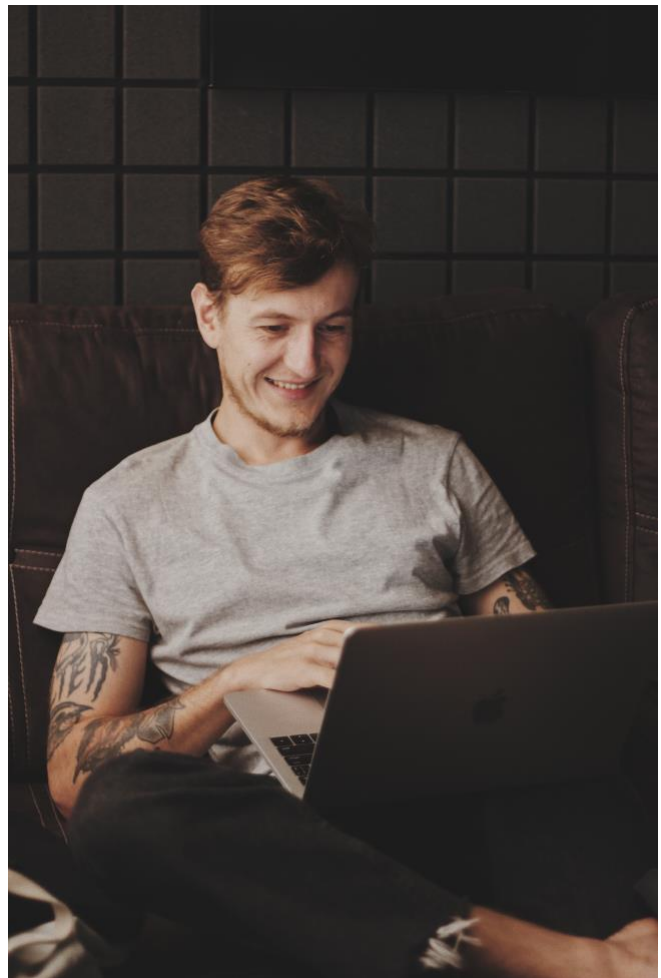
What next?

IPS employment support works to help people with health conditions find work in a way that is fundamentally life changing. Since MHEP’s launch, there has been a revolution in mental health and employment services.

The NHS in England has made a significant commitment to make IPS employment support a core part of mental health services across the nation.

Over the past five years we have learnt that having a well evidenced social intervention is only one of the ingredients to success.

A supportive system around the service model and the quality of the delivery provider can be the difference between success or failure. So, while there are more people to help, we will keep working to ensure everyone who needs it has access to high quality, health based employment support.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bex is Manager of Mental Health and Employment Partnerships at Social Finance. Bex started her career in investment banking and quickly learned that she wanted to apply the principles of finance to achieve social change and improve lives. She now works for Social Finance, a non-profit dedicated to using resources and funding more efficiently to drive lasting social change. She is passionate about developing funding models of employment support to help everyone with a health issue or disability to achieve and sustain fulfilling, paid employment.

Compliance and quality for smaller organisations



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With the Restart programme racing down the track there are many new jobs being advertised in employability with both the words compliance and quality in their titles. I thought it would be useful to do a quick dive into the way smaller organisations can approach these two different, but often linked issues.

Compliance is not something you can choose to do. It is legally part of the contract that a prime agrees with a funder, with which a subcontractor must comply - for example, in Restart there will be a requirement for fortnightly contact. Quality on the other hand is about the choices we make to offer the best possible service: so how we would make that fortnightly contact meaningful and effective.


For funders these contractual conditions are important. They set out expectations; focus money on the eligible; quantify value for money; ensure the delivery of a minimum level of service for each customer; and provide for consistency across big contracts delivered by many different organisations.

There is a strong view in the sector that compliance can drive quality. Tony Wilson FIEP argued in a recent IEP call that the requirement for fortnightly (rather than monthly) contact (compliance) would improve the service the

individual received (quality). Monica Madeira, agrees. An experienced employability sector auditing specialist she explained to me how she feels the two work well together 'Compliance and quality are fundamental for great service delivery.' Compliance makes up the foundations of any programme including its policies and procedures, with quality being equally important in establishing how the contract is being delivered to all customers - for example ensuring SMART objectives are being set and delivered.

When small organisations and individuals look at compliance for the first time, it can feel like one tick box exercise after another whereby someone else has set out for you the standards that they think are right for the delivery of a programme and not understood that, as one individual working with another individual, the quality of that service might better be delivered in a very different way. It can make contracts feel like straightjackets.

Stewart Holdsworth FIEP feels that the two are different and that they should be treated as such. "Whilst compliance can help drive quality service, they often get lumped together and treated as interchangeable, with 'quality' often becoming the poor cousin to the former. I think a focus on quality should underpin and feed through everything an organisation does.



“Quality on the other hand is about the choices we make to offer the best possible service: so how we would make that fortnightly contact meaningful and effective.”

It can help to think of quality through the lens of Continuous Improvement; with the measure of whether we are actually delivering a quality service being determined by all our stakeholders, and especially our participants.”

In the worst cases, if you're focused solely on compliance you might never move beyond the most basic standards and you will become focused yourself on the tick box rather than the outcome so compliance for compliance sake leads to the lowest level of quality acceptable.

In smaller specialist organisations, the ideology is likely to be more ‘different strokes for different folks’ than one size fits all, so how can we reconcile the need for individual interactions that meet the needs of the person in front of you and making sure that all clients receive a service that meets the needs and focus of the funder?

My own experience, as a director of a quality driven specialist service that supports mothers into work, is that compliance is like learning a new language and that there can be misunderstandings along the way. That you need to put in the effort to understand the structure and grammar, but once you learn it can be a great asset. For Belina GRoW our work with G4S is a case study. Like stropky teenagers we initially railed against the paperwork, but as the contract developed, we better understood the reasons they had insisted we comply as we were able to show clearly eligibility, interactions and KPI. Their determination to match quality and compliance has really helped our organisation to develop better services as they have

challenged us, but also provided the support we needed to improve the baseline offer and embraced our approach to innovation and quality.

Three top tips

1) Look at compliance as a baseline

Develop an approach that embraces the compliance elements, so they become a valued part of your service and are delivered without stress. Be open with your clients about what they need to do and how you will work together.

2) Identify what you believe to be a quality service

Determine your own quality standards and map these onto the compliance framework. Add your own flourishes of additional service and use them to show your prime and your funder what your additional value is to the contract. Use Feedback to inform your service and promote it as a barometer of quality

3) Work with your Prime

A prime will have negotiated the contract and so will have an understanding of the purpose of the compliance. Working with the prime from an early stage can help both sides to understand what has to be delivered and how it needs to be reported. The best primes will help you to make the changes to your model to improve quality as well as meet compliance.

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 the 2019 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, a Fellow and previous director of the IEP.

Leading a quality culture – development of a Whole Organisation Approach



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As organisations grow and structures become more defined, an effective quality management system becomes much more important in establishing a quality culture. Sir Bernard O’Connell, the former principal of Runshaw College, who wrote the book ‘How to Create an Outstanding College’, says that a positive organisation culture is the key ingredient in ensuring Outstanding provision.

The first element in leading a whole organisation approach to quality management is the development of robust systems and processes in order to provide structure and defined ways of working. This provides consistency and facilitates the boundaries for effective communication and team working; however, organisation design within a bureaucratic structure often leads to ineffective silo working, which can impact on effective cross contract and cross team working within employability and skills organisations.

This highlights the importance of developing cross team working in the development of process design or process re-engineering. Many leaders fall into the trap when designing new ways of working as they fail to undertake a consultative approach to designing processes which creates resistance; this is also the same with partnership working. It is really positive to see that all prime providers successful in

achieving a position on the CAEHSR agreements, are instituting a consultative approach in new programme design.

The next stage in working towards a whole organisation approach (and when we talk about a whole organisation approach, this includes



“It’s important to highlight and reinforce the positive aspects of good quality, celebrate achievement and best practice.”

the work of subcontractors and partners within a supply chain) Sir Bernard O’Connell highlights the importance of strong performance management techniques, but further highlights that performance management can only be effective if the firm foundations of process design provide the framework and structure in order to performance manage.

There are a range of performance management techniques used within the employability sector and one of the most popular is the use of a balanced score card framework. A balanced scorecard breaks down performance into four key areas: profitability, customer satisfaction, effective processes and innovation. Performance management is often seen as a taboo subject; however, used positively, it can motivate, inspire and enable impact.

The final stage of the whole organisation approach to achieving outstanding quality, according to Sir Bernard O’Connell, is to embed quality into the organisation’s culture. Culture is defined by academics as being a living and breathing object and the heart, signs and symbols of an organisation. Quality is not just the responsibility of managers, or in more developed organisations, quality teams and auditors. To truly achieve a whole organisation approach to quality, it is important that all staff members aspire to achieve, all of the time, the best possible job they can do and to have a “can do” attitude, whilst being supportive and challenging any negative behaviours themselves within their own teams. It’s important to highlight and reinforce the positive

aspects of good quality, celebrate achievement and best practice. This can be achieved in various ways, such as, peer mentoring, workplace coaching, identification of role models and buddies within the workplace to continually develop practice and innovation.

In conclusion a whole organised approach towards outstanding provision takes a three-pronged attack of developing strong processes, systems and procedures, with an effective performance management framework embedded within an organisation’s culture, or as may be the case a supply chain or partnership’s culture.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gareth is Chief Executive of Acorn Training Ltd.

A Fellow of the IEP, Gareth is a strategic director experienced in driving performance and leading teams towards outstanding success. Gareth has worked within the skills and employability sector since 1996, spending a number of years working within Further Education and employability, delivering high profile regional contracts, such as Private Sector Led New Deal, Pathways to Work, The Work Programme, Community Work Placement and numerous Skills Funding Agency and DWP ESF contracts and Apprenticeships.

Collaborating to help young people into employment – a new paradigm?



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myiep.uk/page/FIEPES

I have worked within post 16 education for over 25 years and whilst there have been many crisis and recessions before I have never seen an impact as that which I am witnessing with Covid. I am currently a school governor as well as working with Apprentices, Traineeships and NEET learners. The lack of face to face intervention is having a huge impact on those who need our support. Remote learning does not always work, it is not always the option they need. For some young people, they quite simply do not have the access, technology or funds. For some, even if they do have the access, it is still not the right approach.

For the past few months I have been working with a group of NEET learners and most of them are regularly attending the centre for one to one sessions in a Covid secure environment. Many of these learners are care leavers, carers, or looked-after children. We started with trying remote, online activity but it just wasn't working. Their employability qualification includes elements of Interpersonal Skills and Healthy Lifestyles, but when you talk to these young people about what that means to them, right now, the answers are stark. Their hope is fading in a society that is trying its best to keep people safe and keep the economy moving. Their GCSE grades were predicted after their education was severely affected by the first lockdown and their

results don't necessarily reflect their reality – some better, some worse, which causes both funding and engagement issues at both ends of the spectrum. Their daily routines are terrible, with all of them seeing no point in getting up in a morning. So, offering them the opportunity to come into a centre right now feels like a lifeline. A time where we can talk and support and progress learning. We have another 2 years of young people leaving school this summer and next, who will be even more adversely affected and signs of mental health issues with young people are evident and increasing.

So how do we support this group? How do we show them that they can still have great aspirations? How do we join up Skills and Employment and maximise all the initiatives and funding opportunities that providers of education and employment are working with, or bidding for (Restart, Traineeship, AEB, Devolved areas, Bootcamps...the list goes on)? As a sector there is a complex supply chain of primes, subs and associates, public, private and voluntary, how do we ensure that they are all included and aware of the opportunities? There is then the dilemma of funding. How do we do the best for the learners with the funding we have and how can we work better as one whole sector to truly support these young people? How do we

“We have another 2 years of young people leaving school this summer and next, who will be even more adversely affected and signs of mental health issues with young people are evident and increasing.”

use non-regulated funding to support those learners who have had their GCSE maths and English over graded or their anxiety is affecting their confidence so much it is hindering their ability to progress and learn?

We need to find an efficient and effective way of connecting the newly approved Traineeship providers, Kickstart jobs and Restart activity with Apprenticeship providers to ensure we can support young people into lifelong learning with careers and education that will see them through this next generation. I don't have any easy answers to this. Maybe the new local area plans might help and I know that many devolved areas have a better, all-round picture of provision in their local areas but how does that information get shared and get the information to the learners within the confines of GDPR?

There are very few organisations that can offer the full spectrum of support from unemployment, employability courses, into employment, health and wellbeing, traineeships, apprenticeships, and in work qualifications. I am using my knowledge and connections within the sectors to ensure that these young people are connected for progression opportunities, and to support schools to be aware of post 16 opportunities. This isn't about funding farming, but truly about joining up the dots to support progression, something which I haven't yet seen.

I would welcome the opportunity to work with other individuals and organisations to see how we can create meaningful partnerships, shared job boards, a charter or agreement, and not in competition. We have to work together to ensure we support this younger generation to avoid a future catastrophe.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emma has worked within the Post 16 Education and Skills sector for over 25 years, focusing mainly on Apprenticeships and Adult Skills, along with ESF provision, Traineeships and 14-19 Education. Emma has a passion for Apprenticeships as that is where her career started – as an Apprentice at the Training and Enterprise Council.

As a true ambassador of Apprenticeships, Emma was invited to speak at the Inspiring Women in Apprenticeship Conference in Sept 2019. As an astute professional in the sector, Emma has recently qualified as an independent End Point Assessor and is a Fellow of the IEP and ILM and is highly competent in all areas of administration, compliance, delivery, quality, curriculum and governance.

Labour market data, no longer a ‘nice to have’ in employability services



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In Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s Coronavirus briefing statement on February 22nd this year, outlining plans for England’s move out of the latest lockdown, he stated, “We will be led at every stage by data, not dates.” The Covid-19 pandemic has brought much challenge and change to the UK, and indeed the rest of world, in nearly every aspect of life. And one notable byproduct of the incredible focus on this single, all-encompassing, topic has been the prevalence of data and analysis amongst common discourse.

We have very quickly become familiar with the regular ‘next slide please’ review of charts tracking Covid-19 positive cases, hospitalisation and (sadly) deaths. ‘The data’ drove forward an unprecedented vaccination testing and assessment programme as we raced to find safe and effective ways to manage the infection. And a wealth of data has been regularly tracking the state of the economy, the rise in unemployment and the take up of the government’s Job Retention Scheme, or furlough as we’ve come to know it more commonly, as lockdowns were enforced. The data has led policy, law, funding, innovation, and of course plenty of argument and debate!

However, data is not just the preserve of global pandemics, it is now a part of everyday life

whether you are aware of it or not. Data influences, nudges and directs practically every aspect of our daily activity. From ratings, reviews and targeted advertising influencing our buying behaviour on Amazon, to personalised recommendations in Netflix and Spotify shaping our entertainment consumption, to the decisions being made in financial institutions that impact on our savings and investments. Data is the driver.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines data as, ‘Facts or information, especially when examined and used to find out things or to make decisions.’ By inference, markets cannot function efficiently or effectively without good decision-making, and good decision-making cannot happen without the underpinning and harnessing of good data.

One of the largest, most impactful markets that touches everyone’s lives as beneficiaries and direct participants (and one in which I know you, as I, have a particular interest in), is the labour market. And like all markets, the world of work needs good data to help all the key actors in the market make good decisions. And there is a large variety of actors at play in this market. Of course, workers lie at its heart, but so many institutions and organisations have a key role to play in stewarding decision making, such as educators, government policy makers,

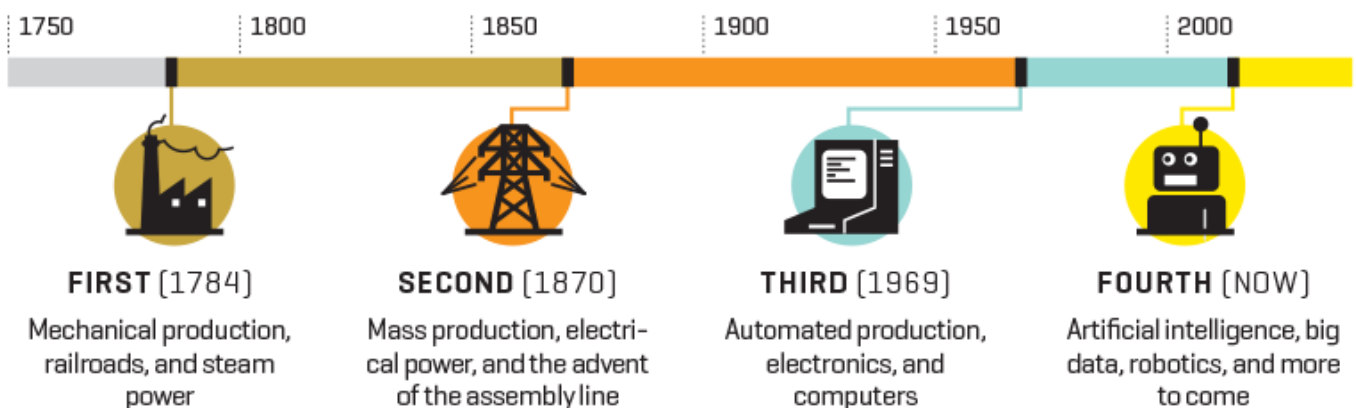
“Like all markets, the world of work needs good data to help all the key actors in the market make good decisions.”

the data in question? Well, this is commonly referred to as Labour Market Information (or LMI). LMI helps us to understand the size and makeup of employment and the workforce. Labour market insights can be gleaned from a wide range of different sources, ranging from official government data, surveys and primary research, and even the mining of transactional recruitment activities like online job postings. Each source provides us with a view of different facets of employment activity such as information on industries and sectors (what types of employers drive employment), occupations (which types of job roles make up the employment mix), labour value (exploring wage and salary variations) and skills (which employment attributes employers seek). Facets that also help us to understand trends over time, and regional variations.

LMI is often a well-known term in labour market circles, but in all honesty is still used sporadically, sparingly and superficially (and sometime not all), yet the need to be led by the data is becoming ever more critical as the pace of labour market change intensifies.

Economic and technological advances and disruptions are major drivers to shifts in the nature of the work that happen in that economy. Such advances are often grouped together into periods of defined ‘industrial revolutions’, the first of which was fuelled by the mass harnessing of the first machines, under steam power. The nature of work was largely consistent and relatively unchanged through modern human history until the late 18th century when the first industrial revolution changed things seemingly overnight. Mechanical production drove major shifts in the types of jobs and skills that were required and where the work took place, and we have seen similar such shifts through each subsequent revolution. Notably, however, the period between revolutions, and thus the pace of change, has increased each time. We now find ourselves in what is commonly referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, a period dominated by digital technology.

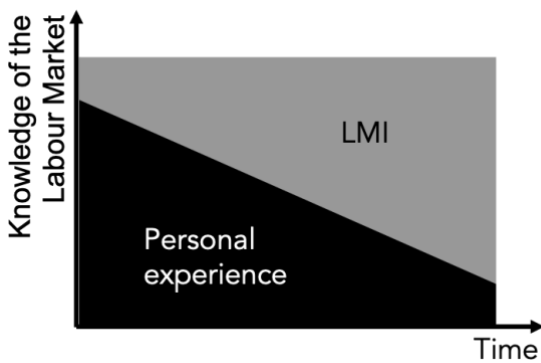
THE FOUR INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTIONS



Source: World Economic Forum

“The way we used to do things, even in the very recent past, is becoming ever less relevant to the way things need to be done now and will need to be done in the future.”

The complexity and pace of economic and labour market change is meaning that the way we used to do things, even in the very recent past, is becoming ever less relevant to the way things need to be done now and will need to be done in the future. Putting it bluntly, in needing to innovate the decision-making process to achieve the desired effectiveness in an ever more rapidly changing labour market context, the value of our personal experience gained in the past diminishes rapidly, and we need to find ways to illuminate the growing proportion of the current labour market that we can't possibly have achieved detailed knowledge of from our past experience. This is where LMI can help to fill the knowledge gap.



In charting the 15 years that Emsi has been serving UK organisations in the provision of LMI it has commonly taken a major external market disruption to drive a new way of thinking and acting that has led to embracing LMI as a key source of knowledge – effectively a bright light being shone on the knowledge gap between personal experience in the sector and labour

market realities, illuminating the need to embrace LMI to fill the knowledge void. The Further Education (FE) sector has embraced LMI as a result of facing political challenge about the impact, value and ultimately the quality of FE provision based on its link to employer demand, as evidenced by the evolving Ofsted inspection focus around *curriculum intent*¹, and the prime sentiment of the recent FE White Paper² in putting employers at the forefront on shaping FE priorities. Universities are also facing similar political and social scrutiny of value and impact as policy makers place growing importance on the connection between higher education provision and graduate employment outcomes – as referenced in the Review of Post-18 Education and Funding led by Dr Philip Augar³. And Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and Combined Authorities (CAs) have embraced LMI as part of their requirement as local leaders in driving the devolution of government powers and funding from central government. This has most recently been fuelled by the Department for Education's requirement for LEPs and CAs to drive local Skills Advisory Panels⁴, designed to ensure skills provision in their region is aligned to labour demand.

The employment support sector is arguably facing its own *act now* moment in needing to embrace LMI, not least thanks to the current Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting economic disruption. The demand for employment support services is growing rapidly in response to the sharp rise in unemployment with key Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) programmes ramping up. The current unemployment challenge is not only bringing through a significant increase in caseload volume, but also bringing through a more diverse range of candidates than has been seen in many

¹ Education Inspection Framework (EIF) 2019, Ofsted

² Skills for Jobs White Paper, 21st January 2021, Department for Education

³ Post-18 review of education and funding: independent panel report, 19th May 2019, Department for Education

⁴ Skills Advisory Panels: S31 grant determination letter, 28th March 2019, Department for Education

“The current unemployment challenge is not only bringing through a significant increase in caseload volume, but also bringing through a more diverse range of candidates than has been seen in many years.”

years as the pandemic has left very few parts of the economy untouched. Coupled with, in the short term in particular, a highly variable labour demand profile than would normally be presented at a time of high demand for unemployment services – namely that the high volume, low barrier to entry workforce sectors of hospitality and retail are exactly those sectors that have faced the greatest disruption through the imposition of lockdown restrictions, and as restrictions ease (and hopefully don't return) these sectors as well as the rest of the economy will further change and evolve as 'normality' returns. And, whilst the route to easing lockdown restrictions becomes clearer, what is not so clear is the extent to which the socio-economic shifts driven by the last 12 months will permanently alter the way we live, work and consume goods, and ultimately impact on the world of work.

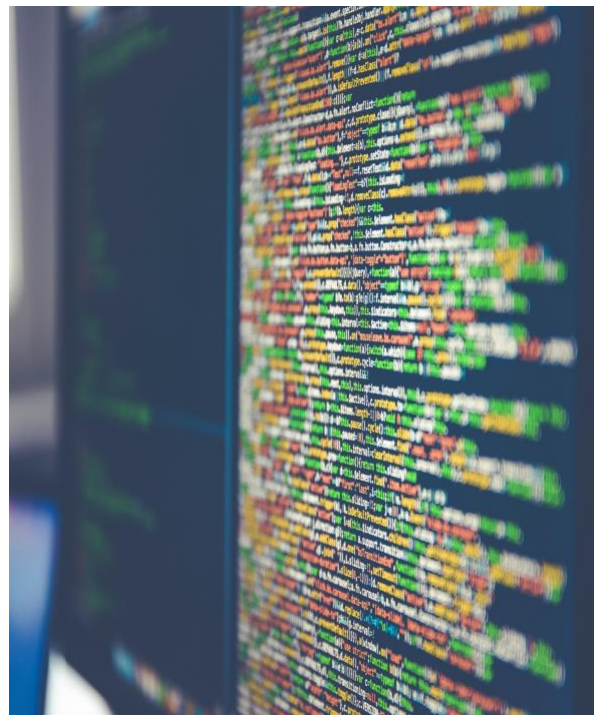
LMI is going to have to play an even greater role in bridging the labour market knowledge gap as service providers and advisers battle to navigate an uncertain, fast changing, and potentially permanently altered labour environment and adapt their services and solutions to respond to constant and rapid changing needs and employment opportunities – and this is before we even consider what impact Brexit, or the continued growth in AI and automation might have on the labour market. Undoubtedly this is driving DWP, in this current commissioning round, to explicitly identify the need for providers to harness LMI-based evidence to drive more robust, data

driven, locally relevant programmes and engagement activities to ensure projects are of the highest quality and deliver the most impactful outcomes for jobseekers and local economies at a time of great change and disruption.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy is Managing Director of Emsi.





Emsi provide easy to use labour market intelligence solutions to drive innovation and excellence amongst colleges and universities across the world. Andy is a Fellow of the IEP and leads Emsi's work in the UK with overall responsibility for sales, customer support, strategy, business planning, product development and marketing direction in close partnership with colleagues across the growing UK-based team and from head office in the UK.



The effectiveness of technology to improve the mental health of unemployed individuals



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We might be mistaken in thinking that only the long-term unemployed need mental health support. In a changing economy, even those short-term displaced workers need mental health support. In fact, those who have never accessed support services, who have been employed for several years are more likely to experience more significant negative life consequences.

There is no doubt that we need a mental health solution that can be accessible to many. Questions need to be answered about how effective technology is in solving mental health issues, and what improves the engagement of mental health technology. With new employment programs being offered by the UK Government, we need to ensure evidence based, reputable and quality resources are available to all unemployed individuals. The following article identifies what works, and what is needed to improve engagement to gain a broader community benefit.

Traditionally, mental health support has been provided to those in need via face-to-face interactions. This has since changed to incorporate a variety of e-interventions. E-interventions consist of mental or behavioural support interventions delivered via internet or electronic technologies (APS, 2010). As such, mental health support is delivered via online platforms (websites), telephones (Telehealth) and

mobiles (mHealth). The use of technology provides a cost effect-effective way to provide evidence based, integrated healthcare that bridges geographic, socioeconomic, and sociocultural divides. In some instances, e-interventions are just as effective as face-to-face supports (Andersson et al., 2014; Cuijpers et al., 2010). E-interventions have been found to be effective in treating a range of mental health disorders, including both anxiety and depression (Casey et al., 2017; Vindegaard et al., 2020).

Due to accessibility and privacy, mHealth and online interventions are the preferred methods of engagement with health services for youth and young adults. Young people, both in the United States and Australia, have identified that they will typically choose not to access face-to-face mental health services until they are nearing a crisis point with their symptoms, a pattern which is emphasised amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2020; Povey et al., 2020). E-Interventions have the capacity to overcome barriers to people accessing mental health care such as geographic location, busy schedules, and mental health stigma. Regardless, these interventions still experience barriers of high dropout, low adherence and lack of awareness. For mHealth interventions, this can largely be attributed to the poor evidence-based foundations and poor design.

“E-Interventions have the capacity to overcome barriers to people accessing mental health care such as geographic location, busy schedules, and mental health stigma.”

There are more than 10,000 mental health and wellness apps available to download (Torous & Roberts 2017). These apps aim to reduce mental health difficulties and promote mental wellbeing through engagement with tools and activities. Mental health apps that provide immediate relief and require short-term usage are more frequently accessed and used (Wasil et. al., 2020). Apps which are more popular, due to these reasons, have the most active users on a monthly basis (Wasil et. al., 2020). Simple and interactive mental health apps are more likely to promote continuous usage (Bakker, Kazantzis, Rickwood & Rickard, 2016). Users spend more time using apps that provide mindfulness, meditation and peer support in comparison to apps that provide tracking functions, breathing exercises and psychoeducation.

Of the mental health apps available, a number are not informed by evidence or based on research. This overall reduces the quality of mental health support an individual receives. Evidence-based apps are rated higher by users (Baumel, Torous, Edan & Kane, 2020). Non-evidence-based apps are found to provide ‘in-the-moment’ relief but are also described as containing potentially harmful content for someone in a poor mental state. A recent examination of current apps showed that 64% of apps made claims about their effectiveness but less than a third provided no supporting evidence (Larsen et. al., 2019). It is difficult to determine if the content users are exposed to will help or hinder their mental health.

A number of design and functionality elements prompt further disengagement with mental health apps. The most prominent causes of disengagement occurred when there were problems regarding usability, credibility, security/privacy, as well as social and emergency support. The majority of apps are not user friendly due to the high data entry burden and hidden costs (Torous et. al., 2018). As a result, users are sceptical of the legitimacy of the information provided on the apps (Melcher et. al., 2020). In addition, many users disengage with apps due to concerns over the apps ability to securely store private information. Privacy was found to be the top concern among mental health app users (Melcher et. al., 2020). Users are wary about disclosing personal details as well as mental health experiences. Regardless, when concerning information is disclosed, mental health apps are often not equipped to respond appropriately. As such, the quality of technology available impedes the support that can be accessed by the individual.

Based on this review, we propose the following recommendations to ensure evidence based, engaging and quality resources are available to all unemployed individuals.

1. Adopt a wider variety of features. Apps should consider including a wider variety of features than commonly engaged with on mental health apps.
2. Increase usability through the app’s design. Ideally, users should be involved with designing and developing the app. In addition to this, the app should offer a variety of different features and options to customise and personalise the app.
3. Promote credibility. Evidence and research will provide users with the appropriate content to support their mental health.

“Mental health e-interventions provide a solution to the negative life consequences that occur due to unemployment.”

4. Implement security and privacy measures. Apps should provide all users with a copy of the apps privacy policy to increase transparency.
5. Display emergency contact information and social support. This would provide appropriate and necessary support to users.

Mental health e-interventions provide a solution to the negative life consequences that occur due

to unemployment. They have been found to support the ongoing and changing mental health needs of individuals. Engagement in mental health apps is determined by purpose and design of these apps. We need to ensure that apps are evidence based, engaging and provide quality resources that are available to all unemployed individuals.

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 is an Adjunct Research Fellow at the University of Southern Queensland in Australia. She is a Fellow of the IEP.

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Employment Support – The policy challenge in future



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I joined what was then the Employment Service in 1992, whilst we were still feeling the effects of the early 90s recession and have since experienced 2 other economic shocks – the financial crisis in 2008 and covid-19 in 2020.

I have therefore seen first-hand the counter-cyclical nature of our work – we significantly expand our workforce when the rest of the economy is shrinking. Last week marked a major milestone with the recruitment of our 10,000th extra Work Coach into Jobcentre Plus with more to come by the end of March.

We have also boosted the support available through our contracted employment support providers, beyond the support which already existed for people with health conditions in the Work and Health Programme and the Intensive Personalised Employment Support Programme.

Most significantly we are in the middle of the tendering process for the new £2.9 billion Restart scheme announced at the Spending Review on 25 November 2020. This will give Universal Credit claimants who have been out of work for at least 12 months enhanced support to find jobs in their local area. Restart will break down any employment barriers that could be holding them back from finding work. Providers will work with employers, local government and other partners to deliver tailored support for individuals.

We have also already launched two programmes aimed at people who've been out of work for a shorter period:

Job Entry: Targeted Support (JETS) which provides light touch, personalised employment support for 6 months; and Job Finding Support, which provides at least 4 hours of tailored one-to-one digital support with an expert adviser, and at least one group session.

We've not had anything like this type of offer for many years, which means we'll be keen to learn what works and how lessons can be applied in the future. The idea of an online offer is particularly interesting, given how much we've all had to get used to remote working (and indeed remote socialising) in the last year.

The common factor in all of these forms of support is the individual who can offer high quality employment advice. Whenever I talk to people who have benefitted from support, or heard their stories re-told, what's always striking is the importance of the relationship with this key person – building confidence and motivation and helping the individual feel 'listened to'.

Whatever other issues an individual faces, it seems to me that they will always need this

“As the new employment support programmes roll out and advisers apply new ways of working, what more can we learn about how to best help those who need additional support?”

kind of help to navigate the opportunities in the labour market and the various forms of support on offer.

My team’s particular focus is on employment for disabled people and people with long-term health conditions. Much of our work in recent years has been in experimenting with different forms of employment support, delivered in different settings.

The NHS is committed to a significant expansion of Individual Placement and Support (IPS) for people with severe mental illness, and we are funding a programme of support to help providers implement a quality service. IPS is focused on helping people find and retain employment, irrespective of their condition, recognising the benefits which a good job can bring.

We have funded trials of this evidence based IPS model for different groups of people, including those with mild to moderate mental illness, physical health conditions and drug and alcohol dependency. What’s particularly interesting in these models is that they are delivered in settings where individuals are already engaged – in health settings for the former, and in treatment services for the latter. We are encouraged by the early feedback, and full evaluation results will be available later this year.

We have also funded employment advisers embedded within the NHS talking therapies services (known as IAPT), providing employment support for those who want it,

whether they are in work and struggling or out of work. Feedback again has been encouraging, with the therapists welcoming the extra time and focus they have with their patients.

People who provide employment advice have a crucial role at the moment in helping the country recover. The labour market will of course recover, and unemployment will fall, though I am not making forecasts about when that will happen – that’s for the Office for Budget Responsibility. But there will always be people who need additional intensive help, and we are increasingly looking beyond ‘into work’ support and considering the best approach to support retention and progression. As the new employment support programmes roll out and advisers apply new ways of working, what more can we learn about how to best help those who need additional support?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Angus is Director, Employers, Health and Inclusive Employment at DWP.

Angus has had a 30 year career in DWP and its predecessors, working in a range of disciplines. He is currently the Director of Employers, Health and Inclusive Employment, responsible for improving the employment rate of disabled people, older workers and carers, and working across DWP and DHSC to improve work and health outcomes.



Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor

There is no doubt that the challenge the Government faces in rebuilding the UK's economy and preventing further unemployment is vast.

The Chancellor's announcement that £2.9 billion would be spent on the Restart programme to help the long-term unemployed was assuredly welcome, but its real impact will be seen in how it is distributed and how it ties into initiatives which have already been announced. It is vital that there are routes into employment for young people and adults, such as traineeships for young people who need a stepping-stone to apprenticeships, as well as sector-based work academies to help more unemployed individuals gain specific industry skills and training to boost their employability.

With this plethora of provision I would strongly advocate that more than ever, now is the time to create career 'super-highways', which provide clear and speedy pathways for young people to get into employment – or at least be able to access opportunities.

The goal of any of these schemes must always be to ensure that they ultimately lead to tangible employment opportunities. A continued patchwork of different opportunities, between which young people end up moving, will only add to confusion and anxiety for those most in need of assistance. There is also a need to invest in careers personal guidance to help all individuals make sense of the changing landscape and options presented.

Mark De Backer | IAG Commercial Manager | Education Development Trust

Dear Editor

Move fast - and mend things

The Silicon Valley mantra has been for a decade 'move fast and break things'. It's time now for the employability sector to do the opposite. Here's why. At the moment the heavy lifting on Restart falls to the bidding teams. I am full of admiration for their achievements: soon enough however the spotlight moves on to implementation and then delivery.

A different set of challenges then cascade through the supply chain. First up will be the need for speed. Restart only lasts a year. After that the customer goes back to DWP and the chance to find them work is gone. And yet most of them will start their time on Restart lacking energy and motivation.

That makes their first contact with their provider crucial: it needs to be prompt and action-oriented, ideally from day one, and be aware that the DWP customer standards are deceptively generous. 15 days to initial interview and eight weeks to action plan completion are really far longer than necessary, remembering that if fully used that initial period is 15% of the programme time available.

A starting expectation should be to complete that initial process in two weeks. It will of course mean investment in people, premises, and systems. But as a sector we can be good at doing that swiftly. Now is the time to make that a reality not just an aspiration.

And that is important for three big reasons. First it sets a tone of pace and purpose for the client and our newly recruited front-line advisers. Next it builds our reputation as a sector that does things well at speed: think of the reputational bonus DWP secured in its amazing work in getting huge numbers onto UC last year and it gives us real partnership clout in working with local stakeholders.

The case for moving fast is clear. Now is the time to set ourselves the challenge and deliver on it.

Patrick Hughes FIEP | Salientwork Ltd

Dear Editor

Employability: how do we know we are doing the right thing?

Is it an oversimplification to say that most of us believe that our employability practice does good things for people? Just lately work has found me reading about this, and a few of the best studies – with randomised control groups and so on – have me thinking that it's time we studied our impact more closely.

These studies showed that not everything works as planned: some programmes reduce the chance of employment for some people; others have a neutral impact on employment rates. In one case, people who were already confident and capable of finding work had their confidence reduced by attending a good-quality back-to-work programme^{1,2,3}.

What does that mean for us? Suppose we were to measure the impact of a programme on an index of employability among participants. Let's also assume that overall the programme improves the index by some amount – say 20% as a guess. That's clearly a gain.

We could almost certainly expect the gains made by individual participants to follow the shape of a 'normal curve'. Some clients do very well. The average is for a gain of 20%. Some do less well, some do badly, a few worse than no intervention at all.

Where does that leave our belief that we are 'doing good'? And how can we address the needs of those who do worse than the average, or even lose out as a result of our work? Would more careful work on 'distance travelled' help unravel the problems^{4,5}?

I'd like to study these questions further, and wonder if there are people or organisations who would be willing to help create a high-quality study of the issues in daily practice? Anyone?

David Imber FIEP | Principal | the good employability company

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Dear Editor

Equality or Equity

I have just read that 'in 2019 in every region in England and in Scotland, unemployment rates were lower for White people than for all other ethnic groups combined'. The BBC also highlighted that young people have also been hit particularly hard by the labour market fallout from coronavirus, with workers aged under 24 accounting for nearly half of the total fall in employment during the economic slump.

Those at this intersection (young and BAME) and at the intersection of being white, young and from a marginalised socio economic groups are more likely to face economic discrimination and are less likely to find jobs appropriate to their skill and expectation levels. The Employability sector will be key to helping these people back into the labour market. So how well prepared are we for that key role?

At one level, I feel that career professionals are ideally placed to support employers, clients and training providers to promote diversity, equity and inclusion and stimulate sustainable change in the workplace. To do this I suggest the sector might focus on equity as opposed to trying to treat people equally. That "leg up" that comes with equity will equalise the ability and opportunity of these diverse individuals by recognising and addressing the historically unfair differences of experience, status and access to resources and opportunities.

I am therefore wondering how the IEP is planning to support the sector in looking at the different ways we can give a "leg up" to our diverse client base and how the sector can encourage and support employers to see the benefits of an inclusive workplace. I am happy to discuss this with you and IEP colleagues.

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