Evaluation of New Deal 25 Plus:
Qualitative Interviews with ES Staff, Providers, Employers
and Clients

By

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Evaluation of New Deal 25 plus

A report for the Department for Work and Pensions by IFF Research.

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We are also very grateful for the time and effort put in by the regional and district teams in each of the areas participating in the research. Their assistance in selecting staff to take part in the project, and arranging times and locations for these interviews, contributed greatly to the smooth running of the study.

Finally IFF Research wishes to thank all those who gave their time to be interviewed, especially those staff and providers who were interviewed on more than one occasion during the course of the year.

¹ From April 2002 Employment Service (ES) became a part of Jobcentre Plus.
### Glossary of Abbreviations and Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADF</td>
<td>Adviser Discretion Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BET</td>
<td>Basic Employability Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPK</td>
<td>Client Progress Kit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPR</td>
<td>Client Progress Record</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMA</td>
<td>Decision Making and Appeals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPQM</td>
<td>District Programme Quality Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES</td>
<td>Employment Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>English for speakers of other languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAP</td>
<td>Intensive Activity Period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSA</td>
<td>Jobseekers Allowance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMS</td>
<td>Labour Market System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDPA</td>
<td>New Deal Personal Adviser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDYP</td>
<td>New Deal for Young People</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWD</td>
<td>Person with disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UoD</td>
<td>Unit of Delivery</td>
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<tr>
<td>WBLA</td>
<td>Work Based Learning for Adults</td>
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</table>
Executive Summary

New Deal 25 plus is part of the government’s welfare to work programme, and is designed to provide long-term unemployed people aged 25 and over with practical help and opportunities to equip them to re-enter and retain employment.

IFF Research was commissioned to undertake a qualitative research study to assess the impact and effectiveness of changes made to the programme in April 2001. Interviews were carried out with 127 ES staff, 128 providers, 104 employers and 151 clients. Employers were interviewed by telephone, the other interviews were face-to-face. Discussions with staff and providers involved a mix of one-to-one interviews, paired interviews and mini-group discussions. Clients were all interviewed one-to-one.

These interviews took place across three waves of research, the most recent being in March and April 2002, and covered eight ES Units of Delivery.

The New Deal 25 plus programme since April 2001

The re-engineered New Deal 25 plus programme did experience some initial teething problems in the months after its introduction. Many staff felt inadequately trained and prepared for the new programme, lacking both information on the range of provision available locally and confidence in how some aspects of the programme were intended to work.

However, the vast majority of staff feel that these problems have largely been remedied and that, since the start of 2002, the programme has begun to work as initially envisaged.

There were also initial difficulties for some training providers and some contracts were not in place by April 2001. There was also some evidence of tensions between advisers and providers due to differing views as to the purpose of the programme, (particularly the extent to which it was a job outcome programme as opposed to a training programme). Tensions also resulted from a lack of clarity about who was responsible for determining suitable provision for a client.

Again, these difficulties have eased as the programme has settled down. Improvements have largely been the result of staff and providers gaining greater familiarity with the programme over time, and improved communication and understanding between providers and staff.

Many providers also experienced low numbers of referrals compared to profile for the first half year of the programme. Numbers have been more buoyant in 2002 (indeed many say in 2002 referrals have been at levels which if achieved throughout the whole year would have put them on or ahead of profile), but most remain behind profile for the first 12 months of the programme.

Low referral numbers have raised financial concerns and have also felt to negatively affect the quality of their provision. The underpinning guarantee has been crucial for many providers.
The re-engineered programme compared to its predecessor

Staff are unanimous in the view that the changes made to New Deal 25 plus have greatly improved the programme. In particular there is felt to be a much wider range of provision to offer clients and the programme is much more client-led and tailor-made than it was before April 2001.

The mandatory IAP for those aged 25-49 has also given the programme more ‘bite’, and led to significant numbers signing off JSA. This has come about through people increasing their job search, preferring to take a job than to undertake some full time activity, and also by compelling those who are working (in the informal economy) and claiming benefit to make a choice.

Other features which staff feel have improved the programme are the Adviser Discretion Fund (ADF) and weekly interviewing on Gateway (where an office might previously have been conducting interviews fortnightly or less often).

The operation of the programme

The programme appears to be being delivered broadly along the lines intended. The following points summarise the key points about delivery:

- Clients are nearly all receiving weekly interviews on the Gateway, and where not this is due to large caseloads rather than it not being seen as desirable.
- Advisers understand that the central aim of the Gateway is to get a job outcome for a client if at all possible, and this objective appears to be understood and accepted by clients.
- Advisers understand that the length of the Gateway is a maximum 4 months (some only found this out mid way through the year), and clients are now being referred to IAP earlier if needed. BET/ESOL clients are particularly likely to be referred early.
- Advisers know that provision can be accessed during Gateway, and most feel they have an appropriate range of provision available. Some areas / offices are particularly pushing the Gateway to Work course, using this for a majority of clients.
- There is generally felt to be at least a reasonable range of provision available on IAP, though many staff can cite ways in which they feel it could usefully be extended. There is a clear desire on the part of providers and staff to avoid training for its own sake.
- Work experience is a popular option with staff, often being used where there is no clear specific training need.
Decisions about appropriate IAPs are being made in discussion with the client and the provider, with advisers aware that they have the final say. In the early months of the re-engineered programme it was clear that some staff were in practice often leaving their lead provider to determine the provision a client would receive. This is happening much less as staff become more familiar with the planning process and the provision available locally.

Providers are very aware of their job search obligations for clients. Some staff have expressed concerns as to the quantity and quality of job search that is being delivered by providers.

Staff know of the requirement to undertake monitoring contacts with clients while they are on their IAP. It is generally happening, and felt to be useful though it is often neglected when things get busy.

Follow-through is seen as an important phase by advisers, and Follow-through interviews with clients are happening. There are few signs however of job outcomes occurring during this phase.

Staff are aware of and making use of the ADF to help overcome some of the barriers to employment raised by their clients.

The Employer Subsidy plays a key role in encouraging small and medium sized employers to take part in the programme. However, many staff feel it has not been marketed well to employers.

Most staff are reluctant to use the Decision Making and Appeals process. It is felt to be time consuming to produce the necessary paperwork, and then they feel that decisions are usually in favour of the client.

Who is the programme serving?

Staff and providers agree that the programme gives them the tools to help most of the clients they deal with, particularly those that want to be helped, and those with more mainstream job goals (such as retail and hospitality) where work experience placements are easier to obtain. There remains a core of hard to help clients who play the system and who they struggle to make progress with. However, three groups were identified as not being well served by the programme:

- **Those aged 50 plus**: staff feel many who could benefit from accessing provision are choosing not to

- **Those with severe basic skill needs**. A number of staff felt that ESOL provision was lacking locally, or that the quality of the BET / ESOL provision was poor. Providers feel it is difficult to help ESOL clients, and BET clients with more severe difficulties, in 26 weeks. Further, some providers felt those needing BET provision were being missed by NDPAs (and being referred for other IAP provision).
• **Those needing intermediate or more advanced training.** In IT for example there is felt to be a wealth of suppliers of basic level courses but it has proved hard to find higher level training.

**Leaving the register and job outcomes**

On the key issue of delivering job outcomes and improving employability there is a general feeling that the programme has worked reasonably well, though more time is needed for the true potential of the programme to become clear. Certainly significant numbers are leaving the register. Although this is often the result of individuals switching from JSA to other benefits, there are positive signs that many are finding work. Many providers have struggled to come close to the job outcome targets set by ES, but feel this will improve as their links with employers develop.

**Conclusions**

The New Deal 25 plus programme is felt by all those able to make a comparison to be a significant improvement on its predecessor. That said, the re-engineered programme got off to a difficult start and it is only in the first few months of 2002 that the programme has started to work effectively.

While lessons have been learnt and refinements made to local delivery of the programme, there are still a range of improvements that are widely seen as desirable.

Any changes made to the programme, however, need to be carefully considered since the desire for improvements sits alongside a common wish that the programme be allowed to continue to settle down.
1 Introduction

1.1 This report presents findings of a programme of action research undertaken by IFF Research on behalf of the Employment Service (ES) to assess the impact and effectiveness of changes made to the New Deal 25 plus programme in April 2001. The study employed a qualitative method, and involved interviewing ES staff, providers, employers and clients across three waves of fieldwork.

Background

1.2 New Deal 25 plus is part of the government’s welfare to work programme, and is designed to provide long-term unemployed people aged 25 and over with individually-tailored practical help and opportunities to equip them to re-enter and retain employment. Broadly it is intended to:

- Give long-term unemployed people an opportunity to reassess their situation with the help of a New Deal Personal Advisor (NDPA) and to enable a speedy return to sustainable work;
- Help equip long-term unemployed people with the skills they require to compete for future jobs, including work skills and experience, qualifications, improved motivation and self-confidence and job search skills;
- Encourage employers to give long-term unemployed people opportunities to demonstrate what they can do.

1.3 New Deal 25 plus was launched as a national programme at the end of June 1998 and provided a common form of provision for long-term unemployed adults across the whole country. In addition to the national programme, 28 pilots were launched in November 1998 to test the effectiveness of a range of different approaches to achieving the aims of New Deal 25 plus.

1.4 Following a comprehensive evaluation of the programme involving both qualitative and quantitative research, a series of enhancements were made to the programme in April 2000. Subsequent research showed that while these changes were viewed positively, there was a feeling that they had not gone far enough. Hence more far reaching changes were made to the programme in April 2001.
1.5 Some of the key elements of this re-engineering of the programme included:

- **Eligibility**: widened to accept participants at 18 months (out of the previous 21 months) of unemployment as opposed to the previous two years. Five categories of early entrant are identified who can enter New Deal 25 plus from day one of their unemployment\(^2\). All those with 18 months or more unemployment are mandated to attend the initial Gateway period. The remainder of the programme is mandatory for those aged 25-49, but those aged 50 or over can choose whether or not to participate in the Intensive Activity Period (IAP).

- **Gateway**: an initial Gateway period of up to 4 months involving a series of weekly interviews between the client and their NDPA, and focussed on getting people into work. Early stages involve assessment and diagnosis, with particular attention paid to potential basic skill needs. If appropriate jobseekers can be referred to a range of measures and support aimed at moving people into work. From week 4 of the Gateway NDPAs will focus on planning an individually tailored programme of help for those still unemployed at the end of the Gateway period.

- **IAP**: the IAP is designed to give people the skills and experience they need to obtain employment by providing tailored, full time, intensive activity. Areas of possible activity include: Basic Employability Training (BET); work placements; work-focused training and help with motivation and soft skills. The assumption at the start of the IAP is that a client receives 13 weeks of help (longer for ETOs and BET), though this can be extended up to 26 weeks. During IAP a training allowance is payable to participants.

- **Models of IAP delivery**: there are three main IAP delivery models:
  - A modular approach, managed by ES
  - A routeways approach, whereby the programme is managed by a routeways provider rather than the ES
  - A Combination approach

- **Follow-through**: those who return to JSA after IAP enter a period of Follow-through aimed at moving people into work. This involves a series of weekly interviews over a (usually) six week period involving intensive job search, and access to Gateway-type provision. For some the Follow-through can be extended for up to 13 weeks.

- **An employer subsidy** and an **Adviser Discretion Fund** are available at all stages of the New Deal to help the transition into work.

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\(^2\) The five categories are: people with disabilities; ex-offenders (i.e. those who have served a custodial sentence); homeless people; people recovering from drug addiction; and refugees (i.e. those who have permission to stay and to claim JSA).
Evaluation objectives

1.6 The research presented in this report is one strand of an overarching strategy to evaluate the re-engineered New Deal 25 plus programme through action research and case studies, supported by analysis of the New Deal Evaluation Database. The specific objectives of this element of the research were:

- To assess the effectiveness of the implementation and delivery of the re-engineered New Deal 25 plus
- To ascertain whether the New Deal 25 plus programme is being delivered as intended
- To contribute to the evidence about what works for whom, why and under what circumstances

Methodology

1.7 Interviewing for the project took place in three waves. The dates for these were as follows:

- Wave 1: July and August 2001
- Wave 2: November and December 2001 (interviewing of employers continued until February 2002)
- Wave 3: March / April 2002 (interviewing of employers continued up to May 2002)

1.8 The research study involved interviews and discussions with four stakeholders:

- ES staff
- Training providers
- New Deal 25 plus clients
- Employers involved in the programme

1.9 All four groups were interviewed for all waves except wave 1, which was confined to ES staff and providers.
1.10 The research covered eight units of delivery (the list of these is shown in table 1.1). Two of these, Norwich and West London, were added after wave 1 in order to boost the number of providers, staff and employers interviewed (no client interviews were conducted in these two areas). The areas were chosen by ES to achieve a geographic spread across Great Britain (covering London and the South East, South West, Eastern, the North plus one area in Wales and one in Scotland) and to cover different labour market conditions (including some inner city areas and more rural areas). One area was selected because it had adopted a modular approach for the IAP. Locations were also selected to exclude those where recent evaluation work had recently or was currently being undertaken.

1.11 A summary of the research programme is shown in the following table. This shows the areas and stakeholders covered in each wave of fieldwork, and how many interviews were conducted with each group.

Table 1.1: The research programme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wave</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>ES areas covered</th>
<th>Groups covered</th>
<th>Number of interviews undertaken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wave 1</td>
<td>July and August 2001</td>
<td>Barnsley Bolton / Bury Cardiff Hertfordshire Swindon Tayside</td>
<td>ES staff</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Providers</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 2</td>
<td>November and December 2001</td>
<td>Barnsley Bolton / Bury Cardiff Hertfordshire Swindon Tayside Norwich West London</td>
<td>ES staff</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(employers until early February 2002)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Providers</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clients</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 3</td>
<td>March / April 2002 (employers up to May 2002)</td>
<td>Barnsley Bolton / Bury Cardiff Hertfordshire Swindon Tayside Norwich West London</td>
<td>ES staff</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Providers</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clients</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.12 By returning to the same areas in each wave of the research, indeed for ES staff and providers often to the same individuals, the research design enabled a picture to be built up of how the programme was developing over time among key stakeholders, and how issues and problems were being resolved.

ES staff

1.13 All discussions with staff were undertaken face-to-face. A mix of one-to-one and paired interviews were used, plus the occasional mini-groups of 3 or 4 staff. Which approach was employed was based on a discussion with our main contact in each area about what would be suitable and practical. All these interviews were undertaken by IFF research staff.

1.14 Names of staff were provided by an ES contact in each area. Our contacts had received a letter from the ES research team indicating that we wanted to interview staff across different Jobcentres and at different levels of seniority (though with a focus on NDPAs). In some areas these district / regional contacts arranged the interviews times and locations. In others they supplied names and contact details, and IFF then called the individuals to arrange a suitable time and date for the interview.

1.15 In total we undertook 127 interviews with staff (we have treated a mini-group discussion with three staff as three interviews, a paired interview as two etc). It is important to note that at waves 2 and 3 in a slight majority of cases we spoke to respondents we had already interviewed on previous waves.

1.16 The majority of staff interviews were conducted with NDPAs. Others covered by the research included: senior advisers, adviser managers, New Deal co-ordinators, members of contracting teams, DPQMs, District Managers / Assistant District Managers (a copy of the semi-structured questionnaire used in the final wave of interviewing is available3).

Providers

1.17 Providers were nearly all interviewed face-to-face, though a small number (three) were conducted by telephone where interviews were postponed by the respondent. All interviews were conducted by IFF research staff.

1.18 Names of providers were supplied by the district / region contacts in each area. IFF then called to arrange a suitable time and date for the interview. In nearly all cases interviews were undertaken at their premises, though in a few cases they were interviewed at a Jobcentre.

3 Available from: Research Management, Level 2, 123 West Street, Sheffield S1 4ER.
1.19 In total we carried out 128 interviews with staff working at provider organisations (the semi-structured questionnaire used for the final wave of interviewing is available). Again it should be stressed that at wave 2 and 3 we returned to many of the same organisations that had been interviewed at previous waves.

Employers

1.20 Employers were all interviewed by telephone. These interviews were undertaken by specialist business-to-business interviewers from IFF’s telephone centre in London.

1.21 Names of employers involved in the programme were supplied by providers and, in some cases, by ES contacts (usually going via providers on our behalf).

1.22 In total we interviewed 104 employers who had been involved in New Deal 25 plus since April 2001. This was someway below the target of 150 interviews. This was a result of two main factors. The most fundamental was a significant difficulty obtaining a large sample of employers. A majority of providers were either unwilling or unable to provide employer names. Some of those in the former category put this in terms of not wanting to risk anything that might damage their relationship with employers. Others said they would only give names once they had first contacted the employers to see if they were willing to take part (few of these providers came back with any names). Those that could supply names often only provided two or three. Where ES district staff attempted to get the names from their providers on our behalf they fared no better (on one occasion this yielded one employer name, on another a total of five).

1.23 The other difficulty obtaining employer interviews was the relative frequency with which employers indicated that they had not been involved in New Deal 25 plus, or at least that they were not aware of any involvement. This was even after giving them a brief description of the programme and what their involvement might have been. In these cases it made no sense to proceed with the interview. In total we were provided with 190 employer names across the two waves and spoke to 26 employers who were not aware of their involvement in the programme.

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4 Available from: Research Management, Level 2, Rockingham House, 123 West Street, Sheffield S1 4ER.
Clients

1.24 Clients were all interviewed face-to-face, in their home unless they chose otherwise. These were undertaken by experienced local interviewers. All interviewers were personally briefed by the research team.

1.25 Names of clients were supplied centrally by the ES research team from the New Deal 25 plus Evaluation Database. Approximately 200 names were supplied in each wave for each area. IFF then selected 50-60 individuals in each location, selected to ensure reasonable coverage by key demographic variables such as age and gender. Each was sent a letter explaining the nature and objectives of the research and offering them the opportunity to opt out.

1.26 All clients participating in the research received £15 as a thank you.

1.27 In total 151 interviews were undertaken with New Deal 25 plus clients (the questionnaire used for the final wave of interviewing is available⁵). One respondent was interviewed across both wave 2 and 3, hence this total represents 150 different clients.

A note on the waves of interviewing used in this report

1.28 In this report we discuss findings from all three waves of interviewing. However, we have concentrated very much on the most recent wave undertaken in March and April 2002 since this clearly gives the most up to date picture of how the re-engineered programme is working.

Providers and WBLA

1.29 Discussions were undertaken with providers who were involved in WBLA as well as New Deal 25 plus provision. While for some issues it is possible to report results separately for each programme, for many areas this is not feasible. This is simply because on such issues as relationships with ES, providers cannot isolate the effect of one programme from the other, and on issues relating to the client’s time while with the provider, the clients’ experience would usually be similar regardless of the programme they were on when accessing provision.

1.30 A report evaluating WBLA written by IFF is due to be published in July 2002.

⁵ Available from: Research Management, Level 2, Rockingham House, 123 West Street, Sheffield S1 4ER
2 Staff: overall views

2.1 In this chapter we look at the overall views of ES staff regarding the re-engineered New Deal 25 plus programme. In the following chapters we examine staff views of the key chronological stages of the process aspects, namely Gateway, IAP and Follow-through. Chapter four then examines specific aspects such as ADF, links with employers and administration and IT support.

Overall views of New Deal 25 plus programme post April 2001

2.2 Staff are unanimous in the view that the changes made to New Deal 25 plus in April 2001 have greatly improved the programme. Three changes are seen as key:

- the availability of a much wider range of provision to offer clients;
- the fact that the programme is much more client-led and tailor made than it was before;
- the mandatory IAP for those aged 25-49, which has given the programme more ‘bite’.

2.3 Other features of the programme which staff feel have improved the programme are the Adviser Discretion Fund (ADF) and weekly interviewing on Gateway (where an office might previously have been conducting interviews fortnightly or less often).

2.4 Overall the re-engineered programme is seen as having been very successful in leading to people signing off JSA either through clients switching to a more appropriate benefit (usually Incapacity Benefit), through their finding work in the Gateway period, or the mandatory IAP. The latter gives those who are working but not declaring this no option but to sign off if they want to continue working. Staff had less evidence that undertaking the IAP activity itself was leading to a significant number of their clients getting work.

2.5 The general consensus among staff is that despite the fact that the re-engineered programme has been running since April 2001 it is only in 2002 that it has started to ‘bed down’. In the early days of the programme severe teething difficulties were encountered in most areas, ranging from staff feeling the training they received was inadequate, to contracts with providers not being in place until after April (in one area not until June 2001), to a general lack of information about provision available locally. This led to a slow and staccato start to the re-engineered programme.
2.6 During the course of the last 12 months though, staff knowledge of the programme has greatly improved, particularly in regard to developing a much greater understanding of the range and usefulness of provision available locally, and of what is involved in the planning of the IAP. It was evident too that good working relationships with providers have started to develop.

2.7 Although staff view the re-engineered programme very favourably compared with its predecessor, there are still areas where they feel improvements could be made and where the programme is not working in the way originally intended. We discuss these throughout this chapter and again in Chapter 9.

2.8 The following quotes illustrate ways in which the re-engineered programme is seen as better than what went before, that it has not always been what advisers expected and that improvements could be made to the programme.

“25 plus is more of a stick and less of the tailored client-focussed training than what I was led to believe at the outset. The big effect is people signing off before IAP, often the day before. The idea of it is great, the mandatory aspect is great in catching them if they are working. The mechanics of it though are far too elaborate.” [NDPA wave 3]

“The new New Deal 25 plus is working much better. It’s basically the same Gateway, though enhanced, but the IAP is invaluable, the mandatory IAP combined with tailoring the IAP. The design of the programme is very good on paper. In theory it should enhance employability. ESOL and BET provision is still a bit patchy, this has not bedded in yet.” [NDPA wave 3]

“The biggest move has been getting away from just sending people on 6 month courses. It has been a learning curve, trying to get it over to clients that it’s not training. They are not taking this on board. I'm not sure if all the advisers are there yet either. The idea of the new programme is good. In practice it has not always been working as we need it to work, especially on eligibility. It’s not providing in a lot of cases what the clients need and what the employers need. The programme is not as flexible as we were led to believe. It’s quite rigid.” [NDPA wave 3]

Who is the programme serving?

2.9 The general view of the re-engineered programme is it provides staff with the tools needed to help those that want to be helped. This is either in terms of finding them work or improving their employment prospects. The programme works particularly well when the client is looking for work in what might be called a mainstream area, such as retail or hospitality, where work experience placements can easily be found.
2.10 There are three main groups that staff feel the programme is not helping as well as it could or should:

- those aged 50 plus.
- those with basic skills needs.
- those with intermediate or more advanced level skill needs.

2.11 There is a very widespread view among staff that, because most of their 50 plus clients are not choosing to undertake an IAP activity, these older clients are gaining little from their time on New Deal. Because of this, and because they feel some of the 50 plus clients group would benefit from undertaking some activity, nearly all staff feel that the mandatory aspect of the programme needs to be extended to the 50 plus group. There are differing views on the format this should take. Some feel the IAP should be mandatory for the 50-55 year olds or for those aged up to 52 or 53. Others simply want the discretion to make the IAP mandatory for any client aged over 50 who they feel would benefit from some activity. Others want to make a Gateway to Work style course compulsory, though often this comment is accompanied by the view that such a course would need to be tailored to older clients (not necessarily all 50 plus, but certainly not mixing the 50 plus with those aged 18-24).

2.12 Although in some areas provision for those with basic skill needs appeared to be working reasonably well, in others basic skills provision was not felt to be meeting the needs of clients. This was for a range of reasons:

- In one or two cases it was simply down to a feeling that the provider delivering BET / ESOL was not performing well.
- Some did not have local providers who could undertake ESOL training (this was not an issue for BET training).
- For others it was a view that 26 weeks provision, which all areas had as their standard for BET and ESOL, is unlikely to really improve anyone’s employment prospects if they have severe basic skills issues or they speak no English.

2.13 As a note, many providers agreed that there were issues surrounding the success of basic skills provision. Certainly most agreed that they felt provision for ESOL clients needed to be longer if it was to really make a difference to employment prospects. In areas where basic skills assessments were only being used selectively, other providers felt advisers were only identifying individuals with very severe basic skill issues. Here they felt many clients with basic skill needs were slipping through the net (in part because many of those with less severe problems are good at hiding their difficulties). In consequence people were starting another IAP programme when a BET provision would have been more appropriate.
The other key group identified by staff as not being well served currently by the re-engineered 25 plus programme is those needing provision above the basic level. Here, staff were typically referring to clients who had been made redundant from well paid positions and who could not afford to take low paid positions because of mortgage considerations. The general view was that while the range of provision on Gateway and on the IAP was good for those needing relatively basic training, provision was lacking for this higher level group. IT was a common example cited. Numerous providers could deliver basic courses in typing, excel, Microsoft word etc, but it was hard to find providers to deliver training on packages such as CAD or SAGE. Similarly, a number of staff expressed the desire for a Gateway to Work style course aimed at this type of client.

A small number of staff felt disabled clients were not well served by the programme. In one case the reason given was that there was no specialist provision available exclusively for disabled clients. Another complained that the local training provider delivering the Gateway to Work course did not have wheelchair access, and hence they could not deliver this training for clients in wheelchairs, an issue that had been raised with her DPQMT.

The re-engineered programme in the early months after April 2001

A report evaluating the New Deal 25 plus programme\(^6\) concluded that the first 12 months can broadly be divided into 3 stages. From April 2001, for two to three months, there was an initial period involving significant confusion, followed by a period from June to December 2001 of ‘recovery from delays and the development of local designs and approaches to the programme’. The third phase from the start of 2002 has seen the programme ‘start to operate as intended’.

Our research completely concurs with these findings. The first few months after April 2001 were characterised by severe teething difficulties. Some of these problems might be described as ‘structural’ (for example, contracts with providers being late, LMS not being up to date in terms of the training opportunities available locally). Others problems were simply about staff having to get familiar with a complicated, new programme in a very short space of time. One described the introduction of the re-engineered programme as ‘rushed, even by ES standards.’

\(^6\) Evaluation of Re-engineered New Deal 25 Plus: Case studies by Philip Wilson, York Consulting
2.18 While some advisers were positive about the training they received, a majority felt the training provided had been insufficient, and had left them under prepared. This was despite many accepting that for all new programmes there is only so much you can learn via formal training, there being the need to learn on the job as you go along. The main emphasis of the training appeared to be on printed material (workbooks), but even here there were complaints about having too few copies to go round or the guidelines being changed regularly (even after the launch date). Some had attended external seminars/workshops, typically one-day events. There was also quite heavy reliance on informal internal sessions, for example NDPA meetings. Difficulties were compounded by the fact that for many offices the training was conducted before contracts with providers were in place.

2.19 One area at wave 2 had decided to re-launch the 25 plus programme to advisers because senior staff felt many NDPAs were unclear about aspects of the programme:

“There was confusion among staff about the Routeways on offer, the difference between training and work experience. This has improved. We got the Routeways provider in and they fully explained what went on. Also discussions with Personal Adviser Managers, the provider and contracts team ironed out some problems and led to a new system of referral and improved communication.” [DPQM]

2.20 NDPAs in this area had clearly benefited from the re-launch in terms of an improved understanding of the programme. As well as providers coming in to talk to staff about their provision, brochures had also been produced listing local training provision and giving information about local training providers. These brochures were being used by NDPAs themselves but were also being given to clients to help them make an informed decision about IAP options.
3 Staff views on the key stages of the programme

3.1 Having discussed key overall views of the programme we look now at staff experiences and attitudes regarding individual elements of the programme, namely:

- Eligibility and early entry
- Gateway and planning of the IAP
- IAP
- Follow-through

Eligibility and early entry

3.2 The criteria for entry into the re-engineered New Deal 25 plus programme is 18 months (out of the previous 21 months) claiming JSA. In addition early entry is available for five groups:

- People with disabilities
- Ex-offenders
- Homeless people
- Refugees who have been granted the right to claim JSA
- People recovering from drug addiction

3.3 A strong sentiment exists among staff that eligibility for the 25 plus programme should be reduced from 18 months to 12 months or even 6 months. This is simply because staff feel that the programme has the tools to help the unemployed back into work or to improve their employability, and the sooner they can deal with clients the less chance there is that ‘bad habits’ have been formed.

3.4 The proportion of candidates coming through as early entrants varied quite widely by area. Typically the proportion was described as being very low; some had none on their current caseload, others estimated it at 1% over the course of the last 12 months. More common was an estimate in the 5% to 10% range. However, there were offices where the proportion of early entrants was much higher, in some cases as high as a quarter of their caseload.
3.5 The extent to which offices had actively sought early entrants varied. Certainly in the early days of the programme it was considered a very low priority, though in later waves some had begun to make more concerted efforts in this area, usually in an attempt to increase the number of referrals. However, at wave 3 some still admitted that they had not actively sought early entrants because they had sufficient numbers coming through as stock and flow. One office described having begun a process of attempting to find those who had been claiming JSA for 18 out of 21 months where the claim had not been continuous. However, this task was a manual one and described as being quite time consuming. It was also being treated as a task to be done when advisers had a quiet moment, and hence, was being undertaken as a low priority. Another office had written to people with disabilities to request they come in for an interview with an adviser to discuss the programme. Another adviser had designed a poster to display in the office highlighting the early entry groups and encouraging clients to talk to her if interested.

3.6 More common was the general approach of simply informing frontline staff and those conducting Restart interviews about the criteria for early entry for 25 plus. These staff would then book a miscellaneous interview with an NDPA if the client appeared interested (interested in this sense typically meant their wanting to do some specific training). In the early days of the programme many incorrect referrals were being made by frontline staff for potential early entry, where they confused the criteria for the 25 plus programme with other ES programmes. This issue had all but disappeared by the third wave of interviewing. As a note, it was also not uncommon for NDPAs to be involved in undertaking 12 month restart interviews, and in these cases advisers could identify their own potential early entrants.

3.7 When the nature of the 25 plus programme was discussed with potential early entrants, two general themes emerged. One is that staff are thinking very much in terms of whether a piece of training will actually improve the person’s employability rather than letting the person on to the programme simply to give them training for the sake of it. Hence staff ‘reject’ some potential early entrants. The second is that once the mandatory nature of the IAP is discussed, many clients lose interest.

3.8 A number of advisers stated that they felt the early entry criteria for New Deal 25 plus should be broadened to include, for example, those with basic skill needs and those facing disadvantages getting work (victims of domestic violence was one specific group cited). Some put this more generally in terms of making the early entry criteria for the 25 plus programme the same as for WBLA and NDYP, indeed some were baffled as to why there should be fewer early entry criteria for 25 plus than for these other programmes.

3.9 Some senior staff expressed disappointment that the facility on LMS to identify those claiming JSA for 18 months out of 21 was still not available.
Evaluation of New Deal 25 Plus
Qualitative Interviews with ES Staff, Providers, Employers and Clients

Gateway

Gateway length

3.10 The Gateway period can last for up to four months. At the first wave of research it was evident that 16 weeks was generally being regarded as the default option, in other words that the Gateway would last 16 weeks unless there was a particular reason why it should be shorter. Indeed some advisers were actually unaware that it was possible to put someone on IAP provision earlier than the 16-week point.

3.11 By wave 3, this situation had changed markedly, with all staff interviewed being aware that the four months / 16 weeks represented a maximum, and most staff being flexible, varying the length of the Gateway to reflect the circumstances of the individual. A number of factors tended to be key in determining the Gateway length considered appropriate: the chances of that person getting work, the extent of basic skills issues and the extent to which the person had a clear idea of some training need. If the NDPA felt a client was job ready and there was a reasonable chance of getting the person into work during Gateway, then they would generally retain the person on Gateway for the full 16 weeks. Related to this, if there were very clear basic skills deficiencies and the person was unlikely to be able to gain employment, then the attitude was that there is no point keeping the person on Gateway any longer than necessary, and the best option is to get them onto provision at the earliest opportunity. In some cases it was also clear that if an individual expressed interest in and showed enthusiasm for a training provision, and this provision was felt to enhance their employment prospects, then they might as well be placed well before the 16 week point.

3.12 In one area, a policy had been introduced whereby advisers were working on the basis that individuals should typically receive a 5-week Gateway. The policy had been introduced to increase pace and purpose and to stop people ‘sitting on the Gateway’ (it should be noted when this was introduced there was no Gateway to Work course contracted for locally, and little activity was being undertaken by clients other than the weekly interviews). It was also an attempt to increase the number of referrals to their main provider, following a slow start. In fact in the third wave of interviewing, following an adviser conference, the 5-week Gateway was being reviewed. Many advisers had complained that five weeks gave them insufficient time to get to know their clients, particularly since most clients by wave 3 were going on a one week style course. As such, decisions about appropriate IAP activity were having to be made after only 2-3 sessions with their client, which was often felt to be insufficient. It is interesting to note that the lead training provider in this area had also raised the concern with ES staff that basic skills needs were being missed by advisers, it being quite common for people to be referred to other IAP provision when it soon became evident that they needed BET provision.
Frequency and Nature of Gateway interviews

3.13 Research undertaken by IFF Research evaluating New Deal 25 plus following enhancements made to the programme in April 2000 found that client interviews on Gateway were often being held fortnightly, not weekly as intended. In the current evaluation research, it was evident that weekly interview sessions during Gateway were almost always the norm, and where this had not been achieved this was nearly always a temporary issue relating to an office being short staffed.

3.14 It was also evident that most advisers were aware of the potential to hold interviews more often than once a week, and it was not uncommon for advisers to ask clients to attend the Jobcentre twice weekly. This was nearly always where advisers were suspicious that the client was working and not declaring this.

3.15 In addition to the formal interviews, advisers made it known to clients that they could come in to the Jobcentre at any time to see them.

3.16 The nature of the client interviews during Gateway appears to follow a fairly standard pattern, which appears to have changed relatively little from the situation pre April 2001. The first session is typically an hour long, and involves a detailed discussion about the client’s employment, training and learning history, and the type of work they are looking for. Their obligations in regard to the Jobseekers Agreement are also a key part of this first discussion, along with an explanation of the structure of New Deal 25 plus, particularly the weekly interviews on Gateway and the mandatory IAP (if they are under 50).

3.17 The nature of subsequent interviews tend to be tailored to the individual, but they typically involve a discussion of job search activity undertaken since the last meeting and then a session of job search on the computer. It is common for the Client Progress Record (CPR) to be introduced at the second interview, simply because there is not time to introduce it at the first. That said, one area was sending the CPR to the client with their initial New Deal letter, on the basis that it was felt to be useful to have them consider some of the issues it raises prior to their first meeting with the adviser.

3.18 The CPR replaced the Client Progress Kit (CPK) during the course of the study. The CPR is felt to be a considerable improvement over the CPK and much easier to use. That said, it still elicits a range of opinion from advisers, from those feeling it is a very useful tool especially for identifying basic skills issues, to those who make the same criticisms that were often made of the CPK, namely that it is too subjective and only really useful for inexperienced advisers.
**Gateway provision**

3.19 Most advisers indicated that a majority of their clients were undertaking some activity during Gateway beyond simply coming to the Jobcentre for weekly interviews. This was most often Gateway to Work courses. In some areas use of this was particularly high: in one area, for example, advisers estimated 60-70% of clients attended this provision, and in another area an adviser indicated that just over 50% of his clients attended. Interestingly, in the latter case, another adviser in the same office had hardly used it at all, simply because he was less convinced of its benefits.

3.20 Staff were generally very positive about the Gateway to Work course, it being seen as a good test of motivation, a useful aid to help decide what would be an appropriate IAP for an individual and a means to improve employability, for example by updating a client’s CV. The main criticisms were not about what the course could deliver for those who attend, but the fact that staff still see it as a course only appropriate for the younger part of the 25 plus age group.

3.21 In all except one area the Gateway to Work course was of two weeks duration. In one area a one-week Gateway to Work style course had been set up as a result of budgetary constraints. The provider was of the view that while useful, it would benefit from being the full two weeks. They had had to reduce the hours of the course from 9am to 4pm to 9am to 3pm because clients were finding the amount being crammed in to the course in this short time too intensive.

3.22 In addition to Gateway to Work courses, quite extensive use was being made of Programme Centres for job ready clients. In one area, for example, senior management had ‘pushed’ the use of Programme Centres as a result of a feeling that advisers were under-using this resource, preferring to keep hold of those clients who they felt they could achieve a job outcome with.

3.23 Most areas also had some of the following provision available: mentoring, specialist counselling covering debt, drugs or alcohol issues, careers advice, work tasters and psychometric testing. These tended to be relatively little used either because they are only appropriate for a limited number of clients or, in the case of drugs and alcohol counselling, because it has proved difficult to get the client to admit that they have a problem in this area. Even if they do admit to having drink or drugs problems, it has often proved difficult to persuade people to attend provision.
3.24 Overall the range of provision available on Gateway was felt to be good, and certainly much more extensive than was available prior to April 2001. A minority of staff felt provision on Gateway could usefully be extended. The most common requests were:

- Improving provision for those with drink and drugs problems (one commented ‘there are courses but they are not always running’; another felt specialist provision was needed in this area for the 25 plus programme, the contract having been bolted on to the 18-24 provision, something he had raised with the DPQMT)
- Having Gateway to Work courses specifically for the 25 plus group
- Introducing a more advanced, intermediate level Gateway to Work course. The current offering was felt to be inappropriate for groups such as individuals who had been made redundant from high earning jobs.
- Being able to make Gateway to Work mandatory for 50 plus clients

**Case conferencing**

3.25 Case conferences are intended to take place at key stages of a client’s Gateway period, and to involve the NDPA in a discussion with a more senior member of staff about the client’s progress and the options being considered to get the person into work.

3.26 In research IFF undertook into the New Deal 25 plus programme following enhancements made in April 2000, it was found that a wide variety of practices were being adopted as to the number and method of case conferencing. There were also very varied views as to their usefulness. In essence a similar picture emerges for the re-engineered programme.

3.27 In some areas formal case conferences are happening for all clients at the intended points in the Gateway process. In others they are used on an as and when basis, with the advisers left to request them. In other areas the process is very informal, with regular discussions taking place between advisers about their caseloads, but this not always involving a more senior member of staff. The system adopted depends largely on the energy with which they are pushed by adviser managers and senior managers.

3.28 The only significant development in regard to case conferencing since April 2001 has been that they are often undertaken by senior advisers.

3.29 Staff vary as to how useful the case conferencing process is, though most feel it is useful to get a second opinion, and occasionally things have been suggested that they had not considered. Some feel that this exchange of information takes place anyway and does not need to be formalised.
The IAP

3.30 The IAP provides further support to clients who have not found work during the Gateway, and is mandatory for those aged 25-49.

The effect of the IAP

3.31 Staff consider the mandatory IAP (for the 25-49s) one of the key improvements introduced to the New Deal 25 plus programme in April 2001. One of the key effects has been that the 'threat' of having to undertake some full time activity has led to a large number of people signing off the register. This includes those who were not working and who have increased the seriousness or scope of their job search on the basis that they would rather work than undertake some training activity. It also covers those who were working in the informal economy and who cannot manage to work and attend some full time activity. It is difficult for advisers to know the balance between the two groups, though a number of advisers in different areas commented that it was not uncommon for people to call up to say they had 'found' work on the day their IAP was due to start, suggesting they were already working.

3.32 Because the threat of IAP has led to a significant number of clients (aged 25 to 49) signing off JSA, some advisers like to emphasis to clients aged 25 to 49 as early as possible in the Gateway that if they do not find work during the Gateway they will have to undertake a full-time activity of at least 13 weeks. Other advisers put this in terms of needing to give clients as much time as possible to get used to the very idea of some full time activity.

Planning of the IAP

3.33 As to when and how the actual planning of the IAP happens, there are quite wide variations by area, particularly in the extent to which providers are involved in the decision process. In the early days of the programme post April 2001, when conducting the first wave of research, it was very evident that the planning of the IAP was the area within the overall programme which staff were least comfortable with. In particular, it was evident that many advisers were not as familiar as they would have liked with:

- the range of provision available locally (in the early days LMS was often not up to date and few advisers had hard copy details of what provision they could access).
- specific details about what a particular piece of training would involve for the client (how long does it last? would there be classroom sessions? would there be a work placement? what would the balance between the two be? would they get a certificate or a partial qualification at the end of it?).
- the quality of the providers delivering the training (especially where a provider had been contracted with who was new to the area or who had not delivered training for ES clients before).
• how best to decide what the most appropriate provision would be for a client.

3.34 In some areas these initial concerns had led to staff placing heavy reliance on the Routeway provider to decide on the appropriate IAP activity for the client.

3.35 One area, for example, had introduced a formalised 3-way interview between the client, the NDPA and the provider at which the client’s IAP was discussed in detail (when the Gateway to Work course was introduced in this area this 3-way discussion became part of this course for clients accessing this provision). In the early days of the programme this provider appeared to play the lead role in determining the IAP activity. While the provider agreed this process had been necessary (he was aware that some staff in the early days were not confident about making decisions on appropriate IAP activity) and beneficial (for example, it prevented the situation of clients going back to an adviser misinforming them about what the provider had said they could or could not do), it had been very time consuming and a drain on resources.

3.36 It is interesting that by wave 3 much less use was being made of the 3-way interview in this area, simply because most staff felt able to make decisions on appropriate activity on IAP without bringing in the provider. It was retained for more difficult clients (either in terms of their attitude or appropriate provision being less clear cut), though could be accessed by staff more generally if they wished.

3.37 On a similar theme, a provider in another area complained that they had become much more heavily involved than they had anticipated in discussing clients and appropriate provision at face-to-face meetings with ES during Gateway. This was no problem when that client accessed provision in that this investment in time had been worthwhile, but a large number of clients were not entering the IAP and here there was a resentment that there was no recompense for the time that had been spent.

3.38 Overall in most areas it was clear that there had been tensions between providers and staff on the issue of the decision making process in regard to the IAP. From the point of view of staff there was often annoyance in the early days that their decisions concerning appropriate provision were being questioned by providers. From the providers’ stand point there was frustration that clients were being referred for inappropriate provision, as the following quote shows.

“Advisers have a big menu to offer and don’t understand all the factors. We do manufacturing electronics (production line skills) and they think we do electronics. We can’t do this, it’s different skills.” [Provider wave 2]

3.39 At the third wave of interviewing it was evident that these tensions were much reduced compared with the two earlier waves. This appears to be the result of a growing understanding and improved communication between advisers and providers, as well as NDPAs becoming more familiar with the range of provision available locally. This is not to say tensions do not still exist:
“Clients say to me what the provider suggests is inappropriate…the thing is we have a good understanding of the client from seeing them a number of times. [The provider] tries to decide after seeing them once.” [NDPA wave 3]

3.40 And one DPQMT commented:

“There is still a blame culture [between advisers and providers]. They are waiting until it escalates…there should be more contact before it reaches this point.” [DPQMT wave 3]

3.41 Some of the tensions between advisers and providers that have been described clearly resulted from a different view of what the programme is there to achieve. In particular, a number of providers felt that advisers saw New Deal 25 plus as a training programme, whereas they regarded it as a job outcome programme. As such, if someone was referred for provision where they felt this provision had no reasonable chance of leading to a job, or where the person indicated they had no desire to work, then this client should not be provided with training. Hence, the sentiment expressed by a number of providers that some advisers were still recommending ‘training for training’s sake.’ Again, these issues were much less apparent by wave 3, mainly because more advisers had come to appreciate the job outcome focus of the programme. However, tensions resulting from this different focus had not completely dissipated, as some senior staff recognised:

“Our provider is keenly focussed on job outcomes. For advisers it has been a culture change and even now I have to reinforce we are not talking about training” [DPQMT wave 3]

“Some training providers are taking as long as the advisers to get round to the new way of thinking. But some providers take it to the other extreme and don’t take people they won’t get a job outcome for.” [DPQMT wave 3]

Models of IAP delivery

3.42 Three basic models exist for the delivery of IAP exist; modular, routeway or combination of both. Other research evaluating New Deal 25 plus has described in some detail the range of approaches adopted in various areas of Great Britain. Here we confine ourselves to comments on a number of the key elements of the different approaches used for the delivery of IAP in some of the areas covered by the research, and the implications of these approaches.
3.43 One area had opted for a modular approach. Here advisers essentially selected suitable modules from a range that could be accessed. Advisers here felt that the modular system involved them in much more work and responsibility than if a routeways approach had been adopted. The greatest difficulty was trying to co-ordinate the timing of the different modules that a person would receive to minimise the gap between them. To make planning as easy as possible, the system adopted was that a client would receive two modules. In practice, these two modules were nearly always being undertaken with one provider. This was in part to ease the planning process, but also because in some parts of the UoD there was realistically only one provider that could be accessed due to the distance to other providers.

3.44 Those staff in areas where a modular approach had not been adopted and who knew of the modular alternative were all glad not to be working within that system, having gained a strong impression that the modular option is much more burdensome for staff. The key difference was seen to be that with a routeways / combination approach while the adviser will decide or agree the direction (routeway) of the IAP, the lead provider will arrange the details of specifically what will happen during the 13 weeks of the IAP. In contrast, with a modular approach advisers were seen as deciding the direction of the activity and then arranging the details.

3.45 It was interesting that the term ‘routeway’ meant different things to different staff. Some characterised it in terms of having a single routeways provider who undertook or arranged the training. Others took the key feature of the approach to be the availability of sectoral routes for clients. Others were unfamiliar with the term.

3.46 It was noticeable that different approaches had been adopted in the areas included in the research as to the number of training providers with whom contracts had been set up. Variants covered the following:

- One area had a single organisation to deliver all Gateway and IAP provision (indeed WBLA too).
- One area had contracts with three providers, but staff in any Jobcentre had in effect only a single provider available since each provider had very distinct geographical coverage.
- In one area approximately half a dozen organisations had been contracted with, but other than in the main city within the UoD, because of travel issues for clients, most staff had in effect one provider available to use.
- One area had contracted with a single lead provider for IAP provision, but this organisation had a formal partnership with two other local providers who each specialised in particular sectoral areas.
- Most other areas had approximately half a dozen providers.
• One area, split at the start of the research between an inner and an outer unit though this was in the process of merging at the time of the third wave, had contracts with some 25 providers across the two units.

3.47 The number of providers available had had some major implications on staff views as to how well the programme was working locally. In one area in particular that was using only one provider, there were major tensions between staff in some offices and this provider. These staff strongly resented the fact that they had no real alternative options available. A major problem in this area was that this provider had not been operating in this county prior to the contract being awarded in April 2001, and hence had had to start from scratch in terms of such things as training their staff, obtaining offices and building links with employers. Provision had clearly got off to a very patchy start in this area, something admitted by the provider. Because of this many staff had developed very negative views about the organisation (again something that the provider was all too aware of). These tensions had been exacerbated by the provider being very job outcome focussed (something strongly praised by some advisers) and resistant to the staff requests for training where this was seen as training for the sake of it.

3.48 It is also worth noting that in the area with a very large number of providers (approximately 25) many of these organisations commented on the fact that advisers in the early days seemed very uncertain of the range of provision available to them, and that they had had to spend a lot of time and resources marketing themselves to advisers in order to achieve referrals. A number of providers in this area also spoke of the fact that although provider forums took place at which issues were discussed with ES, the atmosphere at these meetings was more competitive and less collaborative between providers than it had been before April 2001.

The range of provision available on IAP

3.49 Advisers talk about the range of provision available for clients in different ways. Some see it in terms of making a decision between work experience, training or BET. Others talk much more in terms of the various occupational areas that can be covered (and here work experience is discussed as one option among others like care, retail, warehousing etc). The two following quotes illustrate this, and also bring into the discussion views on the range of provision.

“I’m quite happy with the range available. Work Experience and BET are the two used the most. Training is not used a lot, this is because of the clients, they don’t really want to do training.” [staff wave 3]

“We have five occupational areas. It covers most needs. If it isn’t there then all it takes is a phone call and we’ll do our best to put it on.” [staff wave 3]
3.50 On a general level, staff are basically satisfied with the broad range of provision available for clients on the IAP. It is felt to cover the needs of the majority of clients that they see. Often staff feel that if clients are seeking training or work outside of what is available then these clients have employment goals that do not reflect local work opportunities.

3.51 However, many staff believe there are ways in which the range of provision could be improved. In some cases this was a specific occupational area where training was lacking, in other cases it was training for a particular type of client or a particular level of training. Examples included the following:

- Training for areas within construction (bricklaying, plastering and others). In some areas there was simply no such training available, and in one area the course was described as having ‘fallen apart’ and was no longer being used. In another area the complaint was not that certain construction courses were not available per se, but that these people could only start these courses at fixed times during the year, and hence, accessing them had been problematic. Another problem in this area was that providers were often finding it exceptionally difficult to find employers willing to offer work placements in construction, at least other than general labourer positions. This appeared to be largely down to health and safety requirements, and the need for close supervision of the client which meant that the employer would gain little from the placement.
- As commented upon in reference to Gateway provision, a number of staff highlighted a lack of intermediate level training (‘a lot of clients seem bored and are not being stretched’). SAGE, the accounts package, was mentioned by a number of advisers as being something regularly asked for and something that they struggled to provide.
- More specialist provision for those with drink and drugs problems.
- Another issue affecting some of the larger areas, including Hertfordshire, was training not being available sufficiently locally. This meant that while in theory there was a range of provision that could be accessed, this was more limited than it appeared.
- That ‘there are no extra courses available that could not have been accessed via WBLA.’

3.52 One further issue raised by a number of advisers, and a source of both some irritation and surprise, was that there were areas of provision on WBLA and New Deal 18-24 that were not available to those on New Deal 25 plus. A number made specific reference to the Environmental Task Force (as did a small number of clients).

3.53 It is interesting that some advisers over the course of the year have changed their view of the range of provision available. Whereas initially advisers saw the programme as providing a comprehensive range of training, they now view it as being more about achieving job outcomes.
“I’ve been disappointed with the range of provision, but initially I thought it was there to get people what they wanted. Now I feel it’s having more effect by being something they don’t want to do.” [NDPA wave 2].

3.54 At wave 3 the same adviser, having mentioned having work experience, BET, retail, childcare, warehousing, business admin and catering provision available, commented ‘it’s a fairly limited range, but this is not such a bad thing.’

Use of ad hoc provision

3.55 One means by which gaps in provision can be filled is by staff purchasing one off, ad hoc provision. Although in the early days of the programme there was low awareness of this option, by wave 3 nearly all staff were aware that this was available. However, very little use had been made of it. Although some indicated that they had not had the need to use it, for others it was clear the mechanics of obtaining money for ad hoc provision was a barrier:

“We have been told if there is a case for using it do so. In theory it’s there though it can be difficult to put up a case. You need to justify it by a job outcome or the distinct likelihood of a job. The trouble is it’s usually in an area of interest like a hobby, and they are not applying for other more mainstream jobs.” [NDPA wave 3]

“It’s a lot of work. You have to go through the regional contract team.” [NDPA wave 3]

“It’s a very complicated process. It’s not quick and it’s not easy.” [NDPA wave 3]

3.56 In one area, there were plans to make more use of ad hoc, one-off provision:

“In some occupational areas no training has taken place because of low referrals. We are looking to move into more one-off provision next year. I’m not sure how this will work yet” [NDPA wave 3]

The range of provision being accessed on IAP

3.57 One thing to emerge by wave 3 of the research is that staff have begun to develop a picture of the provision that has been particularly popular, and in contrast provision that has been rarely used. Examples cited of the latter included a hair and beauty course (not used at all in the UoD in question over the first 12 months) and motor mechanics.
3.58 Because of this variation in the use of provision available to advisers, one area had decided to drop a number of providers that were not being widely used. Senior staff here commented that when the range of provision was initially decided upon it had been to create a broad portfolio which could cover nearly all possible training options. Now it was being streamlined to concentrate on those areas that had been widely accessed during the course of the year and which created good employment prospects.

3.59 In other areas, senior staff (and indeed providers) were coming at the issue from a different angle. Recognising that some occupational routeways had been relatively little used, they were now considering ways in which clients could be encouraged to take these options (this was on the basis that there were excellent employment opportunities locally in these occupational areas). Two examples given were retail and call centres.

3.60 In talking to staff at wave 3 about the provision they are tending to access most often, it does seem as if, for those not being referred to BET, that there has been an increasing move to refer people to the work experience provision. This appears to be mainly because it is seen as very flexible. A number of more specific reasons explain its popularity:

- There is a feeling that for a large number of clients what is most needed is to get them into the work place and into the routine of work, rather than giving them training as such. For some this is because the clients have accessed training on New Deal or other ES programmes before, without clear benefit.
- If a client does not have a very clear idea of the employment route s/he wishes to take then this is a more flexible option than deciding on some specific occupational routeway.
- There is a growing confidence that providers can find suitable work placements for clients (in the early days of the programme it was clear that some providers were struggling in this area).
- It being seen as the best provision to tackle situations where clients have employment interests which are less ‘mainstream’. Providers cited examples of a client who had wanted to work with horses, and another where the person wanted to work in body piercing. The provider could not supply training in these two areas, nor could other local providers he had contacted, so these clients had been found work placements with employers in these two fields.
- A feeling that it cannot fail to help, in that it provides everyone with something to update their CV.
3.61 It was also clear in talking to advisers that Business Administration was one of the most popular types of provision with advisers because it was fairly flexible in terms of what could be delivered under this provision. One DPQM was concerned about this:

“I have some suspicions that some advisers may be taking the easy option and sending clients on things like IT or Business Admin or Customer Services because it covers a broad range of things, and they are leaving it to the provider to sort it out. The provider will then choose whatever gives them the most money.” [DPQM wave 3]

**Length of provision**

3.62 Across all areas it was standard for the length of provision on the IAP to be as follows:

- BET provision to be 26 weeks
- Non-BET IAP provision to be 13 weeks, with extensions available if required.

3.63 There is a strong view among staff, shared by providers, that for those on BET who have severe basic skill needs 26 weeks is insufficient to make a real difference to their employability.

3.64 Opinion is relatively split regarding the sufficiency of a basic 13 weeks IAP for non-BET provision. Most feel this is adequate, and if real gains are going to be made they will be achieved within this time frame. A significant proportion, however, feel longer than 13 weeks would be preferable, this on the basis that they have not always seen the advances in the 13 weeks that they had hoped for in many of their clients. None actually gave a figure of what they thought the 13 weeks should be increased to. In some cases the view that a 13 week IAP is insufficient was based upon a comparison with the availability of longer provision in other ES programmes.

3.65 Although staff have the discretion to extend a client’s time on IAP, this appears to be used relatively rarely, advisers having gained the strong impression that they are to be used very much as the exception, and something they have to justify.

“For some 13 weeks is not long enough. Yes, we can do extensions but we are told this is to be the exception.” [NDPA wave 3]

“It’s not very often I ask for extensions. They will only do it for special cases.” [NDPA wave 3]
3.66 Examples of where extensions had been used, or where they were planned for clients currently on their IAP, included:

- To allow the client to gain part of a qualification.
- Where the client had missed parts of provision because of sickness.
- To provide someone with a work placement after their training activity.
- Where it appeared that an employer might offer the person work if they could have longer to assess the suitability of a candidate.

3.67 Some felt the system for extensions was too rigid, in particular the requirement that the extension be for a minimum of 6 weeks.

The quality and effectiveness of provision

3.68 We have discussed staff views on the range of provision available for the IAP. By the final wave of fieldwork, it was clear that attention was beginning to be paid to the quality of provision and the extent to which it is moving clients forward. In terms of timing this simply reflects the fact that for the first two waves of the research, staff did not have sufficient numbers who had completed their IAP to be able to comment reliably on this aspect. Some senior staff also commented at wave 3 that up to this point they had been focusing on numbers following a slow start after April 2001 (for example, how to get people quickly into their IAP), and now they were turning their attention to quality (such issues as the level of outcomes and the effectiveness of using extensions to the IAP).

3.69 Some staff had concerns about the provision that some of their clients were receiving on IAP. In some cases these doubts were just suspicions, in other cases they arose from feedback given by clients and in other cases they were impressions gained while making monitoring visits. Concerns covered:

- A feeling that the training being provided was not always as tailored as they had hoped.
- The quality and amount of job search that was being undertaken during the IAP period.
- The quality of work placements clients were receiving.
- The level of outcomes being achieved (this an issue for contracting teams and senior staff).
3.70 Part of the issue regarding training not being as tailored as they expected in part reflects very high expectations at the outset of the re-engineered programme that it would deliver individualised, tailor-made training for clients. This may have been unrealistic.

“In theory it is tailored but it is not quite a year yet, and the provider is still training its staff and the programme is evolving as it rolls out.” [NDPA wave 3]

“It is not as individualised as it could be. It is delivered too much like a package. Partly this is down to costs” [Adviser Manager wave 3]

3.71 Some staff when seeing clients at Follow-through were finding that very little job search had taken place with the provider, or they were getting feedback from clients that this had just involved sitting around looking at newspapers. Some questioned whether some of the providers had staff suitably trained to undertake job search, and others questioned how job search could be beneficial when the provider did not have access to computerised vacancies as at the Jobcentre (in other words all it could involve would be looking at newspapers).

3.72 One specific example cited by an adviser was a client saying during a monitoring visit that with 30 hours activity a week on the IAP they had no time for any job search, and clearly here the provider had not been undertaking or pushing job search.

3.73 In one area, senior staff were considering changing the job search requirements of the provider so that while the amount of time allocated to job search would remain unchanged, instead of a standard half day job search a week during the whole IAP, this could be back loaded. Hence there would not need to be any job search in the first few weeks of the IAP, but then more than four hours a week would be provided in the final weeks. The potential benefits would be that job search would be undertaken at a point in the process when the client had made some progress.

3.74 There were also criticisms made of some local providers concerning the work placements being found for clients. In the second wave of research, where this was an issue, staff generally felt that providers simply were not able to ‘find’ the number of placements needed. Indeed many providers admitted they had encountered difficulties in this area. By the third wave of research a slightly different issue tended to be mentioned by staff. This was that too many of the placements were with ‘soft options’ (either with the provider themselves or with charities or other voluntary sector organisations) and that the range of employers being used for work placements was very limited.

“[one provider’s] placements are all in house, and most are at [another provider]. I’d like to see more employer placements, to provide real experience.” [NDPA wave 3]
“[a placement with a provider] is a soft touch. Is it the real world? It’s not breaking the mould for them. It is a concern that not much is employer based, though some of our clients you couldn’t send to an employer. I think the provider is trying but it is proving difficult” [NDPA wave 3]

Contact with clients during the IAP

3.75 All staff appeared to be aware of the requirement to monitor client progress during their IAP, and understood the aim to be checking that things were happening as planned (for example, is the training they are receiving matching what was agreed, is job search being undertaken?) and that there were no issues or problems from the client’s perspective. It was viewed as an important motivational tool, to make it clear that the adviser was still interested in their progress during this period. It was also at these monitoring visits that an extension to the IAP would be considered.

3.76 Most cited a requirement for (a minimum of) three contacts, with either one or two being face-to-face. Staff believed these monitoring visits to be important, with useful things having come out of them, but they were also seen as time consuming, many admitting it was a struggle to fit these in to their timetable. Others admitted this was the first thing to be dropped when workloads got busy in the office.

“I’m finding it hard to squeeze in my monitoring visits, but it’s essential that you do” [NDPA wave 3]

3.77 It was evident that the monitoring contacts were the minimum dealings with the client during the IAP, and most staff had made it very clear to clients that they should call them or come in to the Jobcentre if they had any issues they wanted to discuss. One adviser mentioned explicitly he had thought that once clients started their IAP less time would be needed with these clients, but had found this not to be the case (’some you are on the phone to nearly every day’). This was in an area operating a Modular IAP system – it is difficult to know if this level of involvement was a result of the fact that there was no Routeway Provider to ‘absorb’ some of these queries and issues.

3.78 In one office the initial plan had been for one adviser to have responsibility for all monitoring of clients during the IAP. This plan was soon dropped. No adviser wanted to have this job, at least for very long, and more positively, advisers indicated that they wanted to be responsible for keeping track of their own clients.
**How staff deal with quality and other problems**

3.79 We have already commented on the fact many staff were critical of aspects of the performance of some of their providers. It is clearly important if the programme is to improve that this information is fed up to senior staff and then back to the providers.

3.80 Staff appear to be aware that issues around provider performance can and should be raised with the DPQMT and/or the contracts team, and most have raised issues logs. Some appeared to believe it was best if the complaint came from the client, hence if clients were unhappy with some aspect of their provision they attempted to get clients to put the complaint in writing so that this could be passed on to senior staff. It was admitted that many clients were reluctant to do this, and therefore in many cases this information was not being passed up the chain.

3.81 It was also clear that some staff had had little or no feedback when they had raised issues with senior staff, or there was as yet no sign that the matter had been dealt with. A few also felt the reaction when they had raised the issue at a senior level had been inappropriate. Both aspects suggest there is room for formalising and improving the system by which information is passed from advisers to senior staff.

> “I was under the impression that if you inform [the contracts team] about it, it’s their job to make sure they are delivering the programme as they should. But the response is ‘oh well, use another provider.’” [NDPA wave 3]

> “A lot of clients are reluctant to do this [put complaints in writing]. Yes we do have issues logs. We also mention it to management and they say ‘yes, [provider] are addressing it’ but it just seems to carry on the same.” [adviser wave 3].

**Follow-through**

3.82 It is only at wave 3 that staff have been able to talk in any detail about Follow-through, since before that date, numbers entering this stage had been negligible (at wave 1 for example few had even entered the IAP). Even at wave 3, numbers were low: most had had less than a dozen enter this stage and a small number even indicated that they had still not had any at all enter Follow-through.
3.83 Almost without exception, staff see Follow-through as an important part of the New Deal 25 Plus programme, an opportunity to evaluate progress and to motivate clients to do job search. One put this in terms of ‘it shows them we mean business.’ While useful in itself, two further factors are cited as to why further job search can be particularly beneficial. The first is that there are encouraging signs that at least some clients have progressed during their IAP period, and have become more motivated to find work. The second is that in some cases it appears as if job search has ‘tailed off’ during the IAP, and Follow-through presents a fresh opportunity to redress this.

“It has been quite useful. They’ve been more positive than they have been for a long while. The IAP has helped them. I do job search with them, but for some it’s like starting again in that job search seems to have tailed off on IAP. But they know the pressure is off and will be signing as normal quite soon. ‘I’ve survived IAP’ is a common reaction.” [NDPA wave 3]

“It helps keep them motivated. When they finish IAP they are at a higher point than they were originally.” [NDPA wave 3]

“It’s definitely useful. It’s important to reassess them and keep them motivated to do job search.” [NDPA wave 3].

3.84 Although positive about the aims and the potential benefit of Follow-through, there were very few examples of job outcomes during this period. In part this is because of low numbers, and hence, a sense that it is too early to evaluate. Others feel this is almost inevitable, taking the view that if a client is unable to get a job in a buoyant local labour market, then they are unlikely to get one during Follow-through.

3.85 Very little use is being made of provision during Follow-through. Staff were generally aware that this is available as an option, but the only examples of it being accessed were one or two referring clients to Programme Centres. In one area, the DPQMT were considering whether some specific provision was required targeting those on Follow-through. In part this was prompted by the lead provider feeling that not enough was happening with clients after IAP when they returned to ES, and that this was hampering achieving higher job outcome levels.

“All Gateway provision is available on Follow-through, plus Short Job Focussed Training. We feel there may be the need for something more specific, perhaps a one week provision like the Back on Track course.” [DPQMT wave 3]
4 Staff: other issues

4.1 In this chapter we examine staff experiences and views on a number of ‘miscellaneous’ issues, covering:

- Administration and IT systems.
- The Adviser Discretion Fund.
- The Employer Subsidy.
- Links with employers.

Administration and IT Systems

4.2 It is a common sentiment among staff that New Deal programmes (not necessarily 25 plus more than other New Deal programmes) are unnecessarily bureaucratic, and that many of the processes could and should be simplified. Some felt that the amount of time spent having to complete paperwork was reducing the effectiveness of the programme since it is reducing the time they can spend with clients.

4.3 One area where the amount of supporting paperwork that needed to be submitted was felt to be excessive was referrals to the DMA team to sanction clients. It was clear that this was making staff very reluctant to make referrals.

4.4 Another example was a frustration that SL2s\(^8\) had to be re-issued even when re-booking some provision with the same provider, for example, when the person started their second module under the modular approach system.

4.5 A related issue is the sheer number of forms for New Deal programmes (one had a cabinet with over one hundred different forms – not it should be noted all needed for the 25 plus programme).

4.6 One area at wave 3 reported that they had set up a working group with the purpose of seeing what could be done to simplify some of the procedures.

4.7 There is also a desire for the IT systems supporting New Deal 25 plus to be improved, in particular LMS. In the early days of the programme it appeared as if LMS was often not up to date (something confirmed by providers, some indicating at wave 2 that they were still getting calls from advisers asking about things that they were not contracted to deliver). By wave 3 LMS not being up to date was much less of an issue, improvements having been made in this respect during the course of the year, though some staff remained suspicious (‘I’m not convinced the data [on LMS] is always right. I treat it all with caution’).

\(^8\) The SL2 is a form used by ES and providers to record training provision due to be undertaken by clients. There are three section to the document. Part 1 lists participant details, part 2 lists provision details and part 3 the start details. Parts 1 and 2 are completed by ES, part 3 by the provider and participant, with the participant signing that they have started the provision.
4.8 Some of the desires for LMS and IT include the following:

- More details to be provided on LMS about specific aspects of training provision (for example, how much of it will be classroom based and how much of it will be employer based?).
- The ability to easily set up on LMS office-specific training opportunities to save trawling through lists of District-wide provision (one office noted that this could be set up on LMS, and other local offices had been allowed to do this, but district had not allowed this to be done for their office).
- LMS to identify those claiming JSA for 18 out of 21 months (this was due in January 2002 but was not available in April 2002).
- The ability to highlight key text on LMS (important information can be missed since information is currently stored chronologically).
- The ability to be able to write more than 12 lines of text in the Action Plan.
- The CPR to be linked to the Action Plan to reduce duplication.
- Access to e-mail.

The Adviser Discretion Fund (ADF)

4.9 Confirming findings of other research evaluating New Deal 25 plus, the ADF is extremely popular among staff. This is for a number of reasons. On one level it is felt to be something that can, and has, made the difference in terms of getting people back into work. The main impact here is that it removes some of the low level barriers that clients can put up as to why they cannot take a job or interview for a job.

4.10 More generally, it is seen as a good selling point for New Deal 25 plus, it helping to convince clients that the programme is there to help them back into work.

4.11 It is also evident that the ADF is liked by advisers because of the sense of empowerment it has given them. While some were unsure initially about the amount of freedom they would have to use it, for example the extent to which they would be asked to justify each use of the fund, in practice advisers have been left to use it as and when they see fit.

4.12 The range of things for which it has been used is fairly extensive. It includes the purchase of clothes, boots, haircuts, mobile phones, tools, a driving license, watches and even getting a tattoo removed. As one adviser commented ‘we are using it for almost anything we can.’

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9 Evaluation of Re-engineered New Deal 25 Plus: Case studies by Philip Wilson, York Consulting
4.13 There were also instances where training providers were telling clients about the potential assistance that was available through the fund. This was something advisers were quite comfortable about.

**Employer Subsidy**

4.14 We look later in detail at the subsidy from the point of view of employers (6.14 - 6.17). From a staff angle, it is widely seen as a useful part of the 25 plus programme. A bit like the ADF, it is something distinct to offer clients and in some cases it has helped clients into work.

4.15 That said, there is a general sentiment that the subsidy has not had the impact they expected. This is for a number of reasons:

- Many clients do not want to use the subsidy voucher, since the last thing they want to do to a potential employer is to flag that they have been unemployed for a significant period of time.
- A feeling that the subsidy has not been widely marketed locally or nationally, and that hence few employers are aware of the scheme.
- Employers are reluctant to make use of the subsidy, something staff put down to a fear that the paperwork will be excessive and ‘not worth the effort’ given the size of the subsidy. The perception is that the subsidy is only really appealing to small employers, and for larger firms it is ‘a drop in the ocean.’

4.16 On the issue of marketing of the subsidy, advisers in two different areas mentioned that a move to a centralised (within the region) call centre system for placing vacancies meant that an opportunity that had previously existed to ‘sell’ the subsidy to employers had been lost.

4.17 The following comments from staff illustrate the themes discussed.

“I always say to clients ‘don’t forget it is available’, but it has not been very successful with employers. It seems they can’t be bothered with the paperwork.” [NDPA wave 3]

“Some [clients] are very reluctant to send vouchers with their CV or applications. They see it as demeaning. I don’t think clients are using it very much. They don’t want vouchers to spell out they are long term unemployed.” [NDPA wave 3]

“It used to be available from week four, now it’s from week one. None [employers] have taken it up. I’m not sure why. Possibly the paperwork. Possibly the switch to call centres and it’s not being sold to employers. We do have a person marketing to employers now so perhaps this will improve.” [NDPA wave 3]
**Links with employers**

4.18 Staff dealings with employers appeared to be minimal and very few appeared to have relationships with employers that went beyond the ad hoc. This was particularly so for NDPAs, senior advisers and adviser managers. Some indicated that they had no dealings at all with employers (‘we leave it all to our provider’ as one put it). For others it was limited to monitoring visits during work placements, but even here some advisers preferred to undertake these at the provider rather than on the employer’s premises.

4.19 Because of this, very few staff were able to give views on how well the re-engineered programme was working from an employer perspective. Staff were better able to comment on the more general question of the extent to which the programme was meeting the needs of the local labour market. Here a common issue was the low level of interest among people on the programme in those areas where significant employment opportunities existed locally.
5 Providers

5.1 In this chapter we look at the experiences and views of providers involved in delivering the New Deal 25 plus programme. We look first at overall views of the programme. In the rest of the chapter we examine:

- The level of referrals from ES.
- The client group.
- The referral process.
- The extent to which provision is helping clients, covering:
  - the length of provision, the extent that provision is being tailored to individual clients and the amount of job search being carried out.
- Job outcomes.
- Working with ES.
- Relationships with employers (including securing work placements).

Overall views of the programme

5.2 Most providers share the view of staff that after a very difficult start in the months after April 2001, the programme has begun to settle down and to work along the lines intended.

5.3 In the first wave of interviewing, providers focussed on a chaotic start to the programme, especially in regard to the contracting process, and a low number of referrals. Because of both these factors, providers found it difficult to comment in detail about how the programme was working, but many expressed concerns about the implications if the low number of referrals continued.

5.4 By November / December 2001 the concerns that many had had regarding the low number of referrals had been borne out, and this was the primary issue raised by providers. Although for some the low number of starts had few consequences, for most it was felt to have serious implications. This was normally in regard to a loss of income, even despite the 85% underpinning guarantee. Some even expressed serious concerns about the viability of their ES contract.
5.5 Other issues were also raised by providers at wave 2 that indicated that significant teething problems remained with the programme. These included: uncertainty about the reconciliation process (for example were they allowed to go over profile on one provision by the amount that another was under?) and an annoyance that little information was forthcoming on the matter from ES; the fact that many had had to spend more time marketing to ES staff than planned; tensions with some advisers about decisions on appropriate provision for clients; and consistent problems with late or incorrect paperwork (particularly forms Ref2 and SL2).

5.6 By March / April 2002, there was a widespread feeling that the programme was beginning to ‘bed down’, with many of the teething problems that had been identified at wave 2 resolved or in the process of being resolved. This is not to say that major problems did not remain. Most providers were under profile for the year, some by significant amounts, but generally 2002 had seen levels of referrals which, if they had replicated over the course of the whole of the first year, would have meant most providers achieving their initial profiles. There was a widespread feeling that it had been a difficult, even problematic first year, but that assuming profiles could be better judged for the second year, then the New Deal 25 plus programme could start to deliver positive results.

5.7 The following quotes about how providers think the programme is working at wave 3 illustrate the themes mentioned.

“It works well when clients want to be assisted and they are open with us. If they are resentful or playing the system it is unlikely to help. It splits about 50-50. The initial difficulty was a lack of information on both sides about who was doing what...we needed more information on the expectations of what these courses would deliver. We need now to keep it as it is for a while. People have got their heads around it.” [provider wave 3]

“There is no doubt we are providing better quality provision for clients [than pre April]. However, it was very muddled for a long time and confusion existed over responsibility. It is bedding down now and will get better. More people are coming through now. It has improved dramatically. We have marketed ourselves better to ES.” [provider wave 3]

Referral numbers

5.8 Although a few providers were ahead of profile at the end of April 2002, by far and away the most common situation was for the number of referrals to be some way behind the profile detailed in their contract. The extent of this shortfall varied widely by provider, and within provider organisations there was often quite wide variations between the different areas of provision they had contracted for. It was not untypical for the actual number of starts to be about 50% of the numbers expected:
“The numbers have been nothing like what were planned for. It’s probably about 50% of profile. The numbers were imposed on us by ES. From day 1 it was clear they were completely unrealistic. We would close provision down but the 85% payment means we keep it open.” [provider wave 3]

5.9 It is worth noting that where providers were ahead of profile this was more often than not a result of their having been given very low profile numbers in the first instance. At wave 2 for example, one indicated they were ahead of profile but that ‘these [numbers] were fictitious, ridiculously low, it would have been financial suicide. We knew we would get more.’ In another area a provider cited being given a profile for their IAP provision of five starts in the whole year, a figure which he described as being disastrous if it had not been substantially exceeded. In fact he has achieved 100 starts for this provision over the full 12 months. This was put down to the amount of time and effort spent maintaining a high profile in Jobcentres.

Impact of low numbers

5.10 Where low referral numbers had been encountered the seriousness of the consequences varied. For some there were real concerns about the financial viability of their contract with ES, and many of these indicated that the 85% underpinning guarantee was what had kept them going.

“If we were a private organisation we would have pulled out by now.” [provider wave 2]

“Work Experience IAP: 55 starts against a profile of 145. It has been a huge financial burden. We thought about closing the Barnsley office down.” [provider wave 3]

5.11 At the other extreme, there were some providers for whom lower than expected numbers on New Deal 25 plus had no implications at all. These providers tended to fall into one or more of the following categories: they were those for whom the New Deal 25 plus contract, or indeed work for ES generally, was a small proportion of their training provision; or they had experienced buoyant numbers on other ES provision (for example New Deal 18-24 or WBLA). Large FE colleges, for example, often commented that it was easy for them to transfer staff to other areas of provision.
5.12 It should be noted that there were a range of other implications of lower than expected numbers of referrals beyond the financial. These included:

- A fall in the quality of provision on the basis of the loss of group dynamics and interaction with other trainees that larger numbers would generate.
- An increase in the proportion of those referred to a provision not then actually starting it. This was a result of providers not being prepared to start a particular piece of provision with only a small number of referrals, and in consequence extending the lead times before provision would next start.
- Lower than expected job outcomes levels because the programme had lacked buoyancy. For example, some indicated that relationships with employers had suffered in that they had not been able to supply individuals for work placements.
- Running some New Deal 25 plus provision jointly with other programmes (usually WBLA). Though not a major difficulty in itself, indeed other providers had preferred not to separate clients by programme from the outset, the differences in benefits between programmes was often a bone of contention for clients. For example, WBLA clients would ask why someone else in their group had been bought a suit (i.e. via ADF) when this was not available to them.
- The dispiriting effect on morale produced by always being behind target (‘you always feel you are playing catch up’ as one out it).

Profiles and reconciliation

5.13 On the issue of referral numbers, there was confusion and annoyance voiced at the second wave of research about the reconciliation process and the lack of information about the flexibility that was allowed if numbers exceeded target for one area of provision but were low in another. Many had raised the issue with ES management locally but felt there had been excessive delays in coming back with a response.

“Can you substitute one bit of provision for another? Can profiles be backdated and substituted? For example, if we are low in Health and Beauty between March and June, then can this capacity be carried forwards for June onwards, or is it dead once the quarter is over?” [provider wave 2]

5.14 Others were simply annoyed at the lack of flexibility:

“We have very little take up on the hospitality / catering side, and excess on the transport side, but we’ve not been allowed to have these numbers adjusted.” [provider wave 2]
5.15 Another cause of irritation was the situation that some providers found themselves in where, despite having been told by region / district that they could take no more starts in some area of provision, they were still receiving referrals from Jobcentres. The general reaction was to start these people on provision and trust it would be sorted out retrospectively.

5.16 By wave 3 the reconciliation process was much less of an issue for providers, something resulting from decisions having been made on changes to profiles. There had also been a general increase in referrals to provision over the previous three months or so.

The Client Group

5.17 Having discussed in some detail issues concerning the number of referrals we look in this section at what might be termed the quality of referrals in the sense of their job readiness and the barriers they face to employment.

5.18 Providers have not expressed any surprise at the range of barriers to employment that they have encountered among New Deal 25 plus clients. All expected clients with problems such as drink and drugs addiction, low levels of literacy and numeracy, poor personal hygiene, poor motivation and no previous work experience. Some, however, have been surprised by the proportion with multiple barriers to employment. This has contributed to difficulties achieving the level of job outcomes that they hoped for.

5.19 Many of the training organisations that we interviewed were working with WBLA clients as well as those on the New Deal 25 plus programme. For these providers a major issue concerning WBLA had been what they saw as the inappropriateness of some of the referrals in those areas where the provision was intended for those who are job ready. The perceived inappropriateness of referrals was much less of an issue for New Deal 25 plus, but did occur in three main contexts:

- Programme Centres feeling that their provision needs clients to be either job ready or job willing:

  “The quality of referrals has been a bone of contention…We get a lot who will never work again. We get the dregs. We are basically being used [by advisers] as a filler or for those that they don’t know what to do with.” [provider wave 2]

- Occasions when the specific occupational routeway proposed did not seem to match the client’s job goals

- Instances where providers felt clients should have been on BET rather than some other IAP provision.
5.20 The third of these issues was usually felt to arise because advisers were not always good at spotting clients with less severe basic skills needs. Although there was sympathy for this in that these clients were often good at disguising their deficiencies, there were felt to be serious implications in such situations. In particular, it was not felt to be as easy as simply requesting an extension to the IAP provision, since the pace of learning on a 26 week BET course was considerably slower than on 13 week IAP courses. Hence, shorter, more intense IAP provision over 13 weeks would be too fast for clients who providers feels should have been on BET.

**The referrals process**

5.21 The mechanics of the referrals process were described in very similar terms across all areas covered by the research. The provider would first receive information about a client via a Ref2 from an adviser. This might be preceded by a telephone call if the adviser wanted to discuss the provision or the client’s circumstances in more detail. The provider would then meet the client and discuss the client’s situation (their job history, their job goals etc) and provide the client with details about the provision being proposed. Assuming there were no issues to suggest that the course of action proposed were inappropriate, the person would be booked for a pre-entry interview with ES, this then leading to a start date with the provider.

5.22 The mechanism for receiving referrals just described was basically felt to be a reasonable one. The only general issue raised was a feeling that it would be useful to have more information than at present about the client before the first meeting with them. For example, most providers say they rarely receive any information in advance about a client’s job history and employment goals. One specific problem that had arisen in one area was delays with pre-entry interviews, something put down to staff shortages. This had resulted in some instances of lost starts with delays causing clients to lose interest. The issue had been raised with District, and by the third wave of fieldwork appeared to have been resolved.

5.23 The only key variant around this referrals system just described was one area which had adopted a formal three-way interview between the client, the adviser and the provider during the Gateway. This was felt to bring the advantage of all three parties being able to agree matters there and then, and removing the not uncommon situation of clients playing advisers off against the provider. In the early days of the New Deal 25 plus programme, it was recognised that advisers needed the help of the provider in making appropriate referrals. By wave 3 of the research, with advisers much more familiar with the range of provision available and more confident about the mechanics of the referrals process, much less use was being made of this 3-way interview.
Providers were clearly aware of early tensions with ES staff about who was best placed to decide on what was appropriate for individual clients. However, by wave 3 there were encouraging signs that these tensions had generally eased. This was a result of both sides becoming more familiar with the programme, staff getting better acquainted with the provision available locally, procedures evolving as more clients pass through the system, and simply a sense that both sides were getting to know each other better. The following two quotes from the same provider, the first at wave 2 and the second at wave 3, show the strides that have often be made.

“I feel that NDPAs are treating New Deal 25 plus very strictly and by the book, and demanding specific training with no forethought of where it will lead. Some NDPAs have no grasp of what is needed and sometimes give unrealistic expectations… We have 6 weeks in-house training with personal assessments, one to one training for interviews etc. Our employer liaison officer looks at prospective employers. Tailoring takes place over a period of time and this needs flexibility and adaptability. This takes place against a background of where the NDPAs will give an action plan along the lines of ‘this client must have XYZ training’ and often it’s just not relevant or suitable. We have a free hand with other programmes but are severely restricted / tied down with 25 plus.” [provider wave 2]

“ES now treat it like we are working together. Things are much easier now. ES were specifying unrealistic training for clients before we even met them. There is more flexibility now, more room for discussion. Now clients are sent to us with a plan of action and we make decisions in hand with the NDPAs.” [provider wave 3]

The effectiveness of provision in helping clients

In this section we examine the extent to which providers feel their provision is helping to improve clients' employability (we look in sections 5.54—5.59 at the more specific issue of the job outcomes rates that have been achieved).
5.26 Providers feel they have been able to assist those that want help and want to work. Most are also encouraged (some almost pleasantly surprised) by the extent to which they have managed to make an impact in motivating those with low confidence and low esteem. The structure of New Deal 25 plus is felt to be adequate and appropriate to help the client group, in particular:

- The length of time they have with the client is about right, though many do feel they struggle to help ESOL and lower level BET clients in 26 weeks (we discuss this more in the next section).
- They have sufficient opportunity to tailor activities to the individual client, indeed this is seen as a key part of the programme.
- Their provision is focussed on improving employment prospects, and not about delivering training for the sake of it.
- Related to this, the balance of job search (which they are obliged to undertake with clients) to other activity was felt to be about right.

**Length of provision**

5.27 IAP provision of 13 weeks, when allied with the possibility of extensions, is generally seen as sufficient given that the New Deal programme is about job outcomes and not about training per se or achieving qualifications.

“13 weeks is fine given the job focus of it all. If they are going to get a job they are going to get it in 13 weeks or not at all.” [provider wave 3]

“I was sceptical at the start as to whether we could turn people around in 13 weeks, but it’s happening. We are also quite commonly requesting extensions.” [provider wave 2]

“For this contract 13 weeks is fine. The contract is to get people into work not to give them training.” [provider wave 2]

“13 weeks IAP is fine for those who just need some hands on experience, but if they want a specific qualification it is too short. NDPAs need to be greater aware that some clients are coming to us thinking they can get a level 3 qualification in 13 weeks. NDPAs don’t seem to realise this is unrealistic.” [provider wave 2]

5.28 Providers offering BET provision, however, which appears to be a standard 26 weeks, tend to feel that it is fine for those starting from a reasonable level, but not for the ESOL or ‘lower level’ clients.
The extent to which training is tailored

5.29 We have discussed in chapter 3 (section 3.70) that some staff felt that the programme was not delivering individually tailored training to the extent that they had anticipated when first reading about the re-engineered programme. This was sometimes expressed in terms of clients being sent on a particular occupational routeway, essentially all receiving exactly the same training. For others, it was as much to do with the fact there was not the range of provision available for clients as they expected.

5.30 We look here at the first of these areas - the extent to which providers felt they were delivering training tailored to individuals’ needs within a particular piece of provision. Providers are certainly aware that the aim of the programme is to provide individually tailored assistance which will help individuals achieve job outcomes, and nearly all feel they are delivering training and opportunities which are more tailored than they were before April 2001.

“It probably is more tailored, more client-focussed now [than pre April 2001]. We don’t have to deliver a set course but can discuss with each individual client what they want and then design a programme accordingly, which may involve several different elements.” [provider wave 2].

5.31 In some cases it was clear that the content of training did vary widely within a provision. One provider cited a large range of options available within a Transport and Distribution provision, something vital because of the very wide range of previous driving experience and job goals that their clients have. However, in many cases it is hard to escape the conclusion that provision is fairly set and tailoring takes place at the margins. Some, for example, talked of tailoring simply in terms of spending more one-to-one time with individuals if they needed this (often in regard to things like help with CVs or application forms).

5.32 The potential to deliver individually tailored opportunities also varied by the type of provision. Some admitted that there was little tailoring but felt this was because of the nature of the provision. Those delivering care and childcare on IAP, for example, mentioned that because of the requirements of working in that industry, they had to deliver a set range of modules. On the other hand those delivering work experience IAP tended to see this as entirely tailored, in that they work hard to find placements which match the type of employment and the type of employer that the client is seeking.
Job search

5.33 Nearly all providers indicated that they were obliged to deliver half a day (or four hours) job search a week. With one or two exceptions all were delivering this amount, and many indicated that this was treated as a minimum, the following being typical:

“At least half a day a week. In practice it’s nearly always more. Probably a day a week in practice.” [provider wave 3]

5.34 Although the amount of job search appears to be happening as intended, there were certainly variations in the means by which it is delivered. There were cases we saw where it appeared to be little more than clients sitting relatively unsupervised looking at newspapers. In other cases, dedicated job search staff were employed providing tailored assistance to clients (helping out with specific applications, identifying suitable employers to contact, working on CVs etc).

5.35 The only general comment made on their job search requirements was a small number of providers feeling there was little point doing job search in the early weeks of some provision, a comment made about ESOL and also childcare. With ESOL clients job search was seen as having no use until a certain level of English had been attained. With childcare, without various certificates to which the training was leading and which are a legal necessity to be employed, the clients had no chance of getting work in that field.

5.36 In two areas covered by the research, ES District teams has altered job search requirements. In one area a provider noted that District had increased job search to nine hours a week. In another job search was being increased to one day a week from April 2002.

Links with employers and finding work placements

5.37 Providers nearly all discuss links with employers in terms of having employers willing to take placements or willing to recruit New Deal candidates for vacancies. Employers rarely appear to be involved in the design or the delivery of courses or provision, though in one area courses were being set up specifically to train clients in the way required by two very large local employers. There were also examples of employers who have undertaken mock interviews for the provider, and others have provided input in terms of advice about their recruitment criteria for job preparation courses. These have been run by a few providers to target a large employer known to be recruiting locally in the near future – usually large retailers opening new stores.
5.38 Most providers feel that they have good links with local employers, and that they have a reasonable network willing to take work placements. This is particularly the case for providers long established in an area. Some providers had won contracts in areas where they had never operated before and admitted that developing links with employers had been a struggle.

“It has taken a long time to build our credibility with employers. We have put a lot of effort into building links with the Chamber of Commerce, local authorities and Information and Advice Networks.” [provider wave 3]

5.39 One very significant boost to the development of these links has been the employment of staff with specific responsibilities in this area (typically titled placement officers, employer liaison officers or job search officers). Many providers only recruited for such positions mid way through the year. By wave 3, these providers were reporting much greater success in finding work placements, and were finding employers were starting to call in with vacancies.

5.40 Staff in a number of areas confirmed that they were starting to move from a situation where providers were seeking placements on a reactive, case by case basis to their having placements already set up that they needed to fill.

5.41 A concern raised by staff was that too many placements were with voluntary sector organisations or the provider themselves. Although not an issue specifically raised by many providers, some did say that ‘difficult’ clients or those they felt might not cope well with the pressures of a commercial environment would do their work placement internally. Providers were very aware of the potential damage a placement which did not work out could have on relations with an employer (‘you are only as good as your last placement’). Examples were given of good relations being damaged and of losing the possibility of further placements in the short term caused by one placement not making a delivery and ‘borrowing’ a car for a weekend and of other placements not turning up or leaving after a day or two.
Working with ES

5.42 Relations with ES was an area where providers felt great improvements had been made over the course of the year. In many cases relations had got off to a poor start, resulting from a range of issues including:

- A complicated contracting process, with delays and uncertainty while waiting to hear if they had been awarded the contract or not.
- Some being unhappy with their profiles.
  - One was given profiles for provision they had not bid for and could not provide. Even by wave 2 this had not been removed from the LMS system. (By wave 3 this problem had been sorted out, indeed the respondent commented that the process for referrals had improved: ‘we now go to the Jobcentre and talk to them’. However, the respondent was surprised that they were still being asked to take referrals in areas of provision where they had achieved their profile.)
  - Others felt the profile numbers had been ‘plucked out of the air’ and that there was no apparent logic to them.
- Once the programme began, a lack of clear division of responsibility between advisers and providers concerning decisions about appropriate provision. This has been the cause of major tension in some areas.
- Advisers seeming to lack knowledge about the programme.
  - As an example, a programme centre found after holding an open day some months into the programme that advisers did not know how to refer clients to their provision.
- Advisers giving clients false expectations, particularly on qualifications they could achieve.
- Low referrals numbers and then delays in making decisions on reconciliation of profile numbers.
- A heavy paperwork burden, coupled with a high frequency of receiving forms incorrectly filled in or late (we look at this in detail in the next section).
- Poor channels of communication generally.
5.43 By wave 3 providers felt very significant improvements had been made in relations with ES. This was a result both of conscious efforts (on both sides) to improve communications, and then simply norms and best practice developing as more clients have passed through the system. In the former area, efforts had included initiating or increasing their presence in Jobcentres, getting involved at an early stage in Gateway to discuss IAP provision for a client, providing marketing material for advisers, holding open days and coffee mornings at their premises for advisers and instigating / attending monthly meetings with advisers. Many providers complained they had spent much more time marketing themselves to ES than they expected (some described it as time they had spent time training advisers).

5.44 Although great improvements had been made, a common example cited at wave 3 as indicative of working with ES was the fact that many providers had still not received information about their profiles for the second year of the programme. This was despite the fact that some interviews were undertaken a few weeks into year 2.

5.45 When talking of relations with ES, some providers differentiated between district-level relations and relations at an adviser / Jobcentre level. Some described things as working well with advisers but being poor at district level, others the reverse. The former usually arose where there was a perceived lack of support from district over some issue (s), or where they were seen as being very inflexible. The latter usually focused on continued mistakes by advisers, not helped by a perceived high turnover of Jobcentre staff. One example shows the type of comments made:

“I can’t fault district / region. There have been severe teething problems at the Jobcentre level. They are starting to get there. 300% better than at the start. They were not following their own guidelines and were using the wrong contract numbers, the wrong provision was listed for training providers etc.” [provider wave 3]

5.46 We have mentioned that the paperwork for New Deal 25 plus has been a source of irritation for providers. We look in the following section at this issue in the wider context of the perceived bureaucratic nature of the programme.

**Bureaucracy and Paperwork**

5.47 Reflecting the views of many staff, there is a widespread feeling among providers that the New Deal 25 plus programme is bureaucratic and more complicated than it need be. This covered such issues as the length and complexity of guidance issued to providers, the rules on things like attendance, the number of forms for the programme, the fact that the programme is almost entirely paper based, and the records that need to be kept for audit purposes.

“It’s a real problem. Far in excess of what is needed. It’s so complicated it’s a nightmare.” [provider wave 2]
5.48 At the second wave of research a major cause of irritation among a very large number of providers was late and/or incorrect paperwork (the issue was hardly raised at wave 1 but this reflected the low number of referrals at this point). This was most acute with the SL2 forms.

5.49 A client’s SL2 not arriving on the day the client turns up at the provider was common (‘if six start on a Monday there will usually be one without an SL2.’). Providers then faced a dilemma as to whether or not to turn clients away. Strictly speaking, provision should not start without an SL2, and providers were aware that they could be ‘pulled up’ on the issue when audited. In practice nearly all providers indicated that they would start provision for clients without an SL2, trusting that the form would arrive in the next day or two. (A common sentiment was that they see their mission as about training, and they are not in the business of turning people away.) However, one adviser cited an example of a provider turning one client away three different times (this after a journey of over forty minutes on each occasion).

5.50 Late SL2 have implications for both the provider and the client. A common consequence for providers was an increased administrative burden, for example, having to send staff to Jobcentres to collect copies. Late SL2s can also affect clients’ benefit payments, something which the provider then has to try and sort out. It creates resentment with the client and can mean the training with the provider starts off on the wrong foot.

5.51 Providers also regularly complained of SL2s being filled in incorrectly. Some simply indicated there were too many mistakes. More specific examples included contract numbers being incorrect (one provider cited Bolton codes being used for Bury referrals), a serious issue given that payments are triggered on the basis of the contract number, and signatures missed off.

5.52 Compounding this issue, the SL2 form was criticised for being badly designed, having no space for the client’s address.

5.53 By wave 3 these problems had eased slightly, particularly incorrect SL2s, but were far from sorted out. In some cases improvements arose through local procedures being developed with District approval, one example being the faxing of SL2s. In another case a provider had raised the matter with District and they had agreed that all incorrect forms would be faxed to District for them to sort out rather than the provider re-contacting the individual advisers. Another provider said improvements had happened since the previous wave but this was only by threatening not to start clients on provision if the forms did not arrive on time.
Evaluation of New Deal 25 Plus
Qualitative Interviews with ES Staff, Providers, Employers and Clients

Job outcomes

5.54 Nearly all providers indicate that their job outcome targets were 40% for all provision other than BET, and 20% for BET provision. By wave 3 there appeared to be a clear divide developing between providers. On the one hand there were those who had met their target for job outcomes (usually they had just managed to exceed their target). On the other are those who were some way short of their target. Many simply described their achieved level as being low and gave no exact figure, but where figures were given it was often in the 20%-25% range.

5.55 Those who have achieved their job outcome targets tend to put this down to such factors as the quality of their provision and their staff, the good links they have with local employers, their knowledge of the local labour market (for example, knowing when large employers are planning to recruit) and in some cases, simply their hard work.

5.56 Those who have not achieved their targets point to a range of inhibiting factors. These cover:

- The New Deal 25 plus clients being a harder to help group than anticipated (and a view that hence the targets have turned out to be unrealistic):

  “40% is an unrealistic target. Most we have seen have been unemployed a lot longer than 18 months. One recently had not worked for 32 years. We are achieving more like 30%. Most have multiple barriers. We are also a rural location and there are limited job opportunities.” [provider wave 3]

  “Below 40%. This was over optimistic. It’s more like 22%, I think this is good considering the client group” [provider wave 3]

- Clients not being realistic about their job goals:

  “I feel that 40% was asking a lot. We are not near that. Some internal issues on that we are sorting out now. The difficulty is getting clients realistic about what they should be earning.” [provider wave 3]

- Initial teething problems with the programme meant that the focus of attention had been on other issues. Some felt this has been as much the case with ES as with themselves, for example the view that ES locally has had to focus on the number of referrals and less on the outcomes achieved.

  “We’ve been doing very badly on this. We are nowhere near 40%. ES are starting to get a bit concerned by this, though up to now they’ve been finding their feet. We’ve had difficulty turning motivation around. Many are not really looking for work.” [Provider wave 3]
The slow start meant that the programme lacked buoyancy and momentum in the early days. For some, the direct implication of this was that there were not sufficient referrals early on to employ staff with specific responsibility to find work placements and to build links with local employers. Certainly those that had taken on people in such a role mid way through the year indicated that this had helped but that this would take some time to filter through into job outcomes.

One general point is that those providers new to a geographic area have struggled to achieve the job outcome levels of those more established providers who were already well known locally and who had good links with local employers.

Those who have failed to achieve the targets that have been set seem to split into two camps: those who believe the targets were optimistic (and that all things considered they have done quite well), and then those who see it a priority that outcome levels are improved. At least some of this variation appears to be down to differing extents to which senior contract teams / DPQMTs have pressed the issue to date.

If a client finds work within 13 weeks of leaving provision then this counts towards the provider’s job outcome targets. One provider felt a barrier to achieving better job outcome levels was a lack of effectiveness in what ES was doing with clients during Follow-through and after. In this area the DPQMT were considering the issue, with a view to deciding whether some additional training provision was needed for those on Follow-through.
6 The Employer Perspective

6.1 In this chapter we look at the experiences and views of 104 employers involved in the New Deal 25 plus programme. We examine the reasons for their participation, the depth of their involvement, their overall views of the programme and their interest in continued involvement. We also examine the improvements they would like to see made to the programme.

6.2 Fieldwork took place in November / December 2001 (64 interviews) and then again, with a different set of employers, in March and April 2002 (40 interviews). There were no significant developments or changes between the two waves in the type of feedback employers gave about the programme, hence, on nearly all issues, we report the two waves combined.

A note on the sampling

6.3 As described in the methodology section in chapter 1, obtaining a sample of employers involved in the programme was problematic: ES has no central database of employers, nor are systematic records kept at a district/region or Jobcentre level. Providers were asked to supply employer names but many were unwilling or unable to do so, and others gave a very limited number of names. Because of this, a potential concern might be that the names were ‘cherry-picked’ and unrepresentative – one might assume, for example, that providers would be unlikely to want to supply names of employers known to have had a bad experience with 25 plus clients. In fact, a wide range of opinion was elicited on the programme as discussed throughout this chapter.

The profile of the employers

6.4 Given the qualitative nature of the study, it is not the aim to provide a definitive picture on the profile of the type of employers involved in the programme. Rather, we present brief information on the profile of employers to show the type and range of employers getting involved with the programme.

6.5 Most employers covered by our research were small, single site businesses with less than 25 employees in the company. These were most often independent retailers (charity shops, cafes etc), though the sample did include a fairly diverse range of organisations such as manufacturers, small construction companies (painting and decorating, scaffolding and joinery businesses were three examples), childcare nurseries and printers.

6.6 Most of the remainder were relatively large, employing 100-250 staff. These came from a wide variety of sectors, and covered such organisations as cleaning contractors, security firms, publishers and manufacturers.
6.7 Some very large employers were involved in the programme. These were mainly public sector organisations such as local authorities and hospitals, though it included some large hotel and retail chains.

Awareness of the programme

6.8 In order to participate in the survey it was, of course, necessary for employers to have at least some awareness of the programme. For those that were not explicitly aware of their involvement with New Deal 25 plus we prompted them with the following: ‘this may have involved taking someone from the Jobcentre who was aged 25 or over, and you may have received a subsidy for this, or be providing work placements or work experience. Do you recall this now?’ Most employers that we spoke to were aware that they had been involved explicitly with New Deal 25 plus programme. There were some though who knew they had been involved in New Deal without being aware it had been New Deal for those aged 25 plus, and there were others who were unaware of their participation in the programme altogether, simply knowing they had recruited via the Jobcentre or a training provider.

How and why became involved in New Deal 25 plus

6.9 There appear to be four main routes by which employers first became involved with the New Deal 25 plus programme. These are:

- The employer approaching ES with a vacancy (this is the most common route). Usually this was a general request as opposed to their seeking a New Deal candidate. Where a New Deal 25 plus candidate was sought, this was nearly always small employers who had heard and were interested in the subsidy available.

- ES approached the employer about the programme.

- A training provider contacted the employer, usually in regard to taking work placements.

- A client telling the employer about the programme, often after they had already been offered the job.

6.10 A number of reasons explain why they then became involved in the programme. For many it was simply a matter of the programme delivering an appropriate candidate for the vacancy and, more generally, the Jobcentre being an effective means of recruitment. As we see in the next section, for a significant number of these employers the subsidy available played an important role.
6.11 The other strong motivation for participation in the programme is a sense of altruism, that they are putting something back into the local community. This was particularly the case for the public sector and voluntary sector organisations, and it appeared to play a part for some of the large retail chains. It was also the case that the large, national organisations tended to have a centralised recruitment policy that included and encouraged participation in government schemes, and hence, respondents in these companies explained their involvement in terms of it being ‘company policy.’

Extent of involvement

6.12 Employers’ involvement with the programme has been relatively limited in terms of numbers, most generally having employed or provided a work placement for one or two clients. This simply reflects the fact that the majority of employers were small businesses with infrequent recruitment needs. Only the very large organisations were more heavily involved, both in terms of the number of clients and also in their offering a range of placements, permanent jobs and short training courses for clients.

6.13 There is no evidence that work placements are being used to obtain unpaid workers. Nearly all employers providing work placements have offered employment to at least one such client where the person has stayed for the full period of the placement. Exceptions were cases where the employer did not have a vacancy for the type of position that the client wanted. The only general issue raised by some employers was that the work placements do not always last long enough for a decision to be made.

The role of the subsidy

6.14 A subsidy of £75 a week for full time positions and £50 for part time positions is available to employers for New Deal 25 plus clients that they recruit. The subsidy is available for up to 26 weeks.

6.15 For the majority of employers that had recruited a New Deal 25 plus candidate, the subsidy was an important element. Some of the very small businesses would not have been able to recruit at all without the subsidy. For others it meant they took two people on instead of one, or recruited to a full time rather than a part time position. For some employers it was what influenced them in their decision to take that candidate as opposed to a mainstream client.

“The work that needed doing would have had to be contracted out to another company if it wasn’t for the subsidy.”

“Can turn what was a part time job into a full time job.”
“It meant everything, we wouldn’t have taken them otherwise.”

“It removes the risk of employing the wrong person.”

“Taking on people who are not up to speed would not be viable without the subsidy.”

6.16 For the larger employers and the voluntary sector employers the subsidy was of little or no significance to their involvement in New Deal 25 plus.

6.17 Some staff expressed the fear that the subsidy was being abused by employers who were just keeping clients for the period of the subsidy only to then replace them with another subsidised client. There is no evidence for this from employers themselves (though some clients reported experiencing this). Instead there is a strong sentiment that if someone is still with them after six months then they are suitable for the job, and having invested the time to get the person up to speed they want to keep them (although sometimes only at the national minimum wage). The only exceptions were some of the smaller companies who stated that they had made it known from the outset that a job could not be guaranteed once the subsidy ran out.

**Overall views of the programme**

6.18 Views of the programme almost entirely depend upon the quality of the candidates that they have recruited or provided a work placement for, and how they compared to their expectations. Where positive, comments refer to the person/people fitting in well, being enthusiastic and committed and performing on a par with other employees.

“If they all worked liked this we would have no problems at all, he is one of the best employees we have”

6.19 Many appeared to accept that New Deal 25 plus candidates would need more time than the average recruit to settle in, given the length of time they had been unemployed. Indeed, many saw the period of the subsidy or the time that they were with them on a work placement, as a trial period during which the employer could check the suitability of the candidate, and the client could see if they liked the job and the company.

6.20 Where negative, employers tend to focus on such issues as:

- poor motivation and commitment.
- poor timekeeping.
- absenteeism (examples were given of people calling in sick and then being seen in town).
- poor interpersonal skills.
6.21 Even these employers who feel their involvement has not been a big success generally appreciate that their ‘bad experiences’ have been down to the individuals concerned and that this does not represent a general failing of the programme. Some, however, feel the ES should provide better screening of clients, and only send clients who genuinely want to work.

6.22 What is clear is that what most employers are looking for in potential employees recruited from the New Deal 25 plus programme are soft skills, such as motivation and commitment.

Willingness to continue involvement in the programme

6.23 The vast majority of employers were happy to continue their involvement with New Deal 25 plus in the future. However, some smaller employers qualified this to the extent that it would only be if they needed to recruit again and that there were no plans for the foreseeable future in this regard.

6.24 A small number no longer wanted to be involved, this was usually because they had had their fingers burnt and refused to take the risk again. One, for example, had agreed to take four people for work experience / work placements. Only three had turned up for interview. Two of these then failed to turn up for work, and the other walked out after three days. (‘The whole thing has been a waste of my time.’).

“I’ve only had one experience of New Deal, the client walked out. I now only use newspaper advertising.”

“First person they sent me was a younger person and I asked for a mature person. He was not suitable for the job and they asked me if I was discriminating against younger persons. It’s my business and I want the right person for the job.”
7 The Client Perspective

7.1 This chapter examines findings from 151 depth interviews with clients who started the New Deal 25 plus programme after April 2001. Clients were interviewed in November / December 2001 and March / April 2002. Whereas with staff and providers there were significant developments from one wave to the next, among clients there were no discernible differences in the findings between the two waves, hence we report on the views and experiences collectively.

7.2 We first provide some details of the profile of the clients and the stage of New Deal they had reached when interviewed. We then look in some depth at overall views of the programme before examining specific aspects of the programme, and looking at particular groups of clients.

The profile of the sample

7.3 The following information is provided to give a picture of the client group from which results have been drawn. The sample was selected purposively to ensure a reasonable mix of client types by such variables as gender, age and the stage of the programme they had reached. It was not selected to be a representative sample in any quantitative sense.
7.4 The majority of the clients interviewed were male and aged under 50.

Table 7.1: Client profile:

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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-white</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Person with PWD marker</strong></td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highest qualification attained:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree or equivalent</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A level or equivalent</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower than A level</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No qualification</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.5 In all, 14 clients were from minority ethnic groups and 39 were identified on LMS as having a disability.

7.6 Qualification levels varied quite widely, from nine having a degree to a large number (62) having no qualifications.

7.7 The following table shows the length of time that clients recalled that they had been unemployed at the time they started the programme. Of the 30 saying they had been unemployed for less than 18 months, only nine were listed on the New Deal Evaluation Database as being early entrants. This suggests that their recollection of how long they had been unemployed was somewhat inaccurate.

Table 7.2: Length unemployed at time of entering New Deal 25 plus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base: all</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 18 months</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 months</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 18 months up to 3 years</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 3 years up to 5 years</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 5 years</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation of New Deal 25 Plus
Qualitative Interviews with ES Staff, Providers, Employers and Clients

Stage of the programme at when interviewed

7.8 A slight minority of clients were still actively involved in the programme when interviewed. Clients still involved in the programme were relatively evenly split between those on Gateway and those on IAP. Relatively few (7 respondents) were on Follow-through when interviewed. The following table shows the stage of the programme respondents were at when interviewed.

Table 7.3: Stage clients at when interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wave</th>
<th>Seeing adviser</th>
<th>IAP</th>
<th>Follow-through</th>
<th>Switched to other benefit</th>
<th>In work</th>
<th>Claiming JSA, no longer on ND25 plus</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>62 Still on ND</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>89 Left ND</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.9 Many staff had commented that the programme had been effective in leading to people leaving JSA, either through their switching to a more appropriate benefit, ‘revealing’ those working and claiming benefit, and then a proportion ‘genuinely’ finding work. Ten respondents that we interviewed had switched to another benefit (mostly Incapacity Benefit). Twenty had found work, with the remainder having returned to JSA.

Those now in work

7.10 The types of jobs that clients were now working in were quite varied, and included secretarial work, telesales, a roofer, a shelf stacker in a supermarket, a machine cleaner, a care worker, a computer technician and a self employed photographer. In nearly all cases the work was full time.

7.11 Around half of these clients got their jobs during the Gateway period and the rest tended to get them through the employment options available during, or as a result of, their IAP. None indicated that they had found work during or as a result of Follow-through, but at the time of interview, relatively few had moved into Follow-through.

7.12 Most indicated that their involvement in the programme had played a central part in getting them work:

“It gave me the skills, knowledge, confidence, and motivation.”

“The adviser had the contacts to get me the interview and subsequent job.”

Some, however, were keen to play down the role that New Deal 25 plus had played, stressing that they had got the job off their own back.
Overall views of the programme

7.13 As would be expected with any programme of this nature among this target group, clients were divided on their views of the programme. The majority viewed their current or recently completed time on the programme in a positive light. These clients tended to focus on one or more of the following:

- **The one to one sessions with advisers:** clients here referred to the supportive and motivating nature of these sessions, and the feeling that someone was listening and working hard on their behalf (‘a very helpful adviser, she really wanted to help’).

- **Benefiting from provision accessed:** these clients described the training or work experience as having given them useful skills and having boosted their confidence. Some particularly focussed on the social aspects - mixing with others in a similar situation to themselves or getting back into a work environment. Some were particularly pleased about having gained a certificate or qualification, something that had boosted their confidence.

- **Their job prospects having improved:** clients tended to mention this aspect in the light of practical gains in relation to updated CVs, feeling more confident applying for jobs and at interview, and generally improved job search skills.

- **Obtaining work:** though, as we have seen, not all those ending up in work feel their involvement in the programme played any role in their getting a job.

7.14 Although in no way intended as a quantitative measure, around a quarter of clients were wholly or largely negative about their experience while on New Deal 25 plus. These clients tended to focus on one or more of the following aspects of the programme:

- **The compulsory nature of the programme,** and the feeling of being coerced and pressured, both in terms of the threat of having to do some compulsory activity on the IAP but also a feeling of being pressured to take any job that came along.

- **Not getting on with the adviser** (‘they don't listen’, ‘I felt like a number’, ‘they crushed my self-esteem and talked down to me’ and ‘they treat you like you are an idiot’ are examples of comments made).

- **A feeling that what was being recommended was not relevant or appropriate to them,** and that their personal circumstances had not been taken into account by the adviser for the jobs or activity that were being recommended. Examples here included a person who was homeless and another with a visual impairment, both of these clients felt these factors were ignored by the NDPA in the opportunities or jobs being recommended.
• **Provision undertaken being poor.** One described a Gateway to Work course as ‘sheer hell’. Another described the time spent with a provider in a very negative light: ‘it affected me quite badly for a fortnight after, because of the way we were treated.’ A number also complained that too much time was wasted sitting around looking at newspapers.

• **Not getting a job,** and more generally feeling that they had not advanced as a result of their involvement in the programme.

7.15 Many of those complaining that what was being recommended did not seem relevant were those aged 50 plus. Many simply saw themselves to be ‘too old for training’ and ‘out of the labour market’. Those feeling their personal circumstances were not being taken into account included those with caring responsibilities for relatives which affected the jobs they could consider, and some who felt the financial implications of leaving benefits were not appreciated by the adviser.

### One-to-one Sessions during Gateway

7.16 Nearly all clients reported having weekly sessions with their adviser (for a few they were fortnightly) and the average number of interviews that clients who had completed this phase received was around a dozen. Hardly any respondents were unclear as to the purpose of the Gateway, and even some of the most negative clients took no issue with the aims of this stage of the process.

7.17 For many, the one-to-one contact with an adviser during Gateway was one of the best elements of their time on New Deal 25 plus and distinguished it from other programmes they had experienced in the past, or from their regular Jobcentre experiences. These sessions were seen to have helped in improving the frequency and quality of job search activity, and in increasing their confidence and motivation. Some, for example, welcomed the ‘push’ they were receiving from their adviser to get work.

7.18 Inevitably, some clients resented the need to attend the Jobcentre on a weekly basis, and others, a minority, felt the sessions were repetitive and little was being gained.
7.19 When discussing in the interview with clients the training and employment opportunities they had accessed, we did not differentiate between those accessed during the Gateway and those accessed via the IAP. This was simply because the division is not often clear-cut in people’s minds (and certainly these terms are not ones that most are familiar with). It was clear that much use was being made of two week Gateway to Work courses, something we discuss in the following section together with other training provision.

Training activity

7.20 Just under half of our sample had attended a training course. This was most usually a Gateway to Work course described by respondents as having been two weeks long and covering such activities as interview technique, updating CVs, and job search.

7.21 The usefulness of the Gateway to Work provision divided opinion widely, with people seeming to be either very positive or very negative. This appeared to be largely determined by the quality of the provider since results tended to be grouped by area. Where positive, people spoke about their confidence and motivation being boosted, and in some cases gaining practical skills such as better interviewing technique. Examples of some of these positive reactions include:

“My motivation and confidence was so low and now it has been boosted so I can go and look for work”

“It helped me in the search for work – I now use my time better.”

“Very beneficial. It has definitely helped me in looking for jobs”

7.22 Those that were critical of these Gateway to Work courses focussed on their being too basic and hence too long. Related to this, they felt the courses were too general and insufficiently tailored. Some specifically focussed on having too much time simply looking for job adverts in local papers.

“They could have packed it all into four or five days”

“It was too basic. I’ve done this sort of thing at Job Club before.”

“It was useless, just checking for jobs in the paper.”

“It needs to be more personal or particular to the needs of each person.”
7.23 Other more specific training that had been accessed included the following:

- A range of IT courses.
  - Some short, basic level IT courses, often Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT).
  - Other more intermediate courses: short hand and computing; database and word processing; ‘European Computer Driving License’ (ECDL) courses; one leading to the equivalent of RSA II.
  - More advanced courses: HTML and web design course.
- Forklift training courses.
- HGV (10 week course).
- Retail course (4 weeks including a placement).
- Plumbing.
- Electrical course (part time college course).
- Window fabricating course (5-6 weeks).
- Business admin.
- An off shore survival course (needed for work on oil rigs).
- A gardening course.
- A mental health care course (based at a local college).
- A course leading to a health and safety certificate.

7.24 The wide range of courses being accessed does support the common view of staff that appropriate courses are generally available if required. The specific courses listed appear to have been provided for individuals to reflect a specific need or desire, and hence, there is no feedback from clients attending these types of course reporting that that they felt forced into them or felt they were doing training for the sake of it. This again seems to confirm the general finding emerging when talking to staff and providers that the programme is moving towards a concentration on providing work experience, leaving training (other than Gateway to Work courses) only for those where there is a very specific need.

7.25 Clients attending the types of course listed above were nearly all very positive. Some focussed on the style and content of the teaching, for example, the fact that the pace is / was right, liking the one-to-one attention and finding the course interesting. Others commented on the benefits it would bring:

“It will definitely help me to get a job” [web design course]

“It has opened doors. Instead of just being a warehouseman I can be a supervisor” [basic computing course]
7.26 Negative feedback was limited to a few cases where the course had not been what they expected. One client on a construction course had expected much more time to be spent on bricklaying, his specific area of interest. One or two were also finding their IT courses too basic, (‘I'd already done most of it at O level’).

**Employment opportunities**

7.27 Around a fifth of our sample were currently involved, or had been involved, in an employment opportunity, described to respondents as being opportunities ‘such as work placements or work trials or subsidised employment.’ As with training opportunities, clients seemed either very positive or very negative about these employment opportunities.

7.28 Where positive, clients benefited from the chance to get back into a work environment and have the opportunity to update their experience which they feel should help them get work. Some also felt they learnt new skills.

> “I now have more experience and this will improve my chances of getting full time employment.” [admin/secretarial placement]

> “It has been another string to my bow, and it’s interesting. I’m always busy and you do learn something for a change.” [a gardening course involving a placement with a garden centre]

> “Getting up to date experience and I’ve also learnt new skills” [placement selling office supplies]

> “It’s useful and interesting. I’m getting back into a routine.” [placement in an admin position]

7.29 On the other side of the fence, an equal number of clients were quite negative about their work opportunity. In some cases it was simply a matter of finding the work boring or feeling that the work was not in the area that they were really interested in. In other instances, clients were much more critical, this usually resulted from a feeling that they were being used by the employer, in particular, the fact that they were not taken on for a permanent position. A few clients could cite examples of employers who had then employed other New Deal clients, suggesting that the employer subsidy is being abused in some cases.

> “They treated me badly – they did not respect me, they told me off for having no uniform, but they did not give me one” [Hotel room attendant]

> “I felt the employer was taking advantage of the situation, when I completed my six months I was replaced by another New Deal person” [Delivery van driver]
“Yes it got me into the workplace and gave me more confidence, surprised that they did not keep me on, I wanted to stay. They said there were no vacancies but I know different because some other people were taken on” [Work at a supermarket]

“I was a general dog’s body. I did nothing that I’d been trained for and left after 5-6 weeks. I felt I was being used.” [the respondent had done a window fabrication course]

7.30 We encountered a number of examples of clients obtaining permanent (unsubsidised) work with the employer with whom they undertook their employment opportunity. A significant number currently gaining employment experience were confident they would be offered such a permanent position at the end of their placement / subsidy.

7.31 In other cases clients knew from the outset there would not be a job available at the end of the placement. It is encouraging that most of these clients felt or feel they will be in a better position to get a job as a consequence of their placement, due to their newly gained experience and their having an up to date reference.

Follow-through

7.32 With the exception of one case where a respondent indicated that Follow-through sessions did not take place because of delays and cancellations, clients completing the IAP appear to be receiving these sessions as intended. Those who had completed the Follow-through generally recalled having between four and six sessions with their adviser.

7.33 These sessions drew little reaction, positive or negative, and certainly there was no strong resentment about having to have meetings with the adviser again. Most recalled Follow-through as having involved them talking about what they did on their IAP, with the discussion then focussing on the implications of their activity for job search. Some indicated that the adviser was able to suggest other jobs they could look for now they had a certificate. Subsequent sessions then involved a discussion of job search activity undertaken over the previous week, and a further look at current vacancies. From a policy stand point, it seems that the structure and content of Follow-through is along the lines intended.

7.34 While most felt the sessions were useful (and responses suggest that they helped maintain the sense of pace and purpose of job search) there were no examples of actual job outcomes during Follow-through. It needs to be noted though that low numbers of clients had been through Follow-through at the time of the fieldwork.
Clients aged 50 plus

7.35 The IAP is not compulsory for clients aged 50 and over. We have seen that many staff feel New Deal 25 plus is not serving the 50 plus age group well, and there is a strong desire among staff to have the discretion to extend the mandatory aspect of the programme to at least some of this age group. The reasoning is usually that few of their 50 plus clients are choosing to undertake the IAP and that some would benefit from so doing.

7.36 In fact a significant proportion (though a minority) of the 50 plus clients interviewed participated in the IAP. These split between those:

- Keen to work and who believed some specific training a good means to help achieve this outcome:
  
  “to get a job and maybe an NVQ”

  “I wanted a job and thought it was a good way to get one.”

  “I was bored at home and training gets me out”

- Those who were told, or had the impression, that they had no choice.

7.37 As to the benefits conferred by undertaking some IAP activity, the kinds of comments made by the 50 plus group, both positive and negative, were not markedly different from the younger cohort. On this basis there is no evidence to assume that making the IAP mandatory for the 50 plus would bring these clients little benefit.

7.38 Those not taking part in the IAP generally decided against it because they felt that they had little to gain. Some put this in fairly general terms: that they were too old for this kind of thing or that they had done all the training that they needed. Others, however, gave the impression that they would have considered some option if there had been something appropriate for their circumstances:

  “There was nothing for someone my age that was relevant. Nothing appealed to me.”

  “Nothing specific was offered at my level.”

7.39 However, a number of those aged 50 plus claim that the option of undertaking some activity was never discussed with them.
The general conclusion seems to be that there are clients aged 50 plus for whom the IAP is an attractive option. However, there may be limited potential to attract a significant number voluntarily unless provision is tailored more to this age group. Certainly some of the 50 plus age group feel the programme as a whole is not ideally aimed at individuals of their age. One commented ‘it’s tailored too much to a certain age; at 50 I feel like they look at me like I’m 18.’ One older client with an MSc complained that New Deal 25 plus advisers ‘don’t know enough about professional workers and they don’t have enough solutions for the 50 plus.’ His solution was to have specialist advisers for the 50 plus and for the well qualified.
8 Who the programme is serving

8.1 A key aim of the research was to contribute to the understanding of what works well for whom, why and under what circumstances. We summarise findings on these issues in this chapter, some of which have been covered elsewhere in the report.

8.2 Overall, the general view of staff and providers is that the programme provides them with the tools they need to assist those that want to be helped. It remains difficult to do anything for those who are not really interested in finding work.

8.3 Staff point to a number of aspects of the programme that work well, aspects which they feel can and do benefit clients, and which make the programme what it is. The most common items in this respect were:

- Weekly one-to-one sessions between the client and the adviser.
- Gateway to Work provision.
- IAP provision and the emphasis on work experience.

8.4 Weekly one-to-one sessions between the client and the adviser were felt to be the cornerstone of the New Deal process. They allow trust to be built up between the client and the adviser, they differentiate New Deal from what clients may have experienced before with mainstream Jobcentre services and they provide the adviser with the information they need to design IAP activity which is tailored to the needs of the client. They also allow for sustained and relatively intense job search to be undertaken. The one-to-one sessions were felt to be important for all clients, though the success of the sessions depended to a large degree on the attitude of the client. That said, advisers talked about having been able to turn some difficult clients around.

8.5 Many clients confirm that the one-to-one sessions were a key part of the New Deal experience. Those who were positive about New Deal overall often based this on the one-to-one sessions helping their confidence and motivation, or simply getting on well with the adviser. Those who were negative often cited not getting on with the adviser and a feeling that the adviser was trying to push them in a direction they did not want to go (e.g. to take the first job that came along). There was no clear pattern as to the type of clients who was positive and negative about one-to-one sessions, hence there is no firm evidence as to who these sessions work well for.
8.6 Staff, and providers delivering this provision, also tended to be very positive about the benefits of Gateway to Work courses. This provision was felt to deliver a range of benefits from updated CVs, improved interview skills and improved job application skills to increased confidence and motivation. It was also felt to be an appropriate length for clients during the Gateway (typically two weeks), it being long enough to deliver benefits but not too long to be off-putting to clients. Gateway to Work courses were felt to be suitable and appropriate for a wide range of clients. However, there appeared to be some reluctance to use this provision for older clients, mainly because Gateway to Work courses are usually run combined with New Deal for Young People, and there was a feeling that these courses did not work well with a wide range of age groups attending. Hence some staff wanted Gateway to Work courses set up specifically for older clients within the 25 plus age range.

8.7 The IAP was felt to be a key element of the New Deal 25 plus programme, and was felt by staff and providers to be delivering benefits to many clients, particularly those keen to get work. Staff, for example, often described seeing clients on Follow-through whose confidence, motivation and job-readiness had improved in comparison to before their IAP experience. Providers were of the view that the duration of the IAP was sufficient to boost the employability and skills of most clients.

8.8 There was a feeling that the range of IAP provision was better suited to those with more ‘mainstream’ job goals (such as office work, retail, warehousing and hospitality) mainly because it was easier to find work placements / work experience in these areas of provision. Indeed many staff felt that the IAP was working best where it involved or consisted largely of work experience. This was largely because they felt that what many clients within the programme needed was not (more) training but re-acquaintance with the world of work, getting back into a routine, working with others, recent experience for their CV and the boost to their confidence that these things could provide.

8.9 There are three main groups that staff feel the programme is not helping as well as it could or should:

- Those aged 50 plus.
- Those with basic skills needs, particularly those with severe basic skills needs.
- Those with intermediate or more advanced level skill needs.

8.10 There is a very widespread view among staff that, because most of their 50 plus clients are not choosing to undertake an IAP activity, these older clients are gaining little from their time on New Deal. Because of this, and because they feel some of the 50 plus clients group would benefit from undertaking some activity, nearly all staff feel that the mandatory aspect of the programme needs to be extended to the 50 plus group.
8.11 Although in some areas provision for those with basic skill needs appeared to be working reasonably well, in others basic skills provision was not felt to be meeting the needs of clients. Reasons included a lack of local provision, providers underperforming and a view that little can be done with those with severe basic skills needs in 26 weeks. Providers also felt that advisers were not always spotting clients with less severe basic skill needs and in consequence people were starting another IAP programme when a BET provision would have been more appropriate.

8.12 The other key group identified by staff as not being well served currently by the re-engineered 25 plus programme is those needing provision above the basic level. Typically, here staff were referring to clients who had been made redundant from well paid, often managerial positions. The general view was that while the range of provision on Gateway and on the IAP was good for those needing relatively basic training, provision was lacking for this higher level group. IT was a common example cited. Numerous providers could deliver basic courses in typing, excel, Microsoft word etc, but it was hard to find providers to deliver training on packages such as CAD or SAGE. Similarly a number of staff expressed the desire for a Gateway to Work style course aimed at this type of client.
9 Improvements desired for the programme

9.1 We have seen throughout the report the generally positive view of the re-engineered New Deal 25 plus programme once the initial teething problems had been overcome. We have also raised in passing, areas where improvements are desired. In this chapter we draw together findings on how stakeholder groups feel the programme could be improved.

9.2 One of the key themes to emerge from staff and providers, and to a lesser extent employers, is a feeling that eligibility should be reduced from 18 months to 6 or 12 months. Staff put this in terms of ‘why wait?’ If one-to-one sessions with an adviser or providing some opportunity will benefit an unemployed client, then the sooner these are provided the better. There will be less chance that ‘bad habits’ form and work skills are lost. Clients will also be more appealing to employers. Many employers confirm this, and feel the less time they have been unemployed the more motivated individuals will be. Similarly providers feel the longer somebody has been unemployed the more difficult they will be to help.

9.3 There is also a strong desire among staff for some element of compulsion for clients aged 50 plus. This takes various forms:

- Giving staff discretion to make the IAP mandatory for those clients aged 50 plus that they feel the programme could help.
- Being able to make some provision mandatory, for example Gateway to Work courses (though here staff usually feel such courses would need to be set up for this older age group).
- Making the IAP mandatory for all those aged 50 plus.
- Making the IAP mandatory for some of the younger 50 plus age group.

Some of the 50 plus clients themselves feel the programme is not well suited to the older age group, and want to deal with specialist advisers for the 50 plus.

9.4 Among staff and providers there is a feeling that the programme is bureaucratic, complicated and somewhat inflexible, and needs simplification and a greater degree of flexibility.

- The number of forms associated with the programme (as most other New Deal programmes) was felt to be excessive and should be reduced.
- There was a general desire for the process to require less paperwork (employers are in favour of this too). Some providers suggested key forms could be electronic documents, though this would require staff having e-mail access.
• Examples of where greater flexibility could be introduced included: allowing extensions to the IAP to be of any duration up to the maximum; allowing BET provision to be longer than 6 months; reducing job search requirements for certain provision; being less rigid on what is described as the ‘five unauthorised absences and you are out’ rule.

9.5 Many staff and providers suggest that WBLA and New Deal 25 plus be merged. This is for a range of practical and logistic reasons:

• In some areas the provision available for clients is the same or virtually the same on both programmes.
• There was some annoyance in one area that some provision available to WBLA clients was not available to clients on the New Deal 25 plus programme.
• Most providers have contracts for both programmes, and run the actual provision with clients from the two programmes mixed in together.
• There were examples of confusion among a few staff and providers as to whether LOT and SJFT courses were available for those on New Deal 25 plus.
• Slight differences between the programmes from a client perspective, for example, different hours they have to undertake their activity and the availability of ADF for New Deal 25 plus clients, causes (admittedly minor) friction between clients.
• Differences in eligibility for BET between the two programmes, as well as in the early entry criteria, have been a cause of some confusion.

9.6 We have also discussed earlier where staff feel LMS could be improved. These included:

• LMS being more specific about certain aspects of training provision.
• It being easier to easily set up office-specific training opportunities to save trawling through lists of District-wide provision.
• LMS to identify those claiming JSA for 18 out of 21 months.
• The ability to highlight key text on LMS (important information can be missed since information is currently stored chronologically).
• The ability to be able to write more than 12 lines of text in the Action Plan.
• The CPR to be linked to the Action Plan to reduce duplication.
Although communication between the two parties was an area where great improvements had been made, it was not uncommon for staff to want this to be more formalised. Some expressed this as a desire for monthly meetings between advisers and providers.

**Employers**

9.8 There are certain areas where a significant number of employers would like to see the programme improved. These included:

- Improving the screening of clients so that those they see are as motivated and appropriate for the job as possible. One, for example, complained of having to see 15 New Deal 25 plus clients before finding one suitable for the position.
- Reducing eligibility for the programme from 18 months to 12 or 6 months. These employers feel that this could lead to them seeing more motivated clients.
- Increased contact from ES: some employers felt that once the client had been taken on there could have been more contact from ES to check up on how the client was progressing. (*I would like more contact with ES, reviews to see how things are working out [with the client]. We’ve had no contact since January and it’s now March*).
- Reducing the level of paperwork / administration associated with the programme. One employer cited bureaucracy as a reason why they were unlikely to take part in the programme again.
- Marketing this and other ES programmes better. Few besides the largest employers felt they had a good understanding of the range of ES programmes, and many felt only very superficially part of the New Deal programme.

**Clients**

9.9 Clients also offered a range of suggestions for enhancing the programme, some of which, though clearly not all, tie in with the general themes raised by staff and providers. Each was raised by a handful of clients without any being a dominant theme.

- Having a wider range of provision available (some specifically wanted provision that was available on NDYP but not New Deal 25 plus).
- Having specialist advisers, whether this be for older clients, or with an occupational expertise or for dealing with professional / managerial clients.
Being more selective with employers allowed to take clients on work placements or to receive the subsidy, in particular make sure that the employer is likely to offer the position to the client at the end of the placement or subsidy.

Making the programme voluntary.

Increasing the incentives to get work and come off benefit.

Reducing the amount of job search undertaken when with the provider. This usually relates to a feeling that the quality of the job search was poor, and hence could be read as an underlying desire for job search to be improved.
10 **Conclusions**

10.1 The research study has provided a clear picture of the New Deal 25 plus programme following changes made to it in April 2001. For those able to make a comparison with the programme pre April 2001 (this is mainly ES staff and providers), nearly all felt that the re-engineered programme was a significant improvement compared to its predecessor, once serious initial teething difficulties had been overcome. The re-engineered New Deal 25 plus programme was felt to have a better range of tools available to help the long term unemployed, and the assistance available was more tailored to the client and more focussed on job outcomes. The mandatory nature of the programme for those aged 25-49 was seen by staff as the key, or one of the key, enhancements.

10.2 There were signs of success in regard to the programme leading people to leave JSA. Often this was their being moved to a more appropriate benefit, something identified early in the Gateway stage. Significant numbers were also achieving job outcomes. In many instances staff felt this involved those who were claiming benefit and working in the informal economy being forced by the prospect of full-time activity on the IAP to choose between the two. Quantitative evidence regarding job outcomes achieved by the programme is available from the New Deal Evaluation Database, and is discussed in a report due to be published in July 2002[10].

10.3 We have noted in chapter 9 that there are a range of improvements that stakeholders would like to see made to the programme to further enhance it. To summarise, these focus on getting people onto the programme earlier, simplifying the programme (in terms of paperwork), allowing more flexibility, and improving communication between all parties.

10.4 We would recommend that some caution is exercised before changing the programme significantly in the short term. This is because it has taken staff and providers some time to get to grips with what many feel to be a complicated programme, and some indicated explicitly that what is needed in the short term is to let the programme ‘settle down’ to enable gains to be consolidated.

10.5 Given that for many it is only in the later part of 2001 or early in 2002 that the programme started to work along the lines initially intended, it is not surprising that most stakeholders felt the effectiveness of the re-engineered programme would increase in its second year of operation. Where there were concerns, this tended to be providers worried that if referral numbers were not higher in the second year than the first then they would suffer financially (it being assumed the underpinning guarantee introduced in the first year would not be available again in year 2). Otherwise stakeholders were optimistic about the potential for the programme to assist the long term unemployed back into work.

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### Evaluation of New Deal 25 Plus
Qualitative Interviews with ES Staff, Providers, Employers and Clients

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