

Ambition: identifying best practice for demand-led approaches

By GHK Consulting

GHK undertook, on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions, a small qualitative research study into the Ambition Programme. Ambition aims to place disadvantaged jobseekers into types of employment not usually accessible to them, whilst seeking to address identified skills shortages and employers' human resource needs in specific sectors and occupations. Initiatives have been piloted for five sectors or 'strands', namely Energy, Construction, IT, Retail and Health. The specific objectives of the research were to:

- Identify best practice in employer engagement.
- Identify aspects of the programme that could be replicated in the delivery of BoND.
- Identify changes in employer attitudes to Jobcentre Plus and its customers, as a result of participating in the programme.

The approach was premised on examining six locations across three sectors, namely Energy, Construction and IT strands, that Jobcentre Plus had identified as demonstrating key features of the Programme. In-depth interviews were carried out with key stakeholders, including employers, intermediary organisations/training providers and Jobcentre Plus lead staff.

Key findings

- A demand-led approach operated at different levels, including the selection of sectors and occupations that experienced a skills shortage and the identification and engagement of individual employers with their specific requirements. It was found that general skills shortages need to be narrowed down to a limited number of occupations on which to focus pilot activities, and that employer interest is a pre-requisite for delivery:
- Best practice in employer engagement included: building effective relationships; working within the interests and capacities of employers; incorporating employer requirements in all stages of the programme, utilising existing relationships; focusing on selected occupations and areas with skills shortages; creating confidence and trust in processes and outcomes; ensuring effective communication; and adaptability and flexibility by delivery organisations
- General satisfaction with Ambition and its principles, as identified by the research, suggest that an approach that takes employer requirements into account, addresses identified skills shortages and provides the necessary flexibility in delivering such a service should be replicated in other employment programmes. This is in line with the principles set out in the BoND strategy, which offers a stronger voice for employers and seeks greater devolution and flexibility, within a national framework.

The full report of these research findings is published for the Department for Work and Pensions by Corporate Document Services (ISBN 1 84123853 8. Research Report 264. July 2005).

It is available from Paul Noakes at the address below.

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Paul Noakes, Strategic Research and Modelling Division, 4th Floor, The Adelphi, 1-11 John Adam Street, London WC2N 6HT.
E-mail: Paul.Noakes@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

