

Developing a Framework for
Vocational Rehabilitation

DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS

DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION – A DISCUSSION PAPER

The Department for Work and Pensions is looking to produce a Framework for Vocational Rehabilitation by late summer 2004. We see this very much as a shared process and so your views are important to us, regardless of whether or not you have experience of providing or using vocational rehabilitation.

INTRODUCTION

Vocational rehabilitation is a term used by many people to describe an approach whereby those who have a health condition, injury or disability are helped to access, maintain or return to employment. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is looking to produce a Framework for Vocational Rehabilitation that will:

- Demonstrate the Government's commitment to provide leadership on vocational rehabilitation;
- Be the first step towards a better understanding, and improving practice, of vocational rehabilitation; and
- Provide longer-term help to establish a new approach to rehabilitation in the UK.

The primary catalyst for this work has been the Review of Employers' Liability Compulsory Insurance (ELCI) and the commitment given in the Review's Second Stage Report¹ to produce a Framework for Vocational Rehabilitation. The report sets out the background and goals of the work. It highlighted ELCI stakeholder support for rehabilitation playing a greater role in the response to injury, illness or health-related inactivity and found both an appetite and opportunity for radical change in objectives and culture, putting rehabilitation at the heart of the response to injury and ill health.

There are however many other drivers to produce a Framework for Vocational Rehabilitation. For example, The Health and Safety Commission's (HSC) new strategy – A strategy for workplace health and safety in Great Britain to 2010 and beyond – gives a commitment to:

- Develop innovative partnership in the public and private sectors to develop the provision of occupational health and safety support locally, regionally or by sector according to need. At the core of this support will be the principle of proactive management of health risks.
- Work with Government and other stakeholders (e.g. employers, insurers and trade unions etc) to strengthen the role of health and safety in getting people back to work through a much greater emphasis on rehabilitation as a contribution to the wider government employment agenda.

¹ http://www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/dwp/2003/elci/dwp_employers_review04-12-2003.pdf

- Press for the provision of nationally available advice and support focussed primarily on occupational health. This should be active in preventing ill health, promoting rehabilitation and getting people back to work more quickly.

The Government also recognises that there are many other stakeholders in the public, private and voluntary sectors with an interest in vocational rehabilitation. These stakeholders have additional reasons for encouraging more effective use of vocational rehabilitation, including

- To facilitate better retention in work through occupational health and safety support interventions and better attendance management.
- To affect the costs of compensation and ELCI insurance premiums through more effective interventions.
- To support people with health or disability related barriers to enter or return to work.

DWP do not begin this work in a vacuum and so we will look to build on and complement existing strategies to improve employment opportunities for people with a health condition or disability. It will be important for any Framework for Vocational Rehabilitation to mesh with and add value to other initiatives such as the Health and Safety Commission's (HSC) strategy to provide occupational health and safety support, insurers' new approaches to rehabilitation, Pathways to Work and NHS Plus.

There is now strong evidence that people in work generally experience better health than those out of work and claiming benefits (Brenner, M. H. 2001 Employment and Public Health, Final Report to European Commission Directorate General, Employment, Industrial Relations Social Affaires). Therefore this initiative will also support the emerging public health agenda on work and health including, in the context of the rights and responsibilities of citizens, making work accessible to all.

WHO IS THIS DISCUSSION PAPER AIMED AT?

If a new approach to vocational rehabilitation is to be established, Government recognises that it needs to work with a range of stakeholders. This Discussion Paper is part of this approach. We are asking you to comment on the scope of this work and highlight the health and disability related barriers to work you have come across. Finally, the Paper asks for your views on the elements of vocational rehabilitation which work best and those which work less well.

The Government would like the developing Framework to be of particular help to stakeholders outside the public sector, including private and voluntary sector employers, insurers and rehabilitation providers. As well as acting as a useful information source, the Government would initially like to share good practice on vocational rehabilitation across the private and voluntary sector. In addition, as the public sector plays such a large and important role in rehabilitation, as part of the next steps following the publication of the

Framework, the public sector will be encouraged to consider vocational rehabilitation good practice identified. At this stage, the views of the following stakeholders would be particularly useful:

- Organisations that provide and manage the delivery of vocational rehabilitation.
- Employers and their representative bodies.
- Employees and their representative bodies.
- Insurers;
- Organisations representing people who have a health condition and individuals who have a disability; and
- Legal representatives.

The information you provide will not be published, but will be considered by DWP as we work to produce a Framework for Vocational Rehabilitation. Your contributions will also be a useful information source to support the next steps identified in the Framework.

WHAT WILL THE FRAMEWORK LOOK LIKE?

DWP is looking to produce a Framework for Vocational Rehabilitation that will:

- Describe the scope of vocational rehabilitation.
- Introduce stakeholders to the key principles and the concepts and ideas associated with vocational rehabilitation.
- Present an overview of current provision, including the support structures, the management approaches and the roles and responsibilities of the key players.
- Highlight the basic principles and approaches that are common to how employers, insurers and rehabilitation providers deliver and manage effective vocational rehabilitation.
- Summarise the current evidence base for vocational rehabilitation interventions. This section will be supported by new case studies;
- Introduce the new work that is underway or planned and highlight new areas of analysis to consider.

The Government will ensure that the Framework is underpinned by current evidence. However, despite the research which has been undertaken in this area there are gaps in this evidence base. As work is progressed to develop the Framework further areas for research and analysis will be identified. The Government also recognises that providing leadership on vocational rehabilitation may involve an element of encouraging the testing of policies that go beyond the current incomplete evidence base. The Government will suggest that all innovative approaches should be evaluated and will promote the sharing of results and good practice.

The Framework will not establish some form of comprehensive national vocational rehabilitation service. It is about making better use of existing resources regardless of who pays.

THE SCOPE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

It is clear that there are different views of what is meant by vocational rehabilitation and many definitions have been produced. The British Society of Rehabilitation Medicine defines vocational rehabilitation as “a process whereby those disadvantaged by illness or disability can be enabled to access, maintain or return to employment or other useful occupation”.

In producing a Framework for Vocational Rehabilitation, we do not want to try and agree another definition. To help you understand the scope of this work we have described vocational rehabilitation.

- **Vocational rehabilitation is a process** to overcome the barriers an individual faces in returning to employment which results from injury, illness or disability. It encompasses the support an individual and the employer needs to ensure the individual remains or returns to work, or accesses employment for the first time.
- **Vocational rehabilitation therefore includes** the approaches in place to enable people to access such help and which allow the practical delivery of vocational rehabilitation. In addition, vocational rehabilitation covers the wide range of interventions that are available to help individuals overcome health or disability related barriers to work and so maintain, return or access employment. This might involve re-training, capacity building, return to work management by employers, reasonable adjustments, disability awareness, condition management and medical treatment.

Health or disability related barriers to work

Government are aware that there are a range of factors that impact on the extent to which individuals are able to access, maintain and retain work. The Pathways to Work Green Paper contains further information on the health and disability related barriers. We know that people's working environments may make worse or be a cause of illness and poor health itself, for example:

- 24% of GP consultations with working age people are work related;
- Mental ill health cause 13.5 million lost working days;
- Musculo skeletal conditions caused 12.3 million lost working days;
- Few employers have access to any occupational health provision – only 3% of small/medium-sized employers for example; and
- Management of sickness absence is often poor despite there being established best practice to follow.

We are also aware that unemployment and inactivity causes poor health and health inequalities, and this effect is still seen after adjustment for social class, poverty, age and pre-existing morbidity.

We are learning from current and previous research such as New Deal for Disabled People, the condition management programme in Pathways to Work

and the Job Retention and Rehabilitation Pilot. However an increased understanding of what the health or disability related barriers to work are might enable us to identify all the structures, approaches and interventions that should be covered by the Framework for Vocational Rehabilitation.

Many people who suffer illness, or who have a disability, do access employment or return to work without additional support. However, some people never access employment or do not manage to return to work after an injury or illness. The health or disability related barriers to work could include:

- Individual barriers, such as perceptions and motivations;
- Systems barriers such as rules that work against effective support; and
- Environmental barriers such as transport and geographical location.

From your experience we would very much like to hear your views on what health or disability related barriers you have come across.

What currently works well and what does not?

As an employer, provider of vocational rehabilitation or organisation that helps individuals you may already have experience of the approaches used to deliver and manage vocational rehabilitation. Perhaps your company provides occupational health support or vocational rehabilitation or you have accessed support via another provider. This may have been an insurance company that provided the vocational rehabilitation or you may have participated in vocational rehabilitation when you were out of work.

It might be that you are involved in assisting sick and disabled people with their employment goals, your thoughts and ideas will be equally important. Part of this work will be about transferable experiences and good practice that might be potentially effective for both those in and out of work.

To help us identify the basic principles that are common to delivering and managing effective vocational rehabilitation, please think about the current approaches adopted to deliver vocational rehabilitation. From your experience what do you think works well and what does not work well. Sharing this information will enable us to consider your views as we work to identify practical, and effective, approaches to vocational rehabilitation.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The Framework will also help to identify the vocational rehabilitation interventions that appear to be most effective. Although the evidence here is limited, in part because vocational rehabilitation is often undertaken on a small scale, making robust evaluation difficult, we think that there is sufficient information to inform our thinking. Perhaps you can help to increase the information available in this area.

If your organisation has conducted research on interventions or if you have evaluated examples of best practice we would be very interested to

hear from you. We would be grateful if initial contributions here were no more than one page in length.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

The Government recognises that stakeholders will have different vocational rehabilitation experiences and objectives. We would like to understand what these are so that we can consider these as we develop our thinking on vocational rehabilitation. In addition, your views on what the Government can do to help you deliver your objectives would also be helpful. These views will help to inform future Government discussions on incentives and capacity building.

The Government also recognises that many stakeholders may not have experience of vocational rehabilitation. Such stakeholders may have sound reasons why they feel that vocational rehabilitation is not an appropriate approach for their organisation. The Government also encourages these stakeholders to share their thoughts on vocational rehabilitation as part of this discussion process.

By responding to the attached five broad questions you will help us understand your experiences.

DWP see this Discussion Paper as a very important first step towards producing a Framework for Vocational Rehabilitation. **Please find the time to take part in this important discussion.**

NEXT STEPS

The resulting Framework for Vocational Rehabilitation should be seen as a practical, and effective, first step to help you better understand and deliver vocational rehabilitation. Longer-term, the Framework will be a platform on which to build new approaches to vocational rehabilitation. We realise that change is not easy and understand that building the capacity of vocational rehabilitation may take time. However we are confident that by working together, with Government leading the way, we can continue to move forward to make a real difference.

The overall aim of the framework should be a first step to enable more people who have an injury, illness or disability to remain in, return to or access work in order to increase opportunities and life chances and to foster a more inclusive and prosperous society for all.

We encourage you to engage with us and get involved in what is a shared agenda. Your willingness to enter into positive dialogue with us is appreciated and we hope that to continue our positive relationship for mutual benefit.

We are of course open to further discussion on any of the points raised in this Paper. Please do not hesitate to contact me for clarification of any of the points raised at the address below.

Please send responses to this Discussion Paper by 12 July to the contact below. An electronic version of this Discussion Paper is available at www.dwp.gov.uk/consultations/2004/index.asp

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QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTION 1.

Does the description of vocational rehabilitation we are using correspond to your understanding and/or practice of vocational rehabilitation?

Yes

No

If not, what do you suggest we might include or exclude from the description?

QUESTION 2.

Have you come across health or disability related barriers to work?

Yes

No

Please describe the health or disability related barriers you have come across and to whom these were applicable (e.g. employer or person with a disability).

QUESTION 3.

From your experiences of vocational rehabilitation which approaches work best and which work less well and for whom?

QUESTION 4

What are your longer-term objectives for vocational rehabilitation, and what can Government do to help you deliver your objectives?

QUESTION 5

If you do not feel that vocational rehabilitation is an appropriate approach for your organisation, why not?

This is a specific discussion document, not published under the Cabinet Office Code of practice on consultation. Whilst this discussion paper is aimed at organisations with a specific interest in vocational rehabilitation, comments are nonetheless welcome from other interested parties.

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Ref: ELCI DP 1

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18 May 2004