



Customers' experiences of the Youth Contract

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Background

These findings are based on a quantitative survey of individuals who have been involved in elements of the Youth Contract, specifically:

- 1,917 interviews with customers receiving additional adviser support¹;
- 1,532 interviews with individuals taking up a work experience placement;
- 1,053 interviews with individuals taking up a sector-based work academy².

The survey focuses primarily on individuals aged under 25, and results in this summary are based on this age group only.

Work experience and sector-based work academies are key elements of the Government's Youth Contract measures. As part of the Youth Contract which was implemented from April 2012, it was announced that an extra 250,000 work experience or sector-based work academy places would be made available over three years. This will offer at least 100,000 opportunities a year and will offer a place for every 18 to 24 year old who wants one, before they enter the Work Programme.

Additional Jobcentre Plus support involves contact with the Jobcentre on a weekly basis from day one of claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and access to an adviser who can refer claimants to support services.

Adviser support

Contact with advisers

As part of the additional adviser support provided as part of the Youth Contract, it is intended that JSA claimants aged 18-24 years old have:

- at least weekly contact from day one (through face-to-face interviews, SMS texts, emails, phone calls, group sessions);
- from month 5, a weekly face-to-face meeting – either 'signing on' or an adviser doing intensive job search.

However, advisers can use their discretion to waive the additional adviser support for claimants who are actively moving closer to work, for example those who have a job offer, or who are actively participating in training, provision or work experience.

In the survey, up to 29 per cent of respondents who had spent at least five months on JSA said that they were having weekly face-to-face contact. Where weekly meetings were happening, they mostly appeared to have started near the beginning of the claim: 56 per cent said this was the case, and just four per cent said that they started after five months of their claim.

¹ Individuals were excluded who had left benefit or been referred to the Work Programme within three months of the start of their claim.

² The sector-based work academy sample is drawn from those customers who have been recorded as starting a pre-employment training element of the sector-based work academy.

Overall, 41 per cent of customers said that they had weekly contact with an adviser, either in face-to-face meetings or through other forms of contact, during their claim.

It is important to note that the accuracy of the findings may be subject to respondents' ability to recall events during their claim, particularly since we were asking customers to reflect back over a six-month period. Some caution should, therefore, be taken when interpreting this finding.

Support options

Three in four respondents said that they had been offered at least one of the various support options, most commonly a referral to an organisation to help with their CV and job applications (48 per cent). More than one in three (38 per cent) said they were offered a work experience placement and one in four (24 per cent) said they were offered a place on a sector-based work academy. A similar proportion (28 per cent) said they were offered a referral to the National Careers Service (NCS) or a careers adviser, while 13 per cent were offered a placement on Mandatory Work Activity. In a separate question, more than one in three respondents (36 per cent) said they were told about the wage incentive scheme.

In all cases, at least half of those offered an opportunity said that they actually took it up. Overall, 37 per cent took up a referral to an organisation to help with their CV or job applications, while 20 per cent said they took up a work experience placement, 18 per cent a referral to the NCS or a careers adviser, 13 per cent a sector-based work academy and seven per cent Mandatory Work Activity.

Respondents who had taken up support options were likely to say that they found them helpful (at least 75 per cent said this of each type of support).

Customer experience and views

Just over half (54 per cent) of respondents who had attended more than one meeting said they had always seen the same adviser. Among those that had seen more than one adviser, 33 per cent said they would have preferred to see the same adviser, although the majority did not have a strong preference on which adviser they saw.

Most customers thought that they had spent the right amount of time with staff and advisers at Jobcentre Plus (78 per cent of those with regular contact), while 13 per cent said they had not had enough time. The majority of customers (61 per cent) also agreed that the advice they received matched their personal needs and circumstances, while 22 per cent disagreed.

Around one in three respondents (36 per cent) agreed that they felt under pressure to take part in activities that were not suited to their needs and circumstances, but respondents were more likely to disagree (45 per cent).

Two in three customers (65 per cent) said they were satisfied with the overall service offered by Jobcentre Plus in helping them to find employment, while 23 per cent were dissatisfied. Views were more positive among those who had received weekly contact, as well as those who had always seen the same adviser. There were also differences by claimant characteristics: views were less positive among those with specific or more complex needs, such as those with a health condition or disability, those who were nervous about work, and those who were highly qualified.

Employment and intermediate outcomes

By the time of the interview (around six months after the start of the JSA claim), 41 per cent of respondents said that they had moved into work at some point since their JSA claim. It is important to note that this figure does not constitute the employment rate for all claimants at the six-month point since those individuals

who had left benefit within three months of starting their claim had been excluded from the survey.³ One in six respondents (16 per cent) who were currently in work said that they had got the job through Jobcentre Plus. However, a larger proportion (43 per cent) said that the advice and support they had received from Jobcentre Plus had helped them to succeed in getting the job.

The majority of respondents said that the support they had received from Jobcentre Plus had helped them, either in increasing their motivation to find work (65 per cent), increasing their chances of finding suitable work (62 per cent), and helping them to build up their confidence about finding a job they could do (56 per cent).

Work experience

Nature of placement

Work experience placements were most likely to be in a shop (45 per cent) or an office (25 per cent). The majority of placements were at small workplaces: three in four placements (77 per cent) were at sites with fewer than 25 employees.

Experience and attitudes

Around one in five (21 per cent) work experience participants said that their Jobcentre Plus adviser did not speak to them before they were referred onto their placement about what it would involve⁴. However, when advisers did speak to participants about what the work experience placement would involve, it was generally explained clearly (in 89 per cent of cases).

³ The survey focused on longer term claimants in order to gather feedback on Jobcentre Plus support over a longer period of time.

⁴ We understand from DWP that the adviser's role at referral is to provide an overview of the work experience scheme including the benefits of participating. The details of work involved in the placement is usually provided by the placement employers after referral.

Around four in five (82 per cent) said they felt positive about their overall experience of work experience, including 48 per cent who were very positive. One in eight (12 per cent) had a negative overall opinion.

Participants also expressed positive attitudes to various aspects of their work experience placement. Around three in four were satisfied with the amount of work (75 per cent) and the variety of tasks involved (73 per cent). A similar proportion (79 per cent) said that the placement length was about right, while 13 per cent said it was too long, and seven per cent said it was too short.

There were also positive attitudes towards the employers offering placements. At least three in four participants agreed that they were treated like a valuable member of staff (80 per cent), that staff were willing to teach them new skills (81 per cent), and that the placement was well organised (76 per cent).

Attitudes were considerably less positive among participants who did not complete their placement, and were also less positive among participants with a long-term health problem or disability.

Completion and job outcomes

Around one in four work experience participants (26 per cent) did not complete their placement. Some of reasons for non-completion were 'positive', such as receiving a job or an interview; this accounted for 23 per cent of non-completions. Other respondents left for personal reasons (e.g. illness), and small proportions gave specific reasons related to aspects of the placement: the work, people, training or hours involved.

Among those who completed their placement, 22 per cent were offered a job by the placement organisation (this represents 16 per cent of all work experience participants, including non-completers).

Nine in ten (90 per cent) participants who were offered a job with their placement organisation took up the job offer. Most participants who had accepted a job offer were still in that job at the time of the interview, around four months after the start of the placement (87 per cent).

In addition, other participants moved into work after the placement (at a different employer). Of these, half (49 per cent) said that the placement helped them to get the job. In total, 36 per cent of work experience participants were in employment at the time of interview.

Soft outcomes

Three in four work experience participants (74 per cent) said they gained skills during their placement. These included customer service skills, practical work skills and increased confidence.

Sector-based work academies

Nature of sector-based work academy

The sector based work academy sample was drawn from those recorded as starting the pre-employment training element of a sector-based work academy. In addition, 30 per cent of participants had a work experience placement, including 21 per cent who also had a job interview at the end of the placement⁵.

Most participants (74 per cent) received their training solely with an external training provider, while a further seven per cent went to training with both an external training provider and received workplace-based training. The remaining 19 per cent received their training at the workplace.

Experience and attitudes

In total, 15 per cent of sector-based work academy participants said that the adviser did not speak to them about what the training course would involve before they went on it. On this point, we understand from DWP that in order to tailor the scheme to employers' requirements, full details of the sector-based work academy training or work experience placement are not always available at the point of referral. Where participants were informed in advance, the majority (88 per cent) said that the training was clearly explained to them.

The vast majority (87 per cent) of sector-based work academy participants said that they had a positive experience overall, including 47 per cent who were very positive. Just eight per cent had a negative experience. Where a work experience placement was included (in addition to training), views were particularly positive.

Participants expressed positive attitudes towards their training, with 90 per cent satisfied with the overall quality. This was similar for those who were trained by an external training provider as by an employer.

Among sector-based work academy participants who had a work experience placement, attitudes towards the placement were also positive. For example, 85 per cent agreed that they were treated like a valuable member of staff, and 89 per cent felt they received the right amount of supervision.

Attitudes were consistently less positive among those who did not complete their sector-based work academy.

⁵ Work placement numbers may have been underestimated in this survey given that the placement element can be incorporated into employer-based training which can lead to customer confusion about which elements have been completed.

Completion and job outcomes

A high proportion of sector-based work academy participants completed the training (90 per cent). The most common reason for non-completion was finding another job (31 per cent), while one in four of those who left the training did so due to illness. Completion of the work placement element of sector-based work academies was also high (93 per cent).

Where sector-based work academies included a work placement, 42 per cent of participants were offered a job at the end of their placement. Nine in ten (90 per cent) who were offered a job took up the offer, and at the time of the survey (around four months after the start of participation), 72 per cent of those who took up employment with their placement organisation were still working there.

Soft outcomes

Three in four sector-based work academy participants said they gained new skills during their training, including practical work skills, specialist skills, customer service skills and increased confidence.

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The full report of these research findings is published by the Department for Work and Pensions (ISBN 978 1 910219 10 2. Research Report 865. February 2014).

You can download the full report free from: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

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