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A Review of the Economic Evidence Around Employment Support

Who should read this?

Local Authority and NHS commissioners of employment supports for people with disabilities (including mental health problems and learning disabilities).

Background

Supporting disabled people into paid work is a policy priority for local authorities, and commissioners need evidence on which to base investment decisions.

The School of Social Care Research (SSCR) commissioned NDTi to carry out a scoping review to see what economic evidence is currently available. The review was carried out in July 2011, by Anita Wilkins, Bill Love, Rob Greig & Helen Bowers, at NDTi.

Purpose of the Review

To provide a clearer picture of the evidence available to commissioners, to help them make sound investment decisions.

The review aims both to identify what economic evidence *does* exist relating to different models of employment support, and to highlight gaps in the evidence, and questions needing further study.

Plain English summary

The NDTi looked for research reports giving evidence about different types of employment support for people with disabilities. We were particularly looking for economic evidence, for example evidence about the relationship between money spent on employment supports and people getting paid work.

We found that there is *some* economic evidence, especially about particular kinds of employment support e.g. Supported Employment and Individual Placement and Support (IPS). However there are also many gaps in the evidence, and lots more questions that need answering in order to help people in Local Authorities make good decisions about how to spend the money.

Main findings

The review particularly focuses on two client groups (people with learning disability and those with mental health problems). We define 'paid employment' as being a retainable, paid role within an open, competitive employment market (which includes the option of self employment), and which provides a significant number of hours of employment (often defined as 16 hours per week or more). Some employment support approaches may not share this definition; however in the review we included anything that could be seen as a 'potential step' towards the end goal as we define it.

The field of employment support in the UK is currently characterised by a complex, interrelated array of approaches, pilots and schemes, which frame the issue in a variety of ways. In order to present evidence relating to these different approaches, we grouped them into six main categories:

1. Models targeting job retention / career advancement
2. Models that begin with finding a particular paid role, then provide support to do/stay in that role
3. Models that provide training/job preparation in the setting of a mainstream work place (but not necessarily the one in which they will go on to work)
4. Models that provide training / job preparation in a sheltered and/or unpaid environment, as a route into open employment
5. Models & approaches that focus on specific life stages & client groups
6. Approaches that focus on mechanisms - how support might be accessed and/or funded.

Continued overleaf



Main findings – continued

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- Designing services to be open not closed

This report

A copy of the full report is available at:

<http://www.ndti.org.uk/major-projects/employment-support-for-disabled-people/>

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The review then presents a tabulated overview of each approach under these 6 categories, highlighting any economic evidence available (as illustrated in the following ‘screen shot’ example):

Typology	Model / approach	Client Group emphasis?	How / where used & tested	Key distinguishing characteristics & mechanisms	Brief overview of existing economic evidence
1. Models targeting job retention / career advancement	Working for Wellness Employment Support Service	MH	Pilots in 15 London Boroughs, as part of IAPT.	Integrates psychological therapy and employment support pathways. For commissioners: Investment fund for service re-design, e.g. employment of job advisers co-located with mental health team. For workers: Advice, guidance, signposting, in-work support, help with employer / adjustment issues.	Economic impact report published 2011 – mainly CBA: every £1 spent generates £2.79 of benefits; £0.84 for the individual and £1.95 for the state. Of the 1319 individuals referred to the employment support across the 5 sites covered by the evaluation, 260 were supported to retain their employment and 95 were supported to move into work. (OPM, 2011)
	Employment Retention and Advancement (ERA)	Both (Wider)	Model tested in US (from 1999) and UK (from 2003) – implemented by Jobcentre Plus in 6 regions	Input such as employer engagement, individual case management, guidance and career coaching, in-work training and skill development – aimed at people who, following welfare to work placement, have become trapped in low-wage work (as described by Foster & Purvis, 2011). UK ‘demonstration’ project was targeted at long term unemployed over 25 and unemployed lone parents.	Learning from these projects provided in Foster & Purvis, 2011, but no apparent economic evidence.

Conclusions and key messages

- There is acknowledged evidence that Supported Employment (within the learning disability field) and IPS (within mental health) are the most effective solutions to supporting people into paid jobs, and there is more economic evidence in support of these approaches than for others.
- The type of economic analysis that has predominated in those studies reviewed is comparative Cost Benefit Analysis. Relatively little in the way of overall Cost Effectiveness analysis seems to have been published, i.e. the total amounts that have been invested in a scheme, and how many people have successfully gained jobs as a result. The lack of this makes it difficult for commissioners to understand whether they are commissioning effective and successful services or not.
- This problem is compounded by evidence of variability and liberal interpretation of how to deliver ‘Supported Employment’ and IPS. This means that a service using the label of an evidence based approach may be doing different things to that which underpinned the evidence of successful outcomes – thus making it still more difficult for commissioners to know what is / isn’t a cost effective employment support service.
- There also remain gaps and inconsistencies in the existing evidence, for example in relation to ‘real’ savings to the taxpayer if the majority of work gained is part time, and people remain on benefits.
- Recent research into newer approaches beyond Supported Employment and IPS has been more limited. Few of these alternative approaches appear to have been spread or sustained at a national level - which has limited the capacity to develop robust evidence.
- From a cross client group perspective, there is common ground between the employment support models that have developed within the mental health and learning disability fields, but with limited cross-over between the two, in terms of either evidence or delivery. However the review also highlighted ways in which models might need to be tailored in order to respond to individuals who have different issues and needs.

The review ends with a number of recommendations for future study. NDTi are now undertaking a further research study, funded by SSCR, to generate better evidence on the cost effectiveness of employment supports.

