

USING PEOPLE POWER TO SUPPORT JOBSEEKERS

In many fields, such as health and social care, personalisation, co-production and tailoring to local needs are commonly accepted as important features. In contrast, employment support remains highly centralised and poorly integrated with other services and local labour markets. Yet people powered models are likely to have huge potential to improve employment support.

There is a wave of new innovations that take a people-centred approach to supporting jobseekers. These range from Volition, which provides meaningful volunteering opportunities and connections to the world of work, to Smart Works, through which professional women volunteer to help other women who have been out of work to prepare for interviews. Steps Ahead makes use of CIPD members' professional skills to mentor jobseekers. Meanwhile, in some areas Jobcentre Plus has taken advantage of opportunities for local flexibility to offer radically different service models – such as MyGo, the youth jobcentre in Ipswich, or services co-located and co-managed with the local authority in Leeds. However, this type of innovation is relatively rare and not actively championed.

The introduction of Universal Credit will create an even stronger incentive for the state to help jobseekers find good, living wage jobs. We believe this can best be achieved by making much better use of People Powered approaches to support jobseekers into employment.

1. Set up a People Powered Jobcentre demonstration project.

- DWP should set up a programme to enable 10–20 areas to experiment with new models of employment service delivery that are highly networked, people-centred and tailored to local needs and opportunities. This should allow the possibility for radical experimentation, for example separating the Jobcentre Plus functions of benefits administration and employment support, digitising services or moving away from physical jobcentres and providing services in community locations.
- These models should be closely connected to their local community, and Jobcentre Plus should act as a gateway to other services, aiming to broker support and connections that can help jobseekers

find good employment. This should draw on the wide range of support for jobseekers that can be provided in local communities, for example by Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations (VCSEs), local businesses and volunteers offering mentoring and other types of support.

- These pilots should be run through local collaborations or consortia. This should be supported by funding that is devolved to local areas and provides a strong incentive for collaboration and creativity. This should include a mechanism through which local partners benefit from the savings made when a person moves from unemployment into work (at present, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) estimates that around 80 per cent of these savings accrue to central government).*

- The demonstration project should run for at least three years to allow results and learning to be gathered, with potential for a full roll-out if successful.

2. Make greater use of Jobcentre Plus Freedoms and Flexibilities to develop and commission projects and services that put the principles of people helping people at their core.

- Actively encourage Jobcentre Plus District Managers to make greater use of Flexible Support Fund (FSF) to commission innovative people powered services.
- Use the operational space provided under the Freedoms and Flexibilities system to introduce more peer-to-peer and volunteer-led support as part of the Jobcentre Plus offer.
- Publish data on how Freedoms and Flexibilities are being used, and highlight examples of promising service models developed or commissioned, so that Jobcentres can learn from each other's practices.
- Support replication of effective schemes by working with Jobcentre Plus and VCSE / social action groups to identify the core features that make them work, and develop manuals or playbooks that can be used to develop or commission similar schemes in other areas.
- Establish a replication scheme that provides funding, advice and support to allow locally tailored adaptation of successful models. Make tools and data available for simple evaluation and testing the effectiveness of commissioned schemes, for example by replicating the Justice Data Lab model for employment projects.

* Bivand and Simmonds (2014) *The Benefits Of Tackling Worklessness and Low Pay*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation