



**ReAct and Timewise
Change Agent
programme:
evaluation report**

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The ReAct Partnership

About Us

The ReAct Partnership is a new, industry-led, active collaboration to support a continuous improvement community in the Restart programme through action research, shared and iterative learning, and the development of applied, evidence-based resources.

The Partnership is co-funded by the eight 'prime providers' for the Restart programme — FedCap Employment, G4S, Ingeus, Jobs 22, Maximus, Reed, Seetec Plus and Serco — and is being managed by the Institute of Employment Studies (IES), working alongside the Institute for Employability Professionals (IEP) and the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA).



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Executive Summary

Background

The Timewise Change Agent programme was developed to help Restart providers increase their participants' access to fair flexible working from day one. A series of online workshops and coaching sessions were delivered in 2022. An evaluation of the programme involved an online survey and virtual interviews with a sample of delegates.

27 individuals took on the role of 'change agent' for their organisations. Most change agents felt that the course was targeted at the right cohort, although it was generally felt that it would have been helpful to engage more staff members on the programme. They were also very satisfied with the content of the Timewise Change Agent programme.

Key outcomes and impact

All but one of the change agents responding to the evaluation survey reported an increase in their skills, knowledge and confidence following the programme. Most felt they had successfully cascaded the learning to their organisations, however some found this challenging due to the nature of their roles.

Several change agents were confident that the programme had facilitated significant increases in the number of participants moving into flexible roles from day one. Examples of successful flexible working brokerage included:

- changing start times, enabling applicants to use public transport
- the creation of split shifts, creating part time roles that allow applicants to balance work with other needs
- applicants being placed into home-working roles, allowing applicants to minimise travel time and associated costs

Barriers and enablers

It emerged that the Covid-19 pandemic, compounded by the impact of the subsequent cost of living increases, a lack of affordable childcare and access to public transport, had resulted in a major shift among Restart applicants and the level of flexibility they want and need.

Manufacturing emerged as a difficult to reach sector, however there were mixed accounts of successes and failures with other sectors. There were also mixed views on whether size of business was a factor. Employers' perceptions of flexible working, unconscious bias and concerns about wider implications for existing staff were all identified as barriers. There was a demand, among change agents, for more resources targeting employers to promote the wide range of possible ways to introduce flexible working.

The culture, systems and processes within employing organisations was also recognised as a key factor that affected the successful introduction of flexible working, with some employers unwilling to take the risk of doing something different. Piloting was seen as an important mechanism for encouraging employers to take the leap.

For the change agents themselves, critical success factors included their role and the level of influence they were able to have (both within their own organisation and with employers). Change agents struggled with systemic barriers within their own organisations, including a lack of flexibility for their staff and the pressure to place applicants making it more difficult to create longer-term goals. However, the confidence to challenge was highlighted as a particular critical success factor that the programme had supported, providing the opportunity to drive a genuine change in approach.

Programme overview

The government backed Restart Scheme gives Universal Credit claimants who have been out of work for at least nine months enhanced support to find jobs. The Restart Scheme is delivered across England and Wales in 12 different Contract Package Areas (CPAs). Each is managed by a prime provider. The prime providers and their delivery partners, including specialist charities and small and medium-sized enterprises, complement the work of Jobcentre Plus with extra expertise, investment, innovation and additional capacity for tailored support.

The Timewise Change Agent programme was designed to support the prime providers' employer engagement teams to improve Restart Scheme participants' access to fair flexible work from day one. Through developing the ReAct employer engagement teams' expertise in flexible working it is anticipated that they will, in turn, be better able to help employers unlock more job vacancies to flexible working for people who need them most (particularly parents, carers, older workers and people with disabilities).

The programme was designed as a series of four online workshops, four coaching sessions and four masterclasses with employers (involving four of the prime providers) and a final dissemination masterclass webinar. It was delivered over several months, with the coaching sessions completing in November 2022.

The overall programme **aims** were identified as follows:

- Build insights, tools and capabilities into flexible job design to enhance employer engagement and support services
- Incentivise large employers to unlock more job vacancies to flexible work from day one to tackle skills shortages and enable inclusive recruitment
- Evaluate impact on increasing positive outcomes for job seekers

The programme had specific **objectives** to:

- Build understanding of levers to engage employers in flexible working, such as equality, diversity & inclusion and how to use them in conversations with employers about vacancies and recruitment
- Develop expertise in flexible hiring and job design in order to enhance employer engagement
- Incentivise large employers to unlock more job vacancies to flexible work from day one
- Increase availability of good quality, flexible jobs for jobseekers

- Create opportunities for change agents to share their learning within their teams and organisations to grow capability in flexible working

ReAct partners were invited to identify two 'change agents' to participate in the programme. It was suggested that these should be a mix of employment consultants and team leaders, as frontline experience was regarded as essential, and attendees would be responsible for disseminating what they learnt within their wider teams.

Evaluation approach

Survey

A survey was issued to all change agents on completion of the coaching sessions in November 2022 to identify changes in their level of knowledge and confidence to implement the learning. It also sought to identify examples of where the learning has already been implemented and assess its impact. Fourteen responses were received to the online survey, however only four were fully complete.

Interviews

Six delegates were interviewed in December 2022 (three of whom said that they had fully completed the survey). This provided a more free-flowing opportunity for the providers to share how the learning from the workshop and coaching sessions had been cascaded through the organisations and discuss the practicalities of delivering change within their clients, the employing organisations. We interviewed one attendee from each organisation represented at the Timewise sessions. It should be noted that our interviewees had attended a high proportion of sessions. This means that, although we were able to gather fuller feedback on the sessions and how the learning has been applied, we have less feedback from those individuals who found it difficult to engage with the programme. It was also the case that some contacts had changed role or left the organisation.

We also spoke with Timewise, the partner organisation who delivered the ReAct Change Agent programme, in December 2022 to gain their reflections on the programme.

Programme targeting and content

Levels of engagement

In total, 27 individuals were identified from the six prime providers, covering 10 CPAs. Each prime provider was asked to nominate two delegates per CPA and an additional seven replacements were added as some of the original 20 changed roles or left their organisations. All prime providers were represented at all the workshops and the overall number of delegates at each workshop session was 11-14 out of the potential 20. Typical job titles were Employer Engagement Manager, Employer Services Manager and Account Manager, but attendees also included senior managers, national leads and heads of departments. At least one delegate did not have an employer facing role.

Most felt that the training was targeted at the right people and were positive about the mix of attendees and the quality of discussion. However, several said that the net could have been cast wider. Suggestions for additional attendees included employer engagement team members (junior and senior), marketing and training colleagues as well as representatives from partner organisations. Some noted the importance of engaging individuals who had direct experience of employer engagement and one commented on the need for both strategic and practical thinking.

Some delegates struggled to attend all the sessions. This was often due to work commitments but also due to absence, including holiday leave (some sessions were run in July). Fourteen change agents had been unable to attend all the sessions as they were either new to the organisation or had left their organisation or changed their role part way through. Of those interviewed, most confirmed that they had attended at least one of the coaching sessions. One commented that it was particularly helpful to be able to bring a colleague along with them.

The masterclasses were not delivered as intended. There was an apparent lack of demand among employers, however there also appeared to be some reluctance among the change agents to engage employers directly in this way. One commented that employers who are doing well on flexible working may not recognise the need to attend a 'masterclass', while those who are less advanced may feel intimidated by the concept. Another said something similar, commenting that 'employers either run with it or it's a flat no'. Two did, however, suggest that giving their employers the option to attend a Timewise webinar may be beneficial.

Content of the training

Respondents were happy, overall, with the training they had undertaken and complimentary about the facilitator and the quality of the materials shared. The three survey respondents who answered the question on the quality of the workshops, rated them as 'good' or 'very good'. The single survey respondent who confirmed they had attended a coaching session, rated it as 'very good'. When asked whether they would recommend the programme, all those who answered responded positively.



When asked if they would recommend the programme to others in similar roles, all respondents said they would.

As well as valuing the expertise shared by the Timewise facilitators, delegates liked the interactive nature of the sessions and the opportunity to hear from other delegates about their experiences of working with employers on flexible working. One commented that it was useful to hear different opinions and reassuring that they were facing similar issues. Another noted the importance of being set a challenge to put the learning into practice.

When asked for suggested improvements, two commented that more marketing literature to share with employers would have been useful and two also suggested that hearing from an employer at the sessions would have been helpful. One said that the development of an action plan or the opportunity to join an Action Learning Set may have been useful. Another suggested that it may have been better to avoid the July and August holiday season and one suggested that their evaluation interview should have taken place sooner.

All three of those who responded to a survey question asking them about the quality of the tools, resources and links that Timewise provided, said they were useful. One interviewee commented that they had yet to look at them, saying that maybe something interactive would be more engaging. Four of the interviewees commented that they had used the tools, links and resources to back up their employer engagement activity, with one saying that it was helpful to have a bank of information that they could use and another saying 'it was great that things were evidence based'. One mentioned that they had used the information to support a presentation to Restart partners and suggested that a single, condensed version would have been helpful for this purpose.

There were mixed views on whether further training or support would be useful. One survey respondent said 'no' but two felt that a review session may be helpful. One suggested that a themed session could be run every six months and another felt that an Action Learning Set

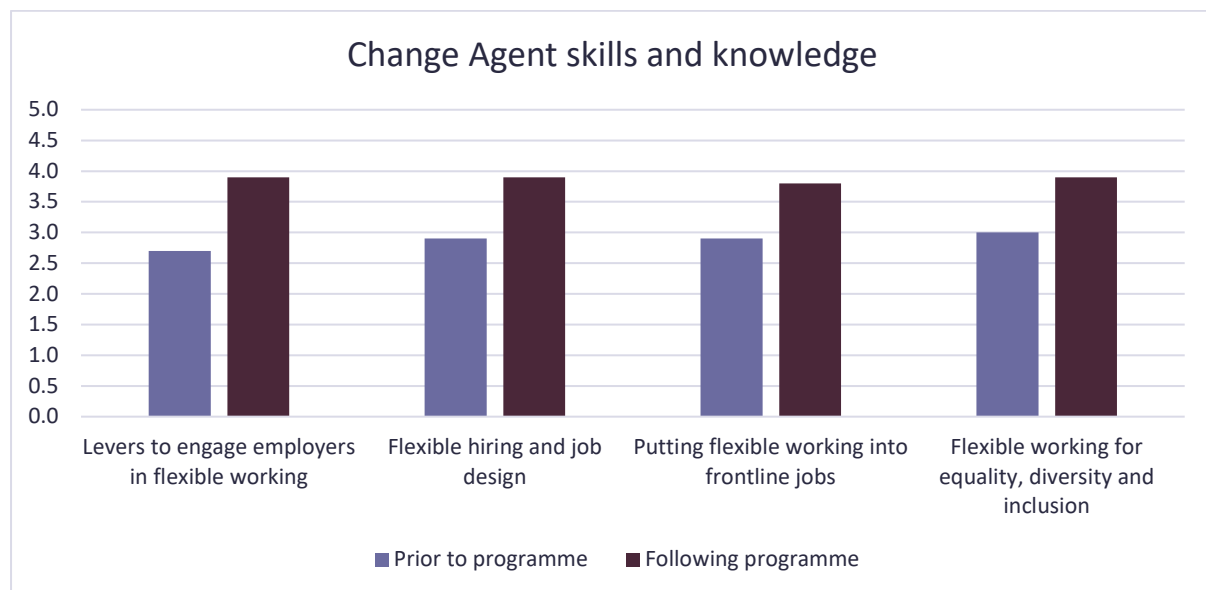
may be useful. One interviewee suggested that more 1-2-1 opportunities may be helpful and two suggested that follow on support in engaging employers would be useful.

Outcomes from the programme

Improved skills and knowledge

Our survey asked the change agents to retrospectively identify their knowledge and skill levels against the workshop topics pre and post programme, giving themselves a score out of five. Eight of the nine change agents that responded to this question reported an increase in their level of skills and knowledge following the programme. Two change agents reported a significant improvement across all workshop topics. It is notable that the most learning appeared to happen at the first workshop.

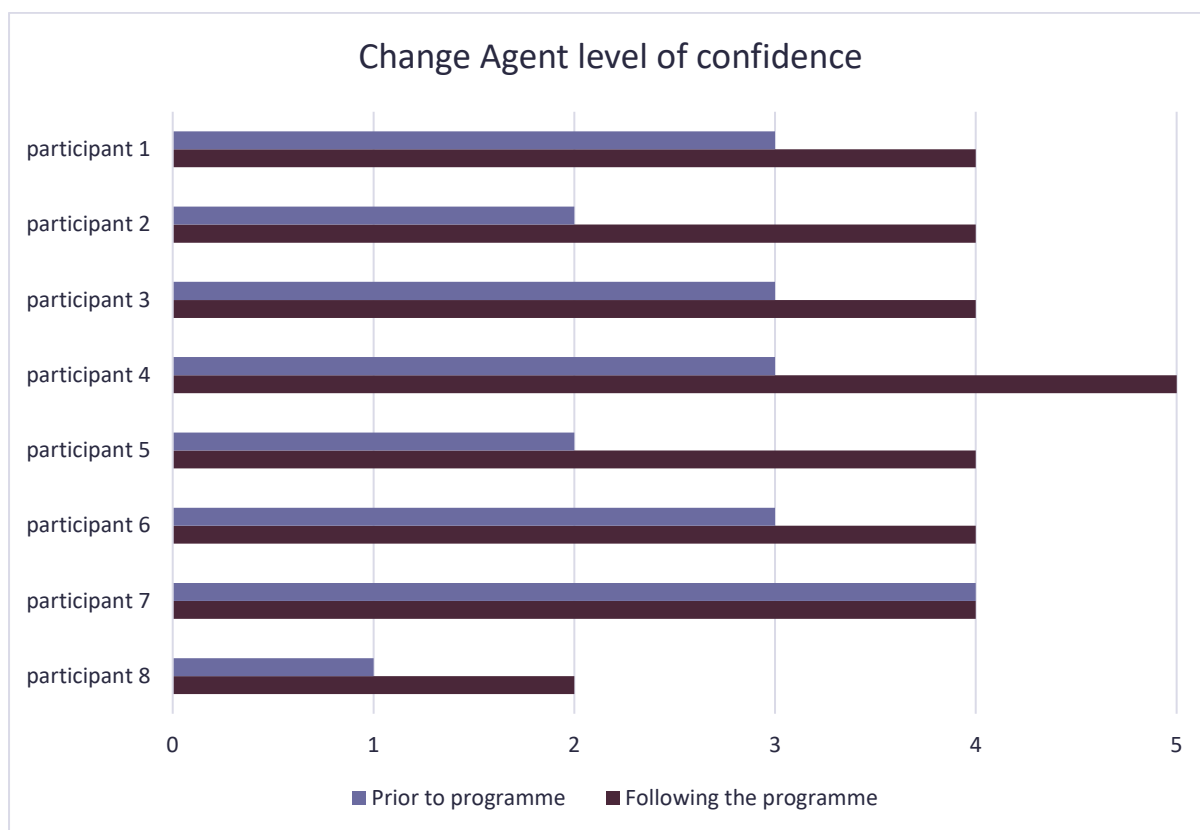
Figure 1: Change Agent skills and knowledge



Increased confidence

All but one of the change agents who responded to our survey question on confidence levels reported an increase following the programme, with three change agents stating that their confidence had significantly improved. It is worth noting that the change agent with the highest self-confidence level prior to the programme, recorded among the most significant increases in knowledge and skills, suggesting that their perceptions of what was possible had shifted during the programme.

Figure 2: Change Agent level of confidence



Cascading the learning

Most change agents we spoke to felt that they were clear about how to cascade the learning within their organisations and said this had gone relatively well. Those responding to the survey rated their success, in this regard, at an average of 3.5 out of a possible 5. Most also reported an increase in the confidence of their wider teams following the training and cascade work that they had already delivered.

I could tell from being in the session that it would be really beneficial to myself. So every other person in my role, it's gonna be the most beneficial too. So that was very clear.

Several change agents provided detail on how they had shared ideas across their teams, and two were sharing the learning with delivery partners. Methods for dissemination included the use of a weekly team call as well as the delivery of training workshops and presentations. It was noted that the learning was also relevant to their wider offer, supporting people into work.

We shared ideas together and used it as a way to get more employers on board as we have a lot of people on the Work & Health programme that require flexibility.

However, two change agents indicated that they may not have been the right person to cascade the learning successfully. Two suggested that managers with team leadership roles

would be better positioned to cascade the learning, with one adding that they did not have the capacity to track progress as it was not part of their overall role. One also commented that they only had one other person in their team and another performed a consultancy role so did not lead teams. One said that they had not shared the learning as they felt that there was no demand from employers in their locality to offer greater flexibility, due to the industrial nature of the work.

Impact of the programme

Impact on employers

Two of the survey respondents felt that their participation on the programme had already changed employers' recruitment practice, leading to improvements in inclusive recruitment. They reported an increase in the ratio of job vacancies specifying flexible working and a higher conversation rate of getting job seekers to job interviews.

Several of the change agents we spoke to were able to provide detailed examples of how they had supported changes within some of the employing organisations they worked with. For example, one had worked with an existing contact to reorganise long shifts into part time, split shifts.

They were advertising all the time or like re recruiting or they'd get someone who'd say they're OK for the position and then, ultimately 3-4 weeks later, they couldn't deal with the long hours each day, which is actually costing them [the employer] more money.

One Restart provider reported particularly successful outcomes from homeworking starts, with 37 out of 38 applicants securing a job. There was also an example of the use of a more flexible recruitment approach (without formal interviews) and a move towards a new hybrid working model, both of which had resulted in impressive recruitment successes for employers. Another had negotiated a later start time for Restart participants, enabling them to apply for vacancies that were previously unable to access due to a lack of public transport at the previous start time.

Impact on Restart participants

There were reports of significant increases in the number of Restart participants moving into jobs because of the programme.

I can think of a few employers that I have passed over [to Restart participants] with those sorts of specific [flexible working] requirements and they've taken up employment with them. So, yeah, I think it's been positive.

There was also a reported increase in the number of participants going into part time roles following the Restart providers' participation on the change agent programme. One change agent reported a significant increase in the number of part time roles being offered by employers and, notably, higher paid, quality part time working. Another change agent also noted an increase in the diversity of successful recruits in terms of their geographical spread.

Stories of success

A warehousing employer had shifts that started at 06:30. On exploring the reasons for this, the Restart provider found that this was because this was what had always been done and there was no real business driver for it.

When they told the business that applicants could not access public transport at that time, the employer agreed to change the start time to 07:30. This allowed Restart applicants to be successfully placed into the roles.

A facilities management services company was offering shifts of 09:00 to 18:00. The Restart provider had lots of applicants seeking part time work and a nine-hour shift excluded lots of these potential recruits.

They asked the employer lots of open questions to explore whether it would be feasible to split the shifts on offer. Initially the organisation had concerns regarding perceived additional costs associated with having two people on the payroll, including doubling training costs.

However, having highlighted the potential for cost savings (from less re-advertising, re-recruitment, and re-training to replace staff who leave), the employer agreed to give split shifts a go. Since then, every Restart applicant that has been placed on a split shift has remained in post.

An international high street retailer introduced 'open hiring' in Australia and was interested in trying this in the UK. Open hiring involves potential recruits doing eight hours of work without a formal interview process.

The Restart provider found that supporting this approach resulted in more applicants being successfully placed with the employer and an increase in those securing part time roles.

Key barriers and enablers

Barriers and enablers for Restart participants

It was felt that Covid-19 had changed the attitudes and expectations of Restart participants. Some are more reluctant to work onsite and an increased number are looking for homebased working opportunities.

We're in that world now where people are wanting that work life balance.

There were also, however, applicants who wanted traditional ways of working. It was noted that health and wellbeing issues were another major issue for some Restart participants and flexible working did not always address those issues.

The costs associated with childcare, travel and heating are also contributing to Restart applicants' reluctance in pursuing specific job opportunities. An aversion to taking financial risk has been compounded by stagnant wages and an unpredictable economic context.

When you're out of work you know where you are with support, some are scared to take the leap.

It was also noted that many Restart participants have lower skill and qualification levels which tend to give them less bargaining power with prospective employers. It was also suggested that there is a lack of confidence among the Restart participants to request flexibility.

The availability of childcare was reported as a major issue for Restart participants, as was the availability of public transport.

Barriers and enablers for businesses

Types of organisations

Change agents reported that the sector in which employers operate is a key factor that influenced their openness to discussions on flexible working. One delegate went so far as to suggest that flexible working was essentially a closed door to the industrial employers whom they worked with in their locality.

This information has not been shared across the offices as there are virtually no employers willing to participate.

Manufacturing was highlighted as a difficult to reach sector. However, there was a more mixed account of successes in hospitality and retail, as well as warehousing and logistics.

One change agent commented that smaller organisations find it more difficult to introduce flexible working, although others said that it can be more difficult for larger or well-established employers to bring about a change to their culture, systems and processes.

Systems and processes

It was felt that some employers are entrenched in existing ways of recruiting and too focused on addressing urgent vacancies to take a more strategic view. A compounding issue for employers is the perception of risk associated with taking a new approach on flexible working. Employers can swing, therefore, from having systems that appear to work (and seen as not needing to be fixed) to having systems that do not work (but feel too risky to change).

When you're dealing with immediate pressure, there's a knee jerk reaction to find a short-term solution. This is a long-term approach.

Some employers were also concerned about making changes to recruitment that may have an impact on their wider employee base. They were concerned that offering flexibility to new recruits would raise issues of fairness and increase the demand among existing employees to have access to the same working conditions. This was identified as a 'massive barrier' by one change agent that prevented employers from promoting flexible working approaches for new recruits, particularly as new staff were unknown quantities who had yet to gain a position of trust with their employer. However, another change agent did not agree, saying that only one employer had raised fairness as issue and suggesting that it was important to 'pick your battles'.

Encouraging the employers to pilot flexible working approaches was seen as a helpful to circumvent some of these barriers.

Perceptions of flexible working

Some change agents alluded to the different perceptions that exist around what is meant by flexible working. As a result of the dramatic increase in home and hybrid working following the pandemic, some businesses perceive flexible working to be only something that is accessible to staff who can perform their roles from home.

Furthermore, the traditional understanding of flexible working e.g. part time, flexitime, term time working, home / hybrid working (and the process of applying for flexible working itself), do not always result in the flexibility that Restart applicants want or need. For example, the introduction of a later start time for new recruits gave the flexibility that

Restart participants needed without the introduction of any kind of recognised form of 'flexible working'. One change agent suggested that unconscious bias was another issue, with employers concerned that hiring recruits with caring responsibilities is more likely to result in employees taking more time off work.

I think the thing that they're scared of is that they're worried they're going to lose that performance.

Change agents commented on the need for evidence to persuade employers of the benefits of change, particularly in the specific context of some sectors which were more resistant to flexible working. While the evidence provided by Timewise was extremely useful, there was an appetite for more. One commented that employers often do not know where to go for support with implementing flexible working practices.

Another change agent said that making changes to flexible working was just as important for employee retention as it was for recruitment. It was noted that some employers recognised the need to make fundamental changes to address recruitment difficulties and reduce the numbers of employees leaving their organisation, something that had increased post-Covid.

It's not just about recruitment, it's all about retention as well.

Barriers and enablers for Restart providers

Levels of influence

There were several things that contributed to the level of influence that a change agent had over the employers that they worked with. One key factor was their role and access to employers and, specifically, the nature of the contact that they had with the businesses. Where change agents' roles involved direct employer contact, they did not always find it easy to access the right contact within the employer, particularly in larger organisations.

If it's a large company, it's gonna be a lot more hoops to jump through to get through to the right person.

This issue appeared to be linked to seniority of both the change agent and their employer contact. Some change agents held national key account management relationships with large employers, which enabled them to gain access to the decision makers within those organisations. It was also linked to confidence. While one experienced change agent felt

confident to tackle flexible working issues with new employer contacts, most reported success with contacts where they already held an established relationship and had a track record of placing recruits.

As discussed in the section above, the question of job design is one that may go beyond the remit of the employer contact responsible for recruitment. This can mean that the change agents have difficulty accessing the right person, or people, within an organisation.

The confidence to challenge

The change agents consistently informed us that, prior to the ReAct Timewise Change Agent programme, a less interventionist approach was taken with the employers whom they worked with. Although they were aware of a high demand for flexible working arrangements among the available pool of candidates, they did not take a proactive approach to stimulate change among the employing organisations.

Following their participation in the programme, the change agents and their teams are taking a much bolder approach with the employers whom they work with, challenging their reasons for not offering flexible working and offering information, advice and guidance to help them change.

It requires an honest conversation. Not being afraid to ask the questions. What can you do to make this more of an attractive offer to more people? It's putting the benefits of it into their heads.

Three of the four survey respondents who answered a specific question on this said that the programme had changed how they approach and work with employers, with three suggesting that they had successfully incentivised more large employers to offer more flexibility.

Systems and processes

It emerged that the change agents themselves feel under pressure to quickly secure job placements for their participants. This can lead to a short-term approach, meaning that some change agents feel that they did not have the time available to effectively cascade the knowledge within their organisations.

...we've got to meet a certain number of KPIs in terms of getting people into a certain number of the jobs per month.

More fundamentally, however, such pressures made it more difficult for change agents to pursue discussions with employers on flexible working, which can take a long time to deliver results. One change agent commented that they would like to see flexible working tasks and

targets set for staff to encourage greater implementation of the learning within the organisation.

If it was me and I was the manager, I would have set a task to follow up for all of us. ... It's kind of I had the conversation, positivity came out of it, but there was no document documenting it, to actually have that there to feedback. It's just kind of all 'off the cuff'.

They also noted that they had experienced a drop off of vacancies within one employer where they had successfully introduced flexible working practices at, as there was an increase in employee retention. This made their job harder when seeking placements for Restart participants.

Because they [the recruits] are happy doing the hours, split shifts keep them there, reduces the retention. And now, they [the employer] are not looking for anyone, so I've not been able to fill any one for the last month with them, which is good and bad.

As previously mentioned, a turnover of staff and staff absence, within the Restart providers, also inhibited the wider impact of the Timewise intervention. Some change agents commented that it would have been more helpful to have more (and a broader range of) personnel on the change agent programme to help embed the approach within their organisation.

Change agents also noted the need to engage their supply chains in the effort to increase flexible working. This was something that at least one change agent had already started to make inroads on, but another reported that they were only now about to embark on this.

It also emerged that Restart providers themselves sometimes feel that they do not have access to the flexible working opportunities they are promoting. This is a source of frustration and makes it more difficult for them to evangelise about flexible working with confidence.

Conclusions

The ReAct Timewise Change Agent programme was largely successful in meeting its ambitions to build insights, tools and capabilities into flexible job design within the ReAct partnership.

Many of the participating change agents reported significant successes with their employers, leading to increased opportunities for Restart participants. Some of the attendees we spoke with were able to provide tangible examples of where they had successfully unlocked job vacancies, resulting in applicants being able to work flexibly from day one.

The change agents were generally highly satisfied with the programme, saying that they would recommend it to others in similar roles. They particularly liked the interactive nature of the sessions, the opportunity to hear from other delegates, the evidence-based approach and the quality of the facilitators. Although the proposed employer masterclass was abandoned, this seemed to be due to the approach, rather than a lack of interest or engagement.

The focus on the employer engagement team within the ReAct partnership organisations was the right one. A combination of the change agent's levels of confidence, experience and the strength of their existing relationships with employers, appears to have contributed towards the most successful outcomes. Some change agents, however, struggled to attain the levels of influence required to make changes either within their own organisation or within the employers whom they worked with.

Limitations in the breadth and depth of engagement with prime provider employees compromised the potential impact of the programme. There were fewer attendees than originally envisaged and some were unable to complete the programme as anticipated. Involving more people on the programme may have mitigated against changes in personnel and encouraged a greater cultural shift within the prime providers. Most of the learning also happened at the first session, suggesting that fewer sessions may have been similarly impactful.

A range of cultural, social, economic and logistical factors have contributed to a change in the attitudes of Restart participants when it comes to seeking job opportunities. The cost of living, access to transport and childcare are major issues.

The participating change agents experienced a range of challenges in cascading the learning within their organisations, as well as delivering change within the employers whom they

work with. Short term pressures to fill vacancies emerged as a barrier to strategic thinking and a major challenge for employers and prime providers alike.

It was generally found that the more agile the business was, the easier it was to introduce changes around flexible working. Perceptions of flexible working and systemic challenges, the perception of risk associated with the introduction of flexible working, potential unconscious bias and the implications for existing employees who were yet to be offered flexible working opportunities were all identified as issues. It was noted that if an employer offers flexible working for new recruits, they need to offer the same to their existing employees, making it more difficult for employers to implement the necessary changes. However, the potential for positive impact on staff retention was also identified as a major draw for employers.

Piloting approaches was recognised as an important way to introduce systemic shift. This gradual approach is more attractive to reticent employers and provides an opportunity to create a structured evaluation that measures the effectiveness of a flexible working approach before introducing wholesale change. The provision of evidence and comparable case studies and peer recommendations were recognised as important aspects for employer engagement.

Having the confidence to challenge was a key enabler that many of the change agents mentioned, suggesting that the programme had been instrumental in bringing about a change in their ability to drive change and have more challenging conversations with employers about the opportunities to proactively offer flexible working to potential recruits. However, change agents sometimes struggled to balance the implementation of this approach alongside pressure to find placements quickly.

Having ongoing opportunities for revisiting their approach to flexible working may be useful to embed and consider next steps within the ReAct partner organisations.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the Restart providers

- Introduce greater flexibility for Restart provider employees
Enable staff to speak with authority and become true advocates for flexible working by improving accessibility for them. We recommend identifying senior sponsors/champions for flexible working to lead this change within each of the prime providers, carrying out an initial assessment to understand the potential for increased flexibility, developing a timed action plan and accessing specialist consultancy support required to facilitate change. It will also be important that progress is carefully monitored and reported against.
- Cascade the learning developed by the Change Agents
We recommend running two sessions through the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA) events programme over the coming year. This should include employer case studies identified by the Change Agents and, where possible, 'live' contributions from employers who have successfully changed their approach on flexible working (including in sectors considered to be hard to flex). We also suggest that the Institute of Employability Professionals (IEP) establish Action Learning Sets which include a combination of original Change Agents and new staff to facilitate knowledge transfer, reflection and continual improvement.
- Celebrate successes in flexible working brokerage
Prime providers should recognise and reward flexible working brokerage by showcasing a range of examples of how this has successfully been delivered with employers. Sharing success stories and details of how brokerage has been successful should be designed to encourage replication.
- Review the impact of short-term expectations around job placements
Targets and expectations around job placements should be matched with longer-term tasks and targets that encourage sustainable flexible working brokerage. This should recognise that flexible working brokerage may result in fewer placements in the short term, as negotiations take time. Valuing the retention of job placements is also key here, as repeat vacancies are likely to dip where jobs are filled sustainably.

Recommendations for the ReAct Timewise Change Agent – Flexible Working programme

- Continue a renewed ReAct Timewise Change Agent – Flexible Working programme
We recommend that the ReAct partnership builds on the Timewise Change – Flexible Working programme, to continue developing internal capability on flexible working within the employer and jobseeker teams. We suggest running further sessions on flexible working, taking on board the recommendations for the programme as outlined below.
- Increase the number of attendees, both from the primes and their wider supply chains
We recommend running series of one off, but repeated sessions to allow a larger number and broader range of Restart provider employees to participate, as well as representatives from their wider supply chains. This should facilitate the systemic change that is required to support successful implementation of the learning across the ReAct partnership. We also suggest that senior colleagues, positioned to have strategic conversations with organisations on hiring employees, are encouraged to attend. It may be useful to survey participants ahead of the programme, to assess their perceived agency to create change among employers and identify potential barriers.
- Provide expert back-up for the employer and jobseeker teams
We recommend that Timewise is invited to deliver a short webinar for employers that employer and jobseeker team members can promote to the organisations whom they work with to place Restart applicants. This will build awareness and understanding among organisations, encourage discussion of opportunities for flexible placements and support the role of the Restart providers in brokering change.

Recommendations for the Department for Work & Pensions

- Develop collaborative strategic jobs brokerage between NEPT and prime providers
We recommend developing collaborative strategic frameworks for the DWP National Employer and Partnerships Team (NEPT) and prime providers to take a more active role in brokering flexible working arrangements with large employers, especially for those who need it most e.g. people with caring responsibilities, disabilities and/or long term health conditions. This requires sharing relationships, investment in training, the provision of protected time for brokers to work with employers and piloting programmes to assess effectiveness with specific target groups of jobseekers.
- Increase the emphasis on good flexible work placements
We recommend a greater focus on all aspects of what makes work good: making jobs accessible, increasing employee influence on their working arrangements, encouraging

work life balance and supporting effective working practices. It is important to acknowledge that good flexible working goes beyond the constraints of accepted definitions of flexible working (e.g. part time working and home working) and consider much broader considerations around flexibility and autonomy (e.g. start times and influence over working hours) to enhance recruitment, job performance and retention.