

Evaluation of Year 2 of the Skills Coaching Trials and Skills Passports

Final Report

December 2007

Of interest to everyone involved in Adult
Information Advice and Guidance

The Evaluation of Year 2 of the Skills Coaching Trials and Skills Passports
Final Report was commissioned in association with Institute for Employment
Studies (IES)

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Contents

<u>Executive Summary</u>	vii
<u>List of Acronyms</u>	xii
<u>Glossary of Key Terms</u>	xiii
<u>1 Introduction</u>	1
<u>1.1 Background</u>	1
<u>1.2 Aims of the evaluation</u>	2
<u>1.3 Methodology</u>	3
<u>1.4 Outline of the report</u>	4
<u>2 Literature Review</u>	6
<u>2.1 Developments in skills policy</u>	6
<u>2.2 Employability and labour market attachment</u>	10
<u>2.3 Relevant research and evaluations</u>	14
<u>2.4 Conclusion</u>	16
<u>3 Development of the Trial in Year 2</u>	18
<u>3.1 The process of subcontracting</u>	19
<u>3.2 The role of Skills Coaches</u>	20
<u>4 Operation of the Trial</u>	28
<u>4.1 Take-up of Skills Coaching</u>	29
<u>4.2 Customer characteristics</u>	30
<u>4.3 Working with Jobcentre Plus</u>	40
<u>4.4 Outreach</u>	50
<u>4.5 Management information</u>	51
<u>4.6 Partnership working</u>	53
<u>5 The Skills Coaching Customer Journey</u>	56
<u>5.1 An overview of the customer journey</u>	58
<u>5.2 The Access Interview</u>	59
<u>5.3 The Skills Diagnostic</u>	61
<u>5.4 Skills File</u>	65
<u>5.5 The Skills Passport</u>	66
<u>5.6 Learning Brokerage</u>	69
<u>5.7 In-Learning Health Check</u>	75
<u>5.8 Progression interview</u>	76
<u>5.9 Views on the customer journey overall</u>	79

<u>6</u>	<u>Working With Other Initiatives</u>	84
6.1	<u>Adult Learning Option (ALO)</u>	84
6.2	<u>Pathways to Work</u>	88
6.3	<u>Train to Gain</u>	89
6.4	<u>Trials with pilots for non-benefit recipients</u>	91
<u>7</u>	<u>The Impacts and Costs of Skills Coaching</u>	95
7.1	<u>Outcomes data in the management information</u>	96
7.2	<u>Soft outcomes</u>	98
7.3	<u>Hard outcomes: learning outcomes</u>	102
7.4	<u>Hard outcomes: gaining employment</u>	108
7.5	<u>Customers without outcomes</u>	113
7.6	<u>Costs of Skills Coaching</u>	115
7.7	<u>Conclusions</u>	119
<u>8</u>	<u>Lessons Learned for the Adult Careers Service</u>	121
8.1	<u>Partnership working</u>	122
8.2	<u>Funding</u>	122
8.3	<u>Staff capability and understanding</u>	123
8.4	<u>The Skills Diagnostic</u>	124
8.5	<u>The customers</u>	124
8.6	<u>What customers want</u>	125
8.7	<u>Supporting customers in work</u>	125
8.8	<u>Delivering the Adult Careers Service</u>	126
	<u>Bibliography</u>	127
	<u>Annex 1: Evaluation Framework</u>	129
	<u>Annex 2: Details of Reference Case</u>	132

Executive Summary

Skills Coaching is being delivered in 20 Learning and Skills Council (LSC) areas. The trials are delivered at a local level in partnership between the LSC, Jobcentre Plus, **nextstep**, and **nextstep** contractors. Skills Coaching is for adults who are aged over 20, and who are either inactive benefit recipients or Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) claimants, for whom lack of skills is the main barrier to employment.

Lessons learned and recommendations for the new integrated employment and skills (IES) system

Skills Coaching is well placed to inform the new integrated employment and skills system. Skills Coaching has trialled an intensive guidance approach and a number of elements likely to be part of an IES service, including joint working and co-location with Jobcentre Plus, and ongoing customer support.

Approach to customers

- The original policy direction of identifying a lack of skills as the main barrier to work proved inappropriate, as customers frequently had multiple barriers to finding work.
- The majority of customers on Skills Coaching needed help with job search and guidance about job options and careers, rather than access to courses. Flexibility in the delivery and funding system helped Skills Coaches to tailor support to varying customer needs.
- Skills Coaching trials did not include in-work support for customers, an element that would be likely to ease the transition into work and to sustained employment for some customers.

Partnership working

- Skills Coaching has been most successful where there is a good strategic relationship between partners, underpinned by strong relationships at the delivery level, and where roles and responsibilities between Jobcentre Plus and **nextstep** were clearly defined.

- Many Skills Coaching customers had barriers to work other than a lack of skills. Devise clear roles for partners, so it is explicit which organisation or individual is responsible for addressing customers’ non-skills-related barriers to work.
- Develop and use systems to ensure that information about customers’ progress through the new integrated employment and skills system can be accessed by all partner organisations.
- Ensure good links at the delivery level between Jobcentre Plus Advisers, ACS Advisers and Train to Gain Brokers, so that customers can continue to address their skill needs once in work.

Lessons learned for the Learning and Skills Council

- Skills Coaching worked well where Coaches were employed to deliver it full time. Working on other initiatives alongside Skills Coaching made it hard for some Coaches to deliver the service effectively at the intended scale.
- Skills Coaching required a significant change in job role for nextstep Advisers. Skills Coaches did not always have the skills for effective partnership-working, and to make and maintain contact with Jobcentre Plus Advisers, training providers and Train to Gain Brokers. Advisers also required skill development, including caseload management and expertise in using diagnostic tools and providing ongoing support.
- Access to suitable and appropriate roll-on, roll-off provision for ACS customers is key to ensuring that individuals can take forward the learning options they have discussed.
- Some interviewees questioned the impartiality of some Skills Coaches. Perceptions of impartiality may be an issue for ACS Advisers who work for organisations that deliver training and refer customers to that training.

Lessons learned for Jobcentre Plus

- Appointing Skills Coaching leads and champions worked well. A designated lead in each Jobcentre Plus office would help to cascade information about the integrated employment and skills system to Jobcentre Plus Advisers and to ensure the relationship with the ACS is working well.
- Referrals to Skills Coaching worked well where Jobcentre Plus Advisers had a sound understanding of the initiative. To aid referrals, build Jobcentre Plus Advisers’ understanding of how to identify appropriate customers for a Skills Health Check, what the health check will consist of, what tools will be used and how they work, what the customer can expect, and how the customer will continue to be supported by the ACS and Jobcentre Plus after referral.

Impacts and outcomes for customers

- The original policy direction of working with clients for whom skills is the main barrier to employment proved inappropriate, particularly given the emphasis on incapacity benefit claimants. Customers frequently had multiple barriers to finding work. The literature review indicated that soft outcomes are generally most relevant to the customer group.

- Most interviewees – whether Skills Coaches, customers or Jobcentre Plus Advisers – felt that Skills Coaching helped customers feel more confident in applying for work and undertaking learning. This increase in confidence seems to have been particularly valuable for lone parents and those who had been out of the labour market for a period of time.
- Skills Coaches reported that customers gained a better understanding of themselves and their skills alongside an increased motivation to seek work and a better understanding of how to be successful in the job application process. This was supported by customers who said that Skills Coaching had improved their understanding of the labour market, understanding of available jobs and careers, the skills and qualifications needed to undertake specific jobs, and of what employers require from CVs and interviews.
- In Year 2, Skills Coaching cost £2.4 million to deliver (excluding management costs, costs of delivering support outside the customer journey, learning, and the costs to Jobcentre Plus). The cost of achieving a work outcome was £3,407, and a learning outcome was £1,789. These costs are within the range for other provision available through DWP to this client group.
- Of the 12,682 Skills Coaching customers examined in the analysis of Management Information, 1,819 (14 per cent) had at least one positive outcome recorded: 710 (six per cent) had a positive employment outcome recorded, and 1,352 (11 per cent) had a positive learning outcome recorded (customers could have both a positive employment outcome and a positive learning outcome recorded).
- Regression analysis on positive employment outcomes found that ownership of a Skills Passport significantly increased the likelihood of an employment outcome¹, as did having had an In-Learning Health Check. This is perhaps unsurprising as it indicates both that the customer has undertaken some training or education and that they have had sustained contact with their Skills Coach.
- As might be expected, customers who have been unemployed for longer than six months were less likely to experience an employment outcome than those who have been unemployed for less than six months. This negative effect increased with the length of time a customer had been unemployed. Customers on inactive benefits were significantly less likely to have gained employment outcomes, compared to Jobseeker's Allowance claimants.
- Having previous qualifications at Level 2 and Level 3 had a positive impact on the likelihood of experiencing an employment outcome.

Operation of the trial

- A total of 12,692 customers accessed Skills Coaching between July 2006 and July 2007 (66 per cent of the planned aspirations). Over two in five (44 per cent) had been out of work for two years or more, and nearly six in ten (58 per cent) did not have a Level 2 qualification.

¹ This provides some evidence that the Skills Passport helps Skills Coaching customers to achieve positive outcomes. However, it should be borne in mind that ownership of a Passport may be acting as a proxy for other factors, such as length of time on the trial (the customers who have Skills Passports may be those who have been on the trial for longer and developed a better relationship with their Skills Coach).

- Skills Coaching had a better reach into some target groups than others. Customers were proportionately more likely to be a lone parent than not a lone parent, and were proportionately less likely to be aged over 50, from a BME group or to have a disability.
- The main customer group for Skills Coaching was inactive benefit claimants, with a target of 80 per cent participation. By July 2007, 55 per cent of all Skills Coaching customers were claiming inactive benefits, largely due to a lack of referrals from Jobcentre Plus, which in part stemmed from their lack of contact with this customer group.

The Skills Coaching customer journey

- To assess the value of a common diagnostic approach, the use of ‘Skills Check’ was mandatory for all customers undertaking a Skills Diagnostic. If Basic Skills or ICT needs needed further investigation, the use of ‘Basic and Key Skills Builder (BKSB) for literacy and numeracy’ or the BKSB tool for ICT was envisaged.
- The response to Skills Check was mixed, partly because it was a self-assessment tool, which did not suit some customers.
- Developing a Skills File and Skills Passport was felt to increase customers’ confidence and to be a useful process. While take-up of a Skills Passport was linked to positive outcomes, many interviewees nevertheless questioned its relevance to employers. Few case-study areas used Online Passports, and approaches to utilising IT solutions by both customers and Advisers would need further exploration for effective implementation.
- Customers were enrolled in a range of learning provision, much of which was below Level 2. The skill levels of customers were such that they often needed basic skills provision.
- Some Skills Coaches could easily access suitable provision for their customers. Some exceptions to this were due to a lack of flexibility, for example in the start dates of courses, a lack of roll-on, roll-off provision, and capacity issues (lack of places and/or waiting lists for courses). This impacted on the types of training customers could undertake and the length of the journey for some customers.

Working with other initiatives

- ALO and Skills Coaching could have complemented each other well, but the link had not been maximised because year-long college-based Level 2 courses had already started before the ALO became operational.
- Two case-study areas had Pathways to Work. In one area, Pathways Advisers were aware of Skills Coaching, and referred customers involved in Condition Management Programmes to Skills Coaches. In the other area, after initial teething problems, referral systems had improved.
- There was little evidence of Skills Coaching working with Train to Gain in the case-study areas. Not all respondents had heard of Train to Gain. Those who had were not always clear about how a link between the two would work, or knew what it involved.

- Delivery of Skills Coaching to non-benefit recipients in the three pilot areas was slow in getting off the ground. The focus of attention and resources remained on benefit recipients, to try and meet the larger-scale targets for the trial.

Overall, there were fewer customers than expected, although Skills Coaching reached some target groups, such as lone parents, particularly well. Qualitative evidence would suggest that the Skills Diagnostic and one-to-one support and discussion were some of the most useful parts of the journey. Where customers were referred to training, Skills Coaches reported that it was not always available when customers needed it. Soft outcomes, such as increased confidence and a better understanding of the labour market and suitable jobs, were often reported by customers. Completing a Skills Passport was linked to positive outcomes. Overall, the cost of delivering Skills Coaching per employment outcome was broadly comparable with other similar services for this client group.

List of Acronyms

ASM	Advisory Services Manager
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
CLAIT	Computer literacy and information technology
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DEA	Disability Employment Adviser
ECDL	European Computer Driving License
ESF	European Social Fund
ESOL	English as a Second or Other Language
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
IB	Incapacity Benefit
IS	Income Support
IT	Information Technology
JET	Job Entry Target
JOT	Job Outcome Target
JSA	Jobseekers' Allowance
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
MI	Management Information
NDLP	New Deal for Lone Parents
PA	Personal Adviser
WFI	Work Focused Interview

Glossary of Key Terms

Adult Learning Option is a programme being trialled from September 2006 in five Jobcentre Plus districts to test out the benefits of providing training allowances for Jobcentre Plus customers to enable them to take-up their Level 2 entitlement. Financial support is offered to low-skilled, longer-term unemployed and inactive benefit recipients to voluntarily take up full-time learning for up to 12 months, where it may improve their chances of getting into work.

Incapacity Benefit (IB) is a benefit for those who are unable to participate in paid employment due to an illness or disability and are aged between 16 and 65 (or 60 for women).

Income Support is a benefit that provides financial help for individuals between 16 and 60 who are on low incomes, are not in full-time paid work, and who are eligible to receive this benefit (ie not those who are unemployed and available for and actively seeking work). Lone parents are a group who can be eligible for income support.

Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) is a benefit for people who are available for and actively seeking work. Every two weeks, recipients need to discuss with an Adviser what they are doing to find work.

Pathways to Work (PtW) is a programme that aims to improve the provision of advice and support to help those on incapacity benefits into work. The main elements include an initial Work Focused Interview (WFI) eight weeks after their claim, followed by a series of five further mandatory WFIs at monthly intervals, a specialist team of Advisers and a Return to Work Credit of £40 per week for 52 weeks after returning to work.

Train to Gain is a Learning and Skills Council service that offers impartial, independent advice on training to businesses. A Skills Broker carries out a training needs analysis and helps businesses to assess what skills their employees have and what skills they will need in the future. The employer can then select from the training solutions presented and work with a training provider who will deliver learning provision.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

As part of the Government's drive to improve productivity, the New Deal for Skills was announced in the 2004 budget. The New Deal for Skills aims to up-skill individuals without a first Level 2 qualification (broadly equivalent to five GCSEs graded A*-C), with the aim of improving their employability. The New Deal for Skills consists of:

- the Adult Learning Option (which is being trialled in five Jobcentre Plus districts and offers customers without a Level 2 qualification financial support to take up full-time learning for 12 months)
- Skills Coaching and Skills Passports (the second year of which is the subject of this evaluation). The changes to Skills Coaching since Year 1 are outlined in Section 1.1.4 below.

1.1.1 Local delivery

Skills Coaching is being delivered in 20 LSC trial areas (19 JCP districts). The programme is delivered at a local level in partnership between the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), Jobcentre Plus, **nextstep**, and **nextstep** contractors.

Local LSCs contract manage the Skills Coaching trial through their existing **nextstep** contractor. **nextstep** is the brand name for local face-to-face Information and Advice funded by the LSC. The **nextstep** contractor then subcontracts all or part of the provision to delivery agencies. The proportion that the **nextstep** contractor may deliver themselves is limited to a maximum of 25 per cent.

Within Jobcentre Plus districts, district co-ordinators are responsible for overseeing Personal Advisers' (PAs) identification and registration of eligible customers to Skills Coaching. Skills Coaches are co-located in Jobcentre Plus offices where possible. The Jobcentre Plus PA continues to work with the customer throughout the Skills Coaching process when the customer is also seeing a Skills Coach.

1.1.2 Eligible customers

Skills Coaching is for adults who are aged over 20, and who are either:

- inactive benefit recipients (principally incapacity benefit or income support customers) who intend to return to work in the medium to longer term, but who want to improve their job prospects in the interim
- Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) recipients (prior to mandatory New Deals) for whom lack of skills is the main barrier to employment.

Given the key target group of IB/IS customers and associated health problems, there is no restriction on the prior level of qualification, and hence individuals for whom skills are a barrier, but who are qualified to Level 2 or above, are eligible, although the majority of customers were expected not to have a Level 2 qualification.

1.1.3 The customer journey

During Skills Coaching an Adviser has a series of sessions with an unemployed or inactive individual to discuss their skills, job suitability and training needs in a work-related context. The first session is an **Access Interview** to check a customer's eligibility and suitability. If Skills Coaching is appropriate for the customer, a computer-based **Skills Diagnostic** tool is used to explore a customer's skills. The customer and Adviser can then work together on a **Skills File** and a **Skills Passport**. The Skills Passport provides individuals with a means of recording their skills, and is also aimed to provide employers with a tool to support the recruitment and workforce development of Skills Coaching customers. There are two versions of the Skills Passport available to customers – an online version and a paper-based version.

When training needs are identified, the Adviser can **Broker Learning** for the individual. They are then able to support them during the learning process with an **In-Learning Health Check**. One or more of these stages may be completed, depending on what is most appropriate for the customer. Once the customer has reached the end of their Skills Coaching journey, they have a **Progression Interview** to reflect on what they have achieved, and to discuss what happens next.

1.1.4 Changes since Year 1

A number of changes to the second year of Skills Coaching were made on the basis of experience in the first year of the trials. These included:

- introducing the Access Interview as a further check of suitability and commitment, also designed to 'build in' a certain level of initial drop-out and increase participation in the journey where appropriate
- more flexibility in the stages beyond the Skills Diagnostic, so that customers can work through all, or part, of the journey in the sequence that is most suitable for them
- a greater emphasis on the Progression Interview, to ensure that the handover back to Jobcentre Plus at the end of participation in Skills Coaching is as smooth as possible, and that customers are clear about what they have achieved and what they still need to do.

1.2 Aims of the evaluation

The Skills Coaching and Skills Passports evaluation has been designed to examine:

- _ penetration among key customer groups
- _ the effectiveness of the Skills Diagnostic
- _ how effective delivery of the customer journey is
- _ the capacity of Skills Coaches
- _ the effectiveness of Skills Passports
- _ the impact of Skills Coaching on out-of-work individuals
- _ complementarity with Pathways to Work
- _ how the findings are linked to other relevant research and policy documents
- _ joint working arrangements at the local level between Jobcentre Plus and the LSC
- _ the effectiveness of pilots with participants outside the benefits system.

1.3 Methodology

An evaluation framework focusing on the aims of the trial was developed to ensure that evidence against each success measure could be collected systematically (see Annex 1). The research process started with a short contextual literature review to facilitate the development of ways in which to measure changes in employability; this has been updated for the final evaluation report, particularly in light of recent policy changes in the learning and skills arena.

To provide quantitative information about the trials, management information collated on the LSC Skills Coaching database was analysed. The Skills Coaching database contains information on the personal characteristics and employment and skills history of all Skills Coaching customers, including age, gender, benefit receipt status, disability status, ethnicity, previous qualifications and length of time unemployed. The data analysed were extracted from the LSC MI manager database (referred to here as the Skills Coaching database) on 13 August 2007. Customer information is uploaded onto the database by Skills Coaches in batches on a monthly basis. As such, the 13 August 2007 extract should capture all customer activity occurring between 1 July 2006 and 31 July 2007.

To look at how the characteristics of Skills Coaching customers differed from those of the benefits population, data from the national Labour Market System (LMS) was obtained for the period March 2006 to February 2007. This included information about all benefits claimants (both active and inactive) who had made a claim for all or part of the period. We have assumed that this is the client base of Jobcentre Plus from which referrals to Skills Coaching could be made, although in reality not all will have skills as a main barrier to employment. Claimants' highest levels of qualifications are not collected as part of the LMS and therefore we have not been able to make any assumptions using qualifications as a proxy for skills to limit the population on these grounds.

In addition to the literature review and analysis of management information, this report draws on two waves of qualitative interviews undertaken in nine case-study areas. The areas were chosen to ensure a balance between:

- _ areas operating since Tranche 1 (April 2005), since Tranche 2 (July 2006) and Tranche 3 (September 2006)

- _ areas with the Adult Learning Option (ALO), and those without
- _ areas working with customers outside the benefits system, and those that were not
- _ areas with Pathways to Work, and those without
- _ urban and rural areas
- _ a good geographical spread of areas across England.

There were two waves of fieldwork, one undertaken between January and March 2007 and one undertaken between May and July 2007, with key stakeholders interviewed in both waves.

In all the following, interviews were undertaken across the nine case-study areas, with several Jobcentre Plus District Managers, LSC Contract Managers and **nextstep** Trial Managers being interviewed on two occasions:

- _ Jobcentre Plus District Managers (eight in all)
- _ LSC Contract Managers (eight in all)
- _ **nextstep** Trial Managers (eight in all)
- _ **nextstep** Skills Coaching Co-ordinators (four in all)
- _ Skills Coaches (20 in all)
- _ Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers (14 in all)
- _ customers claiming benefits (30 in all)
- _ customers outside the benefit system (ten in all)
- _ training providers (nine in all)
- _ employers (four in all).

These have been supplemented with examples of customer case-studies collected by **nextstep** and with some case-studies of customers interviewed for the evaluation.

1.4 Outline of the report

The report is structured as follows:

- _ Chapter 2 details a review of relevant literature on employability and an overview of skills policy.
- _ Chapter 3 discusses the development and set-up of the trial, the role of Skills Coaches and their training.
- _ Chapter 4 presents detail of the operation of the trial, including referrals from Jobcentre Plus, outreach, management information and partnership working.
- _ Chapter 5 details the customer journey and the success of the various elements.
- _ Chapter 6 examines how Skills Coaching has been working with other labour market initiatives, and how well the pilots with non-benefit recipients are working.

- Chapter 7 discusses the evidence of impacts of Skills Coaching and looks at the delivery costs. It also details some overall conclusions.
- Lastly, Chapter 8 provides some recommendations for the new Adult Careers Service.

2 Literature Review

An early task of the evaluation was to conduct a short review of the relevant literature about employability, and this has since been updated in the light of policy developments in the skills area. This literature review examines developments in skills policy before moving on to examine employability and labour market attachment, and relevant research and evaluations conducted in this field.

2.1 Developments in skills policy

2.1.1 The policy context for Year 2 of Skills Coaching

Skills Coaching trials and Skills Passports come under the umbrella of the New Deal for Skills and are part of the Government's agenda to improve and refocus the skills of people in the UK. An emphasis was given in Tranche 2 and 3 of the Skills Coaching pilots (that started in June 2006 and September 2006 respectively) on engaging a number of target groups such as low-skilled women and ethnic minorities (applicable across all trials). This was in response to a lack of skills being highlighted as a barrier to employment for women returning to work (Women and Work Commission, 2006) and for Ethnic Minority groups (National Employment Panel, 2005). Specifically, the National Employment Panel (2005) mentioned skills, principally basic skills and language, as being *'of paramount importance in any effort to increase ethnic minority employment rates'* (p.27).

2.1.2 The Leitch Review of Skills

In November 2006, Lord Leitch reported on his Review of the UK's long-term skills needs. Leitch recommended that the UK commit to becoming a world leader in skills by 2020, rising to the upper quartile of the OECD (HM Treasury, 2006). He also recommended that all public funding for adult vocational skills development in England (apart from community learning and programmes for those with learning difficulties and disabilities) should go through demand-led routes by 2020.

2.1.3 The Government's response to Leitch

The Government's response to Leitch (DIUS 2007) was published alongside the Green Paper: *'In work, better off: next steps to full employment'* (DWP 2007), in July 2007. Together, they set out a common vision of how skills and employment support should

be delivered to benefit both those in and out of work. The Government has accepted the ambition that Leitch recommended and has adopted it as its own. The vast majority of Leitch's proposals have been adopted as government policy and the new UK Commission for Employment and Skills will be maintaining an overview of progress towards this ambition.

The new Adult Careers Service

The new Adult Careers Service will recognise that many people face multiple barriers to getting new skills and better jobs. The past approach of a number of services offering different types of support and leaving the customer to join it up will be replaced by a service that makes the links for customers between jobs, training, childcare, living costs and wider support. The information and advice services currently provided by learndirect and nextstep providers will be merged into this new service.

Skills Accounts

Leitch recommended Learner Accounts, and the government has taken this recommendation on board, under the banner: 'Skills Accounts'. The new Skills Accounts will be designed to give individuals greater ownership and choice over their learning. Skills accounts will give individual learners access to a wide range of support and advice that will help them find the right training. There will be no 'wrong door' and hence Jobcentre Plus, colleges, training providers and the new Adult Careers Service will be able to help individuals open a Skills Account.

A demand-led system

The Government's response to Leitch also accepted the recommendation that a new Commission for Employment and Skills should be set up, and announced that it will be fully operational in 2008 and will operate across the UK with the aim of strengthening the employer voice. It will provide an external challenge to the employment and skills system, and will report in 2010 on whether a statutory entitlement to training is appropriate. It will also oversee performance and reform of the Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). Through the SSCs, employers will have the opportunity to play a leading role in the reform and development of vocational qualifications, so that only those vocational qualifications that meet the standards set by SSCs will be put on the Qualifications and Credit Framework.

In return for making the system more demand-led, the government expects employers to increase their investment in skills, training and qualifications at all levels, and to clearly articulate what their skills needs and priorities are. Employers will also be able to make the Skills Pledge to support their employees to become more skilled and better qualified. The Pledge is a public, voluntary commitment by employers to support their staff to get basic literary and numeracy skills, and to work towards achieving their first full Level 2 qualification in an area that will be valuable to the employer; 1.7 million employees are already covered by the Pledge which was launched in June. Employers will be able to access support provided by Train to Gain to help them deliver on the Pledge, including the support of an independent Skills Broker and free literacy, numeracy and first full Level 2 training for their staff.

Working in partnership to support individuals

'World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England' makes it clear that the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) are committed to ensuring that skills and employment systems work together more effectively for the benefit of the customer. The response emphasises that this will be reflected in the priorities for Jobcentre Plus, the LSC and the new Adult Careers Service. The aim is that there will no longer be any discontinuity between the employment system and the skills system. Instead, there will be a single customer journey from poor skills or worklessness to sustainable employment and progression in work, with accessible support being delivered throughout the journey.

DWP and DIUS will work together to create a shared objective of sustainable employment and progression, and a set of performance measures to underpin it. A strong partnership between Jobcentre Plus, the LSC and the new Adult Careers Service will offer:

- _ adult skills, employment and employer services that are integrated and demand-led
- _ more opportunity for those both in and out of work to gain the skills and qualifications they need to get jobs, and to stay and progress in employment
- _ clearer financial support for those with the lowest skills and qualifications, and for those inactive in the labour market
- _ professional and seamless customer service, underpinned by consistent employment and skills information, advice and guidance for individuals and employers.

Train to Gain brokerage will play an important part in ensuring individuals can continue learning once they stay in work, supporting their progression in employment.

Flexible New Deal and the role of Jobcentre Plus

The new Green Paper: *'In work, better off: next steps to full employment'* outlines a model for a new 'flexible New Deal' for those claiming out-of-work benefits. In the Gateway stage of this flexible New Deal, customers can be referred to a Skills Health Check. The Skills Health Check will identify literacy, numeracy and language needs as well as broader skills needs. As a result of their assessment, customers will be offered a range of training and development options to address their skills needs. These may include the opportunity to acquire formal qualifications, or to develop employability skills, such as team working and effective communication. For those claiming Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA), the Jobcentre Plus Adviser will then discuss with the job seeker and agree what training should be built into their back-to-work plan.

Personal Advisers will identify JSA customers who may find a Skills Health Check useful when they first make a claim to benefit and after six months' unemployment, whilst Work-Focused Interviews will be a way of referring customers on inactive benefits to a Skills Health Check where appropriate. This new approach should mean that customers for whom lack of skills is a barrier to work get faster access to the right training, by being referred to a more in-depth skills assessment along with specialist support and advice, all delivered through the new Adult Careers Service.

The Green Paper also outlined plans for a new 'Jobs Pledge' which was announced in the Budget in March which will complement the Skills Pledge. Through the Jobs Pledge major employers in both the public and private sectors have given a commitment to offer guaranteed job interviews for people who have been on benefit and who are ready and prepared to work. In return they are offered a range of services by Jobcentre Plus. Jobcentre Plus can offer employers a service which matches the right potential candidates to their vacancies and can, in conjunction with the Learning and Skills Council and local providers, organise tailored pre-recruitment assessment and training.

Local Employment Partnerships can offer these job opportunities to disadvantaged people claiming benefits. This presents potential future opportunities to link pre-employment training to more sustained training opportunities for out-of-work individuals. The LSC has recently introduced an umbrella term: 'Skills for Jobs', which will encompass the local activity providing provision to meet the skills needs of low-skilled learners claiming benefits and who want to work, and under which Skills Coaching current sits.

Jobcentre Plus has a role in the skills agenda to both work with individuals claiming out-of-work benefits and with employers. Depending on the needs of the employer and the individual, Jobcentre Plus, with the Learning and Skills Council and other providers, will, according to these proposals, be able to provide a variety of support including:

- diagnosis of an individual's needs to enable a return to employment and to help them address any barriers to employment, including skills and motivation
- pre-employment training to prepare people for particular sorts of jobs and an explanation of the ongoing skills advice available through the Adult Careers Service
- the design and delivery of training, so that individuals have the employability skills needed for available jobs
- arranging and supporting Work Trials, so that the individual and the employer can confirm a proper match for the job before committing themselves on a permanent basis
- supporting individuals in the transition from benefit to work
- working with employers to deliver in-work training through Train to Gain, so that new recruits continue to develop their skills and careers in work.

2.1.4 What can be learned from Skills Coaching for the development of an integrated employment and skills system?

A major part of the Skills Coaching trials is to facilitate closer partnership working between Jobcentre Plus, the LSC and **nextstep**. The Skills Coaching customer journey can inform the development of a single customer journey in an integrated employment and skills system, where customers move from worklessness to sustainable employment and progression through support from Jobcentre Plus, the Adult Careers Service and Train to Gain. The referral process and feedback from **nextstep** to Jobcentre Plus in Skills Coaching can inform how the referral process could work in the new flexible New Deal, where customers will be offered skills development as part of preparation for work.

A key component of Skills Coaching is the Skills Diagnostic, which identifies an individual's skills gaps and their employability; using the Skills Diagnostic any skill gaps which may exist can then be addressed. An examination of how well this is working in the Skills Coaching trials can feed into development of the new Skills Health Check.

2.2 Employability and labour market attachment

Improving employability, and improving and re-focusing skills, are often mentioned in public policy documents¹, especially in relation to the unemployed and in terms of advice and guidance. Improving employability is also an important objective of Skills Coaching trials and Skills Passports. When examining employability, there are two key issues:

- _ firstly, how to define the term 'employability'
- _ secondly, how to measure employability.

2.2.1 Definition of employability

The term 'employability' has been used in different contexts with various meanings. When defining employability, often the emphasis is on individuals (CBI, 1999); however, this approach has been criticised by others who believe it focuses too strongly on individual inadequacies as the obstacle to reducing unemployment (Robinson, 1997).

Hillage and Pollard (1998) combined the individualistic supply-side approach with an element of demand-side factors to create their definition. They suggested that the main components of employability are: individuals possessing skills and characteristics desired by employers, knowing how to use and market these skills effectively to employers, and the context in which they seek work. Specifically, the key elements of employability they highlighted were:

- _ *assets* – an individual's assets in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes they possess
- _ *deployment* – the way an individual uses their assets
- _ *presentation* – how an individual presents themselves to employers
- _ *the personal and labour market context* – an individual's personal circumstances and the labour market environment in which they seek work.

2.2.2 Measuring employability

Measuring employability is a second important issue. Hillage and Pollard (1998) suggested that two components to measure employability should be intermediate indicators (such as possession of technical skills, basic skills, job search skills, etc.) and

¹ Examples of government documents focusing on improving and refocusing skills have been mentioned earlier. One example of the importance of employability is in the DfES White paper (2005) which states the Government is: '*replacing the "redundant notion of a job for life" with our new ambition of "employability for life", thus helping people and communities meet the challenge of the global economy.*' (p.1)

outcome indicators (eg rate of outflow from unemployment). These are discussed in turn.

Intermediate indicators

Intermediate indicators, such as possession of skills, are one way of grouping individuals. However, personal characteristics are also found to be important, as it is often noted that those in unemployment are concentrated in certain disadvantage groups (Ritchie et al., 2005), and may face multiple and/or complex barriers which prevent them re-joining the labour market (Atkinson et al., 2006).

Berthoud (2003) distinguished six specific factors which are associated with non-employment. These are, in order of importance (from most important to least important):

- _ *family structure* – people without partners and lone parents
- _ *skill level* – low qualifications and skills
- _ *impairment* – any impairment increases the risk of non-employment
- _ *age* – specifically over 50
- _ *demand for labour* – living in a high unemployment area
- _ *ethnic group* – specifically Black, Indian, Pakistani/Bangladeshi and other minorities (excluding Chinese who are no different from Whites).

This research (Berthoud, 2003) also found that the risk of unemployment increases as the number of characteristics associated with disadvantage (listed above) increases. For example, the risk of unemployment for someone with no disadvantages is four per cent, rising to 91 per cent amongst those with all six. In general, this increase is additive in nature with the effects of each disadvantage being added together; however, some characteristics, when combined, do lead to higher risks of unemployment than would be expected using the additive model. One example of this is that older Pakistanis and Bangladeshis with low qualifications and skills have an even higher risk of non-employment (82 per cent) than might have been expected from adding up all these characteristics of disadvantage (71 per cent).

Consequently, this research highlights the importance of an individual's context and their starting position, in relation to the labour market, in assessing and measuring their employability.

Outcome indicators

The other aspect of measuring employability, as mentioned by Hillage and Pollard (1998), is to focus on outcome indicators combined with an individual's starting position in terms of basic skills and personal characteristics. This can be measured in terms of hard outcomes such as movement into jobs. However, it is often the case with more disadvantaged groups (which some customers eligible for Skills Coaching will be in) that hard outcome measures are not the most appropriate. In these instances, measuring soft outcomes and the distance travelled by participants towards greater employability (which may subsequently result in 'harder' outcomes) might be more applicable.

A recent literature review commissioned by DWP (Lloyd and O'Sullivan, 2004) studied the different methods of measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled that have emerged. This research identified some key elements which are likely to be needed to formulate a method of measuring soft outcomes and distance travelled:

- _ A set of target indicators relating to the soft outcomes which are to be tracked – some examples of 'core' soft outcomes and indicators (applicable to most target groups) which may be focused on are shown in Table 2.1. Dewson et al. (2000) noted that some indicators may be particularly important for specific target groups (see Table 2.2 overleaf).
- _ A scoring system, for example customers rating how confident they feel as a result of the advice and guidance/training they have received.
- _ Baseline and subsequent interviews are used to assess progress.

Table 2.1: Examples of 'core' soft outcomes and indicators

Types of 'soft' outcomes	Examples of indicators
Key work skills	The acquisition of key skills, eg teamworking, problem solving, numeracy skills, information technology Numbers of work placements The acquisition of language and communication skills Completion of work placements Lower rates of sickness-related absence
Attitudinal skills	Increased levels of motivation Increased levels of confidence Recognition of prior skills Increased feelings of responsibility Increased levels of self-esteem Higher personal and career aspirations
Personal skills	Improved personal appearance/presentability Improved levels of attendance Improved timekeeping Improved personal hygiene Greater levels of self awareness Better health and fitness Greater levels of concentration and/or engagement
Practical skills	Ability to complete forms Ability to write a CV Improved ability to manage money Improved awareness of rights and responsibilities

Source: Dewson et al. (2000), Table 3.1

Table 2.2: Target group-specific outcomes

Target group	Possible indicators
Disaffected young people	Improved behaviour
	Improved attendance at school or at project sessions
	Improved engagement with learning or project activity
Women returners	Recognition of prior skills and experience
Drug/alcohol (ex) abusers	Better health
	Lower levels of drug or alcohol abuse
	Improved personal appearance/presentability
Ex-offenders	Lower rates of re-conviction
	Lower rates of re-offending
	A slowing of re-offending
Homeless people	Permanent accommodation
People with mental illness	A greater level of self-awareness
	Reduced anxiety and depression

Source: Dewson et al. (2000), Table 3.2

2.2.3 Measuring employability in practice: Skills Diagnostic

A key element of the Skill Coaching trials is the Skills Diagnostic which is conducted by the Skills Coach with eligible customers. The Skills Diagnostic assesses, or measures, an individual's employability through the identification of intermediate indicators, such as key skills, personal management skills and a vocational assessment, and helps to identify any weaknesses which may exist.

A similar tool has been used in France, termed the *Bilan de Compétence*. Under a law enacted in 1991, every employee has a right to undertake a *Bilan de Compétence*, or skills assessment, once every five years. This skills assessment 'provides an audit of personal and professional skills acquired through education and training' (Bartlett et al., 2000). The *Bilan de Compétence* is also available for those out of work. Moreover Roy, (2005) stated:

'A study undertaken in 2000 using data from previous years found that roughly three-quarters of the bilans were performed for job seekers¹, suggesting that (at least at this stage) the scheme had become a tool for tackling unemployment, as much as promoting life-long learning among the population.' (p.108)

A recent literature review commissioned by DWP uses a systematic review methodology to examine the evidence on Skills Diagnostics and Screening Tools (Bimrose et al., 2007).

Focusing on, and to some extent measuring, employability using intermediate indicators also seems to be emerging across the Sector Skills Councils in the UK. Employability has been identified as a cross-cutting theme emerging from Sector Skills Agreements, therefore Asset Skills (one of the Sector Skills Councils) is leading

¹ This study was: Ministry of Employment, 2000, *L'activité des Organismes Prestataires de Bilans de Compétences en 1998*.

on a project aiming to ‘*embed employability across the Skills for Business network.*’¹ As part of this, the aim is to develop employability indicators specific to different sectors which can be used in recruitment, or training and development, as a way of assessing employee’s skills and development needs. These employability indicators may also be useful for agencies such as Jobcentre Plus, training providers, as well as for employees. However, this process is still ongoing.

2.2.4 Measuring employability in practice: existing research

Existing research provides guidance when evaluating Skills Coaching trials and Skills Passports, specifically in terms of methods of measuring employability. There are a number of recent evaluations, focusing on disadvantaged groups and improving employability, which have measured ‘soft’ outcomes and/or ‘hard’ outcomes. Some of these evaluations have also combined outcomes with intermediate indicators in order to appropriately measure distance travelled.

One example of measuring employability in practice is the ‘Evaluation of Ethnic Minority Outreach’ (EMO) pilot (Barnes et al., 2005), which used a framework similar to the one described previously (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). In the EMO pilot evaluation, employability and distance travelled were two inter-connected outcomes used to assess whether EMO participants had moved closer to the labour market or into work.

An evaluation of Work-Based Learning for Adults (WBLA), which is aimed principally at those aged 25 years or over who have been claiming Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) for at least six months, also used employability as a measure of impact (Anderson et al., 2004). The key factors that were measured included ‘soft’ outcomes, focusing on individuals’ perceptions of the distance they had travelled, such as self-reported measures of improvement in IT skills through involvement in the programme. The ‘hard’ outcomes measured were the acquisition of qualifications and labour market attachment (defined as those in work or actively seeking work).

Individuals’ perceptions of the distance they had travelled were also used to measure the impact of the Working Neighbourhoods Pilot (Dewson, 2005). Customers who participated in this pilot were asked what they had gained as a result. Responses included: self-confidence and motivation, jobsearch skills, qualifications, team-working skills etc.

2.3 Relevant research and evaluations

As well as providing examples of measuring employability, recent research also highlights outcomes/benchmarks which can be used to assess the success of Skills Coaching trials and Skills Passports. This research includes those which have focused on the impact of learning interventions, and the impact of advice and guidance.

2.3.1 Impact of learning interventions

Dench et al. (2006) conducted a systematic literature review and identified 12 studies which examined the impact of learning on employment outcomes for low-qualified, out-of-work adults. Key findings which emerged concerned the impact of learning on

¹ Quote taken from SSDA website: <http://www.ssda.org.uk/ssda/default.aspx?page=3165>.

the likelihood of obtaining employment, qualifications, and 'soft' outcomes, each of which are aspects of measuring employability. The research concluded that:

- Eight of the studies had explored the impact of learning on employment outcomes and all showed some positive effect. However, this result was not conclusive as some of these studies were employment-focused, or included a mix of approaches; therefore the impact of learning could not be isolated.
- All studies found a positive impact in terms of gaining qualifications for participants with no prior qualifications.
- Two studies discussed the soft outcomes of learning and improved self-confidence; increasing belief in their abilities and improved employability skills (such as timekeeping, etc.) were reported.

Furthermore, the impact of Skills Coaching trials and Skills Passports has been previously analysed (Hasluck et al., 2006). This research concluded that many of the participants of Skills Coaching tended to face multiple barriers, thus explaining, to an extent, the low level of work or education-related outcomes. However, it also concluded that there was *'strong evidence ... that the programme has, in most cases, boosted confidence and motivation and raised aspirations'* (Hasluck et al., 2006: p. 89); which suggests that 'softer' outcomes may be more prevalent and should be a focus for analysis.

2.3.2 Impact of advice and guidance

This focus on 'softer' outcomes is also important as the Skills Coach provides advice and guidance which has been noted in recent research to have a positive impact on attitudinal and behavioural outcomes (Pollard et al., 2007).

Research on advice and guidance suggests the majority of the positive findings appear to be in the learning and attitudes sphere, and weakest for employment outcomes. Killeen and White (2000) noted the positive returns to learning of guidance in their study, which focused on the longitudinal outcomes of adults in employment and matched them to a control group of non-IAG users. More recently, a longitudinal study (Pollard et al., 2007) analysed the impact of advice and guidance in comparison to information only. This study again found a positive effect in terms of learning participation, as well as finding that advice and guidance impacts positively on a range of attitudinal outcomes across the learning, work and career spheres.

The research on advice and guidance provides a set of ways in which we can assess the success of Skills Coaching trials and Skills Passports. We can analyse whether Skills Coaching trials and Skills Passports results in:

- participation in learning activities
- perceived ease of planning future learning
- confidence in obtaining desired learning and job
- feeling clearer about career decisions
- increased self-confidence.

Consequently, the research on advice and guidance supports the findings in the previous section by indicating the importance of measuring 'soft' outcomes as well as 'harder' outcomes, such as employment.

Incapacity benefit customers

One of the key eligible groups for Skills Coaching is inactive benefit recipients. October 2003 saw the introduction of the Pathways to Work Pilot for reform of Incapacity Benefits (IB), which aimed to increase the numbers of IB customers moving towards, or into, paid work. There have been three recent evaluations of the Pathways to Work Pilots, two which have analysed outcomes quantitatively (Adam et al., 2006, and Blyth, 2006) and one qualitatively (Corden and Nice, 2006).

The report by Blyth (2006) used Monitoring and Management Information to elicit conclusions and measure success. The success of these pilots was measured by looking at IB off-flow rates, IB caseloads and job entry rates amongst Pathway to Work customers in the pilot areas in comparison to the rest of the country. The report by Adam et al. (2006) analysed data collected from telephone interviews with individuals who made an enquiry to Jobcentre Plus about claiming incapacity benefits. It is important to note that this research focused on those who were flowing into IB, not those already there. It compared data from pilot areas to similar areas where the pilot was not in operation. The findings were preliminary; however, it is interesting to note key areas of success:

- _ positive findings in terms of movement into employment
- _ positive impact on earned income
- _ reduced number of customers on incapacity benefit 10.5 months after making an enquiry about claiming incapacity benefit.

It was also seen that the nature of the health condition affected the likelihood of moving into employment. This was also found in the qualitative research, where it was noted that the difference of the intervention was dependent on an individual's personal circumstances. For example, an individual's perception of their health, and changes to their health, affected the likelihood of them moving into employment, as did proximity to retirement age. Those who made steps towards work or got jobs across the waves of the research did so after perceived improvements to their health, whereas those whose health had deteriorated tended to be less work-focused. Amongst individuals nearing retirement age, motivation to find work also declined. This implies that when considering distance travelled as a result of an intervention, personal characteristics play an important role; in the case of IB customers, their perception of their health seems to be a key factor to take into account.

2.4 Conclusion

Skills Coaching trials and Skills Passports are well placed to inform the development of the new Adult Careers Service and an integrated approach to delivering employment and skills for those in and out of work, as proposed by Leitch and adopted by the Government in their response to Leitch, and in the Green Paper: *'In work, better off: next steps to full employment'*.

A key measure of their success is linked to improving participants' skills and consequently their employability. Therefore, employability needs to be measured to assess the impact of Skills Coaching trials and Skills Passports. Factors to focus on to measure employability include:

- _ the characteristics of participants (such as qualifications, basic skills level, health, length of unemployment)

- _ the distance travelled (eg what qualification was held by a participant prior to, and then post, intervention)
- _ 'hard' outcome indicators such as:
 - _ employment gains
 - _ educational attainment
 - _ higher earnings
- _ 'soft' outcome indicators such as:
 - _ increased confidence
 - _ higher levels of jobsearch activity
 - _ better presentability.

3 Development of the Trial in Year 2

Key Findings

- _ To ensure quick and effective procurement, the case-study areas initially invited tenders from organisations delivering the **nextstep**.
- _ Subcontractors were selected on a range of criteria, including good performance on the **nextstep** contract, having the capacity to deliver Skills Coaching, already working with the key target groups for Skills Coaching, and having qualified staff.
- _ Over time, several case-study areas reviewed or changed providers to address poor performance or to improve targeting of specific groups.
- _ Whilst Skills Coaches already had a background in IAG delivery this did not necessarily equip them to deliver the customer journey and to work with partners to generate referrals.
- _ Skills Coaches had an induction and attended national training focusing on the processes in the trial. There were some good examples of training being delivered locally to help Skills Coaches develop their skills. However, some Skills Coaches reported feeling unsure about how to deliver the coaching role.
- _ Where case-study areas had a Skills Coach Co-ordinator, this was seen to be a useful role in supporting Skills Coaches.
- _ If Advisers for the Adult Careers Service are not recruited specifically for the job role, then it will be important to have a well resourced and comprehensive national programme of training, supplemented by local level training where appropriate.

This chapter examines the development of the trial in Year 2. Firstly, it looks at how trial areas have subcontracted the delivery of Skills Coaching. It then goes on to examine in detail the role of Skills Coaches, focusing on what respondents saw the coaching role as being, the background and capacity of Skills Coaches, training and support for Skills Coaches, and lastly, whether working exclusively on Skills Coaching made a difference to the performance of trial areas.

3.1 The process of subcontracting

When deciding which organisations would deliver Skills Coaching, in the case-study areas the contractor initially invited organisations delivering the **nextstep** service to bid to deliver Skills Coaching, via a competitive tendering process. This enabled procurement to be undertaken quickly and easily, and to build on successful partnerships that were already in place between **nextstep** and Jobcentre Plus. The short lead-in time for the trials made this the only practical way in many areas of getting delivery in place quickly. The need for a longer lead-in time to be able to select new organisations and those without **nextstep** contracts, as well as to enable more time to get staff in place, to deliver training for Skills Coaches, and for the links between Skills Coaching and Jobcentre Plus to be built, was raised by some respondents.

Subcontractors were selected by the LSC, Jobcentre Plus and the **nextstep** main contractor. They were selected on the basis of a range of criteria in different case-study areas, including good performance on the **nextstep** contract, having the capacity to deliver Skills Coaching, already working with the key target groups for Skills Coaching or in the geographical areas the trial was focused on, and having staff with NVQ Level 4 in Advice and Guidance. In one Tranche 2 area, they chose delivery partners who were Matrix accredited¹ but this limited the providers they could use. In a Tranche 3 area, they found most **nextstep** sub-contractors who were interested in delivering Skills Coaching did not meet their criteria and the main **nextstep** contractor consortium therefore started delivering Skills Coaching themselves with intention of bringing new providers on board subsequently.

In Year 2, the focus on target groups, including low-skilled women and individuals from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups, led to a need for providers to be selected who were based in communities or had the capacity to do outreach (see Section 4.3). This was particularly the case in those trial areas that had a pilot to work with non-benefit recipients (see Section 6.4). The number of subcontractors in case-study areas ranged from two to nine. Subcontractors, in some cases, covered distinct geographical areas within the trial area and were linked to a particular Jobcentre.

In some areas, 100 per cent of the service had been contracted out, whilst in others, the main **nextstep** contractor was delivering some of the service. In one Tranche 2 area, where **nextstep** deliver part of the trial themselves, one respondent felt that this helped them to have a better understanding of the delivery issues than if they simply managed the contract, and felt that it led to changes being implemented more quickly. In other areas, the decision had been to subcontract 100 per cent of the service to try and ensure that Skills Coaching was seen as different from **nextstep**.

In some Tranche 1 case-study areas, the number of subcontractors had been reduced in Year 2 of the trials, with contracts being terminated due to poor performance, whilst in one Tranche 2 area, contracts had been continued despite poor performance, due to a local lack of other available organisations with the skills and capacity to deliver Skills Coaching. The LSC Manager in the Tranche 2 area felt that this poor performance was a result of a lack of support from within the Skills Coaches organisation for the trial, as it was only a part of their job role. **nextstep** in this area

¹ The matrix standard is a national quality standard for organisations delivering information, advice and guidance services for learning and work. It is maintained and promoted by ENTO (European Network of Training Organisations).

was still in discussions with potential new provider organisations at the time of fieldwork.

In a Tranche 2 area, the **nextstep** Trial Manager highlighted how organisations that performed well under the **nextstep** contract did not necessarily perform well under Skills Coaching as it was a different kind of service to deliver. In other areas, trials were continuing with the same set of organisations delivering Skills Coaching. One of these areas felt that having fewer subcontractors was working better and made it easier to manage the trial.

In summer 2007, a number of case-study areas were broadening the providers they used to address problems with poor performance and in order to extend the group of **nextstep** providers who had originally been contracted to deliver the service. New providers were brought into some of the case-study areas to be more proactive in conducting outreach and in reaching the Skills Coaching target groups.

In a Tranche 2 area, the Skills Coaching Co-ordinator highlighted how the service would work better if **nextstep** contracts and Skills Coaching contracts were managed by the same individual. In this trial area, the co-ordinator was a **nextstep** contract manager, but for a different part of the county. This meant that the organisations delivering Skills Coaching in the trial area had their performance reviewed by the co-ordinator, whilst their performance on **nextstep** was reviewed by a different **nextstep** contract manager.

3.2 The role of Skills Coaches

3.2.1 What exactly is the 'coaching' role?

The Skills Coach Handbook describes the role of a Skills Coach and also lists in detail the knowledge, skills and abilities required for the role. The job description is shown below:

3.1 - Skills Coach Job Description

The Skills Coach Job Description includes:

- _ regular liaison with Jobcentre Plus
- _ outreach work
- _ undertaking Access Interviews with customers to explore eligibility, suitability and commitment to Skills Coaching
- _ conducting Skills Diagnostic assessments, and identifying and agreeing skills gaps
- _ producing Skills Development Plans which will link to an individual's Skills Passport
- _ brokering appropriate provision to develop the customer's skills, and supporting the customer to implement their Development Plan
- _ providing support to record and document progress and achievement in a Skills Passport
- _ undertaking a Health Check post entry into learning to identify any issues that could lead to drop-out or under achievement
- _ undertaking a Progression Interview to assist the transition into employment
- _ referring the individual back to the Jobcentre Plus Personal Adviser
- _ collecting management information as required and participating in evaluation activities
- _ ensuring their own continuing professional development.

Four main ways in which the coaching role could differ from traditional IAG emerged. These roles are not mutually exclusive and most Skills Coaches tailored the coaching role to the needs of the customer and performed one or more elements of the role with different customers.

- _ Coaching goes **beyond giving information and advice** – it is an **ongoing process and relationship**.
- _ Coaching is **enhanced/in-depth guidance**.
- _ Coaching is **more directive than guidance**.
- _ Coaching is about **supporting/mentoring/counselling**.

Within most trial areas respondents had a similar view of what Coaching was, but this was not always the case. In a few cases, the labelling of the Skills Coaching trials as 'Coaching' was felt to be unhelpful as it was not always clear what it meant.

Beyond IA - an ongoing process and relationship

A Skills Coach Co-ordinator in a Tranche 1 area described **nextstep** as: *'just information giving'*, in contrast to Skills Coaching which was: *'a whole different service that gets down*

to the nitty gritty' and can really sort problems out for customers. A Skills Coach from this area described coaching as:

'For someone working in an advice and guidance role it [Skills Coaching] is really superior to other provision. This is because you are there to do a different kind of job. Training is training; whereas this is identifying training, identifying careers, identifying what you can and can't do and your limitations, and once a person knows that they think it is great. With IAG someone sits down and says: "what do you need – a CV, information on a course or career?" With Skills Coaching you identify everything that is in the way and find out how to overcome them.'

In a different Tranche 1 area, one Skills Coach described Skills Coaching as helping customers to think for themselves and identify their own skills. They felt that there was not time for this in a one-off IAG session. Another Skills Coach in this area felt that Skills Coaching was different because it gave customers long-term support within the same programme – which had not been possible in IAG before.

Another Skills Coach from this area felt that Skills Coaching was different from IAG as the Skills Coach has more time with the customer and can therefore gain someone's trust. They did not feel the process could be described as 'coaching', but as a process of enabling, facilitating and reflecting.

One Skills Coach in another Tranche 2 area described how the one-to-one approach of Skills Coaching adds value and ensures that the programme is tailored. He saw the difference between IAG and Coaching as:

'IAG – providing them with information and they go off and use it. Coaching is an ongoing programme and you are building a relationship with somebody. It's that relationship and that trust that helps you get more out of a client. You are also advising and guiding, but you are coaching the client to take responsibilities for their own actions and giving them the tools to do it for themselves once you're gone.'

The nextstep Contract Manager in this area described coaching as:

'The Coaching part is when they have done the Skills Diagnostic and we are putting them into learning or work. As nextstep provision, at that point we have lost them. It could be all the things we talk about in a guidance interview, but we are not there to catch it. We can work with them and support them if there are any issues'.

Enhanced/in-depth guidance

In a Tranche 1 area, the Skills Coach Co-ordinator saw Skills Coaching as an enhanced guidance role:

'I think it's guidance, mentoring and support. This is about in-depth guidance and support. I think coaching is a bit off-putting for people – it conjures up the wrong image. It should be client-led with the support and encouragement from the SC to do the best for the client. It's guidance, not necessarily coaching. Coaching is more for people who perhaps haven't got other issues – more life coaching for a particular section of your life whereas this is about everything. It's enhanced guidance.'

Whilst a Skills Coach also felt that Skills Coaching was enhanced guidance:

'Coaching is using your skills to help someone build up confidence and to encourage a person to take the next steps they need to go through learning or into work. Someone to be there to help through the whole process. It's a helping hand. I think coaching is more enhanced and supportive than guidance and it's also longer sessions and ongoing support.'

In a Tranche 2 area, the LSC contract manager described Skills Coaching as: *'the guidance element that IAG had never had because it was never paid for.'*

More directive than guidance

In another Tranche 2 area, the nextstep Trial Manager described Skills Coaching as a structured guidance role with elements of mentoring. She felt that the role should be more directive and proactive than traditional IAG.

A Skills Coach from a Tranche 3 area also described Coaching as being more directive than guidance:

'Skills Coaching is a different role from guidance. It's about coaching rather than guidance. Coaching is taking someone through a process and trying to find the positives and help them see where they might go next – it's looking at what they've done before and giving them input. With coaching, some things are compulsory so it's more prescriptive than guidance; you're not just saying: "how we can help?". It's more directive but more flexible as we can see people so much more than under the nextstep contract.'

Supporting/mentoring/counselling

In a Tranche 1 area, one Skills Coach described Skills Coaching as advice and guidance and more:

*'It is also counselling, and motivation. A Skills Coach should not tell a client what they **should** do, but reveal to them what they **can** do.'*

In one Tranche 2 area, the Skills Coach Co-ordinator described the process as not being guidance, but being coaching/counselling/mentoring depending on the customer. One Skills Coach in another Tranche 2 area said:

'Coaching is more of a supportive role, it not just: "here you go, go and do it", it's more about holding their hand and seeing if they're okay and working on a one-to-one basis with them, encouraging them and helping to identify what their strengths are and to make them feel positive.'

Is 'Coaching' a helpful definition?

A number of respondents in one Tranche 2 area did not feel that the term 'coaching' helped them to explain to customers, or to Jobcentre Plus Advisers, what the Skills Coaching process was all about. One Skills Coach said that 'coaching' meant coaching someone to learn how to do something (football coaching was given as an example). They felt that you: *'really ought not to tag names like that to programmes like this'*, as customers are expecting to be sent on a Work Trial.

In another Tranche 2 area, a Skills Coach commented:

'I wonder if Skills Coaching is what they anticipated it would be? It is more about identifying clients who need more involvement, work and follow-up. Skills Coaching also implies that we are teaching them something and we are not. We are literally just the go between, between them and learning. Once they have done that then you are supporting them to apply for jobs. I feel more like a client case manager than a Skills Coach. It feels false to call it that.'

3.2.2 Backgrounds and capacity of Skills Coaches

Staff providing the Skills Coaching service, must be able to demonstrate they have achieved units of competency from the NVQ Level 3 or 4 in Advice and Guidance. In case-study areas, all Skills Coaches had Level 3 in Advice and Guidance, and in the majority of cases Skills Coaches had, or were currently working towards, NVQ Level 4 in Advice and Guidance.

Skills Coaches may be recruited on the basis of their extensive experience of working with recipients of inactive benefits. They may also have experience of coaching and mentoring for various organisations and client groups. However, Skills Coaches were rarely recruited specifically for the Skills Coaching role as they were normally individuals from **nextstep** subcontractors delivering IAG services, who were already in post. One Tranche 1 area was the exception to this, with Skills Coaches being recruited directly for the position (see Section 3.2.4 below).

Evidence from the case-studies shows that subcontractors were not always supportive of the activity their employees deliver for Skills Coaching if it was not bringing in sufficient revenue, and in these circumstances Skills Coaches were unlikely to have time for development to meet the Skills Coach competencies outlined in Box 3.1.

The majority of Skills Coaches in the case-study areas had a background in IAG and had been delivering **nextstep** prior to working on Skills Coaching (and some were continuing to deliver **nextstep** – see Section 3.2.4 below). One Skills Coach had come from Jobcentre Plus and another from the Employer Training Pilot (the precursor to Train to Gain). Some Skills Coaches, prior to working on **nextstep**, had been Connexions Advisers, had worked for the Citizens Advice Bureau, had delivered IAG through a Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funded project, or had been Careers Advisers.

In one Tranche 1 area, all Skills Coaches had personal experiences of worklessness which they felt helped them to be good Skills Coaches. This was also the case for another Skills Coach in a Tranche 1 area:

‘One of the important things about Coaching is identifying with your clients and making your client feel at ease. I have gone through similar problems to some of my clients so I can empathise with them. I’ve been unemployed; I have a disability so I know what it’s like to have to find work with a disability. These things make good Coaching and mentoring.’

Having a background in delivering IAG did not necessarily equip Skills Coaches to deliver the Skills Coaching customer journey and work with partners to generate referrals. The Skills Coaching role is a different one to delivering IAG provision. For example, in a Tranche 2 area, the **nextstep** Trial Manager felt that the Skills Coaches had a good set of skills in terms of dealing with customers and delivering the journey, but were not good at the proactive relationship-building part of the role and providing feedback to Jobcentre Plus, which is an extremely important part of what makes a good Skills Coach. Many respondents felt that the overall performance of the trial area was dependent on having good Skills Coaches with the necessary internal relationship and networking skills as well as the more traditional customer-facing skills.

In one Tranche 1 area, they had increased the number of Skills Coaches from 16 to 21 to meet demand. However, there were still concerns about having enough capacity to meet demand so there were plans to train **nextstep** Advisers who are qualified to Level 3 to conduct Access Interviews in Jobcentres to free up some of the Skills Coaches to focus on later parts of the customer journey. In a Tranche 2 area, the LSC

Contract Manager said that they had run some more induction and initial training for Skills Coaches to develop a pool of people who can stand in if there are absences or holidays, or to increase capacity at particularly busy times. They hoped that this would give them more flexibility.

There were few reported cases of turnover amongst Skills Coaches in the case-study areas.

3.2.3 Training and support of Skills Coaches

National training

Nationally produced guidance and support materials, briefings and training was organised to outline the parameters and process for skills coaching. Further training and skills development responsibility sits with local trial areas and there was not a coherent approach to training in several of the case-study areas.

Skills Coaches receive an induction on Skills Coaching and there was some nationally organised training to give Coaches an overview of the requirements of the service, and to introduce Skills Coaches to the main tools. In addition, networking events were held to help share practice between the different tranches of trials, which most of the Skills Coaches we interviewed had attended. The content of national level training for Skills Coaches was often criticised for focusing too much on certain elements of the journey and not covering others. Several Skills Coaches said there had been one national training session to help Skills Coaches understand how to use the computer-based tools and packages available to them (including Skills Check and the Online Passport). However, there was not enough computer access for the session and, instead, the Skills Coaches were taught with the use of screen-shots. One Skills Coach from a Tranche 1 area said:

'I don't think the training was as good as it could be – there were still grey areas in relation to the customer journey and what was expected, eg the Progression Interview between Jobcentre Plus and Skills Coaching – it wasn't clear what was expected and nobody knew what to do. After the Learning Brokerage there was no clarification on what was expected. The guidance that we got was hazy initially. It made the job difficult as you had to use your skills a lot more to meet the aims of the programme.'

A Skills Coach from a Tranche 2 area also felt that the national training had not met her needs:

'I felt a bit let down by it [the training] ... I spent two days concentrated on delivering computer-based Purple Passport, which we didn't have time to go through properly and the Skills Diagnostic Tools, and not so much about the delivery and the paperwork and what you're meant to do with these clients ...for example, what to do at the end of the computer-based questionnaire.'

Another Skills Coach also felt that the national training was inappropriate. She reported that the training largely involved how to use computer packages and did not cover how to read, interpret and present the results. She felt it would have been useful to have case studies of how the programme was used, and that there should have been Skills Coaches from the other areas so they could answer questions and explain how they used the tools. A number of Skills Coaches also felt that they had not had sufficient training on how best to use and interpret information from Skills Check. The nationally arranged networking events were described as having been more useful.

The National Resource Website, which includes support materials for Skills Coaches and message board facilities, had been publicised in the trial areas, although, at the time of fieldwork in May–July 2007, not much use had yet been made of the new Skills Coaches discussion area of the website.

Locally organised training and support

In some case-study areas, **nextstep** had funded Skills Coaches to do NVQ Level 4 in Advice and Guidance, and most Skills Coaches had gained Level 4 or were currently working towards it. For example, in one Tranche 1 area:

'We could see that Skills Coaching was more in-depth than advice and guidance, so people needed the higher level. If they hadn't got the Level 4, then we said we would pay for them to do it, so all of our subcontractors are up to Level 4 and are all obviously Matrix quality standard.'

Skills Coaches in some case-study areas networked regularly by phone and e-mail. Training was also delivered to Skills Coaches at the local level, for instance on local labour market information, Skills Coaching paperwork and action planning. In one Tranche 3 area, a training needs analysis had been drawn up to give to all new organisations delivering Skills Coaching. In a Tranche 2 area, training was available to Skills Coaches through **nextstep** on topics such as handling difficult customers and motivational interviewing.

In another Tranche 2 area, Skills Coaches had been on an equality and diversity course, and had a two-day conference in early summer 2007. The conference consisted of an update on Skills Coaching, including links with the ALO pilot and using the Skills Passport, a presentation from Jobcentre Plus about their involvement in the trial and sharing of good practice. It also involved the delivery of City and Guilds Coaching units to give Skills Coaches an opportunity to develop this aspect of their skills. The feedback from this event was reported to be very positive.

However, a few Skills Coaches interviewed did not feel well supported and described themselves as not really knowing what they were doing. One Skills Coach from a Tranche 3 area said she was still unsure how Skills Coaching fitted with other provision. Another Skills Coach was unclear as to what the Passport element of the journey involved and also the role of the Skills Coach:

'Is job search part of what you're meant to do within the Skills Passports? ... Are we meant to get them job-ready and then pass them back [to Jobcentre Plus], or do this ourselves?'

Clearly these questions about how to implement the journey with customers should have been resolved with training and other support.

Advisers for the Adult Careers Service could be recruited specifically for the job role against a set of job competencies similar to the one developed for Skills Coaches part way through the trial. If Advisers are not recruited for the role, then it will be important to have a comprehensive national programme of training, supplemented by local-level training where appropriate.

The role of the Skills Coaching Co-ordinator

Where case-study areas had a Skills Coach Co-ordinator, this was seen to be a very useful role in supporting Skills Coaches. Initially, funding for this role came from capacity-building funding. In one Tranche 1 area, where this was no longer available

after the end of March 2007, the Skills Coaching Co-ordinator, along with the Jobcentre Plus lead at the district level, felt that there should be some core funding for this role. This was a view shared by some other trial areas with a co-ordinator role. A respondent from a Tranche 2 area felt that the role was '*crucial to keep it running smoothly*'.

The Skills Coach Co-ordinator was usually responsible for:

- _ overseeing the Skills Coaching trial
- _ holding regular one-to-one meetings with Skills Coaches
- _ providing local training
- _ holding monthly meetings with all Skills Coaches
- _ visiting Jobcentres to raise awareness of the trial
- _ helping to build relationships between Jobcentre Plus and Skills Coaches
- _ linking up the different people involved in the trial.

3.2.4 Does working exclusively on Skills Coaching make a difference?

In most case-study areas, Skills Coaches worked part of their working week on Skills Coaching and the remainder on other contracts for their host organisations – usually **nextstep**. The proportion of the week spent on Skills Coaching varied in these areas, from 30 per cent to 80 per cent. The positive side of this dual role was being able to make referrals from **nextstep** to Skills Coaching, where customers were eligible and suitable. In one Tranche 3 area, where Skills Coaches also worked on IAG contracts, the LSC contract manager said:

'They're not dedicated to that role – but because it's in its early days we don't know how it will pan out. It's something to keep an eye on. Shouldn't it be a stand alone thing, not something just fitting in?'

However, the Jobcentre Plus District lead disagreed and felt Skills Coaches who also worked on **nextstep** were positive as it meant that they knew the area, and how to work with Jobcentre Plus. In a Tranche 3 area, one Skills Coach felt under pressure from their host employer not to do the administration part of Skills Coaching but to use those days to do money-making activity for the non-Skills Coaching part of their organisation. They felt that the commercial imperatives from their organisation could conflict with their ability to deliver for Skills Coaching.

In one Tranche 1 area, a decision had been taken to pay Skills Coaches a wage based on projected client numbers, rather than giving payments to the contractor based on the stages of journey completed. This meant that Skills Coaches had been recruited specifically to work on Skills Coaching and worked 100 per cent of their working week on Skills Coaching. This was a very successful area and had 100 per cent retention of Skills Coaches. The Coaches in these areas did not feel that their job would be feasible if it was not done full-time in this dedicated way.

4 Operation of the Trial

Key findings

- _ The majority of the case-study areas had not achieved the targeted split between inactive customers and customers on JSA, and many customers were reported to have barriers other than skills.
- _ Skills Coaching has had better reach into the client group of lone parents, and less reach into BME groups and those aged over 50.
- _ The majority of customers were referred by Jobcentre Plus. To facilitate referrals from Jobcentre Plus, co-location of Skills Coaches was important, as was the understanding of the programme by PAs.
- _ Targets for Jobcentre Plus offices and Skills Coaching leads within Jobcentres were some of the ways in which Skills Coaching tried to increase communication with PAs and referrals.
- _ In some areas, referrals from PAs were affected by organisational change within Jobcentre Plus.
- _ Local-level partnerships (both strategic and operational) were strong in the large majority of areas, although staff changes in some areas had made these more difficult to sustain.
- _ There had been teething problems with the management information, most of which had been resolved.

This chapter discusses the operation of the trial. It begins by outlining the take-up of Skills Coaching and the types of customers starting the customer journey. Referrals to the trial from Jobcentre Plus PAs are then discussed in detail, followed by outreach work. The collection and analysis of management information is explored, and lastly the arrangements for partnership working at both national and local level are presented.

4.1 Take-up of Skills Coaching

The analysis in this section first describes the demographics of the benefit claimant population in the case-study areas and differences between them. It then goes on to assess whether any of the case-study areas, and Skills Coaching as a whole, were more likely to work with any particular client groups.

4.1.1 The claimant population in Skills Coaching areas

Data from the national Labour Market System (LMS) held by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) was obtained for the period March 2006–February 2007. This included information about all benefits claimants (both active and inactive) who had made a claim for all or part of the period. We have assumed that this is the client base from which referrals to Skills Coaching could be made, although in reality not all will have skills as a main barrier to employment. Unlike the Skills Coaching management information, claimants' highest levels of qualifications are not collected as part of the LMS and therefore we cannot make any assumptions using qualifications as a proxy for skills.

The population of claimants in the Skills Coaching case-study areas and Skills Coaching as a whole varied. For example, the proportion of BME claimants varied between the case-study areas, from three per cent to 65 per cent, with an average of 24 per cent across all Skills Coaching areas. The proportions of customers with other characteristics, such as a long-term health problem or disability, were more similar between the case-study areas. The proportion of claimants aged over 50 also showed some variation, with an average of one-in-four in the population aged 50 or over. This was only 19 per cent in one Tranche 3 area and 30 per cent in a Tranche 1 area.

4.1.2 Volume of customers starting the customer journey

At the time of data extraction, a total of 12,682 customers were recorded as having accessed Skills Coaching; 5,888 in the nine evaluation case-study areas. Table 4.1 (overleaf) shows the number of customers recorded for the case-study areas only. Area A and Area C have the largest number of recorded customers (1,568 and 1,155 respectively). None of the areas has fewer than 250 customers.

Between July 2006 and July 2007, 66 per cent of the aspirational number of Access Interviews were delivered. Targets were initially formulated based on an analysis of the benefit population, with input by local trials as to what they felt was achievable. This was then further refined with regards to budget availability.

Table 4.1: Number of Skills Coaching customers

Trial Area	Number of customers	Percentage of all customers
Area A (Tranche 1)	1,568	12%
Area B (Tranche 1)	776	6%
Area C (Tranche 1)	1,155	9%
Area D (Tranche 2)	305	2%
Area E (Tranche 2)	272	2%
Area F (Tranche 2)	805	6%
Area G (Tranche 3)	253	2%
Area H (Tranche 3)	347	3%
Area I (Tranche 3)	407	3%
Other Areas	6,794	54%
Total	12,682	100%

Source: LSC Mlmanager database

Some of the case-study areas reported monthly fluctuations in the number of customers starting the journey. For example:

- In a Tranche 2 area, the Jobcentre Plus District Co-ordinator thought that referrals to Skills Coaching had dipped when Jobcentre Plus staff were undertaking their appraisals.
- In another Tranche 2 area, the area nextstep contract manager said they achieved 137 per cent against target in one month, but then fell back to the previous levels which were below target. They were unsure about the reasons for this.
- In a Tranche 3 area, referrals had been up and down for a number of months, although the overall volume was still below target.
- In a Tranche 1 area, the LSC contract manager felt that the decrease in the number of referrals could be, in part, due to a perceived change in Jobcentre Plus priorities, and the effect of changes in key personnel.

4.2 Customer characteristics

In 2006/2007, the Skills Coaching Project Board identified additional target groups for the Skills Coaching service. These were customers aged 50+, black and minority ethnic groups and low-skilled women. A pilot focusing on people not on benefits also took place in Leicestershire, Manchester and Birmingham from July 2006.

In this section, the management information is used to build a profile of the Skills Coaching client base, to assess the progress of Skills Coaching trials in providing services to the target groups and to assess the suitability of customers referred to Skills Coaching services.

4.2.1 Types of customers

Table 4.2 shows the percentage of Skills Coaching customers who are male and female in each of the case-study areas, and for the trial scheme as a whole. Approximately half of the customers are male and half are female. Most of the individual trial areas mirror this split, although in Area C, nearly two-thirds of Skills Coaching customers are men.

Table 4.2: Skills Coaching customers, by gender (per cent)

Trial Area	Female		Male	
	Number	% within area	Number	% within area
Area A (Tranche 1)	620	40%	948	60%
Area B (Tranche 1)	474	61%	302	39%
Area C (Tranche 1)	427	37%	728	63%
Area D (Tranche 2)	146	48%	159	52%
Area E (Tranche 2)	162	60%	110	40%
Area F (Tranche 2)	351	44%	454	56%
Area G (Tranche 3)	141	56%	112	44%
Area H (Tranche 3)	163	47%	184	53%
Area I (Tranche 3)	202	50%	205	50%
Other Area	3,601	53%	3,193	47%
Total	6,287	50%	6,395	50%

Source: LSC MImanager database

Throughout this chapter ‘penetration’ figures have been calculated to compare the ‘reach’ into different groups of the population. This has been done by dividing the total number of Skills Coaching customers with a specific characteristic, by the total population of individuals claiming benefits for all or part of the year March 2006–February 2007 (the time period of the data is restricted by a time lag in data availability). While it is acknowledged that the two time periods do not overlap entirely (the Skills Coaching data runs from July 2006–July 2007), by using a year’s worth of Jobcentre Plus data, any seasonal differences in the make-up or volume of the benefit claimant population should be taken into account. Using the most recent Skills Coaching data in this analysis gives the newer trials more time to have worked with customers and will better reflect who Skills Coaching has worked with.

The Skills Coaching areas worked with proportionately more female benefit claimants (0.58 per cent) than male (0.54 per cent).

Over four in ten out of work for two years or more

The data in Table 4.3 (overleaf) reveals that more than 40 per cent of Skills Coaching customers have been unemployed for two years or more, and just under one in four have been out of work for less than six months. This suggests that these customers may have barriers to finding work other than lack of skills – such as health, confidence – and are likely to be further away from the labour market. This could indicate a tension in the policy between skills being the main barrier to work and the target of 80 per cent inactive benefit claimants. Further analysis is carried out below to investigate whether any of the long-term unemployed Skills Coaching participants are long-term JSA claimants.

Table 4.3: Skills Coaching customers, by length of time unemployed (percentage within area)

	Not unemployed	Less than 6 months	6-11 months	12-23 months	24-35 months	Over 36 months	Not known/ not provided
Area A (Tranche 1)	0%	30%	18%	13%	6%	33%	0%
Area B (Tranche 1)	0%	27%	14%	13%	9%	36%	1%
Area C (Tranche 1)	0%	28%	19%	16%	8%	29%	0%
Area D (Tranche 2)	1%	29%	17%	12%	7%	31%	2%
Area E (Tranche 2)	16%	21%	10%	8%	11%	34%	0%
Area F (Tranche 2)	2%	22%	16%	17%	7%	32%	3%
Area G (Tranche 3)	0%	14%	9%	18%	9%	49%	2%
Area H (Tranche 3)	1%	35%	20%	11%	5%	26%	3%
Area I (Tranche 3)	1%	20%	12%	13%	7%	45%	2%
Other Area	4%	20%	15%	13%	8%	38%	1%
Total	3%	23%	15%	14%	8%	36%	1%

Source: LSC Mlmanager database

The first Skills Coaching evaluation report revealed that many participants had been claiming JSA for considerably longer periods than the six/18 months at which the New Deal for Young People and New Deal for 25 Plus, respectively, become mandatory, indicating that many participants may have already been through a New Deal option. The qualitative research suggested Skills Coaching was being utilised as a service for individuals for whom 'all else had failed' (Hasluck et al., 2006). The analysis carried out for the interim data report provided some evidence that this trend may have continued, revealing that more than 50 per cent of JSA recipients on the Skills Coaching database had been claiming JSA for more than two years. However, the results of the July analysis show that only just over a quarter of JSA recipients had been claiming JSA for more than two years, and 35 per cent had been claiming for fewer than six months, meaning that they are less likely than in Year 1 to have been through mandatory New Deals.

The split of inactive and active customers not yet as intended

Individuals on inactive benefits have been identified as the main target group, and it is intended that 80 per cent of those Skills Coaching customers who are inside the benefits system should be inactive benefit claimants. Table 4.4 (overleaf) reveals that by July 2007, only 55 per cent of customers were claiming inactive benefits. None of the case-study areas had more than 67 per cent of customers claiming inactive benefits, and Area C and Area H had fewer than 35 per cent of customers doing so. Across all Skills Coaching areas, they worked with proportionately fewer inactive claimants (0.48 per cent), compared to 0.56 per cent of active claimants.

Table 4.4: Skills Coaching customers, by benefit status (per cent)

Trial Area	% within area	% within area
Area A (Tranche 1)	45%	52%
Area B (Tranche 1)	63%	31%
Area C (Tranche 1)	34%	65%
Area D (Tranche 2)	47%	53%
Area E (Tranche 2)	65%	35%

Area F (Tranche 2)	44%	56%
Area G (Tranche 3)	54%	46%
Area H (Tranche 3)	30%	70%
Area I (Tranche 3)	67%	33%
Other Area	62%	38%
Total	55%	44%

Source: LSC Mlmanager database

Interviewees discussed the lack of attainment of the 80:20 split, and generally felt this was because:

- Jobcentre Plus do not work with all inactive benefit customers on a regular basis, and some existing IB claimants do not have regular Work Focused Interviews. Skills Coaches tended to be dealing with the ‘flow’ of new customers onto IB and IS rather than the ‘stock’ of customers.
- Customers referred to Skills Coaching are meant to have a lack of skills as their main barrier¹, but there is a tension between the inactive target and the types of customers in that group who are likely to have multiple and other main barriers to work, such as childcare and health.
- Jobcentre Plus made changes to customers’ benefit status, with many customers claiming IB moved to JSA.
- IB/ IS customers who are referred were more likely than JSA customers not to attend the Access Interview. This was felt to be because these customers are not used to participating in labour market programmes in the way that JSA claimants are used to participating in regular interviews and New Deal.
- IB customers, on condition of their benefit, are categorised as unable to work and therefore may be concerned that undertaking Skills Coaching would jeopardise their receipt of benefit.
- Jobcentre Plus offices are typically a ‘place of mistrust’ for many IB customers. Outreach is needed to attract this group to the programme, and in most case-study areas this has not been undertaken to any great extent, although in many it was increasing.
- In three of the newer areas, Jobcentre Plus had made a decision to begin by encouraging PAs to make any referrals to Skills Coaching in the first instance, and then later into the trial tried to hone the 80:20 split. This approach had led one case-study area to freeze referrals of JSA customers.

Although some areas had frozen referrals of JSA customers and one had created an IB referral sheet and IB-only referral times, in others, Jobcentre Plus and nextstep still encouraged all referrals, of whatever type, to try and increase the volume of customers. In a Tranche 2 area, the LSC Contract Manager said that they: *‘can’t afford to be selective and targeted as we are floundering in terms of numbers’*. In a Tranche 1 area, the nextstep Trial Manager said that they did not want to: *‘send out the wrong message to Jobcentre*

¹ Section 4.3.3: ‘Jobcentre Plus Adviser understanding’ discusses how, overall, PAs did not seem aware that skills being the *main* barrier to finding employment was an eligibility criterion. PAs were therefore referring a range of different types of customers to Skills Coaching.

Plus' by turning JSA customers away, particularly after the time and effort they had spent trying to increase referrals from Jobcentre Plus.

One Tranche 1 area had been successful in working with inactive benefit customers and was the nearest to meeting the target of 80 per cent of customers being from inactive benefits (63 per cent). In this area they:

- _ carried out an analysis of Jobcentre Plus customers and assigned Skills Coaches to be co-located at these offices
- _ focused on inactive benefit recipients from the start rather than volumes
- _ gave presentations to all the PAs in the district, and
- _ specifically targeted PAs who work with the client group. They held meetings with disability and NDLP Advisers to tell them about Skills Coaching and why they should refer their customers.

Nearly six in ten do not have a Level 2 qualification

Table 4.5 shows the range of highest qualifications achieved by Skills Coaching customers, prior to accessing the service. While the level of qualification held does not affect eligibility for Skills Coaching, one of the primary goals of the trial is to provide customers who do not have a Level 2 qualification with one. Nearly 60 per cent of customers did not have a Level 2 qualification when they first accessed the service. It is interesting to note that 16 per cent of Skills Coaching customers have qualifications at Level 3 or above. This is not necessarily an indication that lack of skills are per se not the main barrier to work for these individuals; it may be that a lack of *suitable* skills or qualifications is preventing them from entering employment.

When compared to the qualifications of individuals recorded in the Labour Force Survey as claiming JSA, sick or looking after family, Skills Coaching is working with fewer people with no qualifications (25 per cent compared to 32 per cent in the population) and proportionately slightly more individuals qualified at Level 2 (18 per cent compared to 12 per cent).

Table 4.5: Skills Coaching customers, by highest qualification achieved prior to Skills Coaching (percentage within area)

	Level 0-1	Level 2	Level 3-5	No qualifications	Other qualification/unknown
Area A (Tranche 1)	28%	17%	11%	27%	17%
Area B (Tranche 1)	28%	23%	21%	24%	5%
Area C (Tranche 1)	31%	13%	10%	34%	12%
Area D (Tranche 2)	47%	17%	11%	20%	5%
Area E (Tranche 2)	46%	9%	9%	18%	18%
Area F (Tranche 2)	45%	10%	9%	26%	10%
Area G (Tranche 3)	41%	21%	21%	13%	4%
Area H (Tranche 3)	39%	20%	24%	14%	2%
Area I (Tranche 3)	40%	15%	9%	21%	15%
Other Area	31%	19%	19%	25%	6%
Total	33%	18%	16%	25%	9%

Source: LSC Mmanager database

Generally, all Skills Coaches reported that customers did have a lack of skills as a barrier to finding work (to a greater or lesser extent), although it was common for customers to also have one or more other barriers to finding work, including health, childcare or issues with debt. The customers we interviewed were more likely to cite a barrier other than skills as a reason why they were not in work. This is perhaps not surprising, given that the trials are aiming to serve customers who may have been unemployed for some time, who were likely to have health problems and/or family responsibilities. This finding supports the proposed new approach to the Adult Careers Service which recognises that many customers have multiple barriers to finding work and not just skills alone, and therefore Advisers under this service are aiming to tackle multiple barriers alongside each other rather than focus on a single barrier.

Skills Coaches said that customers had a range of skills deficiencies, from formal qualifications, to basic skills, IT skills, soft skills and confidence, and also job search and job application skills. While most customers did not explicitly acknowledge that skills were a barrier to them finding work, many did say that they wanted help addressing some sort of perceived gap in their job search and application skills, for example, writing a CV or interview skills.

Reaching the target groups

Across all the Skills Coaching areas, Skills Coaching worked with proportionately more:

- people without a disability rather than individuals with a disability or long-term health problem (1.86 per cent of all claimants were involved in Skills Coaching compared to 0.20 per cent)
- lone parents than non-lone parents (0.86 per cent were involved in Skills Coaching compared to 0.42 per cent)
- customers from a White background rather than those from BME groups (0.81 per cent were involved in Skills Coaching compared to 0.58 per cent¹)
- customers aged under 50 rather than those aged 50 or over (0.63 per cent were involved in Skills Coaching compared to 0.34 per cent).

Reasons that could explain these patterns will be explored throughout the rest of the report, but could include, for example, more starts with active than inactive customers, and Skills Coaches building better relationships that lead to referrals with particular types of JCP Advisers, such as NDLP Advisers. Interviews with Skills Coaches suggested that the trials worked with a variety of customers, but depended on the relationship with specific PAs and their perceived value of the trial for their customers, which in turn affected the volume and types of referrals.

Low-skilled women

‘Low-skilled women’ are a target group. For the purposes of the analysis in Table 4.6 (overleaf), an individual is defined as ‘low-skilled’ if the highest level of qualification achieved is below Level 2.²

More than a quarter of all Skills Coaching customers are classified as ‘low-skilled women’, the proportion being similar in most of the case-study areas, with the exception of Area E, where it rises to nearly 40 per cent.

¹ NB: only 71 per cent of benefits claimants in the Skills Coaching areas have ethnicity recorded.

² An example of a Level 2 qualification is five GCSEs graded A*–C. Customers with highest level of qualification recorded as ‘not known’ or ‘other qualification’ (eight per cent of all customers) have not been counted as low-skilled in this analysis.

Table 4.6: Low skilled women accessing Skills Coaching

Trial Area	Low skilled women	
	Number	% within area
Area A (Tranche 1)	348	22%
Area B (Tranche 1)	242	31%
Area C (Tranche 1)	259	22%
Area D (Tranche 2)	90	30%
Area E (Tranche 2)	106	39%
Area F (Tranche 2)	244	30%
Area G (Tranche 3)	80	32%
Area H (Tranche 3)	87	25%
Area I (Tranche 3)	98	24%
Other Area	1,984	29%
Total	3,538	28%

Source: LSC Mmanager database

Lone parents

At a local office level, the Skills Coach's relationship with individual PAs seemed to affect the spread of customers they worked with. For example, where Skills Coaches had good working relationships with NDLP Advisers, their caseload tended to involve a large number of these customers.

Referrals from PAs dealing with particular customer groups seemed to depend on what they perceived to be the value of Skills Coaching for their customers. NDLP Advisers were generally felt to have embraced the programme because they recognised how it might help their customers to build confidence and skills ready to go back to work when their child reached the age of 16. Skills Coaches and lone parent customers said that Skills Coaching was working particularly well for lone parents.

Workless lone parents are a policy priority group, given the Government Public Service Agreement (PSA) target for 70 per cent of lone parents to be in employment by 2010, and given the predominance of women they are a also priority group for Skills Coaching. Three in ten Skills Coaching customers were lone parents and the reach into this target group was significantly higher than the reach into groups of non-lone parents (0.86 per cent of lone parents in the benefit population compared to 0.42 per cent of non-lone parents).

Over 50s

Skills Coaching seems to have been better able to reach certain groups than others. Some of the customers we interviewed who were over the age of 50 (and some who were younger than this) said that they were: 'too old to learn'. These sorts of barriers need to be overcome if the potential for careers advice and skills development is going to help this target group as much as possible.

The age breakdown of Skills Coaching customers was as follows:

_ 18-24 – 14 per cent

- _ 25-49 – 70 per cent
- _ 50+ – 16 per cent

Skills Coaching worked with proportionately fewer claimants aged under 50 (0.34 per cent of the benefit claimant population aged 50 or over) compared to 0.63 per cent of claimants aged under 50.

BME groups

Seventy-five per cent of Skills Coaching customers identified themselves as 'White British', and a further three per cent as White Irish or another White background. Seventeen per cent of customers were from BME groups (seven per cent Asian/Asian British, seven per cent Black/Black British and three per cent Mixed backgrounds). It might be expected that the proportions of customers of different ethnicity would vary according to the ethnic composition of the particular area, and indeed that is the case: 17 per cent of customers in Area C identify themselves as 'Asian or Asian British – Pakistani', whilst 15 per cent of those in Area G consider themselves to be 'Black or Black British – African'. The overall Skills Coaching worked with proportionately fewer customers in BME groups compared to those in White groups (0.58 per cent of the BME claimant population were involved in Skills Coaching compared to 0.81 per cent of the white claimant population).

In most areas, Skills Coaches felt that their work with BME customers was reflective of the population, although one case-study area had made a concentrated effort to reach this group by contracting with organisations based in geographic areas with a high population of individuals from BME groups. In a Tranche 1 area with a large BME population, the Skills Coaches felt that they were not working with a representative proportion of customers in this group, and indeed the penetration figures for this area support this. One Skills Coach felt that there was not enough understanding of the cultural and language issues that might prevent these customers from coming in to a Jobcentre Plus office.

Customers with a disability

In one area, Skills Coaches said they did not get many referrals of people with disabilities, as the PAs who specialised in working with these customers did not refer them to the programme. They reported that the PAs felt there was more specialised provision available for these customers.

Twenty-eight per cent of Skills Coaching customers consider themselves to have a disability, learning difficulty or health problem; evidence that Skills Coaches and disabled customers believe Skills Coaching is a suitable service for disabled people looking to improve their skills so that they can enter employment (Table 4.7). In two case-study areas, only two per cent of customers are recorded as having a disability, learning difficulty or health problem – much lower proportions than any of the other seven areas, which may indicate issues with data collection.

Skills Coaching was proportionately less likely to work with benefit claimants with a disability than benefit claimants without a disability (0.20 per cent compared to 1.86 per cent).

Table 4.7: Skills Coaching customers, by disability status (per cent)

Trial Area	Customer considers himself or	Customer does not consider himself	No information
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	herself to have a learning difficulty and/or disability and/or health problem	or herself to have a learning difficulty and/or disability and/or health problem	provided by the customer
	% within area	% within area	% within area
Area A (Tranche 1)	23%	77%	0%
Area B (Tranche 1)	42%	57%	1%
Area C (Tranche 1)	22%	56%	22%
Area D (Tranche 2)	21%	76%	3%
Area E (Tranche 2)	32%	67%	0%
Area F (Tranche 2)	2%	98%	0%
Area G (Tranche 3)	24%	72%	4%
Area H (Tranche 3)	34%	64%	2%
Area I (Tranche 3)	2%	98%	0%
Other Area	33%	62%	5%
Total	28%	67%	5%

Source: LSC Mmanager database

Range of experience and barriers

The labour market experiences and barriers among the Skills Coaching customers interviewed for the evaluation were wide-ranging. The range of past experience, level of education, barriers to finding work, and types of work sought have implications for how the customer journey is delivered, with flexibility being key. Below are a few examples of the types of customers.

- One customer had trained as a lawyer and was qualified to post-graduate level. She had been claiming JSA for 15 months and felt she needed to gain computer skills to improve her chances of finding work. She had caring responsibilities for an elderly relative, which limited her geographic job search area.
- One customer was a lone parent with three children. She had been claiming IS for the last four years and felt that she had been out of the labour market for so long that it had damaged her prospects of finding work. She also felt that her age was a barrier to finding work.
- One customer was a 60-year-old Pakistani woman who had a university degree from Pakistan. She wanted to find work as a translator, but felt that there were few opportunities available for this sort of work in the local labour market.
- One customer had been a painter and decorator, but health problems meant he could not continue his job. He took part in Skills Coaching to try to find out about how to become a teacher of painting and decorating. He felt his main barriers to finding work were his health and lack of confidence.

- One customer from a Tranche 1 area had been out of work for 18 months, and was claiming JSA. She had no qualifications. She felt her biggest barrier to finding work was her lack of skills and qualifications.

4.3 Working with Jobcentre Plus

In keeping with the original model, in most areas the substantial volume of customers was referred by Jobcentre Plus. Jobcentre Plus PAs may refer customers as a result of discussions during their one-to-one sessions. During this session the PA tries to ensure that the customer is both eligible and suitable for Skills Coaching. An appointment with a Skills Coach is either booked with the customer present, or the customer sees the Skills Coach there and then, if the Skills Coach is available. The PA ensures that the Skills Coach has a copy of the customer's Action Plan/Jobseekers Agreement, so they can see the customer's history and aims.

In many of the case-study areas, Disability Employment Advisers and NDLP Advisers were the main sources of referral to Skills Coaching. These PAs see customers on an ongoing basis and therefore they were able to continue to work with customers after they finished Skills Coaching. In one case-study area, the New Claims Adviser and Restart Adviser were frequent sources of referral to Skills Coaching which made the hand back to Jobcentre Plus at the end of the journey more difficult as these PAs do not have a caseload of customers.

4.3.1 Ways of working with Jobcentre Plus

At a local level, areas worked with Jobcentre Plus in different ways to suit local need, but typically there was some co-location, with Skills Coaches working in Jobcentre Plus offices. Having a nominated Skills Coach lead within each Jobcentre Plus office was also found to be beneficial. Nevertheless, Jobcentre Plus did not receive any funding for their work or time spent on Skills Coaching.

Co-location

In some areas, it had not been possible to co-locate due to the roll-out of Jobcentre Plus offices leading to capacity constraints. For example, an IB PA in a Tranche 1 area said some of the PAs did not have their own desk and hence there was not enough space for the Skills Coach. In a Tranche 1 area, the LSC contract manager said that it was becoming increasingly difficult to find space within Jobcentre Plus offices and therefore the trial was giving a greater emphasis to outreach over time.

Where there was sufficient capacity, Skills Coaches were often based in Jobcentre Plus offices on one or more days a week. This was felt to increase awareness of the programme among Jobcentre Plus Advisers, help to build relationships between Skills Coaches and PAs, and hence to increase the number of referrals onto the trial. The benefits of co-location were highlighted by a Skills Coach from a Tranche 1 area where co-location was felt to be an important element in their success, who said: *'the more doors they have to go through [to access a service] the more customers you lose'*.

In areas where Skills Coaches were not located within Jobcentre Plus offices, PAs had to refer customers to Skills Coaches based in other organisations. Some Skills Coaches said this was not a problem as they had offices near to the Jobcentre, but others felt they were 'one-step removed'.

A LSC Contract Manager in a Tranche 1 area felt that it was important for PAs to think of Skills Coaches and Skills Coaching as part of their own organisation and that they were referring to their own provision rather than to a separate service. The new Adult Careers Service should be embedded in Jobcentre Plus and be seen as a part of their provision rather than a separate, or competing service. A lead in Jobcentre Plus offices and events to embed the Adult Careers Service and increase Adviser understanding of the service may both help to achieve a uniform approach to referrals.

Support

Where co-location was possible, Jobcentre Plus offices differed in the facilities and support they offered Skills Coaches. In one case-study area, some Skills Coaches had rooms in the Jobcentre where they could set up printers (provided by nextstep) so they could undertake the Skills Diagnostic with customers in a private setting. In a Tranche 1 area, the Jobcentre Plus District Manager described how, where possible, Skills Coaches had private rooms to work with customers. The Skills Coaches interviewed in this area felt this support was important, as customers sometimes revealed things that they had not told their PA. They also felt that customers were less likely to open up in a public place.

No-shows

Some Skills Coaches said that co-locating in a Jobcentre Plus office meant that customer 'no-shows' could waste time. Here, one nextstep manager describes the concerns of her contractors:

'They would have thought: "what if I go to the Jobcentre Plus and haven't got any appointments, then I'll have down time and down time costs money." ... Anyone who has ever worked with Jobcentre Plus before knows that Jobcentre Plus customers often do not turn up. So they would be concerned about that. If they are in their own centres they can get on with other work.'

The partnership has thought of ways Skills Coaches could use downtime productively, such as undertaking follow-ups with customers or administration associated with the programme. In a Tranche one area, Skills Coaches used any downtime proactively, either 'floor-walking' within the Jobcentre looking for customers, or by undertaking outreach work, visiting community centres or libraries in the local area. The box below summarises some of the ways in which individuals in the case-study areas were using Skills Coaching downtime productively.

Good Practice 4.1 - Using Skills Coach downtime productively

Minimising Skills Coach downtime productively (depending on the resources the Skills Coach has available to them - ie access to a computer or telephone) could be done in the following ways:

- _ floor-walking in the Jobcentre Plus office
- _ visiting nearby community centres to discuss Skills Coaching with staff, or to introduce it to potential customers
- _ undertaking follow-up stages of the journey - such as the In-Learning Health Check
- _ undertaking Skills Coaching administration

- _ networking with Jobcentre Plus PAs (if available)
- _ feeding back progress of customers to Jobcentre Plus PAs (including by email if PAs are with customers).

Customers' views of co-location

Customers, such as those claiming JSA, who were used to attending meetings at the Jobcentre were not put off by meeting a Skills Coach at a Jobcentre, although some thought that their Skills Coach was part of the Jobcentre. Only a handful of customers that we spoke to said that they would have preferred not to meet their Skills Coach at the Jobcentre. These included one customer who was claiming IB after recovering from a hip replacement. He said he would have preferred to meet the Skills Coach somewhere else because he *'didn't want to be associated with the work-shy'*.

One customer in a Tranche 3 area said that he preferred to meet his Skills Coach at the Careers Office rather than the Jobcentre because when he saw the Skills Coach at the Jobcentre he felt she *'wasn't fully prepared. She couldn't get internet access and the laptop she had made it difficult for me to use during the Skills Diagnostic as she had to keep turning it round.'* Although co-location has several benefits it is obviously important that Skills Coaches can access suitable equipment and space to deliver the customer journey in Jobcentre Plus.

4.3.2 Facilitators of referrals

In most areas (particularly the more established ones) referrals from Jobcentre Plus to Skills Coaching were being made, although there were marked differences in performance between areas, between Jobcentre Plus offices in the same area and between Advisers (even in the same office). While some of this was likely to be due to the length of time organisations and Advisers had worked in partnership, there were other factors which facilitated referrals from PAs. These are discussed in turn.

Target for Jobcentre Plus offices

In a number of areas, specific Jobcentre Plus offices and/or Advisers had targets for referrals to Skills Coaching. This was felt to increase referrals to Skills Coaching because of the target culture within Jobcentre Plus.

A Tranche 3 area had recently introduced Skills Coaching targets for Jobcentre Plus in an effort to increase referrals. This had been written into a contract with Jobcentre Plus to make it a formal arrangement. In a Tranche 2 area where referrals from Jobcentre Plus remained slow, the LSC manager said that they were considering Skills Coaching targets for Advisers to increase the motivation to refer and the recognition PAs get for referring.

A Tranche 1 area had recently introduced targets for each local Jobcentre Plus office which helped them identify which offices were not referring to Skills Coaching and helped to identify which offices they might need to undertake some more awareness-raising work with. The Skills Coaching Co-ordinator in the same area hoped it would help them to achieve the 80:20 split and help Advisers to understand which customers to prioritise.

However, in a Tranche 3 area, a Jobcentre Plus Skills Coaching lead said that targets for Advisers would not be implemented, as they feared that it could encourage inappropriate referrals to be made in order to meet targets.

Skills Coaching lead in Jobcentre Plus

In some areas, a Jobcentre Plus Skills Coaching lead or champion (these were sometime PAs and sometimes managerial staff) were felt to have worked well at increasing the number of referrals. In a Tranche 3 area, a Jobcentre Plus representative from each office attended a launch event to increase their knowledge of the trial and then reported back to PAs within their Jobcentre. In a Tranche 2 district, the Jobcentre Plus leads were used as *'resident experts'* to answer queries from Advisers about the programme, and to cascade information.

In a Tranche 1 area, a Jobcentre Plus Skills Coaching office lead had developed handouts and a flow chart for PAs to help them to diagnose when someone should be referred to Skills Coaching and when they should be referred to other information, advice and guidance services, such as learndirect or nextstep. He felt that having a champion for Skills Coaching within each Jobcentre Plus office reminded Advisers of the programme.

One-to-one relationships with Jobcentre Plus PAs

Several interviewees mentioned the importance of maintaining a presence in the office and networking with PAs; even small things such as eating lunch with PAs was felt to build working relationships and trust, and increase the volume of referrals.

In offices where Skills Coaches reported they had a good relationship with PAs, it was common to find that relationships with one or more Advisers (such as NDLP Advisers) were the source of the large majority of referrals from the office.

In a Tranche 3 area, one Skills Coach had had differing success with referrals between two Jobcentre Plus offices he worked from. In one, he had a long-established relationship with staff and reported that he got on well with PAs. In another, he did not have a history of working with PAs and he felt that the lack of referrals from this office was a result of this.

In a Tranche 2 area, where referrals from Jobcentre Plus had been slow, the LSC Contract Manager felt that a key reason for this was that Skills Coaches were not establishing relationships with PAs. The nextstep Trial Manager in the same area questioned whether Skills Coaches had the skills to build relationships and network in this way, for example building and maintaining relationships. They said that a Skills Coach needs to be *'a people person and realise that pro-activity is part of their job'*. Where the new Adult Careers Service requires existing IAG providers to work in different ways, the skills and confidence of Careers Advisers to work in this new way needs to be considered and appropriate training offered as necessary. Some Skills Coaches suggested that developing and maintaining relationships with PAs was easier to do in smaller offices.

Feedback to Jobcentre Plus PAs

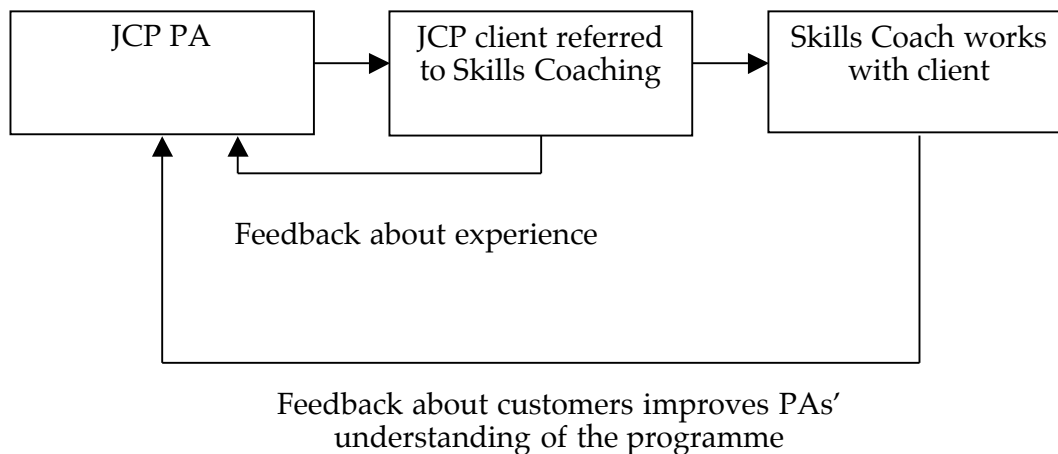
Alongside personal relationships, feedback about client's progress and what they had been working on with the Skills Coach seemed key to increasing PAs' understanding of the programme. They felt it was important for them to know which sort of referrals

worked well, and how Skills Coaches were helping customers, so they could 'sell' the programme to other customers. A NDLP Adviser in a Tranche 2 area felt that co-location made it easier for Jobcentre Advisers to gain feedback from Skills Coaches about their customers.

A Jobcentre Plus Co-ordinator in a Tranche 1 area thought that if PAs understood that Skills Coaching could increase some of their hardest-to-help clients' employability, and heard success stories to this effect, then they would refer customers more readily. In a Tranche 1 area, an IB PA and a NDLP Adviser both said that good news stories and feedback about customers would encourage them to make referrals to Skills Coaching.

The figure below illustrates the importance of feedback from Skills Coaches to PAs to increase trust and understanding of the trials. Without this mutually reinforcing process, referrals to Skills Coaching could slow or stall, as had happened in some areas. For example, in a Tranche 2 area, a New Deal for Lone Parents Adviser explained that she had stopped referring to Skills Coaching as she had '*become disillusioned with it*'. She had not had any positive feedback from customers or feedback from Skills Coaches about what they covered with customers, and was therefore not sure of the value of the programme.

Figure 4.1 The importance of feedback in increasing PAs understanding and referrals



The new Adult Careers Service plans to work with referrals from PAs to Careers Advisers. Skills Coaches' experience would suggest that feedback about the following are all vital to build and facilitate future referrals:

- _ What work Advisers undertook with customers
- _ What customers achieved
- _ Which referrals were suitable, and which were not.

4.3.3 Inhibitors to referrals

Interviewees mentioned a number of obstacles to referrals from Jobcentre Plus Advisers. The most important three obstacles were: perceived quality of Skills

Coaches, a perception that PAs could deliver Skills Coaching themselves and PA understanding of the trial. These could all be addressed (see Good Practice Box 4.2). The fourth reason – organisational change within Jobcentre Plus – is likely to be a short-term issue.

Perceived quality of Skills Coaches

In some areas, PAs were reported by Jobcentre Plus leads to lack confidence in the skills and ability of the Skills Coaches and in what the programme could offer Jobcentre Plus customers – indeed some PAs reported this first hand. Little confidence in the skills of the Coaches meant PAs were reluctant to refer customers to the trial in some instances.

One Jobcentre Plus District Co-ordinator described how Jobcentre Plus Advisers' concerns with the quality of delivery affected referrals, both to the programme as a whole and to specific Advisers:

'There is some cynicism among our Advisers about whether the Skills Coaches have the skills to deliver Skills Coaching ... Jobcentre Plus Advisers are very quick to be selective about who they refer to based on their experience and the feedback they get from the customers about dealing with the organisation... although the Advisers wouldn't consciously refer to one organisation than another they do it sub-consciously about how good an individual might be. Because the Skills Coach attends the office, if the Advisers don't think they are very good, then they will pick another day first [when a Skills Coach the PA prefers is in the Jobcentre].'

A New Deal for Lone Parents Adviser from the same area supported this and said that she tried to refer her customers to a specific Skills Coach she thought was more effective. A NDLP Adviser in an area with ALO funding said that she had stopped referring customers to Skills Coaching because she felt that Skills Coaches: *'don't know enough about the labour market, or about what training is on offer; they don't even know about ALO'*.

Skills Coaches need to feel confident in what they are delivering and how they are delivering it, in order to sell it to PAs – and indeed to customers. Section 3.2.2 detailed how some Skills Coaches were unsure about this and wanted more training. When the new Adult Careers Service is implemented, initial training of Advisers will be crucial so they have the confidence and skills to tell PAs about the service, and so PAs will have confidence in the quality of staff and continue to refer.

PAs feel they can deliver Skills Coaching themselves

Some individuals explained reluctance among PAs to refer customers to the programme. PAs felt they were as qualified as Skills Coaches and could provide the same service for customers. One Jobcentre Plus lead said:

'I think there is a perception of outside organisations by Jobcentre Plus staff. For instance, our Advisers will say: "what extra can they do for our customers?". The subcontractors might say: "we have NVQ Level 4 [in advice and guidance]" and the Advisers will say: "well so have we".'

Indeed, a NDLP Adviser in a Tranche 1 area said that she had stopped referring to Skills Coaching because she felt she could do what the Skills Coaches did for customers herself.

Jobcentre Plus Adviser understanding

Where Jobcentre Plus Adviser understanding of the programme, its content, potential benefits and suitable customers was accurate, Skills Coaches were more likely to report that they gained a steady stream of appropriate referrals. As might be expected, PA understanding of the trial was felt to be better in areas where Skills Coaching had been running for longer, although there were examples of PAs who felt that they had understood Skills Coaching at first, but after sending customers on it, felt less sure what the programme was.

In some areas, Skills Coaches were critical of the PAs knowledge of the trial, which they felt affected their ability to brief the customer appropriately before the Access Interview, to help the customer understand why they were being referred and how the process could benefit them.

Given the vast array of other programmes and initiatives that PAs were able to refer customers to, it was acknowledged that PAs needed support in gaining knowledge of the programme and understanding how and who to refer.

The PAs seemed to have varying types of customers that they referred to Skills Coaching. Some referred customers who wanted to undertake learning, others who were not sure what job they wanted to do, people who needed intensive one-to-one support, people who had been out of the labour market for a while (for example caring for children) but who wanted to return to work in the medium term, and others who were *'not job-ready, but who want to do something'*.

Below are some examples of the types of customers that the PAs who were interviewed for the evaluation said they would refer to Skills Coaching (some of which contradict each other):

- _ people with basic skills needs
- _ people who do not have basic skills needs
- _ people who are motivated, but with little sense of direction or focus
- _ people looking for work, but who are not sure what they want to do
- _ job-ready customers
- _ customers who are not job-ready and who might have basic skills issues, or need to gain new skills
- _ customers with a lack of skills
- _ customers who want to go into training
- _ customers who want to change their careers and don't know how to go about it.

Overall, PAs did not seem aware that skills being the *main* barrier to finding employment was an eligibility criterion. It was also the initial policy intention that Skills Coaching customers would not have ESOL, or basic literacy and numeracy needs. These should have been addressed before they were referred to the programme, although from the types of provision customers were referred to (see Section 5.6.2) this does not seem to have been the case.

Although most PAs had had presentations and seen leaflets about Skills Coaching, when asked about the programme in more detail most were unsure about what

would happen to the referred customers. A NDLP Adviser in a Tranche 2 area said that after she had referred a number of customers to Skills Coaching and asked them about their experiences at their appointment with her, she realised that it was not a one-off intervention, but a series of sessions.

In a Tranche 3 area an NDLP Adviser and a DEA said that lack of feedback on customer's progress and on whether referrals were suitable was a contributing factor to their lack of knowledge of the customer journey. In a Tranche 2 area, a New Claims Adviser reported that customers would undertake a Skills Check and may then go on to do a course, but they were not sure what happened after that, and how or whether Skills Coaching might help the customer move into work.

Several PAs said that better written material which explained what was going to happen would help them to understand what they were referring customers to, and help to explain it to customers.

Good Practice 4.2 - Improving PAs' understanding of Skills Coaching

Improving PAs' understanding of Skills Coaching may help to address concerns about the perceived quality of Skills Coaches and also increase referrals. Ways in which areas were trying to do this included:

- _ Using Jobcentre Plus Communications meetings to present Skills Coaching to PAs.
- _ Refresher visits to Jobcentre Plus Communications meetings to remind PAs about Skills Coaching.
- _ Developing an Adviser's guide to Skills Coaching/information pack for PAs.
- _ Including information about Skills Coaching in a newsletter for PAs.
- _ Producing written material describing who Skills Coaching is for and what it will entail, aimed at both PAs and customers.
- _ Taking PAs through the Skills Coaching customer journey, so they understood the tools involved, how they would be used, the benefits of the process for the customer and the value it could add to the work of Jobcentre Plus. In a Tranche 2 area, a JCP Restart Adviser had attended a Skills Coaching event where they were able to undertake the Skills Diagnostic. They said: *'You need to do the package yourself or see it to be able to convince customers that it will help them'*.
- _ Having a Skills Coaching champion in each Jobcentre Plus office, via which the Jobcentre Plus District Co-ordinator cascaded information to Advisers (rather than doing this through the office managers who were felt to be overwhelmed with information to distribute).
- _ Holding a networking event for PAs and Skills Coaches to develop partnership working. At the event, all parties discussed their role and PAs were shown the Skills Coaches Diagnostic tools, and in some cases used the Diagnostic on themselves to see how it worked.
- _ In a Tranche 1 area, Skills Coaches were able to sit in with PAs to observe and better understand what their work was like and how they made referrals.

JCP understanding has an impact on customers

It was common for customers not to know what to expect from Skills Coaching prior to their first session. One customer who was a lone parent said that she did not know what would happen when she was referred. Another customer claiming JSA said she *'didn't know what to expect of the service, as there wasn't much information at the referral stage'*. Another customer claiming JSA met a Skills Coach at a jobs fair. She later found out that she could have been referred by the Jobcentre, and felt that she was not given the right information by her JCP Adviser.

A customer claiming JSA in a Tranche 3 area said that she *'wasn't sure what exactly it [Skills Coaching] involved, it wasn't clear from the Jobcentre'*, but she said she was willing to try it as it would mean she could get extra help. In a Tranche 1 area, a customer

said she had no idea what to expect from Skills Coaching and thought she was just going to: *'do some tests'*.

How PAs explain Skills Coaching to customers, particularly where they do not feel sure as to what Skills Coaching will involve, may influence the number of 'no-shows'. In the new Adult Careers Service, where referrals are made by Jobcentre Plus to Careers Advisers, it will be important that customers are clear as to the purpose of the referral and what to expect. Information materials were produced at a national level to help PAs explain Skills Coaching to customers. However, most PAs in the case-study areas did not mention using them.

Organisational change within Jobcentre Plus

Some areas mentioned that the move from Job Entry Targets (JET) to Job Outcome Targets (JOT) within Jobcentre Plus had impacted negatively on referrals. The Job Outcome Target (JOT) was introduced in April 2006 and replaced the Job Entry Target (JET) that had been in operation since 2002. Under JET, Jobcentre Plus had to demonstrate that an intervention had taken place in order to claim a job entry point for performance measurement. Under JOT, all off-flows from benefits into work are measured, including those for which there had been no specific intervention.

Under JET, job entry points were attributed to individual members of staff. This was felt at a policy level to impact negatively on staff as they might be influenced to either work more with the easiest-to-help customers, as they would be able to guarantee job entry points, or seek to generate an intervention where one was not necessarily needed in order to help a customer into work and claim the points.

JOT, however, counts all job outcomes and is therefore unable to attribute job outcomes to individual staff or Jobcentre Plus offices. This, in theory, means that staff can prioritise customers and concentrate on those in most need of help and direct those able to help themselves to self-help channels (such as Job Points, Jobseekers Direct, etc.).

However, one Jobcentre Plus lead discussed the impact that removing Adviser-based targets may have on referrals to programmes, such as Skills Coaching:

'There is an issue around how we measure the performance of our Advisers – the change from JET to JOT. Potentially it's a good thing because you don't have Adviser against Adviser regarding a customer and it gives you more freedom to hand people over to someone with more expertise to help them because you won't miss out. We still have an Advisers' measuring system ...however referrals to things like training and Skills Coaching doesn't score any points [for Advisers personally], so why would you refer? Advisers need some encouragement.'

In a Tranche 1 area, the Jobcentre Plus Co-ordinator reported that referrals in Year 2 of the trial had been lower than in Year 1 and they felt this was due to re-structuring at Jobcentre Plus.

Organisational changes within Jobcentre Plus had also been ongoing during the course of Year 2 of Skills Coaching and had created staff changes. In September 2006, the Jobcentre Plus Adviser model was revised, and the Advisory Service Model introduced. The overall aim of the new model is to provide stronger managerial and administrative support to Advisers. This meant that all Jobcentres are now typically managed by two managers – an Advisory Services Manager (ASM) responsible for welfare-to-work advisory services (including the management of the PAs that Skills Coaches want referrals from) and a Jobcentre Manager. In some areas, these posts

remained to be filled. In one Tranche 3 area, the Jobcentre Plus lead said that the new management structures meant PAs were under more pressure and did not have time to devote to developing their understanding of Skills Coaching.

4.4 Outreach

The Skills Coaching model was not originally designed to include outreach. The option to supplement referrals with outreach was introduced several months into the trials. No additional funding was made available for outreach over and above that already available, and it was introduced as an option if trials wished to boost customer numbers.

The degree of outreach activity detailed in delivery plans varied. In some of the case-study areas there were no activities to support outreach in the delivery plans; in others, outreach activity involved developing materials to be distributed by partner organisations or the **nextstep** network, and providers with good community links had been contracted to deliver Skills Coaching. These were often organisations with good links to target demographic groups, such as people from a BME background.

4.4.1 Less incentive or need for outreach activity where JCP refers...

There were no payments for time spent gaining referrals to Skills Coaching from outreach. In most areas, outreach was not part of Skills Coaches' workloads (instead they largely relied on referrals from Jobcentre Plus), although a few made referrals as part of their work with **nextstep** or other IAG customers.

Where Skills Coaches received a steady stream of referrals from Jobcentre Plus PAs, there was little (or no) financial incentive and no need to undertake outreach, and delivering Skills Coaching to these customers and getting paid was the priority.

In a Tranche 1 area, a Skills Coach said that a morning undertaking outreach could be used to carry out three or four paid sessions delivering the journey to customers. In this area Skills Coaches were booked up weeks in advance, leaving little scope or incentive for undertaking outreach. In some areas where referrals from Jobcentre Plus PAs were more patchy, Skills Coaches had used outreach as a way of gaining customers for the programme.

Some areas had tried mailshots to their existing database of **nextstep** customers to get self-referrals. In one area, a Skills Coach described the difficulties this had created as **nextstep** customers were not always appropriate; there had been no prior discussion of the programme and they could feel let down if they were not entered onto the programme. There were also initial problems with paperwork because the referral form was designed to be signed by a PA, so they developed a new form asking customers for their permission to refer them to Jobcentre Plus. Several interviewees mentioned that gaining customers from outreach and putting them back in contact with Jobcentre Plus is one way in which Skills Coaching could add value to Jobcentre Plus.

4.4.2 ... however, in some areas outreach used to engage inactive customers

There were some examples of outreach working well in the case study areas, particularly if the customer sessions were held in an organisation that could double up as an outreach site if customers did not attend an appointment.

Some areas were starting to, or had made efforts to, engage with non-IAG organisations who worked directly with the target customer groups. For example:

- In one Tranche 2 area, they hoped to improve the IS/ JSA split via outreach and **nextstep** were in discussions with a charity working with people on IB and who support them into work. They were also hoping to link to the Probation Service to gain some self-referrals from their customers.
- In an area with a trial with customers outside the benefits system, a Skills Coach had approached adult learning providers and church groups to try to gain referrals from suitable non-benefit claimants.
- In a Tranche 1 area where outreach was more established, **nextstep** distributed material and networked with numerous agencies that dealt with the customer group, such as Sure Start, Social Services, the Probation Service, and community centres.
- In a Tranche 3 area, Skills Coaches and their managers engaged with training providers, Working Links, and Sure Start centres to increase awareness of Skills Coaching. In this area, one subcontractor was particularly engaged in outreach (although this was for all their delivery activity and not Skills Coaching exclusively) and they visited libraries and schools, and ran a series of events in community venues for lone parents.

One Jobcentre Plus District Co-ordinator reported that each area needed to have a strategy for outreach, as only a small minority of the 'stock' of IB customers tend to engage with Jobcentre Plus in terms of returning to work. They continued that IB customers referred by Jobcentre Plus are typically identified at a WFI which takes place towards the start of their claim period and felt this is typically not a good time to talk to them about work. In addition, they said that it was difficult for Jobcentre Plus to talk to IB claimants about returning to work, as their benefit was dependent on them being incapable of working.

4.5 Management information

The national LSC requires information about Skills Coaching customers in all areas. Skills Coaches are typically responsible for collection of these data, which are then uploaded onto a central management information system by **nextstep**, usually by the contract manager or an administrator. There were some initial teething problems with the management information, however, most of these were resolved by the time of the interviews in early summer. Nevertheless, some stakeholders, particularly LSC Contract Managers, were concerned about the lack of outcomes information being collected.

Teething problems

Some areas experienced early difficulties with using the national management information system to upload data. One Tranche 2 area only started to upload their data in January 2007, due to problems with software contractors.

Several case-study areas that had uploaded data onto the national system, reported discrepancies between the national level information and the data they held at local level. These discrepancies included recording more Skills Diagnostics than Access Interviews, and national information recording fewer interventions than had been uploaded. Further guidance on how to use the system has since been issued to try to overcome this.

Analysing management information at a local level

Most areas analysed local-level management information. They wanted to see how they were performing against their target, and in reaching key customer groups. The data were also used to measure the performance of specific contractors. In one area that was below target on Access Interviews, the Trial Manager used the management information to present to contractors the amount of money they had lost by not meeting their targets.

Outcomes data

Capturing outcomes data for customers is critical to determine the added value of Skills Coaching, and to analyse its value for money. Targets and payments for Skills Coaching are process based and contractors are able to draw down funding when they have delivered the service to customers. There are no payments for outcomes, such as gaining a qualification or moving into employment. The aim is for the Skills Coach to pass the customer back to the PA at the end of their journey more 'job-ready'.

The payment structure meant there was no requirement for Skills Coaches to record outcomes and hence it was common to find 'other' or 'don't know' completed as the customer's destination, or for it to be blank. Some Skills Coaches said that they would not find out their customer's destination as a matter of course, whereas others reported that because of the relationship they had built up with the customer over the journey, they found it easier to obtain outcome details than for customers on other, less intensive, IAG programmes.

In a Tranche 1 area, the **nextstep** Contract Manager had hidden the 'other' and 'don't know' options in the system, so that Skills Coaches had to enter an outcome. From 1st April, it was no longer possible to record an outcome as 'not known' or 'other' at the immediate destination stage, although a 'no outcome' option was still available. Skills Coaches have also been encouraged to record all customer impacts during their journey, via the 'immediate destination' field of the management information and to include impacts such as volunteering placements and finding employment.

Some of the LSC Contract Managers mentioned that without outcomes data it would be difficult to demonstrate the value of the trial. They felt that subcontractors did not realise how important outcomes data were, and they were encouraging them to revisit their customers to see if they had made progress and to record their outcomes.

Some areas were planning customer surveys to follow up with customers, check for outcomes and to check overall satisfaction of the service. This may be one way in

which areas are able to demonstrate whether Skills Coaching has been valuable for customers.

4.6 Partnership working

Skills Coaching requires a number of partners to work together, both at a strategic level and operationally. There were mixed experiences of partnership working: in some areas there were long-established relationships between key stakeholders, and between PAs and **nextstep** Advisers, while, in other areas, partners had needed to build (or re-build) these relationships.

4.6.1 National

The Skills Coaching team at a national level consists of one full-time employee in the LSC for whom Skills Coaching forms part of their role, and who is supported by a team at the Centre for Enterprise responsible for a range of activities including delivering training and networking sessions for Skills Coaches, and helping to develop support material, such as the Skills Coaching Handbook. This year, an additional resource, the Skills Coaching website, developed and maintained by the National Resource Service (NRS) has also been introduced. The NRS is also responsible for producing the monthly Skills Coaching newsletter.

There was some indication from respondents that at a national LSC level, the pilot may be under-staffed to meet the demands of deliverers from the current number of areas. Some Tranche 2 and 3 areas often felt that the set-up process (such as issuing contracts) had been slow, as were responses to queries and issues raised, although they emphasised that this was due to the quantity rather than the quality of staffing of the project at the LSC.

Most respondents had attended training or networking meetings at a national level and reported that these could have been better used to facilitate learning from the first Tranche to areas starting in Tranches 2 and 3. Many respondents felt that they did not have a clear idea about what had worked and what had not from the first wave of trials.

Where Skills Coaching trials were run by the same organisation in different areas (such as VT Careers Management), this facilitated the sharing of information and best practice. In some areas, subcontractors shared information, or networked with other Skills Coaching areas, within their geographical region. The Jobcentre Plus Manager in a Tranche 1 area said that they had been networking with newer areas to share success stories and good practice.

Many **nextstep** managers reported that they would have liked more opportunities to share good practice between areas at a national level. A message board facility on the Skills Coaching section of the NRS website was created part way through the trials, and Skills Coaches have been able to discuss and share good practice with Coaches from other areas. Items that have been discussed include working with Jobcentre Plus, and undertaking outreach work.

4.6.2 Local

At a local level there were both strategic and operational relationships between **nextstep** and Skills Coaches, and Jobcentre Plus. Staff changes at either level were

reported to have made delivering the trial more challenging. At an office level, where PAs had changed, several Skills Coaches said that they had to build relationships with PAs from scratch. Changes at a strategic level were also common (given the LSC Theme 7¹ and changes within Jobcentre Plus to the Adviser Services Manager model).

Strategic level relationships

At a strategic level, in many areas, relationships were felt to be strong prior to Skills Coaching, with several of the same individuals involved in overseeing local IAG partnerships and **nextstep**'s work, alongside ESF contracts, and working on Local Area Agreements. For example, strategic relationships and links in a Tranche 2 area were described as 'excellent' by a LSC Contract Manager. The trial linked into the work of the IAG Strategic Board (which involved the County Council, Federation of Colleges, University for Industry, Jobcentre Plus, Learning and Skills Council, Trade Unions Congress, and Business Link). The board discussed IAG between organisations and how they could better work together. The board developed some actions for Skills Coaching to facilitate partnership working in IAG delivery in the area. These had since been incorporated into the local Skills Coaching delivery planning for the coming year.

Where key individuals in a partnership had changed, some strategic partnerships lost momentum. In a Tranche 1 area there had been changes of personnel at a strategic level and the LSC Contract Manager felt that this had: '*contributed to a loss of impetus and less success against targets*'. While any change in personnel is likely to slow progress for a while, it is important that relationships are *organisational* rather than *personal* so that, when there are changes in personnel, there is still a drive and commitment from organisations to work together. A training provider in a Tranche 1 area felt that relationships between training providers and Skills Coaches were personal and that they should be developed to become organisational-level relationships.

Strategic partnership working was reported to be less good in one case-study area where delivery had been slow to date; Skills Coaching covered three Jobcentre Plus districts. One Jobcentre Plus District Manager felt that because Skills Coaching covered three districts it was difficult to agree a common strategy, because the local labour markets were very different and there was little history of working together on joint priorities prior to the trial. The Jobcentre Plus District Manager felt that only covering one Jobcentre Plus area would facilitate the speed and ease with which the trial could deliver.

Although Skills Coaching is a LSC Contract, in some case-study areas it was reported that the trials were being driven by **nextstep** or Jobcentre Plus. The **nextstep** contract manager in a Tranche 2 area said that Jobcentre Plus had been the driving force and 'backbone' of the trials. In a Tranche 3 area, the **nextstep** manager felt that the LSC could be more supportive and said that they were '*operating at a different level to Jobcentre Plus and nextstep*'. An LSC Manager in a Tranche 3 area questioned whether one organisation should have responsibility for Skills Coaching and reported that because responsibility lay with LSC and JCP it made delivering the initiative more complicated. It will be important in the new Adult Careers Service, where the LSC and Jobcentre Plus are continuing to work together, that organisations have clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

¹ Theme 7 was part of the Government's Agenda for Change which meant organisational changes to the LSC and how it works.

Operational relationships

Skills Coaching was felt to have provided the opportunity to strengthen both strategic relationships and office-level relationships between Advisers and Skills Coaches, although this was not without exception. In one Tranche 3 area, the Skills Coaching service had been withdrawn from Jobcentres that did not refer a large volume of customers. This was despite the local Jobcentre Plus District manager wanting Skills Coaches to have a presence in particular Jobcentres and wanting to use the trial to rebuild relationships between PAs and **nextstep** Advisers.

Relationships could be positive at a strategic, but not at a local level. In one area, Skills Coaches reported that Jobcentre Plus buy-in at strategic level did not filter down or translate to Jobcentre Plus office level, with some PAs reported as feeling that they could provide Skills Coaching themselves; whereas in other areas, communication between a strategic and local level within Jobcentre Plus was facilitated by Jobcentre Plus leads on Skills Coaching.

Skills Coaches were more likely to be positive about their relationships with PAs than vice versa. In a Tranche 2 area where Skills Coaches reported that they had good relationships with Jobcentre Plus Advisers, two Advisers described their relationships with Skills Coaches as mixed; some Skills Coaches were seen as responsive and others more distant. The PAs felt that the strength of local office relationships was largely down to the personality of the Skills Coach.

Local-level relationships between Skills Coaches and PAs as discussed earlier were seen as crucial for ensuring that referrals were made and that the Jobcentre Plus Adviser had confidence in the Skills Coaching service and its benefits for customers. PAs saw Skills Coaching as sending customers away from the Jobcentre, rather than a core part of Jobcentre Plus provision. The new Adult Careers Service needs to be seen as embedded and part of Jobcentre Plus provision rather than duplication or competition.

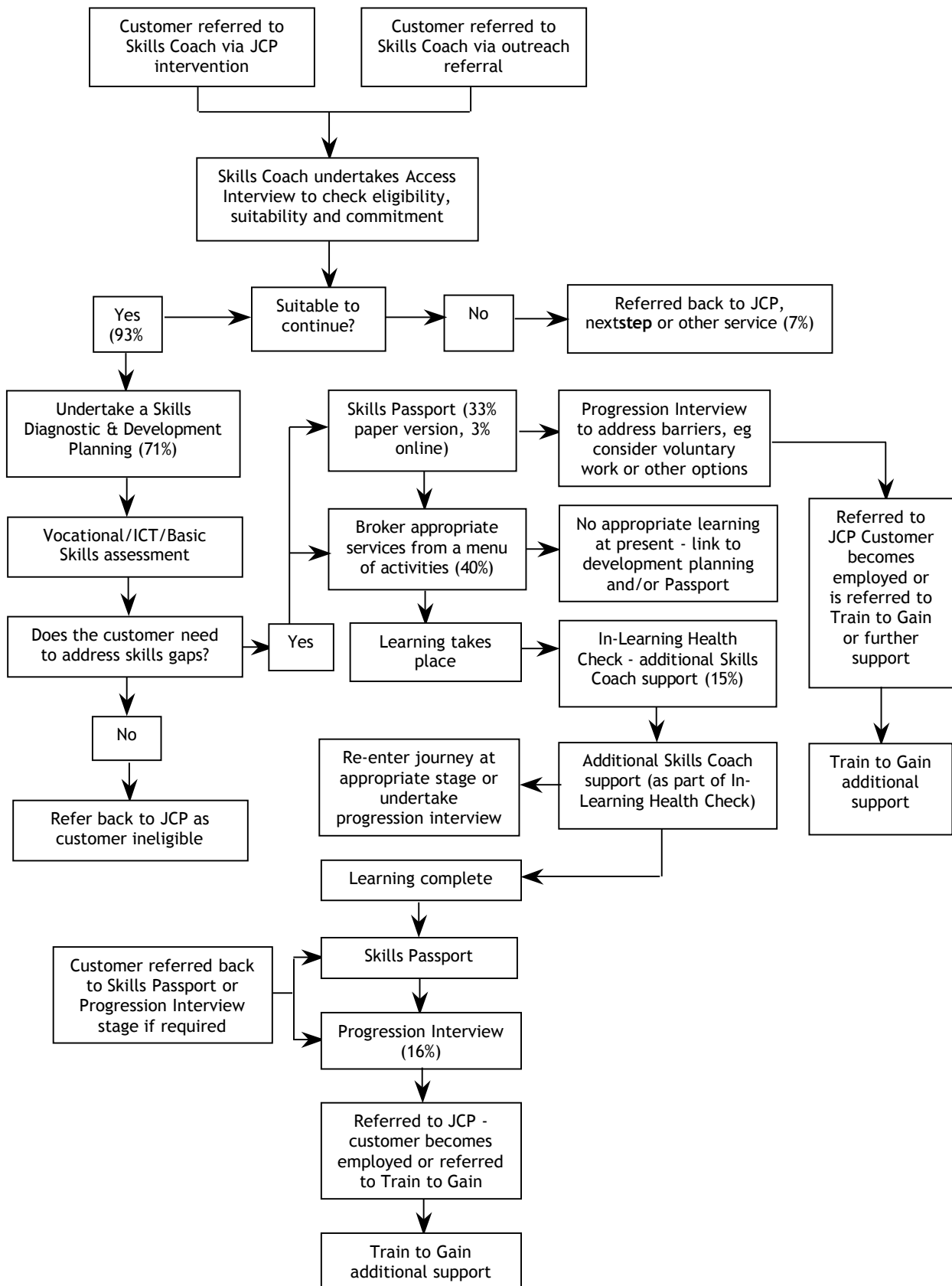
5 The Skills Coaching Customer Journey

Key findings

- _ The majority of customers took part in Skills Coaching to get help with job search and application skills and guidance about job options and careers, rather than to access courses.
- _ Skills Coaches had different approaches to the diagnostic tools. Some would use the Skills Check; others would use this and where necessary supplement it with other tools.
- _ Views amongst customers towards the Skills Diagnostic were mixed, although it was generally seen as a useful part of the journey.
- _ The Skills File and Skills Passport were felt to increase customers' confidence and to be a useful process, but many interviewees questioned the relevance of the Skills Passport for employers. Few areas used Online Passports.
- _ Customers were enrolled in a range of learning provision, much of which was below Level 2.
- _ Some of the Skills Coaches were employed by training providers, and PAs questioned their impartiality.
- _ Funding courses could be an issue and fees were seen to be the main cost barrier. Customers did not report that childcare, travel or other costs had been a barrier to learning.
- _ Some Skills Coaches could easily access suitable provision for their customers. There were exceptions due to a lack of flexibility, for example in the start dates of courses.
- _ Staged payments could lead to the journey being delivered in a prescriptive way and it was questioned whether the pace of delivery was determined by the customer or the financial needs of the provider in some cases.
- _ A number of customers had positive experiences. However, some felt there was a vague end to the journey where Skills Coaches no longer got in touch and they felt that they had 'been left'.

This chapter discusses the Skills Coaching customer journey and takes each stage in turn before discussing general points.

Figure 5.1: Skills Coaching Customer Journey Overview



Source: Skills Coach Handbook, 2006

5.1 An overview of the customer journey

In Year 2 of the trials there was increased flexibility for Skills Coaches to work with customers through the stages of the journey beyond the Skills Diagnostic, in the order that was most appropriate to the customer.

Figure 5.1 details an overview of the Skills Coaching customer journey and the many ways in which customers could move through it, and also includes some data from the management information about the proportion of Skills Coaching customers who undertake various stages of the journey.

Table 5.1 reveals the percentage of individuals accessing each particular service, for the trial as a whole and for each of the case-study areas. The percentages shown are *not* percentages of a declining base; 37 per cent of *all* Skills Coaching customers accessed Learning Brokerage, *not* 37 per cent of the 68 per cent who had a Skills Diagnostic and Development Plan.

Overall, just over 70 per cent of customers underwent a Skills Diagnostic, and 40 per cent received Learning Brokerage. As such, a significant proportion of Skills Coaching customers are receiving skills and employment training services. Just over one-third of customers have either a standard Skills Passport or an Online Skills Passport. It is not clear from the management information whether these customers have dropped out of the journey or whether they are still in contact with their Skills Coach.

The table also shows that a small proportion of customers in Area F do not have an Access Interview recorded, despite the fact that all customers should undergo one. This is likely to be a management information issue.

Table 5.1: Skills Coaching customers accessing services (percentage within area)

	Access Interview	Skills Diagnostic and Development Plan	Learning Brokerage	In-Learning Health Check	Progress Interview	Skills Passport	My Skills Record (Online Passport)
Area A (Tranche 1)	100%	70%	42%	15%	19%	38%	0%
Area B (Tranche 1)	100%	89%	43%	20%	38%	78%	4%
Area C (Tranche 1)	100%	75%	52%	19%	4%	18%	14%
Area D (Tranche 2)	100%	59%	27%	5%	12%	19%	1%
Area E (Tranche 2)	100%	80%	43%	24%	17%	26%	3%
Area F (Tranche 2)	99%	75%	18%	14%	26%	37%	0%
Area G (Tranche 3)	100%	69%	28%	2%	1%	8%	0%
Area H (Tranche 3)	100%	70%	40%	15%	8%	35%	0%
Area I (Tranche 3)	100%	66%	34%	15%	9%	16%	3%
Other Area	100%	69%	40%	14%	15%	32%	3%
Total	100%	71%	40%	15%	16%	33%	3%

Source: LSC Mlmanager database

The 'customer journey' experienced is not generally affected by characteristics such as sex, ethnicity or benefit status, as the proportion of different client groups accessing stages of the journey is fairly consistent. However, there are some notable differences: non-White-British customers were slightly less likely to have Learning Brokerage, an In-Learning Health Check or a Progression Interview. Customers not in receipt of

benefits were only about half as likely as other customers to have undergone a progression interview.

5.1.1 Customers' reasons for taking part

The majority of customers took part in Skills Coaching to get help with job search and guidance about job options and careers rather than to access courses, although some customers did want to take up learning. Customers' reasons for taking part in Skills Coaching are listed below.

IAG about careers

- _ To discuss possible job options.
- _ To discuss how to enter specific job options (for some after a health issue meant they could no longer work in their previous occupation).
- _ To discuss what particular jobs involved.
- _ To gain ideas about what jobs they might be suitable for.
- _ To be pointed in the right direction.

Job search and application skills

- _ To get help with job search, CV writing and job applications.
- _ To get help to explain gaps in employment history to employers.
- _ To get help with translating foreign qualifications for UK employers.
- _ To discuss and practice interview techniques.

Accessing learning

- _ Wanting to update skills.
- _ Wanting to do some learning.
- _ Wanting to do some training that would lead to work.

Other reasons

- _ Meeting people and gaining confidence.

The remainder of this chapter discusses, in detail, each stage of the customer journey.

5.2 The Access Interview

The evaluation of Year 1 of the Skills Coaching trials highlighted that the suitability of referrals to Skills Coaching was a problem, with a large proportion of customers being referred to the programme who were not appropriate. To try to counter this, the Access Interview was introduced so that the Skills Coach could assess suitability before undertaking further work with the customer. Evidence from the case-study

areas, and from the management information (where referrals back to Jobcentre Plus at the Access Interview stage were only seven per cent), would suggest that the suitability of referrals is no longer a large concern, although this figure has risen from four per cent at the time of the interim data analysis. As one nextstep Contract Manager said:

'The appropriateness of referrals took a turn for the better in the latter part of the trial. Certainly in the first year that was one of the biggest problems we had to address.'

Nevertheless, there are some indications that suitability as designed by the policy may still be an issue despite it not being a concern for Skills Coaches. For example, most interviewees acknowledged that, although skills is a barrier for most customers, it is not always the *main* barrier to employment, and indeed many of the customers themselves felt they had other barriers to finding work. Overall, 66 per cent of the target number of Access Interviews for the period July 06–July 07 were delivered.

5.2.1 Face-to-face Access Interviews

The first stage of the journey was generally reported to be taking place promptly after the referral by a PA, and usually within a week, although in some areas, Skills Coaches and PAs said that customers could wait up to three weeks for an Access Interview as they were booked up in advance. Overall, drop-out was felt to be greatest between the referral stage and the Access Interview, and that once a customer had had their first intervention they were more likely to keep attending (although some drop-out between stages was inevitable). Where customers had to wait a number of weeks for an appointment with the Skills Coach, a NDLP Adviser in a Tranche 1 area said that this increased 'no-shows'.

'No-shows' were felt to be more common amongst IB customers, partly because they were more likely to have illnesses which prevented them from attending, and also because they were less accustomed than JSA customers to attending regular interventions and meetings. In a Tranche 2 area a Disability Employment Adviser explained that some customers were concerned that if they attended Skills Coaching their benefits could be affected.

One Skills Coach discussed how lone parents were more likely to attend Access Interviews than some other groups, because if they were referred they tended to be motivated and ready to make a change.

Good Practice 4.1 - Pre-calling and appointment cards

In some areas, they tried to minimise the number of 'no-shows' at the Access Interview. Skills Coaches called their potential customers the day prior to their appointment to remind them, to check that the time was still convenient and that they would be attending. Some areas had also introduced Appointment Cards for the PAs to give to customers as they made the referral, although inevitably, even with these procedures, there was still some degree of drop-out.

The content and length of the Access Interview varied between Advisers and between customers. Some Skills Coaches reported that, depending on the extent of the pre-work by the PA, the Skills Diagnostic could also be started during the first session and this could help the customer feel they had achieved something, and gave more purpose to the session. Other Skills Coaches preferred to keep the first session short and explain the journey, then arrange another appointment to begin the Skills

Diagnostic. It was evident that there were large variations in the pace at which Skills Coaches delivered the customer journey, with some undertaking a number of stages in one session, and others working with customers on the same stage over a larger number of sessions.

5.2.2 Telephone Access Interviews

In two rural Skills Coaching areas, **nextstep** and their subcontractors gained agreement to trial Access Interviews on the telephone. The stakeholders in the area felt they had had a particular problem with no-shows, in part down to the lack of public transport in the area and the rural nature of the district. They hoped that conducting the Access Interview on the telephone would allow Advisers to make sure that customers understood the process and wanted to take part, and to arrange the first meeting to be somewhere more local to the customer than their nearest Jobcentre.

Telephone Access Interviews were to be trialled between May and July, and then reviewed. At the time of the evaluation interviews, the areas were six weeks into this trial and hence generally interviewees felt it was too early to assess whether or not it had decreased the number of no-shows, particularly given that the start of the trial coincided with a downturn in the number of referrals from Jobcentre Plus.

The referral system in Jobcentre Plus also changed; instead of the PA making an appointment for the customer, they were referred to a central point. This was the Skills Coaching Co-ordinator in one area, and a Jobcentre Plus employee in another. Referrals were then allocated to Skills Coaches who would try to contact the client. In one area, Jobcentre Plus handled the referrals and simultaneously assessed the quality of the information sent from PAs to Skills Coaches. In some instances, this process led to them requesting more information from PAs before the referral was handed to the Skills Coach.

The PAs in the districts were generally positive about the change in process. However, a NDLP Adviser was concerned that some customers might miss the phone calls from the Skills Coach. The Adviser said that she had to follow up a referral to the programme for a client who had not been contacted by a Skills Coach several weeks after she had been referred. Under the telephone Access Interview model, a Skills Coach tries to contact the customer three times at different times of the day and on different days; if they cannot make contact, the client should then be referred back to Jobcentre Plus.

When Access Interviews are undertaken face-to-face, the client can sign to authorise that the interview has taken place and this can provide evidence for payment. This was not possible with telephone Access Interviews and it was agreed that Jobcentre Plus, as an independent organisation, would phone a ten per cent sample of customers to check they had received the service. This also provided the opportunity to gain customer feedback.

5.3 The Skills Diagnostic

In Year 2, 9,061 customers received a Skills Diagnostic – 71 per cent of customers starting the Skills Coaching journey and 63 per cent of the target. This is a compulsory element of the journey and it is not clear whether it has not been carried out with 29 per cent of customers because they are still working with their Skills Coach, or because they have dropped out of the journey.

There are a number of Skills Diagnostic tools available to Skills Coaches. However, it is compulsory for them to use Skills Check and it is the use of this particular Diagnostic tool that triggers the payment, although where appropriate Skills Coaches are expected to use other Diagnostic tools with the client alongside this. Largely due to the lack of access to ICT in Jobcentre Plus offices, and the need for confidential discussions, the Skills Diagnostic tended to take place in a private room within another organisation (or in the Jobcentre in some instances where Advisers were allocated a room).

Skills Coaches between (and within) areas had different approaches to the Skills Diagnostic tools. Some would simply use the Skills Check; others would use this and where necessary supplement it with other tools, such as MAPS, that they were familiar with using with nextstep customers. A Skills Coach in a Tranche 1 area described how MAPS could be used at the beginning and end of the Skills Coaching process to demonstrate to the customer how they have improved and to evaluate 'distance travelled'.

There was some variation in terms of who led the completion of the Skills Diagnostic. In some instances, the customer took the lead; in others, it was the Skills Coach; and in others, they undertook it jointly. The level of IT skills and confidence of the customer were seen as key to determining which of these options was followed. The amount of time that customers interviewed for the evaluation reported it took them to complete the Diagnostic tool(s) varied from 20 to 30 minutes, to up to six hours (split over a number of sessions).

A training provider reported it was useful for customers to have undertaken a Skills Diagnostic, because this saved them from having to undertake one with the customer to identify the appropriate level of training. However, another provider in the same area said that they carried out a detailed diagnostic process with all customers who came to them, regardless of whether they were part of Skills Coaching or not. Avoiding duplication in skills assessment and testing is likely to be a key issue for the Adult Careers Service.

5.3.1 Benefits of Skills Check

It is only the Skills assessment that is compulsory to use with customers; however, many Skills Coaches also used the job suggestion part of the tool. Overall, Skills Coaches had mixed views of Skills Check. The benefits mentioned by Skills Coaches included that it:

- _ was a starting point for discussion, highlighting customers' strengths and weaknesses
- _ generated ideas and job suggestions (Advisers then worked with the customer to discuss these in relation to their interests, and within the context of the local labour market)
- _ was a basis to discuss Basic Skills needs
- _ built customer confidence and motivation.

5.3.2 Skills Coaches' concerns with Skills Check

Skills Check was new to many of the Skills Coaches, and some had other tools they reported were more valuable, and which they preferred to use. To some extent, the

usefulness of Skills Check to Skills Coaches may depend on their degree of experience with it and the training they have had to use it effectively. Some Skills Coaches who were negative about the package also felt that they had not had sufficient training on how to use it with customers and how best to interpret the information.

Concerns that Skills Coaches had with Skills Check included:

- It was **time-consuming for some customers to complete**, which meant that it had to be split over two or even three sessions (this meant it was not very cost-effective for nextstep contractors, and where customers did not attend the session in which it would have been completed, providers did not get paid).
- It is **based on self-assessment** rather than an objective assessment (although the Skills Coach should help customers to complete the assessment in a realistic way, asking questions of them as they are completing it and discussing their answers). Because it is a self-assessment, individuals with low self-confidence (which affects many of the customer group) were reported to score themselves down on the measures, although others were unrealistically positive about their skills. The scores customers awarded may also depend on who the individual is scoring themselves against. Skills Coaches said:

'It's only a self-assessment and it's not backed up by any evidence. The customer answers yes or no based on what they think and most people will say yes they can do it when maybe they can't.'

'I don't think it's a very precise tool. It is just how they feel. If you've got someone who has been out of work for a long time and they're a bit down on themselves, no matter what their skills are like, they are going to answer in a negative way.'
- It was **not interest-based**. A minority of Advisers said that because the Diagnostic was skills based, there were occasions when there were not many of the job outputs that customers found interesting or motivating.
- Some Skills Coaches felt it was **not suitable for customers with high level skills**, as it was too: *'Mickey Mouse'* (although not the prime focus on Skills Coaching, people qualified to Level 2 or above can enter the programme).
- Some Advisers felt that the Skills Diagnostic could be **undermining for customers who lacked IT skills**.
- Some Advisers felt that the **language** in the Skills Diagnostic could be softened and more tailored to people who had difficulties with literary and numeracy.

A NDLP Adviser in a Tranche 2 area felt that jobs from the Skills Diagnostic were not always relevant to her customers. She gave an example of a job as a Royal Marine Commando being suggested for a single mother. She acknowledged that the Skills Coach would have then discussed other options with her client, but overall she felt they were not focused enough.

5.3.3 Customers' experiences of Skills Check

Views amongst customers towards the Skills Diagnostic were mixed. At worst it was seen as a waste of time, at best it confirmed that someone had picked the right career to pursue, or gave suggestions of careers that they had not previously considered. Customers who knew the type of work they wanted to do already were likely to say that they did not find the job suggestions useful.

Customers' views of job suggestions

- One customer called it a '*stupid little test*' and said that she and the Skills Coach laughed at the options it suggested for her, which she felt came from a different century. The suggestions included an embalmer, train conductor, silversmith.
- One customer with a history of mental health issues said that the job suggestions didn't really help her, as she knew what work she was capable of. Her main issue was not what type of work to do, but the level of stress associated with jobs and whether she would be able to cope with it.
- One customer who had been claiming IB for less than six months was a trained electrician, but could no longer do this type of work because of his health. He said the types of jobs that it came up with were not suitable for him because of his health, although he did have the skills to do them, and therefore he did not find it a useful process.
- A customer claiming JSA from a Tranche 1 area said that the Skills Diagnostic was '*a really nice motivator*'. She found it helpful and it made her feel that she did actually have some skills.
- A customer who was a lone parent said that the Skills Diagnostic was '*useless*'. He mentioned that he had since found out you could undertake much the same sort of test on the learndirect website. The Skills Diagnostic suggested that he should teach English as a foreign language and the Skills Coach gave him information on courses for this. He looked into the courses further and found they were too expensive and more than he could afford. He had not heard from his Skills Coach since.
- A customer who was a lone parent found the Skills Diagnostic helpful. She said she was only considering employment in the performing arts but it made her think about other jobs. The main thing it identified was that she needed to improve her computer skills if she wanted to work in an office.
- A customer in a Tranche 1 area said that she did not finish her Diagnostic with the Skills Coach as she was going to have to undertake another one as part of the course she was referred to. With hindsight, however, she felt that she should have completed it, as the course she signed up to was not what she wanted to do, and she was therefore left no clearer about the sorts of jobs she could do.

Customers' views of assessing skills

- One customer looked into becoming a maths tutor as a result of the Skills Diagnostic. It found that she had high levels of numeracy and when she discussed with her Skills Coach that she wanted to have flexible work, they came up with the idea of maths tutoring.
- One customer who wanted to become a midwife prior to starting Skills Coaching said that the skills identified as her strengths fitted the skills needed to be a midwife and this was one of the suggested occupations. She felt that this gave her the final push to go into midwifery.
- One customer in a Tranche 3 area, who was claiming IB, felt that the Skills Diagnostic helped him to understand his skills and abilities. However, he said with hindsight he would have liked to have done it again and thought a bit more about his answers, as he may then have had different job suggestions.

- A customer from a Tranche 1 area who was claiming JSA said that the Skills Diagnostic showed her what she could do and that she *'wasn't stupid'*. Below are some case-studies of customers' experiences of the Skills Diagnostic.

Case study 5.1 - Customer from Tranche 1 area - Skills Diagnostic helps to identify work areas

A customer was referred to Skills Coaching by his local Jobcentre Plus. He had been unemployed for 11 months. He worked through the Skills Diagnostic with the Skills Coach to identify his strengths and weaknesses in the workplace. They also discussed his work-related interests, focusing on work in the security industry. Following this, the Skills Coach helped the customer enrol on a BIIAB: National Certificate for Door Supervisors. After this training he was able to apply for a Security Industry Authority badge, which allowed him to work as a qualified Door Supervisor. Two months after completing the course the customer found work with a security company.

Outcomes

- _ achievement of a security qualification
- _ finding work in the security industry.

Case study 5.2 - Customer from Tranche 2 area - Skills Diagnostic does not help to identify work areas

A customer was referred to Skills Coaching by his Jobcentre Plus Adviser. He worked with the Skills Coach on his CV. He worked through the Skills Diagnostic, but he did not feel that the jobs it suggested were suitable for him, or were necessarily available in the local area or interesting. For example, it was suggested that he consider working as a farm worker. With no ideas for other possible types of work, he decided to continue to look for shop work, cleaning and factory work, which he had experience of.

Outcomes

Found work stacking shelves in a large retail store, but at the time of the interview was unemployed again.

5.4 Skills File

The Skills File was viewed by many Skills Coaches as a way to build customers' confidence. One Skills Coach described how the Skills File could be used by a customer to put everything they had achieved in one place. He said it:

'Helps to build confidence – everything in that document is about what they can do rather than what they can't, and that is very important for the customer.'

It is intended that the Skills File belongs to the customer, and while some Skills Coaches reported that customers took them away to work on at home, others said that if they let this happen the File was sometimes lost, or customers forgot to bring it to their next meeting. Therefore, some Skills Coaches kept their customers' Files for them.

Despite some success, some Skills Coaches were critical of the practicality of the Skills File's design and a minority were critical of its content. The Skills File was seen, by one Skills Coach, as a good idea but needed rethinking in terms of its size. He mentioned that the paper folder was not practical and was too heavy and cumbersome. Others from Tranches 2 and 3 mentioned that customers would not have a four-hole punch at home so could not easily add things to their Skills File.

'It is terrible! I give it out and say, "this is some information that you can keep". There is some information on things like how to write a CV with a template on a CD-Rom but it doesn't have much basic information; it's just a file full of paper that doesn't really do a hell of a lot ... It doesn't have a lot of information in it although it has a lot of paper in it so I give them out extra information to go in it, which is ridiculous.'

Another Skills Coach felt that customers like to have sections to put their achievements in, but that the Skills File was much too big. She felt that the product needed more work. One Skills Coach felt that the information in the Skills File was not complete, and she therefore added information to supplement it.

Most customers interviewed for the evaluation could not recall completing a Skills File and those that did were mixed about its usefulness. A customer from a Tranche 3 said:

'It looks good but there is a lot of paper in there. It's too big and unwieldy – too big to carry around. I was given the File and I haven't looked at it since'.

A customer from a Tranche 1 area also did not find the Skills File useful. She said it was:

'Too complicated and made me panic ... I only wanted a job for a few hours a week'.

5.5 The Skills Passport

There are two versions of the Skills Passport, one online and a paper-based version, and providers are paid for using one or the other as part of the customer journey. The online version allows customers to update their details online, enables employers to view a customer's skills online and can, in theory, be used by the employer to help keep training records maintained if the customer moves into work. There are no differences in the content, although there may be minor differences in layout as the online version does not limit the amount of text in each section and instead 'rolls-over' the section to another page.

In total, 4,220 customers had a standard Skills Passport; about one-third of all Skills Coaching customers and 398 customers had an online Skills Passport (three per cent of all customers). Thus, 36 per cent of all Skills Coaching customers had a Skills Passport, 63 per cent of the target for the Skills Passport, and only nine per cent of the target for take-up of the Online Passport.

There is some variation between the number of customers who have a Passport between case-study areas, and particularly between the numbers of customers with an online Skills Passport. In most case-study areas, the number of individuals with an

Online Passport is less than ten, but in one area there are 163 customers with one (Table 5.2). One of the Skills Coaches in this area said that he preferred to use the electronic Skills Passport with customers because the paper version was too bulky.

Analysis by characteristics suggests that no particular group is more likely to have a Skills Passport.

Table 5.2: Number of customers with Skills Passport

	Standard Skills Passport	Online Skills Passport
Area A (Tranche 1)	597	5
Area B (Tranche 1)	607	30
Area C (Tranche 1)	208	163
Area D (Tranche 2)	57	3
Area E (Tranche 2)	72	7
Area F (Tranche 2)	297	2
Area G (Tranche 3)	19	0
Area H (Tranche 3)	120	0
Area I (Tranche 3)	64	11
Other Area	2,179	177
Total	4,220	398

Source: LSC Mmanager database

Of the 1,819 people with a positive outcome recorded, 1,054 (58 per cent) have either a standard Skills Passport or an online Skills Passport, compared to 36 per cent of all Skills Coaching customers with a Skills Passport. This provides some initial evidence that there is a relationship between Skills Passport ownership and positive outcomes, although it could be explained by the number of stages completed, type of client likely to undertake it, or the motivation levels of Skills Passport participants.

For most customers, the Skills Passport was seen by Skills Coaches as a good process to go through, building customer confidence and enabling the assessment of their work-related skills. Many Skills Coaches questioned the usefulness of the Skills Passport as a tool for employers in the recruitment process.

5.5.1 Paper-based Passport

Skills Coaches felt that for some customers the process of assembling a Skills Passport increased their confidence and enabled them to see their achievements and skills. An example is given in the case-study below.

The majority of Skills Coaches did not think that the Skills Passport (both the paper and online versions) would be useful for employers. Indeed, very few (particularly in the newer areas) had customers who had used them with employers in interviews, and some Skills Coaches said they would not encourage their customer to take the Passport to a job interview. One nextstep Contract manager in a Tranche 1 area said:

'the passport takes a lot of time and effort, but it's not clear whether employers look at it ... and it's difficult to sell the idea to the customer without being able to show that employers find them useful.'

Case study 5.3: Customer in Tranche 1 area - Skills Passport aids understanding of skills and abilities

A customer in a Tranche 1 area left school with no qualifications and had been unemployed for six years. She was on New Deal for Lone Parents. When she started Skills Coaching the customer was uncertain about her abilities and felt that her lack of recent work experience was a barrier. The Diagnostic Tool helped the customer to get a clearer idea of her skills and any gaps. The Skills Coach worked with the customer to identify possible administration opportunities and they worked together writing a CV, completing the Skills Passport, and refining her application form and interview techniques. The customer felt that the CV and Skills Passport helped her to understand and present her skills and abilities to employers.

Outcomes

_ gained employment in administration for a Housing Association.

Several interviewees questioned whether the Skills Passports were useful for employers:

'It's handy to have everything in one place but that's all, most employers want customers to fill out an application form or CV.' – Skills Coach

'Not sure how much employers would use it. For lower skilled work they just want to see a CV.... If employers don't use it then it is pointless.' – Skills Coach

'I wouldn't take this to an employer, it is too dense and employers want short things' – Skills Coaching customer claiming JSA

Indeed, of the small number of employers interviewed for the evaluation, none had heard of the Skills Passport, which suggests that they had not been used at interview by the Skills Coaching customers they took on.

Other people working with Skills Coaching customers, such as Training Providers and PAs, often said that they had neither heard of nor seen a Skills Passport. Overall, customers tended to think that the CV was the most useful part of the Skills Passport.

5.5.2 Online Passport

The majority of Skills Coaches in the case-study areas had not used the online version of the Skills Passport – 'My Skills Record'. The primary reasons for this were reported to be:

- _ lack of access to the internet (for the Skills Coach in Jobcentres and the customer at home)
- _ lack of IT skills among customer group (this was frequently a skill identified as needing development during the Skills Diagnostic)
- _ the paper-based version being easier for the customer to take to employers (if they chose to do so) or to keep hold of after the Skills Coaching journey
- _ lack of training for some Skills Coaches on how to use the programme
- _ the online system charging customers to keep the file after a five-year period.

In a Tranche 1 area where some customers had used the Online Passport, one Skills Coach reported that, if customers had an Online Passport and were not able to scan in additional documents, then they ended up with a paper file alongside it.

Only one client we interviewed had used an Online Skills Passport. The client, who was a lone parent, said she preferred the online to the paper version because it was easier to update, did not have to be carried around and because potential employers could be given a website address and login to see her details.

5.6 Learning Brokerage

5,021 individuals (41 per cent of the target for this stage of the journey) took part in Learning Brokerage. The targets assumed that 64 per cent of customers would enter this stage of the journey, whereas only 40 per cent of customers who started the journey actually did. The percentage of the targets achieved are lower as the journey progresses. It is not clear from the management information whether customers are still working their way through the journey or whether they have dropped out.

Some Skills Coaches said they referred customers to a range of learning provision, voluntary work and work tasters, while others were yet to have reached that stage of the journey with customers at the time they were interviewed. Several Skills Coaches mentioned that it was important to work with the customer's PA at this stage to ensure that the learning (or other brokered activities) did not jeopardise the customer's benefits.

One example of a customer from a Tranche 1 area who entered learning is below.

Case study 5.4 - Customer from Tranche 1 area - Achievement of an NVQ Level 2
<p>One customer who left a NVQ2 Childcare and Education Course in 2005 and who had recently left voluntary work in a school was referred to Skills Coaching by a Jobcentre Plus Adviser. She had lost her confidence and when initially talking to the Skills Coach the customer felt that she should be looking for work as a cleaner. Following further discussions with the Skills Coach, and after working through the first elements of the journey, the customer restarted her NVQ2 in Childcare and Education, and contacted the school where she had been volunteering, who welcomed her back. The Skills Coach contacted the customer some time later. She had then completed her NVQ2 and was applying for jobs while continuing to volunteer at the school.</p> <p>Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> _ re-entry into a qualification and achievement of an NVQ2 _ re-entry into voluntary work.

5.6.1 Approaches to identifying provision

All Skills Coaches felt they had a sound knowledge of the range of learning provision available locally. They searched for courses, and kept up-to-date with the provision available by:

- _ searching national databases, such as learndirect and Hot Courses

- _ using local or regional databases detailing training opportunities
- _ speaking to contacts at local providers to discuss the training available
- _ reading nextstep e-newsletters
- _ attending nextstep networking meetings and training days
- _ using the nextstep directory and website
- _ working for organisations that offer training (hence were familiar with the range of learning options that their own organisation provided)
- _ attending training provider open days to find out about the training they offered.

5.6.2 Referrals to learning provision

The majority of Skills Coaches interviewed (particularly those in Tranches 1 and 2) said that they had referred at least some of their customers to learning. Skills Coaches reported that the majority of customers required courses below Level 2, and some raised the question of funding, particularly for customers claiming IB. In many areas, there was a lack of roll-on, roll-off provision for particular courses. Some customers were referred to provision within the Skills Coach's own organisation and some interviewees questioned whether this referral was impartial.

A learndirect training provider in a Tranche 2 area who had Skills Coaching customers on basic skills and European Computer Driving Licence courses, said that Skills Coaching customers (who had been referred by Jobcentre Plus to Skills Coaching and then onto training) tended to be keener to learn than direct referrals from Jobcentre Plus to training (that did not involve Skills Coaching), and appeared to be more focused on what they wanted to achieve and why. This was supported by a training provider in a Tranche 3 area; however, he said that because Skills Coaching customers have typically been out of work for a long time they were more likely to have extra support needs and were more likely to drop out from the course. A provider in a Tranche 1 area said that they would not necessarily know which learners had been referred to their learning programmes from Skills Coaching and which from other routes.

An impartial referral?

Some of the Skills Coaches were employed by organisations that also offer training (for example, Further Education colleges, or private sector training providers). While Skills Coaches said they would be an impartial source of guidance and support for the customer, many also said that customers were frequently referred to training offered by their own organisation. One Skills Coach, based at a learning provider in a Tranche 3 area, said that her own company provided a lot of services for Skills Coaching in-house, including learndirect courses, Skills for Life, and personal development courses.

One Skills Coach said that their organisation delivered IT training in-house for customers and another said customers often entered the learndirect programmes the company also offered. While this may have the benefit of continuity for the customer, the degree of impartiality of Skills Coaches who make referrals to their own organisations could be questioned.

A NDLP Adviser in a Tranche 2 area felt that because the Skills Coach in her office worked for learndirect, customers were usually referred to learndirect courses, even when this might not be their most local provision. She felt that the Skills Coach was not impartial and that having a Skills Coach from a training provider was a conflict of interest (perceived or real).

In a Tranche 3 area, one training provider questioned whether Skills Coaches within providers always refer customers to the most appropriate provision because there is an incentive for them to self-refer and gain the funding attached to the customer.

Typically low level courses - it's a long journey

Skills Coaching aims to offer support to individuals to find their most efficient and effective route to improved employability. Some customers may be capable of undertaking a Level 2 course as a result of Skills Coaching, whereas others may need to develop skills before undertaking courses at this level. However, it was not the initial policy intention that Skills Coaching customers would have ESOL, or basic literacy and numeracy needs. These should have been addressed before they were referred to the programme, although, from the types of provision customers were referred to, this does not seem to have been the case.

Skills Coaches generally felt they were well placed to advise customers on the most appropriate learning available to them. Skills Coaches across all areas reported that the majority of customers needed courses, such as confidence building, basic literacy and numeracy and courses to develop basic IT skills, rather than vocational courses. One Skills Coach said:

'With some of the customers, you are not ready to talk about vocational training because they have other needs like confidence building courses. Once the training is sorted we would then think about getting them job ready, which is when we would look at their personal management skills.'

The majority of Skills Coaches treated Learning Brokerage as developing the customers towards a long-term aim. For example, one Skills Coach in a Tranche 2 area described how he was entering a customer on to an aromatherapy course to build her confidence and to try to re-engage her in learning with something she was interested in, but which was not directly related to the work she wanted to do. Many Skills Coaches felt that customers would progress from these courses to more work-related qualifications in time.

However, a smaller number of Skills Coaches mentioned that it was important for learning during Skills Coaching to be vocationally focused:

'Just having a skills need doesn't mean that it is necessary to do training in it. It needs to be focused on getting a successful outcome for the customer. Also, some people just really need to get back to work so you should try to get them back to work and find training they can do in work or online, or in the evenings.'

'Participation in vocational training is seen to be most beneficial rather than taking part in basic skills training to Level 2. Vocational training improves confidence more and is more likely to lead to a job outcome and it does help basic skills at the same time... If you give someone a vocational qualification and a work experience placement then they have the best chance of getting a job.'

For some customers, Learning Brokerage provided the first steps on a long journey towards employment, for others (perhaps those with lower skills barriers to finding

work) Advisers expected them to be able to undertake qualifications related to their vocational area of choice.

Difficult to find funding for some customers

Some Skills Coaches said there were customers for whom it could be difficult to attract funding for learning. Customers claiming JSA or IS (among other benefits) are eligible for fee remission for Further Education. However, if a customer was claiming IB (not in conjunction with any other benefit), then it was reported that finding funding could be difficult. Some providers were able to provide free training to learners claiming IB, funded through sources such as ESF. However, Skills Coaches across several areas noted that lack of funding for courses for IB claimants could be a barrier to them undertaking learning and upskilling. Course fees were seen to be the main cost barrier. Customers did not report that childcare, travel or other costs associated with learning had been a barrier to them accessing learning.

One Skills Coach described how many of their customers were IB recipients qualified above Level 2, but in specialised areas where there were no longer many jobs within the local labour market. It was reported to be difficult to find funding for these customers. For example:

'Funding for vocational training is a nightmare. They say if you're at Level 2 you can have this but not this; if you're a lone parent you can do that bit but not that bit; ALO this but not that. Somebody needs to look at it more as a whole. I have somebody who is a fully qualified electrical engineer but he can't do it any more, yet he can't have the vocational training because he is qualified above Level 2. If it is something he can never do again it is not relevant. I also had a joiner, he had an accident and lost some of his fingers but I can't access training for him for any other vocation.' - Skills Coach

In a Tranche 3 area, the Skills Coaching Co-ordinator gave an example of forklift driving as a course that could lead people to employment. They said that learners had to pay for a licence to be able to do it and that Skills Coaching customers could not ordinarily afford to pay for this themselves. A customer in a Tranche 1 area hoped to access some training via Skills Coaching, but found that funding for courses was a problem as he had savings, so did not enrol on a course.

Generally, other stakeholders, such as nextstep Trial Managers and LSC Contract Managers, said that funding had not been reported as an issue to them, despite Skills Coaches in some of the areas highlighting it as an issue during interviews for the evaluation.

Referrals to other organisations

A small number of Skills Coaches discussed referring customers to other organisations that would be able to help with their skills development. For example, some discussed how volunteering might help to build a customer's confidence and develop their work skills. Customers also said that they had discussed and taken up volunteering opportunities as a result of working with their Skills Coach. For example, in a Tranche 2 area, a Skills Coaching customer had undertaken some voluntary work in a charity shop to gain experience of retail, and another, who was interested in working in the care industry, had started volunteering at a local hospital.

One Skills Coach from a Tranche 2 area discussed how he had referred a small number of customers, whose aim was to start their own business, to other forms of support, such as Business Link or Small Business Advisers at banks. He felt this was

appropriate if it helped customers to achieve their long-term goal of self-employment, although he was not sure whether or not he should be doing this with customers.

A lone parent in a Tranche 3 area described how she discussed working for a training provider with the Skills Coach. Her Skills Coach organised a work placement for her within their organisation doing administrative support. Since her work placement this customer had found paid employment.

The case study below illustrates how one customer who wanted to move into teaching, found a voluntary placement with young people. However, the placement did not work out and he had not planned beyond this with his Skills Coach so was no clearer about how to enter teaching.

Case study 5.5 - Tranche 3 customer starts a voluntary placement

A customer in a Tranche 3 area had been self-employed as a painter and decorator before various health problems meant that he could not continue to do his job. He felt that he could go into teaching painting and decorating and wanted to work with a Skills Coach to see if this would be possible. The Skills Coach found him an opportunity to do some voluntary work with young people on work experience for two days a week. Once he had found this voluntary placement he stopped seeing his Skills Coach. Unfortunately the placement did not work out and the customer had not discussed other ways of entering teaching with his Skills Coach.

Outcomes

- _ Entry into a voluntary placement.

Customers' experiences of Learning Brokerage

Of the Skills Coaching customers enrolled in learning, some have had very positive experiences and have since gone on to undertake further learning, whereas others did not start, or complete their courses. Some customers' experiences of learning are detailed below:

- _ A customer claiming JSA decided to train to achieve a forklift truck license. She enrolled on this course, but shortly found employment. She was told by the college that the course only ran on a Friday (when she couldn't attend) and that if she didn't turn up then she would fail. She asked to change the day, but they wouldn't let her. She therefore didn't attend. When she next saw her Skills Coach they discussed this and the Skills Coach negotiated with the college and got the date changed. However, the customer had already 'failed' the course by then and she decided not to take this forward any further.
- _ A customer in a Tranche 1 area was referred to a Level 1 interpreting course, which she had completed. She had enjoyed this and now wanted to go and do the Level 2 course.
- _ A customer in her 50s with no qualifications was referred to a basic skills course. Part way through the course their teacher left and was not replaced immediately. She attended for about four to six weeks and then stopped going because of this and because she didn't like learning in a group with people much younger than her.

- A lone parent from a Tranche 1 area completed a Basic Skills course and a CLAIT course via Skills Coaching and at the time of the interview was doing an ECDL course. She felt that she wouldn't have done the courses without the support of the Skills Coach. She has been learning for eight hours per week in a provider where she can choose her hours to fit around care for her daughter. She has enjoyed having social contact with other adults.
- A customer with postgraduate level qualifications planned to go back into education, but to undertake courses that were shorter in duration than the courses the Skills Coach had suggested to him, which would have taken five years altogether.
- A customer who was a lone parent said that the Skills Coach gave her a printed list of courses. Upon making her enquiries she found a course she liked better which the Skills Coach hadn't told her about.

5.6.3 Availability of suitable provision

Some Skills Coaches reported that they could easily access suitable provision for their customers. However, there were some exceptions due to a lack of flexibility, which manifested itself in:

- the start dates of some courses (typically with enrolment in September and January)
- lack of roll-on, roll-off provision
- capacity issues, eg lack of places and/or waiting lists for courses. (Construction training was frequently mentioned here, as well as other vocational courses, such as hairdressing.)

Skills Coaches reported that they needed provision to start when they had identified a need for it, and where this did not happen it meant that customers were more likely to drop out of the programme:

'If I'm saying to a guy with confidence issues that you'll have to wait a year, then they won't want to be on the programme.'

'There is some training out there but a lot of providers say: "yeah, we can start you in September 2007" but if I'm seeing a customer in Jan/Feb, saying you have to wait until September is a big turn-off.'

Some Skills Coaches discussed how, where it had been identified that a customer would be suitable for a course that didn't start until September, they would encourage them to undertake another course in the interim, to increase their confidence and prepare them for the college course, or to help them to gain a voluntary placement in the area of work they are interested in.

Where suitable provision could not be found for customers, this had an impact on their experience of the programme. One customer in a Tranche 2 area had found the Skills Diagnostic helpful and had decided to become a maths tutor. She then searched for a course with her Skills Coach that would enable her to become a maths tutor. These were only available in cities and there was nothing near where she lived. She said that they discussed distance learning, but there was no funding (she was qualified to degree level already). When a course could not be found she stopped working with her Skills Coach.

Within the case-study areas, different stakeholders had different opinions about whether or not availability of suitable provision was an issue. Skills Coaches were most likely to say that this was a problem, and nextstep Trial Managers and LSC Contract Managers were more likely to say that availability of suitable provision was not an issue. In a Tranche 3 area, Skills Coaches had said to the nextstep Trial Manager that there was a problem assessing suitable provision. She had asked the Skills Coaches to give her any specific examples of this, but they had not yet done so.

A nextstep Contract Manager in a Tranche 2 area said that due to the provision available at certain times Skills Coaches *'may not be thinking about the full range of provision'* and that Skills Coaches were not referring customers to *'lengthy courses'*. Certainly from the interviews for the evaluation, there is a prevalence of IT, literacy and numeracy courses, rather than a full range of vocational provision, which suggests that demand for learning from Skills Coaching customers may be limited by supply. Indeed a Skills Coach Co-ordinator in a Tranche 3 area said that most customers were referred to learndirect courses because start times were flexible, and a Tranche 1 area was trying to work with colleges to make start dates more flexible for learners who want vocational courses.

An LSC Trial Manager in a Tranche 1 area said that there was a problem with some customers having to wait months for suitable provision, and said: *'we need some way of dealing with this'*. They felt that because of the constraints on supply, learners did not always have a choice about what courses to do.

The nextstep Trial Manager in the same area said that a lack of roll-on, roll-off provision in vocational training meant that provision was limited to basic skills courses and leisure courses. They said that there was a demand for Level 1 vocational provision to provide an opportunity for learners to try courses and assess their suitability before undertaking a higher level course. They suggested some funding for Skills Coaches to be able to commission provision. Alternatively, Skills Coaches could have looked towards in-work training and opportunities, such as those through Train to Gain where employees can access training alongside work.

Two training providers from a Tranche 1 area described the flexibility of their courses for learners, although the courses they offered were for basic skills and IT. At one provider, learners could choose the number of hours they did a week and when they did them (users enrol to the building rather than to a specific set of lessons, so they can come in when they choose); at the other, provision was available all year round, not only during term time, and learners could learn any time during opening hours.

5.7 In-Learning Health Check

Fifteen per cent of Skills Coaching customers had an In-Learning Health Check in Year 2, which was 20 per cent of the target for this stage of the journey. Between July 2006 and July 2007 the target for this aspect of the journey was 9,099, or 47 per cent of all customers starting the journey receiving an In-Learning Health Check. At the time of the interview, Skills Coaches in some areas had not yet reached this stage with their customers, particularly in areas which were newer to the trials. This aspect of the journey was typically a phone call rather than a face-to-face meeting, and hence did not take a great deal of the Skills Coach's time. Nevertheless, it was (almost unanimously) seen as a useful part of the customer journey and those customers who had started learning, or were about to start learning, seemed comforted by the fact that someone was going to check they were okay.

The In-Learning Health Check was reported to usually take place within a month of the customer starting their learning. Skills Coaches felt that this aspect of the journey enabled the Skills Coach to check the suitability of the course and to try to resolve difficulties if there were any. They also reported that the customer felt valued and supported, and that it helped them to stay in learning.

Two Skills Coaches described the benefits of the In-Learning Health Check:

'It covers checking whether the courses are suitable for them and meeting their needs. Is it the right course? I would check if there are any problems with the course and what they are. It's a check to make sure things are running smoothly and dealing with any issues.'

'The In-Learning Health Check seems to be important. You're letting them know that you're still interested. If they are not enjoying the learning you can then discuss with them what might be more appropriate. You're picking them up half way along before they drop out or change their minds.'

In a Tranche 1 area, two training providers discussed the benefits for customers of having a Skills Coach whilst they were learning. One said that compared to other learners, customers who start the training after being referred by a Skills Coach have an *'external support mechanism...which gives them an extra resource to help them overcome problems and meet challenges'*. The other said that a Skills Coach had come with a customer to their first learning session and that this *'hand-holding service'* could be very supportive for some customers.

5.8 Progression interview

In Year 2 of Skills Coaching, the customer journey was changed to place a greater emphasis on the Progression Interview, to ensure that the handover back to Jobcentre Plus at the end of participation in Skills Coaching was as smooth as possible, and that customers are clear about what they have achieved and what they still need to do, and to gather outcomes data.

The Progression Interview should occur at the end of the customer journey, whether that is after the Skills Diagnostic, learning, or any other stage. The purpose of the Progression Interview is to help the individual to make the transition from learning or other aspects of the process to sustained employment. The Skills Coaching Handbook outlines how the Progression Interview can be conducted by the Skills Coach followed by a referral to Jobcentre Plus for advice on placing in employment. It suggests that a joint approach to progression between the Skills Coach and PA should be considered where appropriate.

By the end of July 2007, 2,027 customers had had a Progression Interview, representing 16 per cent of the target for this stage of the journey. This means that 16 per cent of all Skills Coaching customers had reached this final stage of the customer journey by the end of July. In one Tranche 1 case-study area, 38 per cent of customers had received a Progression Interview, whilst it was as low as one per cent in one Tranche 3 case-study area. Only ten per cent of all non-White-British customers have had a Progression Interview, compared with 18 per cent of all White-British customers.

In the case-study areas, Progression Interviews were often held when a customer's benefit status changed and they had to leave the programme, or when customers found employment. These were described by some customers as informal chats, with one customer feeling that it had been useful to discuss their future plans with a Skills Coach at this stage.

In one Tranche 1 area, Progression Interviews were mainly being carried out by telephone, especially if a customer had already started work. A Skills Coach in this area felt that the payment and paperwork attached to this stage of the journey was unnecessary as it was a smaller intervention than the other parts of the journey.

Some Skills Coaches had had difficulties with customers getting jobs and not informing them, with Progression Interviews then not taking place. For example, a Skills Coach in a Tranche 1 area said:

'I think that it's because someone might have gone from learning straight into a job and you will have missed them. Not many have been done.'

A Skills Coach in a Tranche 2 area also highlighted how, when some customers do not want to continue the journey, they will simply drop out or not turn up rather than attend a Progression Interview. However, respondents in other areas felt that customers were likely to inform their Skills Coach if they got a job because of the rapport that they would have built up with the Skills Coach, although not all of the customers interviewed for the evaluation who had found work said they had done this. In another Tranche 2 area, a Skills Coaching subcontractor had a dedicated person within their organisation for tracking individuals who had left the organisation to pick up job outcomes, and Skills Coaching customers were tracked as part of this.

One Skills Coach in a Tranche 2 area found the Progression Interview a good forum to try and encourage people who have found employment to push for further training through their workplace.

5.8.1 Skills Coaches and Jobcentre Plus Advisers working together

There was mixed experience from the different case-study areas about how well Jobcentre Plus Advisers and Skills Coaches worked together at this stage of the journey. It seems that there was a lack of 'hand-back' and this was linked to a lack of feedback throughout the journey. Some customers described customer journeys where they felt that they had been left by the Skills Coach – nothing further had happened after a number of interventions and they were not sure why that was.

The extent to which Skills Coaches and Jobcentre Plus Advisers worked together on progression reflected the nature of relationships at a local level (discussed in Section 4.6). Where Skills Coaches were co-located in Jobcentre Plus offices this was easier, or where they had regular interaction. The case-study below provides an example of how Jobcentre Plus Advisers and Skills Coaches can work together to ensure the progression of a customer.

Case study 5.6 - Customer from Tranche 1 area - Skills Coach and IB PA working together

One customer aged 25 had been claiming Income Support since leaving school due to an illness. She had been working for three years as a volunteer and wanted to find work in the retail industry but was disappointed after failed job applications. She was referred to Skills Coaching by her IB PA, and after the Diagnostic was referred to a learndirect centre to build her literacy and numeracy skills. She also took part in a short customer service course at a local college. The continued support she received from both her IB PA and her Skills Coach encouraged her to attend several interviews.

Outcomes

- _ achieved Level 1 qualification in literacy and numeracy skills
- _ currently working towards Level 2
- _ increased confidence in job interviews.

One (fairly new) Skills Coach from a Tranche 1 area mentioned that he was not sure when he had to hand back the customer to Jobcentre Plus. He felt that the whole customer journey should last for about three to six months, but was unsure what to do when a customer was not due to start provision until September (a seven month wait). He was unsure whether he was still responsible for them in that time or whether they should get referred back to Jobcentre Plus.

In one Tranche 3 area, a Skills Coach said:

'We don't really keep Advisers up-to-date with the customer's progression as it would be too much to do. I am going to do a talk in a couple of weeks just to tell them how things are going and jog Lone Parents' Advisers' memories. I will talk about individual cases then. Can't do that on a weekly basis as you would have to be up-to-date on all of them.'

Another Skills Coach in a Tranche 1 area mentioned that it was sometimes difficult to make an appointment with a PA to do the Progression Interview together so the Skills Coaches mostly do them on their own. A Jobcentre Plus District Co-ordinator in a Tranche 1 area felt that there should be more rigorous procedures for referral back to Jobcentre Plus at the end of the customer journey.

In one Tranche 2 area, Jobcentre Plus Advisers referring customers to Skills Coaching were New Claims Advisers and Restart Advisers who no longer have caseloads. This meant that there was no-one in Jobcentre Plus to hand a customer back to at the end of a customer journey (in contrast to where a NDLP Adviser or Disability Adviser made the initial referral). In contrast, NDLP Advisers in another Tranche 2 area were very keen on getting feedback on how their customers are doing and did not feel that they were getting enough. They felt that more feedback would make the 'handback' process at the end of the journey easier.

5.9 Views on the customer journey overall

5.9.1 Is the journey sufficiently tailored?

Respondents in the case-study areas did, in the main, feel that the customer journey was sufficiently tailored. There were different approaches to delivery of the journey, with one Skills Coach building the whole journey around the completion of the Skills Passport, whilst another Coach delivered the Skills Passport in the final session.

Skills Coaches found that the needs of customers varied, with some needing weekly attention, and others requiring less frequent sessions. There was no typical length for a session or for a stage of the journey, as again, this was dependent on the needs of the customer (although some parts of the journey did take longer than others to deliver, as described above).

The flexibility to tailor the journey to customers' needs was frequently described as one of the most valuable parts of Skills Coaching, and Skills Coaches valued being able to pick and choose from a range of stages of the journey to meet the needs of each individual customer. A Skills Coach from a Tranche 1 area described it as follows:

'Most of the time you can provide people with exactly what they want within the parameters of the Skills Coaching service.'

A respondent from a Tranche 2 area felt that the journey could be very tailored, but highlighted that the journey was only as good as the Skills Coach delivering it.

5.9.2 The most useful part of the journey

The Access interview, Skills Diagnostic and Learning Brokerage were seen to be the most useful parts of the customer journey by respondents, although relatively few customers experienced the whole process. Skills Coaches from a Tranche 1 area highlight why these three parts of the journey are particularly useful:

'I think the customer finds the Access Interview useful because you're telling them about how SC works and how it will benefit them; also the Skills Diagnostic and Learning Brokerage.'

'I think the Access Interview is really important because if you don't get that right then it will be hard at later stages. Equally important are the Skills Diagnostic and Skills Planning as that finds out what learning they need.'

'I think the customer gets the most out of the Access Interview, Diagnostic and, of course, the Learning Brokerage. The In-Learning Health Check is also helpful.'

A respondent from a Tranche 2 area felt that the Diagnostic was the part of the journey that added the most value. This was because they felt that the Skills Diagnostic went further than the help that a Jobcentre Plus Adviser could deliver, and because Skills Coaches should also have more knowledge of the training available and qualification needs of the customers than PAs.

Other respondents felt that the Skills Coaching process as a whole, rather than any particular element of the journey, was beneficial. The ability to see customers frequently, to spend time with them and provide a face-to-face ongoing relationship and support, was felt to have a positive impact. For example:

- A Jobcentre Plus Adviser from a Tranche 1 area thought that the **stages of the customer journey** are useful in providing a focus for customers, giving them clear objectives and outcomes. He felt that without this people who want to do training tend to ‘course hop’ where they don’t have the skills to pick the right course or complete a course, only to find out it is not going to get them a job.
- One Skills Coach from a Tranche 2 area described **time with customers** as the most important thing, saying that the stages of the journey would not get customers a job, but the process as a whole would. A Jobcentre Plus Adviser from a Tranche 1 area felt that it was Skills Coaches having the time to work with customers to break down their barriers that was the most important aspect.
- A provider from a Tranche 1 area felt that having external **support** gives customers an extra resource to overcome problems whilst in learning and that hand-holding support (eg being taken to the first learning session) was well received by customers.
- A provider from a Tranche 1 area thought that the most useful thing for customers is the **identification of skills needs** as it gives them direction.

5.9.3 The payment structure for the customer journey

A number of respondents raised the issue that the length of time each stage of the journey took and the payments attached to the stages did not match up, and having process-driven staged payments did not reflect the one-to-one ongoing and flexible support that was most suited to the customers. One respondent in a Tranche 2 area felt that the customer interactions were ‘*divided by arbitrary and artificial demarcation lines*’.

The increase in flexibility of the journey since Year 1 has led to some Skills Coaches combining into one session different elements of the journey, where appropriate (for example the Access Interview and Skills Diagnostic). A small minority of contractors and Skills Coaches said they tried to compress the stages of the journey into a smaller number of sessions in order to ensure payment for the Access Interview and Skills Diagnostic (55 per cent of the payment attached to the journey where a customer does all the stages, including a paper-based Passport). This approach was taken to minimise the risk of drop-out prior to the Skills Diagnostic (the element of the journey that receives the most payment), although other contractors and Skills Coaches said the pace of the journey was dictated by the customer’s needs.

One **nextstep** manager described the incentives resulting from the payment structure:

‘Funding is such that if the customers don’t go through to the end you won’t get all your funding. You get paid at each stage but may not get it all if they don’t move on to the next stage – which might happen as it’s hard to get them to come back ...the customer starts and has the Access Interview; the Skills Coaches will then book them in so they have two or three sessions in their next interview slot. It makes sure the customer turns up and also makes sure we get the money to cover their salaries. It’s a way of guaranteeing 66 per cent of the funding even if you don’t get it all.’

Staging the funding over a number of activities could lead to Skills Coaches undertaking all the stages of the journey with a customer, even if they are not appropriate. With drop-out between stages fairly common, there is also the incentive to undertake a number of activities in one session, with a risk that the journey is too condensed and overwhelms the customer. This should be borne in mind when developing the funding model for the Adult Careers Service.

5.9.4 Customers' overall experiences of the journey

Positive experiences

A number of customers reported having found going through the customer journey very helpful. A customer from a Tranche 3 area described it as the best thing she had ever done, whilst another customer from a Tranche 3 area felt that it had given her the final push she needed to start a career in midwifery. Below are a number of examples of customers who have had positive experiences of the customer journey.

Positive experiences of the customer journey

A customer from a Tranche 3 area felt that Skills Coaching had given him confidence and that the Skills Coach had a good knowledge of what employers required, which he found very useful. The Skills Coach and the learning provider had also been understanding of challenges he faced coming to the UK from Zimbabwe and finding work and accommodation.

A customer from a Tranche 3 area felt that the Skills Coach was very professional and really helped him to get into work. They discussed what he wanted and didn't want to cover at the beginning of the journey and he felt that this was vital for the Skills Coach to understand his needs. They did not cover anything that he did not find useful.

A customer from a Tranche 3 area felt that the service was 'brilliant as they really had time for you'. She felt that the Skills Coach helped her in every possible way and would send her possible jobs by post and email. She felt that Skills Coaching can be useful to get you quickly into relevant training to improve the chances of getting a job.

A customer from a Tranche 3 area found it all very useful. They were given tailored information and advice, as well support and mentoring, and help with CVs and application forms from the Skills Coach.

A customer from a Tranche 1 area was finding being on Skills Coaching very useful as the Skills Coach has time to spend with her and sees her regularly providing support. She was currently engaged in learning and feels that she would not have done the courses she has without the support of the Skills Coach.

A customer from a Tranche 1 area was very happy with the whole process and thought it was brilliant; she said that it had '*had a massive impact*' on her outlook, helping her become more focused and to have realistic targets. It had also improved her understanding of what skills you need to do different jobs and what jobs she is likely to be able to get locally.

A customer from a Tranche 1 area found that Skills Coaching built his confidence and confirmed to him that he was doing the right thing in thinking of going into training. He described having got a lot of encouragement as well as information and advice which gave him the confidence to pursue what he had already decided he wanted to do.

The impact of Skills Coaching on customers is discussed further in Chapter 7.

Experiences that show room for improvement

For some customers in more than one area, there seemed to be a vague end to the customer journey, where customers felt that they had been left with Skills Coaches not getting in touch when they had expected them to and where there had been no follow-up or hand-back to Jobcentre Plus. Some reported that Skills Coaches had said they would call them again but had not; others had problems when Skills Coaches left and no hand-over to another Skills Coach had been completed. One customer from a Tranche 3 area was disappointed not to have heard from her Skills Coach again as there were questions she wanted to ask and she had wanted a CV developing.

There were other problems with the duration and intensity of the customer journey. One lone parent in a Tranche 3 area had seen their Skills Coach once in five months of being on Skills Coaching, despite having an Access Interview, Skills Diagnostic, Learning Brokerage and an In-Learning Health Check recorded on file. This seemed like a one-off nextstep IAG intervention more than a Skills Coaching journey. However it did lead to her enrolling on a course and she felt it had pointed her in the right direction. Another customer in Tranche 2 area had found the customer journey long and slow, with long gaps in between seeing their Skills Coach.

Some customers did not feel that the journey had been sufficiently tailored for them; with one Tranche 3 customer describing lots of 'box-ticking' and going through procedures, and another Tranche 3 customer felt the process was inflexible. A Tranche 1 customer also felt that the process was quite set out and that it would be better if it was more flexible rather than there being set stages that they had to go through. One Tranche 3 customer was highly qualified with skills and felt that the Skills Coach was at a bit of a loss as to what to do with her, and did not have much flexibility in what they could offer her. She did need help as she had applied for lots of low-level jobs that she thought would not be too stressful and that she could manage with her mental health problems, but she had not been successful as employers thought she was over-qualified. She found that what the Skills Coach could do for her was quite limited.

Other customers highlighted the need for better advice on jobs that were realistic for them to get. A Tranche 2 customer would have liked more specific advice on jobs. He expected to be told: *'the type of work that you can do with your skills would be so and so'* and did not get that. He did get some information and advice, but did not get help to decide what he needed to do or much support. A Tranche 3 customer had also expected to get new ideas about jobs but found that it did not really help.

5.9.5 Suggestions for improvement of the journey

A key suggestion to improving the customer journey was to have a job-matching service once customers were ready to move into work (which respondents stressed was sometimes a long time as their barriers needed to be dealt with first). This was also linked to the need to provide in-work support once customers had made the transition to employment to support their progression. A Tranche 1 nextstep Trial Manager felt that there was a gap in the journey once customers were job-ready, when sometimes nothing then happens. The Manager felt that the Skills Coach should then be responsible for matching a customer with vacancies and should develop stronger links with employers, rather than just handing the customer back to the Jobcentre Plus Adviser for jobsearch. A Jobcentre Plus lead in a Tranche 1 area felt that there should be more emphasis on outcomes in the customer journey which would help Personal Advisers embrace the initiative. Others felt that payments on outcomes would

incentivise Skills Coaches to keep in touch with Jobcentre Plus and to record outcomes.

6 Working With Other Initiatives

Key findings

- _ ALO and Skills Coaching could complement each other well, but the link was not being maximised as year-long college-based Level 2 courses had already started before the ALO had got off the ground.
- _ In areas with Pathways to Work, Advisers were aware of Skills Coaching, and Skills Coaches were being referred customers taking part in Condition Management Programmes.
- _ Train to Gain was not well linked to Skills Coaching. Not all respondents were clear about how a link between the two would work, and many respondents had not heard of Train to Gain.
- _ In the areas delivering to non-benefit recipients this aspect of the Skills Coaching trials was slow in getting off the ground. The focus of attention and resources in these areas has been on working with benefit recipients to try and meet the larger-scale targets for engaging benefit recipients.
- _ Of the small number of non-benefit recipients interviewed, it seemed that, in most cases, Skills Coaching had not been particularly helpful. For example, some individuals were highly qualified and/or had substantial work experience and felt they did not fit what was on offer.

This chapter examines how well Skills Coaching is working with the Adult Learning Option (the third part of the New Deal for Skills), Pathways to Work and Train to Gain. It also examines how successful those trial areas that are targeting non-benefit recipients have been at reaching this group.

6.1 Adult Learning Option (ALO)

6.1.1 Background to the ALO

The Adult Learning Option (ALO) is being trialled from September 2006 in five Jobcentre Plus districts, to test out the benefits of providing training allowances for Jobcentre Plus customers to enable them to take-up their Level 2 entitlement. Announced in the Budget 2004, ALO is part of the New Deal for Skills. Financial

support¹ is offered to low-skilled, longer-term unemployed and inactive benefit recipients to voluntarily take up full-time learning for up to 12 months through LSC funded provision, where it may improve their chances of getting into work. Eligible individuals are Jobcentre Plus customers whose current qualification is below Level 2 and for whom lack of skills is the main barrier to employment. Four of the case-study areas in this research were ALO areas.

6.1.2 The link between Skills Coaching and the ALO

In areas with both a Skills Coaching trial and the ALO, customers who lack a Level 2 qualification (and for whom this is a main barrier to employment) are eligible for ALO and are also eligible for Skills Coaching. Those not eligible for ALO can also be referred to Skills Coaching if skills are their main barrier to employment.

A further way in which the link between the two initiatives could work (although this is not set out in the Skills Coaching Handbook) is if a Skills Coaching customer has a Skills Diagnostic where a Level 2 training need is identified; they are then referred to Jobcentre Plus to see if they are eligible for the ALO. If they are eligible, they could then receive ALO support while they undertake full-time learning, alongside receiving support from their Skills Coach through, for example, the In-Learning Health Check.

Respondents from the four case-study areas felt that ALO and Skills Coaching could complement each other well. In one Tranche 2 area, a Skills Coach said this was because ALO was a means of engaging people into education/training and Skills Coaching is a way of guiding them through the process of gaining employment, either while they are training or after they have completed training. Another Skills Coach from this area described how, when people enrol on ALO via Skills Coaching, the In-Learning Health Check offers the opportunity to see how they are progressing, to reduce drop-out or to pick up the pieces from drop-out. In a Tranche 1 area, the lead within Jobcentre Plus on Skills Coaching felt that the link would be particularly helpful when people come to the end of their ALO course and need help with deciding on their next steps and future options – help that could be provided by a Skills Coach.

In a Tranche 1 area, the nextstep Manager reported that ALO has been beneficial as another layer of provision which could be utilised by Skills Coaching customers. A Skills Coach in a Tranche 1 area felt that Skills Coaching adds value to ALO by offering extra support and mentoring for those customers who do not have the confidence to go back to learning and by enabling the customer to spend more time with an Adviser. One Skills Coach from a Tranche 1 area described the added value of using ALO with Skills Coaching customers:

'It's a useful hook. People say: "if I do training I'm going to give up my benefits" and I say: "oh no you're not" and I tell them about ALO, the extra money and help with childcare. They like that.'

In a Tranche 1 area the nextstep contract manager felt that having access to ALO helped ease any problems with the availability of funded provision.

¹ For Jobcentre Plus customers this is a training allowance equivalent to benefit plus £10 per week. Inactive benefit recipients can choose whether to receive a training allowance, or remain in receipt of their additional benefit. In both cases customers will receive the £10 per week financial incentive.

However, not all respondents felt that ALO provision was always appropriate for this client group. One IB Adviser from Jobcentre Plus in a Tranche 1 area felt that ALO was good at getting someone a qualification but not necessarily in getting them a job and that NVQ Level 2 was sometimes too low as some jobs required Level 3.

6.1.3 A link that is not being maximised

Respondents felt that the link between the Skills Coaching and the ALO was not being maximised. A major issue had been that year-long college-based Level 2 courses started at the beginning of September 2006, before the ALO had got off the ground. By the time ALO was up and running there were few places left on courses that were suitable for the ALO. This had led to few Skills Coaching customers taking part in the ALO in the academic year from September 2006 to July 2007.

Where ALO is appropriate and Skills Coaches felt that their customers would benefit from a full-time Level 2 qualification, some were working with customers until they could start a full-time course, which in some cases was not until September 2007 (for example, some six months after some customers joined Skills Coaching). In these cases Skills Coaches were working with customers to build their confidence, to help them prepare for starting college/ training, and to ensure that they were ready to move back into learning.

Another reason for the low number of referrals from Skills Coaching to ALO had been the proportion of Skills Coaching customers ineligible for ALO. Some customers do not meet the criteria (as they already have a Level 2 qualification) and others have low basic skills, or are not ready for a Level 2 qualification.

In most case-study areas with both the ALO and Skills Coaching, there were instances where Jobcentre Plus Advisers referred customers to the ALO without going through Skills Coaching first, and instances where Skills Coaches did not refer their customers to ALO support. This may have been the most appropriate course of action and there is no set way for the two initiatives to work together.

In a Tranche 1 area, one IB Adviser referred directly to the ALO when a customer had a good idea of what they wanted to do. This was also the case with a Disability Adviser in a Tranche 2 area. A NDLP Adviser in a Tranche 2 area had three customers on ALO, none of whom were also on Skills Coaching. She felt that, because courses that were eligible for customers under ALO tended to start in September, this could limit the usefulness of Skills Coaching, because a Skills Coach would have to fill in time if a client started in January with other courses (also being careful that they do not achieve a Level 2 in the interim if this is not in their preferred subject, as this would mean they are not eligible for ALO funding). This issue of the timing of provision available under ALO led to a lack of a joined-up approach between ALO and Skills Coaching.

In a Tranche 1 area, after a lot of people were referred directly to ALO from Jobcentre Plus, the Skills Coaching Coordinator organised an awareness exercise to encourage Advisers to refer customers onto Skills Coaching. A Jobcentre Plus Adviser in this area described how the process can work: the Adviser refers a customer to Skills Coaching, they identify a suitable course, and they then refer the customer back to the Adviser, who then refers the customer onto ALO. However, the Adviser felt that they could just as easily find the course themselves for their customer rather than going through a Skills Coach.

There were also instances of Skills Coaches in ALO areas not referring their customers onto ALO. One lead Adviser for Skills Coaching within Jobcentre Plus in a Tranche 1 area was not sure why they were not getting referrals from Skills Coaches of customers who would be eligible for ALO. The ALO champion in the office (a different person) was disappointed that Skills Coaches did not seem to know about ALO or what courses were available for customers on the ALO. This individual had no confidence in the Skills Coaches and had stopped referring customers to Skills Coaching.

6.1.4 Approaches to maximising the link

One Tranche 1 area, with both ALO and Skills Coaching, described some interesting approaches to ensuring that ALO and Skills Coaching worked well together, which they felt had had mixed success. In this area, the LSC asked nextstep, Jobcentre Plus and Skills Coaches to identify where there were gaps for training places, and then commissioned particular provision with local providers (mainly colleges). This bought course places which Skills Coaching customers could access, and meant that Skills Coaching customers could probably start learning more quickly than would otherwise have been the case.

Respondents from this area also reported they had a target for ALO within their Skills Coaching target. A meeting was organised a month before the start of the ALO with Skills Coaches and lead PAs in Jobcentre Plus. It was initially decided that the Jobcentre Plus PA would make a referral to the Skills Coach, who would then identify where ALO was appropriate. If the customer was eligible, the Skills Coach would then refer the customer back to the PA to complete the ALO paperwork. This did not work as PAs were not referring customers to Skills Coaching. Some months later, a decision was taken at the ALO steering group meeting that Jobcentre Plus should take ownership of ALO, complete the paperwork and find out about courses, and then refer the customer to a Skills Coach for extra help.

However, this was not felt to have worked, because when the customer knew what course they wanted to undertake via ALO, they did not always want or need extra help from Skills Coaching. The customer may not be told about the help available from Skills Coaching where the PA was not aware of it. Where the ALO lead was the same as the Skills Coaching lead within Jobcentre Plus, PAs were aware of both initiatives. Where this was not the case, PAs were not always aware. The Skills Coaching Co-ordinator in this area said:

'Hopefully they [ALO and Skills Coaching] will add value to each other but it's not happening at the moment. We do try and plan about the added value for each other. A lot of people weren't aware that they could refer to ALO and Skills Coaching. There have been huge changes in Jobcentre Plus so that makes it harder.'

In a Tranche 2 area, a Skills Coach went through the records at the college where they were based and found there were 12 people on courses that could have been eligible for the ALO. She contacted them to tell them about the ALO and six enrolled on the ALO having already started the course. Whilst this has boosted numbers on the ALO, it is clearly not in line with the policy intent of how the ALO and Skills Coaching should work.

Most of the ALO case-study areas were, at the time of fieldwork in summer 2007, gearing up for the start of college courses in September 2007. In one Tranche 2 area, Jobcentre Plus were working with a local College to publicise ALO, including the Skills Coaching Co-ordinator from the Jobcentre Plus district having written to

principals outlining what their college could do, how it could benefit and how many learners they have funded already through ALO. This Jobcentre Plus Skills Coaching Co-ordinator had also presented to a recent Skills Coaching event on the ALO to encourage referrals from Skills Coaching to the ALO. In a Tranche 1 area, a NDLP Adviser explained how the ALO was being promoted in the run up to September and ensuring Jobcentre Plus customers who are unsure what they want to do are being referred to Skills Coaching, so that they can then be referred on to ALO if appropriate.

6.2 Pathways to Work

6.2.1 Background to Pathways

Pathways to Work was launched in seven areas in October 2003 and April 2004. The December 2004 pre-budget report announced an expansion of Pathways to cover an additional 14 Jobcentre Plus districts, and by December 2006 it covered 40 per cent of the country. The new Green Paper (DWP 2007) states that Pathways will be a nationwide programme by April 2008. Pathways to Work aims to improve the provision of advice and support to help those on incapacity benefits to get back into work. Pathways is aimed at new and repeat IB claimants who pass a screening process called a Personal Capability Assessment.

By April 2008, all new IB claimants will be eligible for Pathways. Existing claimants can participate on a voluntary basis and mandatory participation for existing claimants is being piloted in the original seven Jobcentre Plus districts. The main elements of Pathways include:

- _ an initial Work Focused Interview (WFI) eight weeks after their claim, followed by a series of five further mandatory WFIs at monthly intervals
- _ a specialist team of IB Personal Advisers (IBPAs)
- _ a Choices Package of interventions offering people a range of provision to support their return to work, including work-focused Condition Management Programmes
- _ a Return to Work Credit of £40 per week for 52 weeks after returning to work
- _ an Adviser Discretionary Fund of up to £100 per customer, to support activities or purchases to increase the chance of moving into work
- _ in-work support contracted out to providers.

Two of the case-study areas were Pathways to Work areas at the time of the research.

6.2.2 The link between Pathways and Skills Coaching

In one area, IBPAs were aware of Skills Coaching, and Skills Coaches were getting referrals from Pathways to Work of customers taking part in Condition Management Programmes (CMP). This was facilitated by the co-ordinator of Skills Coaching within Jobcentre Plus who formally works on Pathways and so has good relationships with the Pathways team. The CMP team had recently delivered a workshop at a **nextstep** conference which had also helped build the relationship between Pathways and Skills Coaching.

The co-ordinator of Skills Coaching within Jobcentre Plus in this area felt that Skills Coaching can complement Pathways because it can offer something additional to the

CMP and can *'plant the seeds'* for a new direction once someone has learned to deal better with their illness or disability. They felt that Skills Coaches can also offer more time to customers than IBPAs, making Skills Coaching useful for people with multiple barriers such as skills and a disability. They felt that *'the link needs to be there in Pathways areas'*.

In the other case-study area with Pathways to Work, Pathways to Work was only operating in part of the Skills Coaching trial area. It had taken quite a long time to get Pathways staff to realise that Skills Coaching would not affect their provision and that it was a complementary service. At first, staff on Pathways were afraid of losing customers and respondents suggested that it would have been useful to have had policy guidelines from a national level about how the services could work together. Referral systems have since got much better, and the Skills Coaching trial produced a paper for Pathways staff to encourage them to refer to Skills Coaching.

6.3 Train to Gain

6.3.1 Background to Train to Gain

Train to Gain builds on the successful Employer Training Pilots. Launched in April 2006, Train to Gain will cover the whole of England by the end of 2007. The core Train to Gain service for employers will comprise:

- _ support from a Skills Broker, working to national standards
- _ access to LSC fully funded programmes eg Skills for Life and NVQ Level 2 courses, and apprenticeships
- _ limited LSC support for other learning programmes
- _ information and advice to employees
- _ limited wage subsidies for employers of less than 50 people.

The Skills Coaching Handbook highlights how Skills Coaches and Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers need to be aware of Train to Gain opportunities, as jobs that offer further training may be of particular benefit to Skills Coaching customers. The Skills Coach job description includes a requirement for Coaches to make customers aware of Train to Gain. The Year 2 customer journey highlights the importance of referring customers after the Progression Interview into 'Train to Gain support'.

In summary, Skills Coaches should make customers aware of Train to Gain, and Skills Coaches and Jobcentre Plus Advisers should encourage customers to find work with Train to Gain employers so that they can participate in learning once in work (which can be done when vacancies that might offer training through Train to Gain are advertised through Jobcentre Plus). Skills Coaches and Jobcentre Plus Advisers could also work with Train to Gain Brokers who could encourage employers who have taken on Skills Coaching customers to participate in Train to Gain.

6.3.2 A tenuous link?

In most areas, respondents felt that Skills Coaching was not as well linked to Train to Gain as it could be. The link with Train to Gain was often described as 'somewhat tenuous'. Not all respondents were clear about how a link between the two would

work on a practical level and many respondents had not heard of Train to Gain, or if they had, did not know very much about it or what it involved. For example, two Skills Coaches from a Tranche 1 area described the link as follows:

'No links to Train to Gain. I don't know how it would link?'

'I haven't had any links with Train to Gain – I don't know too much about it. Have never been involved with it.'

In one Tranche 3 area, the LSC Trial Manager did not understand how Skills Coaching and Train to Gain could work together:

'In the Skills Coaching guidance it does mention Train to Gain but it's a very woolly statement and we're not sure what the link is supposed to be. It's two initiatives working at the same time and I'm not sure how they link. It's also about concentrating on getting them up and running and then maybe thinking about how they link later.'

One LSC Trial Manager in a Tranche 1 area felt that the difficulty was that Skills Coaching ends when a customer is 'job-ready' but Train to Gain only starts when a customer enters a job. This was echoed by a Personal Adviser in Jobcentre Plus in a Tranche 1 area who felt that Train to Gain was not relevant to them because it dealt with people already in work rather than those unemployed or economically inactive.

In a Tranche 2 area, the LSC Contract Manager felt that Train to Gain would link well with Skills Coaching if someone started employment and needed a Level 2 qualification. However, they explained that this had not been an issue as customers tend not to be ready for this level of provision as they are a long way from the labour market and need their confidence and self-esteem building up first. In a Tranche 3 area, the LSC manager and Jobcentre Plus Advisers were unclear how you could track whether someone had moved into work with a Train to Gain employer.

6.3.3 Contact between Skills Coaching and Train to Gain

There was little evidence of the two initiatives working together at present in the case-study areas, and there was often little real contact between the two initiatives at a local level. In many areas Train to Gain was in the early stages – for instance, in one Tranche 2 area, Jobcentre Plus had only received their first Train to Gain vacancy in February 2007. Many respondents felt that the whole infrastructure of Train to Gain needed to be up and running before the two initiatives could work together.

Even in areas which had had an Employer Training Pilot (the pilot stage of Train to Gain), relationships had rarely been made between Train to Gain and Jobcentre Plus and relationships needed to be built up from scratch. In one Tranche 1 area, the Skills Coaching Co-ordinator said that the lack of contact was due to there not being a Train to Gain Co-ordinator in post at present. This was in contrast to another Tranche 1 area where communication between the LSC Trial Manager, the nextstep Contract Manager and the Train to Gain Manager was happening. The nextstep Trial Manager in a Tranche 2 area had found working with Train to Gain very difficult and had not been able to find anyone from Train to Gain to take part in the Skills Coaching forum. In a Tranche 3 area, a meeting was planned with Skills Coaches and Train to Gain staff to raise awareness of both initiatives. In this area a workshop on engaging disadvantaged groups had already brought Skills Coaches and Train to Gain staff together.

Skills Coaching was also felt to be focused on meeting targets in terms of Access Interviews and delivering the journey, rather than on linking customers to Train to

Gain. Many respondents felt that this would happen in the future but was not a priority at present.

6.3.4 Good practice of the link working

One Tranche 1 case-study area cited examples of how Skills Coaching was working with Train to Gain. Skills Coaches have access to Train to Gain vacancies and are encouraged to use them. The Skills Coach Trial Manager is e-mailed vacancies by Train to Gain every week and she distributes them to all of the Skills Coaches. However, they still felt that the link should be working more effectively:

'I think it would be better if we had an Adviser per area and had more contact because Train to Gain is the solution. It is not as well used as it could be. I don't think Train to Gain are that interested in Skills Coaching, which is stupid. We up-skill people to some level and then they need to get into a job with more training. There should be more communication apart from the e-mail, and a massive push to link the two up. It is the best result people could have. It is ideal. They could have a massive supply of people from us. If someone has come to us for six or seven interventions then they are reliable.'

In one Tranche 2 area, two organisations subcontracted to deliver Skills Coaching were also involved in delivering training through Train to Gain. One of these provider organisations had arranged work placements with local employers for Skills Coaching customers. This had led to some Skills Coaching customers moving into permanent employment with these employers. One of these employers had an appointment to see a Train to Gain Broker when interviewed for this research. The other was working with Train to Gain and a former Skills Coaching customer there was doing an NVQ in Business Administration through Train to Gain having got the job through Skills Coaching. This employer was already involved in Train to Gain prior to their involvement in Skills Coaching. However, having proactive providers who are working with Skills Coaching and Train to Gain and are setting up work placements may provide a more practical and realistic link between the two initiatives.

6.4 Trials with pilots for non-benefit recipients

6.4.1 Background to the pilots for non-benefit recipients

In the December 2004 Pre-Budget Report, the Chancellor invited the National Employment Panel to recommend measures to increase the employment, self employment and business growth of minority ethnics and faith groups. In May 2005, in conjunction with the Ethnic Minority Business forum, the Panel made their recommendations in the report *Enterprising People, Enterprising Places* (NEP, 2005).

The report highlighted a need to attract more of the 21 per cent of ethnic minorities who are not working and who are not on benefit into the labour market to close the overall 15 per cent employment gap. The report highlighted that minority ethnic groups are concentrated in five main cities: London, Birmingham, Manchester, Bradford/Leeds and Leicester. To maximise limited resources, the report recommended that these cities should form the main focus for any concerted effort to increase ethnic minority employment. From 2006–2007, agreement was reached with ministers to extend Skills Coaching into all five cities.

The Women and Work Commission Report *Shaping a Fairer Future* (Women and Work Commission, 2006) highlighted the gap between male and female earnings, and indicated that many women are in lower-skilled jobs, while others are outside the

labour market altogether. The report made recommendations to improve women's access to learning opportunities and to equip them with the skills and confidence needed to raise their aspirations.

As part of a response to the Women and Work Commission Report, the Chancellor announced additional funding for Skills Coaching in the 2006 budget. This provided an extra £5 million in 2006–2007 to double the number of Jobcentre Plus districts participating in the Skills Coaching trials, with a specific focus on helping low-skilled women to achieve Level 3 skills.

There are three trial areas where delivering Skills Coaching to non-benefit recipients is being piloted (all of which are case-study areas). The focus of the pilots with non-benefit recipients is on low-skilled women, and black and minority ethnic customers, for whom lack of skills is the main barrier to sustained employment. These customers should be non-benefit claimants, out of work and intending to return to the labour market. There is a specific focus on helping low-skilled women to achieve Level 3 qualifications.

By the end of July 2007, there were 111 non-benefit recipients taking part in Skills Coaching across the three trial areas where the approach was being piloted (in addition to 39 recorded as non-benefit recipients in other trial areas). One per cent of all those who had a positive employment outcome were non-benefit recipients, in line with the one per cent of all those taking part in Skills Coaching who were non-benefit recipients. This was also the case for positive learning outcomes.

6.4.2 Getting the pilots with non-benefit recipients off the ground

Evidence from the case studies suggests that this aspect of the Skills Coaching trials has been slow in getting off the ground. Delays in the distribution of marketing materials and in getting Skills Coaching Co-ordinators in place have led to delays in starting to work with non-benefit recipients. Issues with marketing were raised by one case-study area which highlighted that when marketing posters did arrive they stated that Skills Coaching was for people on benefits. An additional problem has been that posters cannot be put up in Jobcentres because it is not a Jobcentre Plus programme.

It seems that in the three trial areas that have a pilot to attract non-benefit recipients, the focus of attention and resources has largely remained on working with benefit recipients to try and meet the larger-scale targets for the trial area – ie engaging benefit recipients to attend an Access Interview, and delivering the customer journey to them.

However, in one area, there was an initial focus on outreach to attract customers from outside the benefit system which has since declined. A report on local demographics was produced for each Skills Coaching subcontractor and was used during the induction process to highlight the wards where there were most people who could benefit from outreach activity. At first, a lot of effort was put into this as Skills Coaches in this area were not getting many referrals from Jobcentre Plus for the trial as a whole. However, as more referrals began to come from Jobcentre Plus, it limited the amount of outreach they could do.

6.4.3 Is outreach reaching non-benefit recipients?

The ability of trials to attract non-benefit recipients is linked to their use of outreach (approaches to outreach were outlined above in Section 4.3). In one of the trial areas

with a pilot to work with non-benefit recipients, Skills Coaches are co-located in Jobcentre Plus premises and are booked up with appointments, as referrals from Jobcentre Plus are working very well. This means that Skills Coaches have little incentive to do outreach to engage non-benefit recipients because it takes up time that they would otherwise be spending with benefit customers, and which would definitely lead to payments for the Skills Coaching contractor.

However, even successful outreach work is likely to attract those claiming benefits (for instance lone parents through Children's Centres) as well as the non-benefit recipients who are one of the focuses of these three trials. Lone parents are an obvious target group (as the non-benefit recipients pilots are aiming to reach low-skilled women), but in many cases lone parents are in fact claiming benefits.

A number of approaches to outreach have been tried by the three case-study areas with a pilot for non-benefit recipients:

- In one area, group events and drop-in days have been found to work particularly well, for example, in community centres and local Surestarts. Job Fairs have also been attended in this area.
- In the second area, **nextstep** have encouraged *all* their Advisers (including those who do not work on Skills Coaching) to inform non-benefit claimants about Skills Coaching. Since April 2007 this area has had new dedicated outreach Coaches who deal with customers both inside and outside the benefits system. Skills Coaching has also been subcontracted to new community and voluntary organisations to improve outreach, with all of these organisations delivering Skills Coaching in the community.
- In the third area, Skills Coaches have used Children's Centres and ESOL courses to try and attract non-benefit recipients to take part in Skills Coaching. This area has also been working through schools, church groups and community centres to try and reach people who are not accessing the services of Jobcentre Plus, and has sent posters out to medical centres and Children's Centres. Adult learning providers have also been approached as a way of generating referrals of non-benefit recipients. This trial has prioritised wards with high BME populations and feels that they have been successful in reaching individuals from BME groups.

The area that had been most successful in terms of attracting non-benefit recipients in terms of numbers felt that their approach to outreach had generated this flow of participants. However, some non-benefit recipients interviewed in this area as part of the research had come into contact with Skills Coaching through the Jobcentre, even though they were non-claimants. Some had friends who told them to go to the Jobcentre and others were going there anyway for their own job search. The Skills Coaching lead within Jobcentre Plus in another area highlighted how it takes a lot of work to get involved in communities, to be accepted and to gain the trust of people before they will come to you for help and advice.

6.4.4 Experience of non-benefit recipients

As part of this research, a total of ten customers recorded on the MI as being outside the benefits system were interviewed. It had been hoped to contact more of these customers. There were 60 non-benefit recipients with contact details available at the time of fieldwork starting in June. The 50 who were not interviewed were not contactable, had incorrect or incomplete contact details, did not want to take part, or agreed to but then cancelled appointments.

When interviewed as part of this research it became clear that four of those recorded on the MI as being non-benefit recipients were in fact inside the benefit system, for example, by signing on to JSA to claim National Insurance (NI) credits only. Of the remaining six individuals who were indeed non-benefit recipients, five had recently come to the UK from abroad. Because of the small numbers of non-benefit recipients interviewed it is not possible to say whether customers outside of benefits have a different experience of Skills Coaching to those on benefits.

Non-benefit recipients were motivated to improve their skills and find work, as shown by the fact that they had signed up to Skills Coaching despite not being part of the benefit system. Although Skills Coaching is also voluntary for benefit recipients, benefit recipients nevertheless have work-related obligations such as needing to be actively seeking work to claim JSA and attending WFIs if on Income Support and, in some cases, if on incapacity benefit. This suggests that those non-benefit recipients taking part in Skills Coaching may be especially motivated to find work and/or increase their skills as they do not have these obligations.

Of the small number of non-benefit recipients interviewed, it seemed that in most cases Skills Coaching had not been particularly helpful. These individuals were already actively seeking work or finding out about courses, and in many cases the Skills Diagnostic was not seen as helpful as individuals already knew what they wanted to do. It did, however, confirm for some that they were doing the right thing and improved their confidence in pursuing that course of action.

Some were frustrated that it did not help them get a job. Others felt that what they were offered was not relevant to them. For example, one individual dropped out after sessions on the Skills Diagnostic because she had wanted confidence-building exercises and felt it was too computer-based. Another kept doing courses but felt no nearer to finding work. Some individuals were highly qualified and/or had a lot of work experience and felt that they did not fit the model and so Skills Coaches did not know what to do with them (as was discussed for customers generally in Section 5.9.4). However, some non-benefit recipients had attended courses that they had found useful and one was very positive about the customer journey and felt that it had helped her get a job.

7 The Impacts and Costs of Skills Coaching

Key findings

- _ Skills Coaches reported that customers gained a better understanding of themselves and their skills alongside an increased motivation to seek work and a better understanding of how to be successful in the job application process.
- _ Entries into learning and voluntary opportunities were reported, but largely the outcomes were increased confidence and motivation.
- _ Just over 1,800 Skills Coaching customers were recorded as having achieved positive work or learning outcomes in the management information, although issues with collection of these data mean this is likely to be an underestimate.
- _ Some customers who had found work had since become unemployed again. There is a need for in-work support.
- _ In Year 2, Skills Coaching cost £2.4 million to deliver (excluding management costs, costs of delivering support outside the journey, learning, and the costs to Jobcentre Plus).
- _ The cost of achieving a work outcome was £3,407 and a learning outcome £1,789. The costs per employment outcome are within the range of other provision available through DWP to this client group.

This chapter presents details of the impact that Skills Coaching has had on customers, both in terms of soft outcomes, such as increased confidence, and hard outcomes such as entry into learning or employment. The costs of delivering the service are also considered and broadly compared to other programmes for out-of-work individuals.

The customers interviewed for the evaluation were all at different stages of their journey. Some were now in work, whereas others were still working with the Skills Coach. Some had completed every stage of the customer journey, whereas others had only completed the Access Interview and Skills Diagnostic. The stage at which customers were on this journey was likely to affect their outcomes to date.

In addition, Hughes et al. (2002) reported on a concept of shorter and longer-term outcomes from guidance based on the time elapsed since the intervention:

- **immediate outcome** measures included increased decision-making skills, opportunity awareness, attitudinal change (ie increased optimism and motivation)
- **intermediate outcomes** might include improved search strategy, intensity of search and ability to cope and plan beyond disappointments
- **long-term** measures for the individual to explore skills matches, labour market entry and progression.

Given that many of the case-study areas had only been running for a year (and in some cases less after a longer set-up period), it is not surprising that immediate and intermediate outcomes were most likely to be reported.

For any positive outcomes to occur, several Skills Coaches described the importance of the timing of the programme in the customer's job search and their motivation to make a change. For example, one Skills Coach said:

'Some people are turning around and other people aren't – I can't think what I did different for different customers. Some are just open to it, and it comes at the right time for them. It's their own willingness and motivation to change.'

Two PAs in a Tranche 2 area discussed the challenges in working with a Skills Coaching's client group and achieving tangible outcomes. One went on to say that Skills Coaching could be a useful first step to re-entering employment, but this was something that for most customers was likely to be a long-term goal.

PAs were mixed about the impacts of Skills Coaching; some were unsure as to what had happened to the customers they referred, whereas others felt that it helped to give customers confidence and the skills to make successful job applications. Others mentioned cases where customers had given them negative feedback about Skills Coaching.

7.1 Outcomes data in the management information

The outcomes that are captured in the management information may be an underestimate of the outcomes Skills Coaching customers have achieved. Several of the customers we interviewed for the evaluation had found work, but said that their Skills Coach would not have known about their change in status and indeed this was not always on the management information about the customers extracted for the interview. It is likely that the total number of outcomes is under-estimated and therefore that the cost per outcome measures presented later is higher than could have been the case were all outcomes data captured. This should also be borne in mind when interpreting the regression results.

Some of the entries in the outcome fields are 'other' or 'unknown', making it impossible to deduce whether the outcome was positive or negative. Therefore, when looking at the data, we have also looked at other variables where possible to make the outcomes data more complete. For example, a person may have their 'impact destination' recorded as 'other', but a 'qualification type' recorded as 'GCSE' in another variable, in which case we have assumed that the person has had a positive learning outcome.

Using this approach, two datasets were created; one containing everyone for whom there was evidence of a positive employment outcome and one containing everyone for whom there was evidence of a positive education outcome. Customers can have

both a positive employment outcome and a positive education outcome recorded, and so some customers may be in both of these datasets.

Finally, a dataset was created of everyone who *either* had a 'completion destination' variable entered (in which case it is assumed that they have completed Skills Coaching) *or* had completed a Progression Interview (which is supposed to occur at the end of the Skills Coaching period). Customers in this dataset who also had a positive outcome recorded were then removed, leaving a dataset of customers who had left Skills Coaching without achieving any positive outcome (or who had not had an outcome recorded).

Based on the results of the analysis described above, of the 12,682 Skills Coaching customers, 1,819 (14 per cent) experienced at least one positive outcome; 710 (six per cent) have experienced a positive employment outcome, and 1,352 (11 per cent)¹ have experienced a positive learning outcome, as shown in Table 7.1 overleaf.

It also highlights the differences between areas in the recording of outcomes. In the case-study areas, this ranges from four per cent of all customers with a positive outcome, to 35 per cent of all customers with a positive outcome.

¹ Customers can have both a positive employment outcome and a positive education outcome recorded.

Table 7.1 positive outcomes by area

Area	Number of positive outcomes	% of customers with a positive outcome	Number of positive employment outcomes	% of customers with a positive employment outcome	Number of positive education outcomes	% of customers with a positive education outcome
Area A (Tranche 1)	282	18%	132	8%	196	13%
Area B (Tranche 1)	105	14%	62	8%	64	8%
Area C (Tranche 1)	228	20%	51	4%	187	16%
Area D (Tranche 2)	11	4%	7	2%	4	1%
Area E (Tranche 2)	11	4%	6	2%	7	3%
Area F (Tranche 2)	167	21%	22	3%	166	21%
Area G (Tranche 3)	9	4%	6	2%	4	2%
Area H (Tranche 3)	121	35%	22	6%	114	33%
Area I (Tranche 3)	71	17%	12	3%	67	16%
Other Area	814	12%	390	6%	543	8%
Total	1,819	14%	710	6%	1,352	11%

Source: LSC Mlmanager database

7.2 Soft outcomes

7.2.1 Confidence

Most interviewees – whether Skills Coaches, customers or PAs – felt that Skills Coaching was most likely to help customers feel more confident in applying for work and undertaking some learning, and this seems to have been particularly valuable for lone parents and those who had been out of the labour market for a period of time. Nevertheless, there is some indication that if customers experience setbacks in achieving the aims discussed with their Skills Coach, this new-found confidence is knocked back.

Many of the outcomes reported by customers fit with the examples found in the literature after an intervention of this sort, such as changes in attitudinal and practical skills (Table 2.1). A NDLP Adviser said that, although she had had a mixed response from customers overall, Skills Coaching seemed to be improving customers' confidence. This also seemed to reflect the experiences of lone parents interviewed for the evaluation. One lone parent said Skills Coaching made her feel more confident as she was *'starting to feel on the scrapheap'*. Another lone parent said, *'you don't have a lot of confidence when you have spent so much time bringing up children and out of work'*, and that Skills Coaching gave her a confidence boost.

Another lone parent reported that Skills Coaching gave her the confidence to stay calm in job interviews:

'I tended to panic and keep talking all the time in interviews and they made me see I had something to offer and to try not to talk too much - just answer the questions. They had faith in me, which made all the difference.'

A fourth lone parent who had previous work experience in a hotel and as a cleaner said that Skills Coaching gave her more focus and greater confidence that she could achieve something.

However, if customers' planned job-search strategies did not work out as anticipated, these soft outcomes and new-found confidence seemed to dwindle. For example, in a Tranche 3 area, a customer who was claiming JSA said that while Skills Coaching had been worthwhile and helped her apply for jobs, she was starting to lose confidence in herself again as she had had a series of knock-backs and failed to find employment.

Skills for Jobs and Local Employment Partnerships may provide a solution. Customers undertaking pre-employment training may be guaranteed job opportunities that have been pledged for disadvantaged, out-of-work individuals under the 'Jobs Pledge', and hence will find employment as a result of working with careers Advisers and undertaking training.

7.2.2 Understanding of the labour market, and their skills and abilities

Skills Coaching is designed to enable individuals to gain a better understanding of available employment in the labour market, of their own skills and abilities and, bringing the two together, of the types of work that they may be suited to which is available in their local area. The following section outlines evidence about the impact of Skills Coaching on customers' understanding.

The labour market

Some customers said that Skills Coaching had improved their understanding of the labour market in the following ways:

- _ understanding of available jobs and different careers
- _ understanding of the skills and qualifications needed to undertake specific jobs
- _ understanding of what employers are looking for in CVs and at interviews.

Several customers with positive experiences of Skills Coaching said that what they had learned about the types of jobs available, job application techniques and what employers want, would help them with their job search for many years to come. For example, one customer claiming IB said:

'I feel more confidence about what employers are looking for in CVs and interview situations as a result of Skills Coaching. I'll never forget what I have learned, like only saying what is important for the job and doing a different CV for every job, which is relevant'.

For others, Skills Coaching made them consider more realistic job options. The case study below illustrates how working with a Skills Coach helped one lone parent to reconsider her work options and make them more realistic.

Case study 7.1: Lone parent helped to think about realistic options

A lone parent in a Tranche 1 area was claiming Income Support when she was referred to Skills Coaching by the Jobcentre. She felt that the Skills Coach was able to give her guidance and support about the type of work that she could realistically do. When she first went to see a Skills

Coach she wanted to do a performing arts course and to become a dancer. The Skills Coach helped her to see that this was a tough career to get into and instead they discussed the types of jobs that would be available in the local area. After this discussion she decided she wanted to work in business or administration. She enrolled on a computer course as a starting point and hopes to get a NVQ in business administration later on. She now views dancing as a hobby rather than as an area she could work in. She said that the Skills Coach: *'helped me to think about what would be possible and what would actually lead to a proper job that would make a better life for me and my daughter.'*

Outcomes

- _ started an EDCL course
- _ more confidence
- _ goals and better understanding of the labour market.

Nevertheless, there were some customers who were still unsure as to whether or not they would be able to find work in the job roles they discussed with their Skills Coach, and even in the areas of work in which they had started training. For example, a customer enrolled on a computer maintenance course as a result of working with his Skills Coach but was *'still not sure how many jobs there are in computer maintenance'*.

Customers' own skills and abilities

Several Skills Coaches felt that the Skills Coaching process was a useful way for customers to explore their skills, and to develop and refine ideas about the type of work they were seeking. One nextstep Contract Manager felt that the long-term nature of the intervention aided this process as individuals needed time to reflect on their discussions with the Skills Coach and to further develop their understanding.

One Skills Coach described the experiences of a customer who she felt had gained both a greater understanding of the skills she had and more confidence:

'The impact it has is massive. I've had girls come in and burst into tears they have such little confidence. One in particular really stands out. She was so intelligent but didn't believe in herself. She had qualifications. Now she has gone through teacher training and has a job with youths, teaching them. She is a different woman. She said, "if it wasn't for you I would never have done this".'

The case study below shows how Skills Coaching helped one customer gain a better understanding of her skills and abilities.

Case study 7.2: Customer in Tranche 1 area - Gaining a better understanding of skills

A customer in a Tranche 1 area had not worked for over 25 years (she had been caring for her family) and had no specific career direction in mind when she started Skills Coaching. The customer lacked confidence and was not aware of the skills she had to offer an employer. The Skills Coach and customer worked through the Skills Diagnostic to help the customer understand and relate her skills to careers and employment. The results then formed the basis of a discussion.

From this, the customer identified that she had an interest in caring for and working with other people. She went on to enrol on a relevant course.

Outcomes

- _ development of Basic Skills prior to commencement of NHS Support Workers Course
- _ enrolment on an NHS Support Workers course
- _ increased confidence and understanding of skills and abilities.

7.2.3 Job search

Through gaining a better understanding of themselves and the work available in the local labour market, several customers (and Skills Coaches) said that Skills Coaching had had an impact on:

- _ customers' intentions and motivation to seek work
- _ the content and quality of their CV
- _ the ways in which they sought work, and their confidence in doing so
- _ the range and type of work that they were seeking – with customers more likely to seek work relevant to their skills.

A training provider in a Tranche 1 area said that the Skills Coaching customers she had worked with were more motivated and had a clearer sense of how learning could lead them into employment than other learners. They said that the main impacts of Skills Coaching for customers were a better understanding of the job application system and what employers were looking for.

An IB PA in a Tranche 1 area felt that Skills Coaching helped to put '*work back on their [customers'] radar*' as it helped to increase their confidence about looking for work and also filled a potential gap on their CV which could make them look more proactive to employers.

A customer in a Tranche 3 area wanted to find work as a graphic designer. The Skills Coach helped him to find local networking groups in the area and to use the internet and Google for job searching. He felt that Skills Coaching had improved his job search strategies.

A case study below shows how Skills Coaching helped another customer with their job search.

Case study 7.3: Customer from Tranche 2 area - Help with Job search

One customer had been a lone parent for ten years and began to claim JSA as his daughter turned 16. He had previous work experience of the painting and decorating industry, but was lacking in confidence to apply for work as he had been out of the labour market for so long. He worked with the Skills Coach to draft a CV and they discussed methods of searching for jobs within the local area. This included writing speculative letters to letting agencies and Housing Associations. They also discussed other job options, including the possibility of working for a builders' merchant. As a

result of their discussions, he enrolled on a literacy, numeracy and IT course, and forklift truck training.

Outcomes

- _ entry onto a literacy, numeracy and IT course, and forklift truck driving training
- _ increased confidence and ability to look for relevant work.

7.3 Hard outcomes: learning outcomes

7.3.1 Participation in learning/voluntary work

Two in five Skills Coaching customers (5,021) had some learning brokered through Skills Coaching, although only 1,352 customers (27 per cent of those who had some learning) have a positive learning outcome attributed to them. This highlights the likely discrepancies between the recorded and actual outcomes data. No gender or ethnicity group was more likely than another to experience a positive learning outcome, although positive learning outcomes were slightly more likely amongst customers in receipt of JSA than others.

Skills Coaches in some areas described how some customers had progressed into learning or voluntary work. One Skills Coach said that when they did it was important for this to be *'relevant, interesting to them and lead to a feasible job'*. Alongside developing work-related skills, participation in learning was also felt to give customers confidence, build their social skills and motivation.

A NDLP Adviser in a Tranche 2 area said that those customers who start learning as a result of Skills Coaching were most positive about the programme. However, another NDLP Adviser, again from a Tranche 2 area, felt that the training offered by Skills Coaches was often basic and not vocationally focused, although she acknowledged that it might be a sensible first step for lone parents looking to return to work over the medium-term. Although there were examples of customers taking vocational and other types of courses, it seemed to be common for those customers who entered learning to be referred to Basic Skills and IT training (see Section 5.6.3 for a discussion of how issues with supply may limit the range of provision that Skills Coaching customers access).

Where it worked well, Learning Brokerage led to further learning and/or to the prospect or reality of relevant employment. A customer in a Tranche 3 area who started an IT course said: *'I don't want to stop studying now I've started'*, indicating that she would be likely to undertake further learning once she had completed her Skills Coaching course. A customer on IB was planning to start an NVQ Level 2 course in Nursery Nursing in September and felt confident that this course would lead her into employment because *'there are a lot of jobs [in this area of work], but they always ask for an NVQ Level 2 or 3 qualification'*.

In a Tranche 1 area, a customer claiming JSA had undertaken a Basic Food Hygiene course through Skills Coaching and, soon after, found employment in the catering industry. She was then hoping to undertake an NVQ as part of her job. Another customer, this time in a Tranche 3 area, had completed an employability course and found employment at a training provider; she was keen to continue training in work, and was considering doing an NVQ in administration.

An employer in a charity shop had had a Skills Coaching customer on a voluntary placement for four months. The employer said that this customer was now *'pretty much up to the standard where she could run the shop'*.

The case-study below details one customer's experiences of entry into learning and voluntary work.

Case study 7.4: Customer from a Tranche 2 area - Entry to learning and voluntary work

One customer, referred onto Skills Coaching via Jobcentre Plus in September 2006, entered a Level 1 Horticulture qualification at a local college with the support of his Skills Coach. The Skills Check revealed that the customer had stronger 'key skills', but identified IT skills as an area for development. As a result of this, and to assist him with using IT to complete coursework for his Level 1 qualification, the customer signed up to an ECDL Part 1 (a basic computing course). The Skills Coach and customer also discussed gaining voluntary work to increase the customer's work experience in his chosen field of study. They identified a gardening volunteering opportunity, and after an initial background check and interview the customer was undertaking voluntary work.

Outcomes

- _ entry to learning - Level 1 Horticulture and ECDL Part 1
- _ gaining work experience in area of work interest through volunteering as a gardener.

Regression analysis for education outcome

Logistic regression estimates the effect of a range of 'explanatory' variables on the likelihood of a given outcome. For example, it can be used to investigate whether Skills Coaching customers who are lone parents are significantly more or less likely to experience an employment outcome than those who are not lone parents.

In the analysis presented in this section we sought to understand the extent to which different factors affected the likelihood of a Skills Coaching customer experiencing at least one education outcome.¹ The table below presents the estimated size of the effect of different factors on the likelihood of a Skills Coaching customer experiencing a learning outcome. They also indicate the statistical significance of those estimates. Where variables that were included in the regression did not affect the model (such as type of benefits in Table 7.2), they are not presented in the table of results.

A positive estimate for a given category (for example, the gender category 'male') indicates that customers in that category (ie men) are more likely to experience the relevant outcome than customers in the reference category (in this case, women). A negative estimate indicates a smaller likelihood. Details of the reference case against which everything else is compared are provided in Annex 2. Statistical significance is shown by stars, with three stars indicating significance at the 0.001 level, two stars at the 0.01 level, and a single star at the 0.05 level.

It is also necessary to emphasise that a regression result which shows that being in a particular category increases the likelihood of a positive outcome does not prove that being in that category *causes* a positive outcome, only that a relationship exists. So when, for example Table 7.2 shows that customers who have undergone an In-Learning Health Check are more likely to experience an education outcome, we cannot assume that undergoing the In-Learning Health Check is a cause of the positive outcome. In fact, you should only be able to have an In-Learning Health

¹ A customer is classed as having experienced a education outcome if any of the 'impact' or 'completion' variables in that customer's file indicate that the customer has moved into education or training.

Check if you are already in learning, and so would already be classed as having experienced an education outcome.

Table 7.2 shows the regression model for education outcomes and the factors influencing the likelihood of a customer achieving an education outcome. Customers who have a Skills Passport are significantly more likely to experience an education outcome than those who do not. This provides some evidence that the Skills Passport helps Skills Coaching customers to achieve positive outcomes. However, it should be borne in mind that ownership of a Passport may be acting as a proxy for other factors, such as length of time on the trial (the customers who have Skills Passports may be those who have been on the trial for longer and developed a better relationship with their Skills Coach).

Customers who have Level 1 or 'other/unknown qualifications' are also more likely to experience an education outcome than those with no qualifications. Having Level 2 to Level 4 qualifications also has a positive effect on the likelihood compared to having no qualifications, although the effect is not statistically significant. Having Level 5 qualification appears to have a negative effect on the likelihood of an education outcome. This could be because people who already have a Level 5 qualification are not seeking education outcomes – as opposed to employment outcomes – from Skills Coaching.

Customers who provided no information about their disability status and lone parent status were significantly less likely to achieve education outcomes.

Table 7.2: Logistic regression model for education outcomes

Coefficients:	Estimate	Significance
Base Model	-16.783	
<u>Access Interview</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer has not undertaken Access Interview</i>		
Has undertaken Access interview	2.510	¹
<u>Skills Passport</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer does not have Skills Passport</i>		
Has Skills Passport	0.359	***
<u>Learning Brokerage</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer has not been referred to Learning Brokerage</i>		
Has been referred to Learning Brokerage	1.725	***
<u>In-Learning Health Check</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer has not had In-Learning Health Check</i>		
Has had In-Learning Health Check	0.983	***
<u>Progress Interview¹</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer has not undertaken Progress Interview</i>		
Has undertaken Progress Interview	1.559	***
<u>Gender</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Female</i>		
Male	-0.129	
<u>Disability</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer does not have disability/learning difficulty/health problem</i>		
Does have disability/learning difficulty/health problem	0.045	
No information provided by the customer	-0.620	***
<u>Benefits</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer receives JSA only</i>		
Customer receives an inactive benefit	0.097	
Customer is not receiving benefits	-0.674	
<u>Lone parents</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer is not a lone parent</i>		
Is a lone parent	-0.053	
No information provided by the customer	-0.434	**

¹ In all three models presented, the Progress Interview variable has a significant effect on the outcome. We understand that these results may be misleading however, as every customer who leaves Skills Coaching is recorded as having a Progress Interview, whether or not they actually underwent an exit interview with their Coach.

Qualifications*Reference Category: Customer has no qualifications*

Level 0 qualifications	0.011	
Level 1 qualifications	0.311	**
Level 2 qualifications	0.076	
Level 3 qualifications	0.200	
Level 4 qualifications	0.111	
Level 5 qualifications	-0.287	
Other/unknown qualifications	0.394	**

Time Unemployed*Reference Category: Customer has been unemployed for less than six months*

6-11 months	-0.018	
12-23 months	0.305	**
24-35 months	0.308	
over 36 months	0.088	
not unemployed	0.347	
not known/not provided	-0.137	

Organisation*Reference Category: Manchester Skills Coaching Central*

nextstep Birmingham and Solihull	0.980	***
nextstep Cambridgeshire and Peterborough	-0.379	
nextstep Derbyshire	-0.826	***
nextstep Devon and Cornwall	-1.580	***
nextstep Gloucestershire	-1.769	**
nextstep Greater Manchester	0.166	
nextstep Leicestershire	-1.105	***
nextstep London Central	0.319	
nextstep London East	-1.082	*
nextstep London North	-0.014	
nextstep London South	0.204	
nextstep London West	-0.961	**
nextstep North Yorkshire	0.961	***
nextstep Nottinghamshire	-1.295	***
nextstep Suffolk	-2.082	***
nextstep Surrey	1.550	***
nextstep Sussex	2.182	***
nextstep Tees Valley	0.856	***
nextstep West Yorkshire	1.284	***
nextstep Wiltshire and Swindon	-2.260	***

Source: LSC MI manager database

7.3.2 Gaining skills and qualifications

Aside from developing skills through formal learning or voluntary work, for many customers, Skills Coaches reported that the programme helped to develop their job search skills (such as understanding and responding to job descriptions), and the ability to match themselves to appropriate employment.

Although there were some examples of learning and voluntary work leading to employment among the customers interviewed, this was not always felt to be likely. A Skills Coach in a Tranche 3 area said that it was difficult to say whether or not learning brokered under Skills Coaching would help people back into work and some Jobcentre Plus PAs felt that the skills and learning opportunities that Skills Coaches offered and recommended to customers were often too basic (although they may have been a sensible first step), and made the journey back to work too long. A NDLP Adviser in a Tranche 2 area referred a customer to Skills Coaching who needed Photoshop training, and once they had this they had a job waiting. However, the Skills Coach said the customer should undertake a basic skills course first. The customer did not continue on Skills Coaching.

However, some customers have gained new skills and qualifications. The case study below details one customer's experience of Skills Coaching and gaining work-related qualifications.

Case study 7.5: A Customer from Tranche 1 area - Gaining work-related skills and qualifications

A customer in a Tranche 1 area had been unemployed for three years and was claiming incapacity benefit. He could not return to his previous line of work due to the manual work associated with the job. The customer wanted to retrain and return to work. After completing the Skills Diagnostic it was apparent that the customer had limited IT knowledge and also an interest in working in accounting and bookkeeping (building on his experience as a shop owner). He needed to update his skills so he could use modern accounting practices and software packages. The customer enrolled on a computer course for beginners (which he completed) and is now undertaking a CLAIT computer course to give him a nationally recognised qualification. The customer was able to access these courses because the provider was one of only a few offering free training to those on incapacity benefit with no additional benefits (ie income support).

Outcomes

- _ completing a beginners computer course
- _ enrolling on a CLAIT course.

7.4 Hard outcomes: gaining employment

In a Tranche 1 area, one Skills Coach said that Skills Coaching prepared customers for work, but they were not sure that this necessarily translated into job entries recorded on the management information (largely due to difficulties for Skills Coaches in accurately accessing and recording this information). The LSC Contract Manager in the same area felt that Skills Coaching impacted on 'soft outcomes' such as motivation and confidence for individuals, which affected their preparedness for work.

Whether or not customers said they felt more prepared for work was varied. Some felt that as a result of Skills Coaching they were more likely to get a job, and one that matched their skills; others said that they were no more likely to start or find work. Where customers said they felt more ready to start work it was usually because of increased confidence.

An employer in a Tranche 3 area said that the Skills Coaching customer they took on as a volunteer was able to '*pick things up quickly*'. They felt that because she had been on a voluntary scheme in order to find work, this meant she was motivated and wanted to work. The Skills Coaching customer at this employer had been there on a work placement and gained a number of skills that the employer felt would transfer to the retail sector, such as invoicing and ordering, merchandising, and Inland Revenue paperwork.

Those customers where Skills Coaching had helped to find employment, and particularly those who were still in employment at the time of the interviews, were very positive about the experience. For example, a customer in a Tranche 2 area who had taken a forklift truck driving qualification through Skills Coaching, and then found a job where he needed a license, was very positive about Skills Coaching's ability to help people prepare for, and find, work.

Six per cent of customers had a positive employment outcome – although it should be noted that among the customers interviewed for the evaluation who had found work, the jobs that customers moved into were not always what they had been discussing with their Skills Coach, and therefore they did not always attribute finding work to Skills Coaching.

White British customers were more likely than non-White British customers to experience a positive employment outcome: they made up 75 per cent of the total customer base, and yet 83 per cent of those with positive employment outcomes.

Table 7.3 shows that people in receipt of JSA were more likely to experience a positive employment outcome than other customers: they account for less than half of all customers, but nearly 60 per cent of customers with a positive employment outcome. This is not necessarily surprising – JSA recipients are, by definition, already actively seeking work, and perhaps have fewer obstacles to overcome in improving their employability and work-related skills (although, as noted earlier, some have been on JSA for significant periods of time).

Table 7.3 positive employment outcomes by benefit status

Benefit status	Percentage of positive employment outcomes	Percentage of all cases
Customer is an Inactive Benefits recipient	41	55
Customer is not a Benefit recipient	1	1
Customer receives Jobseekers Allowance only	58	44
Total	100	100

Source: LSC Mlmanager database

7.4.1 Regression analysis for employment outcomes

Table 7.4 shows the logistic regression model for employment outcomes. Ownership of a Skills Passport significantly increases the likelihood of an employment outcome, as does ownership of an Online Passport.

Having had an In-Learning Health Check also has a positive effect on the likelihood of an employment outcome, which is perhaps unsurprising, as it indicates both that the customer has undertaken some training or education and that they have had sustained contact with their Skills Coach.

As might be expected, customers who have been unemployed for longer than six months are less likely to experience an employment outcome than those who have been unemployed for less than six months. This negative effect increases with the length of time a customer has been unemployed. Customers on inactive benefits were significantly less likely to have gained employment outcomes, compared to Jobseekers Allowance claimants.

As in the previous model, having previous qualifications has a positive impact on the likelihood of experiencing an outcome, although the effect is only significant for Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications.

In this model, in contrast with the education outcome model, providing no information on disability status has a *positive* effect on employment outcomes. Male Skills Coaching customers are significantly less likely than female ones to experience an employment outcome.

Table 7.4: Logistic regression model for employment outcomes

Coefficients:	Estimate	Significance
Base Model	-3.782	***
<u>Skills Passport</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer does not have Skills Passport</i>		
Has Skills Passport	0.193	*
<u>Online Passport</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer does not have Online Passport</i>		
Has Online Passport	0.738	***
<u>In-Learning Health Check</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer has not had In-Learning Health Check</i>		
Has had In-Learning Health Check	0.241	*
<u>Progression Interview¹</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer has not undertaken Progress Interview</i>		
Has undertaken Progress Interview	2.720	***
<u>Gender</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Female</i>		
Male	-0.224	*
<u>Disability</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer does not have disability/learning difficulty/health problem</i>		
Does have disability/learning difficulty/health problem	-0.176	
No information provided by the customer	0.596	**
<u>Benefits</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer receives JSA only</i>		
Customer receives an inactive benefit	-0.339	**
Customer is not receiving benefits	0.019	
<u>Lone parents</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer is not a lone parent</i>		
Is a lone parent	0.123	
No information provided by the customer	-0.378	*
<u>Qualifications</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer has no qualifications</i>		
Level 0 qualifications	0.313	
Level 1 qualifications	0.149	
Level 2 qualifications	0.458	***
Level 3 qualifications	0.520	**

¹ In all three models presented, the Progression Interview variable has a significant effect on the outcome. We understand that these results may be misleading however, as every customer who leaves Skills Coaching is recorded as having a Progress Interview, whether or not they actually underwent an exit interview with their Coach.

Coefficients:	Estimate	Significance
Level 4 qualifications	0.111	
Level 5 qualifications	0.460	
Other/unknown qualifications	0.165	
<u>Time Unemployed</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer has been unemployed for less than 6 months</i>		
6-11 months	-0.384	**
12-23 months	-0.445	**
24-35 months	-0.510	**
over 36 months	-0.971	***
not unemployed	-1.143	***
not known/not provided	-1.348	
<u>Organisation</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Manchester Skills Coaching Central</i>		
nextstep Birmingham and Solihull	0.435	
nextstep Cambridgeshire and Peterborough	0.270	
nextstep Derbyshire	0.554	*
nextstep Devon and Cornwall	0.910	***
nextstep Gloucestershire	-0.588	
nextstep Greater Manchester	0.651	**
nextstep Leicestershire	-0.173	
nextstep London Central	0.658	*
nextstep London East	0.516	
nextstep London North	0.184	
nextstep London South	-0.293	
nextstep London West	-0.099	
nextstep North Yorkshire	0.504	
nextstep Nottinghamshire	-0.057	
nextstep Suffolk	-0.137	
nextstep Surrey	0.903	**
nextstep Sussex	0.629	
nextstep Tees Valley	-0.052	
nextstep West Yorkshire	-0.958	**
nextstep Wiltshire and Swindon	-0.796	

Source: LSC MI manager database

Need for in-work support?

There is no in-work support built into the Skills Coaching model and this is something that could have been helpful for those customers that did find work. A nextstep Trial Manager in a Tranche 2 area said there was a need for in-work support for customers,

as those people who entered work did not always stay in employment. They felt starting work was particularly difficult for people who had been out of work for a number of years. Certainly, a number of the customers interviewed for the evaluation who had found work had since stopped working.

A customer in a Tranche 1 area was a lone parent with a daughter with Special Educational Needs. Through Skills Coaching the lone parent found part-time employment in a care home. However, she left due to difficulties balancing work with caring for her daughter. The case study below gives the example of another customer for whom in-work support could have been helpful.

Case study 7.6: A customer from a Tranche 2 area - Lack of in-work support

A customer who had been in and out of work for some time was referred to Skills Coaching by a Disability Employment Adviser. He wanted help with applying for jobs, and particularly with explaining gaps in employment history due to his health. A job was advertised in the care industry and he worked with the Skills Coach to apply. After he was shortlisted for interview, the Skills Coach had a pre-interview session with him where they discussed interview technique. He was offered the job and started shortly afterwards. Once he started his new job he felt unsupported and did not receive the training that he thought might have helped him. Due to a lack of support he found the job very stressful and left a short time after starting.

Outcomes

- _ a job interview
- _ a job in the care industry (although only sustained for a short period).

7.5 Customers without outcomes

A logistic regression model for customers exiting Skills Coaching without a (recorded) positive outcome is detailed below (see Table 7.5). Once again, ownership of a Skills Passport has a significant effect: customers are less likely to exit Skills Coaching without a positive outcome if they have a Skills Passport. Customers who have undergone a Skills Diagnostic are also significantly less likely to leave without an outcome.

In this model, customers not claiming benefits are less likely to exit without a positive outcome than customers claiming Jobseekers Allowance. Perhaps this is indicative of the fact that customers outside the benefits system have proactively signed up to Skills Coaching, and perhaps view it more positively than customers inside the benefits system claiming JSA, who may have been referred by a PA and view Skills Coaching as 'just another scheme'. The model shows no significant difference between JSA claimants and inactive benefit claimants when it comes to the likelihood of exiting without a positive outcome.

Once again, whether a customer provides information on their lone parent and disability status has a significant effect on outcomes. In this case, customers who provided no information are more likely to exit Skills Coaching with no positive outcome.

Men are significantly more likely to leave Skills Coaching without a positive outcome than women.

Table 7.5: Logistic regression model for exits without a positive outcome

Coefficients:	Estimate	Significance
Base Model	-0.749	
<u>Access Interview</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer has not undertaken Access Interview</i>		
Has undertaken Access interview	-2.151	
<u>Skills Diagnostic</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer has not undertaken Skills Diagnostic</i>		
Has undertaken Skills Diagnostic	-0.249	*
<u>Skills Passport</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer does not have Skills Passport</i>		
Has Skills Passport	-0.227	**
<u>Learning Brokerage</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer has not been referred to Learning Brokerage</i>		
Has been referred to Learning Brokerage	-0.491	***
<u>In-Learning Health Check</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer has not had In-Learning Health Check</i>		
Has had In-Learning Health Check	-0.339	***
<u>Progression Interview¹</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer has not undertaken Progress Interview</i>		
Has undertaken Progress Interview	3.954	***
<u>Gender</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Female</i>		
Male	0.237	**
<u>Disability</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer does not have disability/learning difficulty/health problem</i>		
Does have disability/learning difficulty/health problem	-0.076	
No information provided by the customer	0.330	*
<u>Benefits</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer receives JSA only</i>		
Customer receives an inactive benefit	0.123	
Customer is not receiving benefits	-1.505	**
<u>Lone parents</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer is not a lone parent</i>		
Is a lone parent	0.099	

¹ In all three models presented, the Progression Interview variable has a significant effect on the outcome. We understand that these results may be misleading however, as every customer who leaves Skills Coaching is recorded as having a Progress Interview, whether or not they actually underwent an exit interview with their Coach.

Coefficients:	Estimate	Significance
No information provided by the customer	0.535	***
<u>Time Unemployed</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Customer has been unemployed for less than six months</i>		
6-11 months	0.348	***
12-23 months	-0.009	
24-35 months	-0.192	
over 36 months	0.229	*
not unemployed	0.796	**
not known/not provided	0.358	
<u>Organisation</u>		
<i>Reference Category: Manchester Skills Coaching Central</i>		
nextstep Birmingham and Solihull	1.400	***
nextstep Cambridgeshire and Peterborough	-1.170	***
nextstep Derbyshire	-0.068	
nextstep Devon and Cornwall	0.467	*
nextstep Gloucestershire	0.020	
nextstep Greater Manchester	-0.687	***
nextstep Leicestershire	0.019	
nextstep London Central	-0.723	**
nextstep London East	-0.636	
nextstep London North	-1.716	***
nextstep London South	-0.847	**
nextstep London West	-0.387	
nextstep North Yorkshire	-2.021	***
nextstep Nottinghamshire	0.243	
nextstep Suffolk	-0.715	**
nextstep Surrey	-1.017	***
nextstep Sussex	-2.354	***
nextstep Tees Valley	0.299	
nextstep West Yorkshire	-1.550	***
nextstep Wiltshire and Swindon	-0.070	

Source: LSC MI manager database

7.6 Costs of Skills Coaching

The aim of this section is to better understand how much Skills Coaching costs to deliver (given the available data) and to compare those costs, where possible, with the costs of delivering other programmes for out-of-work individuals.

The majority of the direct costs to delivering Skills Coaching arise from payments to nextstep contractors for each element of the journey. The contractors are paid on

delivery, and once they have verified that they have delivered an aspect of the journey by providing evidence to the contract manager, they can claim payment for that.

The payments for each stage of the journey are as follows:

- _ Access Interview - £25
- _ Skills Diagnostic - £175
- _ Skills Passport - £30
- _ My Skills Record - £50
- _ Learning Brokerage - £35
- _ In-learning Health Check - £50
- _ Progression Interview - £50

There will also be costs associated with the management and administration of the trials, and indeed **nextstep** have a budget of 7.5 per cent of the total value of the contract for this. Interviews in the case-study areas, however, have illustrated that some of the management and administration time, such as the Skills Coaching Co-ordinator role, was funded from different sources. In addition, Jobcentre Plus were not paid for their part in the strategic management, or delivery of the trials, and this also represents a cost to delivering the programme which is not captured in the analysis presented here.

7.6.1 Overall costs of delivery

Given the flexibility with which the customer journey can be delivered and the reported 'drop-out' between some stages, the costs of delivering to customers will vary depending on the number of stages they access. Overall, in Year 2, Skills Coaching cost £2.4 million to deliver to 12,682 participants. On average, the cost of delivering Skills Coaching was £190 per participant, although this does not include the cost of delivering any learning provision and 40 per cent of customers were brokered into provision.

Table 7.6 shows how the total cost breaks down by each stage of the journey. The majority of the cost was spent delivering the Skills Diagnostic and the Development Plan, with the least being spent on 'My Skills Record', the online version of the Skills Passport.

Table 7.6. Total cost of Skills Coaching by programme stage

	Number of participants accessing the service	Cost
Access Interview	12,675	£316,875
Skills Diagnostic and Skills Development Plan	9,061	£1,585,675
Skills Passport	4,220	£126,600
My Skills Record	398	£19,900
Learning Brokerage	5,021	£175,735
In-Learning Health Check	1,855	£92,750
Progress Interview	2,027	£101,350

Total	12,682	£2,418,885
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Source: LSC Mlmanager database

However, costs for delivering Skills Coaching to different customer groups are largely similar, mainly because there were very few differences between the number of stages of the journey accessed by different groups, as explained in Chapter 5. The cost of delivering to BME customers is slightly less than to deliver to White customers and this is largely due to the fact that White customers were more likely to have accessed the later stages of the journey such as brokerage into learning and a progression interview (see Table 7.7).

Table 7.7 Average cost of Skills Coaching for different customer groups

	N	Total Cost (£)	Average cost (£)
<i>Gender</i>			
Female	6,282	1,196,725	191
Male	6,393	1,222,160	191
<i>Ethnicity</i>			
White	9,527	1,834,245	193
BME	3,148	584,640	186
<i>Benefit status</i>			
Active	5,572	1,075,400	193
Inactive	6,953	1,316,975	189
<i>Lone parent status</i>			
Lone parent	3,796	694,440	183
Not a lone parent	7,675	1,476,065	192
<i>Prior qualifications level</i>			
<Level 2	4,163	793,260	191
Level 2+	4,263	801,130	188

Source: LSC Mlmanager database

7.6.2 Delivery costs of other programmes

Jobcentre Plus delivers a number of programmes to help individuals back to work, and while the main aim of Skills Coaching is to make individuals more 'job ready', it is still useful to look at the costs of delivering Skills Coaching compared to other services that could have been provided to this client group, in order to put the costs of Skills Coaching delivery in context.

It should also be noted that the services compared here are different in terms of their content (although we have chosen to present the costs of the most similar services), and they are likely to be delivered to different client groups (ie active claimants) who may be intrinsically more or less likely to achieve labour market outcomes than the mix of active and inactive customers on Skills Coaching. What is included in the costs is also likely to vary. The Skills Coaching costs include only the costs of delivery; they do not include any management costs or, for example, the costs of making referrals from Jobcentre Plus, or learning provision.

Nevertheless, looking at a number of Jobcentre Plus programmes, the cost of delivering Skills Coaching per participant, at £190, is significantly less than for some DWP programmes for unemployed individuals.

For example, both the New Deal for Young People and New Deal 25+ start with Gateway provision. The latest available data that splits these costs out shows that it costs £680. The provision can last up to four months and may involve several different organisations. The activity undertaken during this period depends on an individual's needs but can include some of the following:

- _ independent careers advice, including motivation and confidence-building, and the identification of learning and training needs
- _ access to a mentor who will provide advice, guidance and encouragement on an unofficial basis
- _ short refresher courses to help with basic and key skills, confidence and motivation
- _ after four weeks on the Gateway if the individual has not found work they must attend a course – one aim of which is to improve their ability to search for jobs, their CV and performance in interviews.

7.6.3 The costs of achieving outcomes

The main aim of Skills Coaching is to make customer more 'job ready'. This is a difficult concept to quantify, and the outcomes collected on the management information system are not exactly to this end, as they focus on hard outcomes such as entry into work or learning. Earlier in this chapter, it was discussed that both customers and stakeholders felt Skills Coaching impacted most on a customer's confidence, their understanding of their skills and abilities, and how to search and apply for work. These sorts of outcomes were not captured on the Skills Coaching management information system and therefore we cannot look at these benefits in relation to costs.

Our analysis here can only capture what has been recorded on the management information system. Section 5.6.2 noted that the journey back to work for many of the Skills Coaching customers is likely to be a long one, with the Skills Coach and customer working together on a long-term plan to get the customer back to work. Therefore, employment outcomes may occur outside of the timeframe of this analysis.

Nevertheless, it is important to put the process payments described in Section 7.9.1 into some context in terms of what this funding has achieved, whilst acknowledging that the outcomes that can be considered in this analysis are somewhat limited and do not reflect the range of outcomes from Skills Coaching, and that costs such as those associated with delivery of learning provision are not captured.

It should be noted that despite these outcomes being recorded, customers may have achieved some of them without the help of the Skills Coach. Indeed, some of the customers interviewed for the evaluation felt that they would have found their employment or started a course without having seen a Skills Coach (as voluntary programme customers are likely to be motivated), and these calculations therefore include some 'deadweight' – outcomes that would have happened anyway.

The outcomes data allows us to look at:

- _ cost per job entry

- _ cost per entry into learning.

There are positive outcomes recorded in the management information for 1,819 customers (710 employment outcomes and 1,352 learning outcomes). Given the cost of delivering, the customer journey in Year 2 was £2.4 million:

- _ the total cost per positive outcome is £1,330
- _ the total cost per employment outcome is £3,407
- _ the total cost per learning outcome is £1,789.

If outcomes data was better recorded in the management information, then the costs per positive outcome would decrease and indeed given that we interviewed some customers who had found employment but not let their Skills Coach know, these costs are likely to over-estimate the actual cost per positive outcome. Below is some detail of how the Skills Coaching costs compare to other programmes.

The costs of job outcomes in DWP provision for out-of-work individuals for the period April–July 2007 were as follows:

- _ Programme Centres cost per job entry = £1,771. This involves access to materials to help with job search, such as the internet and phones, but also help with developing a CV, applying for jobs and practice job interviews.
- _ New Deal for Young People cost per job entry = £4,632. This includes a period of Gateway provision (described in Section 7.5.2) and then, if an individual still has not found work, this is followed by an option from one of the following: full-time education or training, employment in the voluntary sector, work in the environmental task force, or an employment option.
- _ New Deal 25+ cost per job entry = £7,359. This includes a period of Gateway provision (described in Section 7.5.2) and then, if an individual still has not found work, they may take part in an Intensive Activity Period. This consists of at least one of the following: basic skills provision, work placements with employers, work experience placements training with strong labour market links, job search skills provision, etc.

At £3,407, the cost of an employment outcome in Skills Coaching (excluding any costs of delivering learning or other brokered provision) would seem to be roughly comparable to the provision delivered through other DWP programmes, lower than programmes with learning provision costed in, but more than provision with access to job search materials and CV development, etc.

7.7 Conclusions

Overall, there were fewer customers than profiled: 66 per cent of the target number of customers started the journey. Anecdotally, there seems to be demand for a service such as Skills Coaching, so this perhaps indicates that the targets for the trials were not wholly realistic, particularly for the later stages of the journey where there appears to have been significantly more fall-out than was envisaged.

According to the management information, few customers pass through the whole of the customer journey. It is not clear whether these customers are still working with their Skills Coach, or have dropped out.

In Year 2 of the trials, referrals seem to be more suitable than in Year 1, but many customers still had multiple barriers to finding employment, and not just a skills deficit.

Skills Coaching had a better reach into some target groups than others. Customers were proportionately more likely to be a lone parent than not a lone parent, and were proportionately less likely to be aged over 50, from a BME group, or to have a disability. Many Skills Coaches had particularly good working relationships with NDLP Advisers, who were a frequent source of referrals, which may help to explain this. It also appears that the customer journey worked well for lone parents, as they were particularly positive in the customer interviews.

Most customers did not undertake the whole journey, but qualitative evidence would suggest that the Skills Diagnostic – and the one-to-one support and discussion that accompanies this element of the journey – were amongst the most useful parts of the journey. The Skills Passport was not seen as something that would be relevant to employers, and was not well-remembered or seen as useful by customers.

Skills Coaches reported that training provision was not always available when their customers needed it and this impacted on the types of training customers could undertake and the length of their journey.

Only 14 per cent of customers had an outcome recorded, which limits the amount of analysis we can undertake on the impact of Skills Coaching. Soft outcomes, such as increased confidence, and a better understanding of the labour market and suitable jobs, were often reported by customers.

The cost of delivering Skills Coaching per outcome was broadly comparable with other similar services for this client group.

8 Lessons Learned for the Adult Careers Service

Key findings

- _ Partnership working between the Careers Service and Jobcentre Plus needs to be overlaid by a good strategic relationship and underpinned by strong relationships at the delivery level that involve feedback.
- _ Jobcentre Plus Advisers need to have a good understanding of how to identify appropriate customers, what the IAG intervention will consist of, what tools will be used, what the customer can expect, and the purpose of it.
- _ The Skills Coaching role involved making and maintaining links with PAs and other organisations. Some Skills Coaches were not able to do this effectively. Given the importance of referrals by PAs, Careers Advisers will need to have the skillset to develop and maintain relationships with external partners.
- _ Careers advisers need to be seen to be impartial. There were some concerns (perceived or real) that Advisers referred customers to provision offered by their own companies.
- _ The funding system for the new Adult Careers Service needs to be sufficiently flexible to support tailored and ongoing support.
- _ The new Adult Careers Service will have to work with learning providers to ensure that appropriate courses are available at times customers want to enrol, rather than at times dictated by the learning provider.

Chapter 2 detailed the policy direction towards an integrated employment and skills system outlined in the government response to the Leitch review and 'In-work, Better-off'. There are several lessons learned from Skills Coaching that can inform this approach and these include partnership working, the capacity of information, advice and guidance staff to take on new roles, and what customers are looking for.

8.1 Partnership working

For partnership working to work well between Skills Coaching and Jobcentre Plus, it needs to be overlaid by a good relationship at the strategic level, and underpinned by good relationships at the delivery level that involve good feedback and handback processes.

In most Skills Coaching case-study areas, co-location worked well (provided there was sufficient space for Skills Coaches to be able to do this). It is also important that Skills Coaches have access to necessary resources to both make best use of any downtime they may have and so that the customer experience is as good as possible. These could include access to a private room and to a computer.

Feedback between Skills Coaches and PAs was often informal or non-existent. In a system where customers work with a Jobcentre Plus Adviser, have an IAG intervention and are then passed back to Jobcentre Plus – as is proposed in the new Adult Careers Service model – initial feedback from the PA to the IAG Adviser, ongoing feedback about the client and finally, a handover, are going to be very important. It may be useful to consider what minimum level of information should be contained at the handover and hand back stages, and how frequently IAG Advisers update PAs about a client's progress.

Jobcentre Plus Advisers need to have a good understanding of what the IAG intervention will consist of, what tools will be used, what the customer can expect and the purpose of it. This, in combination with regular feedback about customers, will help them to:

- explain the service to the customer. (This in turn may mean that the customer has a better understanding of what to expect and may decrease the number of no-shows.)
- know who to refer, and when and who is not suitable.
- understand how the IAG service differs from what PAs can offer and/or to what extent they could offer the service themselves.

The careers process also needs to work well with training providers. One training provider reported that they carried out a diagnostic process with all customers, regardless of whether they were part of Skills Coaching or not. In the Adult Careers Service it will be important not to duplicate skills assessment and testing of customers, and results of testing need to be recognised by providers and made available to them to inform their teaching.

8.2 Funding

The Skills Coaching Co-ordinator role was a vital source of support for Skills Coaches in several of the case-study areas, and was a key link to resolve issues and to facilitate communication across the Skills Coaches in the area. Most areas, as least initially, used capacity-building money to fund this role. A co-ordinating role linking across providers in the new Adult Careers Service could be considered.

Although a key partner in Skills Coaching, Jobcentre Plus did not receive any funding for their role in Skills Coaching. The trials seemed to have worked well where Jobcentre Plus invested significant time and, for example, had Skills Coaching office leads and regular briefing for PAs about Skills Coaching. In one area, Jobcentre Plus

staff time spent working on Skills Coaching was being resourced from ALO funding. The need for adequate funding for all organisations involved in the new Adult Careers Service could be considered.

There was some evidence that staging the funding over a number of activities could lead to Skills Coaches undertaking all the stages of the journey with a customer, even when they were not appropriate. With drop-out between stages fairly common, there was also an incentive to undertake a number of activities in one session, with a risk that the journey became condensed and so overwhelmed the customer. The incentives for providers behind a staged payment for process delivery should be borne in mind when developing the funding model for the Adult Careers Service.

8.3 Staff capability and understanding

There were a number of findings relating to the capability of Skills Coaches, and there may be some lessons for the new Adult Careers Service in terms of recruiting and training staff appropriately, particularly where there is a change in emphasis from existing services.

The Skills Coaching role involved making and maintaining links with PAs and other organisations for outreach. Some Skills Coaches appear to have not had the skills to be able to carry out this aspect of the role effectively, sometimes giving a negative view of the service to PAs who then became reluctant to refer customers to them. Given the importance of referrals by PAs under the new Adult Careers Service model, developing and maintaining relationships with external partners will be an important skill for Advisers to have or to develop. Skills Coaches need to be 'people people' with an individual skillset that includes being able to work – and enjoying working – with customers as well as working in partnership with other agencies.

Overall, there was little staff turnover in the Skills Coaching role, although some felt that they did not have a choice as their organisation bid for the contract and they were made a Skills Coach rather than applying for the role. Continuity of individuals (both for customer and other relationships) is important. Skills Coaches need the support of the organisations in which they are based to deliver Skills Coaching effectively and to have the time to perform this role properly. This is particularly the case at the beginning when relationships need to be built up before host organisations see financial gains from significant numbers of Skills Coaching payments being made.

It was not always clear that after undertaking Skills Coaching customers knew about the types of jobs they were suited to and that were available in their local area. Advisers in the new Adult Careers Service need to work with the customers to ensure that they understand the limitations of the process and that the job suggestions take into account not only customers' skills but their interests, living circumstances and other responsibilities, as well as labour market opportunities.

The evidence from this research shows that, to be effective, Adult Careers Service Advisers need to be seen to be impartial. There were some concerns (perceived or real) that Skills Coaches referred customers to provision offered by their own companies, whether or not this was the most appropriate learning for them. Under the new Adult Careers Service, Advisers will need to be impartial to have the trust and confidence of PAs and other stakeholders. As with impartial Brokers in the Train to Gain model, it could be considered whether the Adviser could present the customer with a number of options from which they make a choice.

PAs' understanding of Skills Coaching (alongside their confidence in delivery staff) seemed key to whether or not they referred, the suitability of referrals, and also the extent to which they were able to explain the service to customers as they were referred. There were several ways which Skills Coaches and key stakeholders found to try to increase PAs' understanding, and these could be used in making PAs not only aware of, but also, crucially, to understand, the content of the new Adult Careers Service. These included:

- _ regular briefings at Communications meetings
- _ showing PAs the tools used in the IAG session(s) so that they understand the products and their purpose
- _ a lead or champion in each office to field questions about the service and cascade information
- _ regular feedback to PAs about their referrals and the progress of their customers.

8.4 The Skills Diagnostic

There are a number of lessons about the operation of the Skills Diagnostic that could inform the Skills Health Check which is part of the new Adult Careers Service. The following could be considered:

- _ If the Diagnostic is undertaken by Careers Advisers on Jobcentre Plus premises, then it will be important that they have appropriate facilities and room in order to carry it out effectively.
- _ Whether objective assessments of skills are carried out alongside any subjective assessments.
- _ Whether there are different tools for people with different levels of prior qualifications.
- _ How the Diagnostic is initially presented to the customer so their expectations of what it will and won't do are effectively managed.
- _ Who should complete the Diagnostic tool (eg customers or customers with help from Adviser).

Advisers need to be able to manage customers' expectations and make any job suggestions relevant to the customer and their personal circumstances, and to the local labour market.

8.5 The customers

The barriers faced by many customers who were referred to Skills Coaching were more complicated and multi-faceted than being just skills barriers alone, particularly with inactive claimants, who often had health problems and other issues. This supports the proposed approach for the new Careers Service which would offer a more holistic service dealing with other barriers and issues, such as childcare and housing, at the same time as trying to address any skills barriers. The balance of customers between JSA and inactive benefit recipients did not reflect the intended 80:20 split across all Skills Coaching areas. There was a policy design tension between wanting to focus on inactive benefit customers and the need to serve those for whom

skills was the main barrier to employment. Inactive customers tended to have a range of barriers that needed to be overcome alongside skills barriers.

Stakeholders frequently said that there was demand for this sort of service from Jobseekers Allowance customers. This suggests that active claimants are equally likely to need support with skills and information, advice and guidance about careers. The types of support needed for customers will be different for those close to the labour market who may need light touch skills support, and those further away who may need more intensive and long-term support.

8.6 What customers want

When customers started Skills Coaching the majority wanted help with job search and guidance about job options and careers rather than to access courses, although some customers did want to take up learning. The range of expectations and needs suggests that the new Adult Careers Service should be flexible and able to be tailored to meet individual needs.

The ongoing one-to-one relationship was valued by customers, and Skills Coaching seemed to work particularly well where the journey was tailored to individuals, and where it stepped outside the prescribed elements of the journey (ie job searching, work placements or getting qualifications from other countries certified at their UK level); indeed these were often the parts that were most valued by customers. The funding system for the new Adult Careers Service needs to be sufficiently flexible to support tailored and ongoing support. The best way of funding Advisers to do this should be considered. Would salaried staff be better able to work in this way than staff paid for carrying out specific processes?

Qualitative evidence suggests that many of the Skills Coaching customers who went into learning undertook basic skills or IT provision. Although it was acknowledged that Skills Coaching customers frequently had basic skills needs that needed to be dealt with before they could undertake more vocationally orientated courses, there were some suggestions that in some case-study areas the learning supply and lack of roll-on, roll-off courses was to some extent influencing the provision customers undertook. The new Adult Careers Service will have to work with learning providers to ensure that appropriate courses are available at a time when customers want to enrol on them, rather than at a time dictated by the learning provider.

It should also be noted that some customers were not prepared to undertake a long journey of learning involving basic skills courses, and then other learning before getting back to work, and some expressed a preference to be able to train alongside working. The approach to learning for customers within the new Adult Careers Service will have to be flexible and suited to individual's needs. This also highlights the need for Jobcentre Plus PAs and Careers Advisers to be well-linked with local Train to Gain vacancies as learning alongside work may be the preferred option of some customers.

8.7 Supporting customers in work

Although some of the customers interviewed for the evaluation had found work, a number of them had since become unemployed again. There was no in-work support built into the Skills Coaching model and for some customers who had not worked in a long time the transition back to work was not an easy one. This transition should be

supported in the new integrated approach to employment and skills, and the following could be considered:

- post employment support, with the Adviser or provider, continuing to support the customer through the early stages of their employment, such as liaising with the employer about any arising issues
- work placements prior to starting permanent employment to help customers get into a routine of working and to see how working would affect their lives on a practical basis
- better links with Train to Gain employers and vacancies so that customers can access (further) training once in employment.

8.8 Delivering the Adult Careers Service

'World Class Skills: Implementing the Leitch Review of Skills in England' and *'In work, better off: next steps to full employment'* outline how, within the new integrated employment and skills system, Personal Advisers will identify JSA customers who may find a Skills Health Check useful when they first make a claim to benefit and after six months unemployment, whilst Work-Focused Interviews will be a way of referring customers on inactive benefits to a Skills Health Check where appropriate. The Skills Health Check and associated specialist support and advice will be delivered through the new Adult Careers Service. The Adult Careers Service will merge the information and advice services currently provided by learndirect and nextstep.

A key lesson from this evaluation will be how the Adult Careers Service operates on the ground. At present, there are a number of actors involved in delivering employment and skills support to customers in trial areas – Jobcentre Plus Advisers, a number of different organisations hosting Skills Coaches, learning providers, and Train to Gain Brokers. In some trial areas it has been difficult managing multiple organisations (who are using individuals working on other initiatives alongside Skills Coaching) to deliver the single Skills Coaching service. To make the relationship between Jobcentre Plus and the Adult Careers service work, there may be a need for a less complex layer of subcontracting than is currently the case under nextstep, or at least a full-time team branded as the Adult Careers Service with a single contact point, who specialise in delivering Skills Health Checks and support for those out of work with skills needs.

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Annex 1: Evaluation Framework

Framework for evaluation of Skills Coaching Trials and Skills Passports

Objective	Measure 1 (from baseline research)	Measure 2 (IES additional suggestions)	Source
Take-up and entry			
Penetration among key customer groups	Participation among those on inactive benefits	Estimated demand for service from key target groups compared to baseline	MI data Need estimates of potential population
	Participation among women Participation among BME Participation among 50+ Participation among low-skilled women returners not on benefits	Estimated demand for service to establish new baseline Suitability of customers referred to the service	Interviews with Skill Coaches Interviews with Jobcentre Plus pilot managers MI data analysis
Delivery			
Effectiveness of Skills Diagnostic		Diagnostic identifies skill levels and skill gaps	Interviews with Skill Coaches and customers
Effective delivery of customer journey		Drop out from the journey Customers' and Coaches' views on the key elements of the journey Customers' and Coaches' views on which aspect of the service has greatest added value Extent to which service is tailored to individual need Nature and location of Skill Coaching delivery Availability of suitable learning provision	Analysis of numerical flow through the customer journey Analysis of MI data Interviews with Skills Coaching customers Interviews with Skills Coaches
Capacity of Skills Coaches		Availability of Coaches with appropriate skills and labour market knowledge to deliver the programme Availability of suitable tools and techniques	Provider interviews Interviews with Skill Coaches
Skills Passport			
Assessment of Skills Passports		Demand from employers Views of Coaches and Skills Coaching customers Evidence of added value in job search and attainment	Interviews with employers, providers, Skills Coaches and Skills Coaching customers MI data

Impact

Impact (on out-of-work individuals): Low skilled women BMEs	Proportion gaining new qualifications Proportion moving into employment Proportion moving into employment lasting > six months Proportion moving into T2G vacancies	Customers' and Coaches' assessment of customers' preparedness and intention to seek work Customers' job search activity Customers' assessment of their likelihood of gaining employment Customers' and Coaches' views on customers' understanding of the labour market and job search strategies Employers' views on Skill Coaching customers' preparedness for work	MI data compared with nextsteps data Qualitative interviews with Skills Coaching customers Qualitative interviews with employers who have employed Skill Coaches Qualitative interviews with Skills Coaches
Additionality compared with nextsteps and Jobcentre Plus IAG		Average cost per Coachee Average cost per (agreed) successful outcome Cost/time to deliver each aspect of the service Comparisons with nextsteps and other provision	Data from nextsteps and Jobcentre Plus pilot managers and comparison with Skill Coaching data

Complementarity

Complementarity with Pathways to Work		Links between Skills Coaches and Jobcentre Plus Links between Skills Coaching pilots and Train to Gain Links with ALO	MI data (referrals) Interviews with Skills Coaches Interviews with nextsteps and Jobcentre Plus pilot managers Interviews with Skills Coaches Interviews with local Jobcentre Plus and Train to Gain personnel
Link findings to other relevant research and policy documents		Establish policy context for Skills Coaching Identify critical success factors in employability skills development from previous research	Desk research Background interviews with policy stakeholders
Improvement in joint working arrangements at local level between Jobcentre Plus and LSC		Views on added value of joint working arrangements Views on ways in which joint working arrangements could be improved	Interviews with Jobcentre Plus and LSC personnel

Non-benefit participants

Assessment of participants outside benefits system	Participation among low-skilled women returners not on benefits	Number of inward referrals	Interviews with Jobcentre Plus and LSC personnel Interviews with non-benefit recipients
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Source: IES, 2006

Annex 2: Details of Reference Case

For the three regression models presented in Chapter 7, the reference case against which everything else is compared is:

- _ has not had an Access Interview
- _ has not had a Skills Diagnostic
- _ has no Skills Passport
- _ does not have Online Passport
- _ has not been referred to Learning Brokerage
- _ has not had an In-Learning Health Check
- _ has not had a Progress Interview
- _ is female
- _ does not have a disability/learning difficulty/health problem
- _ is receiving Jobseekers Allowance
- _ is not a lone parent
- _ has no qualifications
- _ has been unemployed for less than six months
- _ is a Manchester Central Skills Coaching customer.

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