



Maximising Adviser Impact

Supporting workforce development

Meenakshi Krishnan, Jane
Mansour, Tony Wilson, Dan
Mason and Emily Kramers

The ReAct Partnership

About Us

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

The Partnership is co-funded by eight of the 'prime providers' for the Restart programme — FedCap Employment, G4S, Ingeus, Maximus, Reed, Jobs22, Seetec and Serco — and is being managed by the Institute of Employment Studies (IES), working alongside the Institute for Employability Professionals (IEP) and the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA).



The ReAct Partnership

City Gate ,185 Dyke Road , Brighton , BN3 1TL UK

Telephone: +44 (0)1273 763400

Email: jane.mansour@employment-studies.co.uk

Website: www.restartreact.co.uk

Copyright © 2024 The ReAct Partnership

Acknowledgements

The authors are indebted to stakeholders across the ReAct partnership companies for support in providing management information and relevant contacts in their organisations. Thank you also to research participants who took part in surveys, focus groups, interviews and workshops for taking part in the research. This project has also benefitted from the expertise of the PSO team at IES for formatting the report and administering the survey and management information requests.

Contents

I. Introduction	5
Background	5
<i>Research questions.....</i>	<i>5</i>
Methodology.....	6
1. Evidence review	6
2. Study of external labour market data.....	6
3. Study of internal management data.....	7
4. Interviews with HR leaders	7
5. Focus group with line managers.....	7
6. Survey of employment advisers	8
Structure of the report.....	8
II. Skills profile of employment advisers.....	9
Key skills identified in the literature	9
International examples	11
Most important and least important skills.....	12
Getting the 'Right' combination and balance	15
III. Widening talent supply	17
Labour market trends affecting advisers' talent supply	17
<i>How employment adviser roles compare</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Vacancy trends over time</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Salary levels over time</i>	<i>21</i>
Recruitment processes.....	22
Expectations of the role	23
IV. Achieving job entry targets	25
Barriers to successful job performance	25
On-the-job challenges	25
Confidence in achieving job entry targets	27
Engaging complex participants	29
V. Strengthening engagement and support	31
Job satisfaction.....	31

Flexible working	36
Induction and training.....	39
Inclusive culture, values, and well-being	41
Ongoing support	44
VI. Role of line managers.....	47
VII. Recommendations	50
Improving recruitment.....	50
Improving performance	52
Improving progression	53
Improving retention	53
VIII. Appendix.....	55
Demographic breakdown of survey respondents	55
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	58

I. Introduction

Background

Employment advisers, also known as job coaches or employment coaches, play a critical role in supporting people in getting back into work. A high level of skill and capability among employment advisers is crucial to the successful delivery of quality employment programmes. Therefore, recruiting, retaining and developing a workforce of employment advisers with the necessary combination of skills, is essential to the success of the Restart program, as with all other employment services. The role is complex, requiring a diverse range of skills, including selling skills, service orientation, caseload and process management, time and diary management, understanding individual needs, motivation, coaching and tailoring advice or guidance to job search, job requirements and career management needs.

This report explores the current challenges and opportunities for developing and supporting employment advisers on Restart. The research is cognisant of the changes in the profile and needs of Restart participants over the course of the program since 2021 and changing conditions of the labour market post-pandemic and the impact this has had on recruitment and delivery of the programme. Specifically, this research addresses three main objectives:

- *Understanding and articulating the skillsets required to be a high-performing adviser, based on current and future programme needs.*
- *Identifying best practices in supporting the recruitment, retention and progression of advisers.*
- *Understanding the role of line managers, both in terms of the skills required to deliver high performance and the support needed to develop an effective adviser team.*

It then develops recommendations and provides practical strategies to improve adviser capability, recruitment, and retention across the eight prime providers of the ReAct Partnership.

Research questions

Drawing on the main objectives of the project, the research answers the following questions:

1. What are the range of skills needed to be a successful employment adviser on the Restart programme?

2. What are the most effective recruitment and retention approaches to support a team of high-performing advisers for the Restart programme?
3. How do line management and training contribute to the development and retention of successful advisers for Restart?

The research was designed and led by a multidisciplinary team of researchers, economists, psychologists, and HR professionals with expertise in workforce development, job mapping, labour market analysis, and talent management.

Methodology

We employed a range of data sources and methods to answer the research questions and triangulate the findings. These included conducting an evidence review of the existing literature, analysing labour market data on comparable job roles, salaries, and vacancy data, studying management and HR data on recruitment and retention from the primes, conducting interviews with HR leaders, focus groups with line managers, and a survey of employment advisers' views and perceptions of their role. Each method is briefly explained below:

1. Evidence review

The evidence review explored the existing literature about the role and skills of advisers in employment support programmes. It looked at key features of a good adviser-participant relationship, what works well for participants and what barriers advisers face in their work. The review covers a selection of 25 papers from academic literature, grey literature and research reports and evaluations commissioned by UK and international governments.

2. Study of external labour market data

We compared salary and benefits data for the adviser role with other vacancy opportunities using online vacancy data from Adzuna, one of the largest job search engines in the UK. Adzuna aggregates job adverts from thousands of sources and then cleans, de-duplicates and standardises the information to provide a robust picture of employer demand, covering at least 90% of all vacancy activity. IES has access to Adzuna's Intelligence Portal, a proprietary dashboard that aggregates statistics based on all the vacancy listings Adzuna holds on their site. We compared job packages (including salary, contract type, and working

hours, availability of remote and hybrid working arrangements, and wider benefits offered) and skills demanded with other jobs with similar profiles (identified using occupational ontologies including the O*NET database, and through job-to-job flows data from the Labour Force Survey and information provided during the HR Leader interviews).

3. Study of internal management data

Management and HR data was requested from each Prime on the number of employment advisers at their organisation, the number of applications received for each vacancy, preferred recruitment portals and avenues used, details of induction and training modules available to advisers on appointment, and salary details. We also asked for job descriptions and other relevant information, such as company values. Analysing this information across organisations in the ReAct Partnership gave us a good baseline understanding of similarities or differences in approach and emerging good practices.

4. Interviews with HR leaders

In-depth interviews were conducted with nine senior HR leaders from Primes to explore the challenges of recruiting and retaining employment advisers. These in-depth interviews covered questions on the talent supply, profile of candidates, challenges in the recruitment process, effective recruitment, retention, and training initiatives and good practices, and learnings over the course of the programme since its inception to date. We also explored the skills HR leaders considered to be important for a successful adviser and challenges encountered in hiring for these skills.

5. Focus group with line managers

Line managers play an important role in motivating, supporting, and developing a team of advisers. Examining the role of line managers for Restart is a central aim of this project. The research examined the skills needed by line managers to successfully deliver on business goals, challenges in executing their role, and support they themselves need to be more effective. A focus group of seven line managers was conducted to understand their unique experiences, challenges, and suggestions for improvement.

6. Survey of employment advisers

To understand the views and experiences of employment advisers, a survey was designed and launched in March 2024 across all prime organisations of the ReAct Partnership. There were a total of 442 responses from across all 12 Restart Contract Package Areas (CPA) in England and Wales. Of these, 50% of respondents reported working on Restart for more than two years, which indicates sufficient experience in the role to lend confidence to the survey findings.

Demographically, the composition of the survey participants was as follows: on gender identity, 57.9% reported as female, 37.3% male and 4.9% reported their gender as non-binary or preferred not to say. On ethnicity, a majority reported as white (78.1%), 17.7% as non-white and 4.1% either belonged to an ethnic group not specified in the list or preferred not to say. 24.3% reported a disability or a long-term health condition, while 17.8% preferred not to say. Close to two-thirds of respondents were between the ages of 25-44 years. A crosstab analysis of demographic characteristics was also carried out across the survey responses to identify any variations among advisers' experiences on account of these socio-identity markers. These are included in the report where the differences were found to be statistically significant using the Chi-Square test. Detailed tables profiling the demographic characteristics of survey respondents are available in the Appendix.

Structure of the report

A thematic analysis of the data from various sources yielded five main themes of interest:

- *The skills profile of employment advisers.*
- *Widening talent supply.*
- *Helping advisers achieve job entry targets.*
- *Enhancing development and support of advisers.*
- *The role of line managers.*

The report is structured around these five themes, followed by recommendations for action. These recommendations were developed in consultation with a group of senior leaders from Operations and HR functions from all Prime providers as part of a sense-checking and action-planning workshop facilitated by IES in May 2024.

II. Skills profile of employment advisers

The primary goal of an adviser is to place participants into work. The ability to do this effectively comes from a combination of in-depth knowledge of the local labour market, being able to identify transferable skills in participants, and being able to both 'sell' jobs, sectors and industries to participants who may be reluctant to take on new challenges using transferable skills, and to 'sell' participants who have had a significant period outside of the labour market to employers who may be cautious about taking a chance on them.

The role of an adviser in many employment support programmes in the UK is based on the 'broker theory'. This states that advisers should act as brokers to access job vacancies and, if required, additional provision, that meet the needs of participants.¹ Our evidence review identified a series of tasks that advisers need to perform successfully, such as engaging with and moving forward participants furthest from the labour market, tailoring support to individual participant needs, keeping participants engaged throughout the programme, keeping participants focused on their targets, 'selling' participants to potential employers, and finally, 'selling' potential employers to participants.

In order to deliver these tasks, high-performing advisers need to be well informed, skilled at managing their caseloads, able to connect with participants who are further away from the labour market, skilled at keeping on top of administrative tasks, good at both listening and asking questions in a professional capacity, capable of working with employers, and have knowledge of the 'hidden' job market'.²

Key skills identified in the literature

To deliver on the various activities and tasks listed above, a synthesis of the evidence identified the following essential skills as necessary for employment advisers to successfully deliver their role:

- **Identifying and matching** – the ability to identify key transferable skills in participants and match them to relevant support and employers in the local area. This requires being

¹ IES (2009)

² The 'hidden' jobs market is used to describe vacancies which employers have, but do not advertise publicly because they may be filled through informal or internal strategies.

well-informed on the local labour market, 'hidden' jobs and familiarity with a 'menu of provision'.

- **Empathy** – the more an adviser can understand participants' perspectives on the impact of their individual conditions, the more effective they will be at communicating with them.
- **Administrative skills** – the ability to manage a large caseload as well as administrative tasks and documentation needed, including the use of a benefits calculator.
- **Robustness** – the ability to push back and persuade their participant what is in their best interest when required
- **Listening** – listening at a deeper level, understanding what a participant really wants to communicate and achieve, even if they are not able to fully articulate it.
- **Asking productive questions** – avoiding closed questions, and questions that are asked only for an adviser's personal curiosity.

"We aren't just employment advisers we are also: Therapists, counsellors, parents, security..."

Adviser survey respondent

International examples

The evidence review underlined the importance of the adviser's relationship with participants, as noted from the international examples of best practice described in the box.

International Examples

BIP in Denmark

The Beskæftigelse Indikator Project (BIP) undertaken by Væksthuset, is an extensive study in Denmark investigating which indicators are most important in helping individuals with complex problems begin work or education. The project found seven indicators that directly increase the probability of an individual getting a job: the individuals' health and management of their health; their knowledge of the labour market; their belief in their own ability to cope with a job; their collaborative skills; their job search behaviour; and their case manager's belief that the individual will get a job (Rosholm et al 2020). This underlines the role of advisers in building a relationship of trust with participants that reinforces their belief in finding work.

Australia's BOUNCE Professional Development

The Australian Government's Behavioural Economics Expertise Section set out to test a training solution to improve work readiness, with a particular focus on disadvantaged jobseekers. Three elements of the training were considered key: creating a trusting relationship with the trainer, a dynamic and social learning environment, and the importance of pre-course information (DESE 2022). Training that considers the breadth of soft skills (including psychological work readiness) can help disadvantaged job seekers with complex barriers build the confidence, resilience and motivation needed to become job ready. Utilising pre-course information is useful for advisers in building a relationship with participants from the outset without letting admin tasks become a box-ticking exercise that saps the warmth from the relationship, and it also helps with countering mismatched expectations.

JOBS II in the USA

The JOBS II Model, originally developed in the US by the Michigan Prevention Research Centre, is an evidence-based intervention designed to promote re-employment and improve the mental health of the unemployed. It features group work, active learning, practice through role play and the gradual gaining of skills. The JOBS II model has been trialled in numerous countries, and evaluation comparing an intervention group with a control group has suggested significant impacts for people with poor mental health. In the UK, the trial found that group work had positive employment and health impacts on participants (Bryson et al 2022). Using group work is also a good way to reduce the workload on advisers and can get participants invested in the course and hold each other to account.

We triangulated these findings with data from the HR Interviews and analysis of adviser job descriptions provided by the prime providers of ReACT as well as survey responses of advisers' own perception of the skills needed for their job. HR leaders identified the following skills are necessary to deliver the adviser role successfully:

- Problem-solving
- Understanding and following processes
- Labour market awareness
- Sales/negotiation/persuasion
- Organisation/ administration
- Interpersonal skills
- Diary and targets management
- Motivated by the values of the organisation or the work itself
- Customer service
- Networking
- Having difficult conversations

Most important and least important skills

Building on the above lists of skills, we asked advisers to rank 22 skills based on how important they thought these were to their job. The results of this survey question are shown in Figure 1. As can be noted, the top five most important skills selected are:

1. Communication skills and customer service skills (92%)
2. Interpersonal skills, including the ability to build rapport (91%)
3. Able to handle and hold difficult conversations with participants (79%)
4. Diary and time management (79%)
5. Resilience (76%)

Survey participants suggested some additional skills that did not feature in our list of 22 skills. These included compassion, empathy, active listening, dealing with mental health challenges, and understanding systems. Although not in our survey, these skills are highly valued by employment advisers, and are corroborated by the literature, analysis of job descriptions, and HR interviews discussed above.

The three least important skills identified by survey respondents were:

1. Basic Maths (16%)
2. Prior experience in the sector (11%)
3. A language in addition to English (10%)

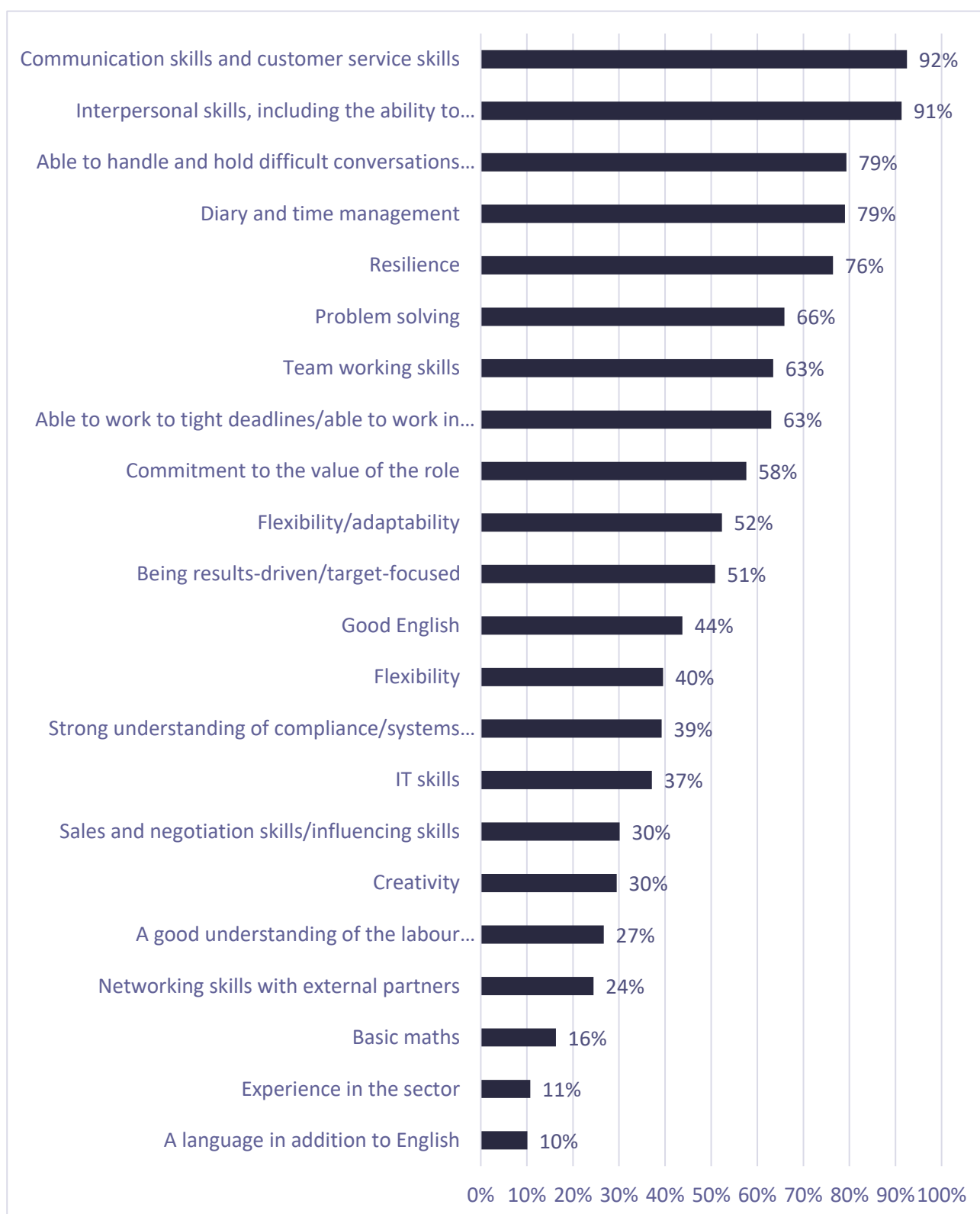
While only 11% of respondents thought that prior experience in the sector was a very important skill and only five percent chose it as one of their top skills, line managers emphasized at some length the value of prior experience. Line managers reported that it takes longer to get advisers upskilled and performing at the level needed if they haven't had prior experience in the role. Line managers also shared that those coming into the sector for the first time are not necessarily prepared to have the difficult conversations that are required on the job. This explains why some Primes have introduced role-play opportunities during the interview process as a strategy for checking advisers' competence and readiness in conducting difficult conversations.

“Everything takes a bit longer when they aren’t experienced. There’s so much information within the induction process.”

Line manager focus group participant

A further crosstab analysis with age revealed some interesting and statistically significant age-related variations in the perception of the least important skills. Respondents from the higher age groups considered prior knowledge and experience of the employment sector, good understanding of the labour market, and networking skills to be more important than younger respondents. This raises the question of whether there is sufficient recognition that prior experience is an important success factor for employment advisers. Line managers suggested that introducing customised induction and training programs based on prior experience in the role would be a helpful approach to ensure advisers at differing skill and readiness levels are equipped according to their needs when they start their jobs. We discuss this issue again in the recommendations.

Figure 1: Percentage of survey respondents selecting 'very important' on how important each skill/competency area below is



Source: IES (2024)

Getting the 'Right' combination and balance

Analysis of skills data across the literature, HR interviews, survey, and job descriptions yielded four main challenges:

- a) Striking the right balance between sales and service skills.
- b) Skills for dealing with an ever-changing and more complex profile of participants.
- c) Skill of holding difficult conversations.
- d) The importance of coaching as skill.

- a) **Right balance or combination of skills** - HR interviews revealed two distinct skills sets that are needed by advisers on Restart to be successful. One is the sales orientation and drive to meet targets and convert cases, and the other is the customer service orientation and the ability to empathize and understand participants' complex and changing needs. However, candidates typically have either predominantly sales skills or a care/social background with experience in dealing with customer issues, and they then struggle with the commercial parameters of the job. This inherent friction between sales and service seems to be at play across most of the Primes we spoke to.

"The role quickly turned into sales and recruitment after applying for advisory and people-focused role."

Adviser survey respondent

- b) **Dealing with a complex profile of participants** – None of the job descriptions referred to the complex profile of Restart participants, either in terms of their needs or level of complexity. Though the job descriptions have been modified over the two years of the program to reflect the need to handle a busy workload, be results-focused, build rapport with participants, and the need to adjust to/ be flexible to accommodate participants' needs, **there was no mention of profile of participants**. The interviews and focus group as well as survey responses indicate that the profile of participants has changed since the beginning of the program, becoming more challenging and complex over time in terms of the diverse range of needs and vulnerability. The skills needed to manage such participants was mostly captured in reference to the need for resilience.
- c) **Holding difficult conversations** – Related to the previous point was the skill of holding difficult conversations which was rated highly by survey respondents, HR leaders and line managers. However, **none of the job descriptions we analysed made explicit reference to it**. All job descriptions discussed the need to challenge participants to

achieve their aims, but none of them referred to the potentially challenging nature of participants' needs, and the difficult and sensitive conversations required with such vulnerable participants. **By contrast, survey respondents ranked being able to handle and hold difficult conversations as an extremely important skill for the role and also pointed to this causing an expectation mismatch in what the role was advertised as and what they were required to deliver.**

- d) **Coaching as an underemphasized skill** - Despite the role sometimes being referred to as job coach or employment coach, only two of the job descriptions included 'coach' or 'coaching' as a desired or required skill set. Another two mentioned 'mentor' and 'mentoring' in their text, but not within the list of required or desired skills. 'Listening' as a skill was also rarely mentioned. Where 'coaching' was mentioned, this was in the context of career coaching or in the context of coaching an individual or group. Our conversations with line managers in the focus group and with operational and HR leaders during the sense-checking workshop found **that coaching is an extremely important but undervalued skill in advisers.** Coaching is the process of helping a person to learn something, develop a skill, or enhance their personal and professional performance by guiding and supporting them to reflect upon, challenge their boundaries, set meaningful goals, and move to achieve these. The box below highlights its core aims and guiding principles. **Equipping advisers with coaching as a skill has the potential to amplify their effectiveness in engaging and placing job seekers.**

Coaching aims to produce optimal performance and improvement at work. It focuses on specific skills and goals and may also impact an individual's personal attributes such as social interaction or confidence. It's essentially a non-directive form of development that focuses on improving performance and developing an individual.

CIPD Factsheet on coaching

III. Widening talent supply

Workforce development of employment advisers necessitates examining labour market conditions that shape the recruitment and retention preferences of people applying for this role. We reviewed the wider labour market comparing the adviser role with other comparable jobs along criteria including salary, vacancies, nature of contract, job requirements, etc. Additionally, HR interviews provided us with a view of the recruitment practices and challenges faced by Primes and how these have evolved over the course of Restart. Attention to these labour market trends was clear in efforts by HR leaders to rework job descriptions, candidate screening and communication processes, as well as selection practices to respond to challenges in attracting the right candidates. It was observed that employment advisers are regularly recruited from competitor organisations or DWP, banking, recruitment services, retail, customer service, call centres, NHS, health and social care, and local authorities. In the same vein, advisers move on to competitor organisations or DWP job coach roles, administration or HR role in the NHS, education or public sector, recruitment consultancies or health and social care organisations.

Labour market trends affecting advisers' talent supply

To understand more about the relative attractiveness of working in employment services, we have conducted analysis of real-time, online vacancy data from Adzuna (one of the largest job search engines in the UK). This allows us to look at vacancy data by occupation, industry and skills across geographic areas at various levels and over time.³

For this analysis, we compared data on vacancies for employment advisers with other broadly similar occupations. Adzuna maps raw listed vacancy job titles to Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2020 codes and to their own occupational framework. Employment advisers do not fit neatly in the SOC 2020 classification. However, Adzuna *do* collect data on employment advisers as a separate category within their own framework.⁴

³ It should be noted that the process of occupation matching by Adzuna is not an exact science, as it depends on what the uploader puts as the job title and the key words that Adzuna's automated tagging process searches for and uses to identify the occupation.

⁴ The top six companies hiring in that category over the last year were Reed In Partnership, Mental Health Matters, Remploy, Maximus, Shaw Trust and Seetec so we can be confident that this is picking up the right sorts of job roles.

We have, therefore, compared data for jobs in the employment adviser category with jobs in other occupations that employment services are likely to be in competition with for candidates. These were based on feedback from prime providers on typical destinations for those leaving posts, which identified local and national government administration, other advice services, youth services, HR adviser and administrative roles, and customer services as common destinations.

Using four-digit Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes, we identified ten comparable occupational groups (shown below in numerical order, where, in general, the lower the number, the higher skilled the job role):

1. **2464** Youth work professionals
2. **3229** Welfare and housing associate professionals – including probation services, student support, mental health projects, and homelessness and housing support
3. **3560** Public services associate professionals – which includes jobcentre officers and health service administrators
4. **3571** Human resources and industrial relations officers – including HR advisers, recruitment consultants and equality and diversity officers
5. **3572** Careers advisers and vocational guidance specialists
6. **4111** National government administrative occupations – including benefits, revenue and passport officers
7. **4112** Local government administrative occupations – as above, plus local housing officers and parish clerks
8. **4113** Officers of non-governmental organisations – includes charity administrators, charity clerks and union officials
9. **4136** Human resources administrative occupations – including recruitment and training administrators
10. **7220** Customer service supervisors

We have also included data for DWP coaches, although the sample size is very small, so only limited data is available.

We extracted all relevant data across the occupations of interest from the Adzuna Intelligence dashboard for the period 18 June 2023 to 17 June 2024, except for DWP work coaches, which, due to sample sizes, was extended to cover two years from 2022.

How employment adviser roles compare

Table 1 sets out how employment adviser vacancies compare with those of similar/competitor occupations. These are ordered by the median salary of jobs advertised in the last year, the cumulative number of vacancies recorded over the last year (or last two years in the case of the DWP work coach category), and a number of other characteristics of jobs of most relevance for this analysis, for example the proportion of jobs advertised as permanent or on contract, proportion advertised as on-site, remote or open to flexible working, and the minimum qualifications required in adverts.

The colour coding in Table 1 shows those with the highest proportion on contract, requiring on-site working or requiring at least a degree in red (and those with the lowest of each in green). Data is not available for DWP work coaches due to the small sample size.

Table 1: Comparison of employment adviser roles with other similar occupations

Occupational group	Median salary	Number of vacancies	% contract	% on-site	% req. degree or higher
4113 Officers of non-governmental organisations	£34,233	2,792	17%	72%	58%
3560 Public services associate professionals	£31,295	3,752	31%	61%	75%
3571 Human resources and industrial relations officers	£30,013	135,667	13%	68%	91%
3572 Careers advisers and vocational guidance specialists	£29,771	2,597	21%	74%	37%
4111 National government administrative occupations	£28,932	2,891	18%	65%	81%
2464 Youth work professionals	£28,621	383	35%	96%	84%
DWP work coaches	£28,117	84			
Employment adviser	£27,711	2,730	10%	92%	11%
3229 Welfare and housing associate professionals	£26,023	15,012	25%	81%	38%
4112 Local government administrative occupations	£25,415	2,465	21%	68%	55%
4136 Human resources administrative occupations	£25,240	19,755	31%	67%	51%
7220 Customer service supervisors	£24,659	66,751	3%	98%	65%

Source: IES analysis of Adzuna Intelligence portal. Data is for year ending 17 June 2024, except for the DWP work coach category where data covers the two years ending 17 June 2024.

Table 1 shows that the median salary for employment adviser jobs held by Adzuna was around £27,700 in the last year. This is a lower median salary than other comparable/competitor occupations including national government/ public services, non-government, HR, and careers advice. However, the salary is almost identical to the average for DWP work coaches (albeit over a two-year period in this case) and higher than welfare/ housing, local government, HR administrative and customer service supervisory roles. Overall, this suggests that employment adviser roles are not significantly out of line with other comparable jobs but, in general, are likely to pay a little lower. This was also supported by findings from advisers on our survey. For instance, Figure 12 (refer section 5) reports that only 40% of respondents agreed that their job offers them prospects of well-paid work as

compared to other sectors they might enter, while 34% actively disagreed with this statement.

Further, Table 1 also suggests that employment adviser roles were less likely to require a degree than any other job (just one in nine adverts did so, compared with at least a third in all other occupations and over half in most of them). Perhaps surprisingly, employment adviser roles were also less likely to be advertised as short-term contracts (one in ten, compared with at least one in five in most other cases). However, nearly all adviser vacancies required on-site work (92%), while other higher-paying roles and many lower-paying ones were more likely to offer flexibility. We discuss the issue of flexible working at greater length in section 5 on organisational support.

Vacancy trends over time

The Adzuna data allows analysis back to 2019, so we have looked at trends in both vacancy and salary levels since the Covid-19 pandemic. For this analysis, we combined some smaller occupational groups, so the non-HR roles that start with a 2 or 3 code have been combined (youth, welfare/ housing, public services, careers advice), as have the non-HR roles that start with a 4 code (local and national government, non-government officers). We have also excluded Customer service supervisors and DWP coaches (the latter due to small samples). This leaves five groups: employment advisers; the two new combined groups; and the two larger HR groups. Data has been averaged over three months to smooth out some of the variability from very short-term peaks and troughs in demand.

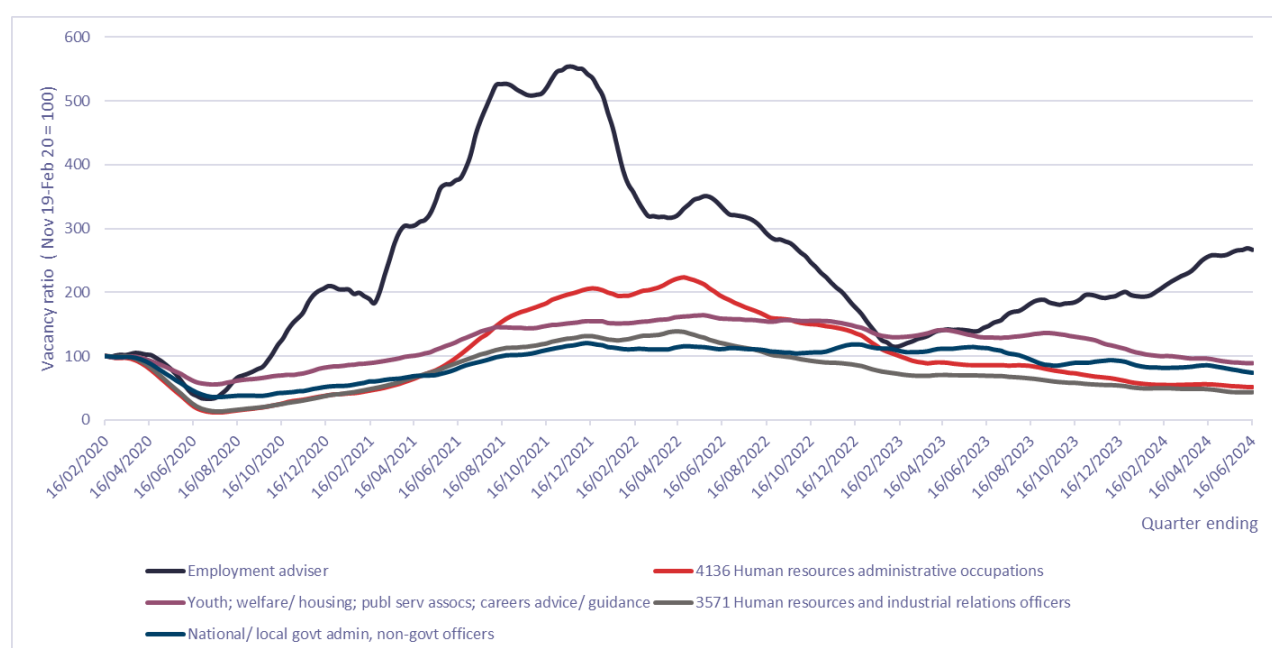
Figure 2 sets out trends in the level of vacancies for each of these five groups. Because the groups are different sizes, the data is presented relative to the number of vacancies for that category in the three-month period November 2019-February 2020 (set at 100). In other words, a value of 200 means twice as many vacancies as in that pre-Covid quarter, 300 means three times as many vacancies, and so on.

This shows clearly that employment adviser vacancies rose rapidly between May-July 2020 and September-November 2021 – peaking at that point at more than five times the level they had been immediately pre-Covid (an average of 343 vacancies at any point in time in that quarter, compared with 62 pre-pandemic). This obviously reflects the rapid scaling up of a range of support programmes, including latterly recruitment into the Restart Scheme. Vacancies fell back fairly rapidly after that but remained high throughout early to mid-2022, before falling further towards pre-pandemic levels by early 2023. Since then, we have seen a gradual recovery in vacancies, which may reflect recruitment into other programmes – UK

Shared Prosperity Fund, Individual Placement and Support services, perhaps employment advisers in talking therapies – but could also reflect industry turnover.

By contrast in other comparable occupations, growth in vacancies after the first lockdown was less pronounced (although still significant, particularly in HR administrative roles and in the higher skilled combined category (the non-HR occupations coded as 2 and 3); but in all cases vacancies have dropped back to slightly below pre-pandemic levels on the latest Adzuna data.

Figure 2: Vacancy trends for employment advisers and comparable occupations



Source: IES analysis of Adzuna Intelligence portal. Vacancies are shown within each category relative to the average number of vacancies over the quarter November 2019-February 2020.

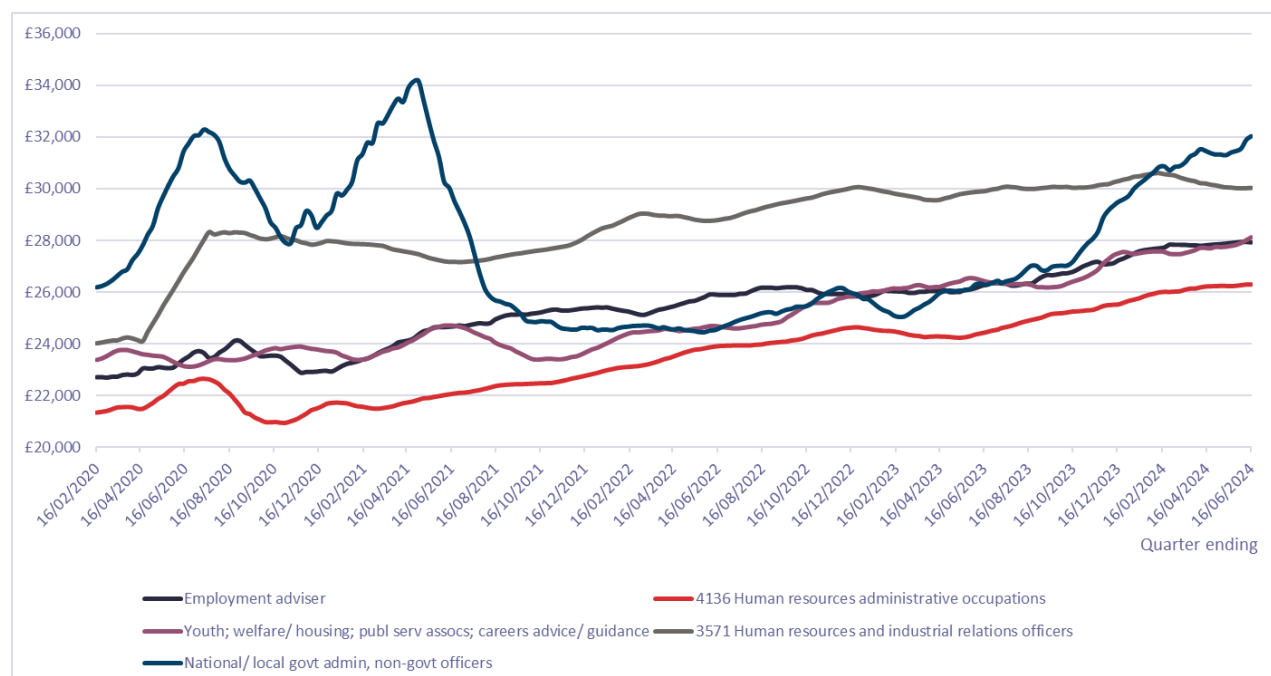
Salary levels over time

Figure 3 sets out the median advertised salaries for jobs in each of the five groups. Employment advisers are the black line running through the middle of the graph, so they follow broadly similar trends to jobs in youth work, welfare/ housing, public services, and careers (the combined SOC code 2 and 3 group shown in a purple line). Overall, this shows that salaries for employment advisers have risen steadily from a median of around £22,700 in the three months before the pandemic to £27,900 in the most recent three months.

Interestingly, pay in the local/ national/non-govt category has shown significant variation over the period – with pronounced spikes in median pay during the early pandemic period, median pay more in line with other industries through 2022 and 2023, but significant rises over the last year. These variations will likely be driven more by ‘compositional’ changes –

different jobs being advertised over time – than by salary increases for the same jobs. Nonetheless, this could suggest that these jobs may be becoming more attractive relative to employment adviser roles (even if the absolute number of vacancies is falling).

Figure 3: Average advertised salary for employment advisers and comparable occupations



Responding to these changes in the wider labour market, HR managers at the Primes shared how they have had to adapt the hiring processes suitably. For instance, the job descriptions emphasize a broad range of benefits packages, especially focusing on health and well-being benefits in addition to standard holidays, pensions, etc. as a means to attract talent. Pensions, in particular, are an important issue raised by the HR and management data in relation to the talent supply issue. Competing with public sector pensions is difficult for Prime providers operating in a commercial environment and is sometimes a deciding factor for someone to move between a job with one of the Restart Primes and a DWP role.

Recruitment processes

The recruitment process for employment adviser roles were examined through HR leader interviews and the survey. Primes reported receiving between 20 and 32 applications for each role across the CPAs, indicating a healthy pool of candidates in most instances. However, challenges in attracting applicants were experienced in certain circumstances, such as:

- rural locations;
- where the labour market in geographies makes roles at this salary bracket challenging to fill;
- areas where the cost of living is particularly high, but the job is not subject to London weighting (e.g. some areas in the Southeast);
- where there is steep competition from local DWP offices; and
- where there is more flexibility on offer from other jobs available.

Additionally, it was noted that the job market moves fast, and if hiring managers are too busy to prioritise shortlisting and interviews, then good candidates can be lost. This points to the need to construct a tighter process when recruiting. Several Primes have also adjusted their recruitment practices to identify the necessary skill sets from a broader pool of candidates who may not have prior employment sector experience but can be groomed to do the job. These initiatives include telephone pre-screening, role-plays and scenario testing, and assessment days or group recruitment to go deeper into demonstrated skills, even if it extends the length of the recruitment process.

Expectations of the role

“What was advertised and what is actually expected and required were two entirely different things.”

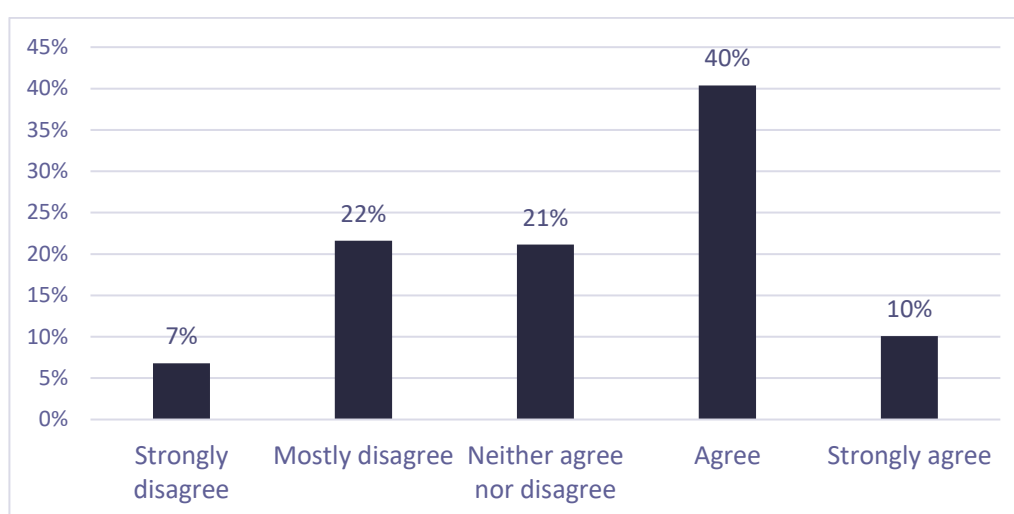
Adviser survey respondent

Attracting the right candidates was also about setting the right expectations from the start. HR leaders shared how some of them had introduced videos with ‘A day in the life of an Adviser’ to explain the role better, and modified the job description to highlight the demands of caseload management more. The importance of clearly communicating the challenging nature of the role is underscored by the disparity reported in the adviser survey between their expectations of the role and the reality.

“This contract is nothing like I was told it would be.”

Adviser survey respondent

Figure 4 shows that only 50% of survey respondents agree or strongly agree that the adviser role is what they expected when applying, while 29% disagree mostly or strongly that the role is what they expected it to be when they applied.

Figure 4: “The adviser role is what I expected it to be when I applied:”

Source: IES (2024)

Among the reasons cited for why the job was not what they expected when they applied, the most often cited reasons were:

- More administration than expected
- The changing nature of the customer profile over the course of Restart. Customers have more complex challenges than expected (including mental health issues)
- Because the job is more about recruitment/sales and performance targets than helping people
- Workload and caseload targets are too high or unrealistic
- Neither the job description nor the interview prepared them for what to expect.
- High number of inappropriate referrals from Jobcentre Plus.

“There are some elements of the job such as mental health related issues with participants which I was not expecting.”

Adviser survey respondent

The analysis in this section suggests that the talent supply of employment advisers is mediated by labour market conditions based on the salary, nature of the contract, educational qualifications, and extent of flexibility offered. Modifying job descriptions and selection processes have shown positive results in attracting suitable candidates. However, an expectation mismatch remains between what is advertised or needed on the job and what candidates perceive the role to be. In the recommendations section of the report, we suggest some actions that can help prime organisations to address this lacuna.

IV. Achieving job entry targets

“It’s advertised as helping people, but all you do is chase targets.”

Adviser survey respondent

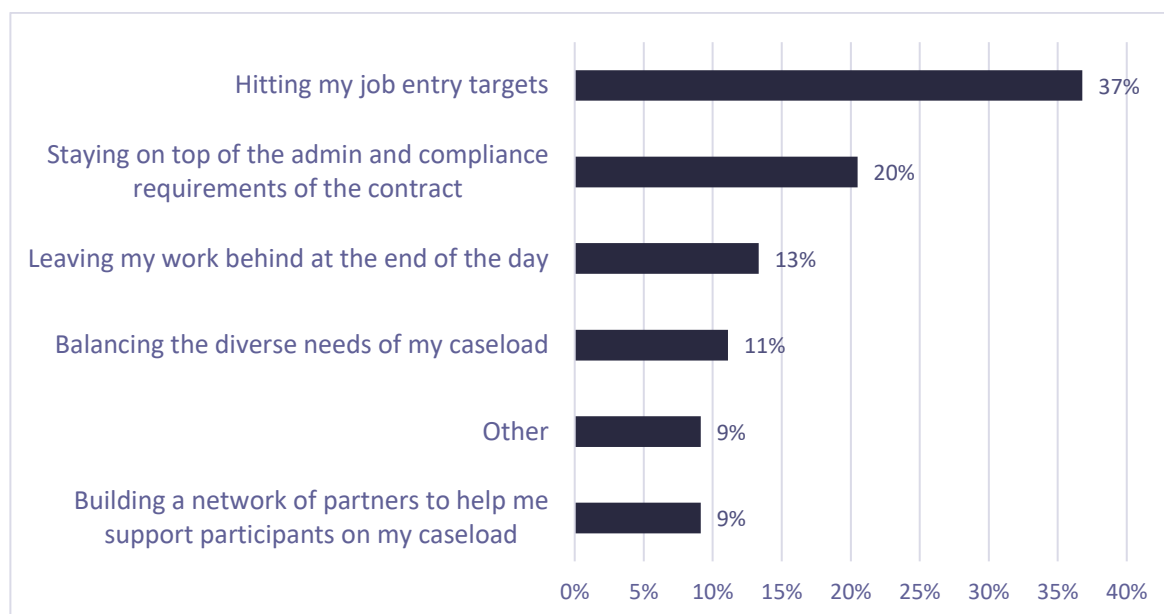
Barriers to successful job performance

Our evidence review shows that advisers face many barriers while performing their jobs. The most common barriers identified are highlighted below:

- **Adviser workload.** Time constraints are an obstacle to generating tailored interventions. The time and administrative costs involved in adviser workloads, which include completing records of attendance and achievement, act as a barrier to providing effective support.
- **Difficulty in supporting complex needs.** It can take time to identify participants’ specific needs. Some participants may not be able to express, or may not even be aware of, precisely what support they want in time for suitable activities to be sourced.
- **Mismatched expectations.** Difficulties with the timeliness of provision could be a result of advisers not appropriately setting expectations of when core provision would start and ‘selling the benefits’ of related, peripheral activities.
- **Not being challenging enough.** Participants need a supportive adviser, but that should not prevent advisers from challenging participants when necessary.
- **Maintaining a focus on work-related activity.** Advisers have highlighted that they try to build a trusting relationship first by talking about participants’ health conditions and broader personal issues but can then find it difficult to move the conversation back to relevant work-related activity topics.

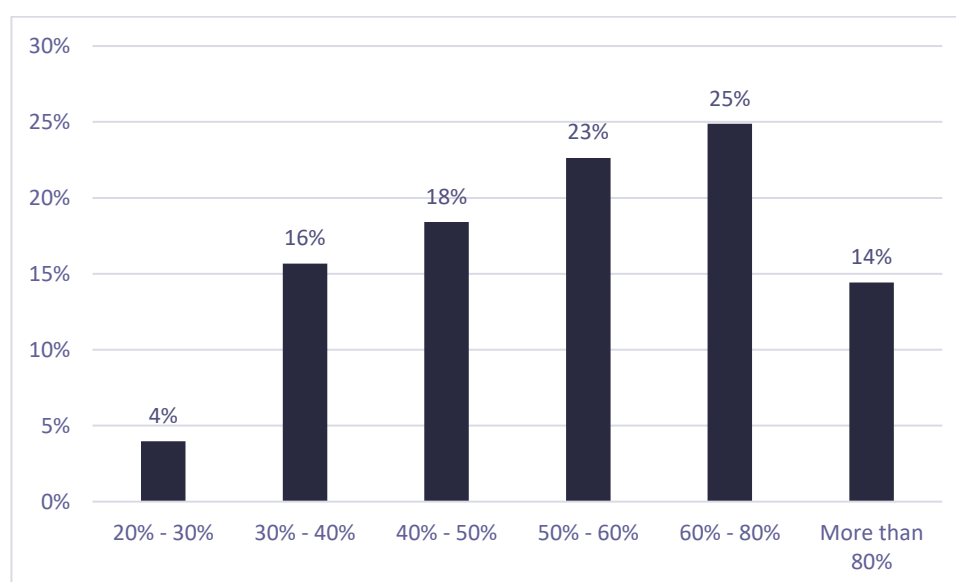
On-the-job challenges

The above findings resonated with responses to the survey. When asked to identify the most challenging elements of the role, the top two aspects reported were a) hitting monthly job entry targets (37%), and b) staying on top of the admin and compliance requirements of the contract (20%). This is illustrated in Figure 5. These were followed by difficulty in leaving work at the end of the day and balancing the diverse needs of one’s caseload. Other job challenges reported were the struggle to connect with participants, having to cover for absent colleagues, and/or finding people to cover for oneself during an absence.

Figure 5: “Most challenging element of the job:”

Source: IES (2024)

To explore the extent of admin responsibilities, the survey asked for the percentage of time taken up for admin and compliance duties. 61.9% of respondents said that admin and compliance/process duties took up 50% or more of their time per month (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: “Percentage of job taken up with admin and compliance/process duties across an average month:”

Source: IES (2024)

This theme of high admin and compliance demands affecting the amount of time available to advisers for engaging with participants (especially those with complex needs) was

discussed at length during the sense-checking workshop. The HR and operational leaders present commented on the nature of the Restart contract that imposed a high degree of compliance and form filling, which was mandatory for the performance of the contract. This did not allow much flexibility in terms of reducing any of the administrative tasks.

Additionally, some colleagues cautioned against seeing admin work as something negative. This was a culturally mediated view which they argued could be problematic. The process of completing the forms and complying with procedures was central to successfully placing participants into jobs and should not be seen as a 'burdensome' task. Instead, admin should be taken to be an integral and central part of the job. In the recommendations section, we discuss some potentially innovative approaches to addressing the high load of admin and compliance elements that emerged from the line managers' focus group.

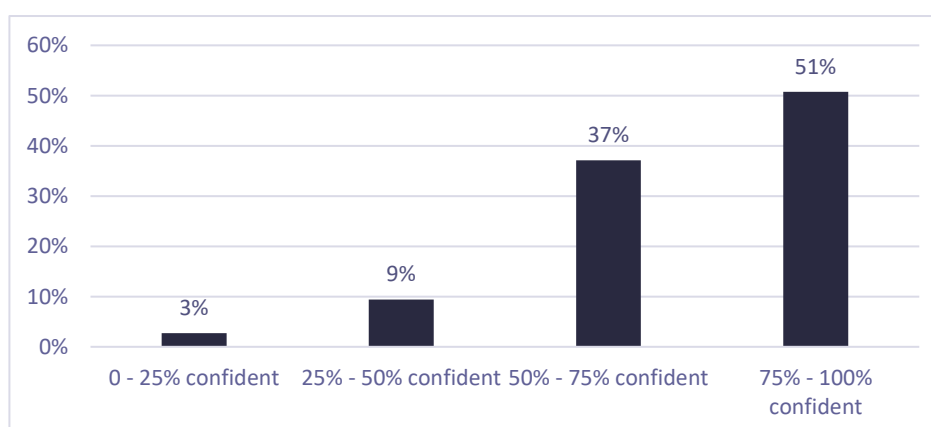
"I feel that admin and compliance are one aspect that could be covered by another role in order that I as an employment adviser can focus on ... give the customer my time and experience to help prepare, apply and diversify where applicable."

Adviser survey respondent

Confidence in achieving job entry targets

Notwithstanding the varied nature of the employment adviser role, almost 90% of respondents reported that they were 50% or more confident of their ability to balance the various aspects of the role as shown in Figure 7.

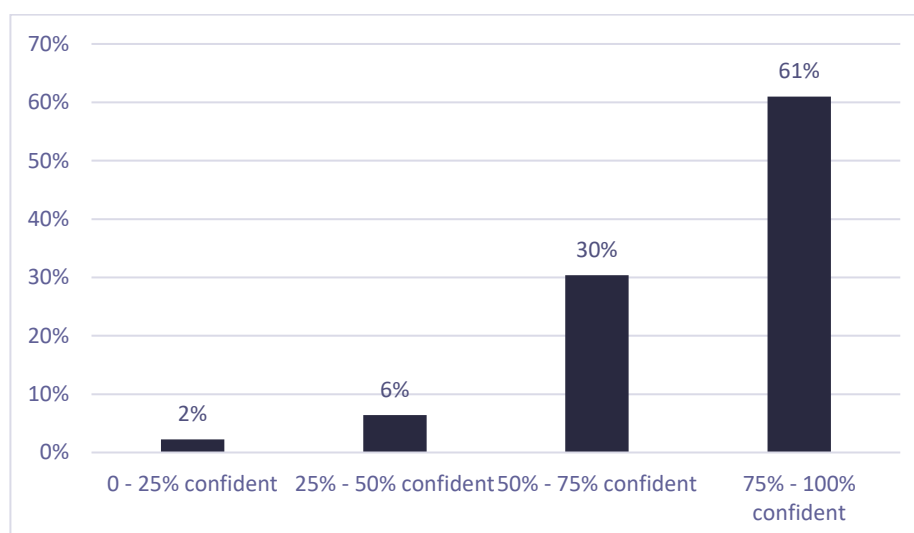
Figure 7: "I am confident about my ability to balance the various aspects of my role:"



Source: IES (2024)

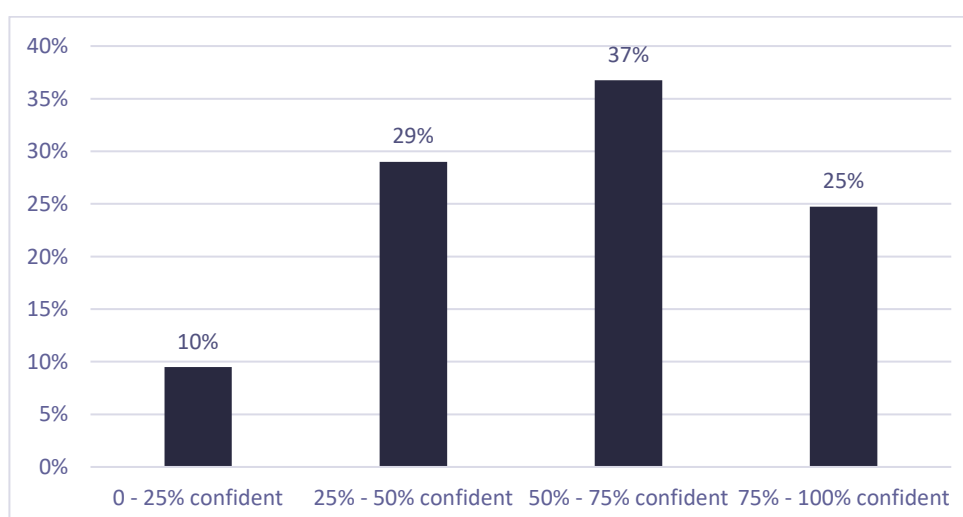
However, when asked how confident they were in managing their caseload and hitting their monthly job placement targets, the figure dropped to 61% of respondents who said they were 75% or more confident of managing their caseload (see Figure 8), and only 24.8% reported being 75% or more confident of hitting their targets every month (see Figure 9). This suggests that managing the requirements of the caseload does not necessarily translate into achieving targets on getting participants back into work.

Figure 8: “I am confident in managing my caseload:”



Source: IES (2024)

Figure 9: “Confident of achieving monthly targets:”



Source: IES (2024)

Difficulties in achieving their monthly job entry targets despite managing their caseload and compliance requirements can have a deleterious effect on the morale of individual advisers as well as the whole team. This is succinctly brought out in the following quote -

“I feel that despite my best efforts and willingness to help others, and my accuracy and attention to details and admin, I am consistently told that I along with my colleagues are underperforming.... I consistently leave my job feeling exhausted, undervalued and depressed.”

Adviser survey respondent

One of the reasons suggested by both the line managers' focus group discussion and the survey's open-text responses was the increasingly complex nature of Restart participants.

Engaging complex participants

“I have been here for two and a half years and the type of job then to now is very different due to the type of participants that we have to help who have many more barriers and are harder to place into work.”

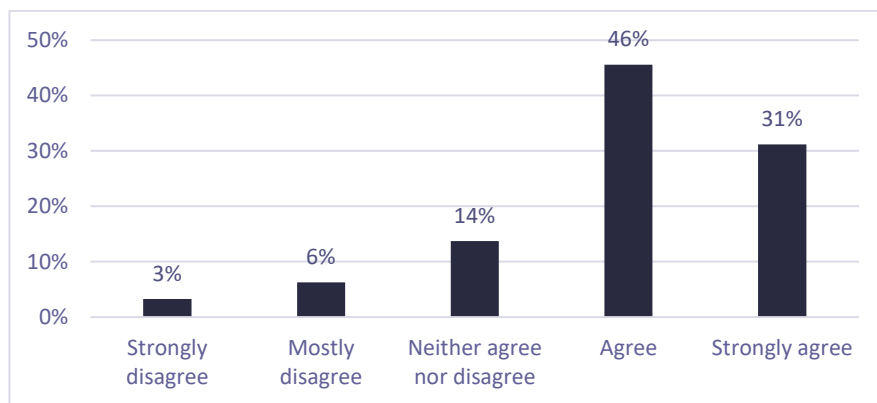
Adviser survey respondent

The above quote highlights a core performance challenge faced by employment advisers on Restart—that of a changing customer profile who need to be placed into work. The line managers in the focus group discussion also underscored this issue, emphasizing the need for greater support to be made available to advisers to handle such difficult and complex situations.

“After Covid the customer base was easier – ready to go back into work. Now three years down the line, the people are presenting with complex needs – mental and physical health. How do you challenge that in the right way and support people in house and with local provision to help them?”

Line manager focus group participant

The complex and changing profile of participants is also implicated in the mismatched expectations reported by advisers between their perception and the reality of the role. It is important to emphasize here that 77% of respondents felt that they were strongly motivated by the social impact of the work that they do, as shown in Figure 10. A similar percentage of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the job offers them an opportunity to help other people or make a positive difference to their community, wider society, or the environment (refer to Figure 12 in section 5). However, the inability to successfully meet this aim can have a negative impact on the motivation level of advisers.

Figure 10: “I am strongly motivated by the social impact of the work that I do:”

Source: IES (2024)

This discussion reiterates the importance of leveraging advisers' motivation toward helping people by emphasizing these aspects in the job descriptions. However, our analysis found that job descriptions tend to focus more on challenging participants rather than mention the challenging nature of participants. This can cause a mismatch of expectations and potential stress or frustration with the role if advisers are not adequately prepared to cater to the diverse and challenging needs of the Restart participants. Ensuring that job descriptions, hiring, and onboarding processes set accurate and realistic expectations among candidates is an important area for action and is addressed in our recommendations made at the end of this report.

V. Strengthening engagement and support

In this section, we discuss the findings of this study on the extent of job satisfaction, availability of flexible working, effectiveness of training and induction, continuing professional development, presence of an inclusive culture, workplace well-being, and avenues of ongoing support available to advisers that can make a material difference to their effectiveness.

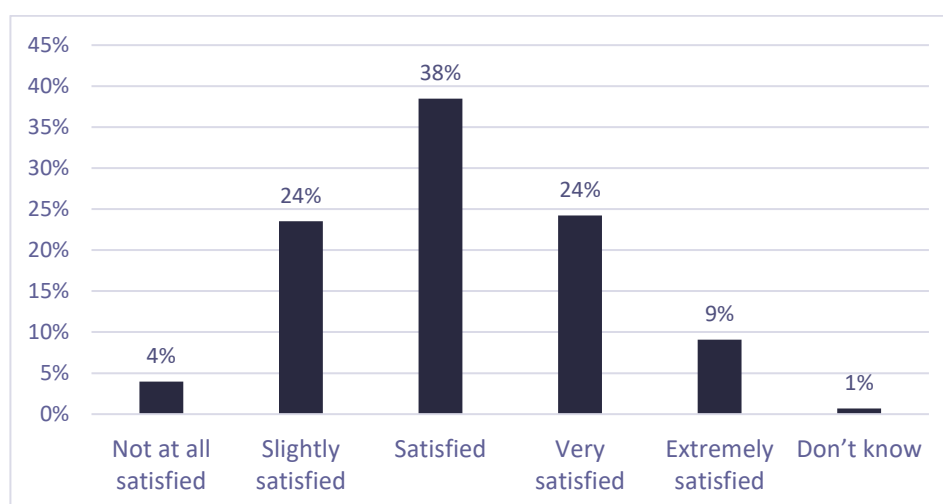
Job satisfaction

“The work is rewarding and it’s an amazing opportunity to learn, grow and develop oneself personally.”

Adviser survey respondent

When asked to rate their overall level of job satisfaction, around 70% of respondents indicated that they were either satisfied, very satisfied, or extremely satisfied (see Figure 11). A quarter indicated that they were only slightly satisfied, and a very small percentage reported being not at all satisfied. Respondents from white ethnic background reported slightly higher satisfaction scores (73%) than those from ethnic minority backgrounds (67%).

Figure 11: “I rate my job satisfaction as:”



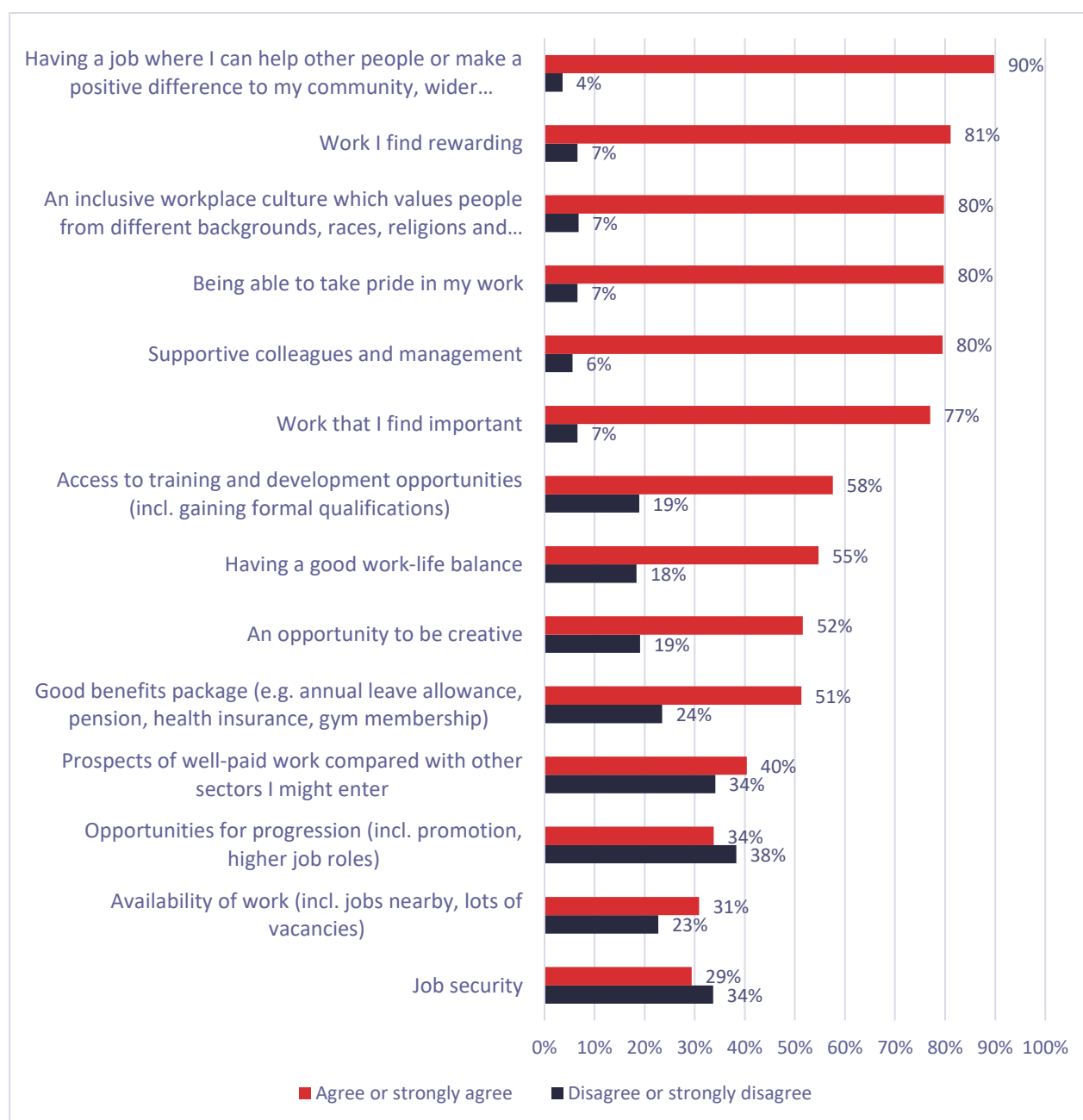
Source: IES (2024)

Figure 10 in the previous section reported that 77% of respondents were strongly motivated by the social impact provided by their work. This is further reconfirmed by the question on what ‘my job offers me’ as shown in Figure 12. The chart shows the percentage of

respondents who agreed or disagreed with various statements describing what the job offers. The top five aspects with the highest level of agreement were:

1. Having an opportunity to help other people or make a positive difference to my community, wider society and the environment (90%)
2. Work that is rewarding (81%)
3. An inclusive workplace culture which values people (80%)
4. Being able to take pride in my work (80%)
5. Supportive colleagues and management (80%)

Figure 12: “My job offers me:”



Source: IES (2024)

Qualitative comments by survey respondents corroborated the social value of helping people and doing work that is rewarding and meaningful.

“Helping individuals back into work and seeing how this positively effects their life is very rewarding”

Adviser survey respondent

“I would say that they bring themselves to work for that reason, to change people's lives. And it's really humbling to see that”

HR leader interview

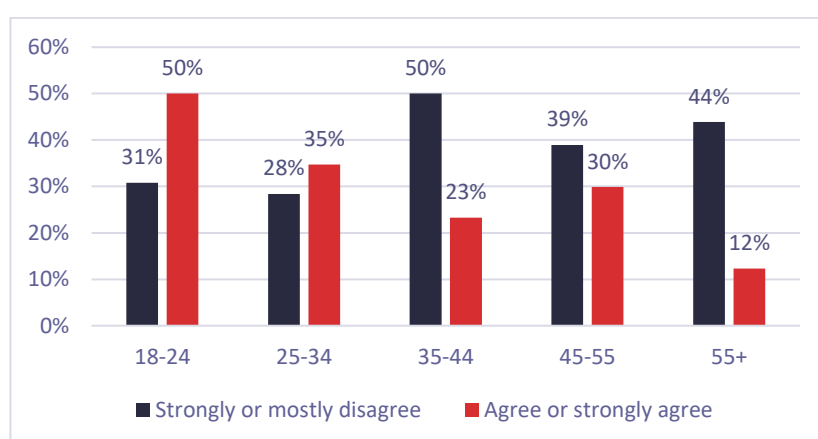
A crosstab analysis found differences between groups on some of these aspects. For instance, men were more likely than women to disagree that their job paid well compared to other sectors they could work in (40% men mostly or strongly disagree compared with 30% women). On ethnicity, differences were observed in responding to ‘there is good availability of work (jobs nearby, lots of vacancies)’ with respondents identifying as White reporting higher disagreement than non-whites. However, it is not possible to draw actionable recommendations from these slight variations.

Figure 12 also points to aspects of the job where a large percentage of advisers disagreed were present. Top three aspects reported to be lacking in what the job offers:

- Opportunities for progression
- Job security
- Prospects of well-paid work compared to other sectors I might enter

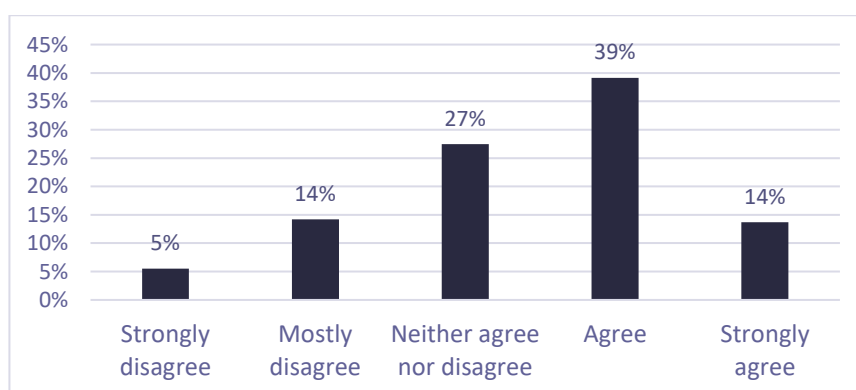
These three aspects have implications for the retention of employment advisers. HR leaders emphasized that those who leave the sector are not always doing so for better pay – they may be leaving for jobs with a similar pay, but that are less stressful. Other roles can offer more flexibility and work-from-home opportunities or clearer progression routes.

Interestingly, age-related differences were observed in job security, as seen in Figure 13. Older age groups (35 years old and over) were more likely to disagree with the statement ‘my job as an adviser offers job security’ than those aged below 35 years.

Figure 13: “My job as an employment adviser offers job security” by age group

Source: IES (2024)

To assess job satisfaction, another question we asked was whether survey respondents would recommend a career as an employment adviser to others (Figure 14). Over half of all respondents agreed that they would recommend the role (53%), but almost one-fifth (19%) said that they would not.

Figure 14: “I would recommend a career as an employment adviser:”

Source: IES (2024)

This divided opinion could partly stem from their own dissatisfaction or partly from an understanding of the challenging nature of the role as articulated in the following quote -

“The job is not for everyone there are some hard conversations that need to be had but the rewards of breaking through a person’s barriers and seeing them push themselves based on your advice is really rewarding”

Adviser survey respondent

A follow-up question was asked to understand the motivations of advisers more deeply on why they felt this way. Of the qualitative comments received, negative responses referred to the challenging nature of the work, dissatisfaction with the target driven nature of the

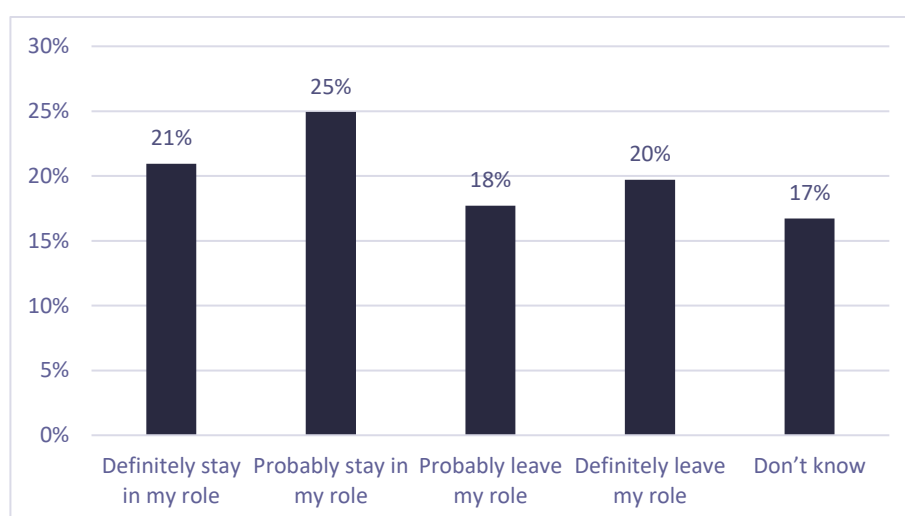
work, poor pay or contract issues, and the emotionally taxing nature of the work. Other comments identified specific workplace issues and problems with management or staff, as well as the lack of progression and poor work/life balance. Around 10% of all responses, whether they had been positive or negative, noted that being an employment adviser required a specific kind of person, and so would only recommend the job to someone that they were confident could handle it.

“I feel it is a good job but that the emotional demands mean that if someone is not confident in setting professional boundaries and knowing how to take care of their own mental health it likely would not be a good long-term fit”

Adviser survey respondent

We further explored some of the dissatisfaction by asking about the intention to leave/change jobs. When asked about their future plans (Figure 15), a little under half of respondents said that they would definitely or probably stay in their role (46%), while under two-fifths said that they would probably or definitely leave their role (38%).

Figure 15: “In the next two years I plan to:”



Source: IES (2024)

A range of reasons behind this intention to leave are captured in Figure 16. Almost half of respondents said this was because there was a lack of promotion/career opportunities in the sector (49%), the pay was unsatisfactory (48%), while over one-third wanted to change role because they were looking for a change (37%), and just over one-fifth reported they did not enjoy the job (22%) or had a poor work/life balance, or a lack of flexibility (21%).

Figure 16: “I may/will change job because:”

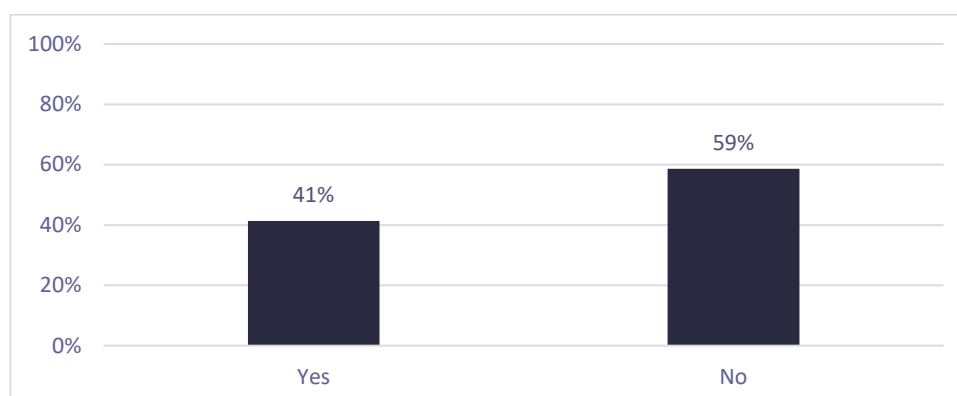
Source: IES (2024)

When respondents had listed ‘Other’, the most common reasons were linked to concerns over job security such as ending of a contract, or a desire to progress in their career path to a role with more responsibilities. This reiterates the lack of job security and opportunities for progression as areas that a number of advisers find lacking in their jobs.

Flexible working

Flexible working is increasingly emerging as important workplace support to enable workers to reconcile the demands of their personal and professional lives. The statutory Day 1 right to ask for flexible working further emphasizes the need for organisations to address this issue. Our interviews with HR leaders across Primes demonstrated the efforts and struggles in implementing flexible working arrangements within the constraints of the Restart contract. Reflecting these difficulties were the survey responses with 59% of respondents answering they did not have flexible working arrangements (Figure 17).

Figure 17: “My company offers some (formal and informal) flexible working arrangements:”



Source: IES (2024)

The following categories of flexible working options were included in the survey to advisers:

- *Job sharing* - Where two people do one job and split the hours.
- *Working from home (occasional /regularly)* - Working from home, or anywhere else other than the normal place of work.
- *Part-time* - Working less than full-time hours.
- *Compressed hours* - Working full-time hours but over fewer days.
- *Flexi-time* - Choosing when to start and end your working day; usually this is accompanied with 'core' working hours (e.g. 10am-3pm).
- *Annualised hours* - Working a certain number of hours over the year, with flexibility about when you work.
- *Staggered hours* - Working with different start, finish and break times than other co-workers.
- *Phased retirement* - Gradually reducing working hours and changing working patterns in a lead up to retirement.
- *Term-time hours* - Working a certain number of weeks per year, where non-working time is aligned with school leave.

Among formal flexible work arrangements, the most common options available were working from home, working flex-time, or part-time. Work from home was the most common arrangement but it was available only to around one-fifth of overall respondents (21%). Informal arrangements such as late starts, flexible timings for caring duties and flexibility around lunch breaks were offered in specific instances and at the discretion of line managers. Primes had also tried to experiment with different approaches to flexible

working, such as introducing admin days as an opportunity to work from home to complete admin tasks when no calls or meetings with clients were scheduled.

The focus group of line managers and the sense-checking workshop participants both reiterated the difficulty of offering greater work from home flexibility, due to constraints of the Restart contract that had changed since the program started. The quote below from a survey respondent highlights the changed workplace conditions because of these constraints:

“We originally were promised the role was three days working in the office and two days working from home. This was promised and we were told this would never change. And yet it has.”

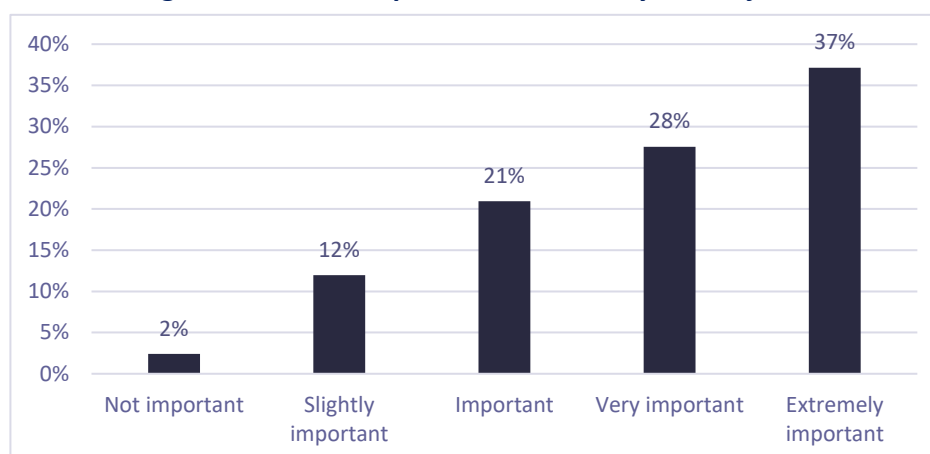
Adviser survey respondent

HR leaders cited the lack of work-from-home opportunities as a factor in exacerbating recruitment and retention challenges. This can also make attracting and retaining women employees and those with caring responsibilities more difficult. One survey respondent indicated that the lack of flexible working is a reason why they would not recommend the job to others.

“It is well-paid compared to other roles. However, there is very limited progression and high turnover of staff because it can be challenging and there is no flexibility with working from home or flexi time.”

Adviser survey respondent

Of those who had the option of working from home, over four-fifths (84%) had taken it up. As apparent in Figure 18, among those who had access to any kind of flexible working arrangements, 86% of respondents said that flexibility was important, very important, or extremely important to them.

Figure 18: “How important is flexibility in this job?”

Source: IES (2024)

Thus, our analysis clearly demonstrates that though flexible working is available in small pockets across primes, it is highly valued among those who have the option, with high uptake. In the recommendations, we discuss the possibility of exploring innovative ways to offer flexible working within the constraints of the existing contract that could support staff in balancing their personal and professional roles as well as improve recruitment and retention.

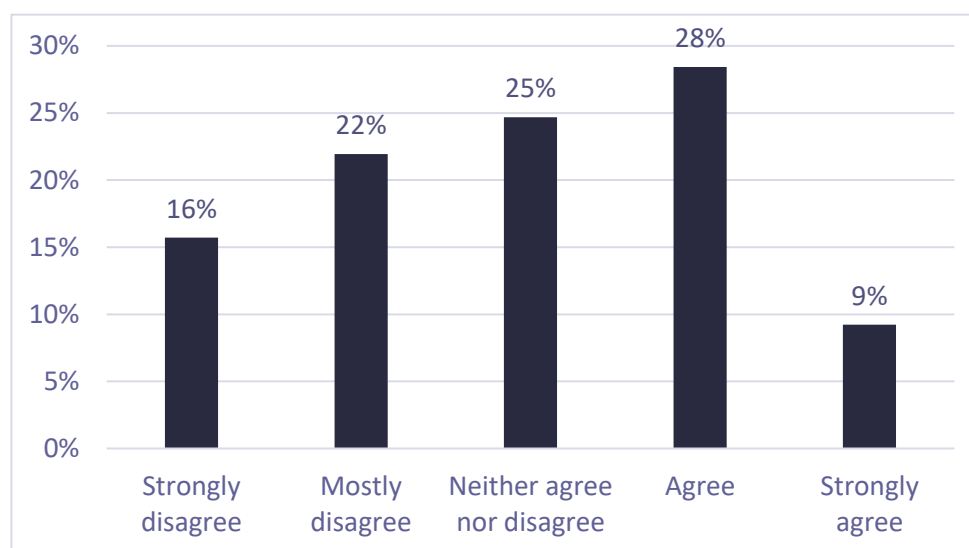
Induction and training

All Primes described extensive induction processes that new recruits undergo. These were different for each organisation, but many commonalities were observed. Most induction programs lasted a minimum of two weeks with modules covering the following core areas:

- the contract
- client interactions
- company-specific modules (Health and Safety etc)
- shadowing opportunities.

Despite the extensive attention paid to designing these induction programs, only 37% of advisers who responded to the survey felt the induction had prepared them well for the role. But as shown in Figure 19, 38% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that it had prepared them well.

Figure 19: “The induction I received when I started this role prepared me well for this role:”



Source: IES (2024)

The Line manager focus group pointed to the difficulties of bringing new recruits from outside the employment sector up to speed in a short duration. They suggested offering customised and differentiated induction programs tailored to the needs and awareness levels of those who have prior experience as advisers and those who don't.

“Everything takes a bit longer when they aren't experienced. There's so much information within the induction process.”

Line manager focus group participant

Line managers also discussed the induction they themselves received as line managers. They felt this induction should be tailored for those coming in as line managers, rather than being the same induction as that given to employment advisers. There was broad agreement that a differentiated approach for line manager induction and training would be helpful to enhance their own effectiveness to supervise and support advisers.

Beyond induction programs in the first few weeks of joining, a range of ongoing training and continuing professional development (CPD) were being provided by all the Primes. All organisations reported having well-developed learning and development platforms and strategies being available within their organisations. HR leaders emphasized that advisers had access to learning and development options over a wide range of training topics beyond the initial induction. In terms of sector-specific training, qualifications by the Institute of Employability Professionals (IEP) are popular in the sector, especially IEP Level 2. In some

organisations, these are a mandatory requirement, while in others they are optional. Qualifications by Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) are widely available and valued by Primes in a complementary way to IEP qualifications. Participation in Employment Related Services Association (ERSA) awards and forums are not universal but valued where it is used.

However, as the quote below describes, these offerings were not always seen as effective in achieving their objectives or equipping advisers with the skills they needed on the job. Despite the wide range of training opportunities being offered, the survey revealed that only 53% of respondents have taken up these opportunities to continue their professional development in the last six months. Of these, there was a split in the view on whether it had helped them perform their role better or not. 51% reported that CPD hadn't really helped them in the role, while 49% found it to be useful. If only half of the training is seen to be contributing to performance, then it raises questions over the scope and coverage of training topics as well as on translating training into practice. Qualitative evidence suggests that there may be some degree of challenge in providing the most appropriate training as captured by the quote below:

"The majority of the role requires a skillset none of [the advisers] have been trained on. Housing, mental health, addiction and convictions. We wear multiple hats in this role which takes away from our actual roles as employment advisers. [They are] unaware of the reluctance of a lot of participants to go into work."

Adviser survey respondent

Another perspective offered by the line manager focus group was to question avenues of formal training as the most appropriate source of enhancing learning and on-the-job performance. The quote below captures the importance of ongoing support, coaching, and mentoring as equally important and, at times, even more important than formal training programs.

"Coaching and mentoring is more important than formal qualifications."

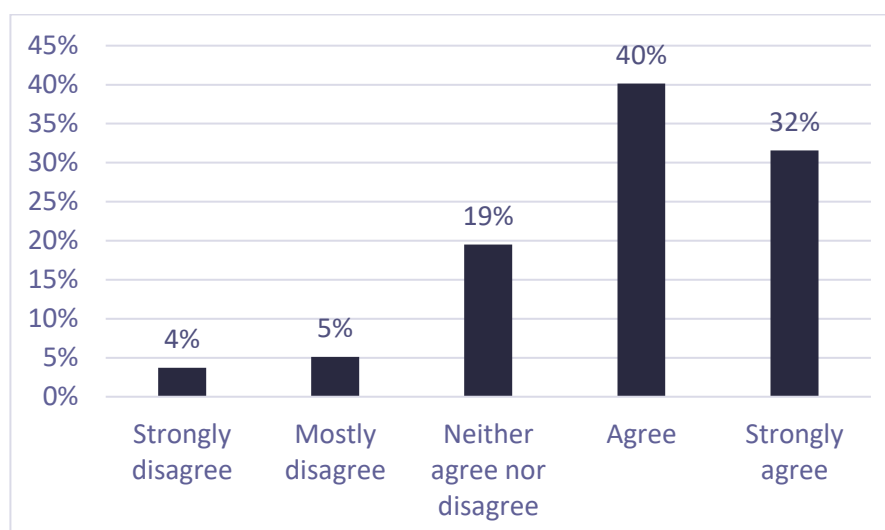
Line manager focus group participant

Inclusive culture, values, and well-being

Company values and culture emerged as important factors that shaped the experience of advisers in the workplace. Company values were featured prominently in the job

descriptions of many primes. The survey confirmed that 72% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that company values were important to them (see Figure 20).

Figure 20: “The company's values are important to me:”



Source: IES (2024)

In the section on job satisfaction, Figure 12 already showed that 80% of respondents agreed that their job offered them an inclusive culture that values people of diverse backgrounds, as well as supportive colleagues and management.

HR leaders reiterated the importance of keeping the workplace positive by sharing and celebrating successes and good news. Primes maintain a strong level of motivation and job satisfaction by celebrating success in a wide range of ways. HR leaders reported a greater focus on sharing good news, reward and recognition programs like employee of the month, awards, and celebration events rather than financial bonuses to motivate and inspire advisers.

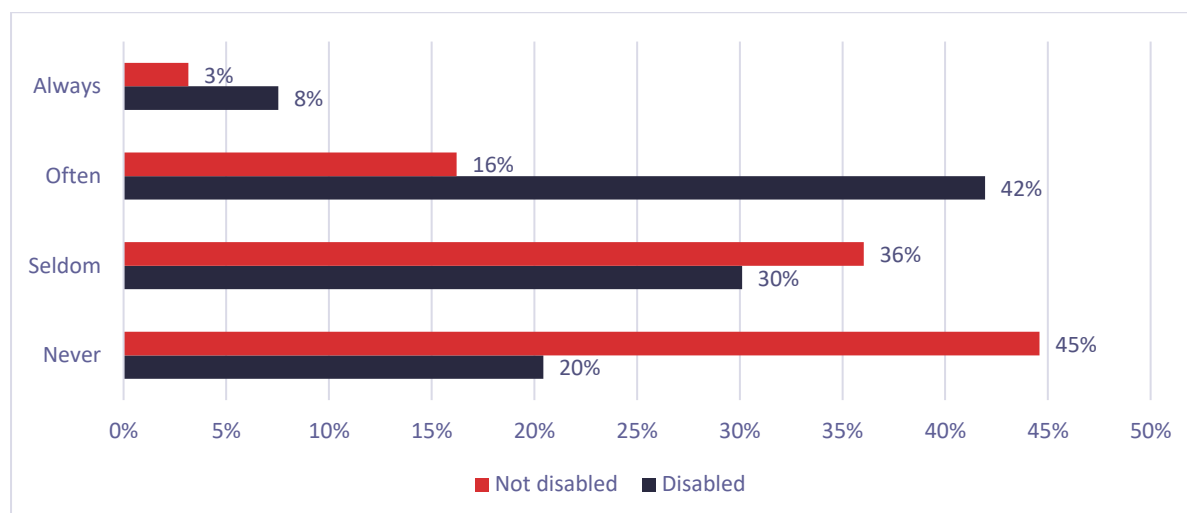
“When we do have success stories, the celebrations and things that we see in the comments and the enthusiasm around that, it's just priceless really.”

HR leader interview

Primes have also undertaken listening exercises, employee engagement surveys, and shared employee forums, to gain feedback from the workforce. This was especially crucial for employees reporting a disability or long-term health condition. Cross-tab analysis shows that 50% of respondents who reported having a disability or a long-term health condition were significantly more likely to have always or often felt unwell because of work-related stress compared to 19% of those who were not disabled (refer to Figure 21). Similarly, 43% of respondents with a disability or long-term health condition were more likely to feel that

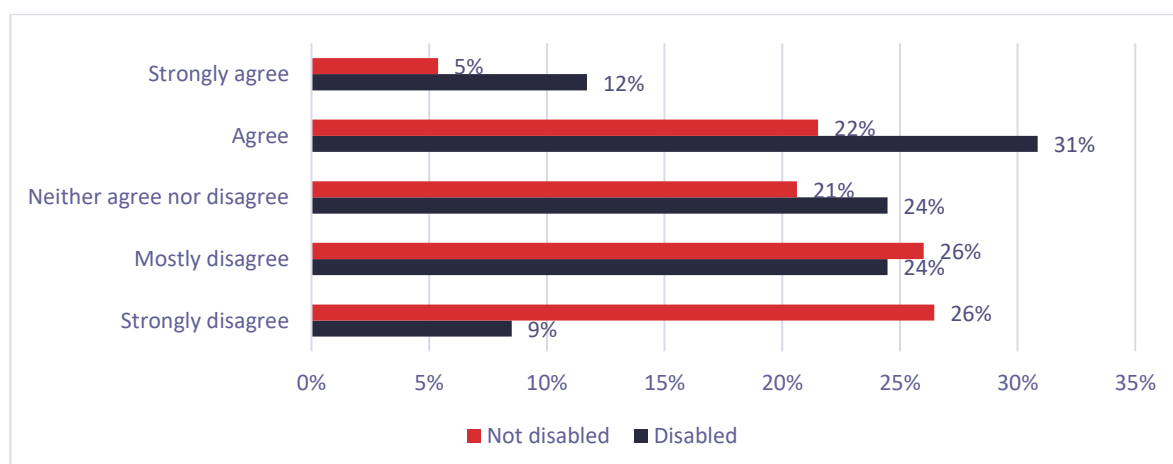
work meant they didn't have enough energy for friends and family compared to 27% of those with no health condition or disability (see Figure 22).

Figure 21: “During the last 12 months, I have felt unwell as a result of work-related stress” analysed by respondents with/without a disability or long-term health condition



Source: IES (2024)

Figure 22: “The pressure of work means that I don’t have enough energy for family and friends:”



Source: IES (2024)

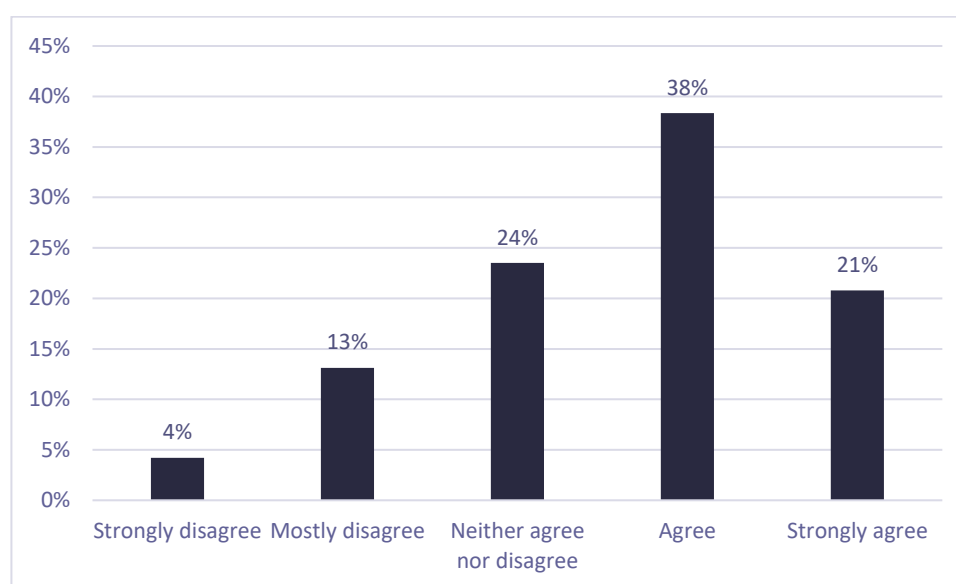
To help reduce the pressure and stress that the workforce experiences, these organisations have developed extensive health and well-being interventions. Well-being benefits and portals, as well as offering wider benefits packages, are designed to send a clear message that the well-being of the workforce is important. However, only 45% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt comfortable accessing individual well-being support when needed. On the other hand, as many as one in five advisers (21%) mostly or strongly

disagreed that they could access individual well-being interventions. This implies that there is room for improving the accessibility of the avenues of support and the trust needed to engage with it. This gap is more acutely experienced by persons with disabilities or health conditions. Only 47% of these respondents felt comfortable accessing individual workplace well-being support when they needed it, with 29% of respondents with a disability saying they did not feel comfortable doing so.

Ongoing support

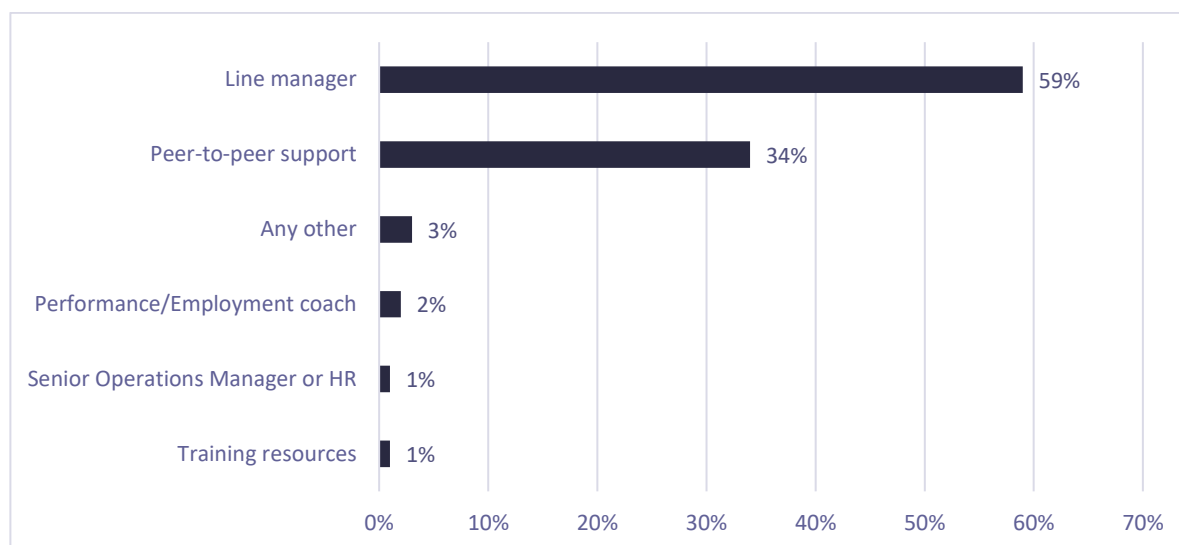
When it comes to supporting the performance of advisers, especially understanding and balancing the needs of the role, a good level of support is experienced by advisers. Figure 23 reveals that nearly 60% of advisers report that they get support to manage the needs of their role.

Figure 23: “I have received support to help me understand how to balance the various aspects of my role:”



Source: IES (2024)

The survey further explored different routes for support available to employment advisers as shown in Figure 24. The line manager and peer-to-peer support emerged as the two most preferred avenues for ongoing support.

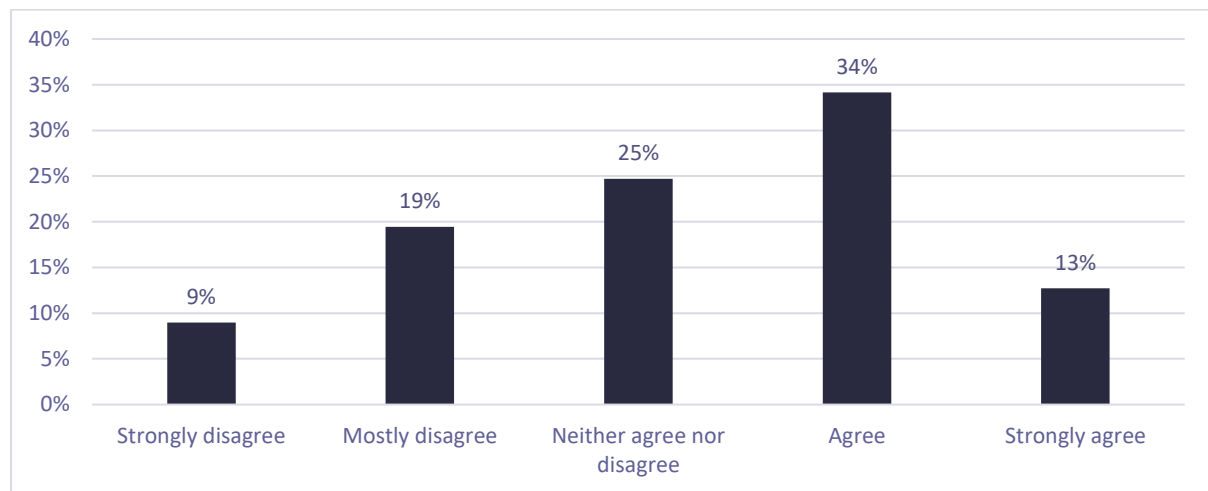
Figure 24: “When I have an issue, my preferred avenue for support is:”

Source: IES (2024)

Additionally, 79% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that peer-to-peer support was very important in helping them perform their role better, with over 80% saying this was because they were able to share best practices with their peers. This points to the importance of regular opportunities for advisers on Restart to have opportunities to interact among themselves and share ideas, discuss challenges and share best practices. A similar preference for peer-to-peer learning was expressed by line managers for their own development in the focus group we conducted. They shared that peer-to-peer support and periodic sharing of best practices was really valued when available. Those participants who had fewer regular opportunities for such interactions expressed a clear desire for more.

The survey also asked about formal and informal buddy schemes within the organisation. Findings show that 80% of respondents have not been assigned a workplace buddy. Of those who do have a buddy, over 80% feel comfortable reaching out to them for support. This again underscores the value of providing peer-to-peer support opportunities. However, survey respondents report a lack of sufficient support in addressing and engaging with challenging participants. Figure 25 underlines this point where less than half (47%) said the organisation supports them in engaging with challenging Restart participants. This triangulates with the finding discussed in section 4 on difficulties of engaging with complex participants.

Figure 25: “I get enough support from my organisation to enable me to manage the more challenging Restart participants:”



Source: IES (2024)

Overall, this section highlights that job satisfaction and retention are affected by a range of organisational engagement and support mechanisms including tailored induction and training programs, availability of flexible working options, an inclusive workplace culture, access to well-being support, and greater engagement with peers and line managers. In the next section, we delve more closely into the role of line managers in supporting and promoting the performance, retention, and progression of employment advisers on Restart.

VI. Role of line managers

“Balancing [the needs of the role] when you have a team that’s not that experienced you become just a sounding board.”

Line manager focus group participant

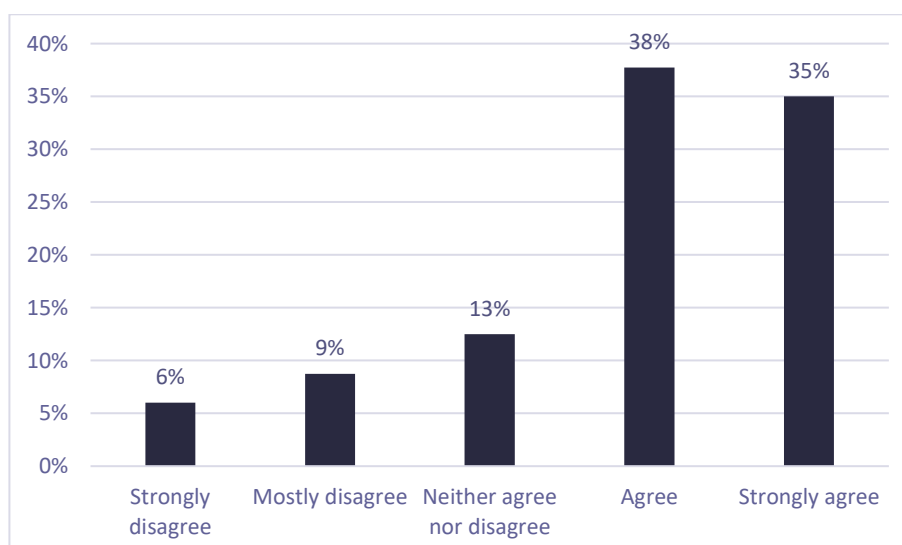
A key research question in this study was to examine the role of line managers. The survey emphasised the importance of line managers in supporting advisers and speaks to the quality of line management across Primes. In the previous section, Figure 24 pointed to line managers as the preferred avenue for advisers seeking support. This underlines the role of the line managers in ensuring the team's success. HR leaders reiterated the importance of good managers in reducing staff turnover, especially by knowing their team members well and keeping them motivated. Reduced turnover is important to maintain consistent service quality to program participants and in ensuring work pressures do not escalate for other team members due to absences.

“You have to be able to empower your employment advisers”

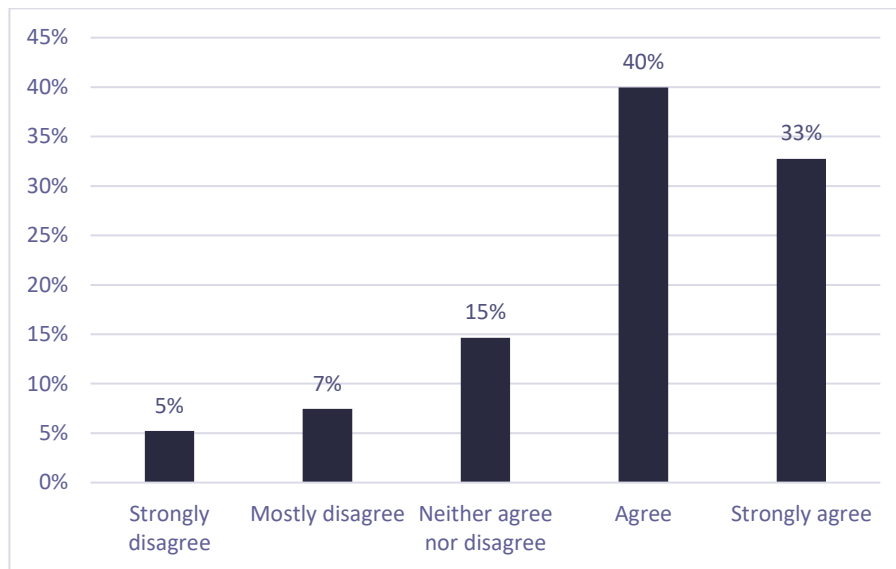
Line manager focus group participant

Advisers reported a positive view of the level and quality of support they received from their line managers. Figures 26, 27, and 28 demonstrated over 70% agreement among advisers that their manager understands and is sensitive to their daily work challenges, provides enough support to help them succeed on the job, and takes a positive interest in their well-being.

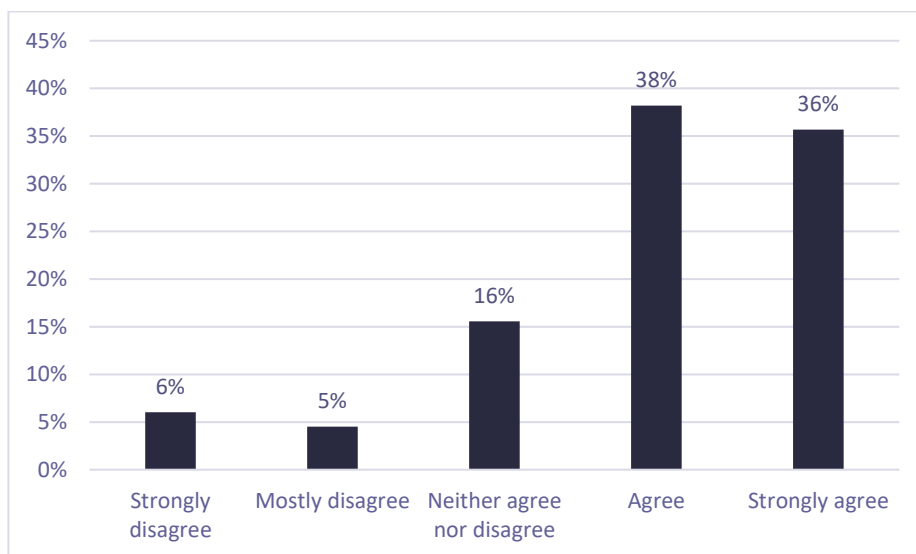
Figure 26: “My manager understands and is sensitive to the challenges I face day-to-day in my job:”



Source: IES (2024)

Figure 27: “I have enough support from my line manager to help me succeed in my job:”

Source: IES (2024)

Figure 28: “My manager takes a positive interest in my health and well-being:”

Source: IES (2024)

The consistency of these responses confirms that the overall level of satisfaction with line managers is very positive for this cohort.

The focus group discussion conducted with line managers revealed how complex the role of the line manager can be. Below are a few phrases quoted by line managers:

‘Juggling’, ‘plate spinning’, ‘no two days are the same’, ‘need a strong stomach’.

‘People management plus target management.’

‘The best managers are those who have been advisers themselves’.

To tackle this high pressure and demanding role of the line manager, at least one innovative example of an organisational structure change was mentioned that allowed for a separate quality and compliance specialist role to be created which then freed up the time of the line managers to be able to offer more hands-on support to advisers. Whilst this structure change depends a lot on a certain size and scale of operations, the group agreed that this could be effective in using line manager’s time and skills more efficiently.

The focus group also referred to the need for line managers to have a business mind and really understand the complexities of the contract. Rather than merely focusing on job entry targets, line managers are expected to take on a broader perspective to guide advisers as articulated in the quote below:

“It’s not just about job entries, it’s about sustainable employment.”

Line managers’ focus group participant

In response to their own training and development needs, the focus group participants questioned the effectiveness of formal training courses, suggesting other types of learning and development as well as emphasizing coaching and mentoring to develop their team members. Some line managers spoke of the need for line manager-specific induction programs tailored to their own roles and experiences. In terms of further training, some primes offer specific line manager training, some have leadership-specific training, and some have little training specific to the role. Only few of the line managers we spoke to had had an opportunity for peer-to-peer learning and sharing forums. This was widely appreciated by all as a means to enable best practice sharing. Line managers were also emphatic that it was important for senior management to consult line managers of advisers when rolling out system-wide changes as they understand what works and what is realistic.

In sum, all participants in the line managers focus group agreed that they would recommend being a line manager for Restart – for the right person!

VII. Recommendations

Ensuring the workforce development of employment advisers, on the Restart programme and beyond, requires concerted actions across the employee life cycle – encompassing recruitment, performance management, progression, and retention processes. To ensure that recommendations from this report are both relevant and feasible for providers of the React Partnership, we first presented our research findings at a workshop of senior operational and HR leaders nominated by all primes. This allowed the research team to discuss the emerging findings and place them in the context of individual organisations as well as the wider Restart contract. The suggestions and questions raised by this group allowed us to fine-tune the final set of recommendations made in this section.

These recommendations aim to offer each organisation an opportunity to reflect on its internal processes, organisational environment, size, and structure, which would shape its approach to strengthening the support and development of employment advisers who work with it. They are intended as a guide for achieving good practice in each of the workforce development areas rather than as a mandatory or compulsory action to be undertaken by all organisations.

We present the recommendations that have arisen because of this research being fully cognisant that each will apply in different degrees to each organisation. Some of the recommendations are a way of sharing good practice that is already happening in one or more of the Primes, some derive directly from developing suggestions from operational or HR staff within organisations, others from the wider research which highlighted transferable practice from elsewhere.

Improving recruitment

Job descriptions

These offer an early opportunity to set expectations of the role. The adviser role is special. It contains a rich, and in some ways, contrasting set of skills requirements and day-to-day experiences. It is also a role that is not well understood by the general public so it is likely that many people who see job adverts for advisers have only a cursory understanding of what it might entail. There is value, therefore in increasing specificity about expectations of the role in the job description.

- The reliability and accuracy of job description can be improved by sharing as many details as possible about the role, particularly participant profiles, including their

complex needs, the range of tasks the job entails, and the wide-ranging nature of support needed to be offered by advisers.

- Consider adding ‘coaching’ and ‘mentoring’ as named skills needed by advisers so that applicants have a better understanding of the skillset required to successfully hold the difficult conversations with participants, and the role these conversations play in empowering participants, shifting mindsets and ultimately transitioning to work.

Advisers are demonstrably motivated by the social value of their role, and the sense of mission that comes from helping people to move forwards in their lives. This can be made more of in the recruitment process by:

- highlighting the social impact of this role, the rewards of helping people and the community in order to attract candidates with the right motivation; and
- centring the company values and positive culture of the workplace as it is an important part of the job offer.

Hiring and selection processes

- Practices such as videos that show ‘A day in the life of an Adviser’ and group recruitment activities have been effective for some providers, and it would be worth those not using these methods to review for suitability.
- Practical recruitment activities, such as role plays and scenario testing, were reported as being a more effective mechanism to assess how well those new to the sector would be able to adapt and pick up the required competencies and skills.
- Review recruitment days to test the possibility of incorporating short sessions with existing advisers for a short Q&A, or description of the role.
- Use a telephonic pre-screening round to identify suitable candidates to lower interview time and costs.

On-boarding/ induction

- Peer-to-peer learning was identified as important throughout the research, but we found few structured buddy schemes or opportunities for sharing experiences and brainstorming solutions with peers. Induction offers a great opportunity to create communities of new starters as well as links with more experienced staff members in the same role, which can then be solidified through buddying schemes into informal but structured peer learning.

- Consider introducing differentiated induction programs for recruits with prior employment sector experience and those without.
- Seek feedback from recent recruits to identify what more (if anything) they needed from the induction process to ensure that they felt prepared for the role, and whether there were elements of the induction process that would have had more impact and value had it been delivered at a later point, for example three or six months into the role.
- Emphasize that ‘the why is as important as the how’ – look for opportunities to recast administration and compliance tasks that are critical in enabling job entry of participants.

Improving performance

Line managerial support

- Enhance line managers’ own readiness and effectiveness by developing and introducing a customised induction for line managers, especially if they have not previously been advisers themselves or line managed within the employment sector.
- Provide opportunities for peer-to-peer support for line managers to share learning and good practice among themselves to enhance their own effectiveness and support strategies.
- Utilise the broader ReAct network to offer line manager support through peer-to-peer learning forums especially for smaller organisations delivering Restart.
- Ensure appropriate line-manager specific training modules and development opportunities where these are missing.

Organisational support

- Explore innovative process improvements to help advisers reduce their workload and reallocate more time for engaging with participants. For example, through the introduction of a dedicated role of a quality and compliance manager etc. There is also considerable investment from providers in using AI to support adviser interactions, for example through transcription of interviews and production of actions as a result. Although these are in developmental stages, there are benefits to ensuring advisers are aware of these developments and able to feed into the process.
- Offer ongoing support beyond the induction period through to the end of the probation period and check in at regular intervals on what gaps the new recruit feels needs to be filled as they become familiar with the role.

- Explore creative ways to offer time-based flexible working or place-based flexible working within the constraints of the contract especially considering day one flexible working laws to enable staff to balance their personal and professional responsibilities such that they can be more engaged and less stressed.
- Review CPD for effectiveness in translating learning into actual job performance. This could include internal surveys, or matching feedback on learning and development from appraisals with individual performance uplifts and gaps. Good practice from the ReAct Action Learning Sets was to ask participants about impact six months after the ALS ended in order to assess how and whether changes were made.

Improving progression

- Implement and communicate clear pathways to progression offering different routes and being transparent about what is available from the start.
- Create different levels with or without financial increments to give a more nuanced progression pathway within the role, for e.g. introducing a senior employment adviser role, performance coach role, or probationary adviser levels where the structure allows.

Improving retention

- There are good practices in retention such as listening exercises, employee engagement surveys, and shared employee forums, which allow the opportunity to gain feedback from the workforce and events such as celebrations, drinks or meals, group walks or yoga sessions which emphasise the importance that providers place on employee well-being.
- It is important to promote an environment of psychological safety to enable people to come forward and share their thoughts openly as well as to encourage accessing the already available suite of well-being services.
- Given the diverse profile of employment advisers as evidenced from our survey respondents, it is important to encourage an inclusive workplace where everyone feels welcome and fairly treated. This could be achieved through different equality and inclusion initiatives such as delivering inclusive line manager and inclusive leadership training, encouraging periodic team inclusion events and meetings, listening deeply to staff networks, and celebrating different cultures and identity group events to name a few examples.

Next steps - making a difference to delivery

This research came from an identified need by the Restart Prime Providers to continue to recruit and support high performing advisers, and a desire to understand what is working well, and where there are opportunities for improvement. It is important that the research we are doing through the Partnership is useful to those designing and delivering employment services, and so we would welcome feedback on this project, its findings and ways that we can support you and colleagues to take this work forward. If you would like to get in touch, then you can email us at: jane.mansour@employment-studies.co.uk or use the contact form on the website www.restartreact.co.uk

VIII. Appendix

Demographic breakdown of survey respondents

Statistically significant findings were generated by analysis of variables by other demographic characteristics, however. Analysis was run by age, ethnicity, gender and disability.

Just over one third of respondents were aged between 25 and 34 years old (N=143) with the fewest respondents being aged 65+ (N=6). For analysis, the age groups of 55-64 and 65+ were combined (55+ N=59).

Table 2: Breakdown of respondents by age (N=393, missing=9)

Age	Number	%
18-24	26	6.6
25-34	143	36.4
35-44	87	22.1
45-54	78	19.8
55-64	53	13.5
65+	6	1.5

Source: IES (2024)

The majority respondents identified as female (N=228) with a significant minority identifying as male (N=147). A single respondent identified as non-binary, with a small number of respondents preferring not to say (N=18). For analysis run by gender, these two groups were not included.

Table 3: Breakdown of respondents by gender (N=394, missing=48)

Gender	Number	%
Male	147	37.3
Female	228	57.9

Non-binary	1	0.3
Prefer not to say	18	4.6

Source: IES (2024)

At just over three quarters of responses, most respondents to the survey were white (N=304). For purposes of analysis, the other smaller ethnic groups were combined to create an 'Any other ethnicity' group (N=85).

Table 4: Breakdown of respondents by ethnicity (N=389, missing=53)

Ethnicity	Number	%
White	304	78.1
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	12	3.1
Asian/Asian British	23	5.9
Black/African/Caribbean/black British	30	7.7
Chinese	1	0.3
Arab	3	0.8
Other ethnic group or prefer to self-describe	16	4.1

Source: IES (2024)

Finally, we ran analysis by respondents health status. Most respondents considered themselves to have no disability or long-term health condition (N=224). A significant minority considered themselves to have a long-term health condition (N=72) with fewer considering themselves to have a disability (N=22). For analysis, respondents considering themselves to have a disability, or a long-term health condition, were grouped together (N=94) for comparison with those who did not have a disability or health condition.

Table 5: Breakdown of respondents by disability (N=387, missing=55)

Age	Number	%
A disability	22	5.7
A long-term health condition	72	18.6
No disability or long-term health condition	224	57.8
Prefer not to say	69	17.8

Source: IES (2024)

Bibliography

Bryson C, Coutss A, Downing C, Knight T, Lloyd R, McKay S, Mukuria C, Purdon S, Rayment M, Svanaes S (2022), *An evaluation of the Group Work (JOBS II) trial*. Department for Work and Pensions

DESE (2022), *Utilising soft skills training to enhance work readiness*. Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment

Fearn H, Johnson C, Newton B (2009), *Activity and Learning Agreement Pilots: Programme Theory Evaluation, Working Paper 3 - Activity Agreement Provision*, Institute for Employment Studies

Foley B, Meager N (2012), *Work Programme Evidence Review: Programme Delivery*, Institute of Employment Studies

Rosholm M, Skipper L, Sørensen K (2020), BIP: *Indikatorer Och Jobb-Sannolikhet. Huvudpunkter*, Aarhus University trns. Google Translate

Sienkiewicz L (2012), *Job profiles and training for employment counsellors*. European Commission Mutual Learning Programme for Public Employment Services, European Commission