



Briefing paper

Strategic Partnership Working: What Works

ReAct: the case for collaboration

As we move towards greater local devolution and more locally commissioned employment support, realising the ambition to better integrate across the support landscape will underpin efforts to Get Britain Working.

ReAct found that partnerships and collaboration between providers and local stakeholders can bring benefits, to operational delivery alongside participant experience, resulting in a more comprehensive support offer and better tailoring of support for participants. Place-based collaboration allowed partners to better understand the strengths and opportunities in the local area, access to sustainable work, and participant support needs; and where there were gaps in services, have shared conversations about how to address these.

Potential benefits to collaboration in Restart included:

- **Access to labour market information:** Combined Authorities, along with the successor organisations to LEPs, could provide labour market information and help providers identify emerging work opportunities and trends in their local area.
- **Linking up with support services to best meet participant needs:** Working with voluntary and community sector organisations could bring access to specific support and expertise, such as access to drug and alcohol counselling. Local authorities could offer support to participants with wider needs, such as housing information via their

housing teams. In one area, a provider worked with both public and voluntary organisations to map support for refugees to join-up support. There were examples of partnerships with training services. For example, a partnership with a digital inclusion training provider enabled participants to access support to improve their digital skills, build confidence with navigating online job search, and perform day-to-day activities like online banking.

- **Access to vacancies and understanding employer needs:** Local stakeholders could support the brokering of relationships with employers and enable participants access to job fairs.

However, the development and maintenance of strong partnerships was not consistently embedded in practice and some stakeholders, including local and combined authorities, did not have any relationship or regular dialogue with Restart providers.

What works to proactively foster strategic partnerships?

Implementing local Get Britain Working Plans and achieving an 80% employment rate will mean mobilising local stakeholders to join up work, health and skills support and work. Research conducted by the ReAct partnership into strategic collaborations found many transferable insights to inform this work and prioritise when developing effective and enduring partnerships with local stakeholders:

- **Be visible and invest in relationships:** Partnership building and collaboration must be consistently invested in. During Restart, providers have had staff members dedicated to maintaining relationships by attending regular meetings and local employability forums. Some providers even created these forums where they did not exist.
- **Get the communication basics right:** Partners with strong relationships with Restart often attributed this to simple factors such as the provider having a general openness and willingness to collaborate, keeping them informed, having regular meetings, and replying promptly to telephone calls and emails.
- **Provide local, relevant information:** Stakeholders appreciate specific, localised information about their area, rather than nationwide or regional feedback about the wider contract. For example, one provider shared site-specific updates with stakeholders, offering a detailed review of local activities and support provision,

participant engagement with training opportunities, and evolving patterns in the challenges faced by participants within the community.

- **Create a shared ‘call to action’:** Collaborating with partners to establish a shared vision and build mutual understanding is key to delivering positive employability outcomes. Being open about the challenges faced, and working together to find solutions, can help partners identify and build opportunities for collaboration. For example, a provider struggling to connect with employers in a particular sector may find local partners can leverage their networks and local knowledge to facilitate connections.
- **Involve local staff alongside the centralised partnership function:** Local, ‘on-the-ground’ staff in partnership building, can bring a deep understanding of the activities, challenges faced and achievements in their locality. They bring contextual awareness and local insight which helps build credibility and trust with partners. By drawing on established relationships and networks developed through their experience in local employability delivery, they are well-positioned to foster collaboration with stakeholders.
- **Extend a 1:1 relationship into an organisational one:** While strong one-to-one relationships can be the bedrock of effective organisational relationships, relying too heavily on individual connections can leave relationships vulnerable if there are staff changes. To mitigate this risk, providers can involve other individuals, such as advisers from local offices and employer engagement teams, in regular meetings and partner collaboration to enable broader, organisational relationships to be built.
- **Invite stakeholders to visit the site:** In person visits help foster deeper, more collaborative relationships and offer firsthand insight into day-to-day operations, the services delivered, and the individuals supported. Experiencing the programme in action enhances understanding of its impact and relevance within the community.
- **Make proactive contact with new staff and new organisations:** The support landscape around skills and employability is ever-changing creating. In this dynamic context, building and sustaining partnerships must be embedded as continuous practice.

Achieving the ambition of an 80% employment rate through local Get Britain Working Plans will take more than delivering programmes – it demands a culture of collaboration. The insights from the ReAct partnership underscore that effective partnerships are intentional, built through visibility, trust, and shared purpose. By embedding cross-sector collaboration into the foundation of employment support, providers can unlock the full potential of local support systems. ReAct’s research highlighted practical ways that relationships can be continuously nurtured and fully utilised to move from promising practice to a consistent principle.