



Briefing paper

Supporting the frontline staff of the future: Lessons from ReAct

Employment advisers, also known as job coaches or employment coaches, have a critical role in supporting people in getting back into work¹. Recruiting, retaining and developing a workforce of advisers with the necessary combination of skills to support Restart participants has been a cornerstone to the programme's success.

The [ReAct Partnership](#), an industry-led collaboration of eight employment service prime providers, aims to support the continuous improvement of the Restart workforce through action research, shared and iterative learning, and the development of applied evidence-based resources. The partnership conducted research in 2024 called [Maximising Adviser Impact; supporting workforce development](#), which examined the workforce development of Restart employment advisers through three key areas:

- Understanding and articulating the skills needed to be a successful adviser.
- Identifying best practices in supporting the recruitment, retention and progression of advisers.
- Understanding the role of line managers in development and retention of advisers.

This research used a mixed-methods approach, which consisted of analysing management information from provider organisations, interviews with HR leaders, focus groups with line

¹ Broadstreet J, Clayton N, Crossfield J, Elmore J, Gooding O, O'Donovan R, Roberts J. (2024), [The Evaluation of the Restart Scheme](#). Department for Work and Pensions

managers, and a survey responded to by more than 400 employment advisers from across the Primes.

Insights for future commissioning

How can the insights from ReAct research inform the development of the employment support workforce of the future to enable the Get Britain Working ambition in practice?

The skills needed to be an employment adviser

The adviser role is complex due to a diverse range of skills required to deliver it. In the ReAct survey, more than 90% said that communication, customer service skills and interpersonal skills (or the ability to build rapport) were very important. Between 75% and 80% of survey respondents also thought the ability to handle and hold difficult conversations with participants, diary and time management, and resilience were very important skills.

The characteristics of Restart participants have changed over time, with participants increasingly presenting a diverse and complex range of challenges that reflect their individual circumstances. HR leaders and the survey responses for the ReAct research emphasised the need for a greater focus on listening skills and a coaching approach to the adviser role.

Plans under Get Britain Working to help individuals who have been out of employment for longer periods re-engage with the workforce represent an important shift in approach which will further effect adviser skills. With Connect to Work using the IPS (Individual Placement and Support) and SEQF (Supported Employment Quality Framework) frameworks, it is useful to look at the competence framework for IPS.² In the foreword to the framework, the adviser is described as needing to be 'multi-skilled' and references both the need to be able to develop relationships with people that build confidence and self-belief, as well as the need to be able to build relationships with employers and partners. Contract holders will need to consider how the upcoming expansion of the support framework for participants, and the interplay of public services and employers, will impact on the relationship building skills needed for the adviser role. Defining and articulating the combination of adviser skills needed will be a key factor in preparing for the future.

Recruiting advisers

Analysis of job descriptions used for the role of employment adviser by organisations across Restart showed a range of approaches being used to articulate the skills needed. The ReAct research found that just 50% of the employment advisers that engaged with the survey

² [IPS competence framework and curriculum: guide](#)

agreed that the role was what they had expected when applying, which would suggest that having job descriptions that are clear about expectations and what the job entails, are a key factor in ensuring a targeted recruitment drive. Being transparent throughout the recruitment process about the breadth and variety of the role is one way to avoid a mismatch between expectations and reality for new advisers. The research saw examples of good hiring practices such as pre-screening calls, videos demonstrating ‘a day in the life of an Employment Adviser’, role plays, and scenario testing, among others. These are all effective ways to ensure that candidates are aware of and well-prepared for what the adviser role entails and the skills they will need to achieve high performance.

Having social impact motivates staff

More than 75% of the survey respondents to the 2024 adviser research said they were strongly motivated by the social impact of their work. This indicates that acknowledging and highlighting the opportunities for making a positive difference to the community through this role can help to attract candidates who share that motivation.

Of the respondents to the adviser survey, 72% reported that the company values are very important to them. This suggests that employment support providers should centre company values and positive workplace culture in recruitment ads and job descriptions as it is an important part of the job offer. With Get Britain Working looking to tackle a range of social and individual barriers to entering work, ensuring a clear focus on purpose and values may be a factor in finding the advisers needed to unlock this potential.

The research also underscored the importance of celebrating successes and sharing positive stories of social impact, which would indicate that a clear internal sharing focus could help maintain levels of social impact motivation among staff.

Retention

Once in post, focus moves to ongoing performance, retention and progression. We explored formal and informal induction experiences such as training programmes and peer-to-peer learning support. The induction period offers the opportunity to create communities of new starters as well as link them with experienced staff members in the same role.

Of those that responded to the survey, 79% of agreed or strongly agreed that peer-to-peer support was very important in helping them perform their roles better, which led to one of the recommendations of the research being to develop buddying schemes and peer learning forums.

Transparent communication of career progression routes and experimentation with flexible working approaches emerged as additional recommendations for providers to consider offering to support advisers in delivering high performance alongside their wellbeing.

Being an employment adviser is a complex and challenging job, and line manager support is especially seen to be a critical factor in developing and retaining good quality staff. Two-thirds of the employment advisers surveyed reported their line manager to be their preferred avenue of support. Most advisers (75% of survey respondents) agreed or strongly agreed that their manager understands and is sensitive to the challenges they face in their role, indicating how important good line management is in the successful performance of the employment adviser.

However, being a line manager can be challenging, and focus groups with line managers of employment advisers revealed a complex picture of their role in supporting and developing front-line staff through challenges such as managing difficult conversations or managing caseloads. Therefore, the report recommended that employment services explore opportunities for peer-to-peer support for line managers to share learnings and good practices. The report also recommended a differentiated induction for line managers to allow a focus on the specific nature of the role and to build the skills needed to support advisers. Again, this was in response to feedback through line manager focus groups. As Get Britain Working brings a period of further change, these recommendations offer valuable suggestions to help line managers guide their teams with confidence and clarity. Collaborative opportunities could be provided within organisations or through partnerships between regional organisations, particularly under a more devolved landscape, to enhance localised understanding of the challenges experienced by the adviser workforce.

Preparing for the future

Alongside Get Britain Working, other changes are affecting staff skills and experience. The introduction of AI into the employment services sector will affect how the role of the employment adviser develops, and the skills staff need to succeed. The conversation on this topic is ongoing, with ERSA recently launching a paper on AI³ and the ReAct partnership exploring the variety of approaches being piloted across the programme.

Managing change itself will also be a focus for retaining existing talent and expertise to create the workforce that can respond to the ambition set by Get Britain Working.

³ [ai-in-employability-report.pdf](#)

Employment advisers have a pivotal role in the development of Britain's workforce by supporting those most marginalised in the labour market into work and are key to the success of Get Britain Working. To be most effective, staff must be supported to develop the skills and expertise to deliver in a new environment.

We started our research into the development of the adviser workforce by looking at three key areas:

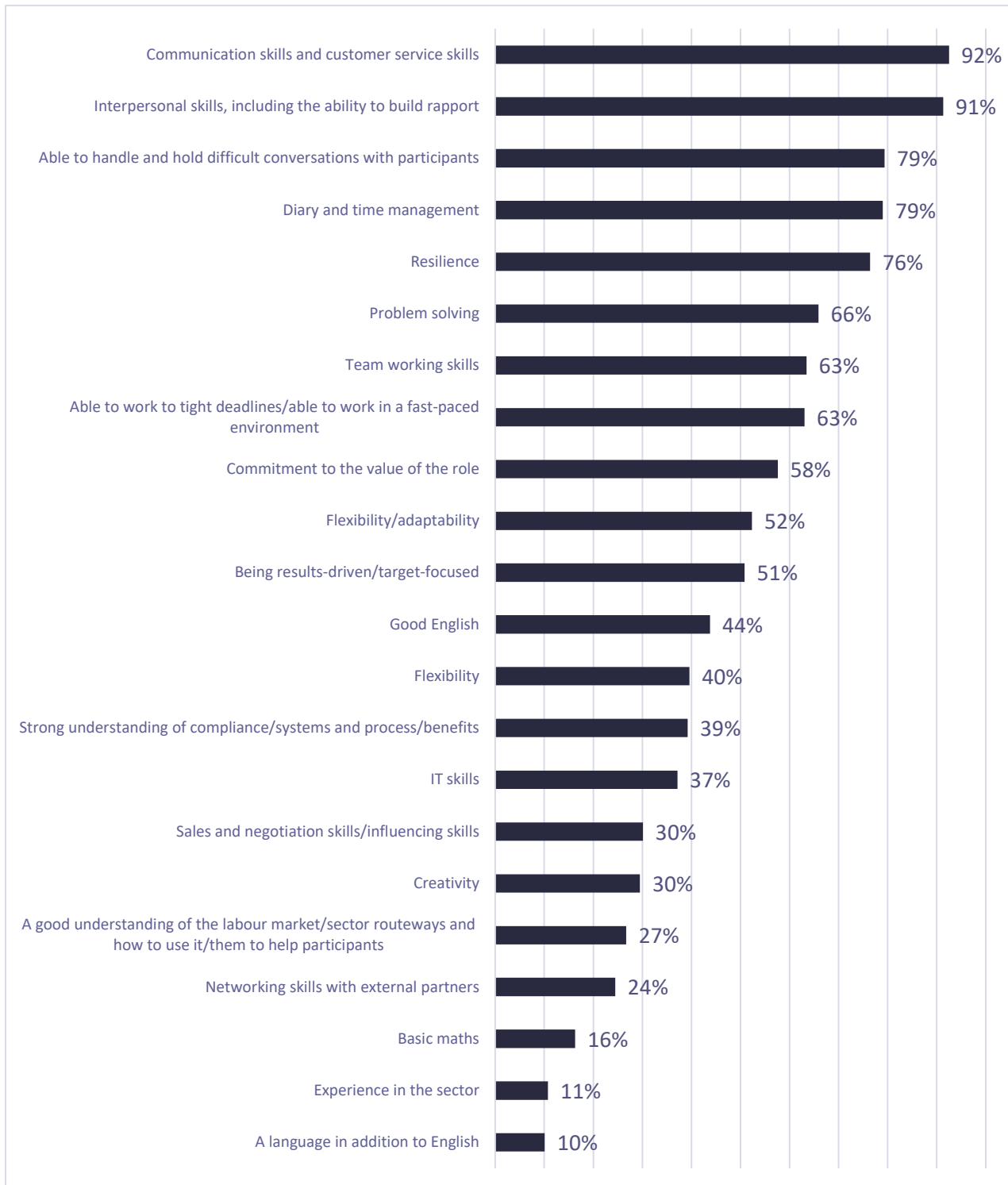
- Understanding and articulating the skills needed to be a successful adviser.
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To inform future employment support, key lessons are:

- Understand the participant profile for Get Britain Working and consider how that might affect the skills needed by advisers.
- Consider the framework of the contract and understand the implications for the adviser role – how is delivery different and what does that mean for how advisers work with participants and with wider partners?
- Be clear and transparent in job descriptions and advertisements to target the advisers of the future. Be careful not to undervalue skills such as coaching and listening.
- Articulate the social value of working with participants.
- Devise induction and peer-to-peer schemes that support skill development.
- Invest in developing the line manager role to provide advisers with the support they need to succeed.
- Look ahead at the way that employability is changing in the AI era.

Appendix

Percentage of survey respondents selecting Very Important on how important each skill/competency area below is.



Source: IES 2024