AI tools and their use in Restart

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April 2026

The ReAct Partnership

About Us

The ReAct Partnership is an 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, AKG, G4S, Ingeus, Reed, Serco, Seetec and Maximus — and is being managed by the Institute of Employment Studies (IES), working alongside the Institute for Employability Professionals (IEP) and the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA).

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Acknowledgements

The authors are indebted to the ReAct steering group for their continued support with all aspects of the ReAct research. Thank you also to the working group who attended the workshops held through this research and helped in identifying sites to visit for observations and interviews. Thank you to staff at Reed in partnership, Maximus, Ingeus, Seetec, and Serco for facilitating fieldwork visits and for offering their time for interviews. The project also benefitted from the expertise of staff at Hudson & Hayes, ERSA and BEAM for providing external stakeholder insights. A final thanks to the PSO team at IES for formatting and proofreading the final report. Copilot was used in the reporting process to help synthesise findings and themes and proofread the draft document.

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Executive Summary

This research examines how Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools are being introduced and used in Restart, examining both the operational processes and the experiences of staff and customers using AI tools in order to generate practical learning for Primes and subcontractors. This report is targeted towards leads on technology and AI implementation at providers, alongside management who will benefit from the learning around change management for their staff.

Against a background of rapid growth in AI adoption across employability services, and wide variation in organisational readiness, providers view AI as a strategic opportunity. This research used participatory research including fieldwork at six sites, interviews with staff, and workshops with operational leads to map decision-making, check emerging findings, and validate insights.

AI tools are primarily being deployed at the early stages of the Restart customer journey, supporting: onboarding of customers, notetaking, translation, CV development, applications and mock interview preparation.

Implementation process

Strategic working groups have overseen adoption and alignment of AI tools with wider organisational priorities. Providers are generally aligned in their focus on reducing administrative burdens, improving customer experience, and strengthening quality assurance.

Tool selection is shaped by strict data protection to ensure that personal data is kept safe, and used in an appropriate manner, usability, and partner capability criteria. Approval processes internally, and with the DWP have been described as structured, iterative, and often time consuming due to compliance and data-security requirements.

Rollout of tools typically follows a phased, pilot-led approach supported by layered training, clear communication to staff and the use of internal champions to build confidence and sustain engagement. Implementation is often resource-intensive and slower than anticipated due to iterative refinements being needed.

Enablers in the effective rollout of AI tools include existing familiarity with AI, integration with existing/familiar systems, appealing to advisor motivations, close communication with developers of tools and gradual introductions to cascade buy-in from staff. Barriers stem from staff apprehension, uneven levels of digital confidence, fears of role replacement, and resource intensity when refining tools.

Staff generally reported AI tools are easy to use once trained, and high confidence in using AI tools, supported by user interfaces with familiar, intuitive features and practical training. Managers noted that confidence varied across their teams, particularly among less tech-savvy staff. Staff with previous

experience of using AI were easier to engage, more curious, and positive about its benefits, while initially sceptical colleagues warmed to using tools once seeing them in operation.

Interviews with staff provided insights into experiences of using AI tools with customers, with staff reporting that their customers were mostly aware, and comfortable with AI use, with advisors gaining consent and addressing concerns where needed. Discomfort was most common among digitally excluded customers or those wary of risks associated with technology. Tools enhanced the customer experience, particularly for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) customers who benefitted from the increased communication facilitated through notetaking and translation tools.

Advisors highlighted mixed feelings about further AI implementation, being concerned about tools extending to "taking away" more of their core responsibilities. Staff and external stakeholders emphasised that the most successful future adoption will come from targeting AI at repetitive tasks such as notetaking and meeting summarisation, mapping and formalising the informal use of AI tools already occurring (for example, CV adaption using AI assistants) and strengthening AI literacy for both staff and customers. Providers furthest along the implementation journey emphasised that AI should augment and not replace advisors' relational work with customers and that truly meaningful adoption is dependent on targeting staff challenges, engaging staff early, and ensuring tools genuinely support the human aspects of employment support.

Introduction

Context

Since the introduction of widely available consumer large language models in recent years, the accessibility and adoption of AI tools in employment support has increased. ERSA[1] provided insights into the potential uses and impacts of AI tools in employability support and highlighted the potential of AI, and the appetite from the sector for widening its adoption to improve the quality of support. The ERSA paper also identified challenges in adopting AI tools, highlighting differing levels of knowledge amongst staff and readiness of existing systems for integration of new technologies as a barrier to implementation, particularly for smaller/sub-contracted providers.

In a period of rapid technological change, where policy makers and practitioners are keen to harness the potential of AI tools to address current challenges in employment support, there is significant value in generating and sharing evidence around the effective implementation and use of AI within Restart provision. Views in the ERSA paper were reflected by the ReAct steering group, with AI adoption identified as a key priority, but with inconsistency noted in adoption of tools across organisations.

This project used participatory research to identify and share practice to support Restart providers to adopt AI tools effectively. The findings from the research will help to inform delivery for the remainder of the Restart contract and provide broader learning for policy makers and practitioners around AI tool implementation in employment support services.

Research aims

This research aims to identify the **operational** processes providers have followed when integrating AI tools into workflows, and the **experiences** of staff and customers who interact with these tools. **Operational** research questions included:

- How are tools being used? (which tools and for what purposes?)
- Are tools tailored to employability support?
- What have been the barriers and enablers to implementing AI tools?
- What support have staff needed to implement the use of AI?
- How have Primes navigated data protection?
- What has been the process of signing off AI use with the DWP?

[1] Employment Related Services Association. (2025). *AI in employability: Opportunities, risks and implementation considerations.*

Research questions focused on the **experiences** of staff and customers included:

- How easy or difficult has it been for staff to use AI tools?
- How does AI affect the staff experience of providing employment support?
- How does AI affect staff job satisfaction and wellbeing at work?
- How have perceptions of AI tools from staff changed over time?
- What do staff perceive the future risks and benefits of using AI in employment support to be?
- Do staff feel comfortable discussing AI usage and explaining tools to customers.

Research questions around future facing aims were also an area of focus for this research, and included:

- What level of AI adoption should be proposed?
- How can providers drive use of AI through supply chains if they don't share systems?
- How can future uptake of AI tools be effectively enabled within employability support?

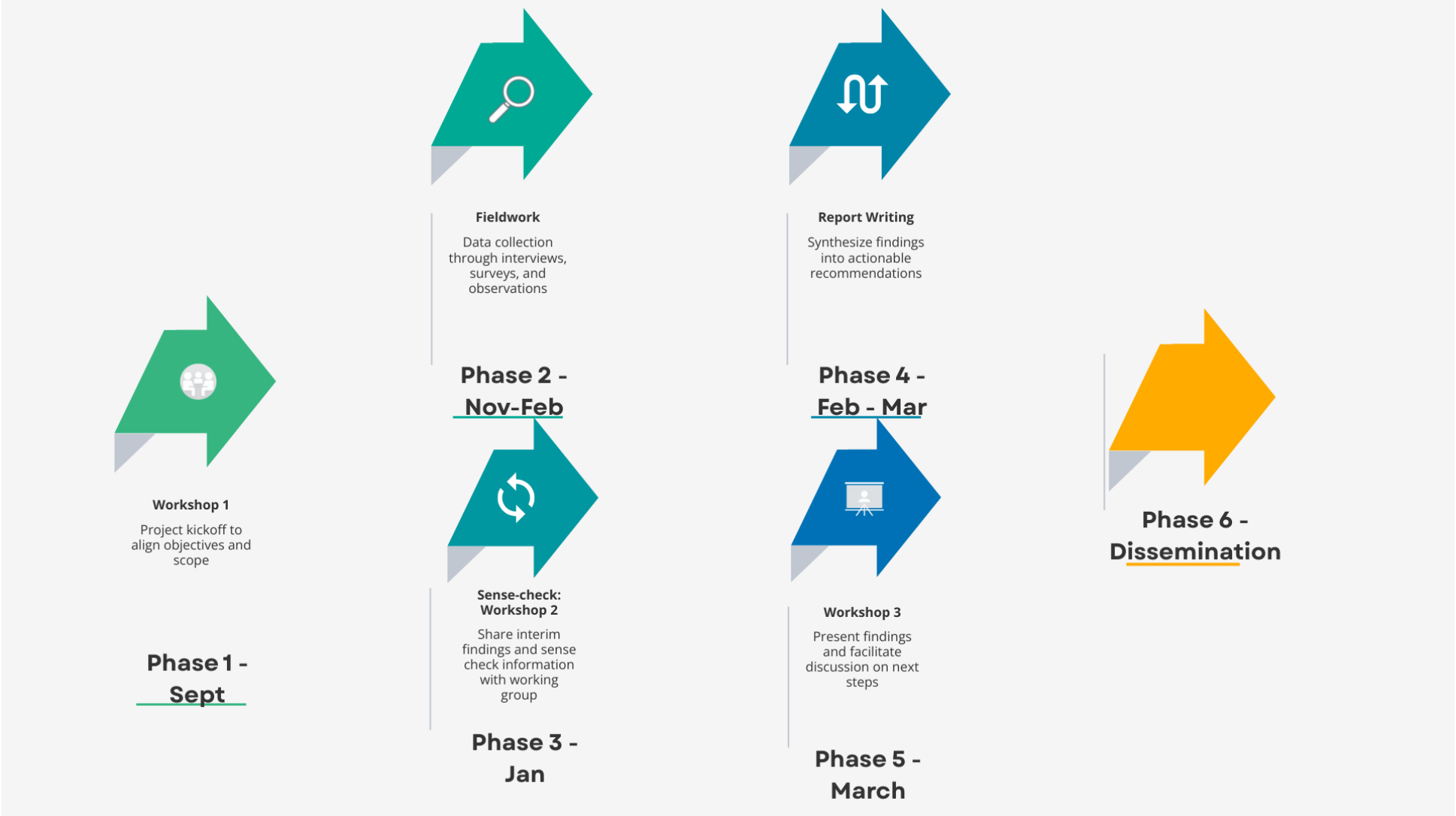
A full list of research questions set out in the proposal for this research can be found in the annex of this report.

Methodology

To achieve these aims, and to keep pace with developments within AI tools and implementation throughout the duration of the project, six fieldwork visits were undertaken at Prime provider sites where AI tools had been implemented. These visits consisted of observations of different AI tools in use in employment support provision, and interviews with staff leading on implementing tools, and users of tools in day-to-day work. Tools observed were at different stages of implementation across sites, including full rollouts and early pilots, ensuring a breadth of coverage around implementation stages and considerations were covered. In total, 21 interviews were conducted with customer-facing staff, leads on AI implementation, and external stakeholders. This included employment advisors, office managers, business improvement leads, external evaluators, and AI tool providers.

Coupled with the fieldwork research, three workshops were held with the operational group. The first was a mapping exercise to focus on the decision-making processes taken within Primes concerning AI implementation, and identifying the stages of trialling, piloting and adoption across providers. This workshop also helped inform the development of the qualitative research design, including what sites to visit and topics of interest for interviews. The second followed the collection of qualitative data to share and discussed emerging findings and allowed for feedback from the operational group to be included into analysis. The final workshop will be conducted following delivery of the draft version of this report where the operational group will sense check findings and add additional insights where changes have occurred since inception of the project and collection of data. Figure 1 below shows the timeline for the workshops, fieldwork, and final report.

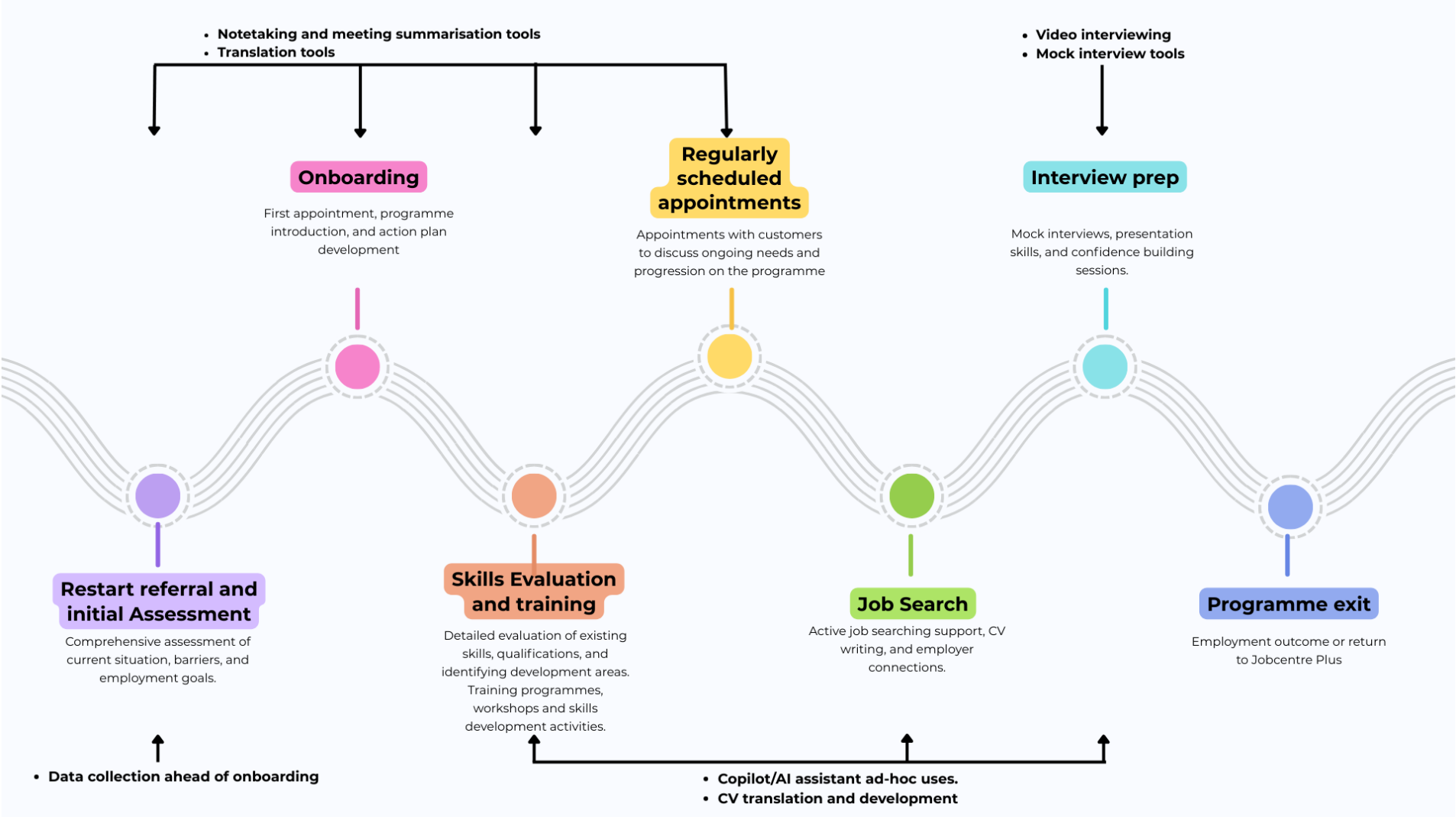
Figure 1: Research methodology and timeline



Extent and nature of tool use

Figure 2 demonstrates that a range of tools were observed across the six site visits and maps them to a timeline of the customer journey following referral to Restart. Many of these tools were focused on the early stages of the customer journey, helping with notetaking and translation in appointments with advisors following referrals to Restart. Others were focused on the early steps towards employment, with examples of CV generation for applying for roles using AI assistants and bespoke tools. Examples were also seen around mock interviews to prepare for successful applications.

Figure 2: Where tools are located on the restart customer journey



Implementation of AI tools

This section focuses on how Primes have implemented the roll out of AI, exploring their decision making, early priorities for AI use, the process of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) approval, and enablers and barriers of the roll out of tools.

Strategic working groups

Primes interviewed had working groups that oversaw AI implementation. These were high-level and strategic, focusing across the business, rather than taking place in local offices. These groups typically had a broader remit and included a focus on continuous improvement, operational excellence, or wider implementation of technology, though all included AI policy and use within their remit.

Overview of existing policies

Where applicable, Information was shared from two providers around their AI policies. Policies were largely in alignment, setting out aims for using AI around improving efficiency and quality of processes, and facilitating staff to make better informed decisions. Both these documents were framed around supporting staff and maximising the impact of their roles on customers. Policies did differ where specifics on what tools were being used and those that were off-limits due to concerns around data security, however, this may be due to one document being a public policy available online, and the other for internal use by staff. In the internal document, staff were also encouraged to contact their IT helpdesk with suggestions for new AI tools, with additional information around ethics, legal compliance, data management, and responsibility and accountability when using AI from an organisational perspective.

Initial strategic priorities for AI

Primes identified three overlapping early priorities guiding the initial implementation of AI tools: reducing administrative burden, improving customer experience, and strengthening quality assurance. Although these aims are interlinked, sites pursued them from different starting points and emphases:

- **Reducing administrative burden**. The identified tasks for AI support varied but commonly included exploring AI-assisted notetaking and meeting-summarisation tools. Other opportunities were speeding up onboarding participants and using tools to draft CVs and cover letters. Reducing administration could also then be framed as a way to increase advisor job satisfaction, by improving the advisor or customer relationship.
- **Improving the advisor and customer experience.** Customer feedback to Primes indicated there were participants who felt job coaches spent too much time entering data during meetings. As one strategic lead explained it:

> *"The main aim was looking at the participant feedback via WaveData. The key trend we picked upon there was we feel our job coaches are spending more time entering data on the computer than listening to us."*

Interviewee

- **By reducing administration during appointments**, it was hoped that advisors could focus on relationship-building and active listening, enabling them to better personalise support, including for specific groups with additional needs, for example, ESOL learners and customers with neurodivergent needs.
- **Strengthening quality assurance and consistency.** Introducing notetaking tools offered the opportunity to improve the quality and consistency of meeting summaries. Additionally, Primes wanted to increase the quality of support to their customers by teaching them to use AI tools appropriately in job search and employability workshops.

Factors considered when identifying and selecting tools

Primes described consistent criteria guiding AI tool selection: data-sharing and compliance, staff useability, and the suitability of potential partners.

- **Ease of use for staff**. Providers wanted tools that would not add to staff workload or create new steps in day-to-day processes, to maximise staff buy-in and support adoption. Some emphasised a preference for bringing multiple functions together in one place, ideally accessible through existing systems, so staff did not have to navigate multiple platforms. This included exploring a "one-stop shop" model within current case management environments, bringing together CV and cover letter writing, job search, career advice and sector information to support career guidance.
- **Data sharing and compliance were critical**. Some Primes required a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) before contracts could be progressed. If any solution entailed data leaving the European Union (EU), or in some instances, the UK, this was treated as an immediate "no."
- **Partner capability and fit mattered alongside the technology itself.** One Prime chose between two similar tools by selecting the supplier whose leadership had direct experience in the employability sector and could demonstrate a detailed understanding of Restart. It was felt that this experience would result in greater alignment between the two organisations, meaning the tool could be better targeted towards improvements.
- **Considerations around ease of use and data sharing** led to some Primes considering building their own customised tools or at least getting a partner to build something that operates on their existing system.

Approval of tools

Once a tool had been identified, Primes described the approval process as structured and compliance-led, involving both internal governance and engagement with DWP. There was broad agreement that the approval process was time-consuming and often iterative.

- **DWP approval was formal, detailed, and time consuming**. Primes described completing structured change request documentation, typically led by internal technology or innovation teams, followed by engagement with DWP, which included information security sign off. Early processes were described as involving significant back-and-forth, particularly as existing approval mechanisms had not been designed with AI tools in mind, and all parties were keen to ensure the process was done thoroughly

and correctly. More recently, updated documentation and clearer guidance include explicit reference to AI use, which was expected to help streamline future applications.

- **Information security and data protection were central to DWP approval.** Data storage location, data flows, and access controls were non-negotiable considerations. Primes referred to requirements such as Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs), confirmation that data was stored within the UK or EEA where required, and clarity on whether personal data would be processed by AI systems. Where hosting or processing arrangements did not align with expectations, tools required adaptation before approval could proceed.
- **Initially, DWP were responsible for risk management with the rollout and use of AI tools. As time went on, some interviewees noted that responsibility for managing certain risks had effectively been devolved to Primes.** While DWP sign-off remained essential, this devolving of risks from DWP was seen as one of the ways in which interviewees expected the approval process to be less onerous in the future. With Primes assuming more of the burden of risk management, it reinforced the need for robust internal controls.
- **Internal governance processes operated alongside DWP scrutiny**. As well as DWP approval, Primes had internal assurance frameworks. These included supplier due diligence questionnaires, review of certifications, evidence of secure data handling, and alignment with organisational AI policies. In some organisations, unified governance processes were used across multiple contracts to ensure consistency. Given the necessary checks and approvals, the process could take three to six months to onboard a supplier, before a rollout could begin.

Rollout and Staff Communication

Once tools were approved, Primes led a process of rollout and staff communication. Primes took broadly similar approaches to this. While tools and contexts varied, implementation was typically structured, phased, and supported by formal communication and governance processes.

- **Where external tools were being introduced, such as with recording and notetaking or interview simulators, rollout was typically pilot-led and phased.** Organisations began with a small-scale pilot, often in a single office or with a limited group of advisors. Pilots were used to test the tool in live operational settings, refine templates and processes, and assess practical fit with existing workflows. Rollout commonly followed a staged model, moving from early adopters to wider staff once learning had been consolidated. Implementation was iterative, resource intensive, and timeliness were often longer than initially anticipated, with refinements following pilot feedback.

- **Training was practical, layered, and reinforced over time.** Rather than relying on a single launch session, Primes described short, focused demonstrations, scenario-based walkthroughs, and roleplay exercises. Supporting materials such as slides, videos, and documentation were provided to reinforce this learning. Primes outlined that light touch expectations were placed on staff, with staff encouraged to try tools at least once during the start-up period, to support early adoption. Ongoing training, such as refresher sessions and reminders, was viewed as important for sustained uptake.

- **Internal champions had a central role in the rollout and scale up.** Where tools were being introduced, organisations identified volunteers or early adopters as "AI champions". These individuals were trained first, and then supported colleagues locally, providing simple troubleshooting and informal peer mentoring. Champions could be established in each office or branch, and regular drop-ins or feedback sessions created structured opportunities to share learning and sustain engagement.

- **Communications had a key part in successful rollout**. Initial rollout tended to be communicated via organisational emails, team meetings, or leadership briefings, followed by structured training sessions. Messaging commonly emphasised benefits for advisors and customers and clarified the intended use of tools. In staff communication, the need to frame AI carefully to avoid perceptions of job replacement was highlighted.

- **Tailoring the tools to organisational context was seen as essential,** and communicating this to staff was important. AI tools creators interviewed outlined how Primes did not favour off-the-shelf approaches. Training, templates, and guidance were adapted to specific roles, services, and operational processes. Tools had to be shown to be grounded in advisors' day-to-day work.

Multiple Primes noted that sustained enablement required ongoing training and monitoring of tool use.

Enablers for AI tool roll out

Providers highlighted several enablers that supported smooth rollout. Most of these were aimed at increasing staff buy-in and staff adoption of AI tools.

- **Previous experience using AI:** staff who had used AI tools before, whether inside or outside work, understood potential benefits and adopted AI tools more quickly.
- **Linking tools to existing systems:** locating tools within the same environment as existing (non-AI) tools meant people could pick them up quickly and avoided switching between platforms.
- **Appealing to advisor motivations:** framing tools as improving customer experience and social outcomes was felt to increase staff buy-in. This messaging is supported by ReAct research which shows that over three quarters of advisors are strongly motivated by the social impact of their work, and 90% feel the role lets them make a positive difference to their community and wider society.[2]
- **Ongoing communication between developers and users:** continuous contact ensured developers understood requirements from the outset and could iterate based on real-world feedback.
- **Gradual introductions for reluctant customers and staff:** initial testing with volunteer staff who were keen to use the tools; not mandating use straight away. As evidence of impact built, more hesitant staff came on board.

[2] Maximising Advisor Impact report

"Because it was such positive feedback, the buy in was there."

Interviewee

- **Champions and training for staff:** two Primes specifically recruited early sceptics as champions to help colleagues adopt the tools and to share the administrative load.

Barriers for AI tool rollout

Interviewees also identified several barriers to implementation. These related to staff perceptions and variation in experience levels, technical constraints, and operational complexity.

- **While staff having previous experience with AI was viewed as an enabler, those who were less experienced with tools could be more reluctant**. Some advisors had preconceived notions about AI and what it is used for – most commonly, fears around job replacement, or the tools being used to spy on what staff were doing. This meant that initial take up could be uneven. To allay these fears, one organisation showed staff that the tool could not be operated without human interaction and emphasised that they were being implemented to save advisors time and make their job easier, rather than to replace them. Staff perceptions of AI tools will be explored in more detail in the chapter 'staff and customer experience of AI tools' following this section.
- **Complex operational requirements proved to be challenging, especially when third party partners did not work in the employability sector.** Restart's complex compliance framework and documentation meant that it could take time to source a tool fit for purpose. One Prime gave an example of a partner having previously worked in a different sector not realising the length of transcripts required for Restart would be much longer, and the tool initially could not handle this.
- Though some strategic leads were prepared for trial-and-error, **where tools did not initially perform, staff confidence in them could drop.** Even if initial take up had been good, after two or three rounds of needing to feedback and refine, it could prove challenging to ensure staff continued using the tools, as they felt errors added to their workload.

Review and evaluation

Primes used a mix of monitoring data, qualitative feedback, and compliance review mechanisms to assess AI tools. Most approaches were early in their conception, and customer experience was proving hard to measure.

- **Feedback loops are used to support continuous improvement.** This is a process that starts during the implementation process but continues for reviews after rollout is completed. Primes described regular feedback channels with partners and internal project teams. Glitches or template issues are reported and refined. Some teams conduct A/B testing (controlled experimentation) of templates or pilot refinements across sites before wider rollout.
- **Where applicable, usage and engagement metrics form the foundation of monitoring.** Some tools included inbuilt dashboards showing how often they were used and what they produced. These mechanisms enabled Primes to identify advisors or branches with lower uptake and target additional training and support.

- **Primes attempt to measure both efficiencies and the quality of captured information.** A commonly cited metric was time saved in producing case notes or documentation. Primes can assess whether meetings are shorter, whether administrative burden is reduced, and how freed staff capacity is used. Alongside these efficiency gains, reviews look at the quality of the output, including whether notes are more detailed or structured, and whether advisors feel more confident in delivery. Customer feedback is sometimes gathered after appointments. These quality assurance and compliance checks are often embedded into review cycles, and some Primes conduct regular audits with compliance teams to check for data breaches.
- **For many of these metrics, formal measurement frameworks are still developing.** Primes are in the process of building structured evaluation frameworks to bring together usage data, quality metrics, and programme outcomes. However, several interviewees noted the difficulty of linking AI use directly to employment outcomes, given the number of intervening variables in employability provision.

Review and evaluation processes are evolving from basic usage monitoring towards more structured, multi-dimensional frameworks, though this is a work in progress. Current practice focuses primarily on uptake, quality assurance, and time savings, supported by regular review and feedback loops. Primes are seeking to understand longer-term impact, particularly in relation to customer outcomes, and are beginning to investigate ways to fully capture customer feedback.

Staff and customer experience of AI tools

This section details how using AI tools within Restart have impacted the experiences of staff and customers.

Staff experience

This section explores staff experiences of using AI tools, covering their skills, confidence and perceptions of AI and views on the effect of AI tools on their experience at work.

Staff perceptions of AI

The research explored what staff thought about AI prior to using the tools, and whether perceptions around AI could act as a barrier or enabler to use of AI tools. In general, there was a sense of curiosity around AI and its role in employment support among staff that were interviewed. Staff gave examples of using AI tools in their personal life or in previous jobs which provided an awareness of AI tools and their uses prior to rollout. This group reported a healthy scepticism towards AI. They were aware of its benefits but felt that it needed to be used carefully to enhance their role and customer support. For example, an Employment Advisor (EA) described being wary of AI that removes individual input from tasks, but is happy to use AI as a tool to enhance her role:

> *I think I'm open to something if I feel it helps and it's not taking away from the job that I'm doing. If I feel like "oh yeah, it's a bit quicker but it's not me authentically doing my role" I'm not into it.*
>
> Employment advisor

Staff members who were familiar with AI raised concerns around AI use more broadly, discussing risks to the environment, the labour market and perceived inappropriate uses of AI, such as in the creative arts. However, this did not seem to affect their views around using AI in their role.

On the other hand, staff driving the implementation of AI tools reported mixed levels of interest among staff and reluctance around learning new tools or making changes to working practices. Indeed, interviews and observations included reflections from staff members who had limited awareness of AI and were initially sceptical of how it was applicable to their role. However, once they saw AI tools being used, they felt more positive about them. While none of the staff interviewed indicated that negative perceptions of AI acted as a barrier to using it in their role, a Strategic Lead felt that improving perceptions of AI could increase uptake among staff:

> *I think perceptions of AI from individuals was something we didn't consider as deeply as we ought to. There will always be people who just don't like AI, who*

don't want to use it. They avoid transcriptions on Teams calls. Perhaps [due to] a lack of understanding of what AI does and what we want it to do.

Strategic Lead

Staff skills and confidence in using AI tools

Staff reported that AI tools were easy to use, and this was supported by evidence from observations where staff members typically appeared confident and at ease. Staff reported that this was enabled by intuitive interfaces for most tools and supported by training. However, skills and confidence differed among staff members. For examples, observations included staff carefully sense checking outputs and using follow up AI prompts to amend them, and examples of staff using outputs uncritically.

Staff who described themselves as early adopters or being interested in new technology found it easier to get to grips with new tools. Others said that it could be hard to learn new tools initially, but once they received training and gained experience, they were easy to use. However, staff also said that while they found AI tools easy to use, colleagues who are less tech savvy or resistant to new ways of working may have found it harder. Staff also had mixed knowledge about AI policy and strategy in their organisations. Management staff were typically more knowledgeable than EAs about AI policies and strategies. Access to training and guidance around good practice and data considerations in AI use for EAs was inconsistent.

Where staff experienced difficulties using AI tools this usually related to software issues. These staff described inconsistent quality of outputs, errors, bugs, or tools being slow. They usually felt able to resolve or work around these issues as time went on. Issues with AI tools being unavailable unexpectedly across a site or needing troubleshooting were also observed, with staff confidently dealing with small technological errors.

Staff also felt confident supporting customers to use AI tools. Observations included staff effectively communicating with customers about AI tools and teaching them to use AI assistants effectively to support drafting CVs and job applications. Staff who felt less confident in their ability to support customers use of AI tools said that their ability to do so depended on how familiar and confident they were in using a tool themselves.

As noted, training was identified as supporting staff to have a positive experience with AI tools. Staff were asked whether they had attended the Institute of Employability Professionals (IEP) AI module. Only one site said that they had engaged with the training. EAs were offered the opportunity to undertake the training, and those who did received the IEP Accredited Award in Artificial Intelligence for Employability with Gold Practitioner status. Their business improvement manager said that the module was good and highly relevant for their EAs. However, they reported issues engaging staff with the training and felt it could have been shorter. A member of leadership staff at another provider reported that they were aware of the module but didn’t use it as they had sufficient in-house training and resources.

Use of AI in day-to-day work

Staff were observed or discussed using AI tools for a variety of tasks, in line with the AI tools described in the introduction. EAs used notetaking tools in customer meetings to write minutes, summaries and action plans. Translation tools were used by EAs when working with ESOL customers, and one site provided AI assisted interview practice for customers. AI assistants like Copilot were used by EAs to draft CVs, job applications and do research to support customers both during and outside of customer meetings. Staff in other roles used AI assistants to support their daily work such as drafting emails or creating resources. Use of AI tools also included providing AI training and support to customers. Staff broadly regarded these tools as having a positive impact on their day-to-day work.

Across sites, different levels of buy-in and consistency of AI use were observed. Some sites had integrated AI tools into everyday workflows, while others used it in a more ad-hoc, or occasional way. This pattern reflected different stages of implementation. Sites with greater integration, more fully rolled out AI tools, and history of staff training and mentorship, showed much deeper integration than those still in earlier phases.

Positive effects of AI tools

Staff identified several positive effects of AI tools on their working life.

Time saving

The key improvement reported by staff was AI tools increasing efficiency and saving time. Notetaking tools saved time in appointments as staff spent less time taking notes and were able to more rapidly draft summaries and action plans. For example, an EA said that previously it would take multiple customer sessions to work on an action plan, but this could now be undertaken in one session with AI support. AI tools also saved time spent on tasks outside of meetings such as CV drafting and administration. The site using AI interview software said they were able to increase access to mock interviews for customers, hit their Key Performance Indicator (KPI) target for mock interviews more quickly, and free up advisors time for other tasks.

Improved customer engagement

Staff reported that AI tools allowed them to provide higher quality support through improved customer interaction. This was mainly due to staff using the time saved by AI tools to spend more time providing one-to-one support to customers. Staff were able to increase the number of appointments they provided, and notetaking tools allowed EAs to be more engaged during customer meetings.

Not having to take notes during meetings allowed staff to listen to customers more actively, be more responsive to what customers said and gave them time to have deeper discussions and talk to customers about their broader lives as well as their job search. This enabled advisors to gain a better understanding of customer goals and to pick up on wider needs and barriers such as confidence and wellbeing. They felt

that this improved customer experiences and that customers benefitted from closer and more trusting relationships with their advisors. As one EA said:

> *It makes my life so much easier, in certain aspects. I have to think about certain parts of my role less and can focus on the parts that are important a bit more. Like actually spending time speaking to the customer. In my mind I'm here to talk to someone to see how things have been going on the last few weeks... that's much easier to do when I'm not worrying about typing.*
>
> Employment advisor

Using AI assistants also allowed advisors to provide more tailored support for customers. Advisors reported that they could more efficiently and effectively research roles, sectors, or support needs that they were unfamiliar with using an AI assistant compared to a search engine and used this research to provide bespoke advice and guidance.

Increased ability to tailor support through using note taking tools to enable deeper discussions with participants and AI assistants for research was useful for providing support to ESOL participants. It allowed advisors to gain a better understanding of their background, experience and circumstances, and provide more tailored advice.

Higher quality outputs

Staff reported that AI tools supported higher quality outputs from customer engagements, such as CVs, applications and meeting notes. Advisors reported that AI assistants allowed them to produce CVs and job applications that were highly tailored to specific job descriptions. Staff also found that note taking software produced higher quality notes that are more succinct and accurate than those made by EAs without AI support. AI notes led to more continuity between appointments, as there was a better shared record. There were also examples reported where AI notes had provided evidence for safeguarding or data protection concerns, or when staff were challenged by customers. While staff acknowledged that producing high quality notes and action plans required sense checking and refining AI outputs, this was less time consuming than writing them from scratch.

> *Meetings are much more interactive now... It's saved time in that I write a lot more (notes) and do a lot less (note taking).*
>
> Employment advisor

Wellbeing and job satisfaction

Staff reported that these benefits led to reduced stress and increased job satisfaction. They reported that workloads felt more manageable and were easier to complete, which reduced stress and anxiety. Neurodivergent staff who were interviewed also spoke about AI assistants supporting them with

challenges at work, such as a member of staff with dyslexia using tools to support writing tasks, and a staff member with ADHD benefitting from a reduced admin burden.

Improved customer interaction was also associated with increased job satisfaction and wellbeing for staff members. Staff reported that that being able to build rapport and relationships with customers made their work more meaningful and allowed them to provide higher quality support that was more tailored to individuals and attuned to wider support needs.

> *I like the conversational part more. Meetings don't feel as awkward to attend… especially for some customers where it's harder to build rapport with them… because I'm not worrying about the typing, I'm able to focus on what they're doing. I find this much more helpful, much more enjoyable. I speak to people all day and copy the notes over into the system... it's definitely made my job more enjoyable.*
>
> Employment advisor

Negative effects of AI tools

Staff interviews discussed downsides or unintended negative consequences of AI tools. They noted that AI outputs were not always accurate and tools sometimes make errors including producing CVs and meeting notes with incorrect information. These issues were also identified in observations.

Staff raised that outputs can "feel" like they were written by AI, including particular uses of language and formatting that are characteristic of AI tools. This can be off-putting to readers or lead to generic outputs. This was addressed by staff sense checking and correcting outputs, and staff felt that this mix of AI and human skills produced high quality results efficiently. They could also request changes to notetaking software to address common errors such as misspelling company names. However, staff could not sense check translations in the same way, and observations included examples of staff using outputs uncritically, so this remains a key risk of using AI tools.

An overreliance on AI tools was also highlighted as a potential negative consequence by staff. A manager reported that staff at their site would get worried when a tool went down and did not feel confident reverting to manual approaches, and an EA said it was "panic inducing" when tools were unexpectedly unavailable.

> *"I think [AI] is very useful, but I think you need to be very careful about being over reliant on it, because it can derail you learning other key employability skills that you need to know."*
>
> Employment advisor

> *"On a personal note, I feel that it's making me redundant and lazy. It's taking my brain cells away slightly. I'm trying to use it cohesively with me, with my input."*
>
> Employment advisor

Data protection was another potential risk identified by staff. Most sites had policies and guidance to prevent personal data being uploaded to AI assistants, and observations noted several instances of staff removing personal data and informing customers of how their data would be protected. However, there were concerns at one site of personal data being entered into ChatGPT which could put customers at risk or break data protection regulation.

Customer experience of AI tools

This section explores how AI tools impacted Restart customers. Findings are primarily drawn from observations involving customers and staff interviews.

Customer awareness of AI tools

Staff made customers aware of the use of AI tools as needed and are transparent about this. Staff described and were observed explaining to customers the tool they would like to use, what they would like to use it for, and gaining verbal consent after answering any questions or concerns raised by customers.

> *"I say [to the customer]"we have a new system called Magic Notes, we both know I'm good at talking but typing what I'm saying is really hard. This system listens to us and summarises our meeting, it only keeps your information for a day and then it deletes everything. It enables me to get that summary and translate it onto our system without stopping talking to you, is it okay if I use that?""*
>
> Employment Advisor

However, observations and interviews identified cases where customers are not made aware of or asked for consent around AI tools being used, including notetaking tools and AI assistants. For example, one member of staff reported not disclosing their use of AI assistants to support CV writing and job applications, they prioritised getting tasks done quickly and felt that dealing with consent to use AI tools should be driven by staff who manage risk assessments and data protection.

Customer views on AI tools

Staff reported that customers are comfortable with the use of AI tools and customers who are interested in technology can be enthusiastic. Where customers are averse to AI this usually stems from concerns around technology (for example, online scams or being monitored), or a lack of digital skills. Staff address this by listening to their concerns, sharing information to reassure them and offering training to those whose concerns relate to digital skills.

"There's a lot of aversion and fear about using AI…We provide objective prompts that they can put into the system that will help with their job search and hopefully eliminate that little bit of fear they feel in using it."

Employment advisor

However, where customers remain wary or uninterested in using AI tools staff will accept this and use manual tools instead.

"We just explain what it is, what it does, and how it'll help them. Most of them are alright, and the 1% that still don't want to do it, that's fine."

Team leader

Changes in customer experiences

Customer feedback on AI tools was limited due to limited customer involvement in the research and providers being in the early stages of delivery and data collection around AI tool use. However, staff interviews and observations provided some evidence on how AI tools impacted Restart customers.

Observations and staff interviews suggested that notetaking tools and AI assistants did not directly affect customer experiences as they were usually used to support staff in their roles. However, staff using AI tools for meeting notes said customers benefitted from more human interaction and EAs being able to focus on conversation during the meeting. They described receiving positive comments from customers around EAs being more present in meetings, making more eye contact and being able to focus more on the conversation. Customers had also noted how quickly meeting notes were produced and gave positive feedback on the quality of CVs and applications produced using AI assistants.

AI translation and interview preparation tools had a more direct effect on customer experiences. Staff reported that AI translation tools enabled better communication and support during meetings and eliminated the need for a translator. An observation of AI notetaking tools used in conjunction with a human translator suggested that this approach enabled good communication and produced high quality notes and seemed to be an efficient way to effectively support ESOL customers.

Customers at the site using an AI interview practice tool had more access to mock interviews. However, observations of customers using the tool suggested mixed experiences. These observations included examples of customers confidently using the tool, and customers who struggled to use it seemed visibly annoyed. Discussions with participants suggested that participants did not like using the tool.

However, these issues with quality may be offset by the increase in access to practice interviews. For example, a customer said that while she didn't like it initially, she has now used it three times and has seen a benefit in real life interviews. An ESOL customer also told staff that her confidence in speaking English had improved through using the tool. Staff reported that the tool supported job outcomes through increased confidence and skills around job interviews.

"A lot of people who have been out of work for a long time are nervous about doing an interview, and this is a softer introduction for them."

Team leader

Suitability of AI tools

Staff reported that the suitability of AI tools differs among customer groups. For example, **digitally excluded customers** are less able or willing to use AI tools independently and can lack trust in technology. These were reported to be typically **older customers**, with **younger people** being identified as the group most likely to use AI tools independently. However, EAs noted a lack of digital skills among young customers beyond smartphone use.

Suitability of AI tools could also be affected by **neurodivergence**. On the one hand AI tools could be used by those with dyslexia to provide support around reading and writing, and to support people with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) to manage tasks and organisation. However, a neurodivergent customer reported that the AI interview tool was not suitable as it gave negative feedback on communication styles associated with neurodivergence.

AI tools may be particularly useful to provide support for **ESOL customers**. Staff reported that this group experienced higher quality communication and support. This group benefited from AI translation tools, AI assistants being used to create suitable resources, and EAs being able to provide more tailored support (see section 'positive effects of AI tools'). However, staff could find it hard to explain and use tools with ESOL customers, and raised concerns that translations could contain errors which they were unable to quality assure or rectify. Staff using AI interview tools felt that these worked well for ESOL customers who struggled with confidence in speaking English but were inaccessible for customers with more limited English due to no option to use it in different languages.

Future use of AI

Adoption of AI tools across sites has largely centred on piloting and early-stage implementation. Uptake at the individual level remains uneven in several locations, with a mix of confident, regular users and others who are more hesitant or reluctant to engage with the tools. This chapter details where AI tool use could be directed in the future, the opportunities and risks of widening adoption, and best practice for implementation and continued engagement with staff and customers utilising AI tools.

Learning from implementation to date

This research was undertaken at a time where understanding and implementation of AI tools across sites was becoming more formalised. Generally, implementation of tools with specific uses (notetaking, meeting summaries) followed a pilot at one or two specific sites, comparing outputs and usage metrics from tools – for example, measuring the quality of notes, time spent by advisors/per site. Those further along in the process also had clear policies on the use of AI, alongside their general IT and data protection documentation. The following information serves as a useful starting point in how to find a suitable AI tool, set-up for implementation, and continue maintaining engagement of staff.

1. Identify a gap in knowledge, or a "sticking point" occupying staff time. Search and identify options that can help alleviate these knowledge gaps.
2. Introduce an AI tool with an initial, small-scale pilot study to compare across sites. Ensure, if possible, that staff know that this tool was to meet a need they felt was occupying time.
3. Monitor engagement from staff, including usage metrics for tools, outputs from notetaking or meeting summaries for quality and compare against non-tool usage.
4. Continue monitoring engagement, identifying where staff drop off occurs, engagement weakens, and introduce training to help re-engage and build confidence.

Generally, interviews and observations around AI tool usage were concentrated on the early stages of the customer journey, including onboarding referrals from Jobcentre Plus, completing initial appointments, and regular meetings with customers. Multiple tools were used for these notetaking and meeting summary purposes, indicating that the early stages of the customer journey are a shared focus.

One site took an initial approach where they asked staff about "sticking points" in their day-to-day workloads and introduced an AI notetaking tool to facilitate more direct contact with customers when the need was identified. Meeting the needs of staff and including them in decision making in this way was felt as a help get staff on board with the use of AI.

Another site collected customer data, identified a trend in work coaches spending more time on data entry than engaging with the customer and triangulated this with interviews with coaches who expressed that this spoke true to their experiences. They also found that evidence from exit interviews supported both these evidence points and subsequently made the decision to focus on addressing this challenge.

Across all sites and to-date, a shared gap in knowledge was around customer views of AI tools and how they had changed the customer experience since implementation had begun. Feedback was generally limited to DWP surveys or small comments in appointments, rather than a more formalised approach to compare experiences before and after implementation. This could be an area for future data collection as triangulating with staff experiences can help in identifying where tools are adding perceived value for both the customer and advisor.

Implications for future adoption of AI tools

While the current level of AI adoption was reported to be at a comfortable level in general, interviews with EAs revealed some concerns around future directions of AI adoption, voicing fears linked to job replacement and role autonomy. Indicating that staff may need reassurance around future medium-term strategies for AI implementation to help calm these concerns.

> *"[I'm] not sure what other aspects of my role would lend itself well to AI... how much more of me are we taking away?"*
>
> Employment advisor

AI tools were felt to be best targeted towards mundane, general tasks such as notetaking so advisors can focus on what they perceive as the "real" meaning for their roles, providing complex, emotional support to customers and understanding their unique perspectives and journeys. Providing AI tools that help advisors with these aspects of their roles will help improve motivation for customers, reduce barriers to engagement, and help make meaningful progress towards work as customers have a more human interaction with advisors, facilitated by technology. In observations and interviews with staff, views on notetaking tools indicated that staff were able to spend more time meaningfully engaging with participants, maintaining eye contact, asking them impromptu questions to get to know them, and utilising the time saved to make progress in other areas. Interviewees discussed how the time saved around notetaking for example, could be used to make a head start on a job application, help with answering any questions, or getting ahead of content for their next appointment. These reallocations of time were not possible previously, where five- or ten-minutes extra were spent on notetaking tasks.

> *"I think if you can get that use case right... understand what frontline users are really struggling with and then deliver something that adds a lot of value. Then you're going to get huge adoption."*
>
> AI product provider

This view was reinforced by observations and discussions during site visits where staff were using AI assistants such as Copilot and ChatGPT for tasks without a designated tool. These included CV template generation, job search assistance and translation. **A future priority for primes should be around mapping the use of what staff are using AI for informally and meeting these needs with an approved tool**. This can facilitate safe usage for an unmet need, whilst also indicating to staff that they are being listened to.

A focus should also be placed on AI literacy for customers, so they are not left behind with technological advancements and for staff, supported by small group sessions for staff to help demystify tools and highlight benefits to their working practice. Mentioned in the chapter 'staff and customer experiences of AI tools', an implication for future implementation is that **tools should be verified for inclusivity as much as possible, particularly for digitally excluded and neurodiverse customers** to ensure that tools implemented are able to provide the best support for all types of customers.

Customer feedback was limited, but a site using a video-interviewing tool showed that as products mature, there is opportunity for the tool to become more personalised and realistic. The tool was described as useful but felt more like a videogame than an authentic simulation. **In future implementation as the technology advance**s, recognisable, advisor-like figures could be included, and it would help the simulation have a more grounded, authentic feel.

Opportunities and risks

AI is likely to become part of everyday practice across employment support, given the early adoption and successes seen in this research. Areas of focus include repetitive, time-consuming tasks like drafting CVs, summarising notes and standardising routine documentation during customer meetings which in turn can free advisors to focus on relationship-based work and progress with customers. Early observations show promise of productivity gains from AI tools on routine writing and support tasks, aligning with hopes for faster CV building and more consistent outputs across caseloads.

For customers directly, AI innovation may facilitate more personalised, accessible support. Examples include translation enabled interactions for ESOL customers, and translation and adaptation of CVs across employment sectors and languages. The balance for EAs is to use AI tools for augmentation of their current work, rather than substitution.

> *"Keep it [AI] at a line where it helps me to do my job but doesn't take away from the job that I'm doing."*
>
> Employment advisor

For Prime providers, the biggest barrier to overcome is implementing a single AI tool and understanding the process to do so. Once teams understand the piloting and feedback processes needed, expansion to multiple tools can become easier to facilitate. Confidence gained in the successful delivery of one tool can be carried through to other attempts, as implementation can now move beyond conversations

around whether a tool would be useful, to more practical considerations around infrastructure, governance, and internal capacity to support further implementation. Leaders will benefit from understanding both existing suppliers of AI tools and new entrants to ensure that new tools can be integrated and pace kept with market trends.

The biggest risk identified across interviews was around the realisation of value in utilising AI tools in employment support. Challenges around attributing outcomes to AI tool usage result in difficulty measuring value. Benefits have been identified in terms of time saved, consistent quality across customers, and ESOL accessibility, with the biggest threat to realising value being through weak management, unclear communication, and insufficient support and training for staff around how to use tools. “Value” hinges on effective and thoughtful change management, coaching, and staff monitoring and reinforcement, not on the technology alone.

Additionally, whilst limited in feedback, there were concerns that enthusiasm in the broader AI market outside of employment support may decline if the “AI bubble” were to burst, so considerations around wider developments in AI should be considered. Financing of tools is another risk, as some types of AI tools may be challenging to attribute impact, and value to. Therefore, disciplined, tracked rollout of tool(s) should be used with evaluation measures able to be easily evidenced, particularly for longer-term impacts.

Review and evaluation

A starting point in reviewing and evaluating AI tools from interviews across Prime providers is around clear, **behaviour-level indicators** from staff. These could include summaries created and actions generated from conversations with notetaking and meeting summarisation tools such as Magic Notes and Earlybird. Live dashboards from tool providers can help in identifying who has signed up quickly and who is using features of specific tools consistently, including log-ins from individual users, and by different sites, helping provide insights into whether tools are becoming embedded into day-to-day practice and whether it’s necessary to direct additional training to sites or advisors who are under-utilising tools compared to their peers.

Usage metrics can also be combined with **internal quality checks** on outputs against staff targets. For example, notetaking tools for meeting summaries and actions can be measured to identify whether job goals are captured, or certain topics discussed (for example, financial support mentioned, next appointment date confirmed).

An important theme across interviews was **not linking AI usage to employment outcomes** at this stage. Any cross-referencing to programme data should be treated as exploratory rather than causal evidence, as there are too many variables involved to attribute change to AI tools. Instead, evaluations could focus on different areas including quality, experience and value when used with customers. For example, time saved in appointments could be measured to identify where time saved was best spent. Impacts on the detail captured in notes, including their consistency and completeness can help show improvements in

outputs. Capturing customer voices alongside EAs can help in showing the changing experience of interactions as a direct result of implementing AI tools.

> *"That's the inherent problem. In employability you'll never create a direct relationship between implementing a piece of technology and getting more outcomes… there's so many other variables involved."*
>
> External stakeholder

Feedback loops and governance are extremely important and can help to cater tools to employment support use. Interviews with one site detailed how staff comments were fed back internally and to their representative of the external tool being implemented, utilising a "you said, we did" feedback loop to show staff that they were being listened to, and changes were being made because of their input. An interview with an AI tool provider for employment support detailed that meeting every few weeks with a Prime provider was helpful in reviewing developments as staff become familiar with tools. Generally, it was felt that 6-12 weeks was sufficient as a pilot for AI tool use, as the insights generated will help around making decisions to invest further, and if so, at what scale. Having regular, **monthly meetings** with tool providers **to gain insights into standard usage metrics**, alongside **quarterly meetings to discuss strategies** around aligning tools with operational data can also prove useful.

Insights for the employability sector

Effective coordination of AI across employment support and supply chains starts with collective alignment. It is important to get everyone involved in the delivery, use and evaluation of AI tools early. Across Primes, and the employment sector generally, it would be beneficial to agree on a collective set of shared priorities focused around high-value use cases for AI tools, encouraging developments across the sector. This creates a common direction for AI in employability, avoids fragmented approaches operating in solution and can channel frontline insights into where AI can improve productivity.

As AI tool use moves from in-house pilots for individual Prime providers to supply-chain provision, governance becomes non-negotiable. Considerations must be in place for Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) providers with less resources to access AI tools. Primes also need clear understanding on what should be shared with their supply chains and how: where an internally developed tool is genuinely proprietary, questions should be asked around whether access be granted to supply chains via other routes rather than passing over models to protect intellectual property (IP). Contracts should specify IP ownership, data handling, and acceptable use in these instances.

The Restart contracting occurred at a unique time, where AI tools have developed and become viable for wider use. The experience of incorporating new technologies into existing provision has been challenging. When AI became a focus towards the end of the contract, budgets had often been accounted for and locked into three-year plans. For the next commissioning cycle, budget for AI tools from the outset (licences, integration, change management, ongoing support) should be well established.

Capability of staff is an important consideration, alongside selection of tools. Staff capability levels for using AI tools vary, with a structured “introduction to AI” training approach being useful to engage those on the fringes focusing on areas such as safe prompting, data protection, and use cases for AI assistants. These introductory sessions can be paired with role specific deep dives for advisors using specific tools in meetings. Opportunities should be available for staff to use tools autonomously and creatively, with guardrails in place around acceptable use, approved tools, and prompt libraries helpful as guiding principles.

Cross-provider collaboration on AI in employment support is shaped by a tension between pressures in a competitive market and shared client outcomes. While feedback was limited, leads from providers described being wary of disclosing detailed methods or lessons learned without some guarantee of reciprocity. In part because future contracts can be won or lost dependent on maintaining a competitive edge, resulting in collaboration sitting at higher levels, focused on areas acknowledging types of AI tools being used and their purpose, rather than disclosing information on models, data, or workflows. A concern throughout interviews was around the widening divide between large and small providers, with smaller organisations at risk of being left out of information sharing and best practice networks, which could limit their ability to adopt, keep pace, and shape AI innovation.

Collective buying power across providers could help in accelerating safe AI adoption by setting a shared understanding of what tools to buy, where they should be focused (for example, what stage of the customer journey, type of staff using the tool), and which capabilities are truly useful. Transparency between providers about the “*how*” of AI tools, their use cases, workflows, and user roles help make conversations easier, and pave a way for other providers to share their findings as once one organisation shares, others can benchmark results, compare like-for-like, and let competition lift quality while bringing prices down. One external stakeholder noted that some duplication is healthy. This research has shown a focus on notetaking and meeting summarisation tools, and these parallel purchases of similar products from different providers help to create pressure for tool providers to improve and reduce costs, whilst keeping Prime providers aware of wider options in the market. Where DWP designates an approved AI partner for use, Primes can simplify assurance and collaboration across an employment support programme by sharing best practice, whilst those opting for different vendors can add value by sharing learning from other tools. This all facilitates an increased understanding of what’s available, what for, and who by for the sector, ultimately promoting faster and safer adoption, benefiting customers, staff and providers.

Conclusion

This research has highlighted that AI adoption across the Restart contract is at an early but promising stage with most adoption of tools concentrated on administrative tasks and early-journey interactions with customers focused on notetaking, translation and CV preparation. Current use of tools has centred around reducing the amount of time spent on administrative tasks, improving the customer and staff experience in meetings, and providing greater consistency in quality from meeting notes and CV outputs.

Clear benefits have been identified around time saved, improved quality and consistency of outputs, and enhanced support for ESOL learners. From observations in the fieldwork, notetaking and meeting summarisation tools have met a clear need and have greatly reduced the time spent on end of appointment administration whilst increasing engagement between staff and customers. CV generation has showed promising signs of improved consistency, and use of translation tools also shows early promise through facilitating access to appointments that otherwise would have been challenging to deliver. However, challenges have been documented around staff confidence, accuracy of tools, accessibility, and the time-intensive nature of responsible, tested implementation. Additionally, there are inconsistencies in outputs, indicating an opportunity and need to develop staff to quality assess AI outputs consistently.

A key priority for future research is understanding the role AI can play further along the customer journey, beyond onboarding and routine appointments. While the majority of the tools observed addressed early-stage administrative pressure, there was evidence of further tool use around interview preparation, however, due to limited customer feedback, evaluation and impacts are difficult to ascertain. There is a lack of evidence on the application of tools to activities including employer engagement, vocational guidance, or sustained progression in work. Further mapping of where advisors spend the most time across the full customer journey and identification of which tasks could be safely augmented by AI tools would help determine which areas of focus could add value without undermining the relational, motivational aspects of employment support that staff view as vital to their role.

As implementation scales and more tools are introduced, the sector will also need to explore how AI tools interact with each other. To date, providers have typically introduced one or two tools at a time, but observations show that staff already use a mixture of approved tools and informal AI assistants in their day-to-day work. Future research could examine operational data, examine how tools complement each other, and whether their functionality could be consolidated.

Customer perspectives have emerged as a gap in knowledge across all sites. While early experiences suggest AI can enhance engagement and experiences, particularly for ESOL learners, formal and systematic customer feedback on AI tools at this stage is limited. Future research should explore how customers perceive AI-enabled interactions, whether tools influence trust and rapport, and whether experiences differ across groups including the digitally excluded, neurodivergent people, and those with low English proficiency.

A further research priority could be around what “value” means in the context of AI-supported employment provision. Interviews consistently noted the difficulty of attributing employment outcomes to AI tools, with causal claims being neither realistic nor desirable at these early stages of delivery. Instead, future work should help the sector define “value” in ways aligned with the employment support operating environment such as quality, consistency of practice, advisor and customer experience, time released for other, meaningful work, and accessibility of support.

With this research delivered towards the end of the Restart contract, the findings highlight the importance in preparing for future commissioning cycles. Much of the AI adoption seen in this research occurred late in the contract period with budgets and planning largely mapped out and fixed. As employment support programmes move into new phases, commissioners and providers will need to dedicate planning for AI from the outset, ensuring that funding for product licences, integration, change management, training and continuous improvement are all clearly set out. Primes could also work together to establish collective priorities for the sector as coordinated approaches early on will help avoid fragmented adoption and ensure that a consistent and equitable offer is available throughout the sector, particularly for smaller SMEs in supply chains.

Annex

Annex A: Full list of research questions

Operational questions

- To what extent are AI tools currently being used by Restart providers to support participants?
- How are tools being used? (Which tools and for what purposes? e.g. for notetaking, agenda planning, CV writing or other content generation, diary management).
- Are tools tailored to employability support, or are they more generic?

For providers who have not utilised AI tools:

- What have been the barriers to implementing AI tools?
- What support would they need to use these tools?

For providers who have utilised AI tools:

- What has the process been of implementing the use of AI tools?
- What support, if any, have staff needed to implement the use of AI?
- What have the barriers and enablers been?
- How have they navigated data protection?
- What has been the process of signing off AI use with DWP?
- How did they find this?
- What has worked well within the implementation process?
- What has worked less well?

Staff experience questions

- How easy or difficult has it been for staff to use AI tools?
- How does AI effect the staff experience of providing employment support?
- How does it affect their job satisfaction and wellbeing at work?
- How, if at all, have perceptions about the use of AI tools by staff changed over time?
- Have staff used the IEP (Institute of Employability Professionals) module around AI? Did this support their knowledge, skills, behaviours with AI adoption? Why/not?
- What other training is required?
- What have been the benefits of using AI tools for staff? (e.g. increased participant interaction, time saved on admin tasks, caseload management)
- Have there been any unintended negative consequences of using AI tools?
- Are there any further AI tools/uses for AI that they would like to implement?
- How equipped do staff feel to support participants to use AI in job applications and the workplace?
- How equipped do staff feel around informing participants about the use of AI?

- Do staff feel comfortable discussing AI usage and explaining tools to participants?
- What do staff perceive the future risks and benefits of using AI in employment support?

Participant experience questions

How does the use of AI tools effect participant experiences including:

- Experiences in one-to-one meetings.
- Relationship with advisor.
- Quality of support.
- Are there risks or benefits of using AI tools with participants who may be digitally excluded?

Future facing questions

- How can primes providers drive use of AI through supply chains if they don't share systems?
- What level of AI adoption should be proposed?
- What plans do providers have for the use of AI going forwards?
- How can advisers best prepare participants for AI recruitment systems and workplaces?
- How can future uptake of AI tools be effectively enabled within employability support?
- Is there a role for joint buying power and a shared approach to AI-tools between Primes? What is the value of shared buying power?
- Could the joint potential of buying power of Primes influence the creation of tools that optimally fit needs?
- Is it feasible for providers to work together to streamline the process of gaining DWP approval for AI use in contracts and maintaining pace of adoption across services?