Hard Times: smoothing transitions in the Employment and Support Allowance customer journey

By
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The University of Warwick, Institute for Employment Research (IER) gratefully acknowledges the support and advice provided by Nicola Squibb, Regional Director, Prospects and her colleagues involved in the Contract Package Area (CPA) 11 Work Programme. Special thanks to Tim Rice, Operations Manager, and his colleagues for making quantitative data available for in-depth review and impartial analysis by the team. We are also greatly indebted to those who contributed to the research interviews, including some Prospects staff and external agencies such as: Dorset and Somerset Training Providers; JobCentre Plus, Taunton; Pennylane Foods, Bridgwater; Plymouth City Council; Kier Living Ltd (South West), Exeter; Re: Source Centre, Bodmin; Somerset County Council; St Loye’s Foundation, Dorset; Tomorrow’s People, Plymouth; United Response (Cornwall Employment Support); and Westward Pathfinder, Exeter. Finally, we are extremely grateful to those Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) customers who kindly shared their experiences and views on key enablers that make a positive difference to their experiences of the Work Programme.
The Work Programme, launched in June 2011, offered providers a new and exciting opportunity to design services for long term unemployed customers utilising what government referred to as a ‘black box’ approach. Prospects rose to the challenge of implementing the Work Programme in the South West by creating a very different kind of employability programme called ‘Ascent’ which was tailored to individuals and the barriers they faced in the return to employment.

The Work Programme has proven to be very challenging indeed with the need to respond to changing customer groups, fluctuating referral levels and an evolving dynamic within the labour market.

Those most in need of support often refer to the hard times they are currently experiencing. Our focus has been to smooth the transitions of customers claiming the Employability and Support Allowance. By working with Prospects they have benefited from:

- Tailored support to meet individual needs
- Flexibility in the context of learning, one to one support sessions and group interventions
- Well-developed links with support organisations at the local level to connect to customers with specialist services.

It is this support that has empowered many of our customers to bring about changes in their lifestyle, improved health and wellbeing outcomes and success in finding work.

This has enabled Prospects to become one of the top 10 providers overall nationally. Our experience over the last five years builds on evidence-based practice that will continue to inform future service design and delivery leading to improved life chances for all our customers.

We are proud of what our customers and colleagues have achieved together.

Nick Bell
Chief Executive
About Prospects

The Prospects Group provides tailored education, employment, training and care products and services for people at all stages of life. Each year Prospects inspires more than 500,000 people to develop their potential and transform their lives. More than 1,400 professional and skilled colleagues provide practical support to the local communities they are based in across the UK and internationally. Prospects is one of the largest employee owned companies in the UK. It is also a Leader in Diversity and ranked in the top 100 index by the National Centre for Diversity.

Our services include:

- Prospects is also a prime contractor for the Work Programme which helps longer-term unemployed people back to work, in the South West and leading subcontractor in London and Bristol. Across these areas Prospects have seen over 42,417 customers join the programme, 23,794 jobs have been started and Prospects have engaged with over 1,000 employers and nearly 100 training, education and skills providers to support customers into employment.
- For those in the earliest stages of education, Ofsted Early Years Inspection Services across the Midlands and North of England and support for local authorities across the South of England.
- Prospects engages with more than 4,250 education establishments across the country providing consultancy, improvement services, awards, resources and outdoor education.
- For young people, Prospects works on behalf of local authorities providing targeted support helping young people who are not in education, employment or training, vulnerable and/or have learning difficulties and disabilities, including Pathway services to care leavers.
- For Adults, we provide the National Careers Service, offering advice on learning and work as prime provider in London, South West and West Midlands. In addition Prospects is a partner in Careers Yorkshire and the Humber.
- Innovative approaches to rehabilitation of adults and young offenders in the community, and in custody, through the National Careers Service, in all prisons in London, South West, West Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber. Prospects provides the education for young people in Feltham Young Offenders Institution.
- Entrepreneurship for young people in Wales.
- Events including regional careers and skills events across the UK such as Skills London, City Walks and award ceremonies.
- Mutuals development services for public bodies.

The Prospects Group includes Gabbitas, independent education consultancy and CfAppointments, specialist recruitment services. Prospects is also the partner in 3BM, an employee-owned mutual providing support services to the education sector.

For more information please visit: www.prospects.co.uk
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Executive Summary

In November 2015, Prospects formally commissioned the University of Warwick, Institute for Employment Research (IER) to undertake a review in the Contract Package Area (CPA) 11 – Somerset, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall – region of the Work Programme, specifically for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) customers with a prognosis of being able to return to work no later than 12 months from referral. This research was designed to build upon findings from an earlier report: ‘The Work Programme: A Reflective View – Common barriers facing Prospects Work Programme customers in the South West region’. The ESA provides support for someone who is unable to work and personalised help to support someone able to join the workforce.

Aim

This study focuses on what lessons can be learned in the CPA11 region from the Prospects Work Programme’s ‘black box’ approach with ESA customers with a prognosis of being able to return to work no later than 12 months from referral. It specifically examines the customer journeys of those who started on the Work Programme between April – September 2013 and left between April – September 2015, or before, including most recent completers.

Key research questions

1. Are certain types of interventions more likely to produce positive outcomes for ESA customers? If so, what is the evidence-base?
2. What are the enablers that produce positive outcomes for Work Programme ESA customers?
3. How can Prospects with its partners achieve better outcomes for Work Programme ESA customers?
4. What key lessons have been learned from the Work Programme in the South West region over the last two years?

Methodology

The study comprised four phases: desk research to summarise key findings on learning and work among low-skilled individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds; data analysis of 799 customer journeys of those who had started the Work Programme between April and September 2013 and were classed as Payment Group 6 (PG6): those who receive ESA with a prognosis of being able to return to work within 3 – 6 months (PG6a) or 6 – 12 months (PG6b) from date of referral. A more detailed analysis of 40 customer journeys was undertaken to identify patterns or trends; telephone and face-to-face interviews designed.

1. The study does not include work with customers on Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) and does not investigate how Work Capability Assessments (WCA) and other allied assessments are undertaken
3. This is defined by DWP as “a term for minimum service prescription, which allows providers to decide which interventions to offer to programme participants into sustainable employment.” Available online at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/197710/repro832.pdf
to capture key themes and emerging patterns from practitioner and manager perspectives, using semi-structured interviews. A total of 10 telephone interviews took place with Prospects staff, and 13 telephone or face-to-face interviews with agencies in the South West involved in working with PG 6 customers; one-to-one interviews (x4) and a focus group workshop with ESA PG6a and PG6b customers to capture their voices and to test out the validity of the interim findings.

Overview of findings

The report findings provide an economic summary of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Somerset (pp. 13–15). This is followed by characteristics of the CPA 11 Work Programme customers, current features within the Ascent Programme, key lessons and challenges (pp.16–21).

- One of the difficulties of comparing customer journeys and the effectiveness of the interventions is the individualised support provided by Work Programme providers. This means no two customer journeys are alike – a significant factor in Prospects’ approach to delivering the Work Programme.

- ‘Ascent’ is Prospects main support provision for Work Programme customers. It provides a tailored journey to guide customers through the employment seeking process focusing on individuals’ unique needs and challenges. Individuals can be on the programme for a maximum of 104 weeks, or until they find sustained employment⁴.

A forthcoming Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model⁵ is due to be introduced shortly by Prospects underpinning the principle that work is part of the customer journey re-integration and/or focused recovery plan.

The structure of the Work Programme’s delivery model (with a lead provider, in this case Prospects contracting directly with a variety of different subcontractors) – remains a key strength of the programme, as reported by staff and external agencies.

Rurality poses particular challenges – for people looking for work, employers/employees and those organisations that support them. Rural circumstances may impede the employability of those with low or no skills and qualifications, and other groupings adversely affected such as people with disabilities, carers, minority ethnic groups, migrants, travellers and gypsies, older working age groups and lone parents.

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4. A ‘job outcome’ is recorded when a customer has been in work for a set number of weeks (13 to 26 weeks, depending on the target group; 13 weeks for PG6 customers). Further ‘sustainment’ payments are payable (on a regular four-weekly basis, subject to a variable cap on the number of payments) after a trigger point when the participant has been in work for a longer period (17 to 30 weeks, depending on the target group; 20 weeks for PG6 customers) (Newton et al. [DWP], 2012)

Case Study

Adam

Adam, from Liskeard in Cornwall, joined the Work Programme in 2013, he was claiming Employment and Support Allowance and had been out of work: “God knows how long, I can’t even remember!”

Adam left school with three GCSEs at E grade, and went on to study animal care at college. After leaving education he worked in kitchens and on a caravan site. Adam was mentored through the Work Programme, he commented about the Prospects approach: “It gave me opportunities. Prospects are more caring, unlike other places. It’s more 1-2-1 and well worth doing as you get so much help. They advised me to keep positive and believe in myself. They showed me how to set goals and take each step to get there.”

Adam was encouraged to take his CSCS Certificate through Cornwall College and started an apprenticeship in December 2014. He is now keen to work his way up the ranks, and own his own construction business one day.

Adam believes the Work Programme: “gave me the opportunity to get this apprenticeship and the confidence to do it. It’s really sorted my whole life out. When I first started Work Programme, I was very apprehensive. I didn’t show up and wasn’t interested. But my adviser spoke to me and I could tell they cared and I could trust them. They helped me to realise I could be someone. Prospects always supported me and never gave up on me. I took all of it on board and followed it to the T.”

Customer intakes – across Britain, recent intakes contain a higher proportion of individuals expected to require more support and assistance6. In recent years, there has been a steep reduction in the flows of referrals to the Work Programme from Department for Work and Pensions (DWP); however, the flows of PG6a and PG6b customers have not been as substantially affected as Jobseeker Allowance (JSA) customers.

Supply chain – Prospects has worked with a wide range of providers including community/voluntary organisations with particular specialist expertise. The community/voluntary sector organisations who contributed to the research cited examples of Prospects offering free high quality training, including labour market intelligence updates and significant capacity building activities for staff. With shrinking budgets prevalent, this was highly valued.

Referral levels – the number of people referred to the JSA Early Entrants customer group has declined since the start of the Programme (having initially been much higher than expected) while the share of referrals going to the ESA customer groups has greatly increased.

Some PG6 customers do not have to engage actively with the Work Programme despite being referred to it – this means they cannot be mandated to attend or engage with the Work Programme providers. The uncertainty surrounding customer engagement restricts their ability to forecast caseloads, plan and manage resources effectively and ultimately to agree effective action plans with customers that will enable them to gain employment. This means that providers have undertaken a great deal of activity to seek to engage voluntary customers with sometimes no tangible results (p.19).

Links with JobCentre Plus (JCP) – in the region are very good, relationships exist and positive steps have been taken to ensure regular communication between Prospects and JCP staff operating in area offices. It was apparent that referrals from JCP were significantly lower than expected, particularly this year, which has a ‘knock-on’ effect within the supply chain (p.19).

Links with employers – Prospects has worked closely with a wide range of employers in the CPA 11 region. A detailed graph illustrates current activity in a wide range of sectors (p.20).

Payments – it was reported the payment group a customer is allocated to on the Work Programme does not accurately reflect how easy or difficult each customer will be to get into work.

Up to two years to work with customers – sometimes even two years is not long enough for those facing particularly significant barriers to employment such as individuals with a physical disability, mental health, drug or alcohol addiction, sensory or other disabilities. Clear incentives to deliver results are embedded centrally within the programme.

Re-designing the Work Programme – the overwhelming feedback from Prospects staff and external agencies in this research was for DWP to find a way of maintaining referrals to ensure programme stability.
Q1. Are certain types of interventions more likely to produce positive outcomes for ESA customers? If so, what is the evidence-base?

Findings are reported from the data analysis of 799 customer journeys of those who had attached to the Work Programme between April – September 2013 and left between April – September 2015, or before, including most recent completers. These customers were classed as PG6: those who receive ESA with a prognosis of being able to return to work within 3 – 6 months (PG6a) or 6 – 12 months (PG6b) from date of referral are presented. A more detailed analysis of 40 customer journeys was also undertaken to identify patterns or trends.

There were very few differences between customers in the PG6a and PG6b groups. The differences were that the PG6b group were more likely to be last in employment longer ago, be slightly older, and be more likely to have learning disabilities and no qualifications than PG6a customers. Despite these minor differences, the outcome rates for PG6a and PG6b were broadly similar.

When looking at PG6a and PG6b groups and at those who achieved an outcome, the main differences were that, among PG6a customers, duration of being out of work and having some idea of a job goal were higher than for those who did not. However, for PG6b customers, the only significant difference was the lower incidence of having a criminal record history between those who achieved an outcome and those who did not.

The main findings from this detailed analysis (pp.23-40):

- 25 out of 40 customers completed the Work Programme having found employment. Of the remaining 15 ‘completers’ (those completing Work Programme without having achieved a job outcome), 10 had moved from Work-Related Activity Group (WRAG) into a voluntary group, largely because of adverse or deteriorating health.
- Employment ranged from voluntary work, service work, construction, catering, and self-employment. Routes into employment varied depending on the customers’ links with the labour market, job goals, experience, and work readiness.
- There was a wide variety of adviser support and interventions. The most commonly occurring types of support included job-related support; education and skills; support for health, mental health, and confidence/self-esteem; and lifestyle advice.
- The support provided largely depended on customers’ needs. Some customers were facing complex and challenging health difficulties, and the advisers were mainly focusing on helping these customers manage their healthcare issues. Other customers were keen to find work, and the advisers tended to focus more on skills, employability, and searching for and applying for vacancies, including voluntary work. The latter was generally viewed as valuable step in gaining employment.
- Advisers made use of local organisations, online resources, and national-level support services. Frequently mentioned organisations included:
  - Local organisations: Pentreath - charity for people with mental health difficulties, St Loye’s Foundation – disability and training charity, Be Me Cornwall – NHS service for people with emotional or psychological difficulties, Streetlink - service to help those sleeping rough, Transferable Skills Training - deliver programmes to increase employability, Link into Learning – specialist ‘Skills for Life’ provider within Cornwall Adult Education Service
  - Online resources mentioned included: Alison, Vision2Learn and Craigslist.
Advisers were encouraging of customers’ personal learning and training. Good relations exist in particular with Cornwall College and Community Mental Trust (CMT) Services. For customers who are far from labour market entry, particularly those facing multiple barriers and/or significant mental health issues, a successful outcome is not necessarily a job start.

Factors that facilitate a successful Work Programme experience:

✓ Offering tailored support and accommodating customers’ needs
✓ Being flexible in the content of the one-to-one sessions
✓ Having well-developed links with support organisations, especially at the local level, in order to connect customers with the support they need.

The research captures the voices of customers and their experiences. The report highlights reasons that help explain why some customers failed to secure employment after two years on the Work Programme (pp.41–46).

Q2. What are the enablers that produce positive outcomes for Work Programme ESA customers?

The research team identified seven key enablers identified by customers, staff and external partners that produce positive outcomes for PG6a and PG6b customers (pp.44 –48). These are:

1. Tailored support that accommodates differing customers’ needs
2. Trained, knowledgeable and skilled workers
3. Sustained links with support organisations, especially at the local level, in order to connect customers with the support they need
4. Case-managed conferences and best practice workshops
5. Connections with employers to help secure real-work experiences and job opportunities
6. Encouragement and support for ESA customers to form their own peer group support networks.
7. Enhanced quality management systems and standardisation of processes.

Q3. How can Prospects with its partners achieve better outcomes for Work Programme ESA customers?

The following four themes emerged from the research which merit further particular attention (p.48):

✓ Continue to strengthen links and referrals to specialist organisations – maximise training opportunities, further develop in-house specialists and review the entire specialist provision available for customers to ensure this remains relevant for the changing needs of the PG6a and PG6b customers.

✓ Prepare more employers to know what to expect from ESA (PG6a and PG6b) customers and support them in finding ways to understand and accommodate these individuals’ transition needs – coach employers and relevant ‘influencers’ in the workplace on the techniques of stress management, coping strategies, dealing with anger management, negotiation skills etc. as part of their human resource strategy. Make greater use of the guidance, coaching and counselling expertise already available within Prospects.
Q4. What key lessons have been learned from the Work Programme in the South West region over the last two years?

In recent years, the Work Programme in CPA 11 has become better understood both within and outside of Prospects. The majority of individuals interviewed called for greater stability in current arrangements. Emerging approaches to devolution, joint commissioning, pooling resources and/or greater alignment to local area needs will have a significant impact across the region. This provides an opportunity for Prospects which will need to share best practice and find ways of making innovative and effective use of scarce resources with its existing and new partners.

There are at least six key lessons learned (p.49):

1. Help others to fully understand that working with ESA customers is not a quick fix – it takes time to build trust, confidence, self-esteem and a commitment to action(s).

2. The ‘payment by results’ approach is now widely understood; however, the majority of participants reported an urgent necessity to move towards a needs-based categorisation that acknowledges gradual positive steps taken by ESA customers (usually at a significant distance from the labour market) and to build in some form of incentives for the individual and the provider.

3. Prospects has a tested methodology refined over several years with an experienced and dedicated group of well qualified and highly experienced staff. Prospects’ skilled workforce should be more widely promoted in local communities. The company is meeting with local authorities, wider voluntary and community groups and the National Health Service (NHS) in order to address this issue. It should continue to provide high quality training and development services for capacity building within voluntary and community sector organisations across CPA 11, but this has cost implications. In most cases, voluntary and community sector organisations and councils highlighted the networking and training provision was excellent.

4. There is more pressure from DWP to achieve positives outcomes with ESA (PG6a and PG6b) customers. It was reported working relationships have strengthened between JobCentre Plus and Prospects’ staff.

5. Information gathered by DWP from the ESA assessment process should be routinely shared with the Work Programme provider to ensure the right level of service is delivered to the right customer at the right time.

6. Focus more on job and labour market opportunities i.e. finding sensitive employers who are able to understand and help overcome barriers to work faced by PG6a and PG6b customers.
## Glossary of terms

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAB</td>
<td>Citizens Advice Bureau</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBT</td>
<td>Cognitive Behavioural Therapy</td>
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<td>CPA</td>
<td>Contract Package Area</td>
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<td>DWP</td>
<td>Department for Work and Pensions</td>
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<td>ESA</td>
<td>Employment and Support Allowance</td>
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<td>FFW</td>
<td>Fit for Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>GP</td>
<td>General Practitioner</td>
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<tr>
<td>HCP</td>
<td>Healthcare Professional who carries out the Work Capability Assessment</td>
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<td>IB</td>
<td>Incapacity Benefit</td>
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<td>IS</td>
<td>Income Support</td>
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<td>JCP</td>
<td>JobCentre Plus</td>
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<td>JSA</td>
<td>Jobseeker’s Allowance</td>
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<td>PCA</td>
<td>Personal Capability Assessment</td>
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<td>PWR</td>
<td>Permitted Work Rules</td>
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<td>SG</td>
<td>Support Group</td>
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<td>UJM</td>
<td>Universal Job Match</td>
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<td>WCA</td>
<td>Work Capability Assessment</td>
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<td>WFI</td>
<td>Work-Focused Interview</td>
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<td>WRAG</td>
<td>Work-Related Activity Group</td>
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1. **Introduction**

1.1 Prospects is one of 18 Prime providers selected by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to deliver a Work Programme contract in Great Britain (DWP, 2011). Its work covers the South West region and includes a rich supply chain involving smaller specialist and local organisations from public, private and third sector organisations. In this context, the South West region covers Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Somerset (commonly known as the Contract Package Area (CPA) 11 region). The Work Programme provides support for people who are long-term unemployed – or are at most risk of becoming so, for example, those who are disabled or have a health condition, and who may have been out of work for several years. The programme is funded on a payment-by-results model, where providers are rewarded based on their success in achieving sustainable employment outcomes for their clients. The contracts will end in March 2016 (although delivery responsibility will continue for a further two years).

1.2 In November 2015, Prospects formally commissioned the University of Warwick, Institute for Employment Research (IER) to undertake a review in the CPA 11 region of the Work Programme, specifically for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) customers with a prognosis of being able to return to work no later than 12 months from referral. This research is designed to build upon findings from an earlier report: ‘The Work Programme: A Reflective View – Common barriers facing Prospects Work Programme customers in the South West region’. The ESA provides support for someone unable to work and personalised help to support someone able to join the workforce. A clear definition is provided below:

“The Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) is the main benefit for people who are unemployed and have a limited capability for work because of their health. It replaced incapacity benefits for new applicants in 2008. Most recipients are assessed as being capable of work-related activity, the minority who are not are included in a separate the new Universal Credit system continue to receive incapacity benefits; lone parents with younger children and some other groups are eligible for Income Support. Work Programme Prime providers are able to require participants to undertake work related activity depending on the conditions of the benefit they are receiving.”

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8. For all customers (or claimants) two formal assessments are in place, namely, sickness benefits known as the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) which assesses whether people are capable of undertaking work and the Customer Assessment Tool (CAT) designed to identify barriers to work and appropriate services to overcome these barriers for those customers coming on to the Work Programme.
10. The study does not include work with customers on Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) and does not investigate how Work Capability Assessments (WCA) and other allied assessments are undertaken.
12. https://www.gov.uk/income-support/overview
Aim

1.3 This study focuses on what lessons can be learned in the CPA 11 region from the Prospects Work Programme’s ‘black box’ approach14 with ESA customers with a prognosis of being able to return to work no later than 12 months from referral.15 It specifically examines the customer journeys of those who started on the Work Programme between April – September 2013 and left between April – September 2015, or before, including most recent completers.

Key research questions

1. Are certain types of interventions more likely to produce positive outcomes for ESA customers? If so, what is the evidence-base?
2. What are the enablers that produce positive outcomes for Work Programme ESA customers?
3. How can Prospects with its partners achieve better outcomes for Work Programme ESA customers?
4. What key lessons have been learned from the Work Programme in the South West region over the last two years?

1.4 The Welfare Reform Act (2012),16 Universal Credit aims to combine benefits into one payment. These include JSA, Housing Benefit, Working Tax Credit, ESA and Income Support. It is being rolled out in stages, based on where claimants live and their personal circumstances. The Welfare Reform and Work Bill (2015 – 2016)17 proposes to abolish the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) component for new claims for ESA from April 2017 (clause 13). This will reduce income for those qualifying for the WRAG by £29.05 per week. Existing claimants will be protected but will be affected should they move into work and then return to claiming ESA WRAG. This focus on ESA customers is timely given the Government’s aim to halve the disability employment gap (Cameron, 2015).18

1.5 In recent years, a growing number of sanctions have been applied to claimants who have a health condition or impairment that limits their ability to work (claimants of ESA). The number of ESA claimants sanctioned has risen sevenfold since 2012 – from 2,201 in the first quarter of 2012 to 15,955 in the first quarter of 201419. For Prime providers and their supply chain there are significant challenges in their work supporting these vulnerable adults into sustainable work within a two-year period. Currently, roughly 60% of people spend approximately two years in the ESA WRAG. This compares with ‘60% of people spending roughly six months on Jobseeker’s Allowance’.20

14. This is defined by DWP as “a term for minimum service prescription, which allows providers to decide which interventions to offer to programme participants into sustainable employment.” Available online at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/197710/rrep832.pdf
15. The study does not include work with customers on Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) and does not investigate how Work Capability Assessments (WCA) and other allied assessments are undertaken.
17. http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2015-16/welfarereformandwork.html
1.6 Our starting position was to build on key characteristics of the Work Programme valued by providers (reported as contributing to better outcomes for programme users) as outlined by the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) and the Shaw Trust (2013). These include:

- Diverse provider market: A significant strength of the Work Programme is its inclusion of a wide range of providers from different sectors within supply chains. While there is a need to refine subcontracting arrangements, the model enables Work Programme delivery to incorporate a range of specialist expertise and experience, allowing it to meet the complex and diverse needs of service users more effectively.

- Black box flexibility: The ‘black box’ approach aims to give providers as much scope as possible to be innovative and creative in their provision of back-to-work support by avoiding narrow prescription of particular interventions, methodologies or processes. This gives Work Programme providers the freedom to tailor their methods to the specific needs and circumstances of their clients.

- Contract duration: The minimum five-year contract duration gives providers the stability to develop effective long-term relationships with delivery partners in their area. The degree of added commercial security enables providers to commit more resources to the preparation, bidding and capacity building that is required and enabled Prime providers to invest in programme design and infrastructure. Providers have up to two years to address the complex needs of individual clients and help them back to work.

1.7 One of the difficulties of comparing customer journeys and the effectiveness of the interventions is the individualised support provided by Work Programme providers. This means no two customer journeys are alike – a significant factor in Prospects’ approach to delivering the Work Programme. Over recent years, Prospects has adapted the design and delivery of the Work Programme in the South West region in response to: changing customer barriers to employment; differing referral levels of payment groups; and changing dynamics within the labour market. The minimum service delivery for the CPA 11 Work Programme offer is outlined in Appendix 1.

2. Methodology

2.1 The study comprised four phases:

1. Desk research to summarise key findings on learning and work among low-skilled individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds. We have undertaken a literature review, and we also reviewed the Prospects ‘black box’ approach, commonly referred to as the Ascent Programme or the ‘Customer Journey’.

2. Data analysis of 799 customer journeys of those who had attached to the Work Programme between April – September 2013 and were classed as PG6: those who receive ESA with a prognosis of being able to return to work within 3 – 6 months (PG6a) or 6 – 12 months (PG6b) from date of referral. A more detailed analysis of 40 customer journeys was undertaken to identity patterns or trends.

3. Telephone and face-to-face interviews to capture key themes and emerging patterns from practitioner and manager perspectives, using semi-structured interviews. A total of 10 telephone interviews took place with Prospects staff, and 13 telephone or face-to-face interviews with agencies in the South West involved in working with PG6 customers.

4. One-to-one interviews (x4) and a focus group workshop with ESA PG6a and PG6b customers to capture their voices and to test out the validity of the interim findings.

2.2 The research examined the ESA customer journey within the CPA 11 Work Programme to identify key enablers that contribute towards positive outcomes for supporting vulnerable individuals within and across the region.22

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22 High skilled workers ‘passing through’ JobCentre Plus and/ or those on Jobseekers Allowance are beyond the scope of this research
3. Economic Summary of CPA 11 – Cornwall, Devon, Dorset and Somerset

This section provides a brief economic summary of trends in the CPA 11 region. The data was extracted from the Office for the National Statistics (ONS) and other local area-based reports. These are summarised below:

- Employment in the South West region is consistently higher than the national average of 73.2% with Somerset being highest at 79.1% and Cornwall lowest of the four geographical areas at 74.5%.
- Unemployment is lower than the 5.3% national average, with Cornwall being 4.2% and Dorset lowest at 3.0%.
- National average for claimants is 2.0%, with Cornwall the highest of the South West regions tabling 1.3% and Dorset the lowest having 1.0% of the 16-64 population claiming benefits.
- “Demand” or Job Density (ratio of available jobs to population aged 16-64) is slightly higher than the national average of 0.79, with Cornwall being 0.8 and Devon being 0.84, the Devon figure has been skewed by the greater job density in the city of Exeter.
- Indications are that the four geographical areas have an ageing population as life expectancy increases. Somerset has 21% of its population aged over 65, 61% aged between 16-64 and 18% under 16. This trend is expected to continue. In 2004, Cornwall had a 2.8% of the population aged over 65 and today this is 5.7%.
- Productivity measured as Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita in the South West is lower than the national average, with Somerset being 25% lower. Cornwall has the second weakest GVA in the country.

- Because of the mix between rural and urban demographics, the economy is also a combination of agriculture, manufacturing and tourism. Much of the job market is centred on the service and health industries. Some examples of specific characteristics in each geographical area:
  - Dorset has 3 ports – 10% of its employment is tourism based, 82% service, 12% manufacturing, 5% construction
  - Cornwall – 32% of employment is health and social service related, 14% education, 13% related to accommodation and food industry (tourism), 9% manufacturing and 8% wholesale and warehousing
  - Somerset – 16% of employment is health and social services related, 13% manufacturing, 24% wholesale sector (influenced by the M5 and A303 corridors running through the county) and 10% public administration and defence

23. Dorset Local Enterprise Partnership – Available online at: http://dorsetlep.co.uk//local-delivery/strategic-economic-plan/
25. Note – this is expected to alter significantly with the proposed Hinkley C nuclear power station which is forecast to create upwards of 25000 jobs.
Devon – with two major cities, Exeter and Plymouth, the main jobs are allied to the universities and defence industries. However, Devon is the biggest county, the population density is centred around these two cities but Devon’s agricultural output is four times the national average. Main occupations are 19% professional, 11% administration and secretarial, and 13% in skilled trades.26

- Self-employment in the region is higher than the national average, especially in Cornwall where the numbers of people in employment have declined while the numbers of self-employed has increased by 9% over a similar period.
- Growth in small enterprises is evident in Cornwall – see Table 1 below – higher than the national average and the remainder of the region. This may reflect the isolation and rural aspect of the county compared to the others which have better links.

Table 1 below provides an overview of the small enterprise count in England compared to the CPA 11 region, followed by Table 2 which provides a comparative analysis of employment, unemployment and job density trends in the CPA 11 region.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SMALL ENTERPRISE COUNT</th>
<th>GROWTH</th>
<th>GROWTH %</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>1993295</td>
<td>255750</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornwall</td>
<td>22285</td>
<td>2990</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devon</td>
<td>15724</td>
<td>1890</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorset</td>
<td>12705</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>22280</td>
<td>2695</td>
<td>12.1</td>
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</table>

Source: Extracts from ONS data (op.cit)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNEMPLOYMENT</th>
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<th>POPULATION</th>
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<td>Population</td>
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<tr>
<td>16-64 (000's)</td>
<td>(000's)</td>
<td>16-64 (000's)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Employed</td>
<td>% Claimants</td>
<td>% Unemployed</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Claimants</th>
<th>Universe</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Population</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>England</td>
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</table>

### Table 2

**Source:** Extracts from ONS data\(^2\)

4. Key lessons and challenges in the CPA 11 Work Programme since 2014

4.1 In this section, we review key lessons learned and challenges within the Work Programme in the CPA 11 region since 2014. The rationale for this approach was to build upon previous published work and to offer insights to more recent key headlines. We begin by setting out characteristics of the Work Programme customers, current features within the Ascent Programme, followed by key headlines.

4.2 Characteristics of Work Programme customers in CPA 11 (2016)

- Just over two thirds of people joining the Work Programme are male (68%). This is a similar proportion to those claiming JSA (which is the main qualifying benefit of the Work Programme).
- Almost two-thirds of ESA claimants are male.
- A quarter of those who join the Work Programme are under the age of 34.
- Around 7% of ESA claimants are under 34.
- 94% of individuals joining the Programme view their ethnicity as “white”.
- All people claiming ESA are eligible to volunteer to join the Work Programme at any point after their Work Capability Assessment (WCA).

4.3 The Ascent Programme (commonly referred to as ‘the Customer Journey’)

The Ascent programme is Prospects’ main support provision for Work Programme customers. It provides a tailored journey to guide customers through the employment seeking process focusing on individuals’ unique needs and challenges. Customers are referred to the Work Programme by DWP JobCentre Plus, and then attach to the Prospects Programme offer. Customers can be on the Programme for a maximum of 104 weeks, or until they find sustained employment. During their participation on the Programme, customers get regular targeted one-to-one support from an adviser, and assistance from the Ascent programme through attendance at interventions, group development sessions, job search activities, work experience, employer engagement experiences and/or referrals to specialist support providers.

4.4 The support provided by Ascent covers the following main areas:

- Aspiration and motivation: Customers’ motivations, confidence, and self-esteem.
- Skills for the future: Customers’ functional skills, management of personal circumstances, and healthy lifestyle and work-life balance.
- Challenges: Customers’ specific challenges that may be preventing them from finding and maintaining employment, such as caring commitments, disabilities, debt, etc.

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29. A ‘job outcome’ is recorded when a customer has been in work for a set number of weeks (13 to 26 weeks, depending on the target group; 13 weeks for PG6 customers). Further ‘sustainment’ payments are payable (on a regular four-weekly basis, subject to a variable cap on the number of payments) after a trigger point when the participant has been in work for a longer period (17 to 30 weeks, depending on the target group; 20 weeks for PG6 customers) (Newton et al. [DWP], 2012)
Employer desirability – Addressing customers’ readiness for the labour market, including work ethic, long term unemployment, personal presentation, and references.

Notable influences – identifying and tackling pressures that may be contributing to unemployment.

Transferable and specialist skills – Ensuring that customers have up-to-date transferable skills.

4.5 Under each strand of the Ascent programme, Prospects has developed six group work sessions relating to aspects of the areas covered. The company has also developed six bespoke Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) based group workshops relating to the above strands. This results in a minimum of 42 possible group interventions in addition to the one-to-one support with an adviser which Ascent provides. Under each strand a variety of innovative development activities include: Come Dine with Me (skills development route way into hospitality and catering); Heroes to Inspire (mentoring support from a wide range of people who have overcome injuries whilst serving in the armed forces or inspiring community-based people); Health and Wellbeing Groups; Community Action Groups; and Skills Enhancement Projects.

4.6 A forthcoming Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model30 is due to be introduced shortly by Prospects underpinning the principle that work is part of the customer journey re-integration and/or focused recovery plan.

Key Headlines

4.7 The structure of the Work Programme’s delivery model (with a lead provider, in this case Prospects contracting directly with a variety of different subcontractors) – remains a key strength of the programme, as reported by staff and external agencies. It enables Work Programme delivery to incorporate a wide range of specialist expertise and experience, enabling the approach to meet the complex and diverse needs of service users more effectively. Prospects has supported the training and development of subcontractor staff through a variety of different training courses and access to ‘Skills Bites’ – an e-learning platform containing over 200 learning modules.

4.8 Rurality poses particular challenges – for people looking for work, employers/employees and those organisations that support them. In some cases, limited local options or travel to work can make it difficult for people to secure sustainable employment, develop their skills and/or progress their learning and work without moving. Distance, and the economics of delivering learning and/or employment support services to sparse populations, creates further problems. Rural circumstances may impede the employability of those with low or no skills and qualifications, and other groupings adversely affected such as people with disabilities, carers, minority ethnic groups, migrants, travellers and gypsies, older working age groups and lone parents. A detailed understanding of the rural issues in employability context built up over many years of service delivery is a real strength of Prospects.

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4.9 Customer intakes – recent intakes across Britain contain a higher proportion of individuals expected to require more support and assistance. A little over a quarter of the March 2015 intake is from ESA groups compared to less than 3% in the first intakes to the scheme. Differences since September 2012 reflect changes in access to the Programme, especially for ESA claimants, including the introduction of information sessions for potential ESA volunteers and a JCP exercise to identify eligible ESA claimants who had not been referred to the Programme. In recent years, there has been a steep reduction in the flows of referrals to the Work Programme from DWP JCP; however, the flows of PG6a and PG6b customers have not been as substantially affected as JSA customers.

4.10 Supply chain – Prospects has worked with a wide range of providers including community/voluntary organisations with particular specialist expertise. Some examples include: Avon and Somerset Probation Trust; Barnardos; Bristol, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire Community Rehabilitation Co. Ltd.; Cinnabar; Cornwall Food Foundation; Fifteen; Dorset, Devon and Cornwall Community Rehabilitation Ltd.; Dorset Probation Trust; Pentreath Ltd.; Re-Source; ReZolve Kernow Ltd.; Princes Trust; Shekinah Mission; Shelter; South West Apprenticeship Company Ltd; St Loye’s Foundation; The Cornwall Foundation of Promise; The Restore Trust; TIPCEM Leadership Trust; Tomorrow’s People Trust Ltd.; United Response; Volunteer Cornwall; Westward Pathfinder Trust; and Whitehorse Leadership Training.

4.11 The community/voluntary sector organisations who contributed to this research cited examples of Prospects offering free high quality training, including labour market intelligence updates and significant capacity building activities for staff. With shrinking budgets prevalent, this was highly valued.

4.12 Referral levels – a House of Commons (2015) briefing paper indicates that “referral volumes have declined since the Programme’s introduction and the profile of referred claimants has also changed. In the period 2014/15, the average number of referrals per month was around 15,000, compared to 69,000 in the first year of contracts. The number of people referred to the JSA Early Entrants customer group has declined since the start of the Programme (having initially been much higher than expected) while the share of referrals going to the ESA customer groups has greatly increased” (p. 6). People claiming ESA must undergo the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) which is designed to determine eligibility for ESA. It is a functional assessment based on the premise that eligibility should not be determined by the description of a person’s disability or health condition but rather on how their ability to function is affected, which may vary considerably between individuals with the same diagnosis. There are extra conditions associated with claiming ESA. Claimants can be placed in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG) for people who are unwell but may be able to do some work. Claimants are expected to attend a work-focused interview and training, and will have regular reassessments to decide if they should claim JSA instead of ESA. Once placed in the Support Group claimants do not have to attend work-focused interviews and training unless they would like to.

33. DWP, Work Programme Official Statistics to June 2015, 17 September 2015
Some PG6 customers do not have to engage actively with the Work Programme despite being referred to it — this means they cannot be mandated to attend or engage with the Work Programme at any point after their WCA. This voluntary arrangement has presented a major challenge to Prime providers and supply chains. The uncertainty surrounding customer engagement restricts their ability to forecast caseloads, plan and manage resources effectively and ultimately to agree effective action plans with customers that will enable them to gain employment. This means that providers have undertaken a great deal of activity to seek to engage voluntary customers with no tangible results.

Links with JCP — a national DWP (2012) study suggested that a ‘problematic’ relationship may exist between Work Programme providers and JCP, mostly due to a lack of communication, however it did point to regional variations. In the region, good relationships exist and positive steps have been taken to ensure regular communication between Prospects and JCP staff operating in area offices. Embedded working relationships exist between Prospects and DWP Performance Managers to further support relationships with JCP advisers. It was apparent that referrals from JCP were significantly lower than expected, particularly this year, which has a ‘knock-on’ effect within the supply chain. It may be the case that JCP advisers who have expertise in helping people with health conditions are simply putting their knowledge and skills into practice (DWP, 2012, p. 68). Unemployment levels have dropped since the programme began and this will have also had an impact on referrals.

Links with employers – Prospects has worked closely with a range of employers in the CPA 11 region. The graph below illustrates current activity in a wide range of sectors.

Participants claiming ESA have generally been less successful in achieving job outcomes than those claiming JSA (even though the proportion obtaining job outcomes within 12 months has increased slightly since the start of the Programme). This was anticipated by the Programme’s payment model which awards providers a higher payment for placing ESA claimants into sustained employment.
Case study

Charlene

Charlene joined the Work Programme in Weymouth for a year after more than ten years out of work. Charlene had very low confidence and did not believe she would ever work or lead a life without medication.

Charlene worked with a Prospects adviser, setting small targets to remove barriers each week. After six months Charlene’s confidence had grown and she began voluntary work with the British Red Cross gaining NVQ level 1 in retail and passing English level 2.

When the voluntary placement ended Charlene looked for part time paid work. Prospects supported Charlene to ensure she had the tools necessary to start the application process. Within a fortnight Charlene gained an interview at Haven, she was positive and excited about starting the next chapter of her life. Haven employed Charlene in February 2016, and within a month Charlene was working full time and completely signed off of benefits.

Charlene comments: “In my life prior to the Work Programme, I didn’t go out of the house unless necessary and I was taking anti depressants, I could not see the future for myself or my children changing. We now have a full future ahead, and my children are proud of me for achieving this for us all.”

4.16 Payments – all Prime providers are paid when an individual reaches six months in work (or three months for those expected to require more assistance) and also for further work. Providers are paid more for further employment, usually up to a maximum of an additional one year or a little over a year and a half for the harder to help groups. If individuals remain in work, providers can receive payments after the two-year completion point. Payments end following a break in employment after the two-year point. It was reported the payment group a customer is allocated to on the Work Programme does not accurately reflect how easy or difficult each customer will be to get into work.

4.17 Up to two years to work with customers – given the complex and varied needs of many ESA customers this two-year period gives providers time, if they are unsuccessful in placing somebody into a sustained job, to try a second time to help them into a different role, although sometimes even two years is not long enough for those facing particularly significant barriers to employment such as individuals with a physical disability, mental health, drug or alcohol addiction, sensory or other disabilities. Clear incentives to deliver results are embedded centrally within the Programme. Service providers are paid almost entirely for results – defined as sustained job outcomes for participants. The longer a customer stays in work, the more delivery partners will be paid, so there are strong incentives to continue support once participants are in work. The Programme supports a wide range of participants and payments are higher for helping participants who are further from the labour market into sustained work.
4.18 Re-designing the Work Programme – The House of Commons, Work and Pensions Select Committee report (2014)\textsuperscript{34} states that “the flaws in the existing ESA system are so grave that simply “rebranding” the WCA by taking on a new provider will not solve the problems: a fundamental redesign of the ESA end-to-end process is required” (p.5). The most recent statistical release from the DWP (2015)\textsuperscript{35} clearly indicates dissatisfaction with the assessment process is increasing and around one in eight of all claimants are still successfully challenging their assessments. The overwhelming feedback from Prospects staff and external agencies in this research was for DWP to find a way of maintaining referrals to ensure programme stability.

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5. Are certain types of interventions more likely to produce positive outcomes for ESA customers? If so, what is the evidence-base?

5.1 In this section, we investigate whether certain types of interventions are likely to produce positive outcomes for ESA customers and we highlight findings from the data analysis of 799 customer journeys of those who had attached to the Work Programme between April – September 2013 and left between April-September 2015, or before, including most recent completers. These customers were classed as PG6: those who receive ESA with a prognosis of being able to return to work within 3-6 months (PG6a) or 6-12 months (PG6b) from date of referral are presented. A more detailed analysis of 40 customer journeys was also undertaken to identify patterns or trends.

Summary

5.2 The delivery of services, interventions and case management strategies have been developed to support all ESA customers. Prospects Work Programme staff tended to refer to ESA customers rather than to specific payment group types. There were very few differences between customers in the PG6a and PG6b groups. The differences were that the PG6b group were more likely to be last in employment longer ago, be slightly older, and be more likely to have learning disabilities and no qualifications than PG6a customers. Despite these minor differences, the outcome rates for PG6a and PG6b were broadly similar.

5.3 When looking at PG6a and PG6b groups and at those who achieved an outcome, the main differences were that, among PG6a customers, duration of being out of work and having some idea of a job goal were higher than for those who did not. However, for PG6b customers, the only significant difference was the lower incidence of having a criminal record history between those who achieved an outcome and those who did not.

5.4 It was not possible to review what type of outcomes had been achieved by all 799 customers. However, the outcomes of 40 customers, randomly selected from those who were recorded as having an outcome, were analysed, along with the support from their advisers and the Ascent interventions. The data are given in Tables 7 and 8, and are discussed later in this section. The main findings from this analysis are that:

- 25 out of 40 customers completed the Work Programme having found employment. Of the remaining 15 ‘completers’ (those completing Work Programme without having achieved a job outcome), 10 had moved from WRAG into a voluntary group, largely because of adverse or deteriorating health.
- Employment ranged from voluntary work, service work, construction, catering, and self-employment. Routes into employment varied depending on the customers’ links with the labour market, job goals, experience, and work readiness.
There was a wide variety of adviser support and interventions. The most commonly occurring types of support included job-related support; education and skills; support for health, mental health, and confidence/self-esteem; and lifestyle advice.

The support provided largely depended on customers’ needs. Some customers were facing complex and challenging health difficulties, and the advisers were mainly focusing on helping these customers manage their healthcare issues. Other customers were keen to find work, and the advisers tended to focus more on skills, employability, and searching for and applying for vacancies, including voluntary work. The latter was generally viewed as valuable step in gaining employment.

Advisers made use of local organisations, online resources, and national-level support services. Frequently mentioned organisations included:

- Local organisations included: Pentreath (charity for people with mental health difficulties), St Loye's Foundation (disability and training charity), Be Me Cornwall (NHS service for people with emotional or psychological difficulties), Streetlink (service to help those sleeping rough), Transferable Skills Training (deliver programmes to increase employability), Link into Learning (specialist ‘Skills for Life’ provider within Cornwall Adult Education Service)
- Online resources mentioned included: Alison, Vision2Learn and Craigslist.

Advisers were encouraging of customers’ personal learning and training. Good relations exist in particular with Cornwall College and Community Mental Trust (CMT) Services. For customers who are far from labour market entry, particularly those facing multiple barriers and/or significant mental health issues, a successful outcome is not necessarily a job start. These customers were facing a difficult customer journey, and for them, significant milestones may include being able to leave the house when suffering from agoraphobia, or reaching an improvement in their health or wellbeing, recovering from drug addiction, or entering voluntary work. These milestones are meaningful indicators of progress towards labour market entry, but it may not always be possible to record this improvement in their conditions on the system and to take this into account when evaluating Prospects’ Work Programme delivery performance. For some of these customers, entering employment before they are ready may lead to a deterioration in their conditions, and advisers must use their experience and judgement to decide how best to support such customers.

The factors that facilitated a successful Work Programme experience were:

- Offering tailored support and accommodating customers’ needs.
- Being flexible in the content of the one-to-one sessions.
- Having well-developed links with support organisations, especially at the local level, in order to connect customers with the support they need.

These were also reiterated in the some of the themes emerging from interviews with Work Programme staff and external agencies (see Section 7 below).
PG6 customers’ overview

5.5 799 customers attached to the Programme between April – September 2013 and were classed as PG6: those who receive ESA with a prognosis of being able to return to work within 3–6 months (PG6a) or 6–12 months (PG6b) from date of referral. PG6b was introduced by DWP memo 083 on 12 November 2012.36

- Customers may have two jobs at the same time to make the required hours to sign off benefits. This means that the second job start date may be before the first job start if these are jobs that run alongside each other.
- Customers may have job starts which are after the outcome date. These will be job starts which have been gained following accruing 13 weeks’ employment and which are now being used to claim subsequent sustainment blocks following achieving outcome, re-joining the programme (within 104 weeks from referral) and getting a further job.

General characteristics

5.6 There were 388 women and 411 men in the PG6 group as a whole, with an average age of 43 at the time of starting the Work Programme. On average, their last employment date was over seven years ago, but this ranged from two years (25 cases) to over 30 years (four cases).

5.7 The majority of customers did not require childcare. Just under one third had a learning disability (including those with possible learning difficulties but excluding those who mentioned physical and mental health issues). Over a quarter of customers had no formal qualifications. Just under one third had a criminal history (including driving offences, spent offences and cautions). The vast majority self-identified as white, which was not surprising given the low numbers of ethnic minorities in the South West. These data are shown in Table 1.

5.8 Regarding differences between customers who achieved an outcome and those who completed the Work Programme but did not achieve an outcome, at the aggregate level, those who achieved an outcome were more likely to be 2.5 years younger, to have been last in work more recently, to have a job goal, and less likely to have learning disabilities. Other differences between those who achieved and did not achieve an outcome were very slight and not statistically significant. There were no significant differences in the probability of outcomes achieved for PG6a and PG6b groups between the four counties: Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, and Somerset.

Gender

5.9 Looking at the differences between customers by gender (Table 4), a slightly lower proportion of women achieved an outcome than men, but this difference was not statistically significant. Men were more likely to have been in employment more recently (by 1.4 years on average), and to have a job goal. However, men were also more likely to have learning disabilities and to have a criminal record. Women were much more likely than men to say that they required childcare.

5.10 Comparing customers in PG6a and PG6b groups (Table 5), PG6a customers were more likely to be younger, have been employed more recently, have a job goal, and have qualifications than those in PG6b. PG6b customers were more likely to have learning disabilities than PG6a customers. This suggests that it may be harder to achieve outcomes for PG6b customers, and that unsuccessful PG6b customers may be further from the labour market than unsuccessful PG6a customers. However, there was no significant difference in the customer journey number between the two groups. There was also no significant difference in outcomes, with about 15% of both PG6a and PG6b customers achieving an outcome.

5.11 Among PG6a customers, those who achieved an outcome were significantly more likely to have a job goal than those who did not. They were also last in employment more recently compared to the group average (4.4 years ago compared to 6.7 for those who did not achieve an outcome. This can also be compared to the average of 6.3 years ago for PG6a and 7.4 years ago for PG6 customers as a whole). However, neither of these factors were significantly different between those who achieved an outcome and those who did not in PG6b.

5.12 In contrast, for the PG6b group, the only significant differences were that those who achieved an outcome were more likely to have some qualifications (but only at the 10% level of significance) and to be much less likely to have had a criminal record (20%, compared to 33% for those who did not achieve an outcome, and to a 31% average for PG6 as a whole). It should be noted that the PG6a group did not differ significantly from the average in terms of possessing a criminal record.

5.13 This statistical analysis, however, does not show how these different characteristics come together to affect the likelihood of achieving an outcome. Such work has been carried out by the DWP (2014)\textsuperscript{37}, which analysed customers’ experiences of the Work Programme, as well as the likelihood of obtaining and sustaining employment. Regarding ESA customers, the main findings were that those with a health condition or disability lasting more than 12 months were less likely to be in paid employment than those without a health condition or disability, but no significant difference was found for self-employment. Customers with a health condition or disability were also more likely to feel uncomfortable talking to advisers, believed that the support provided was not well matched to their needs and that they felt under pressure from the adviser to undertake activities they thought were unsuitable. However these differences disappeared for those staying on the programme nine to 12 months after referral, which suggests that for customers who remained on the Work Programme for a longer period, these differences between those with and without long-term health conditions diminished.

5.14 It was not possible to review what type of outcomes had been achieved by all 799 customers. However, the outcomes of 40 customers, randomly selected from those who were recorded as having an outcome, were analysed, along with the support from their advisers and the Ascent interventions. The data is given in Tables 7 and 8, and are discussed later in this section.

Which interventions were associated with achieving an outcome?

- 40 customers who were recorded as having achieved an outcome were randomly selected from the PG6 group of 799 customers, 20 from PG6a and 20 from PG6b.
- 25 out of 40 customers completed the Work Programme having found employment. Of the remaining 15 ‘completers’ (those completing Work Programme without having achieved a job outcome), 10 had moved from WRAG into a voluntary group, largely because of adverse or deteriorating health. In a further five cases, the job outcome was not clear.
- The Ascent interventions recorded on the customer record management system that occurred most often in this group were those from the A strand (Aspiration and motivation), followed by those from the E strand (Employer desirability). But only a few interventions were in the N (Notable influences) or C (Challenges) strands. Sometimes, interventions were delivered as a course, for example ‘Job Smart’ which comprised several of the Ascent strands.

However, it was often the case that during the one-to-one sessions, customers were receiving other kinds of support that may be classed as ‘interventions’ from the advisers. Among the more frequently mentioned suggestions offered by advisers were CV and cover letter support and advice, opportunities for jobs, training, or voluntary work, and referral to specialist organisations, for example for helping with mental health difficulties or accommodation. These suggestions differed depending on customers’ individual needs.

5.15 One of the difficulties of comparing customer journeys and the effectiveness of the interventions is the individualised support provided by Prospects means that no two customer journeys are alike. This individual approach, tailoring support to the individual, including addressing participants’ confidence and self-esteem, is a great strength of the Work Programme, as concluded by a DWP evaluation of Work Programme delivery (Newton et al., 2012). The report found two other practices to be helpful: having continuity of adviser, and running one-to-one sessions rather than group deliveries, particularly for customers with specific needs; and, crucially, linkages with employers and other local organisations to help customers with job placements and other areas of support. Similar attitudes have been echoed in the course of interviews with Work Programme staff and key stakeholders.

5.16 The following analysis summarises customers’ journey outcomes and interventions, and provides examples of what worked, to highlight the variety of interventions that could be adopted. This further illustrates the idea, occurring in the interviews, that any intervention could be effective, depending on the individual circumstances. A brief description of the customers’ outcomes and interventions can be seen in Tables 7 and 8. In the analysis below, customers are referred to by their ID, corresponding to the information in Table 7 (PG6a, 36-37) and Table 8 (PG6b, 38-39).

Customers’ attitudes and Work Programme effectiveness

5.17 Some customers are close to being in work and have high levels of motivation before joining the Work Programme. For these customers there is usually one main barrier to work. If this barrier is addressed, employment can typically be found quite quickly. In the sample of 40
PG6 customers, five were in a position where they were able to find work quickly. The Work Programme enables appropriate levels of support to be provided to customers so that this return to work is as fast as possible.

For example, one customer had physical health problems, which were his main barrier to employment. However, the customer had also been proactive in maintaining contact with his past employer and was “upbeat” about the prospect of working for the same company again. Indeed, this was the job outcome that he had gained after only a short period of time on the Work Programme. It is not clear to what extent Prospects Ascent assisted in this case. The customer’s health condition stabilised, which enabled him to return to work. (A3). In cases such as this the adviser is instrumental in supporting the customers with positive disclosure of their health condition with previous or potential employers and in instigating a communications plan with employers about returning to work.

5.18 The Work Programme may help customers who have low motivation. For example, one customer, who had depression and anxiety, had a five-month gap in attending the programme. However, after this period of failing to attend, the customer returned to the Work Programme to re-engage, as noted by the adviser:

“[The customer] has attended today to apologise for not engaging, and has told me that he needs support, and that he no longer wants to stay at home doing nothing with his life. We have negotiated the below interventions to kick start [his] journey into personal and professional development, closer to sustainable employment.” (A1)

5.19 After this turning point and the change in attitude, as documented in the adviser’s records, the customer went on to complete courses in order to be able to take the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card test, which further helped boost his confidence. Ultimately, the customer’s high level of commitment to engaging with the Work Programme, in particular attending job search sessions, led to a job offer and an Apprenticeship in painting and decorating, as shown in the adviser notes:

“Feedback from the employer is that [the customer] has always shown up on time every day, and has had no time off. Furthermore, [the customer’s] work ethic has been so strong that [the employer] simply do not want to lose him, and will be offering [the customer] a full apprenticeship starting [on date].” (A1)

5.20 In one case, the customer obtained a job, and later went back to the Prospects centre to recommend that his employer be contacted to arrange potential placements:

“[The customer] popped in to say ‘hello’, he is still working at [the company] and has been there nearly a year. He said that they have a large turnover of staff and they have jobs in a wide variety of roles, he wondered if there may be the option of approaching them for work placements.” (A17)

However, highlighting individual motivation as a key facilitating factor in the effectiveness of the programme is problematic. Customers may face challenging circumstances which make it difficult to ‘feel positive’.
Voluntary work

5.21 Voluntary work is often viewed by advisers as a way of improving social skills, meeting new people, and helping to overcome depression, anxiety, or confidence issues. In some cases, voluntary work was the outcome status for Work Programme completers. In other cases, voluntary work led to jobs, as described in the case below.

5.22 The customer (A4) had difficulties relating to depression and anxiety, but had expressed an interest in undertaking office work. However, the adviser thought that the best way forward was to build up the customer’s confidence and self-esteem. The adviser suggested voluntary work to help meet new people, free online courses to help with training in order to be able to undertake the NVQ at a later point, and referred her to Ascent interventions such as Wellbeing for success (A1) to build up her confidence. The adviser also helped arrange an ongoing process of support with a Volunteer Co-ordinator, through which the customer was able to secure a voluntary position in a foodbank, which then led to a job as a foodbank administrator. The experience in administration was also furthering the customer’s progression towards her goal of office work, and undertaking a relevant NVQ. This is a good example of effective links between Prospects and supporting organisations, and of tailoring support to the customer’s needs and objectives. In another case, a customer wanted to find work, but was struggling with drug addiction and recovery programme. At the end of the Work Programme, the customer was looking for voluntary work to prepare for future employment after completing the recovery programme (A5).

5.23 Skills Enhancement Projects (SEP) enable the customer to volunteer at the local Prospects centre, which can help develop their skills and confidence. SEP duties typically involve administrative tasks such as updating job book records, job boards and reception duties. SEP was offered in four cases (A10, A15, B7, and B16), but only A10’s adviser’s notes commented on SEP at length.

5.24 In the case of A10, the customer was very positive about its contributions to his skills development and the possibility to make new friends, and had asked to extend his SEP placement. The SEP was a very positive experience for this customer, who had been applying for many jobs, and had been employed in numerous positions during his Work Programme participation, but not managing to find sustained employment or to pass probation. In this customer’s case, the SEP was directly helping him develop his skills for his job goal as a receptionist. His SEP experience led to the customer applying for an Apprenticeship in administration, however, it is not clear from the records whether the customer pursued this.

Changing PG6 status to voluntary group

5.25 Sometimes the customer’s health issues were such that they were not able to work, which the adviser recognised. However, it often took a long time for the customer to change status, as the two following examples demonstrate:

“Although [the customer] was placed in the Work Related Activity Group, their health condition means that they are a considerable distance from the labour market. We have discussed activities such as voluntary work, permitted work, courses and referral agencies but these are not appropriate at this time due to health limitations.” (A19)
“[The customer] is convinced her deteriorating health will not allow her to be doing any work either now or in the near future....she is in regular contact with her GP, […] “I have told [the customer] that for the time being we will have contact monthly as [she] is so far from the labour market that it is unrealistic to expect her to compete targets and action points other than staying in touch with Prospects and the medical professionals she visits for her health conditions." (B1) This is an example of where advisers seek to support customers' health conditions in the short term.

Freedom to decide what to do in one-to-one sessions

5.26 For some customers, group-based sessions were not viewed to be helpful, because these customers felt that they could not cope well in such environments. In these cases, advisers referred customers to other types of support, such as online courses, or individual sessions, for example at the St Loye's Foundation.

5.27 In one case, the adviser was helping the customer with maths calculations to revise for the customer's CSCS card test:

“[The customer] attended today [date] where we have spent time together revising for his CSCS test on [date], and also teaching [him] how to work out areas of shapes, such as when measuring a room for carpet/tiling etc. [The customer's] attitude is fantastic, and I cannot commend him enough on just how hard he is working recently. Keep up the fantastic work!” (A1)

5.28 Some time is spent searching for and applying for jobs, or running mock interviews. In one case, the adviser suggested that customer undertake a mock interview even though the customer did not think that there was any need for this. While the mock interview did identify positive areas, it also revealed some areas where interview technique could be improved, such as maintaining eye contact, giving specific answers, etc. (A10). This then enabled the customer to focus on improving his interview technique, which led to being invited to interviews and receiving several job offers over the course of the Ascent programme.

5.29 Some one-to-one sessions were spent searching for social clubs or other activities in a bid to boost self-confidence and motivation levels. This is a clear example of the holistic approach Ascent takes in supporting customers:

“[The customer] still doesn't feel like life is moving forward and he is forcing himself to do it. [He] plays the guitar but we have looked for groups in [town name] that play guitar and haven't found anything.” (A17)

5.30 The flexibility of being able to focus on the customers’ main needs were key to successful one-to-one sessions.
Potential difficulties

5.31 There were several difficulties, besides significant health barriers, that arose during the Work Programme participation and getting jobs. These related to employers’ and customers’ attitudes about disclosing customers’ disabilities, precarious employment that prevented a job outcome or a sustained job outcome, the long waiting period between hospital appointments, benefits claims, or accessing specialist care, and breaks in specialist care provision. These issues are discussed in more detail below.

5.32 Sometimes employers being unaware of disability – e.g. a Work Programme customer was hired as a chef but then let go as the employer thought that they were ‘too slow’ (A10), or turning down customers who disclosed their disabilities, as the example below shows:

“[I issued 5 copies of the customer’s] CV and asked [her] why she had not taken CVs with her when she was coming into town - and [she] said that she had nothing to put them in!! I told [the customer] that I was not convinced that she wanted a job which upset her and [she] started to cry. She explained that it was difficult for her to find part-time work - especially when she told [the employers] about her health problem and I have explained that she should not put anything on the application about her health problem so long as she is applying for jobs that she can actually do.” (14)

Such situations can have a negative effect on customers’ confidence issues. Whether the employer should make work concessions depended on the individual customers’ circumstances, and the suitability and fit of the job, as well as the type of job modifications. Similar findings were also reported by the DWP evaluation of participants’ experience (Meager et al., 2014).

5.33 Precarious work was another issue, for example, sometimes customers were offered a job, but the job hours became reduced (A10, B2); the job did not pay enough (A14), or the company restructured, leading to a loss of job (B20). These factors are outside the direct control of Prospects, and they are emblematic of a wider problem of precarious, low-skilled, low-pay work, highlighted in a review of employment support (Oakley, 2015).

5.34 A third issue was related to having to wait a long time between hospital appointments, benefits claims, specialist referrals, and other such services. For example, in one case a customer was suffering from severe health conditions (B4). She had been advised to get in touch with her council housing provider to ask to be relocated to a more appropriate place, but her request was denied. She was also routinely waiting 6-8 weeks between hospital appointments, which were further complicated by other health conditions. In this case, health conditions were the main barrier to work, and the customer was eventually moved to a voluntary support group.

Related to this, a particular difficulty was reported by vulnerable customers or customers with particular difficulties facing breaks in the provision of service, for example, being unable to arrange counselling (B12), to access CPN (B20), or being disappointed with frequent change of advisers (B6).
Comparisons with other findings

5.35 These findings are similar to those found by a DWP consultation (DWP, 2012) about distance from the labour market. People who were closest to the labour market were sometimes left to their own devices; usually assistance with job search was provided. When there was a discrepancy between participants’ search for work and the job applications their adviser suggested, this was usually experienced negatively.

5.36 Most respondents in the DWP evaluation were those that were close to the labour market but not as close as the first group. They typically faced a constraint that could be resolved through some kind of intervention, and also had scope for improving their employability. Interventions offered included training, work experience and other job search activities, others referred to health assessments, and others had not, at the time of the evaluation survey, had not received the support they needed, although the DWP evaluation did not explore why.

5.37 Those furthest from the labour market typically had multiple and/or severe barriers to labour market entry, including health problems, alcohol problems, criminal records. “There were not many participants in the sample who fell into this group (possibly reflecting the small numbers of claimants being referred to the programme as a whole who were in receipt of ESA)” (p. 110). Some had received direct support, while others thought they had very little help, few requirements, and telephone contact instead of face-to-face one-to-one. The DWP evaluation suggested that there was “clearest evidence of parking in this group” (p. 110).

What works?

5.38 From the above analysis, the factors that facilitated a successful Work Programme experience were:

- Offering tailored support and accommodating differing customers’ needs suited to their own specific health-related employment barriers.
- Being flexible in the content of the one-to-one and group sessions
- Having well-developed links with support organisations, especially at the local level, in order to connect customers with the support they need
- Connecting with employers to help secure job opportunities and support for ESA customers.

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5.39 Findings from a review of literature, including a meta-analysis of recent Active Labour Market Policies (ALMP) (Card et al, 2015) indicate the average impacts of ALMP’s vary across groups, with larger effects for females and participants drawn from the pool of long term unemployed, and smaller effects for older workers and youths. Hasluck & Green (2007) noted the heterogeneous nature of disability and the wide range of issues that people face in entering and retaining work. The personalisation of service delivery, so that it meets the specific needs of individuals, was viewed as crucial. In particular, ensuring that staff have adequate time to spend with participants and the opportunity to tailor services to meet individual need are seen as key factors in moving disabled people towards work. Audhoe et al (2009) highlight robust evidence that peer-led group work can be effective in improving wellbeing and employment. Purvis et al (CESI, 2014) provide an excellent summary of international research findings. They highlight a model built around holistic engagement of the participant and those around them, effective profiling, job matching and then extensive support in work is most effective, but they also highlight this is relatively expensive and needs to be effectively targeted. Barnes et al (2016) in a European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) major European study of low qualified adults’ emphasise the importance of vulnerable adults having access to guidance and counselling to assist them in confidence building and self-esteem. A number of reviews (Shaw Trust 2013; Didben et al, 2012) have noted, there are constraints in terms of clearly identifying what works, mainly due to a lack of consistency in the definitions used to categorise participants, support models or methods of service delivery and programme outcomes. There is also a lack of robust assessments of the additional impact of programmes, and on the costs and benefits of differing interventions. An important development in the recent evaluation literature is the increasing use of Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs).

5.40 Some of these factors were also reiterated in the some of the themes emerging from interviews with customers, Work Programme staff and external partner agencies (see Section 6) and other research findings.

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43. Purvis, A., Foster, S. & Lanceley, L. (July 2014) Fit for Purpose: Transforming employment support for disabled people and those with mental health conditions. Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion.
Table 3: PG6 customers’ characteristics overall and by whether or not they achieved an outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>No Outcome</th>
<th>Missing cases</th>
<th>Significant difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female customers (% of customers)</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age (mean number of years old at attachment)*</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>p&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average last employment (mean years ago at attachment)</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>p&lt;0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers with any job goal (% of customers; don't know or none = 0)*</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>69.9</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>p&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare required (% of customers; including school-age children and 'maybe' answers)</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare required (% of customers; 'yes' only)</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any learning disabilities (% of customers)*</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>p&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any qualifications (% of customers; including vocational, entry level onwards)</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any criminal record (% of customers; including spent offences and cautions)</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers of white ethnicity (% of customers)</td>
<td>97.9</td>
<td>99.1</td>
<td>97.6</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average customer journey number (mean, 1–4, 1 is further away from labour market entry)</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 799 PG6 customers who attached to the work programme between April – September 2013. The text in bold shows where there was significant difference between those who achieved an outcome and those who did not. * significant at the 5% level, ** significant at the 1% level, *** significant at less than 0.1% level.
Hard Times: smoothing transitions in the Employment Support Allowance customer journey

Table 4: PG6 customers’ characteristics by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Women (N=388)</th>
<th>Men (N=411)</th>
<th>Significant difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes (% of customers)</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age (mean number of years old at attachment)</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average last employment (mean years ago at attachment)**</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers with any job goal (% of customers; don’t know or none = 0)**</td>
<td>66.9</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare required (% of customers; including school-age children and ‘maybe’ answers)***</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare required (% of customers; ‘yes’ only)***</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any learning disabilities (% of customers)*</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>35.4</td>
<td>p&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any qualifications (% of customers; including vocational, entry level onwards)</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any criminal record (% of customers; including spent offences and cautions)***</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers of white ethnicity (% of customers)</td>
<td>98.1</td>
<td>97.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average customer journey number (mean, 1—4, 1 is further away from labour market entry)</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: 799 PG6 customers who attached to the work programme between April – September 2013. The text in bold shows where there was significant difference between those who achieved an outcome and those who did not. * Significant at the 5% level, ** significant at the 1% level, *** significant at less than 0.1% level.
### Table 5: PG6a and PG6b customers’ characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PG6A (N=355)</th>
<th>PG6B (N=444)</th>
<th>Significant difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female customers (% of customers)</td>
<td>45.9</td>
<td>50.7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes (% of customers)</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average age (mean number of years old at attachment)**</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>44.2</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average last employment (mean years ago at attachment)***</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>p&lt;0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers with any job goal (% of customers; don’t know or none = 0)**</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>p&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare required (% of customers; including school-age children and ‘maybe’ answers)</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare required (% of customers; ‘yes’ only)</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any learning disabilities (% of customers)*</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>35.3</td>
<td>p&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any qualifications (% of customers; including vocational, entry level onwards)*</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>70.4</td>
<td>p&lt;0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any criminal record (% of customers; including spent offences and cautions)</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers of white ethnicity (% of customers)</td>
<td>98.2</td>
<td>97.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average customer journey number (mean, 1–4, 1 is further away from labour market entry)</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: 799 PG6 customers who attached to the work programme between April – September 2013. The text in bold shows where there was significant difference between those who achieved an outcome and those who did not. * Significant at the 5% level, ** significant at the 1% level, *** significant at less than 0.1% level.
Table 6: Characteristics of PG6a and PG6b customers who were and were not successful in achieving an outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PG6A</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>No Outcome</th>
<th>Significant difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of people</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>299</td>
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<td>Female customers (% of customers)</td>
<td>45.92</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age (years old at attachment)</td>
<td>41.51</td>
<td>39.68</td>
<td>41.88</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean last employment (years ago)*</td>
<td>6.32</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>p&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers with any job goal (% of customers; don’t know or none = 0)*</td>
<td>76.63</td>
<td>87.27</td>
<td>74.56</td>
<td>p&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childcare required (% of customers; including school-age children and ‘maybe’ answers)</td>
<td>15.94</td>
<td>14.55</td>
<td>16.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any learning disabilities (% of customers)*</td>
<td>27.11</td>
<td>18.18</td>
<td>28.82</td>
<td>NS: p=10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any qualifications (% of customers; including vocational, entry level onwards)</td>
<td>78.34</td>
<td>78.18</td>
<td>78.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any criminal record (% of customers; including spent offences and cautions)</td>
<td>30.43</td>
<td>32.73</td>
<td>30.00</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers of white ethnicity (% of customers)</td>
<td>98.20</td>
<td>98.04</td>
<td>98.23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer journey number</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>2.12</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PG6B</th>
<th>All</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>No Outcome</th>
<th>Significant difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of people</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>380</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female customers (% of customers)</td>
<td>50.68</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age (years old at attachment)</td>
<td>44.17</td>
<td>42.04</td>
<td>44.54</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean last employment (years ago)*</td>
<td>8.19</td>
<td>8.04</td>
<td>8.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Customers with any job goal (% of customers; don’t know or none = 0)*</td>
<td>67.29</td>
<td>73.77</td>
<td>66.21</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Childcare required (% of customers; including school-age children and ‘maybe’ answers)</td>
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<td>12.90</td>
<td>12.30</td>
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<td>Childcare required (% of customers; ‘yes’ only)</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>4.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any learning disabilities (% of customers)*</td>
<td>35.32</td>
<td>25.81</td>
<td>36.90</td>
<td>p&lt;0.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any qualifications (% of customers; including vocational, entry level onwards)</td>
<td>78.34</td>
<td>78.18</td>
<td>78.37</td>
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<td>Any criminal record (% of customers; including spent offences and cautions)</td>
<td>31.34</td>
<td>19.67</td>
<td>33.24</td>
<td>P&lt;0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Customers of white ethnicity (% of customers)</td>
<td>97.59</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>97.19</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer journey number</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>2.06</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: 799 PG6 customers who attached to the work programme between April – September 2013. The text in bold shows where there was significant difference between those who achieved an outcome and those who did not. * Significant at the 5% level, ** significant at the 1% level, *** significant at less than 0.1% level.
### Table 7: PG6a outcomes and interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PG6a ID</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Outcome/ID</th>
<th>One-to-one attended</th>
<th>No. interv. attended</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Other interventions raised in 1:1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Customer’s attitude really changed and is engaging in learning and revision, which the adviser thinks contributed to job offer at decorators’</td>
<td>Apprentice decorator</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>CV workshop, job search, mock interviews, speculative approaches, T1, N1, E1, E2, T2, E7, Breakfast club, National Careers Service</td>
<td>UJM job search; potential referral to Be Me; speculative approach ongoing; adviser helping with maths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Customer going through a difficult period</td>
<td>Moved to voluntary support group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Suggested looking at available courses, but customer feels he cannot engage because of MH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>Customer upbeat about employment and has been proactive in maintaining contact with past employer</td>
<td>Crew member at restaurant</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>Customer remained in contact with ex-employer; adviser suggested thinking about short and long-term objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>Customer thinks she has a weak support base</td>
<td>Foodbank administrator</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>activity sessions, A1, T1, E8, E1, Employer Solutions Team Adviser support</td>
<td>Encouraging to explore voluntary options, especially to help with MH and support network; NVQ in business and admin; free online courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5</td>
<td>Addiction was a key problem</td>
<td>Moved to voluntary support group</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>achievement projects, A5, A2, A6, S6</td>
<td>Discussed need to do PW before committing to FT job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6</td>
<td>Customer did not attend any appointments or inductions and then notified us of employment</td>
<td>Self-employed labourer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7</td>
<td>Child care and health issues</td>
<td>Care home employee</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>A5, A2, A6, C4, S6, cover letters</td>
<td>Daily routine, training needs, CV review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A8</td>
<td>Criminality and attendance issues</td>
<td>Supermarket night shift assistant</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>E2, ESA open session</td>
<td>CMT, CV review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9</td>
<td>Customer did not attend any appointments or inductions</td>
<td>Self-employed store owner</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A10</td>
<td>Customer was applying for various jobs and placements throughout, including some job starts but not outcomes</td>
<td>Telephone agent</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>job club, motivation, Apprenticeships, IT, Careers South West, CV, meet the employer, S5, E6, help with interviews and applications</td>
<td>Providing feedback and advice; insisting on mock interview although customer thought they had no problems; voluntary work, SEP</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hard Times: smoothing transitions in the Employment Support Allowance customer journey

Prospects Services 2016
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A11</th>
<th>A12</th>
<th>A13</th>
<th>A14</th>
<th>A15</th>
<th>A16</th>
<th>A17</th>
<th>A18</th>
<th>A19</th>
<th>A20</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health issues (seizures and memory impairment)</td>
<td>Front of house; apprentice</td>
<td>Health issues (knee replacement)</td>
<td>Customer not making enough money in first job</td>
<td>Addiction issues</td>
<td>Customer noted that customer was negative about WP. No longer claiming benefits. Being supported by parents.</td>
<td>Confidence up and down</td>
<td>Adviser noted that customer was negative about WP. No longer claiming benefits. Being supported by parents.</td>
<td>Confidence up and down</td>
<td>Job start?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A11</td>
<td>A12</td>
<td>A13</td>
<td>A14</td>
<td>A15</td>
<td>A16</td>
<td>A17</td>
<td>A18</td>
<td>A19</td>
<td>A20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workforce support, coaching, life skills; adviser helping customer prepare for opportunities</td>
<td>Motivation, first aid, confidence, internet, money advice, job of dreams, job search, interview skills</td>
<td>Mental health issues (depression and stress)</td>
<td>Customer service assistant</td>
<td>Self-employment, National Careers Service, job search, Ascent</td>
<td>Handyman</td>
<td>Self-employed landscape gardener</td>
<td>Computer Numerically Controlled Operator</td>
<td>Computer Numerically Controlled Operator</td>
<td>Self-employed landscape gardener</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A11</td>
<td>A12</td>
<td>A13</td>
<td>A14</td>
<td>A15</td>
<td>A16</td>
<td>A17</td>
<td>A18</td>
<td>A19</td>
<td>A20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved to voluntary status</td>
<td>Motivated to voluntary status</td>
<td>Moved to voluntary status</td>
<td>Sales advisor; Customer service assistant</td>
<td>Handicrafts</td>
<td>Induction only</td>
<td>Self-employed landscape gardener</td>
<td>Computer Numerically Controlled Operator</td>
<td>Computer Numerically Controlled Operator</td>
<td>Moved to voluntary status, Bar staff at pub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A11</td>
<td>A12</td>
<td>A13</td>
<td>A14</td>
<td>A15</td>
<td>A16</td>
<td>A17</td>
<td>A18</td>
<td>A19</td>
<td>A20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
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Prospects Services 2016
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PG6b ID</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Declining health.</td>
<td>Moved to voluntary support group, no longer wants to attend</td>
<td>Adviser suggested work choice option</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CV workshop, keeping it real C1; Transferrable Skills Training personal development; self-esteem course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Losing health issues (previous stroke)</td>
<td>Moved to voluntary support group, no longer wants to attend</td>
<td>Adviser highlighted potential job opportunity, appointments with JCP and TASS training, to achieve Security Industry Authority (SIA) license</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>Declining health, counselling and support in place. But has taken long time to move out of WRAG in voluntary group</td>
<td>Moved to voluntary support group, no longer wants to attend</td>
<td>Adviser highlighted potential job opportunity, appointments with JCP and TASS training, to achieve Security Industry Authority (SIA) license</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4</td>
<td>Depression and poor health; complaint about lack of adviser continuity</td>
<td>Employed at a charity</td>
<td>Adviser suggested community psychiatric nurse (CPN) treatment sessions; National Citizen Service; UJM voluntary work; CV review; therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5</td>
<td>Mental health issues (depression and paranoia)</td>
<td>Completed Work dried due to mental health issues</td>
<td>Adviser suggested community psychiatric nurse (CPN) treatment sessions; National Citizen Service; UJM voluntary work; CV review; therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B6</td>
<td>Customer thought that Work Programme was not helpful</td>
<td>Completed Work dried due to mental health issues</td>
<td>Adviser suggested community psychiatric nurse (CPN) treatment sessions; National Citizen Service; UJM voluntary work; CV review; therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B7</td>
<td>Mental health issues (depression and paranoia)</td>
<td>Completed Work dried due to mental health issues</td>
<td>Adviser suggested community psychiatric nurse (CPN) treatment sessions; National Citizen Service; UJM voluntary work; CV review; therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B8</td>
<td>Benefits issue during programme; poor physical health</td>
<td>Completed Work dried due to mental health issues</td>
<td>Adviser suggested community psychiatric nurse (CPN) treatment sessions; National Citizen Service; UJM voluntary work; CV review; therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B9</td>
<td>Mental health issues (depression and paranoia)</td>
<td>Completed Work dried due to mental health issues</td>
<td>Adviser suggested community psychiatric nurse (CPN) treatment sessions; National Citizen Service; UJM voluntary work; CV review; therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B10</td>
<td>Customer thought that Work Programme was not helpful</td>
<td>Completed Work dried due to mental health issues</td>
<td>Adviser suggested community psychiatric nurse (CPN) treatment sessions; National Citizen Service; UJM voluntary work; CV review; therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B11</td>
<td>Customer thought that Work Programme was not helpful</td>
<td>Completed Work dried due to mental health issues</td>
<td>Adviser suggested community psychiatric nurse (CPN) treatment sessions; National Citizen Service; UJM voluntary work; CV review; therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Case</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Action Taken</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B12</td>
<td>No counselling arranged; issues with Pentreath appointment; managed to get private counselling briefly but this stopped.</td>
<td>Hospital care support worker</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B13</td>
<td>Accommodation issues; deteriorating health; has since been placed in sheltered housing</td>
<td>Completed Work Programme, no outcome due to health issues</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B14</td>
<td>Health issues</td>
<td>Completed Work Programme, no outcome due to health issues</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B15</td>
<td>Changed adviser.</td>
<td>National trust volunteer</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B16</td>
<td>No longer in work</td>
<td>Administrative assistant</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B17</td>
<td>Vulnerability status</td>
<td>Retail assistant</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B18</td>
<td>Carer's allowance takes customer off Work Programme; she does not require Work Programme support</td>
<td>Online ALISON course</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B19</td>
<td>Had ideas about own business</td>
<td>Moved to voluntary support group; caring responsibilities</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B20</td>
<td>Issues with CPN provision; returned to Work Programme after brief spell of employment due to company restructuring; then found another job</td>
<td>self-employed floor layer; working with mentor from Prince's trust</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. What are the enablers that produce positive outcomes for Work Programme ESA customers?

6.1 In this section, we draw upon findings from customers, staff and external agencies. We begin by capturing the voices of customers and their experiences. We then highlight reasons that help explain why some customers failed to secure employment after two years on the Work Programme. We also identify key enablers identified through the research to help guide future Work Programme developments both within and outside of Prospects.

The voices of customers

6.2 A male customer (27 years old) described his earlier work in the family business where he was responsible for warehousing, IT and stock control:

“I worked hard in the family business but experienced a very abusive relationship were I was bullied and made to feel inadequate. Working with the family was not easy! I ended up having a mental breakdown and I attempted suicide on more than one occasion. Eventually, I went to the Job Centre and it took 12 months for me to receive my full payments. I felt demoralised, demotivated and depressed. When I was referred to Prospects, I was sceptical about what they could do for me but I decided to give it a go. I am nervous about travelling on public transport but my adviser offered to support by travelling alongside me in case I have a panic attack. I know I need to overcome my fears but it isn’t easy. My adviser has tapped into my interest in animation and she has put me in touch with a film company in Bridgwater. When I manage to overcome my public transport phobia (hopefully soon), I hope to be able to have a work placement using my creative skills. My confidence was shattered and I’m doing my best to rebuild this. I have enjoyed coming here!”

6.3 A female customer (46 years old) who is coming to the end of two years on ESA explained she has fibromyalgia - a rheumatic condition characterised by muscular or musculoskeletal pain with stiffness and localised tenderness at specific points on the body. Prior to being on the Work Programme, she was a medical receptionist:

“I didn’t feel very positive when I received a letter advising me to come here. Each day varies – sometimes I can feel okay and then I can suddenly go downhill. I must admit I had a bit of an attitude at first. Why did I need to come here? My doctor encouraged me to join a self-help group and I enjoyed meeting people in a similar situation. Anyway, I came along and found the staff really supportive. They encouraged me to participate in one-to-one and group sessions which helped boost my self-esteem and confidence. I discovered other people had their own medical problems but most of us wanted to return to some form of work. I decided to make the most of this experience and volunteered to work in the reception. I’ve volunteered in a craft centre and I now have a CV. The Prospects team have pushed and supported me. It’s been worthwhile. I’d like to go on to work in a Care Home for the Elderly - health permitting!”

6.4 In one case, a male (39 years old) had separated from his wife (not of his own choice) having lived for 16 years in the South East of England:

“I was a successful entrepreneur with my own kitchen fitting company. I was happily married for 16 years, had three children and a good university degree behind me. I never claimed anything of the state in my entire life. But when my wife told me she wanted a divorce, I had a breakdown and returned to be near my parents in Devon. Life was hell as I tried to come to terms with everything. At first, I didn’t go to the Job Centre because I felt there was a stigma attached to...
this but eventually I needed money to survive. I joined the Work Programme in June 2015 and I've been looking for a job since then. The group meetings at first were difficult – we're all so very different! Continuity is problematic because people sometimes don't turn up, some don't want to be here! I've managed to update my CV and I've further developed my IT skills with support from the Prospects team. I know this might sound strange but I've been so grateful recently because I have a job interview in a Call Centre this week (not great I know but it's better than nothing) and Prospects have paid for me to have a haircut and I actually get my travel expenses paid. Honestly, without this I don't know how I would manage. I'm living on the breadline.”

6.5 In another case, a male (35 years old) had previously worked as a Stock Market Trader. He had a brain tumour operation in 2014 and following this he had suffered from depression and anxiety attacks. The Citizens Advice Bureau referred him to the Job Centre for ESA and Housing Benefit.

“When I joined the Work Programme I knew I needed CBT to overcome my worries because this was something I had discussed and agreed with my doctor. I came here to rediscover myself and gain practical advice, coaching and support to help me get job ready. I had to focus on resilience and learn how to better cope with setbacks in life. The most important thing for me was to learn how to market myself to employers. My confidence was low and I benefited from speaking in front of groups, but it was very difficult at first. There are 5-6 people in my group and we support one another. I've also had one-to-one support which has been incredibly useful – this has helped me immensely. I've learned more about the difference in being assertive rather than sounding aggressive. The interview practice is great, particularly the mock interviews. Though, I'd really like employers to come and talk to the group so that we know they haven't given up on us. I'm feeling more positive about my future thanks to the help and support available here.”

6.6 Six customers who participated in the focus group workshop had been together as a group for most of 2015. In two cases, a male (54 years old) had previously joined the Work Programme in March 2014. He described himself as “a loner who lived in a caravan and had to travel miles to attend the group meetings.” He resented being forced to attend and although he had learned about interventions he was “struggling to understand how he would put these into action because I need to go into hospital soon for an operation!” A female (50 years old) had spent most of the last three years caring for her terminally ill mother:

“I was a full-time carer for Mum – there was no-one else. I looked after her and when she went into hospital I was still there for her. When she died, I had to learn to mix with people again and I had no transport or money. When I claimed from the state I was told to come here. I didn't like it at first but I've grown in confidence and always speaking up in the group. They're great here… very supportive and encouraging. Outside of here, I'm now doing some cleaning a few hours a week.”

In one case, a male (60 years old) could not read or write. He described his experience as follows:

“I've worked most of my life buying and selling things. I made a mistake and ended up in prison for handling stolen goods. I'm not a thief! I was unlucky because I'd worked for years labouring and paying my own way. Now I have to sit through these activities and I don't want to learn how to read and write. I can't see how this will help me. The main problem is employers don't want you if you have a criminal conviction. Why can't they come here and listen to us so that we can have our faith restored in the system. The advisers here are friendly and helpful but they can't offer me a job!”
In another case, a female (45 years old) had been in prison for 15 years. She described her first meeting at Prospects:
“I didn’t want to come. I was terrified and was physically sick at the thought of having to meet other people I didn’t know. I managed to get some counselling and I’ve since started counsellor training as a volunteer. My adviser has really helped me – he’s very supportive. I never had a CV before and I now like being part of this group. But, coming here every week can be a struggle. It would be better if we could phone in sometimes instead of having to physically be here.”

In two cases, the participants highlighted they travelled 10–15 miles to attend the group sessions. A male (39 years old) described how he gradually joined the group activities:

“When I first came here I couldn’t come into the room. I was depressed and anxious and did not want to talk to complete strangers. I kept my head down, but staff here are very patient and they gradually managed to persuade me to sit in the room with this lot. I was frightened of the unknown. My self-esteem was low...they’ve built me up and I’m starting to believe in myself. The activities have been good. But there aren’t any suitable jobs for me because of where I live and poor public transport.”

Finally, a male (43 years old) described himself as suffering from depression and anxiety:
“I’m currently on beta blockers and each day is a struggle. This group understands my situation and we give each other support. My mother died recently my family are demanding. I have to travel 15 miles to get here and it causes me a lot of stress. I’m trying to find out where I can get some local counselling. They’re very good here in helping me to find local services. I don’t think I’m ready to go back to work yet until I come off the beta blockers.”

**Why some customers failed to secure employment after two years on the Work Programme**

6.7 The explanation for this is well documented and multi-layered:

- Many ESA customers have physical, health-related and/or mental conditions with some having multiple challenges to deal with such as homelessness (temporary living in hostels), drug addiction, criminal record, extreme mental health conditions, including paranoid schizophrenia, psychosis, bipolar disorder and autism.
- Some are not hopeful of finding work. For these, there may have been little change in their personal circumstances, which may include ongoing health (e.g. Cancer recovery) and/or literacy barriers; lack of qualifications, skills or work experience.
- The majority of ESA customers face significant competition for scarce jobs and often struggle to find secure employment or work that fits around family responsibilities.
- Some live in places where options for work are significantly reduced by lack of public transport and/or the expense of long journeys.
- Some have applied for inappropriate jobs i.e. any job is better than no job and then the realisation of mismatch occurs or they may not have received feedback from an employer(s) on how to improve their applications which has lower their confidence and self-esteem.
- Some are not offered any form of training by the employer.
- For some the day-to-day challenge of work routine is not clearly understood e.g. an employer explained he had to sack an employee from the ESA customer group because “six times I explained the necessary to phone in before the shift starts if [x] was ill and could not come to work. Sadly, he had special educational needs and could not fully understand this despite his and my own best efforts. I had flexed the rules to accommodate him but eventually I had to draw the line.”
What are the enablers that produce positive outcomes for Work Programme customers?

6.7 Based on customers, staff and external agencies’ interviews, we identified seven key enablers that produce positive outcomes for PG6a and PG6b customers.

Key enabler 1: Tailored support that accommodates differing customers’ needs.

A significant proportion of ESA customers have multiple and complex factors preventing them from smooth transitions into employment. At least three key themes emerged from the interviews, namely, (i) offer a comfortable setting; (ii) have continuous contact to build a trusted relationship; and (iii) take the service to the person, whenever possible. The first contact point is very important. Both Prospects and its partners talked about the importance of having personalised, one-to-one interventions that are meaningful for all ESA customers:

“Treat them the same as everyone else – when you have PG6 specific activities or focus groups you tend to isolate them, [and] when you don’t integrate them I think you are not helping. Some people are really poorly but what we can offer them here gives them hope and gives them a break from their everyday routine.” (Staff)

“The Work Programme approach has given us a collective framework for shared dialogue, particularly in our case conferencing meetings and training.” (Voluntary Sector Organisation)

Case Study

Matt

Matt, from Exeter, joined the Work Programme after having a number of temporary jobs in stockrooms, retail, cleaning, kitchens and a café, but nothing permanent. He joined Prospects in October 2014 and received assistance from a support worker as Matt has learning difficulties, but as his confidence grew he became more independent. Matt has been a champion volunteer for Mencap and produced a promotional video about attitudes towards disability for Pluss, a voluntary organisation. Outwardly Matt is confident, however, internally he has anxiety and low self-esteem and struggles to cope with changing situations.

Prospects person centred approach motivated Matt, he created a CV, covering letter, practiced interview skills and developed his confidence. He achieved three job starts, however, these were temporary contracts, but Matt continued to attend Prospects Work Programme joining an intensive basic skills training course and receiving his completion certificate from Exeter MP, Ben Bradshaw. The course spurred him to achieve his goal of getting full time, permanent work by his 30th birthday. Matt’s determination was rewarded when cleaning contractor, CBRE, employed him and adapted the job description to suit his needs.

Matt feels that Prospects one-to-one sessions helped him adopt a positive attitude. Matt’s advice to other jobseekers is: “Don’t give up, and don’t just sit in front of a computer, get yourself out there. You have to take risks to get what you want.”
The Ascent approach has provided flexibility in delivery combining holistic interventions with a wide range of job search related activities: CV preparation, compiling job applications interview training and pre-employment support. All staff interviewed mentioned there is a lot of flexibility in the range of approaches used with customers, but with the drop in referrals to the Work Programme over the last year, the costs of some interventions is a limiting factor. For example, certain group sessions are not run frequently as there is a requirement for a minimum number of attendees to ensure cost effectiveness. This problem is further compounded by the rural geography of CPA 11.

**Key enabler 2: Trained, knowledgeable and skilled workers.**

Clearly, ESA customers have complex barriers to work, therefore, practitioners have to be well-trained, knowledgeable and skilled in diagnosis, treatment, follow up and/or referrals. Regular communications with JobCentre Plus staff, including co-training with partners, appears be highly valued. For example:

“We have introduced a three-step approach to working with our ESA customers (i) general engagement, we call it ‘Walk on the wild side’ – getting out of the house, go for a walk in the woods, a book club, community adventure, building a relationship. If you have to work with someone who has just been told that they potentially have to work, they may be very reluctant. But we put a time limit on those because we didn't always move people forward. … [Outcome:] They would hopefully build a relationship with us and with the peer group. (ii) Then we move them on to our Stepping Stones programme, so we start looking at their IT skills, we start looking at possible goals, we put together a CV – to show them that they have lots to offer to an employer, look at all you’ve done, just building their confidence in their work skills and then (iii) working with employers, perhaps introducing them to work experience, work trials and jobs, obviously.” (Staff)

“My colleagues attended a really good training session on resilience and this made me realise the value of being part of a vibrant learning network.” (Housing Association)

“The Prospects team are very patient and knowledgeable. They take us out of our comfort zone to help improve our confidence levels.” (Customer)

**Key enabler 3: Sustain well-developed links with support organisations, especially at the local level, in order to connect customers with the support they need.**

Prospects has a wide range of working partnerships across the region as described earlier in sections 4 and 5:

“I needed counselling support and Prospects helped me find this close to home.” (Customer)

“Regular partnerships meetings that are locally driven work well.” (College)

“Having a strong value base within and between our partnership work means we are working for the common good of the individual and will always try to find ways around a problem.” (Council)

From the outset, it is an important decision as to whether an intervention should be delivered by a Prospects staff member or by a specialist from within the established supply chain. This is an issue that merits greater clarity at a time when referrals to the Work Programme have been much lower than expected. For example:
"We offer unique specialist support to vulnerable adults and can provide real life work tasters in a safe and nurturing environment e.g. in our charity shop. We fully understand the challenges faced by individuals with addiction problems." (Community Organisation).

**Key enabler 4: Case management conferences and best practice workshops were highly valued by internal and external stakeholders.**

This appears to feature regularly in everyday work. An ESA best practice group operates across the region and this has facilitated professional dialogue using case studies and training modules:

“We attend Prospects training and development sessions to discuss referrals (or the lack of these) and this gives us the opportunity to exchange ideas, identify good practices and get some free high quality training.” (Voluntary Sector Organisation)

“As a Local Authority we benefit from Prospects’ updates and we can share local labour market intelligence/information to help improve access to hidden jobs.” (Council)

**Key enabler 5: Connect more with employers to help secure real-work experiences and job opportunities.**

Prospects staff indicated there is a strong recognition and desire to do more work with employers. There was some evidence that whilst Prospects has a good working relationship with employers more needs to be done in the early entry stage of ESA customers moving into employment. One employer indicated:

“I would like to have more regular contact and support after I’ve recruited the person to work in our factory. Maybe they call the person but I don’t know and I feel we should be working together on this.” (Employer)

“The extent to which links with employers are known across the Prospects and partnership network is a mystery…..greater attention should be given to this. (Community Organisation)

There were some suggestions from external partners (including an employer) that employers need to be made aware of the range of resources available to them locally and what they can do when or if they encounter any difficulties with new entrants from the ESA PG6a or PG6b group. For example, in some cases, it is a major achievement for some PG6 customers to operate effectively in a group setting. This has implications for individuals’ longer-term integration into real workplace settings.

There were many examples of skills and training providers across the entire supply chain offering work tasters and/or work placements to help ESA customers gain more experience. In a few cases, some provision was significantly over-subscribed and/or under-developed in certain geographical areas. This raised the issue of adequate provision available at a local level.

“We have a strict policy here, lateness or non-attendance, three strikes and you’re out! In our industry people have to be able and willing to work in teams and be reliable. We have a waiting list of 400 people wanting to join our programme.” (Employer & Training Provider)
Key enabler 6: Encourage and facilitate ESA customers to form their own peer group support networks.

Making use of feedback from ESA customers based on their experiences should be a key feature to help inform the choice of interventions or even locations where individuals or groups meet. This is an approach that Prospects and its subcontractors appear to fully utilise.

Key enabler 7: Quality management systems and standardisation of processes.

Having dedicated staff firmly embedded within the continuous improvement cycle in Prospects helps provide direction and support to managers and practitioners on quality matters that focus on customer and partnership perspectives.
7. How can Prospects with its partners achieve better outcomes for Work Programme ESA customers?

7.1 In this section, we draw conclusions from the research and highlight ways in which Prospects can achieve better outcomes for ESA (PG6a and PG6b) customers.

7.2 Effective interventions rely heavily on collaborative and partnership activities and interventions between a wide range of ‘influencers’ including DWP, customers themselves, employers/employees, learning providers, coaches, advisers and other specialist workers in local community organisations. The majority of external partners indicated they welcomed having some stability in the current system. Prospects were reported as providing the right type of services for vulnerable adults.

7.3 Four key themes emerged from the research which merit further attention:

7.3.1 Continue to strengthen links and referrals to specialist organisations – maximise training opportunities, further develop in-house specialists and review the entire specialist provision available for customers to ensure that it remains relevant for the changing needs of the PG6a and PG6b customers.

7.3.2 Prepare more employers to know what to expect from ESA (PG6a and PG6b) customers and support them in finding ways to understand and accommodate these individuals’ transition needs – coach employers and relevant ‘influencers’ in the workplace on the techniques of stress management, coping strategies, dealing with anger management, negotiation skills etc. as part of their staff retention strategy. Make greater use of the guidance, coaching and counselling expertise already available within Prospects.

7.3.3 Ensure networking activities and opportunities remain available for ESA customers – for example, offer more creative activities such as drama, art therapy, creative writing, gardening, neighbourhood and/or volunteer projects. It is recognised however that these opportunities need to be balanced with wider job seeking activities to ensure that customers maintain progress in their journey back to work. There is scope to invite more employers to participate in the group interventions so that PG6a and PG6b customers can hear directly from them on the realities of the job market.

7.3.4 Compare results to external benchmarks and eventually matched samples and/or randomised control groups – finding appropriate benchmarks that can match the target population is often challenging. Nonetheless, Prospects needs to continue mapping different sources of potential benchmarking data. This should be shared and further developed with key partners.
8. What key lessons have been learned from the Work Programme in the CPA 11 region over the last two years?

8.1 In recent years, the Work Programme in CPA 11 has become better understood both within and outside of Prospects. The majority of individuals interviewed called for greater stability in current arrangements. Emerging approaches to devolution, joint commissioning, pooling resources and/or greater alignment to local area needs will have a significant impact across the region. This provides an opportunity for Prospects to share best practice and find ways of making innovative and effective use of scarce resources with its existing and new partners.

There are at least six key lessons learned:

8.1.1 Educate others to fully understand that working with ESA customers is not a quick fix – it takes time to build trust, confidence, self-esteem and a commitment to action(s).

8.1.2 The ‘payment by results’ approach is now widely understood; however, the majority of participants reported an urgent necessity to move towards a needs-based categorisation that acknowledges gradual positive steps taken by ESA customers (usually at a significance distance from the labour market) and to build in some form of incentives for the individual and the provider.

8.1.3 Prospects has a tested methodology refined over several years with an experienced and dedicated group of well qualified and highly experienced staff. Prospects’ skilled workforce should be more widely promoted in local communities. The company is meeting with local authorities, wider voluntary and community groups and the National Health Service (NHS) in order to address this issue. It should continue to provide high quality training and development services for capacity building within voluntary and community sector organisations across CPA 11, but this has cost implications. In most cases, voluntary and community sector organisations and councils highlighted the networking and training provision was excellent.

8.1.4 There is more pressure from DWP to achieve positives outcomes with ESA (PG6a and PG6b) customers. It was reported working relationships appear to have strengthened between JobCentre Plus and Prospects’ staff.

8.1.5 Information gathered by DWP from the ESA assessment process should be routinely shared with the Work Programme provider to ensure the right level of service is delivered to the right customer at the right time.

8.1.6 Focus more on job and labour market opportunities, i.e. finding sensitive employers who are able to understand and help overcome barriers to work faced by PG6a and PG6b customers.
Appendix 1

Prospects’ minimum service delivery for the Work Programme includes:

- 90% of customers will undertake an initial assessment within 10 days of referral
- All customers will be provided with an appointment with their Ascent Cohort Adviser within five days of their initial assessment and will undertake their first Ascent intervention within five days of their meeting
- No customer will be at a financial disadvantage from attending the Ascent Programme. All travel costs will be reimbursed, childcare funded and carer support supplied for all approved Work Programme activities
- All customers will have access to the Ascent Employability Kit and will receive a minimum of one item for example a haircut, personal hygiene kit, alarm clock, work or interview clothing
- All customers will have their own secure log-on for their Ascent Online Progress Tracker
- All customers will be able to view their Personal Action Plan and Ascent Tracker online
- All customers will be reminded of their Ascent appointments and interventions by phone and/or text following the appointment letter
- All customers will be able to contact an Ascent Adviser between 8am and 11pm Monday to Friday
- All customers will have an assigned Ascent Cohort Adviser
- All customers will receive one-to-one contact with their Ascent Cohort Adviser once every two weeks as a minimum
- All customers will undertake at least one activity per week on the Ascent Programme
- All Ascent Cohort Adviser one-to-one contact will take place within 30 minutes travel of the customer’s home
- On progressing to employment all customers will benefit from weekly contact until week four followed by fortnightly contact until week 26, followed by a minimum bi-monthly contact until sustainability has been achieved. All customers will have continued access to Ascent Workshops following entry into employment for a minimum period of 12 months.