THE COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME: DELIVERING A LOCAL INTERMEDIATE LABOUR MARKET PROJECT

By Angie Libman

“The importance of work is often taken for granted. However, despite government employment interventions of recent years, there are still significant numbers of excluded groups and individuals who remain unable to access employment in the regular labour market.

During the late 1980’s and early part of the 1990’s, successive government programmes attempted to raise the skills and employability of unemployed people through schemes such as the Community Programme and Training for Work (TFW). However, these programmes were often perceived by many unemployed people as a form of cheap labour, offering little or no long term employment or training benefits.

In Glasgow, a new type of employability initiative was piloted during the 1980s known as the Intermediate Labour Market (ILM). This provided paid temporary work often in socially/environmentally useful activities, together with training and personal development. In 1997, the Manchester Training and Enterprise Council (TEC), in partnership with a number of local authorities in the Manchester sub-region and the Employment Service, established Work Options, a...
The introduction of the New Deal programme in April 1998 presented an opportunity for the partnership to further develop and expand the ILM model locally by providing mainstream funding resources. Agreement was reached with Jobcentre Plus within the then City Pride area of Manchester, Salford, Tameside and Trafford to amalgamate Options 3 (the Environmental Task Force) and 4 (Voluntary Sector Option) of the New Deal Programme to create a waged ILM model, locally branded as the Community and Environmental Employment Programme (CEE). Additional funding was also secured from SRB, ESF and local authority contributions.

“...The aim of ERP and the City Pride Partners was to design the best possible quality offer for those young people being referred to the Voluntary Sector Option and the Environmental Task Force. They were helped in this by the ability to use the available New Deal funds to pay towards a wage instead of an allowance on top of their benefit payments”.

(Improving the New Deal).

The incorporation of CEE into the mainstream New Deal programme played a pivotal role in securing a period of stability for the ILM. Another important change to the national New Deal model was the fact that an individual’s period of paid employment was extended from 6 months to 12 months; this in turn provided a longer package of support for those most at risk of permanent exclusion from the labour market.
Funding

Sponsoring Employers

There are currently some 30 Sponsoring Employers (SEs) involved in the delivery of CEE, mostly in the voluntary and community sectors. Their role cannot be understated and is paramount to the overall success of CEE. Initially, however, some organisations were sceptical about becoming involved in what some perceived to be yet another “government sponsored employment scheme”. Whether this was due to previous experience or just a general apprehension on the part of some employers to employ long term unemployed people with little or no formal qualifications or work experience, is not clear.

However, what is apparent is that the complexity of the funding, administration and audit requirements did deter some organisations wishing to participate. One other important factor was the fact that SEs tended to be charities, community organisations and environmental groups and so often lacked the necessary infrastructure required to deal with the complexity of the CEE programme.

What Makes a Successful ILM? - Package on Offer

Reerrals to CEE are made by Jobcentre Plus New Deal Personal Advisers. Individuals receive:

- Up to 12 months employment at the minimum wage (although some SEs enhance wage levels from their own resources)
- Access to on and off-the-job training leading to a vocational qualification
- Ongoing personal advice and support
- Access to an allowance to cover care of dependants (eg. childcare)
- Help with travel costs (in exceptional circumstances)
- Job-search

Performance

City Works programme

The true extent of social exclusion can be evidenced by the fact that for a number of New Deal participants, the CEE programme still remained inaccessible. This client group were typically “Gateway overstayers” who had failed to secure a place on a New Deal option and so became mandatory referrals.

In order to address the needs of this particular client group, in 1999, a pre-CEE programme was developed in partnership with Manchester City Council’s City Works (DLO) Department. The approach was subsequently extended to Salford and Trafford local authorities’ Direct Works departments.

Individuals who were referred to this provision were de-motivated, poor attenders, had few or no qualifications, poor communication and social skills and little or no work experience. They were allocated to small teams within the City Works department who were responsible for dealing with void properties. Induction training was followed by a two month probationary period during which employees received a wide range of intensive support whilst they were working.

The first eight weeks of employment focused on a way of addressing such things as:

- Motivational issues
- Conflict at work including anger management
- Health and Healthy Eating
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Financial issues
- Offending issues
- Basic skills

All employees are placed individually with existing City Works staff. Areas of work include:

- Construction
- Administration

The support and training on offer is a critical factor in determining how positive or negative an employee’s experiences are. The support and management of City Works, together with the trade unions, play a critical role in developing and challenging the individuals in the workplace. As the clients work alongside these members of staff for the majority of the time,
they are able to see the commitment, attitude and enthusiasm of the City Works staff. Some of the City Works team had a similar background to some of the clients accessing the programme and therefore provided a positive role of how hard work and commitment can provide a career path and opportunities.

The City Works programme has now been incorporated into ERP’s Ambition Construction Programme.

Conclusion

“CEE would not have been possible if New Deal was not sufficiently flexible to be tailored to meet the needs of local labour markets and the specific problems of young unemployed people”.

(Improving the New Deal)

The evaluation of the CEE programme (which was undertaken by the Centre for Social Inclusion in November 2000) found that CEE more than doubled the chances of young people getting into a job in comparison with other high unemployment inner city areas. The extension of the programme beyond the 18-25 year old age group has presented more difficult challenges for the CEE partnership, not least of all, the issue of wage levels and the benefit trap for those individuals with childcare and other dependent care responsibilities.

The other major challenge is to increase the rate of job outcomes. The impact of four years of the New Deal programme and the resulting decrease in unemployment nationally has meant that, in areas such as Manchester, it is now the hardest to help client group who remain in need of employment and training assistance. As previously stated, the CEE programme provides a bridge back into the labour market through a holistic approach to tackling the barriers to work. However, it is widely acknowledged, that those who suffer the greatest economic disadvantage and social exclusion require intensive support if they are to make the successful transition from welfare into (sustainable) work. As CEE moves into its next phase of development, the task is to harness the creativity and energy of the wider partnership to secure sustainable employment for those who have never had it before.

Bibliography


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