

**Work on the New Deal for Young People:
An Ethnographic Evaluation of the
Voluntary Sector Option in London
between August 2001 and June 2002**

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**PhD dissertation
London School of Economics and Political Science**

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Abstract

This thesis examines the experience of participants in the Voluntary Sector (VS) option of the New Deal for Young People (NDYP) through a survey of London providers and two case studies between August 2001 and June 2002. By 2001, the government had already claimed that the NDYP was a success. However, extensive evaluations identified increasing numbers of its participants churning between the programme, unemployment and the labour market and that 'harder to help' participants were concentrated in the VS. While their complex and multiple barriers were acknowledged, a supply-side perspective focused on welfare dependency and negative attitudes to work. A welfare state, newly reformed and providing increased choice and attention to individual need, was presented as enabling these young people to improve their employability, while work was promoted as their route to social inclusion.

An ethnographic approach combined observation at provider organisations¹ with qualitative interviewing of their clients and staff. Clients discussed their personal and work histories, attitudes and aspirations and experiences of the option. Staff gave their perspectives on clients, implementing the contract, relationships with delivery partners and the option's referral, training, placement and jobsearch stages.

The thesis contributes to further understanding of the mechanisms of churning in welfare to work. It looks at how participants' sources of support can conflict with participation in welfare to work and the labour market and how past and current disadvantage create barriers to participation. VS staff were limited in their capacity to acknowledge and address these barriers as a consequence of structural pressures and constraints in implementing the VS contract. Moreover, aspects of provider and placement provider provision replicated their clients' negative experiences of both personal and labour market disadvantage, with the effect of reinforcing their barriers to participation.

¹The private or voluntary sector organisations awarded contracts to deliver the option as a whole (arranging client jobsearch, training and work experience) are from this point referred to as providers. While those voluntary organisations in which clients did their work experience are referred to as placement providers.

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1 Chapter One: The New Deal for Young People (NDYP): Policy Overview

1.1 Introduction

This thesis examines the New Deal for Young People (NDYP), the welfare to work programme implemented in 1998 by the New Labour government, for unemployed people between 18 and 24 years old and claiming Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)². While there were minor changes to the policy, it ran with little modification until 2007, when the government announced the introduction of a new, flexible version for all jobseekers to replace the current separate New Deals, to be implemented from 2008. This study researched the effects of one of four possible options within the NDYP, the Voluntary Sector (VS) option, on clients and staff delivering it in London between 2001 and 2002. Its findings are therefore time and place specific but nevertheless of wider relevance and application for their insight into the negative consequences of policies which do not take full account of both the effects of disadvantage on their users and the structural pressures and constraints on staff delivering them.

This chapter reviews the literature that contributed to the formulation of the study's research questions. It provides an overview of the political importance of the NDYP and the claims made about its objectives and expected outcomes before and after implementation. It briefly explains the programme and the VS in particular and outlines some successes attributed to it at the time of fieldwork. It finishes by outlining some problems or failures identified by the government up to 2001 and suggested improvements. The second chapter presents independent critiques of the policy's objectives and delivery.

² JSA replaced Unemployment Benefit and Income Support (for the unemployed) in 1996 and is delivered by Jobcentre Plus (formerly by the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency). To qualify for JSA, a person must be available for work for at least 40 hours a week (with various exceptions), be actively seeking work and enter into a Jobseeker's Agreement with Jobcentre Plus.

1.2 Policy background

1.2.1 Political context

One of New Labour's 1997 election pledges was to get 250,000 young unemployed people off benefit and into work (Field, 2007). This was a powerful means of drawing support from a population that, according to analysis of public attitudes surveys during this period, widely believed unemployment benefit to be the bulk of social spending (Hills, 2005).³ After its victory, Blair declared that New Labour would create 'the welfare to work government' (Philpott in Deacon (Ed.), 1997: 65). The macro goal of bringing down unemployment in order to cut welfare spending was given by Brown as 'one clear and unapologetic reason for welfare reform' (Brown, 1997 in Heron and Dwyer, 1999: 96). This would reinforce New Labour's economic credentials, showing that it could solve economic problems that had beset its predecessors (Willetts, 1998). It would also signal a change of direction towards the centre and garner the much needed continued support of the median voter (Hyde et al., 1999). The NDYP was therefore a central political symbol of Labour's new direction, the flagship programme of broader welfare reform that included the introduction of the national minimum wage, tax credits, Sure Start⁴ and pension credits (Jarvis, 2000). Allocated £1.9 billion⁵, it was one of a series of welfare to work programmes for different groups of the unemployed claimant population, rolled out in 1998. Delivery started in twelve pathfinder areas in January, representing 11% of national unemployment, and began nationally three months later (Anderton et al., 1999).

The macro goal of reducing unemployment was linked to the policy's related aims of reducing welfare dependency, increasing employability and reducing social exclusion (see for example, Department of Social Security (DSS), 1998) through a series of claims or assumptions. The first of these, a pathological, supply-side or deficit perspective, is

³ In fact, it accounted for only 5% of spending, the majority being allocated to the disabled, pensions and children (ibid).

⁴ A cross-governmental programme of support for children under four and their families living in deprived areas.

⁵ Of a total £3.5 billion set aside for all New Deal programmes (Field, 2007: 4)

one in which the unemployed are seen as lacking attributes which are the cause of their unemployment (see for example, Haughton et al., 2000 or Peck and Theodore, 2000). This construct is critiqued in the following chapter. The policy's premise was that putting pressure on individuals to increase their own employability (albeit supported by the state) would have a positive contribution to a broad range of economic benefits including levels of employment (DSS, 1998), job creation, economic growth and inflation, which are outside the scope of this study (see Boeri et al., 2000), but critiqued by economists such as Peck and Theodore (2000a) and Solow (1998).

In New Labour's welfare to work framework, the responsibility for reducing unemployment and creating jobs was shifted away from both the market and the state and onto the individual (Hyde and Dixon, 1999). This shift was given extra legitimacy by questioning the relevance and validity of the traditional welfare state. Giddens (1998) pointed to its retrenchment, claiming that its legitimacy and importance had been undermined by globalisation, while others argued that the enlightened paternalism of Fabian welfare state policies was outmoded (Hughes, 1998).

This decreased role was also legitimised by highlighting the moral dilemma that it faced. On the one hand, it had a duty to alleviate poverty but on the other it was accused of fostering dependency, reducing self-esteem and denying opportunities (Cox, 1998 and Levitas, 1996). Therefore, rather than ensuring full employment through state redistribution, the New Labour reformulation of the Government role was one of an investment state enabling full employability (Commission on Social Justice, 1994; Evans, 2003; Haughton et al., 2000). 'Redistribution of possibility' through the 'cultivation of human potential' would replace 'after the event redistribution' (Giddens, 1998: 99).

The validity of the policy goals also rested on a positive portrayal of work in the low-wage flexible labour market. One in which 'a hand up' was better than 'a hand out' and a first job would lead to subsequent better ones through individual advancement in the flexible labour market. Moreover integration into the labour market, 'making work pay'

(Tonge, 1999: 229) and improving human capital was presented as the best route or a passport to inclusion (Grover and Stewart, 1999, Levitas, 1996 and 2001, Lister, 1998, Nye, 1996)—an argument which is critiqued in the following chapter.

The policy's withdrawal of state responsibility for the unemployed and its compulsion were legitimised by a moral construction that work is 'a duty, a condition of citizenship enforceable by the state' (Smith, 2000: 313)—only through paid work can an individual be judged a citizen. In a contractual model of state operating through the discourse of rights and responsibilities, the citizen has a right to receive benefits but only in return for looking for work (Lewis, 2000). Identifying welfare dependency as a key policy problem and depicting unemployed people as costly to the state (MacDonald and Coffield, 1991), Blair promoted the need for individual moral responsibility:

The greatest challenge for any democratic government is to refashion our institutions and to bring the new workless class back into society and into useful work (Peck and Theodore, 1999: 486).

This claim drew on strong public fear and anxiety about society's apparent moral decline and a simple economic rationale model of motivation. As such, New Labour's third way rhetoric and ideology shared some moral concerns with the New Right⁶.

Rather confusingly, in naming one of the programme's options after the voluntary sector and using the sector to deliver the programme, the policy also drew on New Labour rhetoric about the importance of voluntary activity, as espoused by David Blunkett, then Secretary of State for Education and Employment, speaking at the Annual Conference of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations:

Voluntary activity is the cornerstone of any civilised society. It is the glue that binds people together and fosters a sense of common purpose. It is an essential building block in our work to create a more inclusive society. It contains the principles of commitment and engagement that are the foundations of democracy (Blunkett, 2001: 4).

⁶They also reflected Blair's interest in MacMurray's interconnected communities, Christian socialism and Etzioni's moral communitarianism (Heron and Dwyer, 1999).

1.2.2 The 'New' Deal

Blair claimed that the NDYP was a departure from the negative history of the youth training scheme:

Nobody says to me they're on a skivvy scheme. The sort of language used about employment programmes in the 1980s is not used about the New Deal (Blair, 2001 quoted in Van Reenen, 2001: 2).

58 government schemes ran, either exclusively or inclusively, for young unemployed people from 1972 onwards and will not be detailed here (for a comprehensive review, see Jarvis and Campion, 2000). However, negative critiques of these previous programmes included low level or inadequate training, inadequate work placements, lack of choice, little sense of purpose, their socialisation of young people to low expectations, their use as 'warehouses' for the unemployed and the lack of any real job prospects at the end of them. These schemes were also accused of slave labour and unfair pay, bullying and abusing the system (Atkinson, 1999; Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999; Donnelly, 1998, Evans and Heinz (Eds.), 1994; Stafford, 1999; Wilkinson, 1995).

One claim to be different was that the programme would treat each person as an individual. The 'Jobcentre Vision' stated:

Our service will treat each customer as an individual rather than as one group narrowly defined by benefit entitlement. Our aim will be to tailor what we can offer to what each individual needs (Jobcentre Plus, 2002:3).

This individualised support would be provided to the New Deal client by a Personal Adviser (PA) to whom they would be allocated at their local job centre on reaching the six month mark of claiming unemployment benefit. Although the client worked with other people during their stay on the option, PAs were described as the main contact throughout a person's time on the NDYP and key to the process. They organised the clients' receipt of a range of possible services provided under the Gateway⁷, including advice and guidance, direct help identifying appropriate vacancies, arranging

⁷ The first four months of the programme and theoretically 'an intensive period of advice, counselling and guidance' (Jarvis and Campion, 2000: 31).

appointments, contacting employers and ‘capacity raising’ such as preparing CVs, as well as specialist support (training, educational qualifications and vocational qualifications) (Snape, 1998). This personalised attention would also be provided by Jobcentre Plus partners, particularly the voluntary sector, (for a discussion of the extent to which this is a particular strength of the sector, see Billis and Glennerster, 1998).

Another claim was that the programme would introduce more choice than its predecessors—rhetoric introduced into welfare provision by earlier Conservative reforms (Glennerster, 1996). One of the PA’s roles would be to make the client aware of available choices (while not raising expectations about their extent) and arrange an individually appropriate package (Atkinson, 1999).

While the NDYP could be seen as a typical welfare to work programme in being compulsory and, as such, based on a simple stimulus-response model (or, as more frequently described, a carrot and stick approach) (see for example, Nickell, 2004), policy makers claimed it was more focused on human capital, with a balance of training and work experience and the compulsion offset by the increased choice and individual support.

The programme’s delivery structure also differed from that of previous schemes. While Jobcentre Plus (formerly the Employment Service (ES)) was responsible for overall management via 142 delivery units, delivery took place through a number of partnership models. For example in a joint venture partnership, the partnership contracted with and included Jobcentre Plus but each partner was separately accountable for their part of the programme, while in a private sector led model, a private sector organisation was in the lead and sub-contracted to individual providers (The Tavistock Institute, 1999).

The creation of these delivery models drew on New Labour’s increased links between state, market and the voluntary sector and the comparative advantages of different providers. They were marketed as a genuine partnership between sectors (Cartwright and Morris, 2001), an example of joined-up delivery, which would build heavily on the

provision of local solutions to local needs (Woodfield and Finch, 1999). Community renewal was emphasised in this partnership approach with a harnessing of local initiatives, third sector involvement and protection of the local public sector, with the intention that partnership would lead to decentralisation with local decision-making. The voluntary sector was promoted as having a special role in mediating between different sectors.

As well as planning to operate through partnership and decentralisation, the policy continued the internal market reforms begun pre-New Labour, claiming that awarding contracts would increase administrative efficiency through accountability by placing service providers,

on an objective-based, temporary, monitorable and not necessarily renewable form of funding (OECD, 1994: 2).

Giddens was one such high profile exponent of this new public sphere,

most governments still have much to learn from business, auditing, increasing employee participation and so on ... Social Democracy must respond to the criticism that, lacking market discipline, state institutions become lazy and the services they deliver shoddy (Giddens, 1998: 75).

Performance would be measured by targets, core performance measures⁸ (published on the internet), performance league tables, financial penalties for poor performance, and strong monitoring of providers by ES⁹ district¹⁰ officers and by auditors such as the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI)¹¹. A reliance on measurement that some have argued suggests a government belief that measuring in itself makes things better (Simmonds, 2002).

The programme's evaluation was also:

⁸ The NDYP was measured locally against 9 core performance measures with information collected and produced for each Unit of Delivery. The first of these was the numbers of new participants and the proportion of each cohort moving into unsubsidized, subsidized and all jobs. (Research and Development page, ES website).

⁹ The ES was joined with parts of the Benefit Agency in October 2001 to become Jobcentre Plus. For an early evaluation, see (Lissenburgh and Marsh, 2003).

¹⁰ London Jobcentre Plus operates through a network of 6 districts covering the 33 boroughs (Jobcentre Plus, 2008).

¹¹ A non-departmental public body responsible for inspecting the quality of education and training for adults and young people in England, raising standards and reporting its findings back to both the Secretary of State for Education and the public. (See: [http://www.lsc.gov.uk/Jargonbuster/Adult+Learning+Inspectorate+\(ALI\).htm](http://www.lsc.gov.uk/Jargonbuster/Adult+Learning+Inspectorate+(ALI).htm))

the most detailed and extensive Government policy-related research programme carried out in the UK in recent years (Millar, 2000: 11).

By 2001, over 50 research reports had been commissioned by the ES. These used both performance and evaluation data collected by the ES nationally on core characteristics of New Dealers and their routes through the NDYP, as well as data specific to each piece of research. This research included analysis of macro-economic criteria most commonly used to evaluate the programmes, such as deadweight, additionality, substitution effects, displacement effects and net costs¹² (Boeri and Layard, 2000; Philpott, 1999; McGregor et al., 1997; Finn, 1997). It also included case studies and surveys of delivery arrangements at each main stage of the programme, analysing the experience of the main policy actors, including employers and using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies (e.g. Rodger, Burniston and Lawless (2000) on evaluating delivery and performance in private sector led areas).

As well as numerous evaluation reports, National Statistics and the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) also regularly released a range of summary statistics on their websites. These included total numbers participating in the programme, thousands entering (or starting) and leaving the New Deal monthly and destinations within the ND (starts on each option) by gender, ethnicity and disability.

1.2.3 The Voluntary Sector Option (VS)

Young people aged between 18 and 24 years old, who had been claiming JSA for six months, were eligible and had to enter the NDYP or face benefit sanctions.¹³ At this six

¹² Layard (2001) commented that evidence on these criteria is difficult to obtain and is normally acquired as part of an evaluation of a subsidy scheme by asking employers the following: of the individuals subsidised, how many would have been hired anyway (deadweight)? Of the remaining jobs subsidised, how many would have been filled by other recruits anyway (substitution) and of those remaining subsidised jobs which represent an increase in employment in your firm, how many were at the expense of your competitor (displacement)? Hasluck (1999) described additionality as the total effect of the programme less deadweight.

¹³ Jobseekers, if meeting certain criteria, could enter before six months if they wished. These included lone parents, people who have just left care, ex-offenders, labour market returners (if they have been out of the market some years), large scale redundancy victims, people experiencing homelessness or without

month mark, the jobseeker met with a PA who put them onto the Gateway¹⁴ (p.13). For those who remained unemployed at the end of the Gateway, a choice of options was offered by their PA. These were the VS and the Subsidised Employment, Full-time Education and Training (FTET) and Environment Task Force (ETF) options. The VS and ETF offered a combination of work experience (in voluntary sector organisations and environmental projects respectively), training and jobsearch. Every option had an element of jobsearch, CV and employability training. All options except FTET lasted six months (see Appendix 1).

Jobseekers taking the VS option were referred by their PAs to local organisations contracted to deliver the option and these could be private, public or private sector. These providers were contracted to arrange a package of training, jobsearch and work experience totalling 30 hours per week for 6 months. The work experience or placement was arranged by the provider with a voluntary sector organisation (placement provider)¹⁵ for 4 days per week. One half day per week was given to training in a qualification up to NVQ Level 2 and one half day per week to jobsearch. These were delivered by providers at their premises (although they could also be delivered by placement providers, or, less frequently, by another organisation). As part of their contractual requirements, providers also had to monitor client attendance and performance.

If a client completed or left an option and had not found a job, s/he could return to claiming Income Support (IS) or remain on the New Deal, entering the follow-through period, at which point, JSA could be claimed again and further intensive help with jobsearch provided for a further four months. After 26 weeks, if the client had not found work, they would re-enter the New Deal at the Gateway stage.

secure accommodation, those with physical impairments or learning difficulties, and those with literacy, numeracy and English as a second language needs (DfEE National Statistical First Release SFR 17/2001).

¹⁴ Although continuing to receive JSA, once on the NDYP options, they were no longer registered as JSA claimants.

¹⁵ From now on referred to as a placement or placement provider.

1.2.4 Participation figures

Participation in the NDYP built up from 6,500 at the end of January 1998, to a peak of 149,800 by end of July 1999 (national roll out having been in April 1998) (DfEE/National Statistics, SFR 11/2001). At that stage, 40% of people found work—and therefore exited the programme—in its Gateway phase (Philpott, 1999: 16). At the end of January 2001, participation in the NDYP was at 101, 900 (DfEE/National Statistics, SFR 11/2001). 72% of people starting were men and 14% were from minority ethnic groups (ibid). 15% of those entering the options took the VS (ibid).¹⁶

1.3 Evaluation to 2002

1.3.1 Success

As described above, the NDYP was extensively evaluated from its implementation. Such evaluations are typically large, complex and expensive, with a considerable proportion of the time, money and effort involved devoted to estimating one outcome, the impact of the programme (Purdon et al., 2001). An early national study by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (Riley and Young, 2000) was one such evaluation finding that the NDYP had got more than 250,000 young people into employment, and therefore achieved its first macro objective of reducing unemployment quickly. It also concluded that the programme had met its job creation and economic growth objectives having created 20,000 more jobs at any one time, increased employment by 0.1% and contributed £0.5 billion to the economy. The net costs were also seen as demonstrating the programme's value for money - for every £5 spent, £3 had been returned in benefit and tax savings (ibid, 1999). By 2002, another macro analysis found that long-term unemployment would have been almost twice as high in 2000 without NDYP and that 60,000 more young people moved into jobs in its first two

¹⁶ As at November 2007, 69,290 people were on the NDYP according to DWP statistics (accessed at http://83.244.183.180/new_deals/ndyp/live/yp_p/tabtool_yp_p.html). As Riley et al. (2007) point out, most macro-analysis has been concentrated on the first two to three years of the policy.

years than would have done without the existence of the programme, more than half of those unsubsidised (White and Riley, 2002). With such evaluations, the NDYP was heralded as the key economic achievement of New Labour's first term (Blair, 2000).

Evaluation of the different delivery models concluded that it was difficult to see:

whether these different partnership models [made] any difference to operational aspects of delivery or to New Deal outputs and outcomes (Stern et al., 1998: 22).

However, those of delivery in general confirmed that the NDYP was qualitatively different. Past programmes had been treated negatively by their target group and had contributed to an enduring negative image in young people's minds (Atkinson, 1999; Donnelly, 1998; Stafford, 1999). However, attitudinal research identified that those NDYP clients:

who have been on other employment programmes recognise the different tenor and intent of New Deal, even if they are initially suspicious (Hasluck, 2000: 4).

Such early research found that the client relationship with their PA was critical, particularly the importance of the PA's capacity and willingness to assess their needs and discourage them by pointing out possible limitations in their plans (Woodfield et al., 2000). It also found that the programme offered more choice and opportunity than any of its predecessors (Bryson et al., 2000). However, understanding choices was found to be crucial to the success of the NDYP as the mismatching of option and placement could result in non-completion and sanctioning (Woodfield et al., 2000). Client feedback on the Gateway activities found that improvements in confidence and enthusiasm stemmed from them (Woodfield et al., 2000). Employer involvement at the Gateway stage was also greeted very positively by clients (Davies and Irving, 2000).

Studies of the FTET option found that participants were generally enthusiastic about the option. They saw it as an opportunity to make up for less successful experiences at school and most valued hands-on practical courses (Woodfield et al., 2000). Some saw the option as a means of enhancing their employment prospects, others took it because they could not get on the subsidised employment option. These evaluations also confirmed that PAs were critical in setting up placements. Evaluations looking at the

Subsidised Employment, VS and ETF options found that New Dealers welcomed the opportunity to gain qualifications as well as work experience on placements. The quality of the work experience was crucial. The size of the organisation was also a factor: smaller organisations were able to give New Dealers a greater variety of responsibilities. However, larger ones were associated with higher chances of retention (Davies and Irving, 2000). Higher chances of retention were also associated with participants' qualifications, more skilled occupations, prior work experience and absence of health or other problems (ibid).

There was little research solely on the VS, but the feedback that did exist found that it was similar to that on other options, namely clients responded well when formal and relevant training was provided as well as hands on work experience, when they found their workplace colleagues and managers supportive and felt able to discuss any problems with them further (Woodfield et al., 2000).

1.3.2 Acknowledged problems

As early as 2000 the Government acknowledged that there were various problems emerging with the NDYP. Richard Layard, a key architect of the policy, wrote that the main measure of the success of any welfare to work programme was the number of its participants who got regular work and kept it (Boeri and Layard, 2000). Regular work, referred to as a sustained job in NDYP terminology, was 13 weeks or more. By 2001, 40% of NDYP job outcomes were unsustainable (Select Committee on Education and Employment, 2001). What is more an increasing number of participants, 1 in 5, were returning to the programme for the second time (ibid). By 2000, Hasluck had already concluded that:

how to deal with clients who have passed through their New Deal Programme without a 'successful' outcome has begun to emerge as an issue on the programmes that have operated the longest (Hasluck, 2000: 5).

Two-thirds of VS participants left (or dropped-out in NDYP terminology) without completing it (O'Connor et al., 2001). This was partly attributed to it not being their first choice of option. That study and an early postal survey of providers also attributed

drop-out to problems such as homelessness, other accommodation difficulties, the lack of suitable jobs, drug and alcohol problems and literacy and other skills needs. However, that and other evaluations followed a deficit model and focused on client motivation and attitudes (The Tavistock Institute, 1998).

Problems with the referral process (mandatory and inappropriate referrals) were cited by over half of the providers as the main reason for drop-out. They described being sent clients with a range of difficulties which resulted in them being unready for participating or unsuitably matched to the option. Inappropriate referral was attributed to PAs being under pressure to make referrals, high caseloads, lack of training and high turnover.

Other negative impacts of PA pressures were identified such as inadequate communication with provider management, discrimination against small providers and poor liaison between the ES and options. 70% of providers in a survey of 30 New Deal partnerships stated they had received fewer than expected referrals of clients, with some providers having to drop out of partnerships as a result (The Tavistock Institute, 1998).

Client lack of understanding of the policy was also identified as a problem. This included limited awareness of the range of options (and PA inability to provide information) and of what would happen when their option came to an end, which led to problems later on. The complicated nature of delivery arrangements was also raised as problematic in that the client had contact with many different actors from first interview to 'first destination' post-New Deal (Woodfield et al., 2000).

Factors constraining client choices included their perception, as opposed to that of their PA, of their job readiness, the degree to which their own preferences were adhered to, adviser caseloads, organisational representation in partnership, discrimination against small providers and effectiveness of liaison between the ES and options (The Tavistock Institute, 1998). A national survey of participants also concluded that,

in practice, large proportions [of participants] perceive constraint rather than choice (Bryson, 2000: 6).

The relationship between choice, outcomes and delivery structures was also examined. It was concluded that it was not necessarily the partnership configuration that made a difference but choices made within the models. Individual choice was also dependent on PA knowledge of the sector and direct contact with it (The Tavistock Institute, 1998).

Woodfield et al. (2000) found that participants had a hierarchy of preferred options, with either subsidised employment or the FTET as top priority or second choice. Owen et al. (2000) suggested that that hierarchy needed to be looked at in terms of access to top options by ethnicity. They found, for example, that 9% of minority ethnic participants were on the subsidised employment option compared to 15% of white participants.

Limited choice for both marginalised and graduate clients was also identified as a problem (The Tavistock Institute, 1998). For the former, PAs could not always fulfill their supporting role by identifying basic skills needs and compiling an individually appropriate training package or give them adequate Gateway preparation (Atkinson, 1999). Clients also reported a lack of support from their PAs and from other agencies. There were also problems with delays in getting referred to chosen options and, as a result, being left on the Gateway for more than four months (Walsh et al., 1999). Poor quality training or lack of formal training and the demoralising effects of low, or no, remuneration emerged as demotivating factors in experience of the options (Hasluck, 1999; Woodfield et al., 2000).

A group of clients described as 'least job ready, facing the most complex and multiple barriers to employment' (New Deal Taskforce, 1999) and 'harder to help' was constituted, one which tended to be made up of men, associated with high drop out rates, dismissals and sanctions, a growing proportion of the total client group and concentrated in the VS (O'Connor et al., 1999; Millar, 2000).

These clients were said to be less motivated, comprising a higher amount of mandatory referrals, being highly disadvantaged, and requiring intensive support (Morris et al., 1999). This group was also found to have care responsibilities that played an important role in its ability to participate, to be least geographically mobile and most prepared to take drops in wages (Bryson et al., 2000). Hasluck referred to the interdependence of such factors affecting the employability of people in this group and that the cumulative impact of those factors on labour market experience was greater than the simple sum of separate risks (Hasluck, 1999). In the same report, he commented that the extension of the programme to more disadvantaged clients would require disproportionately high levels of resources to secure positive outcomes (ibid).

Problems were also found with providers' responses to delivering the VS, particularly those who took on mandatory referrals. It was soon recognised that there was little incentive in the contract structure to work with less employable participants and that the mix of a high proportion of mandatory referrals and a small group of voluntarily registered and committed people was challenging (Millar, 2000). Another concern was that mandatory referrals led to the VS and its providers being labelled as the 'sink option' or 'option of last resort'. One area identified for further research included looking into how mandatory referrals impacted on the effectiveness of the options (The Tavistock Institute, 1998).

Other problems with voluntary sector delivery included the perception that it was at financial disadvantage and that contract finances were insufficient (Employment Policy Institute, 1999). Some placement providers were not being paid at all (ibid). Upfront funding was also a burden (Blackburn, 1998). Problems in the relationships between partners were also identified:

...a trusting partnership culture is infiltrated by some of the downsides of a rigid 'contract culture' (The Tavistock Institute, 1998: 71).

Similarly, there were problematic contradictions in the need for voluntary organisations to provide a client centred approach (one in which trust was also developed) and yet also have a policing role within a sanctions-orientated, stricter benefit regime (ibid). In

relation to the effect of sanctions, an acknowledgement of some of their negative consequences was evident in an emphatic request from the House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment (2001a) that they should not affect receipt of Housing Benefit (HB).

What was not emphasised was research finding many participants were not getting work through the NDYP and that they were returning to unemployment benefit. It was argued that it had important interim outcomes and that the work experience obtained through the New Deal would substantially improve its participants' future employability, especially for those without any experience of work prior the NDYP (O'Connor et al., 2001).

Similarly, it was also downplayed that many young people were churning between unemployment, work and welfare to work:

It should also be remembered that young people tend to be inexperienced in the labour market and often try out different opportunities whilst learning where their long term goals lie— (Minister of Employment quoted in Sunley et al., 2001: 505).

Although, the Minister went on to say that:

...the precise scale and causes of welfare recycling and benefit churning deserve further detailed research (Ibid).

Early evaluation also concluded that the main delivery issue was to determine how far provision should be matched with diverse client aspiration and how far those aspirations had to be managed to match available provision and labour market constraints (The Tavistock Institute, 1998). This was picked up again by the Government's acknowledgement that NDYP participants were 'ambitious and aspirational' but that:

Those aspirations will not be met by a cycle of continual short-term employment in entry level jobs, registered unemployment and participation in New Deal (House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment, 2001b: para 40).

1.3.3 Recommendations

With reference to harder to help clients, the Government stated that:

The Employment Service will need to pay increasing attention to this group of clients. It should seek to identify quickly the particular barriers which a participant faces and make appropriate referrals to specialist organisations, many of which will be in the voluntary sector. The Employment Service should build its capacity to recognise difficulties and make appropriate referrals and its capacity to collaborate with external organisations. It is not acceptable for young unemployed people in the NDYP client group to be overlooked (House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment, 2001b: para 28).

In line with this, suggested measures in, for example, the DfEE Green Paper, Towards Full Employment in a Modern Society (2001), looked at changes to the programme structure, increasing flexibility through more modulated tailored pathways and providing more support through more intensive gateways, earlier and longer intervention, and mentoring (DfEE, 2001). Internal analysis by the Employment Service found that re-entrants to the New Deal were more likely to get a job, and to do so more quickly, than those on the New Deal for the first time, and step-up pilots were suggested guaranteeing jobs for those who had already been on the option. The possibility of providers running outreach to clients, rather than waiting for referrals from jobcentres, was also considered.

The government responded to provider concerns that the contract structure and the focus on job outcomes did not include recognition of working with difficult clients and the Select Committee's earlier recommendation by agreeing that evaluation should take into account distanced travelled to employability (House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment, 2001b). A move to formula funding and the availability of funds for projects targeting certain groups was also considered. For example:

All future contracting for NDYP should stipulate in bidding criteria to potential delivery agencies as to how they will meet the socio-economic needs of BME communities (Ayton and Butt, 2001: 6).

However, there was no further discussion of the negative effects of contracts and performance measures. In fact, a 40% job entry rate became a key target.

Finally, the programme's supply-side focus was also recognised. The Select Committee on Education and Employment found that there had been a disappointingly low level of employer (including public sector) involvement (2001). It concluded that 'a demand-led approach within different industry sectors' would be an effective way of increasing

employability 'because it uses employers' hiring requirements as the standard of job readiness' (ibid).

1.4 Conclusion

While thousands of young people moved from the NDYP into work in the first few years following implementation, early evaluation of the policy identified that a growing number of NDYP leavers returned to the programme and these people were referred to as 'harder to help.' It has been said that New Labour will be judged on their delivery and many of the factors determining successful delivery may be accounted for by local characteristics that performance indicators or macro evaluations miss (Simmonds, 2002). The evaluations did find problems with delivery such as conflicting organisational cultures and lack of built-in incentives to work with the harder to help clients. Subsequent chapters investigate the processes behind those problems, which although flagged up, were not examined in any depth due to the policy's focus on outcomes.

2 Chapter Two: Policy discourses and delivery problems

2.1 Introduction

New Labour partly legitimised welfare to work by claiming that policy was being made in a more pragmatic and evidence-based way, concentrating on ‘what works’. The empiricist and rationalist traditions in academic social policy have tended to legitimise government policy, not only by their statistical and social science base and focus on expert knowledge (Harris, 1992), but by their non-critical stance. As such, the discipline has been accused of being normative dominated by lay knowledge and common sense beliefs (Brewer, 2000).

Critical social policy academics emphasise that all policies have ideological underpinnings and, as a consequence, are theoretically problematic and contentious. Terms such as ‘unemployment’ and ‘poverty’ used to formulate, promote and deliver policies, are not:

...fixed, objective and self-explanatory social phenomenon but relativistic and socially constructed concepts (Harris, 1992: 119).

This makes it all the more important to maintain an epistemological awareness, defined by Chambers (1987) as how we learn, how that affects what we think we know, and how we perceive and distort the realities of others. This included bearing in mind that there will always be several portrayals of a policy, including those officially prescribed, the interpretation of the service as it actually is and the prospect of the service as it ought to become (Donnison, 1965).

The last chapter summarised the series of claims used to legitimise the NDYP, its difference from previous programmes and its success up to 2001. This chapter first reviews critiques of the policy’s description of unemployed people, the enabling role portrayed for the welfare state and claims made about the policy’s success, the experience of work and its role in social inclusion. The middle section briefly reviews

some literature on the changing nature of youth participation and experiences of education and housing for disadvantaged youth. The chapter finishes by discussing critiques of new public welfare management reforms, including their ability to offer choice and individualised treatment.

2.2 Constructs

Unemployed People

As outlined in chapter one, the policy framework implicitly constructed a deficit model of unemployed young people, presenting them as not only lacking skills and employability but dependent on the state, deviant from the norm (in, for example, their sense of social responsibilities) and holding negative and defeatist attitudes to work (particularly, unwillingness to work). Therefore, there was an inbuilt suggestion that the attitudes, character and behaviour of welfare recipients needed not only improving (McCrate and Smith, 1998) but reforming in order to take responsibility for their own lives and be reconnected with both the labour market and society (Lund, 1999).

Critics argued that New Labour's portrayal of the welfare state as encouraging dependency and of the existence of an underclass who needed to be remoralised (Bagguley and Mann, 1992) drew directly on the New Right's portrayal of dependency culture in the 1980s, in which it was argued that the welfare state's permissiveness had created perverse incentives and thereby fostered negative attitudes to work. This was part of a political rhetoric which:

recast social security as a mistargeted system – one which regards many claimants as 'undeserving' at best or fraudsters at worst (Becker, 1997:63).

The underclass was presented as a group of people who were not only marginalised from the labour market but who had low aspirations and were behaviourally deviant with a separate and deficient cultural and social outlook (MacDonald (Ed.), 1997; Stepney et al., 1999)—even dangerous and in need of regulation and control (Becker, 1997). Their behaviour was presented as the central cause of their disadvantage, entrenched and

passed on through families and social networks, lacking in positive role models, in a culture of poverty¹⁷. While structural barriers to work were admitted in these analyses, it was argued that these, including historical lack of opportunity, were overplayed (MacDonald (Ed.), 1997, Mead, 1997 and Murray, 1994), because the underclass was unable to respond rationally to opportunities. Mead legitimised the compulsion of welfare to work by arguing that presuming welfare dependents could respond was the mistaken 'competence assumption.'

Young men were also central to this depiction of the underclass, with Murray (1994) claiming that large numbers of healthy young men choosing not to take jobs were evidence of its existence. In the UK context, a similar policy pessimism (which was also class specific) about men outside the home and in public places fuelled a sense of 'lawless masculinity' (Scourfield and Drakeford, 2002) which led some to argue that welfare to work reform was aimed at men (Levitas, 2001). Similarly, Dean (1997) identified the spatial dimension of the construct in pointing out that youth homelessness was seen as a housing issue, young adults in work as a low pay issue but when young people were not in work or at home, they became 'youth'.

The deficit model also presented young people as lacking both skills (particularly soft ones) and 'employability'. It was argued that employers rated soft and interpersonal skills (for example, communication, motivation, self-confidence, esteem and team working) as equal to, and if not more important than, occupationally-specific hard skills (Davies and Irving, 2000). This was especially relevant to young people who were most likely to be recruited to occupations at or towards the bottom of the occupational skill hierarchy. Employers demanded character as well as qualifications and the right attitude was central to this, described as the essence of employability (Nye, 1999).

¹⁷ For a discussion of this term's origins, see, for example, Glennerster (2000).

Work, the Labour Market and the Welfare State

New Labour's welfare to work framework also equated paid work with social inclusion in a positive view of young people's experience of education and work that relied on a social democratic depiction of education and training enabling individuals to progress in a meritocratic environment of opportunities for all (Giddens, 1998). People are therefore encouraged to embrace the risks said to be inherent in the new global marketplace (Beck, 1992, Giddens, 1998) because upward mobility is possible solely through this cultivation of human potential.

The policy also gave a moral construction to citizenship in which it was implied that a person can not be a citizen if they do not work. This 'citizen-worker model' (Lister, 2003a) maintained the traditional view of:

paid employment [as the] sole marker of the responsible citizen and unemployed people, in turn, as ... dependent on the state and 'costly' to it (MacDonald and Coffield, 1991).

Equating citizenship, responsibility or duty with the work ethic, while at the heart of the ideological discourse of rights and responsibilities, again had strong similarities to the arguments of New Right proponents of welfare to work, such as Mead (1997), who argued that while it was important to maintain the principle that all citizens had a right to a basic level of protection, that right could not be unqualified, but instead entitlement had to be reconciled with obligation.

As mentioned above, the policy rhetoric presented the pre-reform welfare state as partly causing the problem of unemployment, by being permissive and encouraging dependency. With the introduction of welfare to work, it was given an enabling role in a presentation of the employment question as a deficit of skills and not of jobs, in which the duty of the state was not to create jobs or effect redistribution, but rather to enable people to find jobs by making them more employable—in assisting the creation of 'full employability' (Evans, 2003; Haughton et al., 2000). However, this role also involved compelling citizens to meet their responsibilities. Both the enabling and enforcing aspects were presented in a wider context of welfare state retrenchment in the face of the nation state's diminishing power in a highly globalised marketplace (Giddens, 1998).

2.3 Critiques

Dependency and Deviance

Dean (1997) critiqued the construct of deviant and dependent youth by looking at its origins and arguing that it was created as a result of the changing political economy of the household and the labour market following the introduction of the wage labour system when factory conditions curtailed the continued participation of young people and compulsory education made them depend on their parents for longer. Looking further back, it has been argued that the association between providing welfare and creating dependency, and the labelling of unemployed people as not only dependent but deviant, can be traced back to the origins of the welfare state and the creation of a distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor in the workhouse (Lowe, 1999) in which the able-bodied were judged as not willing to take responsibility for their own lives (Jones, 2000) and establishing in British welfare provision that the poor needed to be disciplined (Jones, 2000, Englander, 1998 and Lowe, 1999). Being in a workhouse was worse than the conditions experienced elsewhere and this created the concept of 'less eligibility' and contributed to the stigma associated with being poor. Some see a continuous welfare response to the unemployed from the repression of vacancy under the Elizabethan Poor Law, the workhouse test, the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, the 1930s genuinely seeking work test and the voluntary unemployment rules of the 1980s YTS and Restart programmes (Walker, 1996).

The conclusion is that the work ethic and the stigma of being out of work, run deep in our modern psyche (Noon and Blyton, 1997). Work is deemed a defining part of us, one of the principle ways in which we evaluate ourselves and each other. As Whyte observed, for a man

to think about his job is to see himself as others see him, to remind him of just where he stands in society (Whyte, 1943: 60).

Paid work and the work ethic's importance are perpetuated by raising the former to a status level that other forms of work have not achieved, the recognition of being engaged

in something 'worthwhile' (Sen, 1975; Weber, 2001). Self-respect is felt through fulfilling the social norm of engaging in paid work. Public attitude surveys at the time of fieldwork revealed that negative public opinion persisted about the unemployed (MacDonald (Ed.), 1997) and that the belief that unemployment was the result of personal qualities and attitudes to work was widespread. The individual who does not fulfil the social norm is stigmatised as deviant (Cohen, 1985), he is then:

...the subject for shaming and is assigned low status. Shame may be said to be a feeling of inferiority or inadequacy. A feeling which is aroused when the individual becomes aware of an ascribed weakness in his or her person, of a goal which he or she has not attained or an expectation which he or she has not lived up to (Kaufman et al., 2003: 109).

Literature on the effects of unemployment has shown that unemployed people are both aware of being judged and devalued by others and of their vulnerable position—and therefore that negative public attitudes have considerable significance for self-perception or identity (Gallie (Ed.), 1994). It has been argued that much of the negative effects of unemployment are related to these public attitudes (Breakwell, Collie, Harrison and Propper, 1984; Peck and Theodore, 2000). Similarly, studies looking at young men's unemployment have shown how it is associated with higher rates of depressive illness, homelessness, mortality and suicide (Dennehy et al., 1997; Howarth et al., 1998, and Allard, 1997 cited in Stafford, 1998). Suicide is the second most common cause of death among 18 to 24 year olds (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999). Poverty is therefore:

itself experienced as reflection of skills and beliefs held by those enduring deprivation and by those in the wider society (Golding, 1995: 213).

Young unemployed people internalised and were persuaded by public opinions (Phoenix, 2004, Kildal, 1999). In 'victim blaming discourses' (McIntosh, 2003: 96), they drew on the 'responsible economic dependency model of paid work as a condition of citizenship' (Lister et al., 2003: 242-8) discussed in this chapter and elsewhere and presented themselves as second class citizens (Wyn and White, 2000). Evans et al. (2001), in looking at young adults and their sense of control, found that the UK's more insecure and flexible systems meant that young people needed to demonstrate greater proactivity which in turn led them to feel responsible for their own failure or success. Concluding reports from large scale studies looking at disadvantaged young people such

as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's 26 project study of diverging paths to adulthood, stated that, despite social exclusion and the severity of their experiences, their aspirations were no different from other people's (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999; Jones, 2002).

Governments have many motivations for sustaining the image of welfare recipients as unwilling to work and the stigma associated with them (Manning, 1985). For example, stigma serves to control claimant populations by having an adverse impact on take-up of benefits and services (MacDonald, 1997; Mack and Langley, 1985) and ensures that the working population continues working. Although, this includes adding to the negative image which has traditionally endured in young people's minds about the programmes aimed at those out of work (Atkinson, 1999; Bentley and Oakley, 1999; Donnelly, 1998 and Stafford, 1999).

However, while the social norm of work is certainly reinforced by social pathology, policy responses that spring from such a perception may be inherently contradictory in their objectives, by being, for example,

...aimed at developing and enhancing competence, or capabilities, or the capacity for autonomy on the one hand and yet involving restrictions on autonomy on the other (McLaughlin, 1997: 80).

Their effects may be opposite to those attended. For example, the stigma associated with the programmes may make their participants anti low-status jobs (Sjoberg, 1999) and forced participation may erode their sense of responsibility (Dean, 1997).

The concept of dependency has been critiqued on an empirical level by Hills (1995) who pointed out that it would be difficult to actually test if the welfare state causes dependency—studies can only look at how long people are on benefit and how many times they return to it. Similarly, in terms of the cost of unemployment, Gardiner (1997) pointed out that there is in fact no agreed value of getting people into employment.

Feminist and sociology of work critiques argued that viewing formal and informal work activity as either dependent or independent is a misleading and overly simplistic model

of human behaviour and motivation for policy formulation (Land, 1989; Lister, 1992; Ungerson and Kember (Eds.) 1997). A person's paid employment, rather than being equated with their independence, is in fact predicated on the unpaid labour of others (Lister, 1992). In other words, the economy is dependent on unpaid labour—the latter has its 'fingerprints' all over paid work (Tilly and Tilly, 1998: 22). It was argued that a more accurate depiction of society is one of associations of interdependent humans (Dean in Baldock, 2003). For this reason, such critics called for a redefinition of autonomy which fits with the notion of interdependence (Williams, 2000).

Those critiquing the pathological interpretations outlined above, argued that looking at individual responses is a mistaken emphasis, instead there needs to be examination of:

how structures of authority, knowledge and power (including those of the social welfare systems) set the parameters for individuals' actions, whilst similarly investigating the relationships between structures, values and behaviour in individuals' decision-making (McLaughlin, 1997: 90).

In the US, Wilson (1998) examined the underclass theory by looking at the large pool of black youth identifying a 'discouraged worker' effect in reaction to low pay, demeaning work and racism¹⁸. Crime, family dissolution and low levels of social organisation were seen as a consequence of lack of work (Wilson, 1997: xii). He provided a more structural interpretation of the development of an underclass as the result of a long-term cultural adaptation to class disadvantage. Looking at the impact of lack of interaction between people of different classes and racial backgrounds in enhancing the effect of living in a highly concentrated poverty area, he argued that dependency was not engrained but passed on by sheer isolation from anything different in areas of highly concentrated poverty which resulted from the welfare state's failure to integrate the most

¹⁸ While the racial dimension of welfare to work is not as explored in the UK context, this thesis was influenced by the discussion of the constructed character of ethnicity, in which it becomes understood as a 'relational process – in which categories of community and identity are in constant formation at the intersection of actual or imagined cultural (understood as ways of life) heritages and the political/economic/cultural (understood as representations) relations through and upon which racisms emerge and operate. It is around this intersection that boundaries demarcating 'ethnic groups' (within and between 'minority' and 'majority' are discussed)' (Lewis, 2000: 262).

disadvantaged into mainstream society, and the economic downturn that saw the middle class and manufacturing move out of urban areas.

UK academics focused on the interaction between structural changes in the labour market and the operation of the benefit system, which they argue, is central to understanding unemployment (Philpott, 1997). They pointed out that there is insufficient recognition that jobs do not always pay enough and that any suggestion that the solution is to work longer does not consider the consequences on health, family life and childcare (Phillips, 1997). They also argued that preferring the relative stability of benefits to the prospect of low paid insecure work could be seen as a rational response when both the deterrence of the types of work on offer, and the problems of signing on and off benefits are considered (ibid). What is more, withdrawal of state benefit does not give everyone more control over their lives (Land, 1989). Research contextualising the decisions made about work also critiqued the economic rationale model by finding that the social and moral rationalities considered during decision-making are often more important than the economic ones (Duncan and Edwards, 1999).

Such critics concluded that the dependency theory focus on jobseeker pathology failed to address both the realities of individual participation in the labour market and the important role of the employer in taking on unskilled young people and providing training, as work-based as opposed to class-based training was shown to be more effective for young people (Steedman et al., 1998). Problems with employer training identified in the literature included short-termism, ad-hoc, rather than planned, solutions to training needs and a lack of understanding of issues of workforce reproduction, expansion and changing skill needs. However, this research also conceded that some employers had 'learnt the lessons of the 80s' and instead of buying new skills, had invested in developing staff and techniques (Penn 1999). Neglected examination of the employer's role was one part of a wider neglect of the demand management and job creation which critics concluded needed to be linked with any supply-side reform (Finn, 1997; Peck and Theodore, 1999, 2000a, 2000b).

Employability

Employability was identified as a key economic and social target by the government (Kleinman and West, 1998). This rested heavily on the assumption that the economic welfare of individuals and the competitive advantage of nations depended on the knowledge, skills and enterprise of their workforces (Brown et al., 2003). Despite this emphasis, little was really known about what constituted employability (Hasluck, 1999) and the term was heavily critiqued. The literature pointed out that discussing employability in isolation ignores the fact that whether a particular person is employable or not depends partly on the balance between labour market demand and supply.

Taking the concept of skills, Crouch et al. (1999) argued that these need to be considered in the particular context of the political economy at any time, defined as the relationship between state, capital and labour. Whatever employers may explicitly say they are looking for, they will be applying 'ethnic, gender and social criteria (such as speech, dress and behaviour) to screen applicants and will have preconceptions and prejudices about what is suitable for various kinds of people' (Lee et al., 1990). In other words, skills are socially structured and not shared equally. They also include the navigational skills needed to operate within the system of both education and employment (Cohen, 1997; Walford, 1988 and Penn, 1999). The soft skills promoted by NDYP policy discourses, for example, may in fact be a misnomer for certain attributes that employers conceptualise as skills (Moss and Tilly, 1995).

While government rhetoric promoted a high skills modernisation agenda and theorists discussed 'the post-industrial possibilities' for the future of work, critics pointed out that such debates were irrelevant to the 'grim reality of working life that awaits the majority' (Young, 1998 in Lloyd and Payne, 2002: 379). The meritocratic rhetoric used in the policy was also critiqued:

...under the New Labour model, the field is assumed to allow relatively easy 'capital' accumulation ... this is simply not the case, we do not live in a meritocracy (Greener, 2002: 699).

Levitas described meritocracy as depending on:

...a process of social control exercised through the labour market and the ideology of the work ethic. (Levitas, 2001: 459)

She referred to a 'Blair fantasy land' in which the:

poor have presumably abolished themselves through the saving grace of working in McDonalds and call centre ventures indirectly subsidised through tax credits (ibid, 2001: 458).

What is more, the education and qualifications a person obtained depended more on their parents than ever before (Hills, 2004).

The focus on improving employability through welfare to work was termed the learnfare approach (Field, 1997) and charged with accentuating a process of credentialism or qualifications inflation (Atkinson and Hills (Eds.), 1998) whereby people need more qualifications for lower skilled jobs. One likely long-term consequence envisaged was a two-tier workforce with a growing institutional divide between skilled and unskilled work (Field, 1997). While some argued that the labour market required even steeper employability criteria than ever before (Steedman, 1998), the literature conflicted on the extent to which more skills were required and in which sectors (Boeri et al., 2000; Green et al., 2000 and Peck and Theodore, 2000b; Penn, 1999). It also debated the extent to which 'upskilling' theories applied to young people because employers looked to them for cheap, unskilled labour (Maguire and Maguire, 1997) as they:

...may well choose the immediate benefits to the bottom line that deskilling strategies promise (Baran, 1988: 704).

Chapters 5 and 8 look at how participants on the VS talk about their employability and the option's role in improving it. Chapters 6 and 7 look at how those delivering the NDYP view their clients' employability.

Citizenship through work

Kildal (1999) argued that the positive value of work, as promoted in the rhetoric, was actually made irrelevant by the duty of paid work being presented as a component of citizenship. Smith (2000) argued that:

[those in poverty] can no longer be relied upon to fill low wage, low status employment on their own initiative—

and work had become:

a duty, a condition of citizenship enforceable by the state (Smith, 2003: 313).

He questioned the types of jobs that people were being encouraged or compelled to take and called for:

political morality that balances a concern with achieving full employment with meaningful employment (ibid: 313).

Moreover, that:

obligations to work should be accompanied with an obligation to protect those in low paid, unattractive work or the cycle of intermittent spells of work interspersed with recurrent recourse to the employment service and benefits agency that characterises the work histories of many disadvantaged people in the labour market, will continue (ibid: 321).

While dependency theorists claimed that social rights damaged young people's independence and self-discipline, their critics pointed to the way in which the citizen-worker model undermined social rights (Dean, 1997; Levitas, 1996). They argued that young people experienced a double process of disadvantage, with their economic and socially less privileged position making them more reliant on the state. The state reproduced those inequalities and:

notions of citizenship mask inequalities and conflate private individual rights with civic ones (Lewis, 2000: 104).

Dean (1997) emphasised the need for young people to have social rights which guarantee them substantive independence and afford them a status not only not conditional upon employment (to enable them to resist exploitation by the labour market, in jobs which were often low status and badly paid) but also not conditional on family circumstances, thus allowing them to set up households on their own terms.

Social Inclusion through Work

New Labour's use of social exclusion in social policy making was welcomed by some for its extension of the conceptualisation of poverty beyond terms such as relative and absolute and beyond income, to include measures of well-being and to incorporate analysis of the social participation and dynamics of the actor and their various roles in the social structure (Jordan, 1996, Room 1995). Literature that adopted a social exclusion framework looked at the relationship between early life circumstances, intergenerational links, mobility, environmental and area influences and later outcomes (see for example, the work of the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion on

intergenerational dynamics of poverty). Its contribution was greeted positively for highlighting the multi-dimensions of unemployment, looking, for example, at how poverty in childhood was linked with lower educational attainment, higher unemployment and lower earnings in adulthood (McKnight, 2000).

However, the application of social exclusion to welfare to work policy was criticised for condensing different types of inequalities into one notion of exclusion from waged work:

...the concept of social exclusion, as it is currently deployed, places people either inside or outside of mainstream society, synonymous with inside or outside the labour market. The concept works to devalue unpaid work and to obscure the inequalities between paid workers (Levitas, 1996: 18).

As such, the stepping stone advancement promoted by the NDYP ignored the negative aspects of work and differences in participation created by the inequalities of the labour market (Holden, 1999; European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2002).

The rationale for focusing welfare to work expenditure on the NDYP was partly that, at the time the policy was created, youth unemployment rates had been twice the national average for two decades (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999). There was evidence of increasing polarisation within the youth market (Bynner and Parsons, 2001) and of young people who were not in education, training or employment¹⁹ (Wilkinson, 1995), a disengaged population termed status zero (Williamson, 2000). What is more, unemployment early on in the career of people with low skills was found to have a lasting adverse effect both psychologically and in terms of permanent wage reduction (Burgess et al., 1999).

The influence of industrial and occupational change on the nature of unemployment has been extensively discussed in the literature, but briefly includes the decline of manufacturing (Wilson, 1997) leading to loss of manual jobs, full-time traditional male jobs and a contraction of skilled manual occupations. Technological advancements and

¹⁹ Referred to as NEET.

the shift towards knowledge-based service sectors have been accompanied by rising premiums on skills, changing participation by gender (and the attendant changes in family structure) and changing work routines, with increased flexibility in particular (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999; Maguire and Maguire, 1997). This has been accompanied by a weakening of demand for youth labour (and a fall in youth wages) and a demise of apprenticeship type training, as employers switched their traditional recruitment paths away from the youth labour market (Bynner and Parsons, 2001) and towards highly qualified labour. Consequently:

Opportunities for a young person to work their way up the organisational career ladder have diminished – due both to changing employment profiles within organisations and changing recruitment strategies. These developments have culminated in a polarisation and marginalisation of unqualified and poorly qualified young people into a decreasing number of unskilled manual and lower-manual occupations, which offer low pay, poor training and lack job security (Green et al., 2001: 8).

The ‘last hired and the first fired’, young people’s employment insecurity was high, their wages static or falling and career ladders truncated (Green et al., 2000). This led to ‘churning’ or ‘a revolving door syndrome’ (McCormick and Oppenheim, 1998) between low paid, low skilled temporary jobs, government schemes, college courses and recurrent unemployment which left them trapped at the bottom of the market (Dolton et al., 2002; Sunley et al., 2001).

One study found that two-thirds of all benefit claimants aged between 18 and 24 had already claimed in the past two years—a third on two or more occasions (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999). An ESRC study into youth transitions in the North East of England, which included New Deal evaluation, concluded:

In the light of [our] findings, it is difficult to avoid the image of a slow tide of marginalised young people ebbing and flowing between unsuitable work, inappropriate training courses and unemployment (Dolton et al., 2002).

Young people therefore lived, not as a permanent underclass, but as a reserve army, continually changing places with those in low-status employment (Bryne, 1999). The NDYP statistics that one in five people were entering the VS for the second time, confirmed this appraisal of the dynamics (Sunley et al., 2001).

As a result, any claim that young people's labour market movement was unproblematic and that a stepping stone route of advancement existed in the labour market for young people over time was very much disputed. Rather, critics emphasised that work does not necessarily provide a route to inclusion (Lister, 2001) because people may be included but on 'deeply unfavourable terms' through the 'unequal inclusion of exploitative work' (Sen, 2000: 30). They called for more economists:

to recognise that if intense labour market flexibility can corrode the commitment, self-respect and work ethic of those in ordinary occupations, it is even more likely to be corrosive for those moving in and out of low paid insecure employment (Sunley et al., 2001: 505).

Evidence from a Demos consultation The Real Deal found that for many young people,

Life in the low-skill labour market is disjointed and exploitative, with many recounting stories of underpayment, unpredictability and unfairness by employers (Bentley and Oakley, 1999).

And that their common perception is of:

exploitation in jobs that offer few opportunities for advancement and are accorded little prestige by the workers themselves or by social attitudes towards the jobs... (Smith, 2000: 320).

Similarly, Hoogvelt and France (2000) found that participation in the NDYP confirmed these perceptions. Asking participants how the programme changed their labour market expectations, they found that 40% of respondents were more pessimistic about the world of work, with a cooling down of career ambitions and realism in terms of labour market.

Looking at labour market inequalities in terms of participation by ethnicity, in 2001/2, Bangladeshi young men had unemployment rates of over 40 percent while rates for all other minority ethnic²⁰ young men ranged between 25 and 31 per cent. The comparable rate for young white men was 12 per cent (ONS, 2002b). The picture for women was similar. Bangladeshi women had the highest unemployment rate at 24 per cent, six times greater than that of white women (4 per cent). Women in all other ethnic groups had rates between 7 per cent and 16 per cent. Rates for young women under the age of 25 years were considerably higher than for older women and this was true for all ethnic groups (ONS, 2002b).

20 The ONS cites Black African men, Pakistanis, Black Caribbeans, and those belonging to the Mixed group as survey categories. Other Black and Chinese groups were omitted from the ONS chart because sample sizes were too small for reliable estimates (ONS, 2002b).

There were also significant differences in the education, training, employment and earning rates experienced between minority ethnic groups. While the unemployment rates were highest for Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black-African people, Indian and Chinese people tended to experience relatively low unemployment rates (Parekh, 2000).

One contributory factor presented for overall higher unemployment levels for minority ethnic groups was that they were not presented proportionately in all industries with descendants of original labour migrants continuing to be employed in a restricted spectrum of occupational areas with over-representation in work which was low-paid, insecure, had lower wages than the national average and had anti-social hours (ibid). Looking at the various ways in which discrimination took place, Parekh (2000) described how people could be rejected at the first stage by having an ethnic name and how agencies would not submit minority ethnic applications because they did not want to anticipate rejection. Young people were aware of such institutional recruitment practices and that constrained their behaviour:

...the very anticipation of rejection on racial or ethnic grounds meant that, over time, processes of exclusion continued to operate without individual acts of direct discrimination taking place (Parekh, 2000: 198).

The Experience of Work

Critics argued that the normative ideas dominating the policy had not only obscured the realities of world of work but had meant that:

Somewhat perversely, there has been little serious consideration of work in ... a truncated and narrow welfare to work debate (Peck and Theodore, 2000: 120).

Sociological literature confirmed that work has many important positive functions that, aside from income, include status, autonomy, sense of involvement in collective pursuits (Hyde et al., 1999), central life activity, coherence, a sense of routine, security, conscious endeavour, discipline and social interaction. The well-being associated with work comes from self-respect, realising one's own potential, self-realisation, social belonging and interaction (Noon and Blyton, 1997). However, the policy's positive presentation of work failed to acknowledge that work can also lead to loss of self-respect

(through not making full use of your abilities or realising one's potential, for example) and damage physical and mental health (Kildal, 1999).

What is more, the experience of work is heavily influenced by employees' own attributes (socio-economic status, gender, age, and so on), employers' attitudes, the work itself and the workplace. Some argued that the experience, rather than being determined by the type of work per se, is instead influenced by the cultural/social/economic contexts of that work experience (Tilly and Tilly, 1998).²¹ This literature also pointed out that defining a job as 'good' by its activity is an oversimplification suggesting that certain jobs are good, no matter who does them, which, in turn, assumes a ranking of jobs conceptually prior to the sorting of people among those jobs (Granovetter and Tilly, 1988). In fact, a job's holder brings particular expectations to a job and the employer's view of a job is coloured by the worker holding it (Tilly and Tilly, 1998).

Returning to the impact of structural changes on the experience of work, White and Forth (1998) showed that 75% of jobs entered by the unemployed were flexible or contingent—part-time, temporary or self employed or at a much lower skill level than previously worked. Earlier research found that only one in three of British employees worked what was regarded as a normal week (Marsh and McKay, 1993). Theorists used such evidence to argue that the age of full employment had passed and that:

a transition is occurring in industrial society from a uniform system of lifelong, full-time work organised in a single industrial location, with the radical alternative of unemployment, to a risk-fraught system of flexible, pluralized, decentralised, under-employment, which, however, will possibly no longer raise the problem of unemployment in the sense of being completely without a paid job (Beck, 1992: 143).

It was also argued that the certainties, traditions, household structures and family ties that characterised modern industrial society were being replaced with new sets of risks and opportunities and that social class had become less important as a determinant of behaviour (Kemp and Rugg, 2001). Such approaches therefore:

foreground individualisation processes, reflexivity and lifestyle choices in the determination of social outcomes over more traditional concerns with the functioning of socio-structural factors (Burrows and Rugg, 2001).

²¹ For a fuller discussion, see for example, Haralambous and Holborn (1995).

The Experience of Transition

Research on the changing nature of opportunities and constraints in young people's participation in education and the labour market has examined the various forms of transition replacing the traditional structured movement of a young person leaving school as a dependent child and starting work as an independent adult. These include 'delayed' transition (Evans and Heinz (Eds.), 1994; Evans and Furlong, 1997; Green et al., 2000; Wyn and White, 2000) in which the transition from school to labour market is extended and with it dependency (normally on family) (Bynner et al., 2002; Green et al., 2000)²².

Others identified serial short-life engagements, described as yo-yo movements (Fergusson et al., 2000) encompassing default participation in education and resort to part-time work. Dropping out of school, starting it again, finding a job that may be lost at any time and so on become a kind of limbo between adolescence and adulthood (Stauber and Walther, 1998). This also includes the churning or cycling between unemployment, part-time work and government schemes discussed elsewhere (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999). One consequence is that old definitions of adult status are no longer valid for young people who can no longer be referred to as 'youth', but at the same time are not yet adults in the traditional sense (with established employment and their own family). Biographies of young men and women are 'somehow' located between the two statuses of youth and adulthood, neither one nor the other (Stauber and Walther, 1998)

This literature debated the way in which these movements were viewed by young people. Some optimistically claimed that responses to precarious employment would naturally involve adoption of creative new ways of gaining livelihood, new mixes of work and study (Wyn and White, 2000). Fergusson et al. (2000) also argued that

²² In terms of extended dependency, there are also converse examples, such as those coming out of care tend to make accelerated transitions and shoulder adult responsibilities at a much earlier age than other young people. (Catan, L. 2002; Dolton et al., 2002; Lister, 2002; Thomas and Holland, 2004.)

dislocation from the dominant frameworks had become normalised and that there were some young people who would view their serial short-term engagements as an extended and successful phase of discovery and self-actualisation. However, they also felt pressure to take responsibility for their own education and training and achievement of aspirations (ibid). The extent to which young people plan or operate more on chance was also examined, with the finding that those from working class backgrounds tend to do the latter (Evans, 2002). Evans examined young people's ability to experience agency in these transitions, developing the concept of 'bounded agency' to describe young people who:

manifest a sense of agency but are aware of a number of boundaries or barriers which are beyond their control and which circumscribed, sometimes prevented the expression of agency (Evans, 2003: 24).

The role of welfare

Youth training has long been attacked for maintaining the status quo of inequalities rather than ameliorating the negative aspects of work, through the cultural reproduction of the workforce (McDonald, 2002, and Willis, 1977). In other words, it reproduces patterns of labour market inequality by providing a forced labour supply, re-regulating low wage workers and the unstable market they depend on (Peck and Theodore, 1999). Those arguments have been part of a wider criticism of the welfare state's role in socialising the population to the economic order (Lipsky, 1980), of contributing to, as well as ameliorating, the effect of inequality (Lewis et al., 2000). For example, feminists argued that the welfare state lowers the cost of the reproduction of labour power in various ways, namely by displacing it either onto the state (e.g. with provision of health and education services), or onto women's unpaid labour, which creates a feminisation of poverty, or by providing caring and reproductive services at a low cost in the waged sector. The domestic sphere of production and reproduction has been systematically ignored, despite most welfare taking place there (Pierson, 1998). Similar arguments were made in relation to ethnicity and the welfare state's complicity in providing cheap labour (ibid).

The welfare system's reproduction of labour market inequality was reflected in participation in and outcomes from the NDYP. Figures looking at the composition of participants showed gender imbalance—more men (Millar, 2000)—and an over-proportion of minority ethnic participants (Fieldhouse et al., 2002). While those looking at geographical outcomes from the programme showed that it was less effective in urban areas (Adams et al., 2001, Sunley et al., 2001). In turn, minority ethnic outcomes were 50% lower than white ones—with most minority ethnic people living in inner cities where job outcomes were worse for everyone regardless of ethnicity (Fieldhouse et al., 2002).

A wider theoretical body of literature looked at the welfare state's management of client compliance (Hasenfeld, 1992) and at social control. It has been accused of taking away their autonomy under the guise of being the 'helping' or 'caring' professions (Watson, 2000) and in actively controlling its clients, having a 'disabling role' (Ilich et al., 1977):

In the very process of being helped and assisted, the poor are assigned to a special career that impairs their previous identity and becomes a stigma which marks their intercourse with others. Social workers, welfare investigators, welfare administrators and local volunteer workers seek out the poor in order to help and yet, paradoxically, they are the very agents of their degradation (Coser, 1977, in Becker, 1997: 161).

Similarly, Foucault's studies of asylums and prisons explored the way in which people are turned into subjects through experiences of high levels of intrusion and assaults such as hierarchical surveillance, continuous registration, perpetual assessment, disciplining and re-socialising as well as dividing practices, such as entry into hospital, scientific classification and subjectification (Rabinov (Ed.), 1984).²³ As McNay commented:

To be a subject in Foucault's view, is necessarily, to be subjected (McNay, 1994: 5).

Similarly, Cohen concluded that in welfare systems:

The 'deprived' are not very different from the 'depraved' (Cohen, 1985: 60)

Professionals are seen as agents of social control, with the power to determine how people feel about themselves. As Lipsky put it:

²³ Educational literature also looked at the school as a closed institution analogous to prison, with pupils expected to confirm and given strictly controlled tasks (see, for example, Cullingford, 1999).

to designate or treat someone as a welfare recipient, a juvenile delinquent, or a high achiever affects the relationship of others to that person and also affects the person's self-evaluation (Lipsky, 1980: 9).

Front-line workers are also powerful in their ability to breach the barrier between public and private, which means that processes of welfare delivery act as powerful structuring mechanisms (Lewis, 2000) and the welfare state is given a moral significance (Donnison, 1975). As citizens directly experience government through services, front line workers' roles are moral ones, with each action involving a moral judgement and, as such, their work has a 'precarious legitimacy' (Hasenfeld, 1992: 3-23). Also drawing on Weber, Hasenfeld (1992) discussed how Weber's rational-legal model approach has been applied to welfare to work, with a flowchart system in which recipients are processed, and precise rules specified for workers to follow, with elaborate manuals detailing the role of case managers and their procedures and elaborate management information systems to keep track of clients.

Cohen (1985) argued that such systems are created for a 'certain kind of client'. Categories are invented and people assigned to them. Access is then controlled to these categories through bureaucracy. The approach to people who don't fit the norm is described as behaviourism—a focus on categories rather than individuals and external behaviour as opposed to internal states. At its most extreme, this leads to time (lateness), activity (inattention), speech (idle chatter), body (incorrectness) being judged and made the objects of small-scale penal systems reproduced throughout society (ibid). However, these systems do not cope with a changing environment, uncertainty about availability of services, informal relations or the lack of cooperation and other 'deviant culture' (Goffman, 1961) developed by their clients to deal with extensive controls (Hasenfeld, 1992).

In the welfare to work policy literature, the role of compulsion and control tended to be discussed not only in relation to its legitimacy and the role of the state but also in terms of its relative advantages and disadvantages—the 'carrot' or 'pull' versus 'stick' or 'push' approaches. One advantage given in compulsion was that, without it, only the most employable and motivated would participate in programmes and therefore the

policy would fail to reach the people who are the problem. Mandatory programmes were also cited as the only means of exposing fraud in the system (Mead, 1992). Mead also argued that compulsion is a form of caring, the push that the unemployed need (ibid)—although he acknowledged that it is not the compulsory nature of the programmes in itself that makes them successful.

However, it was also argued that compulsion overloaded provision and disrupted programmes by drawing in reluctant participants, many of whom have serious problems underlying their long-term unemployment and that it targeted certain client groups, namely men (Rogers, 2002). Opponents of compulsion also emphasised that not all work available would be equally valuable to clients (Cook in Deacon et al., 1997).

What is more, in compulsory programmes, participants cannot influence programme review by their response to change. They have to turn up no matter how bad the programme (McGregor et al., 1997). Alternatively, if they refuse to participate, they are given labels such as ‘drop-outs’ implying that the exit of the client is attributable to a defect or fault in that individual (Lipsky, 1980: 56). Some critics pointed out that compulsion therefore sits strangely with the idea of consumer feedback. On the one hand, the government claimed that consumer choice and competition improved quality but, on the other, they introduced a programme within which there is no effective consumer choice at all (Deacon et al., 1997). Although the bidding process, multi-agency involvement and continuous monitoring and evaluation, the government might argue would partly address that (ibid). Freedland and King pointed out the dangers of implementing compulsory programmes:

The worry is that arrangements which in principle embody that liberal conception may be implemented by processes which are or become arbitrary, oppressive or one-sided in character. This is the danger of illiberal process; it is often overlooked or underestimated (Freedland and King, 2003: 470).

and that:

The historical and comparative record of work-welfare programmes is that when the policing and assisting roles are combined, the former dominates because it is easier to measure (ibid, 2003: 477).

Finn (1997) concluded that the counselling and advice part needed to be separate from the policing part of these programmes.

Compulsion also created morally ambiguous and incompatible objectives in that the programmes were claiming to be both punitive and educative (Council of Churches, 1997). It was argued that agency is prioritised in one way but ignored in another (Beresford, 2001), only acceptable when it means working within the existing rules of the game and not challenging the rules themselves (Greener, 2002). In their study on young adults and their sense of control, Evans (2002) found that being forced onto employment schemes felt like not being in control, but participants nevertheless felt individually responsible for their situations.

It was also argued that forcing participation fostered antagonistic and bad relationships between claimants and administrators (concluded from research into US work-first programmes²⁴) and that it may have the adverse effect of disenfranchising them even more:

...when accompanied by too strong an emphasis on compulsion and draconian penalties for non-compliance, the results may well be counter-productive to the principle of 'empowerment' that current reforms aim to encourage (Smith, 2000: 320).

Jobseekers found sanctions stressful and depressing, reporting loss of confidence and feelings of shame and that they tended to disengage from the system after being sanctioned (CESI, 2002). Voluntary schemes, such as the Wise Group programmes, cited their voluntary nature as a main reason for their success (McGregor et al., 1997):

...voluntary, mutual relationships are a vital part of projects which support longer-term progression (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999: 76).

Some concluded discussions of compulsion by arguing that a combination of carrots and sticks is best (Nickell, 2004) and that if compulsion was going to be used, the programme has to be good quality (Field, 1997, and Mead, 1997). Applying stricter benefit regimes without better active labour market policy led to, as in the case of US

²⁴ This approach supported the view that getting any job was the best solution to unemployment and that this could only be achieved by making programmes compulsory. US research, most famously on the Wisconsin and California GAIN programmes claimed that work-first programmes were not only cheaper but got more people in higher earning jobs. However Bewick and Corney (1997) found that only 15% of their participants earned enough to come off welfare and only 42% earned enough for their benefits to be reduced.

welfare reform, people disappearing off the rolls. The two had to be complementary – especially in an era of distrusting governments (Giddens, 1998).

Finally, in contrast to social control critiques, literature on the role of the welfare state also raised the issue of the contradictory pressures it faced. While economic recessions created pressure on government to reduce welfare spending, those recessions also caused hardship, which increased public demand for such programmes (Cox, 1998). The welfare state's survival and its continued legitimacy were questioned in such literature. Globalisation was seen as an excuse for governments not to implement national policies responding to labour market inequalities and discrimination because the market is presented as beyond the control of the nation state.

Some argued that globalisation's undermining of the role of the welfare state made the transition from welfare to workfare state inevitable and its attendant changes to concepts of social rights and the obligations of citizenship, as discussed elsewhere in the chapter. The UK was portrayed as applying a third way between policy instruments appropriate to the neo-liberal workfare model—the creation of an adult worker model in which everyone is expected to work and sustain themselves through the market—and those which are closer to the protectionist model associated with the traditional Beveridgean welfare state (Lewis, 2000). As Cox put it:

Obligations can be pressed because taxpayers have a right to demand that governments be accountable for the money they spend (Cox, 1998: 12).

Considering the limits on the welfare state's role in reducing youth unemployment, several independent critiques and some government evaluations suggested that perhaps half of the NDYP's participants would have got jobs without the programme (Millar, 2000). Chapters 4, 5 and 8 return to both welfare's limits and the ways in which it may have a negative impact on its users.

2.4 Young people and continuing disadvantage

Research into childhood disadvantage and the way in which it is carried into adult working lives, while informing this study, is vast and will not be summarised here (see for example, Bynner et al., 2002; Hobcraft, 1998). This type of research highlighted how risk factors interact. For example, showing how poverty in childhood is linked with lower educational attainment, higher unemployment and lower earnings in adulthood, and that this ‘poverty penalty’ has increased over time (ibid). Similar research looking at disadvantage over time, showed how risk factors are mutually reinforcing, creating vicious cycles. For example, drug and alcohol abuse can act as both cause and effect in homelessness (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999). Such studies emphasised that consideration needed to be given to processes and dynamics—for example, looking at not just routes into an experience such as homelessness, but also pathways out of it (Anderson and Tulloch, 2000).

Education

The literature described growing polarisation (in terms of occupation, qualifications and earnings) between the majority who are benefiting from education and a minority who are not (JRF, 2002). In 1996, for those who left school at 16, the risk of not having a job or government training scheme by the following spring was more than one in three, whereas in 1989, it had been one in ten (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999). Stable family environment, parental commitment to education, strong aspirations and encouragement from teachers were all found to be important contributing factors in a person’s successful experience of school. Problems at home directly related to achievement at school, with disruption acting as a form of deprivation (Cullingford, 1999). Those from disadvantaged backgrounds were found to be more dependent on support from teachers and youth leaders to override effects (Schoon et al, 2002).

MacDonald and Marsh’s (2003) research on the effect of being in a low achieving school in a low achieving class, on incentives to disengagement, found resonance with

Brown's research (1987) which looked at the ordinary kids who were neither trouble makers nor victims but who felt ignored by the system. Similarly those who had been excluded felt that their educational and behavioural needs were not always detected or addressed, causing frustration, anger and aggressive behaviour (Stanford, 2002). Adults who had had those experiences looked back on such an education with regret (MacDonald and Marsh, 2003)—particularly about lack of qualifications and their consequences (ibid).

Considering the relationship between masculinity and school experience, Mac and Ghail (1994) found that those who quietly got on with school work were considered effeminate and that anti-swot culture was part of boys' construction of masculinity together with aggressiveness and hierarchical power relationships. MacDonald and Marsh (2003) looked at how working-class masculinity and counter-school cultures were beginning to break down with the declining availability of working class jobs. There was also research on minority ethnic constructions of masculinity and their impact on school (Lewis et al. (Ed.), 2000).

Discussing ethnic inequalities in education, Law (1996) outlined some difficulties with researching the issue which included lack of research into pupils' skills and knowledge from the points of entry to and exit from an educational institution due to emphasis on qualifications and league tables, inadequate construction of ethnic categories and other operationalising problems. He also argued that although ethnicity and gender are used as descriptive variables, that should not prevent the construction of complex explanations. What is more a substantial part of ethnic differences may have no direct connection with either racism or ethnicity. Similarly, there are difficulties establishing causal links between racist attitudes and achievement (ibid). While intersections between class, gender and ethnicity are difficult to establish, they can be revealed through, for example, examination of banding of subjects, assessment of minority ethnic students by careers staff (ibid).

Law (1996) also reported that minority ethnic children were disproportionately assessed as having special needs and overrepresented in excluded pupil figures. While Parekh (2000) highlighted that African Caribbean descent pupils accounted for 8% of all permanent exclusions, while comprising 1% of the total school population. In terms of achievement, Law (1996) suggested that the most important conclusion from such studies was that there was no evidence of homogenous black underachievement, that there had been a narrowing of the qualifications gap between black minorities and white ethnic groups overall and therefore that any oversimplification was dangerous.

In terms of higher education, access to post-secondary education continued to depend on social background (Schoon et al, 2002). Non-completion was attributed to the sector's expansion, with students from a more diverse range of backgrounds. Many students had to work (10% of full-time students in 1997 compared with 1% in 1984) and drop-out rates were high—with those working more than 16 hours per week, more likely to leave (Phoenix, 2004). However, financial pressure was not found to be the most distinguishing factor in dropping out, choice of courses, feeling of belonging to university and support from staff were also important (ibid). In terms of ethnicity, the educational aspirations of black minority ethnic children was evident in higher rates of participation in post-16 full-time education than whites, but that overrepresentation had not yet translated into Higher Education (Law, 1996)²⁵.

Area and housing

Research on the changing nature of participation, youth unemployment, social exclusion and cycles of disadvantage stressed how, within national averages, local conditions, cultures and resources helped to shape young people's transitions. Access to employment was particularly marked by geographical variations, for example:

While the national unemployment rate was 9 per cent, unemployment in the ten most deprived local authority districts such as Hackney and Knowsley ranged from 17 to 23 per cent. Location determines not only chances of employment but often access to food, banks, health provision and entertainment (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999: 16).

²⁵ Also see Law (1996) for a discussion of racial discrimination in university entrance.

Critics such as Turok and Webster (1998) argued that such local labour market disparities threatened to undermine the NDYP and that rather than focusing on unemployed people's mobility, instead jobs should be brought to them, especially in cities, in which the NDYP had been least successful.

The effect on young people of perceiving lack of access to employment by adults around them, discussed earlier, was looked at in men in particular due to their challenging of authority, truancy and being excluded from school and their group behaviour in riots on 'unpopular' estates (Power and Tunstall, 1997; Lee and Hills, 1998; Wilkinson, 1995). The literature emphasised that young people's housing careers need to be considered alongside their employment ones as housing pathways are also structurally determined and reflect the changing realities of socio-economic life (Ford et al., 2002). While, in the past, young people, underpinned by employment and family formation, tended to move from parental home to social housing or parental home to owner occupation via rental, they now modified their behaviour with the likelihood that a higher percentage would stay in the parental home, or 'transitional' housing arrangements for longer (Burrows and Rugg, 2001).

Welfare retrenchment also contributed to these fractured and protracted pathways, particularly changes in social security benefits (Kemp and Rugg, 2001)—with the impact of the single room rent restriction, heavy constraints from low income, the rules of the scheme and imperfect knowledge of those rules (ibid). That research also highlighted young people's lack of knowledge of the housing benefit scheme and difficulties securing accommodation because of discrimination against those receiving it (ibid). Again, locality impacted via locally varying structures of housing provision easing and restricting costs, accessibility and so on (ibid). Research into young people and the housing market in London found that it:

seems to prevent young people from considering a wider range of opportunities since interviews there suggested that the loss of housing benefits is perceived as a disincentive to taking full time employment (Sunley et al., 2001: 504).

As the supply of affordable housing has fallen with the decline of social housing and owner occupation out of range for many, it has been argued that where young people do seek independent housing, they have an increased risk of finding the costs unsustainable; living in poor conditions; experiencing frequent mobility and homelessness (Burrows and Rugg, 2001). For these and other reasons, it was found to be more dangerous to leave home early, in terms of long-term harm to individual life chances (Bentley and Gurumurthy, 1999) and increasing numbers of homeless people were from younger age groups (linked to changed entitlements and opportunities for work) (ibid). Similarly, Stafford et al. (1999) found that living at home or with a relative had a profoundly positive influence on young men's chances of securing employment, although the nature of the support given was unclear.

Despite the fracturing of more traditional means of support for independent housing, young people continued to seek it from an early age, but for a wider range of reasons than noted in the past—to solve other issues, rather than for its own sake and

...perhaps contrary to expectations, exclusion from the labour market does not necessarily constrain young people from seeking independent housing (Burrows and Rugg, 2001: 7).

What is more, housing goals were still valued and achievement of independent housing per se still used to express adulthood (ibid).

2.5 New public welfare management and the NDYP

Since the end of the 1980s, there has been a drive to develop mixed economies in public services in a new culture of public management, one endorsed by New Labour:

Structural reforms that have sought to institutionalise the separation of service provision from political decision-making, the creation of markets and competition, and consumer-focused initiatives to orientate services towards their clients (Gray and Jenkins, 1999: 209).

Below, is a brief discussion of both some independent research on the delivery of the NDYP up to 2001 and theoretical literature on several aspects of new public management, including choice and the effects of introducing contracts into welfare programmes.

2.5.1 Providing choice and meeting individual need

As discussed in the previous chapter, the NDYP was to provide new and improved levels of choice within the programme and individualised attention for its participants. Literature on successful welfare to work outcomes in countries such as the US and Australia, confirmed the necessity for such guidance (Finn, 1997; Mead, 1997). However, government evaluation of the NDYP up to 2001 showed that jobcentre staff could not fulfil these expectations.

Looking at wider debates on the extent to which welfare services can offer choice or individual service, much of the literature looked at the change in the relationship between services and their users since the 1970s. At that point, the beginning of the end was signalled for the passive role of clientalism—one which had been assigned to welfare users from the founders of the professionalised welfare state (Klein and Millar, 1995) in which state welfare was envisaged as a form of enlightened paternalism safeguarding the potentially misguided consumer (ibid). A relationship which reflected the:

authoritative patterns of a still highly deferential, class divided society (MacKenzie and MacKenzie cited in Lee and Raban, 1988: 25).

It was replaced by welfarism, defined as an active pursuit of one's entitlement and the best of what is available (Hughes, 1998). The implementation of internal markets into public services by the last Conservative Government introduced the idea that welfare service users were now customers, with the implication being that their interests would be brought forward and that they would be in control.

Perri 6 (2003) divided the possible goals for consumer choice into consumer and service levels. The former included improved outcomes, acceptability (the political importance of Government being seen to offer choices), improved client satisfaction and user convenience. While in the second, he included responsiveness (choice used as a discipline upon providers to offer service content that consumers want), efficiency and presentation in which:

...choice is used on a political rather than technical policy rationale, in order to mask the operation of other goals (Perri 6, 2003: 244)

However, the relevance of choice as a concept in services that consumers cannot exit, or even threaten to exit (Jones and May, 1992) and in which resources are scarce (Walker, 1989) has been widely critiqued. Major constraints have been highlighted in the user's ability to choose, such as not being supplied with enough information, and difficulties accessing it, not understanding the organisational processes, rules and decision-making (Jones and May, 1992), lack of confidence in the system, their attitudes towards receiving benefits and their own individual personal characteristics and circumstances (Ritchie and Chetwynd, 1997). Such literature questioned the assumption that a rational market process existed and that users were risk aware and operating on a rational, self-interested, calculative basis (Klein and Millar, 1995). User empowerment literature argued that users may not see exercising choice as a priority:

Public services can be used in conditions which are likely to be experienced as risky, confusing and uncertain. This implies that, at the point of consumption, values such as confidence, security and trust may be more appreciated by users than the opportunity for choice: a simple notion of choice as selection between options cannot stand up to systematic analysis of the processes through which people come to receive and make use of welfare services (Barnes and Prior, 1995: 58).

While users do not necessarily want to be faced with a wide choice of different brands of the same type of service, they do want individualised service of their choice (Walker, 1989).

It was also argued that the introduction of choice leads to increased inequalities. Choice making can not only:

...serve to reinforce and reproduce ... unequal starting points but it makes the social characteristics of such inequalities disappear in the 'magic of the marketplace' (Clarke in Hughes, 1998: 41).

For example, in relation to access to education, Penn (1999) showed what he referred to as decreasing, asymmetric cognitive filters—the least privileged in terms of social background have the least knowledge about how the system operates. Similarly, choice is shown to do little to break the link between educational and class outcomes (ibid). Professional, middle class users will tend to get the best out of welfare and an inverse care law operates whereby those most in need do not assert themselves and therefore do

not get the service they require and polarisation is created between sink and elite providers (Le Grand, 1991, and Perri 6, 2003).

Literature looking at the front-line experience of the user pointed to the negative effects of asserting choice. Hogg (1999) argued that users often feel that they can only exercise choice in a passive and negative way, such as through non-compliance. Hudson (1993) reviewed how Lipsky's work outlined the dilemmas faced by clients, not only in what they had to accept from services but in their interactions with welfare institutions. They must strike a balance between asserting their rights as citizens and accepting the obligations public agencies seek to place upon them as clients. As citizens they should seek their full entitlement; as bureaucratic subjects they feel themselves obliged to temper their demands in recognition of perceived resource limitations and the agencies' organisational needs. Although it is apparent that exceptions are often made and additional resources often found, clients also recognize the potential costs of unsuccessfully asserting their rights.

In relation to consumerism, Taylor (1992) argued that the claimant is not necessarily empowered by being called a customer. Consumerism was seen by some as a tactic to divert attention from lack of user rights and the unequal power relationship between user and worker based on unequal distribution of resources and power (Walker, 1989). Similarly, it was seen as a diversion from social rights (Barnes and Wistow, 1993) that challenge governments by the contract between state and citizen that they involve (Cox, 1998), and the implications of their positive definition—the right to food and shelter, for example, (Coote, 1992). Consumerism moves the focus away from substantive rights to actual services or benefits to procedural ones, such as the fair treatment of individuals in contact with providers which tend to be overseen by informal, non-statutory codes of practice (*ibid*). The literature also pointed out that welfare systems could not operate if everybody exercised their choice:

if more than a very few people operated in this way, the public sector would rapidly be overwhelmed (Hughes, 1998: 40).

Regardless of views on the feasibility of welfare users as consumers or customers and their ability to make choices about the service they are receiving, the literature on user rights and on the social construction of the user emphasised that welfare delivery is driven by preconceptions about types of claimant (Hewitt, 1999).

As well as promoting the NDYP as a programme offering unprecedented choice, the policy literature also presented it as being able to provide individualised service. This notion of welfare services being able to respond to individuals and differences has been challenged in several ways. The literature on the construction of youth as a social problem, as discussed above, argued that welfare to work policies promoted certain constructs of young people because they were unable to admit their heterogeneity or to accept that the reasons for unemployment are complex and varied, because doing so would offer many challenges to those policies (Baldwin, Coles and Mitchell, 1997 and Maguire and Maguire, 1997). Conceiving a young person as a 'victim' or an 'idle, thieving bastard' (Bagguley and Mann, 1992: 113) provided conveniently conscience salving, if limited, dichotomies (Hammersley, 2000) for policy makers.

Theoretical literature looked at how the relationship between social constructions of need and social relations of power leads to these top-down processes ascribing identities. Williams (2000) described how relations are 'refracted' in welfare through hierarchical relations between providers and welfare (constitutive of moral categories) in the form of restricted access to resources by marginal groups.

Taylor (1998) looked at the conflict that welfare services have between the need to redistribute resources on the basis of equality and acknowledging individuality. He described how they make a claim for redistributing resources by denying specificity and appealing to wider criterion. However, people have both categorical (what they share despite their difference) and ontological (their difference and uniqueness as individuals) identities. Differences define what we need from the welfare state and are important for understanding not only how people treat each other but also are linked to substantial differences in outcomes.

Earlier research on decision making examined how front-line workers use ascribed identities to make decisions. Huby and Dix (1992) looked at the way in which front-line workers decided eligibility for grants or loans from the Social Fund and found that officers reliance on definitions of their client group to judge the status of need as opposed to assessing individuals. The study concluded that there was no difference in need between people who received those loans and grants and those that did not. Lipsky (1980) argued that it is impossible to reduce discretion because aspects of front-line jobs involve complex tasks for which rules, guidelines and instructions cannot circumscribe alternatives. What is more, the maintenance of discretion in the welfare state contributes to its legitimacy. It promotes workers' discretion and encourages clients to believe that workers hold the key to their well-being. However, he was also sceptical about the ability of front-line staff to treat their clients as individuals. Ideally, and by training, street-level bureaucrats²⁶ respond to individual needs or characteristics of the people they serve or confront. In practice, they must deal with clients on a mass basis, since work requirements prohibit individualised service. At best, this leads to benign modes of mass processing, but at worst, to favouritism and routinising, all of which serve private or agency purposes (Hudson, 1993). While Jones and May (1992) argued that much of the antipathy that social and welfare workers feel about working in organisations may come from their inability to be responsive to the needs and wants of individuals.

Lipsky argued that staff working lives may start with the intention of meeting service ideals such as meeting individual need, but that over time, they are dominated by coping strategies and in the end:

They develop conceptions of their work and of their clients that narrow the gap between their personal and work limitations and the service ideal (Lipsky, 1999: 383).

These conceptions are then used in their front-line responses, of which Lipsky identified three: modification of client demand, modification of job conception and modification of

²⁶ Lipsky's term 'street-level bureaucrat' is used to describe those public service workers who 'interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work (Hudson, in Hill, 1999: 394).

client conception. In the former, he included forms of demand control such as perpetuating delay, withholding information and stigmatising the process of service delivery. However, they can also control clients through for example, settings that symbolise and limit their relationship and the timing of interactions or presenting their services as always in the best interests of clients. As an example of modification of job conception, Lipsky cited psychological withdrawal resulting in a workforce relatively unbothered by the discrepancy between what they are supposed to do and what they actually do (Hudson, 1999). The final modification of client conception is described as more subtle—unable to provide the service to all clients in the way they would like, street-level bureaucrats divide up the client population and rationalise the division even though the consequence may be in conflict with the organisation's formal goals, cream-skimming is given as an example (ibid).

Organisational literature argued that reducing the gap between rhetoric and performance in service provision to consumers cannot be done without recognising the constraints on both worker and consumer from their organisational context (Jones and May, 1992). This is defined as the way in which organisations structure relations between consumers and workers by imposing various boundaries on the range of issues covered by their interactions, the kinds of information that can be processed, the range of alternatives offered and the way in which decisions are made (Hasenfeld, 1987). What is more, organisations' structures and practices also have to consider their relationship with external organisations, especially when they are resource dependent on them. These relationships have been theorised in various ways, for example, in terms of political economy—the importance of garnering political and economic power—Marxist theory, population ecology and institutional theory which emphasises the importance of looking at the structure of the sector in which any single organisation operates (ibid). Looking at problems that arise from complex relationships between organisations, Barlett et al. (1998) discussed, for example, demarcation disputes (with a tendency to pass users on) and problems of responsiveness (and related issues of accountability and transparency) arising from long agency chains

2.5.2 Consequences of contracts

Government claims about the benefits of using an internal market to deliver the NDYP drew on the assumptions of efficiency gains in introducing competition—lower costs and greater responsibility—without sacrificing equity goals. Not only would consumer interests be brought forward, the competing providers would be incentivised to develop and diversify their services, to offer differentiated services to different types of users and to be creative with the allocation of scarce resources leading to more choice for the consumer. Providers would have to be accountable in a new way, so while they had the freedom to manage, there was also centralised control through contract conditions (Lowe, 1999).

These assumptions have been strongly critiqued. The problem with introducing the private sector is that public services are different from other markets. For example, in markets, rising demand is good, in services it is a problem—a cost, not a source of income (Glennister, 1996). The capacity of services is limited and so they have to be rationed and demand managed downwards with some customers moved on (Hughes, 1998). Jones and Gray (2001) discussed the ways in which the pressure to perform and the output-related nature of the funding leads to distortions and perverse and unintended consequences.

Some argued that the introduction of market reform into public services has moderated their bureaucracy and created slightly flatter hierarchies and more discretion, for example, over forms of provision—even though that discretion has been governed by contractual arrangements (Gray and Jenkins, 1999). However, in the contract mode of governance, bureaucracy still has a ‘deadening hand’:

We now have MBA managers so preoccupied with systems, recording and checking, that they have stopped valuing their most precious resource, their staff ... These managers have devised sophisticated and time-consuming assessment procedures ... They have set up procedures and instructions ... while they translate human distress into recordable statistics (Brand, 1997 quoted in Gray and Jenkins, 1999: 200).

Van den Brink et al. (2002) looked at how welfare organisations may respond to the internal market by using organisational strategies which restrict competition and therefore the client's ability to exit (Hirschman, 1970). One method is entrapment (for example, interlocking working processes of the provider with those of the client by setting up administrative systems that are directly compatible²⁷). While these may appear beneficial in the short run, they may not be in the long term. That study concluded that when conditions for competition are undermined, the exit option becomes infeasible and that if an effective market-orientated system is to develop, more understanding is needed of the actors' reactions to incentives.

Cutler and Waine (1994) questioned the use of performance measurement. Indicators may look at the use of resources rather than what is done with them and the same indicator may be seen as good and bad by different organisational actors. They examined the disjuncture that arises in measurement between outputs and outcomes, arguing that the latter are intangible, which means they are always dependent on constructs which generate proxies or substitutions for outcomes and can be criticised for not capturing the character of the outcome. Prior et al. (1995) similarly pointed out the immeasurability of some public sector work and that performance measurement may put excessive weight on features of a service that happen to be easy to measure. The focus on efficiency (rather than effectiveness), relating inputs to outputs, also depended on the premise that products are the same at two points in time, which they argue is a simple reductionist claim (ibid). They raised the question of causality, to what extent can an institution be responsible for its outcomes—how far does the provider have control over its product? (Ibid.) Prior et al. (1995) similarly discussed the appropriateness of using contracts in environments of uncertainty, in that contracts assume a degree of precision that may be difficult to attain.

Among the negative effects of using performance indicators, Gray and Jenkins (1999) discussed the incentive to cheat, to concentrate activity on aspects of performance being measured and the reductionist impact in which they may help bring unacceptable

²⁷ In their discussion, the client is not the end-user. In the NDYP context, the client is Jobcentre Plus.

performance up to the standard required but also promote reduction of standards amongst highest performers in paradoxically penalising innovation (Cutler and Waine, 1994).

One perverse consequence of the market in welfare to work was that it did not incentivise providers to take on the more challenging clients. Organisations became risk averse, cream-skimming or adverse selection took place and this led to distributional inequity and undermined equity of access (Bartlett et al., 1998; Prior et al., 1995). While individual charities taking part in the NDYP were not obliged to accept every person referred to them, some charities reported being under pressure to receive them. In contrast, Jones and Gray (2001) identified that some private companies were reluctant to deal with the 30% to 40% of claimants defined as least employable. Cream-skimming was exacerbated by the pressure to meet contractual requirements and performance targets (Perkins-Cohen, 2002). At the time of fieldwork, there was no acknowledgement in the contracts that organisations were taking on different types of clients. Even though calls for such acknowledgement existed in various quarters, such as in the Parekh report referenced above, which recommended that:

an explicit focus on achieving employment equity should be a key condition for the award of contracts to deliver programmes such as the New Deals at local levels. If inequality persists, responsibility for such programmes should be transferred to other organisations (Parekh, 2000: 201).

Perkins-Cohen (2002) recommended an acknowledgement of the work that organisations did with the 'harder to help clients' through a revision of performance targets to recognise distance travelled to employability. While this proposal was being considered by government (p.25), they did not fully acknowledge the other negative effects of contracts and performance measures. Finn's (1997) conclusion from looking at welfare to work in Australia, was that national programmes with targets for placement can be counter productive: in that they will be under pressure to focus on those most likely to get jobs and at least cost and that the pressure of targets means that people are put on programmes that are available rather than suitable.

The claim that performance could be improved through more rigorous surveillance of service providers and financial penalties for poor performance was also open to much criticism. One difficulty comes from trying to find an appropriate balance between horizontal controls and vertical regulation (such as financial penalties enforced by external authorities) to avoid creating conflicts between cultures and imposing costs, losing trust, flexibility and innovation (Flynn, 1997). The value of this type of quality assurance was challenged with concerns about importing commercially generated forms of quality assurance to state welfare services with little regard for the complexities of specifying and measuring quality in the latter (ibid).

Lipsky (1980) argued that administrative controls, such as sanctions and incentives, only have a minor role in directing the behaviour of front-line workers. He gave several reasons including that they have a high turnover and therefore the relevance of, for example, salary increases are low but also that front-line performance is difficult to define and measure, commenting that client files reveal relatively little (ibid). Top-down concern with prescription also 'creates and reinforces low-trust relationships'. Lipsky (ibid) cites Downs' (1966) 'law' of organisational behaviour:

The greater the efforts made to control subordinated officials, the greater the efforts by those subordinates to evade or counteract such controls (ibid: 399).

This in turn leads to a lowering of commitment and motivation which is then felt by others further down the delivery chain.

The concept of partnership was also critiqued—the feasibility of partnerships existing, for example, with the unequal power between government and voluntary organisations—and the strategies that have been used to make them work (Craig et al., 2004). Contrasting sector responses to involvement in the NDYP and their consequences have also been looked at. For example, the contrasting attitudes to referrals between voluntary and private sector representing contrasting organisational principles and different types of accountability (Hudson, 1995). Other consequences for the voluntary sector included loss of trust in the relationship with their users, charity remits and independence being compromised by the rigidity of the contracts, conflicts between the NDYP and charity law (Van Doorn and Pike, 1999) and negative impacts

on relationships with staff (Prior et al., 1995). Not having the same resources as private partners to deal with the vast and complex bureaucracy of the contract and paperwork involved was also a major problem (Van Doorn and Pike, 1999). The literature on voluntary sector management of contracts more generally pointed out that organisations had to develop a whole new range of skills to tender for contracts, manage expenditure within contract income and monitor performance (Hudson, 1995).

2.6 Conclusion

The area of youth unemployment and welfare to work is a highly contested one, the discussion of which has largely taken place in terms of the portrayal of young people and the reasons for their unemployment through dominant constructs created by vested interests, predominately, but not solely, government. The NDYP has largely been considered in terms of its macro-economic impact, and as such, has been judged a success. However, that focus outweighs or covers up failure in other areas and can be identified as a research artefact of large scale surveys looking at complex policies in areas where one size cannot fit all and cream-skimming takes place both over time²⁸ and at any one time by organisations working with favoured clients.

Questions raised by the brief outline on the vast research on youth disadvantage include how those vicious cycles it described can be turned into virtuous ones or complex transitions connected to policy (Bentley et al., 1999) as:

No simple policy initiatives will rapidly resolve the growing polarisation we see in the youth labour market (Bynner et al., 2002: xiii).

While the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2002) stated:

Research on vulnerable groups consistently outlines the need to address a wide range of personal and social problems in addition to the issue of employment exclusion: debt, housing, family difficulties, substance abuse, education, transport (Pillinger, 2001; Ditch and Roberts, 2002). It is the multiplicity of difficulties, rather than their nature, which different groups share (2002: 7).

²⁸ In that, even government evaluation has acknowledged that easiest to place clients created the success of the programme's first wave.

ESRC's Youth, Citizenship and Social Change programme research concluded that young people form relationships with people, not organisations (Evans, 2002b). It was asked how ways of working could be personalised to give consideration to their life histories and ongoing difficult events.

Having examined the constructs discussed earlier in this chapter, this research looked outside the intervention to contextualise the lives and identities of NDYP participants, who remained under-researched in terms of their relationships in different institutional settings and localities, in order to:

Develop an improved understanding of the factors involved in becoming socially defined as independent and personally effective or (conversely) marginalized in different settings (Evans, 2000:3).

At the same time, the research examined those delivering the programme, and how their perception of clients and the pressures created by working in the contractual structure (some of which have been discussed in the third section of this chapter) impacted on clients and the consequences of that for process outcomes.

3 Chapter Three: Method

3.1 Introduction

This study took an ethnographic approach to the examination of the NDYP VS in London using a background survey to map provision followed by two case studies. This chapter discusses the strengths and weaknesses of using this approach and outlines the research objectives. It describes the fieldwork: the background survey (why it was carried out, issues of access and the survey visits) and the case studies (methodological strengths and weaknesses as well as the interview and observational methods used within them). The chapter finishes with discussion of how data was recorded, analysed and written up.

3.2 The ethnographic approach

The research design, namely the questions the study was asking, the data collected and the conclusions drawn (Denzin and Lincoln (Eds.), 2000) were influenced by ethnography—defined as an approach or perspective that combines method and methodology (Clifford and Marcus (Eds.), 1986)²⁹. This was because of its strengths in challenging policy constructs and macro findings by looking at them in context, over time and beyond words. A wide range of methods can be used to produce ethnography, but tend to include participant observation, observation and qualitative interviewing, all of which were used in this study. However, the final product was not intended to be written up as ethnography.

²⁹ The changing nature of ethnography will not be discussed here, although the literature described its development from Malinowski's objective, positivist accounts to the multiplicity of methods embracing post-positivism and constructionism, crisis of representation, emphasis on reflexivity to action-orientated research (McLeod, 2000).

3.2.1 Strengths

Context

In ethnographic research, data is collected in the context of its production (Burawoy et al., 1991; Denzin and Lincoln (Eds.), 2000). The researcher participates directly in the setting if not the activity (Brewer, 2000; Smith, 2001). This requires:

the distress of contact with the recalcitrant untidiness of real economies and people (Chambers, 1997: 53).

The researcher attempts to understand insider perspectives, the different realities and views of sub-groups within a given situation (Fetterman, 1998), particularly those that may be obscured and neglected. This includes how they:

actively make sense of their surroundings, and how this shapes what they do; the unintended and often unforeseen consequences of actions; and the resulting contingency of most courses of events (Hammersley, 2000: 394).

In a policy setting, by watching people 'through a prism of organisational spaces, routines and events' (Smith, 2001:220) and over a sustained period of time (although how that is defined is open to debate) (Silverman, 2000; Tedlock, 2000), using ethnographic methods also allows exploration of the processes constituting what has been called the 'black box' or gap between measures of inputs and outputs. This is valuable for those who argue that the front-line interaction or encounter is where policy happens (Lipsky, 1980).

Closing the distance between the researcher and the context is also an important way of emphasizing the limits to simplistic dichotomies used to legitimise policy (Hammersley, 2000). In revealing heterogeneity, messiness and movement in any research field, ethnography becomes:

potentially the strongest social metaphor within which members of some group can display the complexity of variability of their lives ... [it] can complicate the simplified and often incorrect notions that one group has of another (Agar, 1980: 252).

Showing individuals moving between spheres is also evidence that:

there is of course no essential self, only different selves, different performances, different ways of being a ... person in a social situation' (Denzin, 2001: 28).

As such, the perspective is valuable at confronting normative assumptions and dominant discourses (Brewer, 2000) which:

Characterise in a totalising and moral fashion, one particular attributed essence or a constellation of related essences—as accounting for the complete ontological identity of [a person] (Taylor, 1998: 342).

It does this by:

privileging the ordinary by bringing it out in public, the ordinariness of people's private lives – a melodrama of ordinary interiority (Becker, 1986: 63).

As such, it was appropriate for examining the much debated concept of dependency in welfare to work, in that it would reveal the interdependencies and connections between individuals (Jessor et al., 1996)—articulating the interface between agency and structure and young people's own horizons for action (Williams, 2002).

Not just words

If words were enough, there would just be interviews (Altheide and Johnson, 1998: 297).

Observing the behaviour of actors within the delivery context of the NDYP VS was considered important, not only because, as just discussed, the front-line encounter is considered to be where the policy happens (Lipsky, 1980), but also because the policy rhetoric incorporated the objective of behavioural reform—for example, it raised the issue of literal physical conduct³⁰ (where young people should be and when) as well as moral conduct (how they should behave). It therefore made intuitive sense to choose a method designed to look at behaviour as well as speech.

What is more, as outlined previously, the programme was compulsory and people could be sanctioned for non-attendance. Ethnography is associated with studying workplaces as:

institutions where practices of coercion, stratification, inequality and resistance exist in relation (ibid: 224).

Looking at responses to power, individual and group level resistance in work settings (Smith, 2002), ethnography is also known as a means to:

³⁰ Gilliatt et al. (2000) incorporated physical or bodily orientation towards orderly conduct as one of three requirements of 'responsibility' in the consumption of public services. The other two being intersubjectivity or interaction with authoritative people (or experts) as well as other consumers and a knowledge base for understanding people, documents and machines.

address unpopular questions, talk to outsiders and the marginalised and come to the conclusions that question conventional wisdom and entrenched interests' (LeCompte, 2002: 287).

In doing so, it has found that recording speech alone is not enough to capture the shifting relations of power in various sites, institutions and transition as they are lived, experienced and handled by subordinate groups (Willis and Trondman, 2000). People may not only be reluctant to feedback in these contexts but may withhold comments as a means of resistance:

embodied sense is often not expressed in language but sometimes more strongly, it is organised against it or in tension with language (Willis, 2000: xii).

Scott referred to a 'hidden transcript' that needs to be observed rather than heard as it contains not only 'speech acts' but a whole range of practices (Scott, 1991: 15). Therefore, ethnography has a counter-tendency against privileging speech. It incorporates 'embodied sense' by also examining less conventional units of analysis including non-verbal facial expressions and aspects of body language, such as proxemics and kinesics³¹.

The ethnographic perspective also incorporates a wide definition of units of analysis, including the meanings attached to the use of space in an organisation, the use of objects in that space and aspects of the environment such as noise, temperature and smell. It does not draw limits on collecting whole pieces of evidence, but also includes mundane encounters such as snatched conversations between one event and another.

³¹ The term proxemics was introduced by anthropologist Edward T Hall in 1966 to describe set measurable distances between people as they interact. Accessed at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proxemics#cite_note-Hall-0. 18 May 2008. Kinesics is the interpretation of body language such as facial expressions and gestures — or, more formally, non-verbal behavior related to movement, either of any part of the body or the body as a whole. The term was first used in 1952 by Ray Birdwhistell, a ballet dancer turned anthropologist. Accessed at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinesics>. 18 May 2008.

3.2.2 Difficulties

The relationship between researcher and data

While the experiential nature of the approach was considered one of its strengths, it also created various challenges. Ethnography is a perspective that acknowledges that it is unrealistic to think of the researcher and the evidence as separate. The ‘field research highlights the researcher’ (Renzetti and Lee, 1993) who is understood to affect the evidence being collected rather than as a neutral recording device (Weber, 2001).

If Lipsky’s argument that front-line delivery is where policy happens is followed, the impact of the ethnographer and the method on the field is significant. This is why they need to be reflexive, to deconstruct their role in an interactive process, which is partly shaped by personal history, biography, gender, social class, race and ethnicity. They need to be sensitive to how they might be perceived and the impact of that in the field and on analysis. Self-presentation is key, which includes being transparent about their role³² and firm about boundaries. The researcher also has to acknowledge that they will be affected by the research—that it has personal consequences³³.

The lack of distance between the researcher and the research has also been considered as a weakness by those who argued that this makes it harder to identify any causation.

³² In this study, this included informing as many people in the field that my research was independent, for my own academic purposes, was not commissioned by any organisation and that it would be written up anonymously.

³³ I would argue that there need to be more formal structures in place in the PhD research environment for ‘debriefing’ from fieldwork experiences on a regular basis so that any issues arising from the researcher’s or someone else’s experience in the field can be supportively discussed with someone who is trained in dealing with difficult fieldwork experiences and can provide guidance—that person may or may not be your supervisor. Such a support structure would improve both the quality of the research and the ability of the researcher to maintain appropriate boundaries in their fieldwork.

However, a central strength of the approach is that it reminds the researcher, that regardless of which method used:

Social research will never be able to specify invariant deterministic causal relations because any causal mechanism will be inherently unstable ... people differ in their ability to make things happen and actions often have unpredictable and unintended consequences (Sen, 2000: 15).

The extent of a researcher's belief in their capacity to determine cause is fundamental to their methodological choice. It will depend on their views about the possibilities of social science and the extent to which they hold a positivist perspective in believing causes of phenomena can be identified and hypotheses tested using dependent and independent variables.

Aligned to the question of lack of distance, another challenge presented by the approach is the amount of data that can potentially be collected. This will partly be determined by decisions made about the slicing of data—how and when units of analysis are gathered. This will be further discussed in the section on case studies.

3.3 Research objectives

These have been defined as the set of questions that drive the data collection process (Robson, 2002) and which are a means of getting assumptions out in the open (ibid). This study's research questions were as follows:

1. How do participants' personal circumstances affect their participation in the NDYP VS and their chances of obtaining employment?
2. How do participants' work experiences affect their participation in the NDYP VS and their chances of obtaining employment?
3. How do participants' aspirations in relation to personal circumstances and work affect their participation in the NDYP VS and their chances of obtaining employment?
4. How do participants' attitudes to their personal circumstances and to work affect their participation in the NDYP VS and their chances of obtaining employment?
5. How does the way the policy is delivered affect participants?

6. How does the way the policy is delivered affect staff?

3.4 Fieldwork

The fieldwork consisted of a background survey of all providers running the NDYP VS programme in London during the summer of 2001, from which two were chosen as case studies and researched between August 2001 and June 2002. Participant observation and interviews (combination of semi-structured, unstructured and focus group) with clients and staff took place mainly at those two organisations, but also at the various placement providers in which clients were placed.

This section discusses why the survey was carried out, access issues and describes the survey visits. It then looks at the case study approach, influences on case study selection and discusses the observation and interview elements of the case studies. Finally, it outlines how data was recorded.

3.4.1 The background survey

Why it was carried out

The objective of the background survey was to map out provision by identifying, visiting and interviewing all London organisations with VS (and ETF) contracts (see Appendix 2 for list of providers). From that initial survey, two organisations were selected in which detailed case studies could be conducted. Obtaining a broad picture of provision, before focusing in on two case studies, ensured a basic understanding of the policy that then allowed identification of those aspects of delivery specific to organisations and those generic to the policy. It also meant that the cases could be selected from as large a sample of organisations as possible.

London was chosen as the fieldwork site for two reasons. The first was methodological: a desire to carry out the research in my home city—to gather evidence from sites that

were within the same place that I lived and worked in order to reinforce the experiential nature of the research. Secondly, London was an interesting place to study the policy as evaluations had already shown that it did not work so well in urban areas (Sunley et al., 2001) and was overrepresented in London and the South-east (Dorsett, 2001).

Accessing the providers

Finding the organisations provided a challenge in itself. Jobcentres in local boroughs were an initial point of contact, but it was difficult accessing the right contacts within them and they were slow to respond. While not wanting to immediately use a top-down approach by contacting the district or regional offices of the Employment Service, I instead decided to test out local knowledge of the NDYP VS and the organisations contracted to deliver it by contacting organisations such as the National Centre of Voluntary Organisations, the careers advice offices and local libraries.

However, local organisations were not able to provide that information. I therefore resorted to contacting the London and South-East regional office of the Employment Service (LASER). It did not have an existing list of all VS providers but after a short delay, collated and sent the information to me³⁴. With this list, I initially contacted each provider by letter (see Appendix 3) followed by emails and phone calls. In making contacts with the organisations, I used methodological advice in being open and honest in making initial contacts, being clear about my study's purpose, funding and use, including the potential benefits to the organisation and responding to any fears and objections (Bulmer, 1988). Aware that many organisations were constrained by funding and often had difficulties with staff recruitment and retention, my letter stated that I wished to volunteer. This offer of unpaid work succeeded in being a route in to most organisations.

³⁴ Eight months later, I contacted LASER again for an updated version of this list and met with a defensive response, questioning why I wanted the information and asking for evidence supporting my claim to be researching the policy. At this point, I asked if it was considering making this information public in some format, and it said it was about to do this, four years after the policy's implementation.

The survey visits

Having established contact, I visited 21 of the 24 organisations which LASER listed as delivering the VS contract in London, between August and November 2001. Each visit lasted from an hour to a whole day and typically consisted of hour long semi-structured interviews with managers, using an interview schedule but not recorded (see Appendix 4), tours of the sites by the people interviewed, informal discussions with front-line staff and sometimes participation in training sessions.

Interviewees were asked about their role and main responsibilities in the organisation, about the history of the organisation and its involvement in the New Deal. Questions about the latter included asking how many contracts they had had, partnership arrangements, how many clients they take on at any one time, how long they tend to stay for and the job outcomes. Interviewees were also asked to describe their client profile.

The second half of the interviews asked about the delivery process such as about the type of placements offered, changes made over the lifetime of the contract, problems with delivery, the nature of the organisation's relationship with the ES, staff training and the effect of inspections. The final part asked for views on the policy in general and about the organisation's future role in delivering the VS. The findings from these interviews are discussed in chapter 6.

3.4.2 The case studies

This section looks at why a case study approach was used and strengths and weaknesses with the method, outlines how the case studies were selected and set up and problems with that process. The two case study organisations are then introduced. This is followed by a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of methods used within the case study—observation, interview and documentation collection.

While the literature discussed the different types of case study, such as critical, extreme, typical and heterogeneous (Patton, 2002) and also pointed out that the term can refer to

either the process or the product of analysis or both, this discussion will use Robson's definition of the case study as:

a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence (Robson, 1998: 146).

Strengths of the case study approach

Yin (1993) argued that the case study method is the most appropriate approach to studying how or why a programme works. Unlike survey or experimental strategies, which separate phenomena from context or reduce them to mere frequency or incidence, it explores organisational links over-time and in real-life context, and is thus able to look, for example, at the link between programme implementation and effect. While case studies have been seen as a somewhat 'weak sibling among social science methods' (ibid: xiii) and for some time in decline, with the advance of quantitative methods (Hamel et al., 1993), there has been renewed interest in them due to an instinctive desire to understand complex, social phenomenon (Yin, 1993). Therefore:

If your main concern is understanding what is happening in a specific context, and if you can get access to, and co-operation from, the people involved—then do a case study (Robson, 1998: 168).

There is an expectation that a range of techniques will be used in a case study and this 'inherently multi-method' characteristic is identified as another major strength (ibid). Considering a variety of materials, produced by different types of knowledge or multiple sources also ensures the case study's depth (Hamel et al., 1993). The variety of evidence may include documents, interviews, observations and artefacts (Yin, 1993).

Unlike survey work, the case study is flexible in terms of not needing to know exactly what you are doing before you start. It is defined solely in terms of its concentration on the specific case in its context and that can be as pre-structured or emergent as you wish. What is more, if it is an exploratory case study on a new area, pre-structuring will not be possible (Robson, 1998). As such, it was described as the 'ideal inductive approach' (Hamel et al., 1993: 41). However, while flexibility is seen as the case study's strength, it can also create the difficulty of delineating boundaries:

The looser the original design, the less selective you can afford to be in data selection. Anything might be important. On the other hand, the danger is that if you start with a strong conceptual framework³⁵, this will blind you to important features of the case, or cause you to misinterpret evidence. There is no obvious way out of this dilemma (ibid: 149).

Robson (1998) concluded that case study design is a continuous process. Just as qualitative research is iterative so the case study is being constantly reformed during the process of the fieldwork. The lack of set boundaries reflects the nature of sampling in qualitative research more generally:

Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources (Patton, 2002: 244).

As such, there will always be a trade off between breadth and depth (ibid).

The case study has also been faulted for lack of representativeness (Hamel et al., 1993).

However, the case study does not aim for statistical generalisation:

like the experiment, [it] does not represent a sample, and the investigators' goal is to expand and generalise theories (analytic generalisation) and not to ensure frequencies' (Yin, 1989: 21).

In other words, analytic generalisation is striving to generalise a particular set of results to some broader theory (Hamel et al., 1993) and:

The degree of detail in the description of the case study ... serves to ensure that the representation of the case under investigation has been defined in a manner that is clearly apparent (Yin, 1989: 35).

Case studies have also been critiqued for their lack of objectivity in data collection and analysis and therefore the problem of bias (ibid). Certain ways of mitigating this include comparative method and analytical categories which are free from those used by the subjects of the case study themselves (ibid). The defence of case study subjectivity is also framed in a theory of explanation in which it is argued that the researcher's subjectivity must intervene to produce a definition of the object. The definition involves breaking down the personal experiences of the actors. The subject then becomes 'objectified' into a 'sociological point of view' (Hamel et al., 1993: 42). In other words, the emphasis is on the abstract nature of explanation in that it must be constructed in a

³⁵ Robson's definition of a conceptual framework is that it 'covers the main features (aspects, dimensions, factors, variables) of a case study and their presumed relationships. (Robson, 1998: 150).

theoretical language. It is that abstract form that makes it possible for the explanation to 'detach itself' (ibid: 49) from the direct point of view contained in the field.

Influences on case study selection

While Yin argued that the case study does not represent a sample in the statistical sense, the literature on sampling in a general sense of decisions about where and from whom you are going to get your information (Robson, 1998), informed the selection of cases, particularly the way that scoping case studies is based not only on purposive sampling³⁶ but on 'methodological tactics and selections' (Hamel et al., 1993: 36) and is emergent³⁷, determined by 'the logistics of real life' (Robson, 1998: 146). It includes, for example, snowballing in which a few potential respondents are contacted and asked whether they know of anybody with the characteristics that you are looking for in your research (Patton, 2002).

I have already discussed why I chose to carry out the research in London (p.74). In determining which areas of the city to carry out the research, the survey revealed that the NDYP programme was not delivered within simple geographical boundaries. For example, not all clients at any one provider came from one borough. Nevertheless, I intended to select case organisations that were based within the top ten most deprived districts in England according to the government's index of multiple deprivation.³⁸ This was important for being able to explore the first three research objectives (p.73). London, as a cosmopolitan city, provided an opportunity to study the dynamics of ethnicity in the policy—the literature review had identified differences in outcome by

³⁶ Sampling which considers the underlying purpose or theme (Patton 2002).

³⁷ Otherwise known as opportunistic sampling and defined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) as sampling that occurs when the researcher makes sampling decisions during the process of collecting data. This commonly occurs in field research—as the observer gains more knowledge of a setting, he or she can make sampling decisions that take advantage of events, as they unfold.

³⁸ An index developed in 2000 for the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), a detailed measure of deprivation for every ward and local authority in England. It is based on six separate dimensions or domains of deprivation, namely income, employment, health deprivation and disability, education, skills and training, housing and geographical access to services. Each domain is made up of a number of indicators (total in index of 33) which cover aspects of deprivation as comprehensively as possible. The two London boroughs in which the case studies took place were within the top ten most deprived districts ranked according to average ward scores (Department of Communities and Local Government, 2008).

ethnicity. I therefore chose organisations that did not have an ethnically homogenous client group.

Selection was also determined by the stability of the NDYP contract in each organisation. From the survey, it became apparent that many organisations, primarily smaller ones, had problems holding onto their contracts. They were often not sure, at the time of being visited, whether those contracts would be renewed. While not wanting to do my fieldwork solely in successful, large organisations, I had to ensure that the cases chosen would retain their contracts for the duration of the fieldwork. As Bryman commented, this type of research negotiates unpredictable factors and is:

particularly capable of undergoing a change of direction and also permits a more opportunistic approach to making contacts and following up new leads (Bryman, 1988: 10).

Although access into organisations was not a problem due to my offer to work in them unpaid—except in the sense of their self-selection in being organisations that accept you (Bryman, 1988)—staff attitudes to my research, the amount of time they were able or prepared to give me and the amount of freedom they gave me within the organisations influenced the case study process as a whole. In other words, the problem of access does not stop when access has been granted, but then becomes one of ‘getting on with people’ (ibid: 16). This was sometimes challenging as the survey had already revealed a pervasive fatigue among organisations with being monitored and evaluated throughout their delivery of NDYP contracts.

The decision to write up my study ensuring anonymity to both individuals and organisations partly came out of desire to strengthen trust and improve access. Therefore organisations in the thesis are discussed in terms of their characteristics, without referring to specific names, places and statistics and while organisational documentation and statistics were gathered for the purpose of triangulating evidence, they are not presented either in the main body of the thesis or its appendices.

The decision to carry out fieldwork in two organisations, rather than one, came from a motivation to examine the relationship between various features of the contract

organisations identified as important in the literature review and the policy delivery. As discussed, the influence of geographical area in terms of deprivation and ethnicity were two factors important to my research objectives. I also wanted to examine how delivery was influenced by the sector in which providers operated and organisational ethos and size. The intention was therefore to find two organisations contrasting in some of the features listed above.

The case study organisations

The first case study organisation worked with unemployed people in South London, and is given the pseudonym, In2work. The organisation is non-profit and well-established in the area (over 10 years old in 2001). At the time of fieldwork, it ran 14 programmes, not solely Jobcentre Plus contracts. It had run NDYP VS contracts since the policy was first implemented. Employing approximately 90 staff (Annual Report, 2001/2), about 15 of those worked on the VS contract, with approximately 80 NDYP clients on its books at any one time.³⁹ The client group was composed of mainly Afro-Caribbean and white young people.

Research took place between October 2001 and January 2002. Based at their premises, I was known to staff and clients as an independent researcher. It was agreed that I would have as much flexibility as required and I was granted access to all parts of its delivery, meetings and physical spaces. Arrangements were also made for me to visit some placement providers. The only stipulation was that I produce a report with initial findings shortly after completing the fieldwork⁴⁰.

The second case study organisation was in East London, and is given the pseudonym, Employ Ltd. The organisation is one branch of a national employment agency. They had also run more than one NDYP VS contract and ran other government programmes.

³⁹ Information collected during interview PSI1.

⁴⁰ A 9000 word report was presented to In2work in March 2003 and discussed with its Director and VS staff during a feedback session.

It had approximately 15 staff, working with approximately 60 clients⁴¹. Its client group was mainly white and Bangladeshi.

Research took place between February and June 2002. Again, this was on a full-time basis at the provider's premises. I was originally taken on with the understanding that I would cover maternity leave for, what they called, the placement monitoring officer, a role which will be discussed in the chapters on delivery—but which involved, as above, visiting placement provider organisations. However, for various reasons, I did not take this role for very long and returned to my role as researcher.

3.4.3 Observation

As outlined in the earlier discussion of the ethnographic approach, this study used participant observation in which:

The investigator takes on a role other than that of a passive observer and participates in the event being studied (Robson, 1998: 159)

It also, to a lesser extent, used simple observation described as passive, unobtrusive observation (ibid). For example, if observing training sessions, in some of those I might interact with clients and staff by taking part in their discussions or helping a client on the computer, while in others, I would not engage with anyone. In other contexts, such as spending time in a reception area, there would be little choice as to whether I participated or not, as people would interact with me by nature of the setting.

In observation, units of analysis may be chosen by time, dates, events or incidents, by space, by individuals and so on. The observation may be systematic or unsystematic—a decision requiring a trade-off between reliability and validity. For example, one might choose to systematically count the use of a word, this would be 100% accurate but trivial. In conflict with my supervisor, I made the decision not to carry out systematic observation—this was partly a desire, as discussed above, not to replicate more tick-box type methodologies already widely used in evaluation.

⁴¹ Information collected during interview PSI12.

Robson looked at observation selection through the following questions:

Who? Which persons are being observed? Where? In (or about) which settings are data collected? When? At what times? What? Which events, activities or processes are to be observed? (Robson, 1998: 155)

While no tabulated record was made of what was being observed, for how long or how often, observations included the main components of the VS programme (namely inductions, referrals, training sessions and placements) and observations categorised according to where I was physically in the organisations, examples under this category include staff offices and reception (see Appendix 6). Although by the nature of participant observation, continuous evidence was being collected, not all of which could be assigned easy categories. Others were observed regularly, such as training sessions, others only once, such as a Christmas party arranged for clients. Some observations were of groups, such as various types of training or placement visits, others could be situations involving a member of staff and a client on a one to one basis, such as the referral interview.

Strengths and weaknesses

The strengths of participant observation have already been discussed in the earlier discussion on the ethnographic approach: gathering evidence in context and over time, the experiential nature of the method and not just recording words said in interviews. The literature had also identified additional strengths of observation for the welfare to work policy context. If I had only visited sites for interviews, I would not have experienced the large number of young people whose attendance would not have been constant enough for me to engage them in interviews or those who, while forced to attend, would not necessarily have wanted to be (or be confident enough to be) interviewed. For those willing to be interviewed, the nature of the power imbalance in the policy also meant that respondents might not be very open to disclosing their views or histories.

In relation to the limits of interviewing, the objective of applying ethnographic methods to this policy area was informed by a wider theoretical debate about the extent to which

you can gain an understanding of the relationship between agency and structure through interviews. As Fine et al. argued, interviewees:

do not directly narrate their relationships with structures and ideologies (2000: 126).

Some of the problems or challenges encountered with observation included knowing what to observe among the many possible foci in the field (Robson, 1998). While having experiential evidence on the delivery environment was invaluable and while I had decided that unsystematic observation was most appropriate for the context and my role within it, there was nevertheless frustration at not always knowing what is relevant, or significant for your study. As Lipsky (1980) observed, the most powerful effect of any policy intervention may be a dirty look received by a client from a member of staff and which influences all subsequent encounters. I was interested in identifying aspects of delivery that were not measured by other evaluations and that set an even greater challenge for observation.

What is more, it was not always easy to know how to separate one incident or event from another or to know whether something was an incident, and if so, how to characterise it. There was also often the feeling that something had just happened or I had just missed something which came out of a pervasive sense that it is almost impossible to collect ethnographic evidence in a way that seems concrete or has neat beginnings and endings marking it off as a piece of data.

Another related difficulty with the method was my positioning in the field. As a new researcher, earlier stages of participant observation were about learning how to conduct myself—including, for example, how to engage and build trust with actors on site and prepare for interviews, but also maintain boundaries while forming those relationships, in the context of the 'strain of repeated negotiations in daily encounters' (Gordon et al., 2001: 190). Relationships with staff took time to develop, they were busy, space was limited and I often felt that I was in the way. The fast pace of delivery meant more observing rather than participating for much of the time. Some staff resented my presence. They had a negative attitude to academics and research that partly stemmed

from having been the frequent subjects of research and evaluations. While staff appeared to be a united group prior to being interviewed, some took the opportunity of the one to one interaction of the interview to express their negative feelings towards membership of their team and organisation. Out of interviews, it was in their professional interest to present a more unified positive group identity.

There were also limits to my ability to make my role clear at all times. This was partly because, outside of interviews, my role was ambiguous and fluid. Wenger (1987) wrote of the schizogenic characteristic of observation in that the work often involves the nature of agency and client relationships and the social scientist and participant observer may at times, participate in both groups. Frideres talked of researcher deceit:

Often in fieldwork, the subjects are conning you until you can gain their trust, and then, once you have their confidence, you begin conning them (Frideres, 1992: 28).

These issues became apparent in the different roles I assumed in, for example, being a participant observer in training sessions. While in all of them, I introduced myself as an independent researcher and asked if anyone objected to my presence, in some of those situations, I carried out simple observation, while in others, with some of the same clients, I might help the trainer out, assisting clients with jobsearch for example on a one to one basis. As such, some clients understandably understood me to be another member of staff, a manager, an inspector or a client. It was not always possible to correct these misconceptions. The precarious role of the researcher in the relationship between clients and staff was also a constant dilemma. On the one hand, I used my status as an independent researcher, to gain the confidence and trust of participants. On the other, I attempted not to alienate staff, or the organisation they were part of, and which had agreed to host my research. Keeping independence but building relationships was therefore a delicate exercise.

What is more, transparency, while easy to conceptualise in theory, was much more difficult to put it into practice. For example, it was not always feasible to inform everyone there of my role while observing in public areas of the organisation, such as the reception. I did not wear identification and therefore at times could have been

rightly accused of covert observation. The more general problem with consent is that while one person—the Manager or Director of the organisations in which I worked—might have formally consulted with his staff about my doing research, this was not feasible to do with all clients. Additionally, neither staff nor clients, even if they did have objections to my presence, may have felt able to voice them.

Another main concern was that choosing participant observation was imitating an element of the policy—namely the tracking and surveillance of its participants—that the study set out to examine. In terms of relations with staff, I was again imitating the extensive auditing, inspection and evaluation described earlier (p.16). Neither method was free of negative connotations. Therefore, while ethnography claims to be a perspective that ‘insists on a level of agency which is often overlooked’, at the same time it can be ‘...patronising and condescending’ (Fetterman, 1998: 142) yet using observation felt like it replicates the power imbalance inherent in the policy in that it watches people who will not have directly consented to that observation. What is more, unlike interviews, the participants have little ownership or control over what is recorded. Regardless of method, what is finally written about them ‘is beyond ... respondents’ control’ (Burawoy et al., 1991: 5). Again, this reiterated the importance of considering ethics, reflexivity and self presentation in the field.

3.4.4 Interviews

During the case studies, semi-structured interviews were conducted with provider staff (15), placement provider staff (9) and in-depth interviews with NDYP VS participants (44 including a focus group interview and 3 follow up interviews) between October 2001 and June 2002 (see Appendices 6, 10 and 13). This section looks first at interviews with VS participants, followed by the focus group and interviews with staff. It discusses why they were carried out, how they were designed, how respondents were selected, how they were conducted and strengths and weaknesses of the method.

Interviews with VS participants

Design and Preparation

The objective of these interviews was to learn more about young people's 'life worlds' (Kvale, 1996: 29), past and present, their relationships with people and structures around them and how they describe and make meaning of routine and problematic events (Denzin and Lincoln, (Eds.) 2000).

Kvale wrote of the qualitative research interview:

Technically, the qualitative research interview is semi-structured: it is neither an open conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire. It is conducted according to an interview guide that focuses on certain themes and that may include suggested questions. The interview is usually transcribed and the written text together with the tape recording, are the material for the subsequent interpretation of meaning (Kvale, 1996: 27).

Aware of the dominance of survey approaches to interviewing in this policy context, the objective was for the interview to be loosely structured, allowing as much in-depth narrative as possible, using a simple interview guide (see Appendix 10) specifying key topics but not listing questions therefore allowing the nature and order of questions to remain unfixed. It was divided into pages on personal histories, work experience and current experience of the VS together with an area on aspirations. Each page was split into columns. For example, the personal histories, page had columns on 'family', 'housing', 'health', 'school' and 'further education'. I was interested in the opportunity this looser structure gave for respondents to provide a narrative of their experiences and attitudes.

In terms of interviewing participants about their experience of the service, the literature had already pointed out the limits to any structured approach to understanding the relationship between a service and its users. For example, Bryson et al. (2000) pointed out that there is no unitary concept of satisfaction. Sources of dissatisfaction vary widely and mean different things to different people at the same time. One determining factor is expectation:

satisfaction often invokes a comparison of what one receives with what one expects to receive. As a result, those with low expectations are particularly likely to express themselves as satisfied (Bryson et al., 2000: 81).

What is more, big differences in satisfaction may not indicate differences in quality or effectiveness of a service and there may be no link between satisfaction and subsequent outcomes (ibid).

Conducting the interviews

Within the first weeks of being on site at the two organisations, I was looking for VS participants to interview. Sampling methods were opportunistic, depending on which clients were willing to be interviewed and which interviews (if arranged for another day) were kept. However, within this opportunistic sampling, I was looking at 'maximal variation' within my sample. Factors such as whether critical and sensitive cases and the dominant ethnic group were included. I was also keen to get a range of clients by time on the option and nature of placement. Regarding time on option, I was aware that that variance was limited as the average time on the option was extremely short, with completion of the option quite rare.

I approached clients during training sessions, explaining that I was studying for a degree and researching the policy, that my research was independent, anonymous and funded by a research council. I explained that the interviews were conversations about their backgrounds, personal and working and about their ideas for the future, that they were confidential, lasted for approximately an hour, that, if agreed, I would like to record them and that I was not offering payment.

The interviews were conducted either at provider or placement organisations or in nearby cafes when there was no available space or the respondent felt more comfortable away from the organisations' premises. They normally lasted about an hour, but some were longer and between one and three were conducted on any one day. They began with my explaining where I was from and about my research. Once the person had been informed about the research and had agreed to be interviewed, I would document their consent⁴² to be interviewed, recorded and that extracts from their interviews would be

⁴² Described as clear understanding about later use and possible publication of interviews and preferably, written agreement (Kvale, 1996).

used in subsequent publications of the study. (See Appendix 8 for the consent form, which I attached to the hard copy interview notes at the end of the interview and later filed).

Whether or not clients consented to be recorded, I took notes throughout all interviews. However, at the same time, I tried to be conscious of, what Kvale referred to as the 'interpersonal dynamics' during each interview (Kvale, 1996: 35)—the knowledge obtained through the interaction itself—such as the tone of what is said, vocalisation, facial gesture, other bodily gestures as well as being alert to what is said between the lines (ibid).

Strengths and challenges

Most respondents valued the attention provided by the interview. My experience echoes the following conclusion:

It is probably not a very common experience in everyday life that another person—for an hour or more—is interested only in, sensitive towards, and seeks to understand as well as possible, another's experiences and views on a subject. In practice, it is often difficult to terminate a qualitative interview: subjects may wish to continue the dialogue and explore further the themes and the insights of the interview interaction (Kvale, 1996: 38).

With its origins in institutional case histories (Foucault, 1995), methodological literature has discussed the negative connotation of the interview and that it no longer functions as an automatic extension of the state—

an interpretive practice that people willingly submit to (Denzin, 2001: 28),

but rather that:

people are increasingly cynical about interviews, conducted by university and government professionals and then ...bought and sold in their specific 'marketplaces' (ibid).

Over and above these negative connotations, I was aware that in the welfare to work context, jobseekers have to attend compulsory interviews both in jobcentres and with potential employers and that any other type of interview was bound to replicate elements of these.

What is more, regardless of the voluntary nature of the interviews in this study, there was an inherent asymmetry of power (Kvale, 1996) to the method. Often, respondents

would want to know about me and I would turn the attention back to them. The imbalance between what I, as a researcher, was prepared to disclose compared to what I was asking the respondent to disclose, was always there and an uncomfortable element of the interview, confirming the observation that:

we ask for revelations from others ... [but] ... we reveal little or nothing of ourselves. We make others vulnerable, but ourselves remain invulnerable (Fine et al., 2000: 109).

The literature also discussed the roles played by the interviewer—presenting yourself as ignorant or the ‘deliberate naivety’ (Kvale, 1996: 83) of curiosity and openness to new phenomena that they adopt, when in fact knowledge is increasing from one interview to the next and the way in which this might be perceived as a trick by respondents and in turn interfere with their cooperation (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000).

Interviews are also challenged as lacking objectivity. However, it has been argued that objectivity in the context of qualitative interviewing has different criteria. Kvale (1996) gave three examples, lack of bias being validated through craftsmanship, inter-subjective knowledge—such as agreement among researchers through discourse and thirdly, objectivity as letting the object speak.

Practical problems

Finding places to interview confidentially and that were sufficiently quiet for recording was another difficulty in a setting with limited space, a high turnover of clients and a noisy and chaotic environment. Aware of the influence that venue can have on the relationship between researcher and interviewee and the dynamics of an interview, I tried to conduct interviews off site of provider organisations in order to distance myself from the formal world of the VS, reinforce my independence and build a sense of trust with the respondents. This was a trade-off in that many of my interviews ended up being conducted in nearby cafes with varying levels of privacy, audibility and distraction. If the interviews extended beyond an hour, we often had to move for varying reasons, thereby interrupting the narrative and the recording.

I found the method quite challenging in a number of ways. To encourage respondents to talk about themselves freely, the literature advised not directly asking about opinions, attitudes or causes (Bauer in Bauer and Gaskell, 2000), not pointing to contradictions (and therefore not creating a climate of cross-examination) and not asking for dates, names or places (ibid). However, in practice, unstructured interviews are often a compromise between narrative and questioning (ibid). This is because, while respondents enjoy the attention and time given by an interview, they do not talk endlessly about themselves for long.

There was a delicate balance between wanting to keep the interviews relatively unstructured but keep the interview going and within a timeframe. In terms of the former, it was also difficult to ask the right kind of questions at the right time—open, rather than closed and/or leading and not cross-examining, for example. In relation to keeping the interview within time, the topic guide was invaluable. Printing it out in three clear A3 pages meant that both myself and the interviewee had a spatial indicator of what we had covered in our interview at any one time and what was still to be covered, or when we had strayed too far from those topics.

In providing an opportunity to talk in-depth and confidentially, the interviews led to a range of interactions with respondents that raised moral or ethical challenges. Sometimes, having talked about a range of issues, which included physical and sexual abuse, mental health problems, criminal experience and housing problems, they would look to me for emotional reassurance or advice. Sometimes, they would ask for practical help, such as with moving or requesting loans. Others, perceiving me to be a similar age, asked me to socialise with them.

Being asked for help directly in an interview, for example, or being asked for emotional support, were more difficult situations to negotiate ethically, in a one to one situation where the person was already disclosing personal information to further my research. This was a difficult balancing act—wanting to be friendly and supportive, acknowledging both their vulnerability (such as being homeless for example or having

significant mental health problems) and their contribution to my research. Reflexivity needs to include both your possible impact on the field and the impact that the field has on you personally.

The Focus Group

I conducted one focus group of VS participants during the first case study in March 2001. Rather than promoting it myself, several members of staff had agreed to tell clients that it was taking place. Again, no payment was offered, although lunch was provided at the beginning of the session. Taking place at In2work premises, it lasted one and a half hours, was recorded and attended by 5 people (for brief profile, see Appendix 11). The topic guide consisted of 11 questions about aspects of the option, focusing on experience of the placement (see Appendix 12).

The focus group is another example of a method that provides emic data (that arising in natural or indigenous form) in that it:

allows individuals to respond in their own words using their own categorisations and perceived associations (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990: 13).

It also provides something that would not come from a single interview in its synergistic effect of respondents able to compare and react to each other as well as a snowballing effect of building on each others' responses (ibid) in providing feedback on the option.

Furthermore:

In the group situation, it is important to note that it is the characters of group members relative to one another and not merely individual characters that determine group behaviour and performance (1990: 33).

This would be facilitated by the creation of a confidential and non-threatening environment, without any members of staff present. Other tips on conducting focus groups include the importance of remembering to start by emphasising to participants that they are doing you a favour and to show your appreciation of that and using icebreakers. Methods used to sustain the discussion include brainstorming, use of commonplace, moving from specifics to general, using probes and picking up signals that people have more to say (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990).

The problems with the method listed in the literature include the interaction effect, that responses are not independent of each other, that the discussion may be dominated by one member, that the moderator may bias the results, that they are difficult to transcribe (and to summarise) and that they have limited generalisation (ibid).

Interviews with staff

The case study also involved interviewing several provider front-line and senior members of staff. The former were interviewed using an interview schedule (see Appendix 14), which built on that used in the survey visits, but with additional more directed questions about delivery devised both from the survey findings and initial case study observation. It asked respondents to describe their role and activities within that (daily, weekly and monthly) and their client group and to comment on the main components of delivery (training, work experience and jobsearch), the programme outcomes, their relationship with the Employment Service and their views on the NDYP in general. The managers were interviewed using a topic guide, rather than an interview schedule, which contained similar questions but with some additional ones specifically on management issues (see Appendix 15).

As with the other interviews conducted, I assured confidentiality and individual anonymity in any publications deriving from the research. The interviews were conducted towards the end of my time at each case study organisation. Each lasted approximately an hour. They tended to be conducted on site.

Several placement provider managers were also interviewed. These interviews were arranged on my behalf with the providers and took place at the placement organisations. Questions were modified from the existing topic guides and interview schedules from the background survey and case study providers based on what I knew of their provision, relationship with the providers and the clients that had been placed with them. They lasted approximately an hour. Where consent was given, they were recorded.

3.4.5 Other evidence

During the case studies, documentation gathered included literature produced by provider organisations (for example, annual reports or performance figures), placement providers (for example, promotional leaflets) and the Employment Service (such as Provider guidance documents). Organisational files on individual clients were also copied, where available and with their permission.

3.5 Data recording

Observations were recorded daily in fieldwork diaries in both the survey and case study phases of the research. They were written during times in the day when I was able to use office space or at the end of the day away from the fieldwork site. They were read during analysis but not transcribed. Each interview was given a label. Interviews with providers in the survey were labelled from PSI1 to PSI21. Interviews with staff during case studies were labeled as case study 1 provider interviews CS1P1 to CS1P11 and case study 2 provider interviews from CS2P1 to CS2P4. Interviews with clients, including the focus group interview during case study 1, were labelled NDI1 to NDI44. Interviews with placement providers during case study 2 were labelled CS2PPI1 to CS2PPI9 (see Appendices 3, 6, 10 and 13).

Where interviews were recorded, they were either transcribed or notes made. The transcriptions were carried out by a professional agency with instructions given that they were to be done verbatim, including pauses and other noises. For those interviews that were not recorded, I typed up their notes when they were illegible or if the exercise of copying them aided analysis.

The majority of interview transcripts and typed up interview notes (where the interview was not recorded) were imported into the computer assisted qualitative analysis data package NVivo, for coding, as were any notes written about the interview in my

fieldwork diary. The interviews were prepared for analysis in various ways, for example, VS participant attributes were entered along with their interview transcripts. Putting the interviews into NVivo allowed each interview to be accessed and worked on through a variety of sets created such as 'all case study 1 participant interviews' and 'all male participant interviews.'

3.6 Data analysis

Analysis has been described as separating something into parts or elements (Kvale, 1996). Miles and Huberman (1994) defined qualitative analysis as tactics for generating meaning. While there is a lack of standard techniques in qualitative analysis, perhaps due to the richness and complexity of data (Kvale, 1996), they referred instead to different groups of tactics, the first being achieving integration among diverse data. Under this group, they listed noting patterns and themes, seeing plausibility, clustering and making metaphors. This first stage of creating categories, patterns and themes is generally referred to as 'open coding' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 223), and will be discussed further below. In their second group, they cited contrasts and comparisons which aim at sharpening understanding—the differentiation needed to partition variables. Finally, they identified tactics for abstraction (defined as subsuming particulars under the general) such as noting relations between variables.

Criteria for carrying out qualitative analysis include transparency, validity and generalisation. The literature promotes the continuation into analysis of the procedural clarity or transparency adhered to in collecting the evidence and notes that case study researchers have often been very apologetic about the external validity of their findings (Bryman, 1988). Others looked at differing descriptions of validity—for example, the degree that a method investigates what it is intended to investigate (Kvale, 1996), distinguishing between a practical and theoretical approach to validity. Practical validity is based on good craftsmanship (rather than the strength and credibility of an assertion)—the continual checking and questioning of findings whereas theoretical validity focuses on the communication with and action on the social world (ibid). In this

latter meaning, the decisive point for the validity of a study is the conversation that the community of researchers have about the relationship between the methods, the findings and the nature of the phenomenon investigated (Kvale, 1996).

Generalisation is discussed in terms of its analytical (Yin, 1994) or theoretical form (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) as opposed to comparing sample to parent population or sample to whole population, existing theory is used to compare results. Yin (1994) argued that if two or more cases are shown to support the same theory, replication can be claimed, which he refers to as level two inference. Qualitative generalisation can be seen as taking place by mapping the range of views at the level of categories, concepts and explanations. It has been argued that full and thorough knowledge of the particular is a form of generalisation. Stake pointed out that in the case study, analysis is both direct interpretation of the individual instance and aggregation of instances, arguing that:

Our primary task is to come to understand the case. It will help us to tease out relationships, to probe issues and to aggregate categorical data, but those ends are subordinate to understanding the case (Stake, 1994: 77).

And that:

To devote much time to formal aggregation of categorical data is likely to distract attention from its various involvements, its various contexts (ibid).

The degree to which you want to develop general theory or stay within providing description is what divides the methods (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). In a postmodern approach:

The goal of universal generalisability is being replaced by an emphasis on contextuality and heterogeneity of knowledge (Kvale, 1996: 289).

However, the move through analysis to theoretical understanding and construction is described by some as the main task of qualitative research (Richards and Richards, 1994). They followed Strauss who argued that theory construction is what separates qualitative researchers from careful journalists. According to him, you cannot remain descriptive and simply précis data under broad themes but need to take the analysis through to abstract concepts and themes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Similarly, Spencer, Ritchie and O'Connor argued that at the heart of good analysis is:

the ability to move up and down the analytic hierarchy, thinking conceptually, linking and nesting concepts in terms of their level of generality (Spencer, Ritchie and O'Connor, 2003: 213).

In order to be able to do this, what first has to be in place is a comprehensive classification of evidence.

In this move from initial analysis to theoretical understanding, Kvale described the first stage as:

A rephrased condensation of the meaning of the interviewee's statement from their own viewpoints as these are understood by the researcher (Kvale, 1996: 214).

This is followed by critical commonsense understanding—general knowledge is added, but remains commonsense. In the third and final stage, theoretical understanding is achieved in which a theoretical framework for interpreting the meaning of a statement is applied. The interpretation goes beyond the subject's self-understanding and exceeds common sense understanding (ibid).

Coding

Coding was described as one of the ways that qualitative researchers link data to ideas by creating categories and placing at them references to data. The CAQDAS programme, NVivo, referred to this as coding at nodes (Richards, 1999).⁴³ This was the process used to analyse the VS participant interviews (see Appendix 17 for list of nodes). Coding is useful when you have different narratives (because they are unstructured) and when responses are not grouped by question (because the questions are different). It allows different slicing of the data. For example, the same interview can be coded in terms of individuals' attributes—gender, age and so on—or their attitudes towards certain things.

This slicing is facilitated by using a computer assisted qualitative analysis package (CAQDAS) as if it was done manually or using a word processing programme, it would involve copying out data. Using NVivo, the interview is only entered once and can be 'coded onto'. In other words, you can code the same extract, as many times as you

⁴³ The other two types of coding referred to are visual coding and attributes (ibid).

want. The ability to assign multiple codes to one passage allows close coding of individual interviews.

NVivo is also useful for coding across the corpus. For example, you can collate all the examples of text under one code and create a report of those on one page far more quickly than if you were doing it manually. It also has useful functions for connecting whole interviews together in analysis. This simple time-saving feature allows you to have more time to look at subtler aspects of your evidence, to develop a more complex set of codes and in turn, have greater opportunity to recognise various patterns in response and achieve a higher level of abstraction, which is at the same time, is grounded in evidence.

Seeing the texts coded on screen can also highlight the juxtaposition of apparently unrelated subjects, which may be a clue for later analysis. Themes may be in close proximity with each other, they may weave in and out of each other. As its name suggests, you can also move immediately from looking at a piece of text under one code in the abstract back to the code 'nvivo' or in context in the transcript. All these facilities encourage the iterative process of analysis.

During coding, the codes become 'saturated' with as many examples from the interviews as possible. This saturation is useful as a filtering system in that, eventually, you will come to examples that do not fit. These are to be analysed as carefully as those which do because while you are looking at the recurrence or frequency at which a theme occurs, you are also looking for unusual or exceptional themes and in doing so, begin to get an understanding of the diversity of the phenomenon and not just recurrence. This is absolutely critical in qualitative analysis because the researcher should be clear that recurrence is not the primary finding, because it has no statistical value at all (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Although others have argued that:

The important meanings will come from reappearing over and over (Stake, 1995: 278).

What is more, this ensures what Ritchie and Lewis referred to as 'deep familiarisation' with the whole picture. Finally, as discussed above, the recurrence, dominance and

diversity of themes is seen in the groupings of codes and from that, a framework is developed that has theoretical relevance beyond the research setting, thus freeing the researcher from description and forcing interpretation to higher levels of abstraction (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

However, coding is also seen in an opposite light, with some arguing that that data should not be abstracted out of context in that way (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Different attitudes to coding stem from different beliefs about the appropriateness of theorising in qualitative research, some of which have been discussed above.

3.7 Writing up

‘Describing, understanding and explaining’ are, according to Hamel et al., the three words that characterise any qualitative method (1993:39). While sounding deceptively simple, others acknowledge a common perception that:

the research experience is untranslatable and that even reflecting on it somehow betrays the intimacy and irreducibility of the direct involvement with other human beings (Frideres, 1992: 28).

There is a:

perpetual tension between the richness of the data and the remoteness of the reader from the sources of the data. Reducing this remoteness is often the goal of qualitative research (Morgan, 1997: 64).

However, there is also a warning against the risk of:

replacing our own assumptions uncritically with those of our informants. In this way, via a sort of empiricism by proxy, qualitative research may repeat the errors, more commonly thought of as being associated with unreflective positivism (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000: 15).

A reporting of results in such a way that reasonable sceptics will be convinced is suggested and a warning given against the use of quantitative phraseology, such as ‘the majority said’ (ibid). Stake (1994) helpfully pointed out that equal attention to all data is not a civil right, while Kvale (1996) referred to building a logical chain of evidence and making conceptual coherence.

‘Thick description’ is the term given to the writing up of rich data, described by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) as intelligent sampling of quotes, appropriate citation, indexing of

quotes and having a sociological imagination (Wright Mills, 1999) but showing that imagination is linked with text. Language acts as an intersection that occurs:

between the common language that describes the form of the object of study in terms of the selected empirical matters and the language that gives form to the tools and operates from the sociological perspective (Hamel et al., 1993: 47).

In terms of moving from description to explanation, Spencer, Ritchie and O'Connor (2003) discussed the subject of cause, first pointing out that universal, deterministic causes are not achievable in any research:

Social research will never be able to specify invariant, deterministic causal relations because any causal mechanism will be inherently unstable. People differ in their ability to make things happen and actions often have unpredictable and unintended consequences (Spencer, Ritchie and O'Connor, 2003: 216).

While explanation is normally operationalised as establishing causal relationships between variables, qualitative research thinks in terms of inference. They described that as learning something we do not know from something we do—to infer is to go beyond the immediate data to something broader that is not observed. What is more, while uncertainty in quantitative work can be managed by calculating a standard error of estimate, in qualitative research, we can only return to tenets such as explicit methodology, the belief in a reality to be captured (which Ritchie and Lewis (2003) describe as the constructs, beliefs and behaviours operating in the field) and thirdly that small scale studies can be used to draw wider inference, provided there is appropriate adherence to the boundaries of qualitative research (ibid). They instead defined the objective of qualitative research as:

clarifying the nature and interrelationship of different qualitative factors and influences, such as personal intentions, understandings, norms and situational influences (ibid).

They pointed out that:

rather than specifying isolated variables which are mechanically linked ... the analyst tries to build an explanation based on the way in which different meanings and understandings within a situation come together to influence the outcome (ibid: 216).

In terms of applying theory, we have already discussed the different levels of analysis and referred to the 'sociological imagination' required to jump from coding to a theoretical framework. Yin (1994) pointed out that, in case study research, there are different kinds of theory to be applied to each level of your case study. For example, at

an individual level about perception; at an organisational level about bureaucracy and at group level about inter-organisational partnerships (ibid). The challenge is to match these appropriately. He also warned about the problems that arise from a mismatch in the application of theory of a programme (such as how to reduce unemployment) with that of implementation (how to install an effective programme), while Bryman (1988) criticised organisational research for its limited knowledge of the speed of change.

Finally literature on writing up highlighted that it is at that point that the politics of the study become apparent. Researchers work with overlapping perspectives and paradigms, multi methods and the knowledge that science is power – that all research findings have political implications (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). There are several audiences for which different reports are needed (Robson, 1998: 146). Differences in objectives for both the policy process and further research become highlighted—for example, the social scientist asks what ought to be done, while the policy maker asks what can be done and what must be done (Wenger, 1987). Bauer and Gaskell (2000) argued that the crucial question to ask is to whom are the findings sent and for what purpose? Robson (1998) also discussed the issue of communicative validation of the research—which is defined as going back to the people that you studied with your research, getting their reactions. Problems of dissemination include a time lag between inception and completion of studies and isolation of the researcher (Hadley, 1987).

Writing up proved the most challenging part of the research process. As Richardson (2000) pointed out, qualitative work carries its meaning in the entire text and, as such, the writing is the contribution. Initially, I was fearful, as Frideres (1992) described, of betraying the study's participants in trying to represent the untranslatable. My desire, at that point, was to attempt to represent everyone and everything. In fact, as Bauer and Gaskell (2000) warned, in the early drafts, I wanted the data to speak for itself, to not take responsibility for analysing its richness.

My way out of these initial dilemmas was to write with a consideration of the reader in mind. However, this led to a reluctance to retain my presence within the text, even

though the generation of the meaning required a constant reflexivity, I found that by later drafts, my voice had been edited out of the thesis. I concentrated on achieving the conceptual coherence described by Kvale (1996) by building a logical chain of events, while at the same time focusing on conveying the different meanings attributed to any one of those events by the various actors (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). This process of drawing out meanings—the constructs, beliefs and behaviours in the field (ibid, 2003)—and how they in turn come together to influence outcomes, was made easier by the systematic approach to coding and analysis provided by the use of NVivo. At the same time, bringing theory and data together in the writing was aided by bearing in mind Yin's (1994) discussion about the importance of matching levels of theory and data within the case studies.

3.8 Conclusion

The chapter has presented the rationale and strengths behind using an ethnographic perspective in this research as well as some of its challenges. It has outlined the research objectives and the way in which the fieldwork was designed to investigate first the broad structure of VS provision in London through a background survey and then the front-line interaction between providers, clients and placement providers through interviews and observation during two case studies. Observing interaction, behaviour and not just words in context and over time allowed the policy gaps and 'black box' of the VS option to emerge, the difference between what the policy literature intends and what is actually delivered, particularly looking at the consequences of contractual pressures on both staff and clients.

More in-depth interviews with clients were intended to cover not only their experience of the programme but also provide accounts of their working and personal lives both before and during their participation on the VS. The next chapter starts with a discussion of the family narratives presented in those interviews.

4 Chapter Four: VS client personal circumstances

4.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the effect that young people's current and past personal circumstances had on their participation in the VS by discussing the influence of their family, health and housing contexts. It presents evidence from 40 interviews conducted at In2work and Employ Ltd between August 2001 and June 2002 (for a list of respondents, see Appendix 9). Incorporated into the analysis were considerations of the legitimacy of theoretical constructs describing young (unemployed) people as variously dependent, unmotivated, deviating from social norms and holding low aspirations (p.103) and the validity of theories on the changing nature of and attitude to participation in education and the labour market, such as delayed transitions (p.44) and increased individualisation and risk (p.30). Reviewing respondents' accounts of service provision in care, healthcare and housing, the analysis also considered whether the evidence supported the arguments outlined in chapter 2 about the welfare state's negative impact on its users in terms of creating dependency, structural disincentives and inequalities (p.28). What legacy did relationships with these providers leave and what implications did this have for the impact of the VS?

The chapter first provides evidence of how families were both a support and a barrier to respondents. The discussion covers caring roles, familial obligations, the influence of family work backgrounds, ill-health and disability. The chapter's middle section discusses the effect of ill-health on school, while the final section looks at the role of housing in respondents' lives. As referred to in the previous chapter, while family, health and housing are presented under separate headings, the discussion illustrates how interconnected these areas were in respondents' lives.

4.2 Family

Despite formal welfare provision, the family remains the first line of support for many individuals. Feminism opened up this private realm as an important area of study (Scourfield and Drake, 2002) by highlighting the economy's dependence on family welfare provision. Acknowledging the importance of family as a source of welfare and considering arguments about the extended nature of dependency on the family during 'delayed transition' into adulthood, the interviews began by asking respondents to talk about their families. This study followed the call of other researchers to:

take a long look at the conditions that prepare youth for a changing, uncertain future, including the experiences provided by family, the peer group, the school, the community as a whole. Only by a painstaking analysis of how adolescents can draw useful knowledge and habits from these varied social networks can we understand what it will take to prepare our youth for the future (Csikszentihalyi and Schneider, 2000: 19).

Analysing respondents' accounts about family was also important because the literature contained strong assumptions about its influence on young people's behaviour and motivation to work. The culture of poverty thesis attributed the so-called cultural and moral deficiency of young unemployed people to family background, while New Labour welfare reform rhetoric encouraged moral responsibility to both family and community through its promotion of citizenship (p.12).

Wider social policy research identified the social and economic changes influencing the changing sociology of the family (see, for example, Lewis, 1999). How did such changes impact on respondents and the type of welfare they received from their families? The case study areas had large Afro-Caribbean and Bangladeshi populations, how did family relationships vary according to cultural and ethnic backgrounds? The following section presents evidence on the nature of support in respondents' current relationships with family, narratives of upbringing and how they differed according to culture and ethnicity followed by evidence on the influence of work in family relationships.

4.2.1 The double-edged support of living at home

Those living at home (23 out of 40 respondents) started talking about their current relationships with their families⁴⁴, by describing them as providing a home that they lived in out of necessity—through lack of any other alternative:

Jo [NDI40]: I mean if I could've moved out, I would, but [*inaudible*] I'm stuck.

Respondents described the effects of financial strain:

Colin [NDI15]: I live in Old Kent Road with my mum and 2 little brothers. She doesn't really want me there, I need to get my own place, paying a little rent doing a little job.

Sarah [NDI7]: Basically, I was doing that administration course and then my mum got a letter for me which she didn't know nothing about, so we had to go and sign on and that's how I started signing on.

Tim [NDI18]: I'm happy living with my parents but the only thing they want me to do is get a job.

Jo [NDI40]: I've been on these schemes for so long, and yet, they're not, they're not very productive. And my family's getting quite sick of them, coz they just want me to be earning money, like the rest of them.

Sibani [NDI34]: Don't mind being at home, but [they] want you to do something.

Ed [NDI31]: He really started saying I was a waste of space.

Sarah's experience was confirmed by comments from a Citizens Advice Bureaux Manager (and placement provider) on the effect of housing benefit changes on VS participants:

Once they get to a certain age, they have to either sign on or find work, and within this area especially, a lot of the children are non-dependent, they're over 18 and they're not at college doing A Levels, and the Housing Benefit goes down, so the child has to go out to work in order to help the parents pay the increase in rent, because they're there and not sort of working. [CS2PPI4]

Family pressure could push respondents either into looking for any job or one that their families thought appropriate but that they were not interested in. Difficulties arising out of lack of physical space at home were a recurring theme (compounded when parents no longer worked and therefore spent more time at home):

Abdul [NDI36]: Because my brother went to Bangladesh and he, he did get married didn't he? Erm, so what I found like he um, he has to take my room anyway (laugh). So I have to move out and, er like, and like I say I move to my brothers.

⁴⁴ Respondents' definitions of their family units included both biological parents, one biological parent and their partner (who could be a step-parent), single parent families, or close relatives, such as older siblings.

Nicholas [NDI8]: I still share the other room now [with my twin brother], it's really bad actually.

Mohamed [NDI44]: It's getting crowded at home and I've been having fights with my brother and stuff, well not fights but arguing.

Abdul and Mohamed's accounts of living at home reflected wider research findings that Bangladeshi families were likely to be living in overcrowded conditions and dissatisfied with those conditions (Harrison and Phillips, 2003).

Other effects of living in cramped conditions included not being able to study at home. Noor, a 20 year old Bangladeshi woman, talked about her desire to move out and attend university:

there's too many people, but I've got my own room, people come every weekend and we have like a [pauses] party, especially now when it's the Easter holiday, people are coming from Leicester and everything, my mum's side. So it's really hard to concentrate when everybody else is having a party downstairs, you know? [NDI38]

Providing shelter also sometimes meant that families also expected support with a range of problems including surviving on low incomes or benefits, unemployment, unfavourable working conditions, mental health problems, relationship difficulties and alcoholism. However, a dominant reason for parents needing support was chronic ill-health and/or disability, which had led to their early retirement:

Jo [NDI40]: She's been redundant due to poor health, from her back (Interviewer: Really?) Coz she was involved in a hit and run years ago. And she was a victim and it's, it did really bad damage to her back, so she's been unemployed for a while.

Abdul [NDI36]: he can't really work but the job centre gave him a job, because he's got a bad back and that's why he can't [work].

Respondents described the consequences of parental ill-health, disabilities and related problems on their own roles in the household. Jo told me how she would run errands for her sick mother. She came back to this later when describing being mugged one night returning from the shops where she regularly shopped for alcohol and sweets for her family:

I'm always the scapegoat of the family. They want me to do favours for them. I'm the idiot really because it never gets paid back. But it's been like that way for years. [NDI40]

Several respondents provided care to their parents, whether this took the form of physical care, emotional support with various vulnerabilities, including mental health problems and alcoholism or help accessing welfare—particularly when respondents spoke better English than their parents. An example of the latter is provided in these notes on my interview with Uy:

Mum was signing on. She didn't get paid for 5 or 6 weeks. Spoke about having to go down there every week, and wait hours, on mum's behalf, and that they accepted that he was representing his mother. [NDI25]

Parental ill-health also led to respondents, such as Noor, caring for siblings and managing the family home as part of living with their families. This care was given despite having her own serious health problems, which started at school and involved long hospital stays and convalescing and which have prevented her from attending university, working or going out. Alia, a 22 year old Bangladeshi divorced woman, unemployed for more than two years and living at home in east London, explained that she had five siblings ranging in age from 9 months to 15 years old; one of whom had learning difficulties. Her mother had been bedridden since the birth of her last child, while her father was disabled and had stopped working. Alia did the childcare and her father shopped, cleaned and looked after his wife. When she attended the VS, a carer and her father managed the household between them.

Families also asked respondents to provide care when they were juggling work commitments with childcare. Ed lived with his parents at home in East London. The eldest of four, he described caring for his youngest sibling in the two years he had been unemployed:

When we weren't in here [i.e. on the VS], I just woke up in the morning, uh, just, just do nothing really until my mum went to work and then baby-sit my little sister... [NDI31]

Asked if he found looking after his sister difficult, he replied:

Can be. I think the worst thing was when, sometimes, if my mum went out, wanted to go out, when the baby's really been, like [inaudible] at night time. Then they'll both be arguing, dad be saying, 'oh, I got to go to work' and she'll be like, 'uh, I've got to go to work, I got to be tidying' so I'll just take the baby and look after her all night. [ibid]

Support was therefore often two-ways. For example, while Alia provided childcare support for her parents, they gave her emotional support after a violent relationship with her ex-husband, who had tried to kill her. This abuse had left her psychologically vulnerable and afraid to leave the house alone, one consequence of which was that she had become socially isolated. Others, as discussed later, had health problems requiring emotional, if not physical, support from families.

However, family was also a source of strength. It provided a unit with which to identify and socialise with. As Jo remarked, it was “very much the whole clan thing”. It also provided protection from an outside world often perceived as hostile, with respondents describing feeling culturally isolated and fearing being a victim of crime. However, as Jo’s example of not being taken seriously in her family—and her later reference to being bullied at home—together with Alia’s more extreme example of her violent relationship with her ex-husband, showed, family could also have negative effects on respondents’ self-confidence and ability to participate in wider society. In its most destructive role, parental abuse and neglect had led to several respondents being put into care (briefly discussed below).

The negative impact of anti-social behaviour and crime on young people’s self-confidence and mental health was a theme running across the narratives. Jo’s experience of being mugged reinforced low self-confidence and self-esteem, which she partly attributed to being bullied at school and at home. She described not only finding it difficult being assertive at home but also in searching for work and meeting people. Colin described his relationship with the police, being arrested and spending time in prison. His detailed depiction of these experiences included frequent references to feeling paranoid that he was going to be accused of crimes, that he was being watched and that he was afraid to leave his mother’s house.

Social isolation ran through many of the narratives. Respondents spoke of living at home, lacking in social confidence, being fearful and having limited social networks—in some cases, only socialising with their families. Tim was 25, had always lived at home,

suffered from epilepsy and was bullied at school. He told me that he had no friends and spent nearly all his time at home. Pete, 19 years old, who had been unemployed for 11 months, also described having no social life outside of his nuclear family. Respondents' families similarly drew on them for protection from that same fear of wider society. Ed described being thrown out of the house for running up the phone bill and going to stay with his grandma because she was glad of the company having been scared to live on her own after a break-in. Similarly, Jo described how one of her sisters returned to stay with their parents following a break-in in her own flat.

Support from families was therefore mixed. Respondents spoke both directly and indirectly about needing several types of support, some of which were only provided by their families. Whether respondents were part of an extended family "clan" or a member of a small family unit, their narratives showed that family homes not only provided literal shelter but also social protection from the outside world. However, living with families could also lead to being cut off from other influences in ways that perpetuated or reinforced their vulnerability.

4.2.2 Family influence on participation in the labour market

The effect of family support on respondent motivation to find work and support is difficult to reach conclusions on. In providing a home and company, it did protect respondents from extreme vulnerability, such as homelessness. However, it also presented a barrier to respondents thinking about opportunities and moving out of that environment to look for work. The picture given of family life and relationships was one that did not provide any space—both literally and figuratively—for exploring preferences and choices in relation to employment and education opportunities. Family was presented by some as not being interested in respondents' ideas about their lives. Jo, who was interested in journalism, spent as much time as she could, doing creative writing during her placement and commented:

It's so typical of my family, when I get home with the printed 24 pages, nobody has read it.
[NDI40]

Respondents also talked of being pressurised into adopting lifestyles, including taking certain jobs that suited their families.

Reciprocity meant that respondents were involved in caring and other roles that prevented them from focusing on their own education, employment and social activities. For example, Alia had not attended school for significant amounts of her childhood. She talked about the caring responsibility which kept her at home:

I [would have] loved to stay at school but because of my mother I have to stay. [NDI30]

However, it could not be concluded that respondents saw their caring and other roles in the family as something that was solely negative. Alia, although aspiring to work in an office, drew on her family experience in making realistic choices about her VS placement:

Before I wish, before I stayed home from school, I wish I work in an office, something like that, and now I decide that I was doing childcare because I don't have good English. [NDI30]

Later in the interview, she said:

I decide I like to because I'm experienced, I have five brother and sister and I look after them, so I think it's best to do childcare because I'm experienced with that. [ibid]

Ed expressed pride in having cared for his sister:

To raise something, and that's your own. It's got to be, I just, I suppose it's opened my eyes really. [NDI31]

He continued:

I take her out, to my nan's and I still do near every night, I'll take her to the shops, take her, I walk around, I don't mind people seeing me either. [ibid]

Relationships with families could help self-esteem and confidence but could also lead to negative feelings of failure and guilt. Respondents spoke of letting their families down by not succeeding in education or being unemployed. Abdul lived with his brother and occasionally helped out in the family restaurant. He had tried several further education courses, some funded by his parents, but had not been able to complete or pass them for various reasons. Towards the end of the interview, he said of his relationship with his family:

I have broken the trust innit? I haven't got trust anymore. [NDI36]

That was shortly followed by:

I let them down, you know, let them down a couple of times. (sighing) I don't know, I don't know. [ibid]

The respondents discussed so far had contact with family in London. However, others had little or no contact with their families. This was for a combination of reasons, including that they had moved from, or their families had moved to, another part of the UK, or another country and that they had experienced estrangements and bereavements. These respondents described a mixture of vulnerability and determination in dealing with sometimes very difficult situations, including homelessness.

Tom had not been in touch with his relatives for several years. They lived in America, having moved from Canada, where he had been brought up. He had moved to London when he was about 20 years old and had since had a series of short-term “horrible” jobs. Problems with renting had led to homelessness and squatting. Living as a squatter (for several years), he talked about how it had liberated him both from homelessness but also from a mainstream economic and social world with which he did not identify and which had made him feel socially excluded:

unemployment is linked with squatting because it's quite difficult when you're working in market research and you're meeting all sorts of different people and you're, you're sort of excluded in a way and in a way I'm excluded here because while other people live with their parents or they're on housing benefit and stuff, I'm lucky enough to have my free place.
[NDI20]

Habiba, a 24 year old French Moroccan woman, came to London to pursue a singing career—a decision that did not meet with her parents' approval. She had been almost continuously employed since arriving in the UK, but had experienced problems with housing and become homeless. However, she had not made contact or asked for help from her family or thought of returning to France. Despite an emotional account of being homeless, she was determined to continue developing a new life in the UK and talked of progress with her singing (at the time of interview, she invited me to a concert in which she was performing). Later, during fieldwork, when she had moved into a council flat (after our interview), she told me she had telephoned her family and that they were coming to visit.

Respondents' accounts revealed how challenging, and at times harrowing it could be to be a young person living in London without family support. Alike, a 23 year old Nigerian woman, came to London with her father. Her mother lived in Saudi Arabia with her other children and "didn't want her". Not long after coming to the UK, her father died, and she lived with siblings, one of whom was her guardian, but in 1997, she was "kicked out" after a family row. While Alike did not want to be recorded, her narrative was an example of the struggles faced in working, trying to continue in education and look for housing.

4.2.3 Childhood

This section looks at respondents' experiences of growing up in different places, family breakdown, the care system, the impact of health problems and their families' working lives.

Moving in childhood

Family movement either between countries or within the UK was dominant in the narratives and respondents spoke of the instability it created. Bangladeshi respondents spoke of one parent moving to Britain, followed by another, usually before their birth, and subsequent continued movement between Bangladesh and the UK—either themselves or family members—as they grew up and in adulthood. Negative consequences included difficulties adjusting to the new culture (feeling, for example, between cultures and not fully belonging to either), insecurity and isolation.

Afro-Caribbean and Bangladeshi respondents recounted the challenges of being moved during school, including cultural differences between schools in Jamaica, Bangladesh and the US. Uy attributed failing at school to his early English language difficulties on first arriving in the UK from Vietnam. Bangladeshi women had particularly suffered from gaps in schooling. I have already referred to Alia's absences from school in order to care for her mother in the UK. Nasima spoke of not learning very much at school while in Bangladesh due to not being encouraged to attend but also because she was

short in an educational system where children are organised into classes according to height:

cos I look small, I'm small, back home the taller you are the older you are, you see what I'm saying? If you're tall, they say 'they're grown up', it's a very mixed culture, so because I'm a little person, they see you as, you know. So I didn't really attend, they probably thought 'she's got time yet.' You know what I mean? [NDI39]

Sibani spoke of doing well in GCSEs and starting intermediate GNVQs but being taken to Bangladesh halfway through them because her family wanted to visit relatives. Her parents said they would bring her back in time to do course work and assignments. However, her father became ill, she wasn't allowed to come back alone to the UK and she missed handing in the required work. She explained the knock-on consequences of not being able to get onto any courses because of her lack of GNVQs, not being able to get back on track and since then:

[it's] been a disaster, too late for Sixth Form, changed courses at school, joined JSA... [NDI34]

In such cases, the instability of moving between countries and cultures was exacerbated by an ever-present possibility of being sent to live in Bangladesh. While the Bangladeshi women described parental neglect of their education, Abdul described how his parents had considered sending him to boarding school in Bangladesh to keep him out of trouble in the UK:

My pa-a-arents said their plan was to go to the Bangladesh for me and to stay, you know, for [Interviewer: Really?] the whole my life until my education or something. Coz they think, like, if I stay in London here, I'm going to do this and this, like you know [Interviewer: Do what?] Like you know this ... like you know. I-I-I think, I-I-I get into the bad ways, you know, that stuff innit? [NDI36]

And his reaction to that:

I don't know Bangladeshi. I don't know the people as well. I never went there. It's too hot. I-I I'm not going to go to boarding school and stay whole of my life (laughs). There's, there's not girls down there, there's only boys (laughs)... [ibid]

Similarly, Afro-Caribbean men spoke of their parents' decision to send them to school in Jamaica "to get a better education." All those who had been through a Caribbean school system mentioned its stricter discipline and their experience of corporal punishment.

Some respondents had experienced a first move from one or both parent's country of origin to the UK and a city or town other than London, and then at some point during

childhood, a second move to London. The experience of moving country, settling and then moving again was described by Vietnamese and Bangladeshi respondents. Hieu travelled from Vietnam with his family to the UK, settling first in Pontyfraich, then Sheffield followed by London, all before he was nine years old. Sibani came to the UK to live first in Halifax then London. This was not a positive move—she spoke of preferring living in Halifax because of its open space and the area surrounding her home being “quiet” and “nice” in contrast to London.

Moves to London were often followed by housing problems, such as overcrowding, that resulted in more moves and/or the resulting lack of space discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The chapter has recounted the experience of young Bangladeshi women missing school. Alia described how her family’s housing circumstances, together with caring responsibilities and then marriage, prevented her attendance at school:

we left home, we go into hotel for housing, you know? And then I missed second year because of that and then I find a house in Dockland... [NDI30]

She continued:

I apply to Central Foundation and they give me after one year, I missed third year, and I went to go fourth year, I go fourth year, yeah, then my mother was ill and then I have to left again, I left fourth year and then next year she’s okay, I go back to fifth year, again she’s ill and then I miss fifth year, and then I go to sixth form, for three month I think, and next year I go for three month and then I get married. Bad life! [ibid]

While Bangladeshi respondents’ immediate families were, for most of their upbringing, living together, Afro-Caribbean respondents experienced something slightly different as a result of parental separation. They described being brought up with each parent in a different country forming second families and spending time between, not only their parents but also with grandparents. Together with the cultural and other consequences of geographical separation, they had to cope with being part of more than one family and spending time away from either parent.

Ian, who did not want to be recorded, described being born in the UK, growing up with his grandma in Jamaica and returning to the UK each summer. At 13 years old, he went to join his father and second family—who he “didn’t know much”—in the US for a

couple of years. He came back to the UK in 1996, living with his mum and her second family. Diane described her family:

my dad lives in Florida and my mum passed away three days before my 18th birthday as well. I've got loads of cousins and relatives over here, in America and Jamaica as well, so I've got a really big family. [NDI33]

Aside from the challenges of dealing with family breakdown, moving between countries and schools, respondents conveyed the complexities of being part of more than one culture. Aidan, one of several Irish respondents, was brought up in Ireland and London. He spoke about the impact of his cultural background:

Yeah, my family are all out in [town in Ireland]—been living there about twenty-two years, my mother and father. Erm, they plan to go back, I don't know, [Interviewer: Really?], in the next two years. [NDI32]

He went on to say that he went to school in Ireland and that:

I did like it when I was younger, I didn't want to come back here, but now I consider myself as being English. And, uh, I feel ostracised when I'm over there, a lot of the time, coz I'm too different there. [ibid]

Others, while having lived most of their lives in the UK, culturally identified with their country of birth. On being asked to talk about his personal history, Winston began:

I come from Jamaica, came here in '86. [NDI22]

I asked him who he came over with:

with my mum, why I come was you didn't have much choice at 16! [ibid]

Those respondents who had been brought up in more than one culture, described feeling identification with one more than the other. This was sometimes due to their families having a strong single cultural identity:

Jo [NDI40]: [My father], he's very proud, you know, he does the whole clan name thing.

She continued:

You know, you're [her family surname] and proud and all this. [ibid]

While Winston explicitly commented on his lack of choice in decisions about where to live, many narratives spoke of childhood events, such as moving country, in a relatively factual way.

As with those who had moved between countries, some respondents brought up only in the UK, had also experienced frequent moves as a result of family breakdown. Gavin spoke of difficulties adjusting to moving from life in a small village to that in a small

town following his parents' divorce and also problems with changing schools, not seeing his mother and adapting to a new relationship with his stepmother.

Respondents struggled with the complications of living in a family experienced as "clan like" which exerted cultural and other pressures on them to live and work in a certain way. However, they also struggled with the isolation and vulnerability created by being part of a family that had been "scattered" for various reasons, whether within the UK or across the world.

Being in care

Several respondents had not only experienced the challenges of growing up with family breakdown and contrasting cultural influences, but had also suffered abuse. Barry spoke of being "brought up in military style" by a violent stepfather who he spoke of "bashing the shit" out of him and his mother:

I've got a photographic memory and I can remember things from when I was a little boy, like seeing my mother getting beat up in the kitchen and shit like that, I can still see every punch my step-dad threw at her, and it was sloppy because he was pissed, and I've seen him when he was sober and he proper belted her... [NDI11]

Barry's interview was the longest conducted, partly because he vividly recounted that abuse and subsequent experiences of being at school and in care with great detail. Mohamed was also physically abused by his biological father and put in care. Both respondents referred to their adult housing circumstances when discussing experiences of being in care. Early on in his interview, Mohamed told me:

Yeah, I've just basically applied for a flat and because when I was young, I was put in care. [NDI44]

Soon after, he said that he should get it within four months:

because I was in care with Social Services and stuff like that, that's what they said... [ibid]

He then said that his home was overcrowded, he was one of 11 siblings and that he had been having fights with his brothers.

Barry told me that he did not have contact with his family, except with his step-grandmother because she used to visit him in the children's home. The latter he mistakenly referred to as a hostel and then corrected himself, explaining:

—I mean the children's home. I always associate the hostel with the children's home because that's where I come from, for me it was like the second, another stage of the children's home. [NDI11]

Both respondents spoke of the neglect of being in care and of their vulnerability:

Mohamed: They don't look after people, really pay attention to people, there were people in there like, you know, they was cutting themselves, making themselves sick and I started doing that for a while. [NDI44]

Barry: I didn't really have much contact with my family, because at the time my mum ran away with some black geezer and I went into care and all that, and I was in a very messed up state. They said that I was emotionally disturbed and had violent tendencies, which wasn't true, I was just cut up inside and people just would not leave me alone, they wanted me to talk about my problems and at that time I didn't want to, I just didn't want to. [NDI11]

Barry also described violence, being "pounded on for a long time" and stealing between children in the home, some of which he was involved in. Together with his account of living in hostels as a young adult, he spoke of developing habits such as sleeping with a knife under his pillow and said that such experiences had made him "a tough little git."

Later referring to his lack of bonding with his foster parents, he commented:

They were stuck up snobs, because I'm what you would call a street boy, I grew up on the streets, children's home didn't really give a shit really so that's how I grew up, I taught myself my own manners and the way to live, yeah? [NDI11]

Both Barry and Mohamed felt culturally and ethnically isolated:

Mohamed: There was no Bengali there. I was the only Asian boy. [NDI44]

Barry: The only white boy there, everyone else, out of 11 kids that were there, I was the only white boy. [NDI11]

Barry also spoke about the staff:

Out of a staff of 15 there were only three white care workers, so really I got one of those white care workers. [ibid]

Both respondents felt that they had not fitted in with foster parents who had been primarily motivated by money:

Mohamed: The first foster parents which I had, they were rubbish, they were in it to make money and didn't really care about me. [NDI44]

Mohamed went on to say:

they used to always put me in my room, not let me come in and be part of their family. [ibid]

Barry felt that his foster parents wanted a ‘genius of a child’:

and I got very like ‘my name is Barry [surname] and that’s all I am and if you don’t like it, I’m a south London cockney street boy and if you can’t hack that, I’m sorry. [NDI11]

Both Barry and Mohamed discussed the impact of these experiences on their schooling. Both had started off in mainstream education and been sent to special needs schools. Barry had been excluded having attacked a teacher. Both felt that they had been inappropriately referred and had not needed special education.

Barry later talked of care as having:

gone through the fucking meat grinder backwards, coz I’d been shoved, pushed this way, that way, like, you see. [NDI11]

Mohamed returned to live at home after care, where he still lived. He finished his account of being in care by concluding that there is “no place like home.”

Families’ working lives

Work featured strongly in discussion of the history, formation and survival of families as clan-like. For example, Bangladeshi respondents spoke of their fathers first moving to the UK without their families and joining relatives who had already settled there: Nasima, for example, spoke of her father joining brothers in the UK, who had their own business tailoring and then working in a clothes factory. Once their fathers had established themselves in the UK, the rest of the family followed:

Fatima [NDI41]: My dad, he was a business person. An English café, a café in Birmingham, he ran that for a long time, while we was in Bangladesh. I came with my mum in 1988, ’88, in October I think and that’s when he gave up his business and he came to London, and basically started working for other people until he fall ill.

Noor described her father coming to the UK when he was 16, working on the ships with uncles and brothers and then in the leather trade. Even after marriage, his family remained in Bangladesh while he continued living in the UK:

He was here while we were in Bangladesh, so he didn’t really see me when I was born. [NDI38]

However, it was not only the Bangladeshi respondents who had experienced the effects of their parents’ moves for work during childhood. Respondents of varying cultural backgrounds told of their parents’ aspiration for something better and the moves that that

had led to. When I asked Aidan why his parents moved to London from Ireland, he replied:

Work and to get out of the little towns they were living in, as well, I suppose. [NDI32]

As described above, Tom's parents moved from the UK, first to Canada and then to the US, because of his father's work. Martine described being born in South Africa and brought up in England. At the time of the interview, her father had recently moved to work in Malta, and her mother was preparing to join him, leaving Martine responsible for a sibling still at school.

Therefore, parents' working lives had led to respondents experiencing the effects of migration on family relationships and schooling with an impact on their sense of cultural belonging and security. Parental ill-health, disability and death were dominant in the narratives and explicit connections were made between their parents' hard work, the nature of that work and its negative consequences, including ill-health and disability. Mohamed told me that his dad worked in restaurants:

because he can't really work but the Job Centre gave him a job, because he's got a bad back. [NDI44]

When I asked how this came about, he replied:

I don't know, working too much, I think, lifting, carrying... [ibid]

In some cases, parents had been ill and not in work for much of respondents' childhoods. Subsequent effects, discussed at the beginning of the chapter, included the caring roles taken on by respondents and constraints on space at home.

Respondents seemed keen to make clear that their parents had worked hard over time and overcome barriers. They spoke of helping out in family run businesses—weekend shifts in a restaurant for example or alternatively working alongside their parents at home (making clothes, for example). A proud and sometimes defensive tone was present in the accounts when discussing family working lives which seemed to be related to a sense of the importance of work status. This was seen, for example, in a tendency to mention relatives who had the most high status jobs. Siblings and their work histories often featured in such discussions. For example, although Solomon had

not seen his sister for some years and, until recently, had lived with his mother, he first told me about his sister:

My sister went to Oxford University. She's got a good job. She's a management consultant. [NDI1]

Diane was proud of her late mother's achievements. Having first described her as a doctor, she later explained that she decided to stop working as a doctor and become a nurse:

I don't know how you say it, going backwards, but she didn't want all the stress and all that, so she actually became, she was a sister in charge of [name] five star nursing home... [NDI33]

Perceiving that she had downplayed her mother's career, Diane tried to reinforce her status:

[the nursing home] has got cream carpet and chandeliers, it's very expensive for them to stay there, it costs a lot of money, and she was in charge of 48 nurses or something there... [ibid]

She told me that her mother didn't talk much about her career but that:

I used to see her certificates and stuff around the house. [ibid]

The desire to point out that parents had qualifications was evident across the narratives:

Jo [NDI40]: My step-dad has been made unemployed. I mean, he used to work in a supermarket. Even though he has the qualifications to do whatever he wants, he worked in a supermarket...

Jo then added:

I think he's got a couple of degrees under his belt, I'm not sure. He knows various languages. [ibid]

Some respondents also expressed embarrassment, apparent disinterest and/or lack of knowledge about their parents' working status and histories. Some did not talk about one parent unless specifically questioned about them. The way in which Hieu talked about his father and his work was not uncharacteristic. Having first explained that his parents were separated, he told me:

My dad, I'm not sure about my dad. My mum, she's unemployed now but she'll get a pension soon. [NDI3]

He then said that he didn't really talk to his father, but thought that he might be signing on and receiving a disability benefit, but wasn't sure.

It was common for respondents to play down their parents' work histories. The word 'just' featured in their responses:

Rachel [NDI37]: My mum doesn't work, she's just a housewife, whatever they're called...

Diane [ND33]: She was just like a normal nurse...

Sarah [ND7]: He's just unemployed.

Jo [ND40]: I wouldn't say he's an odd job man. He's a painter and decorator. But he doesn't use it, erm, he doesn't do his work on a professional basis, he just gets cash in hand.

While respondents had mixed feelings about their caring roles and other family pressures, acknowledgement of and pride in their family's working background helped explain the sentiment that they had let them down:

Jo [NDI40]: My family is quite a successful family, there's no one really not working, there ain't nobody working, only me, messing about, and that's it, really.

The effect of family working histories on respondents' own experiences of work, and attitudes to it, is further discussed in the next chapter.

4.3 Health

The analysis looked at respondents' and their families' present and past health status and its consequences. This included looking at the impact of health on attitudes to and decisions about work and welfare. This section looks first at parental ill-health, partly discussed above, followed by respondents' own ill-health in childhood and adulthood. The latter includes discussion of respondents' views on normative ideas of self-image, appearance and presentation.

4.3.1 Family health

As discussed, ill-health was a dominant feature of respondents' experience of family and growing up. They spoke about their parents leaving the labour market pre-retirement age due to either serious illness or chronic conditions such as diabetes and asthma. Some parents had died young—Fatima's father, for example, was only 48 years old.

Some respondents explicitly connected the work conditions their parents had experienced with their ill-health.

Some of the impacts of parental ill-health and death have been discussed—for example, Alike's history of being brought to the UK by her father and his subsequent death leading to her living with siblings. Diane also found her circumstances changed quite dramatically, when her mother died, just after her 18th birthday. She described the impact of her father's decision to move to the US following his partner's (of 30 years) death and her own decision to stay in the UK:

after my mum died, my dad didn't want to live in this country, he left. He wanted me to come with him but I didn't want to go to live in Florida. I've got all my friends and stuff, I didn't want to leave all my friends and go somewhere I don't know anyone, do you know what I mean? [NDI33]

She recalled how that affected her housing circumstances:

Well, when my mum died I left home and I lived in Southwark, then I lived in Lewisham, then I went back to Southwark and now I live in Tower Hamlets. [ibid]

She explained that she moved out because her dad was selling the house. I asked if she found a flat and she replied:

No, I went into like a, I went and stayed in a hostel kind of thing and then after I stayed there for a couple of months, then I went into, had my own flat and everything and then my landlady, it was private, she said she was going to sell it so I had to move again, so I've been moving a lot. It's not bad, at least I get to see London I suppose!

Fatima described the impact of her father dying:

My dad [had] chloride something on his tongue, my dad died in '98, and I'm the one looking after the family and everything, like basically I do everything for them. [NDI41]

Although her mother, a housewife, was still alive, she explained, that this included shopping and other duties:

[my mum] doesn't do it. I mean she doesn't know where to go anyway, she only knows Tesco's. [ibid]

She then commented:

I've been doing that for five years, and I've come to the stage that my health is really poor ... I can't hack it. [ibid]

Asking her about her role looking after her brothers, she said that it included managing the finances and practical responsibilities such as buying clothes and shopping as mentioned, but also:

Look[ing] after their education, find out how they're doing at school, also checking on their behaviour, it's like everything. One of them is a teenager and I have to watch on him, keep my eye on him, my mum can't do it... [ibid]

Some respondents made reference to fears or concerns that they had inherited their parents' health conditions:

Noor [NDI38]: [My father] stopped working recently, not recently, six years ago, because of his diabetes. Both my parents have diabetes. I hope I don't get it.

Parents' mental health problems were discussed. Aidan struggled to describe his father's depression:

Dad's not been ill, he's not been well, but he's not been ill. He's not been well for two years and that, so. [NDI32]

When I ask him what the problem had been, he said:

Just like, well, it's sort of depression, I suppose. [ibid]

I asked how it started, to which he replied:

I don't really know, you know. I don't really know. So, it's. He seems fine and that, but. Plus he's diabetic as well. [ibid]

Aidan appeared to include diabetes because it seemed more justifiable or legitimate for his father to have a physical rather than mental illness. Later he mentioned his mother's experience of mental health problems, which he attributed to not being able to deal with family bereavements. He said that she had been on tablets for a while, that they had led to weight gain:

She's put on loads like, she's always been attractive, you know what I mean? But, she takes tablets for everything. Takes tablets for this, then another one to combat something out of that, and uh— [ibid]

4.3.2 Childhood and adulthood experiences of ill-health

Respondents' accounts of their experience of ill-health, disabilities and issues with their physical appearance were intermixed with discussions of lack of confidence, difficulties at school, including bullying, having few friends and reliance on family and social isolation. Tim, who did not want to be recorded, mentioned his ill-health as soon as he started talking about his education. He described how he had been bullied because of his epilepsy and being short. He was taken out of mainstream school without having achieved any GCSEs and transferred to a college for students with disabilities. This was followed by attending various vocational training providers.

Those with chronic conditions, continued to experience their impact in adulthood. Tim continued to refer to his epilepsy when giving me his employment history. He described working for Tesco and being sacked because the company “couldn’t cope with [his condition]”. He felt that the jobcentre’s disability employment adviser had “done nothing” about what he felt was discrimination and that the case “really should have gone to tribunal.” He also thought that his condition had prevented employers selecting him for interview but that “they are not allowed to say that”.

Noor described the impact that the onset of Crohn’s disease on her schooling:

I fell ill for a time when I was 18, when I was doing my A Levels and I thought I’d just take a break, a long break for a while, my father recommended it. [NDI38]

She spoke of going into hospital, “getting into a right state”, missing lots of classes and how:

I couldn’t do anything, I was like having one test after another and I couldn’t concentrate coz it’s like I got like temporary diabetes. [ibid]

Having achieved one of the two best sets of GCSEs among those interviewed, she started Biology, Chemistry, IT and Art A Levels but:

I only passed IT and the art because I was so ill, I was in hospital, so I couldn’t pass the biology and chemistry, so I’m planning to re-do them. [ibid]

When she finished school:

I just couldn’t do anything, couldn’t go anywhere, I just stayed at home because I was so ill. I even fainted on the streets a couple of times, you’re going to the doctor’s and you faint— [ibid]

She continued:

I was recovering for a year because my hair fell out and everything. [ibid]

She had applied to two universities but had not been able to attend their interviews.

As an introduction to discussing his mental health problems, Aidan talked about school:

I wanted to do an A-level in photography, but I stopped after three months. It was too, I was doing too much. I was trying to work and do that and personal problems. [NDI32]

I asked him if he would go into those a little bit, and he replied:

I was trying to work as well. And, erm, the work I was doing was on a building site and it was like steel work and it was so hard I had bruises everywhere, on my shoulders and that. I’d be wrecked going into college. Lots of personal stuff, family problems—it was too much. I couldn’t, I couldn’t concentrate when I was at college. So I had to fucking flunk it. [ibid]

He described his referral to a psychiatrist and subsequent year-long stay in a residential home. While not specifically talking about his mental health problems, Aidan described his drug use, how, for example, he had been on the drug speed during the residential stay and the effect that cannabis had on him:

I smoke a lot, cos I don't drink and I smoke a lot of cannabis and weed and that brings me right down ... [but] I still used to have [a joint] before I went to bed. [ibid]

He talked about being depressed:

I went bad for like two months, I couldn't get out of bed or nothing. I was like sort of forcing food and I went through it really badly. [ibid]

When we discussed his experience a little more, he said:

it was the medicine. Really, changing, getting off the Prozac really helped me a lot. It was doing shit for me, it just made me feel worse, and, sick. [ibid]

Asking about his aspirations at the end of the interview, his response gave some further indication of his mental health struggles:

I suppose I'm proud of getting on under pressure, that I've made myself get out of bed and eat scramble eggs. I couldn't be bothered even eating—just wanted to for my mum and dad. I'm getting better and my mum said like she didn't know me for a year. [ibid]

Low mental states were alluded to in many of the interviews, particularly in relation to spending large amounts of time at home, further described at the end of the next chapter.

The only references to healthcare provision came from Aidan and Noor who had had long stays in a residential home and hospital respectively. Having asked Aidan about what he thought about other patients in the home and his feelings about leaving it, he replied:

I've known people that have schizophrenia and that, and it doesn't bother me, you know, but, it's just that, they, they thought I was nuts, anyway, they sent me to this shrink and everything in that place. [ibid]

Noor told me that the state of the hospital she was in was “awful” and, later, while discussing VS work experience, she alluded to feeling passive as a patient. She also described having to pay for prescriptions because her condition was not covered in exemptions and that the NDYP VS rules on sickness leave did not make allowance for her state of health:

They give you ten days holiday and ten days sick leave and I need more than that, they should have like exceptions for people like me because I can't get there all the time. I've already explained to them that I'm an ill person, but when I'm ill I need to take the time off, it's compulsory and I can't do that otherwise I'll get my benefits cut off. I need them more than anybody because I've got prescriptions to pay for. [ibid]

From these accounts, ill-health was presented as a barrier to independent living, achieving qualifications, and getting and keeping work. Aside from the physical and mental pain of their conditions, respondents referred to the stigma and isolation of not being well and a concern to live up to normative images of being fit and healthy to work. They also spoke of their frustrated aspiration and feeling that their lives might have been very different if not for their ill-health and its consequences.

Allied with concerns about meeting norms of health, the narratives presented a preoccupation with idealised norms about appearance and self-image, that was reflected in comments about other people who were seen to be outside those norms. Aidan, while concerned to show me that he did not discriminate against people with mental illness, told me that he had not really required psychiatric referral and was not like the other patients he met while in residential care.

Alike's comments on the customers at her VS placement, a charity shop, were not uncharacteristic. She told me that she didn't mind working at the back of the shop, as opposed to on the shop floor, because the clients were "not really general public", they were "not well, mentally, don't get me wrong" and some "spit and smell." Similarly, Noor asked to be moved from a VS placement that worked with mentally-ill clients.

Several respondents referred to their physical features, ill-health and/or disabilities when discussing lack of confidence and social difficulties. The narratives of Tim, Jo, Mohamed and Noor implicitly linked aspects of physical appearance and health with problems at school, in work and more generally. Physical characteristics such as skin colour, height, poor sight, poor skin, as well as chronic health conditions or disabilities, such as asthma and diabetes, were all discussed. They talked about the relationship between such physical features and health conditions and lack of confidence, special educational needs, language and cultural barriers, social isolation, mental health problems and ongoing barriers to education and employment.

Fieldwork evidence, together with the interviews, raised the broader question of well-being, the relationship between health conditions and lifestyle and issues such as personal hygiene, diet, alcohol and drug consumption, exercise and maintaining home environments. While some respondents appeared to be managing those aspects of life, others were not, particularly those who were homeless or precariously housed. My notes on Nina are one example:

Her teeth are black. She doesn't eat, has a couple of doughnuts for lunch, painfully thin and always cold. [NDI4]

4.4 Housing

A dominant aspiration across the narratives was for respondents to have their own home. This was true of both those who had been brought up in London and those who had moved here in adulthood. In the narratives, having your own home meant housing provided by the council and not privately owned homes. The latter were something that respondents alluded to owning as part of a long-term aspiration but were not realistically considered in the short-term. As previously mentioned, while family, housing, health, education and employment are discussed separately for the purposes of exploring each in detail, the narratives reflected how interconnected they were in respondents' lives.

4.4.1 Having your own place

As discussed above, advantages for the 23 respondents who did still live at home included financial and social support. One disadvantage was lack of space, which when combined with the pressure of family expectations and preconceptions about respondents' decisions about work, was enough to create a strong motivation to move out:

Interviewer: What are your aspirations, your dream of the perfect life for you?

Nicholas [NDI8]: Really boring, buy my own place, my own room—a taste of freedom after 23 years sharing the same room.

Ten respondents already lived by themselves. This was a source of great pride and significance, partly due to having survived the arduous process of getting housed, which will be described below, and partly because of the associated symbolism of adulthood and independence:

Barry: When I was 18, I actually signed the papers on my 18th birthday, on 10th December.
[NDI11]

Soon after, Barry mentioned that he thought of himself as a territorial person and this sense of the belonging attached to getting your own place was expressed in other narratives. Pride and the importance of having your own place were reflected by those respondents who started describing themselves by telling me that they had their own flat:

Hieu [NDI3]: My background? I live by myself, got my own flat and what else?

Some advantages identified with independent housing status were described as an absence of the disadvantages associated with living at home. However, those could be replaced with different problems. Moving in, for example, required more resources than some people had. While I was at In2work, Habiba moved into her flat and had to transport her belongings by numerous bus trips as she did not have anyone to help her. Maintaining independent housing was expensive. Diane lived with her boyfriend and commented:

you can get housing benefit if you haven't any income, but what's the point of having a house when you can't really eat? If you can't really survive now, the only reasons why I survive is because I've got someone, if I didn't then it would be a lot harder. [NDI33]

Alike [NDI21]: It is a 2nd floor flat in a block. Quite big with 1 bedroom, a sitting room, kitchen and bathroom. I got £600 from Community Grant to do it up.

These were my notes on Solomon's description of having recently moved into his own flat:

Haven't settled in yet. Have repairs to do. No hot water. Few times I have stayed there, felt lonely. [NDI1]

He told me that he had been on the local authority housing list for 5 years before he got the flat. The problems with living by themselves were therefore considered in the context of knowing how long it had taken to achieve. Solomon's reference to feeling isolated was characteristic of those living alone, as were mental health problems. Such problems were ameliorated when respondents had started to make connections with those around them. Barry told me that he went past Katherine's flat in the morning and

how they sometimes came into In2work together. Solomon mentioned that his new flat was “less than a mile from mum’s.” Respondents who did have their own council flat were also preoccupied with remaining eligible for HB. A dominant fear, repeatedly expressed, was that HB would be taken away once they were employed. Therefore, they would not risk taking temporary or short-term jobs, but would only consider permanent work.

4.4.2 Homelessness

The remainder of this section looks at the housing histories of those who did not have the option of living with family in London and did not have their own homes. Some respondents who were precariously housed or of no fixed abode, such as Nina, were reluctant to talk about their housing circumstances in any detail. However, others gave quite detailed accounts of the vulnerability of being homeless, the process of being housed and the consequences for other areas of life.

Some respondents who had come to London by themselves and did not have family in the city were in the process of being housed or were homeless. They had found private rented accommodation on first arriving but had all experienced similar difficulties with it, including the consequences of landlords evading immigration and other services, debt, relationship and alcohol problems, which resulted in having to leave the accommodation. Several spoke of being propelled into homelessness by not getting deposits returned.

Those who had been street homeless and stayed in hostels told of vulnerability and problems encountered in sharing space with other people. Alike lived in four hostels before she was housed. These are my notes of her description of those hostels:

“Horrible”. Mix with people you don’t want to—puffing weed, keep your door locked. In [name of hostel] there was a heroin guy who overdosed and they had to take to hospital. Most of the 16-21 kids there are most dysfunctional. [NDI42]

As described above, Barry saw the move from his children’s home to a hostel as a natural progression from being in care. He told me about the differences in the way the institutions operated and about the culture of the hostel:

There was strife in the actual house and we'd get together and sort them out. I did mediate a little bit but then in some cases I reverted back to what I call my primate myself, had to get physical with some of the boys who come straight from, like they'd been running on the streets for so long they do it this way— [NDI28]

He went on to explain that:

you leave anything for a second, any half chances, they'll have it. People wouldn't give a shit that they'd rob from their nan, who'd rob from their families, they're right shit heads, but the way that I'd deal with those type of people, language, you can't talk with those people, the only language they know is that [gestures punching]... [NDI28]

The respondents had dealt with the process of getting housing in two ways. At times, they had attempted to juggle securing housing, education and employment. The difficulty of this approach is well illustrated by Alike, described earlier. Having been “kicked” out of her family home, she had rented with friends while doing a business course at the Guildhall and “working 2 jobs, at the same time as being at college, to pay the rent.” She did this for several years, but then dropped out of college because of the financial pressure and fear of getting into debt. Her landlady was then evicted from the flat and that led to her living in a hostel.

Tom's comments illustrated the various barriers to finding and retaining work when you are precariously housed. These included the practicalities of focusing on housing and work needs and the problems of stigma and discrimination from both employers and fellow employees:

When you're homeless, it's quite difficult to sort of maintain full-time employment and being in a work culture where they say you're a squatter and they pay rent and stuff, you know things like that, when you have to move house and stuff and you know you can't really keep a job if you have to go and stay in the house. [NDI20]

Shortly after, he added:

it's like that whole cycle—maybe you want to try and put that in—to being unemployed. I don't know if governments realise that when you're like on the run or you know, you don't have a permanent house that it's quite sort of difficult. [ibid]

As a consequence, respondents spoke of resigning themselves to the fact that they would only be able to get housing if they made it their first priority and therefore allowed finding work and education to become a secondary concern:

Alike: I went to the Homeless Unit. Patience is the only thing, that's it. Why do you think I don't have a job now? [notes on NDI21]

The process of securing housing was described as not only involving years of waiting, but taking up time and energy in negotiating with the housing system, which acted as a barrier to involvement in work and education. For those who were homeless and trying to get housing, it also acted as a barrier to participating in welfare to work:

Marian: I missed jobsearch, got sacked once before— I didn't come in because of my housing situation, used absences, down there at the hostels. [notes on NDI6]

The welfare system created a disincentive to look for work while also trying to get housed. For example, several respondents had stopped working because they needed to be eligible for benefits to then access housing. Habiba told me how she had been working and privately renting since she arrived in London, but that:

The landlady chucked us out—she was running away from immigration. I spent 3 days on the street. Went to council, they said I had to be on benefits. I went to live in a hostel. I signed on because [name of council] said I should because I had no income, even though I didn't want to. [NDI19]

When she moved into the first hostel, Alike was still working but:

I got the sack for taking time off to look for work, but it was the best thing to happen, because I was paying so much rent. Hostels are £120, but when not working, you only have the service charge to pay. [notes on NDI21]

She remained in the hostel, unemployed for six months and described the regime of the hostel as “so many rules, when you are in and out” acting as a barrier to activities outside of it. Martine spoke about starting signing on after completing her Masters:

I didn't really know anything about it at all to be honest, and the only reason I did was because I had a council tax bill that came through a couple of days after I'd finished my course, I hadn't started anything and I gave them a ring and said, “I've just finished my Masters and I'm looking for work at the moment, what do I have to do about it?”, and they said “you need to go and sign on”. [NDI23]

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented evidence on respondents' experiences of family, health and housing, the nature of support and barriers found in each and how they interact as well as respondents' attitudes to them. This will provide a context for understanding the impact of the VS. Asking respondents questions about their family life and relationships confirmed the importance of analyzing this private realm of social policy (Scourfield

and Drakeford, 2002). The chapter showed that family provided essential shelter and social interaction for some respondents—those with no family in London were among the most vulnerable and had experienced homelessness. However, while family was a source of strength, described as “clan-like”, that very quality could lead to social isolation outside of the family unit.

The evidence does not support theories such as the culture of poverty argument which suggest that unemployed young people learn worklessness from their families. While the discussion showed that some respondents had family obligations, such as caring roles, which could act as a barrier to participation in work, some of them were also pressurised by parents to find work and this was mixed with a desire not to let them down.

Discussion of family working histories showed that respondents had been brought up in families where work was central or where parents had been disabled and unable to work. However, the effect of work on families and on respondents was complex. Some respondents were proud at how hard their parents had worked, while others were embarrassed at their parents’ working lives. They were also at times sensitive about discussing their parents’ unemployed or disabled status—which some connected to the types of work their parents had done and which led to a desire to avoid certain types of work.

While those young people still living at home could be seen to support the theory of delayed transition (p.44), the chapter confirmed that, despite cultural differences among the sample, families also needed support. The evidence confirmed Dex’s finding (2003) that low income groups preferred informal care, not only due to income constraints (for example due to working atypical hours, La Valle et al., 2002), but also due to attitudes and values around caring. Research on Bangladeshi communities found the same (Dale et al., 2002). Low income groups also had better local networks partly because they were less mobile, and more likely to have family in the area (Dex, 2003). As a result, respondents were under pressure from conflicting demands and the chapter supports

Dearden and Becker's (2002) conclusion that caring obligations decrease the educational, social and employment opportunities of young carers.

The chapter's showed that ill-health was dominant in respondents' lives, past and present, with diverse consequences for their role in the household, their relationships with parents and housing circumstances. Childhood illness had led to difficulties with school, missing school and problems socialising. In adulthood, illness had impacted on their ability to find and retain work and live independently of their families—they spoke of not being able to cope and of discrimination. The evidence showed the impact of respondents' ill-health on gaining qualifications, integration, both socially at school and later in work. The importance attached by some to meeting social norms in relation to health could be understood in the context of having experienced stigma and discrimination. Explicit and implicit reference to mental health problems was found across the narratives.

The dominance of ill-health confirmed the research finding that those who were already disadvantaged were at significantly greater risk of becoming disabled (Burchardt, 2003). Jenkins and Rigg (2003) found that those who became disabled were older, had lower average household incomes, were more likely to be in the poorest fifth of the income distribution, less likely to be in paid work and had lower educational qualifications on average.

Finally, the chapter outlined respondents' experience of housing instability in childhood, their past and current problems with living with parents, living on their own and being homeless. It showed that there were problems both with being homeless and in having your own home and trying to stay in work or education.

Homeless respondents had had to focus on engaging in the processes of securing accommodation and coping with the extremely difficult circumstances of precarious housing and living in hostels. For those with their own council housing, the chapter confirmed that fear of losing housing benefit was a major disincentive to participation

and stemmed from uncertainty and lack of understanding of how the benefit was calculated (Kemp and Rugg, 2001). Other problems with living alone included finding resources to maintain homes and loneliness. Wider research confirmed the difficulties with living alone and associated lower employment rates (Harrison and Phillips, 2003), particularly for young men (Berthoud, 1999; Stafford et al., 1999).

This chapter's discussion of respondents' experiences of family, health and housing provides a background to the accounts of schooling, work and unemployment in the next chapter, which continues to provide a context for understanding the extent to which the VS can meet its participants' needs.

5 Chapter Five: VS client experiences of education and work

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 discussed the nature of respondents' personal circumstances. Evidence was presented on the effects of a range of childhood experiences including family bereavement, divorce, moving country, learning a new language, family ill-health and being in care. Adulthood experiences included caring for family members, homelessness, ill-health and social isolation. This chapter discusses their experiences of education and work, looking at influences on participation, including the role of family and educational institutions. As with the preceding chapter, it is important to bear in mind that while family, health, housing, education and work are discussed separately, they were not experienced as such by the respondents.

5.2 Education

Respondents' experience of education varied in terms of gender, culture and ethnicity, social interaction and barriers to learning. Respondents' qualifications ranged from none to postgraduate degrees, reflecting O'Connor et al.'s (2001) findings that there was an over-representation of those with advanced or higher qualifications on the VS. The discussion looks first at influences on experiences of school and learning, followed by influences on post-compulsory education and what respondents said about making decisions about courses and influences on their attendance. It then looks at how respondents' previous experiences and attitudes to education affected their relationships with welfare providers and their attitudes to the VS training element.

5.2.1 Influences on participation at school

In the last chapter, respondents talked about the effect of family on their education—for example, the effect of moving country or of different cultural and gendered attitudes to education. Bangladeshi women described cultural attitudes to their schooling, being taken out of school in the UK to care for siblings and parents, for example, as well as time spent in Bangladesh not attending school.

Parents sent children abroad as they wanted a better (and more disciplined) schooling for them than they perceived could be provided by the UK system. A Bangladeshi respondent's parents wanted to send him to school in Bangladesh in order to “stay out of trouble” in the UK. Several Afro-Caribbean men were sent to school in the Caribbean for the same reasons. Winston told me about returning to the UK to attend secondary school having attended primary school in Jamaica and compared himself to those who had been educated in British primary schools:

By the time I was ready to go, they didn't even know how to hold a pencil! [NDI22]

He continued:

I knew up to my twelve times tables and everything else because in Jamaica you—I went to a Catholic school so you had to do certain stuff, the nuns weren't messing around, so you have to cover certain gaps. [ibid]

However, having been ahead educationally:

then it just dropped back and the next minute you're the one who's behind. [ibid]

Schooling in the Caribbean was described as more disciplined than in the UK:

Ian: much stricter, they beat you. You have to be good over there. [NDI14]

Although it could also be a “bit rough” and overcrowded—Ian's school in Kingston, Jamaica, operated in two shifts because there were:

too many people and [the school] didn't want to throw people out. [ibid]

Bangladesh's school culture was also presented as more regimented:

Alia [NDI30]: Morning time, we have to go out from classroom in the playground, we have to line up, singing about Bangladesh.

Alia continued:

we go to like army training, we have to say 'right, left, right, left'—everything. That's our exercise, morning exercise teacher, teacher was at front of classroom in playground, and he show us like an exercise, a morning exercise what you do, you have to go like that and everything. Then after this we are line up, go to our own classroom and then start writing and reading. [ibid]

While she talked positively about the transition to UK schooling, she later expressed regret at not having continued her education:

Yeah, because if I good at English, like at the moment I'm doing Childcare, if I had educate, I can do work, my dream come true, you know? [ibid]

Fatima described learning English at secondary school:

When I started secondary school I could hardly speak English, like yes or no, but I didn't go to language class, I picked it up, my dad used to teach us, and in the first year/second year obviously I had to struggle with it. So the third year I started picking up the words and I used to go in school at 7.30 or 8.00 in the morning to study extra hours. [NDI41]

Alike moved from an all-girls school in Nigeria to a mixed comprehensive in London. Her first year at school was "very difficult" as she didn't understand what people were saying and as a result, sometimes didn't bother speaking. Similarly, Uy spoke about the challenge of arriving from Vietnam speaking very little English and having to attend extra-curricula English as another Language classes.

Language was also a barrier for those Bangladeshi respondents who had grown up in London, but who had spoken Bengali at home and had lived and been schooled in nearly exclusively Asian schools and communities. Abdul spoke about his problems with learning English while attending a "ninety percent" Asian school:

I-I still study Bengali every day so (laugh). Well at this time I did learn my English then as well, big time ... cause of English, I didn't do well... [NDI36]

Nasima gave her view of mainly Asian schools and communities:

it's full of Asian kids and there's only a few [non-Asian], and I don't think that's a good way of, you know how they say we've got to live in a community where we mix and all that, I don't think that's a good example. So in that way it's more out on its own. [NDI39]

Abdul summed up the embarrassment felt by many about their difficulties with English:

I'm not that good at English as well so, even though I was born here. [NDI36]

He later talked about being on the NDYP Gateway:

But [that] was a like-like a good, good experience, innit? Like, like, you know, for get confident at, you know, speaking English, and you know, like you know, I did do some, you know, you know, um, practice in interview, innit? talking to one to one. [ibid]

Family relationships also played an important role in how respondents coped at school.

Mohamed's home life had led to his school initiating his being placed in care:

When I was in school, I was doing PE or something like that and they found marks on my back, that's how I got into care. [NDI44]

Diane was one of the few who talked about the positive effect of her family when she described going to a grant maintained tertiary college for girls, as opposed to the local comprehensive:

I don't know now, luck I suppose. I think just because my mum really wanted me to go to a good school and stuff, so I just applied, did the test and then I got a letter saying [I had got in]. [NDI33]

While Barry was one of several respondents whose family life had led to his anger being vented at school:

I was angry [inaudible], put it this way, they put me on half days because I was a bad boy, my mental state was, they [inaudible] me, that was my mental state. [NDI11]

A few moments later, he explained:

I was brought up tough, I was brought up in a military style. [ibid]

Respondents admitted being bullies:

Emmanuel: You were a bully in a circle of bullies. Not directly involved. Threw chair at a teacher. They didn't think I was trying hard enough. I didn't do well. My brother is smarter, he works and is bad. [NDI13]

Winston talked about being expelled after confiscating a teacher's keys and making her cry. Barry's violence extended to attacking a teacher. In a long and vividly recalled account, he described an incident in secondary school in which, having told him he was stupid for doing something wrong in class, a teacher had then tapped him on the back of the neck with a piece of plywood that he had been playing with, after which:

I lost it completely, and the last thing I remember seeing in my hand after I'd hurt her, was a one of those [rods for closing windows]. I was in a rage. I grabbed one of those and smashed it on her knee.

He was not the only one to attribute such behaviour, not only to family influence, but to boredom, too much energy, not being stretched and not feeling valued by teachers.

Violence and bullying were strong factors in the experience of school across the accounts. Steve's first words used to describe school were "dangerous, the deep end" and he was not the only one to portray school in such dark and dramatic terms. Jo's first words were "Hell, hell on earth". The previous chapter discussed respondents'

experiences of social isolation, having few friends at school and being bullied. Their descriptions paint quite a bleak picture of school as a place to try and survive in. Tim talked about being short, epileptic and severely bullied “by about fifty kids” “being spat on”, “having no friends” and how his mother decided to take him out of mainstream school. Jo described school:

torture, nightmare, a five year nightmare. And in some ways I still haven’t woken up from it. I mean, I used to get bullied quite a lot, and when you finish school, people say that, erm, it’s finished, it’s over, you can move on, but you can’t really, coz the damage has been done... [NDI40]

Asked what effect that had had on her, she commented:

It makes you a little bit lost and paranoid, and not trusting people, coz I’d like, I’d like to trust people more, but I’m always wary of them first. [ibid]

She described the power of psychological abuse:

They were never really physically violent. They just kept the intimidation up, but in some ways it is worse because if I was physically, if it were physical I would have hit, healed quicker, I think. [ibid]

Tim and Jo continued to have few friends in adulthood, spending nearly all their time between home and on the VS.

Respondents also regretted how negative peer influence had distracted them from their school work:

Nasima [NDI39]: I didn’t really put myself into getting a good grade and all that. What it is, I did at the beginning and then I got into a crowd, you know how it is, but I regret that now of course.

Abdul [NDI36]: Coz at this time, like I-I-I didn’t know what was like err, what it was about—that it was so important, innit? I was like, still like, hanging around with my friend and bunking off lots of lessons and that’s it.

Truanting also featured in the accounts:

Winston [NDI22].: I was an arcade addict, man, computer games to the max, it was just, it was unbelievable, I spent most of my time in the arcade, I remember it, early in the morning I was in the arcade and half my lunch money gone, come up to school, lunchtime there—

Some respondents, having been excluded, had continued learning in alternative schooling which they felt worked out better:

Messiah [NDI13]: I did the National Record of Achievement. In the [learning support] centre, you can wear your own clothes, rules aren’t enforced. Teaching was ok, was common sense—

Winston [NDI22]: Teachers at the learning centre were very supportive. When you come in, everyone wanted to work and it changed the environment.

5.2.2 Learning at school

Barriers to learning included moving, cultural problems, language difficulties, caring roles and the effect of marriage, ill-health and aspects of school culture. Looking at these in more detail, there were striking differences in learning by gender. Men talked about changes in their ability to progress as they grew up, particularly a contrast between primary and secondary school. Aidan's comments were characteristic:

Loved primary, secondary school was a heap of shit—I hated it, all the way through. Used to bunk off and everything. Surprised I got any GCSEs, really. I used to bunk off so much. Even my mum kept saying I was. [NDI36]

Problems controlling their behaviour, boredom and lack of concentration were largely mentioned by men. Those female respondents who had achieved qualifications at school gave more positive accounts of camaraderie and finding school fun.

However, only two respondents (out of 40) had more than two A-C GCSEs—despite more than two having entered Higher Education. Responses to being asked about their GCSEs, such as “I don't want to tell you the grades” or “I basically didn't get very good grades at all” were typical from both men and women. They also did not remember how many they had taken or their grades:

Nasima [NDI39]: They weren't all that. It was Es.

When I then asked Nasima which GCSEs she had taken, she continued:

I can't remember [in which ones] exactly. In humanities, I think I got an E, in Maths I think I got an E, in English I got an E as well [interruption]. In Art I got a D. [ibid]

Many respondents were left with a combination of regret, anger, frustration, embarrassment, and feelings of stigma that their qualifications were insufficient. They also expressed concern at their levels of English and Maths. Problems with these subjects acted as a barrier both to education and employment. Several respondents commented that GCSE grades below C in English and Maths had prevented them from taking further courses. As discussed above, problems with English were shared by those born in this country as well as abroad and by those both with and without qualifications.

Some felt that their bad behaviour had been to blame for their subsequent lack of qualifications and that they hadn't realised the importance of education at the time. However, some felt that teachers had treated them unfairly, by, for example, having low expectations of them and neglecting them.

Winston [NDI22]: some had a clue, some didn't, some was bothered [inaudible].

Pete commented that teachers were "just there to be paid", that some didn't even give them work, and that they didn't always know what was going on. He talked of being in classes with other children:

throwing books out of the window, walking in and out of classrooms until they were caught on camera, hanging outside, going home early— [NDI41]

In that environment, he "didn't manage to learn much." He also distinguished teachers by age and gender and went on to say that they needed a level of maturity to handle students.

Other respondents said that they had worked hard but had just not been able to get the grades:

Rachel [NDI37]: I worked hard throughout the whole time I was there, and at the end of it, I didn't really get the results I wanted, so I was a bit disheartened.

Jo [NDI40] I was stuck with the second from worst class, even though I didn't belong there—

For some, their experience of learning was dominated by learning difficulties, such as dyslexia:

Nicholas [NDI8]: what I can remember of primary school, it was dealing with my dyslexia so I can remember being in the corner of the room with a support helper most of the time, the only time I can remember working with some of the other kids was in Art...

Creative subjects were talked about as being both a relief from the failure and associated frustration in other subjects and outlets for expression for those who had problems interacting with the school environment, whether having no friends, being bullied or being violent themselves:

Sean [NDI10].: I was interested in music a lot and that was, kind of one saving grace I suppose and kind of art, drawing.

Jo told me that she got E grades in her GCSEs except in Design, in which she got a D:

I have a bookshelf in my room as part of my GCSE project [in design], I'm really proud of that. That's probably one of the few things I got good at that place. [NDI40]

5.2.3 Post-16 education

Some spoke about leaving school at 16 as the norm—something that their friends and family had done. Some felt that what they had learnt during their education had limited value:

Winston [NDI22]: They say it's a place of learning, it is about learning characters because you realise what you've learned at school doesn't hold any weight at all outside school, because your mum can teach you the maths, your dad can give you trade days.

Dave's comments about his brother leaving school at 16 and getting a job as an apprentice welder were characteristic:

My younger brother, he's not thick, but he can't work to study, things like that. And if he went to school, he'd just be lazing about. So got him into a job straight away and like, and it's been me that's been the one lazing about, really. [NDI9]

Dave emphasised that his father had left school with no qualifications but had “loads of experience” and had worked really hard. He had also got his younger son, an apprenticeship in the firm where he worked as an accountant.

Others started college but didn't stay on. Histories of post-16 education were portrayed as struggles with juggling different priorities. In the last chapter, Aidan described the pressures of combining work and education on his mental health, he continued:

the work I was doing was on a building site and it was like steel work and it was so hard I had bruises everywhere, on my shoulders and that. I'd be wrecked going into college. [I had a] lot of personal stuff and family problems. It was too much. I couldn't, I couldn't concentrate when I was at college. So I had to fucking flunk it. [NDI32]

Ed gave his reasons for not continuing in education:

I studied like really hard the first couple years and then I started drifting off. Met a few people and, and after I done my GCSEs, I couldn't afford it. [NDI31]

These are notes on Alike's description of “taking two jobs to pay the rent while at college”—

Cleaning in the morning, university during the day and the fish and chip shop until 10 pm at night, kept those 2 jobs til 1998, left the cleaning which had been in Oxford Circus, in the BBC World Service—got that from the job centre for £4 per hour. In the fish and chip shop 1997-8, got that through [name of job centre] as well. [NDI21]

When I asked if she had sought support from college, she replied:

didn't talk to people too much at college coz had to go to work. [ibid]

She added that she was “too tired” from working to look for support and that, on reflection, she should have taken out a loan but had been too cautious about the resultant debt.

Others described trying a series of courses. Abdul had a pass in GNVQ Advanced engineering, but described in some detail how he had spent several years starting and stopping various college courses of various GNVQ and BTEC levels and one degree course in engineering, from which he had been “chucked out”. He had pursued engineering originally because a friend had taken it and felt that he would be able to master the course despite difficulties with English. Before attending VS, he had been taking a course in airline ticketing. Mohamed had a similar history:

I took a break for a while, I went on another NVQ Level 2 in Business Studies, I didn’t want to do that, I left that after a while, then I done NVQ Level 2 in [pause], what was it—application of numeracy? [NDI44]

Those who had taken courses with welfare to work and other training providers had similar histories. Tim, whose account was taken in note form as he did not want to be recorded, described short spells at seven colleges doing a range of courses, including English, Maths, Electronics, Computing, Gardening and First Aid, some of which he did not complete. Reasons he gave for not completing the courses and others gaps and changes in his education and work history included looking for work, time spent unemployed, the colleges closing down and colleges not having the courses he wanted.

Ed spoke of his time at home having dropped out of A Levels:

I was on the internet at home a lot, and uh, I was just playing games. It might seem sad and all that, I don’t know, I just, I just found it, just couldn’t be bothered to go to school, so I just sat at home and, erm, played on the internet with my mates— [NDI31]

Nasima described leaving school:

After I finished my GCSEs I was so not sure what I wanted to do next, so I took like four months out and I didn’t do nothing, just stayed home, then I went to training. [NDI39]

Several respondents decided to continue in education after GCSEs and went on to take GNVQs—many took Business studies.

Jo [NDI40]: I don’t know how I managed to get on, because I did really crap in my first year GCSEs, but I compensated with Business Studies when I got to sixth form and I passed that.

Some took more vocational choices. Dave, whose three best friends left school at 16, told me he went on to a local college to take print design and production, computer graphics, desktop publishing and word-processing.

Wanting to go on to further and higher education led to a range of problems. The way in which Ed spoke about university was typical. Despite having left school several years before, he still wanted to return to college to take the minimum qualifications required to apply to university, where some of his friends had gone. This desire to return to education by those who had not gone on to take GNVQs and A Levels was common as was indecision about what to do:

Ed [NDI31]: when I went September time, reading my A-levels again, they said I've got to do my IT and I've got to get a B in English. He said, he said sign up for GCSE, but in the end I thought, ah, fuck it, and I just left it. I went to sign up, the next time I went to do it was too late and I was like, Oh God!

A few moments later, he continued:

Yeah, coz I wanted to do an A-level in art. But they wouldn't, I could do art, obviously coz you don't really need grades. But they wanted me to get an IT and that's what I needed to do. [ibid]

Some respondents had known what subjects they wanted to do in school but had been indecisive about higher education courses. Combined with other pressures, this led to dropping out. Sean, who had already spoken of the challenges of family breakdown and going to different schools of varying quality, told me about his struggles deciding what to do within his mixed media degree course at Westminster and as a result "messing up" his first and second years, not being able to catch up and finally dropping out.

Others managed to finish their degrees but found that they could not find opportunities once graduated.⁴⁵ Martine was the only respondent with both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. She described her experience after completing her Masters:

I then started applying for PhD positions and looking for part-time work in the meantime, and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine said to all of us on our course to go and get, to sign on while we were looking for work and stuff, and basically I just haven't

⁴⁵ O'Connor et al. (2001) identified that graduates on the NDYP were determined to find jobs in the same field as their qualifications, but that there were limited availability of jobs for them in their chosen field, in their local labour market and with 'decent' wages. The study concluded that the challenges working with this client group revealed tensions between their aspirations and needs and the programme (pp.22-28).

found anything except for this [PhD offer] that I've got. So I've been unemployed, and then I'm now doing this voluntary placement. [NDI23]

5.2.4 Influences on Higher Education participation

Starting more than one course or dropping out of college was partly influenced by the pressure of attempting to hold down jobs, secure housing and attend college, often also without family support. Housing and living cost pressures were combined with the pressure of a perceived societal message that having higher qualifications was the norm and that a better standard of living and the realisation of certain aspirations could be achieved through education. When asked what he wanted to do next, Uy, who did not have any qualifications, said:

Think will pass [this NDYP course], get qualification, go straight to uni, graduate. Don't like girlfriend's parents looking down on me. [NDI25]

Asked about his role models, Ed replied:

No role model as such. Suppose that's my mates, really, they've gone to university and I'd like to follow in their steps really. [NDI21]

Being influenced by family and friends, the desire to stay with what they knew and importantly the desire to keep debt down, meant that some respondents also wanted to go to, or had been to, university either locally or at least in London. When asked which university he was thinking of going to, Uy replied:

Greenwich one? Who knows? In London though. Don't like to travel too far. [NDI25]

Ed [NDI31]: I would go to college and I'd study there, till I got my A-levels, and then I'd go to university around [here]—local.

Families were mentioned in relation to coping with financing their educations. Nicholas felt that he had been lucky to be one of the last students to get a grant, but that it had not covered the rent, so while he had spent a couple of years in halls of residence and renting, he had returned to his parents' home (and left college with a £6000 student loan). Ed, on the other hand, said that living at home would be a barrier if he went to university:

Oh, and I'd go, I'd have to go to college coz I have too many distractions at home with my little sister, as much as I love her. But, I'd go to a college near and just study for two years. [NDI31]

The perception that obtaining an FE or HE qualification was the norm led to a preoccupation with gaining any qualification, rather than thinking through one that would be suitable and enjoyable:

Ed [NDI31]: My mate went to university and said it don't matter [which A Levels you do].
As long as you've got any A Levels you can still go to university.

Abdul spoke about his family paying a £2000 fee for a course in computer engineering that would give him a Microsoft qualification. However, with no IT qualifications prior to the course, he had found it too difficult and given it up, feeling that he had “let them down big time.” Uy told me that he had started a two year car mechanics course. When asked why he had chosen it, his response was typical:

No other choice [I] enrolled late and had to get something— [NDI9]

Sometimes, respondents, such as Ed, left it too late and could not enrol for courses that year. Schools and colleges were implicitly implicated in the unplanned nature of these decisions about taking courses. Respondents made reference to not feeling valued by teachers, having been overlooked or having had little expected of them:

Sean [NDI10]: My tutors told me not to when I was doing my GNVQ, they said ‘you’d never get in there because of the applications’, like the percentage of applications, you wouldn’t get in and they said ‘it’s all overseas students’.

Aside from aspirations to have HE qualifications, some respondents were concerned about improving their literacy, numeracy and English language skills. Most respondents referred to these indirectly in the interviews. However, when I asked Colin what his barriers were to work, he immediately replied: ‘a lack of confidence in reading and writing.’

5.3 Work

The policy literature and rhetoric surrounding the NDYP VS suggested that its client group did not have experience of work and held negative attitudes to it (p.28). This chapter looks at the evidence from the narratives in these two areas—first at different types of work histories then at influences on their experiences of work.

5.3.1 A series of “dead-end” jobs

While some respondents had worked, for example, as call centre operators, a personal service occupation in group 6 of the standard occupational classification, most had had experience of jobs in elementary occupations, group 9 of the classification.⁴⁶ These included jobs such as waiters and waitresses, cleaners, care workers and shelf-fillers. Respondents’ accounts of their experience of this work tended to consist of a series of short-term jobs on leaving school, interspersed with short periods of unemployment and participation on welfare to work or related training.

Winston [NDI22]: I was signing on for a bit but then I was working doing the cleaning, so I left there now and it was like, it was in between times I’d been looking for things to do in certain courses, like [inaudible] typing course and stuff like that in between—

Accounts of jobs taken, such as cleaning, portrayed a concern with low status, poor working conditions and their repetitive, unchallenging nature and lack of in-built career progression. In some cases, respondents had taken so many jobs that they were hard to recall and certainly difficult to put in order.

Diane had worked since “before I could get an NI number” for employers that included Adams (a high street fashion retailer), B&Q, Manpower recruitment agency, McDonalds, the Metropolitan Police, Mortgage Express, Sitel (a customer call centre) Tesco’s and a hotel. When I asked her to go through her work experience, she replied:

What have I done, like work and stuff? Okay, I’ve had loads of different jobs. I won’t go through all of them! [NDI33]

After mentioning working at McDonalds during college, she continued listing some of the jobs that she had done before she was 18 years old:

and before that I done paper rounds and stuff, I did loads of different retail jobs, call centre jobs. [NDI33]

She worried at the impression that employers might have of her work history:

You see that’s the problem, because I’ve done so many little couple of months jobs here and there, if I was to put them all at my CV, people would look at me and think ‘no way am I going to hire her because she doesn’t want to stay anywhere’ I’ve always thought to myself, if I was to put down all the jobs I’ve had I’ll never get a job— [ibid]

⁴⁶ ONS (2000)

Accounts of these histories often began with the move into their first jobs and the push factor of not staying on at school but not knowing what they wanted to do:

Sarah [NDI7]: I didn't know what I wanted to do. You don't do you, unless you want to set out in life to be a certain person?

Chance and lack of planning were featured in these accounts:

Colin [NDI15]: I thought, 'I'll cut my losses and do this

Nina [NDI4]: They were interviewing people that day at the jobcentre

As discussed, these first jobs were sometimes through family:

Winston [NDI22]: Worked for my old man, well me and my cousin, we did work coz, we, the family, built houses, we'd decorate them houses and rebuild them and stuff—

Emmanuel [NDI13]: I started painting and decorating 3 months after I left college—business of someone my gran knew.

Diane: I worked in Adams after 18 because my cousin was the Manager there, she got me the job!

Although, they were also found through friends:

Uy [NDI25]: I worked with all my friends. And I worked there for two years and then I moved to the Regent Street one. And then I worked in Paddington. Interviewer: Oh. Uy: All my friends were there. Interviewer: From School? Uy: Some from school, yeah. It's a laugh innit, working in a kitchen?

Dead-end jobs were better if taken locally. Diane described one of her jobs as okay because "I could walk home." The following notes were taken from my discussion with Colin about being self-employed in his neighbourhood:

Working odd jobs 'kept me going'. Painting and decorating, gardening for people off the estate, little Brookside', people knocking, repairs bikes. 'Simon's the one'—only one that rides a bike. Friends of friends. Like a garage at mum's house. [NDI15]

Those that continued onto second, third and further short-term elementary occupation jobs described further push factors, of which not wanting to sign on, was dominant. They also described a "I'll cut my losses" approach to taking such work—but then not being satisfied with the jobs once they were in them:

Diane [NDI33]: ...I always seem to get any job so that I don't have to sign on, because the whole stress of going into the job centre, handing in your book, I know it's a little thing but the looks you get, just the hassle you get, I'd do anything not to come back to this place and that's the reason why I've had so many jobs and ended up quitting, because they're not jobs that I want—

Diane described talking to New Deal Advisers about this type of job:

They're not helpful. I can give you a little example. When I went to see my New Deal Adviser, another New Deal adviser said to me, because I was telling them about what I want to do, like I don't want to keep on getting jobs that I don't want. You know what the guy

said to me? He said “look, I told you this before, the only way you’ll get out of not getting any job is if you get pregnant” I told you, didn’t I?

Consequently, many flexible labour market jobs taken by respondents were not ones they wanted. More specific reasons given for leaving jobs included various aspects of the work environment such as temperature, uniform, the physical nature of the job and the hours. This is Nina talking about being a care assistant:

[You] would go into people’s house, sometimes on your own. Wash, dress and give medicine to old people—change their colostomy bags. I did that for 6 months. This time last year, I was cold. I went home—I’d had enough. I had a blue dress, with the name of the company written on it—it was too thick for summer. [NDI4]

Ian described working at Safeway:

I worked there full time, before starting signing on. Had words with boss, got fired. He asked me to pick up boxes, too heavy, asked the Manager to pick them up. We had words. He didn’t believe me—he’s the Manager. He didn’t care about employees. [NDI14]

Diane and Nasima talked about working in a supermarket and nursery respectively:

Diane [NDI33] I used to have to leave my house about quarter to five, and I quit that job because I saw this woman getting chased. That’s when I was living in Peckham and I used to have to get the bus—

Having described the incident, she said:

that’s what made me quit the job, I said ‘I’m not risking my life to work in Tesco’s, it’s not worth it.

Nasima talked about the start time at her job as well but also that:

It was a long day, that’s why I left. But we had a shift, when we started at 8.00 we finished at 5.00, when we started at 9.00 we’d go when the last child leaves, but it was such a long day and around there, there’s nothing ... even for an hour you can’t go anywhere, there is but it’s just, you know, it’s like you’re stuck in there all day. [NDI39]

Respondents aspired to jobs that stretched them—that were challenging—and disliked those they perceived as boring and repetitive:

Mohamed [NDI44]: I was on night shift [as a security guard] and I got bored and was phoning my friend, things like that, and the phone bill came up to about £70...

Darren [NDI5]: I don’t want a dead-end job in a supermarket, but something changing daily [and] that keeps me motivated. I want to be in an active environment.

Nasima [NDI39]: I wanted a change, you know, when it’s all getting to you and all that. I just wanted a change so I left that, I wanted to do admin so I joined the New Deal, which is where I am now.

Diane described working as a call centre operator:

You got weekly paid as well, you didn’t get that much tax, I don’t know why, they only taxed you about £50 a week from Manpower, but it was okay, I was walking home, it was just that after a while it became so routine, I thought I might make mistakes— [NDI33]

She told me how she decided to leave and then said:

It wasn't like you were doing anything that stretched your brain— [ibid]

One respondent during observation commented about working in a clothes shop:

I won't stand around doing nothing.

Poor relationships with management and other staff were also push factors. Katherine spoke of working as a trainee in a hairdressing salon, where the Manager “gave me a lot of stick” and others “put me on the spot” or bullied her. Des told me why he left a retail position:

Younger people already managers, “talking down” to you. [NDI2]

Not enjoying contact with customers was another negative factor in the jobs they had taken. Noor liked the idea of administrative work because:

there's not much like contact with clients, not clients, customers, that's what I like—
[NDI38]

Discrimination also featured in the accounts. Winston talked about being supervised by someone while working as a mechanic:

He was one cheeky little bugger, very cheeky, racist to the core and one day I decided, “I've had enough of this”, went to the main boss, I said “this geezer's been racist to me”, [he replied] “I'm afraid he's a shareholder, there's not much we can do.” [NDI22]

He also felt financially exploited:

the boss was terrible and [about the] minimum wage, the minimum wage would have been a bonus! [ibid]

Respondents desired more autonomy in their work—such as Uy, who spoke admiringly about a friend he had once worked with who:

went on to do job in delivery for a Chinese company. Delivering to restaurants. Gets to go all round to Birmingham, Manchester— [NDI25].

Respondents were also made redundant. Dave had been working as a trainee typesetter in a small printing firm but:

They had to cut back on people and because I was the newest person, like a trainee, I had to go. [NDI9]

Dead-end jobs, creative activities and education

Respondents wanted jobs that were creative and fulfilling. While some did creative activities as “a sideline”, such as Des who presented a local radio programme once a week, other respondents saw these activities as their real vocation. 18 of the 40 respondents spoke seriously about their music and described spending a significant amount of time doing it.

Ian, for example, aged 22, had had several elementary occupation jobs but had also taken NVQs and City and Guilds in sound production. He described being part of a group recording an album and spent several evenings a week down at a local studio and saw his time on the VS as a distraction from this project. His longer term plan was to continue his music career in the US, where some of his family lived. Several other respondents had similarly invested time in their music, such as Darren, who did not want to be recorded while being interviewed:

Past 2 years, been working on an album. Friend got his own studio for 3 or 4 years now. Bought everything. Hires it out. Specially soundproofed whole room in his house. Every night, working on that. [NDI5]

Habiba, introduced in the last chapter, had left France in order to pursue a singing career. She was singing at the time of the interview but had not yet earned any money from it but had had a series of jobs including being a dinner lady, factory worker in Scotland and receptionist, before housing problems had led to her becoming homeless and signing on.

However, Nick’s work history showed how difficult it was to succeed in the media and creative industries. Aged 25, he had been to drama school and then taken a long list of short-term jobs, mainly as a runner or researcher in the TV industry. He had survived by living at home, applying for lots of jobs, taking “tiny jobs ... a few days here and there”, using contacts, taking in-between jobs such as window cleaning and periods of unemployment.

5.3.2 Higher Education and little to no work experience

A few respondents had higher education qualifications and little to no work experience. Nicholas had taken an art related degree, but at 23, still had no work experience, apart from having done small jobs for his art college and occasionally helped out in his father's restaurant. He lived at home. When discussing what he was going to do after the VS, he still hoped to get a job in something related to his degree. Martine, was a graduate in Biology. After completing a Masters, she was offered a PhD place but could not get funding. She talked about why she thought she was unemployed:

I've been looking for PhD positions and I've always been looking for sort of temporary work in the meantime, with things like Research Associates and stuff but the problem that I have is that if you go for quite a basic thing, because I'm quite well qualified, they say 'you've got too many qualifications and we'd rather take someone who's less qualified, and we know will stay with us for the next two or three years, than someone who's going to come for about six months and then sort of leave'. If you go to the other end of the extreme they say, 'you've got all the qualifications but you haven't got the experience', so it's a lose-lose situation— [NDI23].

Several respondents mentioned the frustration of not having been able to afford to take work experience as a route into their occupations. Sean, who did not complete his Art degree, described getting some short work experience at a prestigious fashion magazine:

Most of [the other people on work experience] had done BAs somewhere [inaudible]. Yeah, it was a whole kind of middle class network. [NDI10]

5.3.3 No qualifications, no work experience

The final group of respondents had no work experience and no qualifications. They attributed this to a range of events and barriers, many of which have been described in this and the preceding chapter. They included problems with school (such as bullying, difficulties speaking English and periods of absence), housing vulnerability, caring responsibilities, cultural conflicts and health problems (including mental health problems), which combined with other personal barriers, such as lack of confidence. Alia had such a history. Since arriving in the UK, she had missed periods of school to care for her family, had no qualifications and had difficulties communicating in English.

Married briefly, she had suffered domestic violence, and despite a restraining order on her former husband, was frightened to go out alone. This meant that she was accompanied to and from her house by the staff at the nursery where she was doing her VS placement, which she had enjoyed and asked if there were any up and coming paid vacancies there. She talked about her future and although not wanting to remarry, about having children:

if I have children I'm going to look after them, if I have job I'm going to get part-time job, you know, spend time with them some time, go shopping, something like this! [NDI5]

Respondents with these histories had aspirations for work that were unrealistic. Jo had few qualifications and no work experience. The staff at her placement allowed her to spend time on the computer creative writing as she wanted to become a newspaper journalist—although, as plan B, she told me that she would be happy working for a magazine:

I mean it's a plan B, I want to stick to plan A. I mean my family would say it's unrealistic, but I can't help it at all, really— [NDI40]

When I asked Jo what type of work she would look for at the end of her time on the VS, her response conveyed her lack of confidence in applying for work and a disparity between that and her aspirations:

I'm trying to think, to pluck up courage to, erm, go in to my local Blockbuster, coz that's been an idea for me. [ibid]

5.4 Influences on participation

While much of the influences on young people's participation in the labour market have been discussed in the preceding chapter, this section looks at contributing factors to lack of confidence and more specific connections between respondents' experience of work and the influence of family, peers and health.

Lack of confidence and related factors

Lack of confidence featured throughout the narratives and was influenced by all the personal experiences outlined in this and the previous chapter. Respondents described losing their confidence in interviews. Michelle, a client observed in a jobsearch session, felt that she could not talk naturally in interviews, that she had to remember to use certain language but that sometimes slang slipped out, the interviewer laughed and she would think “that’s it, I’ve blown it.” She felt that interviewers made you uncomfortable on purpose. When I mentioned that there might be things she could do to offset that and provided some examples, she said:

Oh, is that how it works. We don’t know—we’re doing it all wrong.

Jo talked specifically about her lack of confidence during interviews:

I think one of the main reasons I haven’t got a job is just my confidence is so fragile. It’s always been fragile. I mean all it takes is a comment or a remark and I’m down— [NDI40]

She spoke of being at a loss what to say:

When I can feel the pressure, then I just lose it. Even though I have planned in my head what to do, it just goes. [ibid]

Language difficulties were another contributing factor. Abdul had applied to the Home Office for an administrative position and told me proudly how he had passed the first round of the application, but had not been successful at interview:

they gave me this tricky question, yeah, like I couldn’t answer, yeah [Interviewer: Oh] Abdul: They said to me, like, you know, how do you motivate yourself when you go to work or how does your friend describe you— [NDI36]

Respondents also felt that they were disadvantaged in the application process by the way they spoke and their appearance. Discussing his chances at getting a job in retail, another client observed in a jobsearch session, commented:

Some people, in retail, like French Connection, want a certain look don’t they?

Lack of qualifications and a perception of failure in education were main sources of lack of confidence. Several respondents were so embarrassed about their GCSE grades, that they either lied about them when applying for jobs or didn’t include them on forms and CVs. Many felt that they were at a disadvantage not having a degree and that having one would give them extra confidence when applying for jobs:

Ed [NDI3]: if you’ve got [a degree], you’ve got something to say you’ve done that. Ok, so that you, you might get started, get into a company that you’re dealing with on practicalness, but you could say, look, I’ve done it, I’ve been to university, I’ve been through this, I studied for this, I know everything about web pages, I’m great at it. I suppose you could say that and actually mean it, oh yeah I’m, uh, ok at websites, and I like

doing creativeness, and yeah, I would, would enjoy working for the company, you could actually say 'I've got a degree in it.' So I suppose it puts forward something extra.

Pete felt that he was applying for and not getting entry-level jobs because those jobs were now being taken by graduates.

As described in the previous chapter, mental health problems also contributed to lack of confidence. When I asked Aidan what he was proud of in his life, he referred to battling with mental health problems and in doing so, gave some idea of the barrier that they may present to finding work (p.124). Colin, similarly, referred directly to the relationship between his poor mental health and not being able to get out and carry out odd DIY jobs locally:

Stayed in doors doing nothing. Wasn't doing repairs. Proper period not wanting to go outside. Talking to yourself. [NDI15]

Those with criminal convictions talked about the difficulties they had experienced with employers:

Mohamed [NDI44]: They go, 'you've got a criminal conviction, sorry, you can't'—just things like that. One job I was going to go for and I knew I was going to do it, I knew I was going to get it and in the interview, they asked me 'have you got any prior convictions?' and I said, 'yes' and I don't hear from them afterwards.

Sarah was frustrated at her lack of work experience for jobs she wanted to apply for:

I've got to get the experience maybe but the catch is if you can't get the experience off of somebody, you're in Catch 22. [NDI7]

This left many with a despondent view of competing in the labour market:

Nasima [NDI39]: there's quite a few people that they keep on going for interviews but they never get jobs, it's not a bad example but you just think, 'Oh God, am I going to go down that?' I think it's really sad. Some people try really hard and the amount of places they go to and they get rejected.

The role of educational institutions, peers and family

Respondents spoke about the ways in which they felt school, college, university, peers and family had influenced their participation in employment. Several talked about preparing to leave school, of not knowing what they wanted to do and of not getting any advice from careers services. They felt that they had been neglected:

Sarah: Yeah [inaudible] but it was hard to get an appointment because [the careers advisers] were concentrating on those staying on [in school]. [NDI7]

Pete had wanted to gain media work experience during school, but:

all was left [was] two weeks in a sports shop—not very interesting, stacking shelves, sweeping up, bit of warehouse. [NDI24]

Martine described having felt let down by lack of guidance from her college:

I don't think we got a lot of advice to be honest from them really as to what to do. It's only over the past year I've been applying for positions and that kind of thing, sort of figured out how it all works and that kind of thing. [NDI23]

She also talked about meeting other Masters graduates in a similar position.

Some spoke about their friends in work being positive influences. When I asked Jo if she had any role models in her life, she replied:

People around me make too many mistakes. [NDI40]

While others spoke of unemployed friends as distractions:

Abdul: I'm seeing my couple of friends here, er, there and never wish to stay full day innit? Like, you know, hang around with them, and, but, at the same time, yeah, it was good fun, though, innit? [NDI36]

A few moments later, he said:

I find so lazy because I've friends here— [ibid]

As discussed, families and friends were one way in which respondents found jobs, whether their first ones after leaving school ⁴⁷ or ones they saw as gap-fillers:

Ian [NDI14]: Did a bit of painting and decorating with a LETs training scheme. I think mum introduced me, the son of a friend—it was alright.

Some found their family “more resourceful than anything else” in finding them work, while others felt that:

Ian [NDI14]: Family and friends don't know the right type of work.

Not all families were happy to be involved. Having told me that his dad was trying to find him work at Boots or Warehouse, Tim later said:

[I look for] work just through the job centre. Wouldn't ask family—I would ask my brother for a security guard position but his company don't take them. Don't think he could work with me there. Mum wouldn't take me on. [NDI18]

Some families presented a cultural barrier to work. However, the evidence supports Dale's (2002) argument that while we normally attribute cultural and religious beliefs to

⁴⁷ This supported research which found that in the London area in which Employ Ltd was based, relatives and friends were the main source of jobs for 16 year old school leavers (Kysel et al., 1992).

lack of participation in the labour market by Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, we also need to recognise a wide range of influences. These include the migration process, the labour market conditions in areas of settlement, the expectations, assumptions and prejudices of educators and employers (including outdated views) in the host community and also the diversity of cultural and religious backgrounds of the women. Work was seen as important source of identity and independence for young Bangladeshi single women. When asked to talk about what her friends were doing in life, Nasima immediately replied “They’re all working.” She then said of one friend:

Nasima [NDI39]: Yeah, actually [a friend] called at the weekend, she said she’s working at Powergen and I was surprised, she’s one of those people who came when she was 15 to this country. Everybody used to bully her and make fun of her because she didn’t speak English and now her English has really improved and she’s the one who’s got a job and I can’t believe it.

Sibani’s family wanted her to find a job:

Don’t mind being at home, but [they] want you to do something. [NDI34]

She envisaged a part-time job only:

[My] ‘perfect’ [job would be] part-time probably retail, down west end, or city, big shopping centre, clothes store. [ibid]

Again confirming Dale et al.’s (2002) conclusions, family support was a mixed blessing for Abdul. While his family gave him somewhere to live, his subsistence, as well as opportunities to work in the restaurants it ran, it also partially removed financial pressure which did not help his motivation. At the time of our interview, the World Cup was coming up and he talked about planning to leave the VS in order to stay at home and watch the football. However, at other points, he talked about how he was letting his family down and wasting his life. Discussion of work merged with that of family in Abdul’s accounts in a way which reflected Dex’s findings on the way in which business and family may blur in small businesses, so that their owners feel:

a responsibility to the wider family to offer supportive employment, even when it was not always in the business’ interest (Dex, 2003: 71).

In terms of the influence of relatives’ occupations, respondents were influenced by siblings, particularly when they still lived at home. Dave, for example, referred to earlier, felt a pressure to find work as his younger brother was already earning money as an apprentice welder. When fathers had been in trades (such as pipefitting, painting and

decorating and the leather trade) but were now unemployed or retired due to ill-health and disability, respondents, while proud of their parents' hard work, did not want to go into those trades themselves.

5.5 Conclusion

The chapter has shown the strong impact of school, not only on what respondents did after it but how they felt about themselves and their participation in the labour market. In the main, respondents were not carrying positive experiences of either educational institutions or of learning into their adult life. They felt let down by a lack of guidance and support from schools, colleges and family and were left with barriers that included lack of confidence, mental health problems, language difficulties and criminal convictions.

These experiences were individualised according to gender, ethnicity and culture. Taking ethnicity, the specifically racial nature of Afro-Caribbean rates of imprisonment has just been referred to. Similarly, rates of exclusion from school—although halved in the few years preceding the study, Afro-Caribbean pupils were still three times more likely to be excluded than white pupils (ONS, 2002a).

However, such differentiations were difficult to distinguish from class inequalities. For example, class and race interacted in such a way that many of the issues examined in literature on Afro-Caribbean male experience of school (Berthoud, 1999; Gillborn, 1990, and Sewell 1997) resonated with those of young white men too. Accounts of violence, problems relating to teachers, and behaviour leading to exclusion were similar from both black and white men in the sample. Berthoud (1999) identified a feeling of alienation among young Caribbean boys which he explained as both a consequence and a reinforcing cause of their exclusion:

This may occur at school, where Caribbean boys, perceiving the stereotyped views of them held by teachers, develop a sense of resentment; this is then perceived in turn by the teachers as a potential threat and reinforces the image (Berthoud, 1999: 4).

This chapter has outlined how some respondents felt a pressure to go to university, regardless of which courses they were most suited to and the career opportunities that followed on from their choices. This led to young people becoming what was described as 'reluctant conscripts' to post-compulsory education (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). The chapter has implicated schools, colleges and universities in exacerbating, even encouraging this, by not guiding young people onto the next step or checking young people's suitability for the courses. Those young people who started courses but did not complete them, spoke about, in retrospect, realising that they were not qualified or suited to them and about the difficulties of juggling education with housing, health and employment. As such, the chapter also confirms the argument that some disadvantaged young people experience 'protracted transitions' (MacDonald et al., 1997: 5).

Accounts of making decisions about leaving school chimed with Penn's (1999) findings that little emphasis was given to the world of work in school until it was too late. They also echoed his conclusion that knowledge, perception, belief and attitudes towards skill formation are socially structured and not shared equally, such that the 'least privileged in terms of social background have the least knowledge about how the system operates.' (ibid, 1999: 3) It also reflected research on inequalities in higher education participation, which found, for example, that ethnic minority staying-on rates were higher than for white people's due to taking longer to achieve qualifications (Hagell and Shaw, 1996, quoted in Modood and Acland (Eds.), 1998).

The chapter confirmed that most ex-welfare recipients have considerable experience of labour market participation, especially in the secondary sector (for example, Spalter-Roth et al., 1995). The chapter presents respondents with no illusions about the nature of that work (which they had also indirectly experienced through their parents' work histories) and confirms another study's conclusion that:

the belief that the world of manual work offers the route to better life has been eroded (Smith, 2003: 318).

Work histories that consisted of a series of elementary occupation jobs over a long period of time, as well as those comprising movement between education, employment

and unemployment, seemed to be driven by an attempt to avoid both the effects of experiencing unemployment and the negative consequences of low paid work.

They disliked these jobs' working conditions, their low level of challenge and the lack creativity involved. Notwithstanding differences in experience of work according to age, gender, ethnicity, cultural identity and many other factors (see for example, Tilly and Tilly, 1998), respondents shared a perception of flexible labour market jobs as insecure, exploitative and looked down on both by workers and society's attitude to them. The perceptions of other people were critical. Working in low status jobs was embarrassing to the extent that some respondents would miss them out of any work histories. The evidence supports the theory that status is so fundamental to the value of work that some people, if not in work commensurate with their training, do not feel as if they are working and refer to themselves as unemployed (Sen, 1975).

While they wanted to move away from their experience of working in the flexible labour market, the evidence does not support the conclusion of an early NDYP evaluation that NDYP participants':

rejection of low paid, unskilled work was unspecified – it applied to anything that required them to be in a routine workplace everyday (O'Connor et al., 2001: 16).

The chapter instead confirmed wider research findings that most unemployed young people want to work (Kildal, 1999; Morris, 1999). However, for the reasons outlined above, while the instrumental values of work were important, such as decent pay, these were not more important than values such as status, autonomy⁴⁸, creativity and fulfilment. The evidence therefore suggests that:

motivational structures are far more complex than the economic incentive perspective suggests, personal development and social relations are among the most important motivational factors. Youth in particular want to become involved in their work, to become identified through work. 'My job should give me something personally; it should have

⁴⁸ Desire for autonomy was reflected in the widespread aspiration to be self-employed. Literature on self-employment showed that there was income disparity for workers in this category (Knight and McKay, 2000). While people in sustainable self-employment tended to be male, prime aged, white, married and with some labour market experience, those with vocational skills or lower academic qualifications were also pushed into self-employment through lack of opportunities. Having a father who was or had been self-employed was also a strong influence, as seen in ethnic minority groups, especially Indian and Bangladeshi (ibid).

something to do with me' are typical comments which reflect current attitudes to work (Kildal, 1999: 360).

The fact that policy literature did not capture these attitudes to work was evidence that:

Somewhat perversely, there has been little serious consideration of work in what has been a truncated and narrow welfare to work debate (Peck and Theodore, 2000: 120).

6 Chapter Six: Provider and placement involvement in the VS Option

6.1 Introduction

Drawing on findings from both the initial background survey, conducted between August and November 2001, of the 21 providers delivering the VS in London and the two subsequent case studies researched between November 2001 and June 2002, this chapter presents provider perspectives on four aspects of delivering the option. These are the contractual influences on organisational identity, ethos and survival, the implementation of the contract, communication and relationships with their delivery partners (district offices, jobcentres and placement providers) and the support and development of front-line staff. The final part of the chapter looks briefly at placement provider perspectives on their involvement in the VS.

Teams working on the VS in provider organisations, while differing according to organisational size and other factors, typically consisted of a manager, an office manager (focusing on administration, some contact with clients, such as organising their travel cards), team leaders, client support officers (who dealt with referral and planning out the option for each client), monitoring officers (who visited placements), job search tutors and other trainers for specific courses. In organisations where the VS was one programme of several (both ES and non-ES) being delivered, the option was run by teams ranging in size from approximately 5 to 20 people.

However, the providers were not so large, and the resources devoted to VS were not such, that all the staff in these teams had only one role. So for example, while those responsible for securing and processing referrals only worked on those referrals, others might have been monitoring placements and training clients. Similarly, not all the staff worked solely on the option, the numeracy and literacy tutor at In2work, for example, worked with clients from several programmes, including the VS. Additionally, where

providers had delivered the option for a while, their staff tended to have had several roles within the VS team.

6.2 Challenges implementing the VS contract

6.2.1 Organisational identity and survival

Respondents from both case study providers conveyed a sense of being part of organisations with strong identities. At In2work, that identity was largely structured by it being a Christian charity with religious objectives. Its staff members were all Christian and, unusually, the organisation had a flat payment structure⁴⁹. By contrast, Employ Ltd had a strong corporate identity as one branch of an established, successful national recruitment agency competing both with other branches within the company and other VS providers.

In both cases, management spoke of the challenges created by the lack of fit between their organisational objectives and those of the option—of contractual inflexibilities encountered while trying to adapt their own organisational practices and style of implementation to those of the ES (discussed further below). Both organisations had to consider the contract's financial feasibility but In2work, a voluntary and religious organisation, questioned the appropriateness of its involvement in a compulsory government-run programme. Some of the option's objectives and delivery mechanisms were in conflict with its ethos or value system. Managers spoke of being compromised on a regular basis. For example, one team member spoke of himself and other front-line staff as 'pharaohs' in following the letter of the law in New Deal terms and betraying their clients in the process. Similarly, Paul, In2work's Director, expressed his concern at the potential negative effects of the organisation's focus on meeting contractual requirements:

⁴⁹ During fieldwork, it was in the process of changing this recruitment policy.

Unless I actually meet some of the clients and chat to them, I lose sight of it quite easily. It was very interesting, I was sat in on an induction a few days ago, there I was concerned about something about how clients are treated, but just when you look at the monitoring forms and the statistics and things, you easily lose sight, and from [the organisation's] perspective, we don't want people disempowered and the whole system sloshing around, I don't like the way we join in on that. [CS1PI11]

Managers also described having to continually assess the value and performance of the contracts within the context of each of their organisation's wider performance and priorities. Paul spoke at length about reconciling his priority of making the contract work for his organisation (by, for example, using it to finance other projects) and reconciling that with ES priorities:

Like all the civil service, when you get to the very senior levels they're all very sharp but completely divorced from reality, no idea about how programmes are really run, they've got no idea about our motivation, it surprises me. When I was on the policy action team⁵⁰, I was saying that there are people like me, who, when the ES issue a rule book, read it to see how we can breach it. The civil servants gasped at this concept, I had a conversation today about what can we get away with and how can we push the limits of these rules, it's just that these rules are so onerous and everything that we've got to make them work for ourselves, because we're not doing it to run the ES programme, we're doing it for other things, things we want to do and we make the programme work for us to do what we want to do, or we don't want to run it. I think the ES forget that, I think the trouble is, one of the slight problems about treating us, going more and more commercial, is you risk losing the people for whom profit isn't a particularly exciting, motivating thing, which means you may end up with an awful lot of [private providers], which if that's what they want that's fine. [Paul, Director, CS1I11]

Despite the case study organisations being in different sectors and having differing financial motivation and values, staff in both conveyed the same sense of a common purpose and spirit when describing the importance of ensuring the contract was financially feasible and beneficial to their organisations.

This led to competition between the team delivering the VS contract and other teams within the organisation. For example, Mark, at In2work who had previously worked in the VS team but now worked in the Basic Employability Training team (working with

⁵⁰ The Policy Action Team on Jobs was one of eighteen teams set up by the Social Exclusion Unit's September 1998 report on neighbourhood renewal. The PAT was made up of representatives from organisations involved in the delivery of employment and training services, organizations representing people from ethnic minorities, academics, Government officials and business. It was asked to develop an action plan, with targets, to: reduce the difference between levels of employment and unemployment in poor neighbourhoods and the national average; and between people from ethnic minority backgrounds and the rest of the population (Department for Education and Employment, 1999a).

asylum seekers or refugees) spoke of the declining significance of the VS contract to the organisation. While the survival of other programmes in the organisation had once depended on it, it had become:

the Cinderella project because the Basic Employability project (BETs) brings in the money now. [Mark, ex-member of staff on VS, CS112]

He partly attributed the VS's declining importance to the challenges faced by the organisation in attempting to meet its contractual rules, commenting that although BETs was an ES programme, its delivery required less emphasis on documenting client attendance:

We are fairly lenient on the timesheets ... That's one of the biggest differences in culture between the VS option and BETS. [ibid]

The sense of competitiveness between programmes delivered in the same organisation could also be explained by staff concerns about the security of their jobs which was often conditional on retaining the VS contract. This concern was added to by additional pressures created by, for example, preparing for inspections by regulatory bodies, such as the ALI or the Training Standards Council (TSC)⁵¹:

[PSI18]: Everyone was cheesed off at the effort involved in the TSC ... none of us know if we have got a job.

Managers also spoke of having to consider the team's performance in the context of other providers' performances both in and out of the borough, as expressed by their position in performance league tables or 'traffic lights' as they were also known⁵². This competitive position was a subject of great sensitivity. Although I requested summary statistics on performance from all providers, only one organisation (fairly near the top of the tables) readily gave them to me. Reasons given for not providing the information included fear that I would pass it on to their competitors, that they were "in the middle of compiling them", that they did not have them in summary form, that they did not have

⁵¹The TSC was set up in 1998 to inspect organisations which received government funding to run work-based training programmes. Inspectors looked at the quality of training provided by the organisation in each occupational area and in four generic areas. Each aspect of training was awarded a grade from 1 to 5, with 1 denoting outstanding quality and 5 indicating poor provision with many weaknesses.

⁵² These ranked providers by achievement of job outcome targets.

them to hand and that they were too busy to access them. Many offered to send them on at a later date, but none did.

Unsurprisingly, contact between providers was practically non-existent. There were a few exceptions. In2work had once been in contact with a private provider outside its district in order to arrange a one-off benchmarking exercise together. While sharing best practice and joined-up delivery were discussed in policy literature, staff spoke of such relationships between themselves and other providers being prevented through the time constraints of delivery and by not sufficiently trusting each other—especially those providers in the same delivery district. Christina, a former VS manager at In2work described how the nature of ES district office’s “provider meetings” did not help foster relationships between providers:

They would have the meetings and in public they would say “you have In2work in [name of ES district], you haven’t been meeting your job outcomes, tell us how you are managing it?”, and then we would have the meetings when they would give us feedback after inspections, say, ‘[In2work] did this, this and that, and you did this, this’, and it was quite daunting, so of course that creates a climate of mistrust and hatred within providers. [CS116]

There was a great deal of resentment at the nature of the performance tables and the way in which certain providers were perceived to have “cooked the books” to improve their rankings. Several respondents felt that ‘like was not being compared with like’ and that organisational differences among providers were not taken into account:

Christina [CS116]: a provider who is on top with 100% job outcomes when he has one client, you know...

Christina also expressed resentment at those providers who selected or ‘cream-skimmed’ clients (p.64):

At [In2work] we would take clients left out by the system that nobody else wants, and it’s not the job outcome as such that measures success only, there are many other things like clients staying on the programme for 26 weeks, it’s a major achievement. [ibid]

Those in the voluntary sector felt that the ES needed to acknowledge this difference but also that good work with “difficult clients” was not easily quantifiable in the current performance system. For example, when asked to describe his responsibilities, Kofi, the Career Start Co-ordinator at In2work, started his reply with:

Motivating clients to build self-esteem— [CS111]

And yet Antoine, his Manager, talked about the need to have quantifiable criteria for success in running the VS contract and that:

We can't quantify self-esteem or self-confidence... [CS1I9]

6.2.2 Coping with contractual requirements

Several respondents spoke about the challenges of implementing the contract. A common problem was actually understanding it and interpreting its requirements. Fraser, VS Manager at Employ Ltd, described its contract as:

very complicated, a nightmare for us. [PSI1]

Similarly, Paul, In2work's Director said:

Well, the real negative is the paperwork, we've never hit such a complex system and the processes aren't particularly our strength. [CS1I11]

VS guidance listing all the rules and regulations was provided by the ES. Informally referred to as "the Bible" and "the doorstep", this was lengthy and obtuse:

Christina [CS1I6]: Now who has time to sit down and read 300 pages of rules and regulations, even if you do, they're in a totally foreign language because there are lots of forms and there were only four of us in the beginning, and it was a nightmare, it was a nightmare!

[PSI8]: The problem was the rules you had to follow.

The inflexibility of contract rules restricted the nature of delivery as time was spent, as Antoine, In2work's VS manager said "learning how to get round things, the technical stuff, rules and regulations" and "addressing the grey areas of the contract." There were also considerable resource implications in setting up a contract, which several respondents felt were not sufficiently acknowledged by the ES. For example, while providers continually approached organisations about becoming VS placements, the majority of their 'placement portfolios' were set up when they were initially awarded the contracts. This early work was described as resource intensive. What is more, contacting local organisations and encouraging them to be involved could be frustrating, as some were not interested in taking on VS clients:

[PSI4]: [Name of council] don't cooperate with us – they don't believe that New Dealers should be offered placements.

Once organisations had agreed to become VS placements, the process involved checking that they fitted VS criteria and ascertaining whether they would be willing to take on any clients referred to them, or only some, and carrying out health and safety checks. These and other procedures required by the contract, created delays while the ES processed that paperwork and approved each placement. What is more, if placements were not happy with the clients, moving them was difficult:

Jermaine [Key worker, CS1I5]: sometimes what [the client] has done to be dismissed, you can't inflict that on another placement.

Aside from understanding the contract and the resource implications of setting up provision, a major challenge consistently identified during fieldwork was the amount of paperwork involved throughout the programme's delivery. In the surveys, the paperwork burden was cited as one of the main reasons that organisations withdrew from running the contract. As Paul, In2work's Director remarked:

A programme that requires 100 forms per person is a silly programme, which reflects the emphasis on process rather than the emphasis on outcome. [CS1I11]

Clients had to attend 30 hours per week. This included two half-days on site for training and job search⁵³ and the remainder of the time at placements. All these hours had to be recorded in a weekly timesheet, signed by clients and placements, returned to providers and then forwarded to the ES district office, on receipt of which, providers would receive payment.

Respondents spoke at length about the importance of completing and collating the timesheets and returning them to the ES on time, that this was the key to making the contract financially viable. As Fraser, Manager at Employ Ltd put it:

If we can't demonstrate a client did 30 hours – we give the money back. [ibid]

Another manager surveyed, commented:

[PSI6]: Timesheets are a massive job and very complicated.

⁵³ Although if training took place within the placement, that could be reduced to one half-day per week attending the providers.

Providers also had to ensure that clients completed other documents, such as a weekly form completed with clients at their placements confirming that various objectives of their work experience had been fulfilled. Similarly, equivalent forms completed during job search and training sessions evidenced activity. There were also a series of claim forms that had to be completed (most but not all) with the client on referral, at induction and at other fixed points proving that they had completed various stages in their individual plans. These forms were all worth money to the provider:

[PSI2a⁵⁴]: Personal Development Plans (PDPs) and other forms must be filled in because they trigger payments from the ES.

[PSI13]: There are lots of different claims we can make. There is the initial claim from the Personal Development Plan (PDP) and the individual training plan (ITP), there is the value added (VA) form at 13 weeks, the training claim, then the job outcome claim and the self-assessment claim done at the end.

However, providers also commented that it was a challenge making money from them as:

[PS13] ...there are so many restrictions on different types of claims.

If paperwork was left outstanding, providers lost money:

Christina [CS116]: I did some research and found out that there was a number of forms outstanding, many PDPs and ITPs, which if we did them, we would get another £400,000. It's because they were not chased systematically so I remember sitting one week at home and going over 2,000 client files, and finding out what was missing in each and every file, and I brought this to my manager's attention, "Paul" I said, "this is the money that is outstanding because the paperwork isn't done." He was horrified.

Christina felt that the payment structure was badly designed:

it's got seven payment triggers, and every payment trigger has to have supporting paperwork, so it's an inherently complex system. You've got the three training payments, the PDPs, the on programme, the VA and the job outcome, and it's just stupid, it's a stupid design, so it's inevitable that you'll make mistakes, it's far too complex. [ibid]

Sandra, the jobsearch tutor at Employ Ltd commented on the importance of ensuring such documentation was completed as it was needed as evidence for auditors. Joy, a client support officer at In2work, described "gathering evidence" at client placements:

We take a lot of writing on the premises and then you come back into the office the following day and do the proper writing. You're always looking for evidence of the training ... Say for example we didn't get any satisfactory evidence of them training, then we'll have to chase it up— [CS117]

⁵⁴During this survey visit, two members of staff were interviewed, hence the interviews were recorded PSI2a and PSI2b.

Although the delivery focus was on completing and sending the various claim forms and other documentation to the ES on time and therefore meeting process targets, providers also had to meet the contract's job outcome target in order to stay in a low risk band of the performance tables and not fall to the point that they would face giving money back and ultimately lose their contracts. Fraser, the Manager at Employ Ltd, explained that, meeting the job outcome target of 33% involved tracking "leavers":

[PSI12]: ...at the moment they get a job, track them for 13 weeks, then they are leavers, that is they are only classed as leavers three months after they have left the programme⁵⁵.

While Antoine, VS manager at In2work, commented that there were positive effects to having a VS contract, such that it helped motivate staff and maintain standards, he felt that being measured mainly by the job outcome target was:

A narrow way to judge performance of an organisation—it is the only thing being used – the bottom line. [CS119]

Similarly, Jermaine, one of his team commented:

Success is not just the job outcome for us, even though it is one of our aims, but actually seeing clients develop themselves in terms of their confidence, their self worth, their self esteem, the opportunity to actually see and experience new things and also show what opportunities are there, I think this is success to us as well as the job outcomes. [CS115]

Those respondents who had worked on the contract since the policy's inception spoke about contract changes over time, namely that its requirements were becoming stricter. Several respondents informed me that, at first, there had been no targets but since then, the job outcome target had increased to the point that it was out of reach:

[PSI19]: The targets went from nothing to 40% - so unrealistic.

There was also comment that, as the number of providers grew, providing the option had become more competitive over time. During the survey interviews, one manager reflected on why her organisation had just ended involvement with the option:

[PSI8]: It was not worthwhile, there was not enough money in the contract because there was more and more paperwork, it was hard going, loads of forms, lots of New Dealers didn't want to be on it. Our hand was forced, we were told we were going to get a high drop-out rate [and] there were so many other providers doing it.

⁵⁵ This meant that organisations had to find ways of ensuring they kept in touch with NDYP Leavers. Employ Ltd offered financial prizes to those clients who had got jobs, stayed in them for 13+ weeks, got back in touch and who could provide evidence that they were still in work.

The top-down challenges of complex and inflexible contractual requirements, the consequent paper burden and the increasingly difficult job outcome target were compounded by the challenges presented by the clients. Just as the targets got higher, so there was consensus that the clients had become more challenging:

[PSI13]: It is much harder to shift people on than before.

[PSI12]: The clients are harder to keep because they are sick of it, the hard core, but job outcome targets have risen at the same time.

[Christina CSI16]: Well in the beginning we usually had the easy clients you see, the clients the Employment Service would not hesitate to refer because they were easy, and then as time went on we'd get more and more difficult clients.

A few moments later, she returned to this point, saying:

So yes, in the beginning we had the cream of the cream. One of the advisors used to say, 'we went through the cream, now we're going through the crap'. [ibid]

Part of the increasing difficulty was found in the growing number of re-referred clients:

[PSI13]: They may have been through the programme twice or three times. And most have been with other providers.

Despite this, contractual conditions did not allow providers to claim for re-referrals which therefore made contracts less financially attractive.

The increasing difficulty with clients manifested in unpredictable numbers of referrals arriving at providers. One Manager estimated a third of referred clients failed to turn up to the first meeting with the providers—nonetheless, they all had to be documented:

[PSI119]: I have a big file down the road of all the people who didn't turn up.

[PSI17]: We have to put a note in their file to 'cover us' – we need to prove we have followed procedure.

Therefore, while maintaining the financial feasibility of running a contract relied on having enough client referrals from jobcentres, this could not be assured due to client unreliability. Client failure to turn up was exacerbated by communication problems with jobcentres.

High client turnover was another dominant characteristic of the caseload. A consistent message from respondents was that many clients were lost, if not before arriving with providers, then in the first few weeks after their arrival.

[PSI119]: By 8 weeks, the group would decrease by 50%.

[PSI120]: 40% of people don't start.

[PSI120]: 50% stay 7 to 8 weeks.

In2work informed me that 20% of clients dropped out by 4 weeks, 50% by 16 weeks and that 30% completed the option. The Managers felt that if clients stayed for 16 weeks, then they would stay and complete the option. At Employ Ltd, I was told that the average client spent 11.5 weeks with them and that 75% of clients did less than 13 weeks on the option. Very few clients stayed for the full period. Consequences included providers finding it difficult to plan and budget and knock-on effects on staff retention.

Dealing with the challenges presented by the unpredictable nature of the caseload and high client turnover meant that a common perception was that there were “too many clients for the amount of staff” [PSI13]. This resulted in very limited time with each client. What is more, as outlined above, the structure of the option was not flexible enough, so, for example, if clients:

[PSI112]: ...miss an interview, it can be another 2 weeks to set it up.

Due to such challenges, providers had to make sure that the range and nature of their placements was attractive both to jobcentres and to clients in order to ensure referrals and to encourage clients to stay on the option once they had been referred. The need for a certain number of referrals to make the contracts viable meant that many providers, including In2work, could not afford to cream-skim, whether or not they wanted to in principle, they needed the “mandatory referrals”:

Charles [Office Manager, CS113]: It is a balance between sending back inappropriate referrals and being open door...

In2work had to market its placements to the jobcentres, in competition with other providers in the same ES district. Some providers went as far as to say it was less marketing their provision as:

PSI13: A lot of bribing the job centre.

In terms of approaches to encouraging referrals, In2work selected placements for its clients that were in line with their creative interests⁵⁶. However, this contradicted the contractual focus on achieving a job outcome target. As Antoine put it during observation:

What job outcomes will [we] get from a West Side Story production?

Similarly, Judith, a key worker at In2work, commented:

The thing is, it's very difficult to break into the music field and sometimes if I'm really close to a client I'll let them know, it's a hard industry to break into. Most of them want to go into the music industry.' [CS118]

One Manager in a large private provider with some of the highest job outcomes felt strongly about the negative effect of marketing such placements, speaking about a web design placement, he said:

[PSI20]: I am very reluctant to put them on this. There is a lack of jobs at the end and a lack of recognised qualifications. It is minefield not giving them what they need. Those who choose media should look at job outcomes.

However, regardless of their attitudes towards the extent to which they should adopt a meaningful occupation or work first strategy in choosing client placements, most providers acknowledged that they were also working within certain limitations, the main one being that they had to choose placements from within the voluntary sector only.

6.2.3 Working with partners

Delivering the option involved working with the Employment Service district office and its jobcentres within the district as well as with a range of voluntary organisations providing work experience. This section looks at what providers said about those relationships, particularly at how they felt they impeded their ability to fulfil the contract.

⁵⁶ Such an approach, particularly in schemes working with homeless people, is referred to as 'meaningful occupation'. See an explanation at <http://www.homeless.org.uk/policyandinfo/issues/ete>. Accessed at 18 May 2008.

Relationships with the ES

Respondents spoke about the challenges of communicating with jobcentres during the referral process. These included not being sent paperwork or being sent incomplete paperwork on clients. For example:

[PSI19]: Initially we should have got action plans but these very rarely arrived. All we got was ND1s.

As Jermaine described, this had led to delays and not knowing what to do with the clients once they had arrived:

A client can be referred to us and it takes a while for the paperwork to get here and in that time you can't put the client's details on the system until the paperwork gets here, sometimes they give to the clients to bring to us and the client doesn't do that and we have to ring them. [CS115]

Clients could also arrive that were not expected:

for some strange reason they think they've referred a client and the client turns up and he's not booked to see myself or [name of colleague] sometimes we'll get a ND1 form⁵⁷ and there's no time allocated or space where the person we're meant to see, sometimes there's no name on the client's form, it's just a surname, and there's no time where the client is meant to see anyone and there's no date and you try and look on the system and sometimes they're late and it's an appointment that's gone past and you don't know who this and you have to send the form back saying you don't know who this is. [ibid]

Survey respondents also spoke of clients arriving at providers knowing little about either the NDYP as a whole, the option and/or the provider. One spoke of "the cliff at the end of the Gateway" and, referring to her colleagues, she added:

[PSI9]: We find out more in half an hour than the PAs did on the whole of the Gateway.

They also said that clients were sometimes given the wrong information by the jobcentre—such as being told about a placement that was not, in fact, available. Time-lags together with miscommunication also meant that clients were often told about a placement that was no longer available.

The nature of the relationship between provider and jobcentre was affected by the way in which they communicated. At In2work, while there was daily contact, much of it was

⁵⁷The ND1 is used to refer young people onto the Full Time Education and Training, Environment Task Force and Voluntary Sector Options. The form is completed when a young person has a referral appointment arranged with an Option provider. The New Deal personal adviser will complete Parts 1 to 3 of the form during a Gateway interview. Then they will send it to the provider as confirmation of the appointment (ES, 1999).

by phone and staff mentioned not having met the personal advisers (PAs) they worked with and of not having visited their jobcentres. This was attributed to lack of time and high PA turnover. Employ Ltd had a different relationship with its jobcentres. Based in the same building as a jobcentre, its Manager regularly visited the PAs there. Patrick, the senior placement monitoring officer at Employ Ltd commented:

The jobcentres we work with are excellent. [CS2I2]

Providers who took on difficult clients felt that PAs should give prior warning about their problems, but rarely did:

[PSI5]: The weirdos we find once they're here.

While those who wanted to cream-skim or avoid difficult clients, such as Fraser, Employ Ltd's Manager, commented:

We shouldn't get these referrals in the first place. [PSI12]

It was felt that PAs did not take the time to understand the nature of their clients' barriers:

[PSI7]: What the ES and the government don't seem to realise is that they can't get the jobs because they have loads of barriers to employability.

Later in the interview, the respondent gave an example of a PA sending a client straight to a retail job who couldn't use the till, "she couldn't even tell the time" and that when asked about it later, the PA had said, "Really? I didn't know".

Many respondents felt that PAs could not deal with challenging clients. During fieldwork, several staff expressed the view that they did not inform clients of their obligations under the conditions of the JSA contract or explain the VS provision because they feared confrontation with them. Staff also commented that most advisers were not in a good position to describe individual providers to clients because they had not visited them and did not know what they provided. Another frequent comment was that PAs lacked training and were themselves in high turnover, confirming early evaluation findings (Stern et al., 1999). However, respondents felt that PAs sent them inappropriate referrals primarily to "get them off their books":

Mark [previous VS team member, CS1I2]: The ES don't mind too much because they don't know what to do with clients.

Jackie [Skills for work trainer, CS2I1]: Dumping ground for people they've got problems with. They shovel them in regardless of where they should be going.

Patrick [Senior Placement Monitoring Officer, CS2I2]: I feel as if they are pushed onto the scheme when at the end of the Gateway—pushed, rather than choosing their direction.

[PSI7]: PAs just want to get them off their books.

Judith [Key worker, CS1I8]: They just want to get them off their books and to us and through the system in a way, as long as they've got rid of them.

“Dumping ground”, “get them off their books” and “pushed” were words scattered throughout the evidence, both in and out of interviews with both clients and provider staff. Judith outlined one consequence for vulnerable clients:

Sometimes it's the fact that [clients are] homeless and they still get no sympathy from the job centre, 'who cares if you're homeless? You're signing on.' I had a client that I interviewed last week. He came in really, really filthy, his hands were stained and dirty, he stank. Now he wants to do a childcare placement. Now, no-one in their right mind will place him, his name has been sitting there on my list and I don't know what to do with him. They have said from the jobcentre that they want him to go into childcare. Now he doesn't have a house, he doesn't have a home and obviously he hasn't had a bath in a while, I'm not going to place him near kids. [CS1I8]

ES delays in processing paperwork at other stages in the option also impacted on delivery. For example, delays processing forms approving clients' placements, which needed to be returned to providers before they could start them. Paperwork was again mentioned in relation to another complaint about PAs—that they undermined providers' authority with clients by not sanctioning them for non-attendance because they did not want to process the paperwork involved with that.

Provider relationships with ES district office management were frequently referred to as unequal. While there was frequent communication between In2work and the district office with “lots of chasing on both sides”, Antoine spoke of his constant awareness of his organisation's financial dependence on the ES:

They are the big boss, it is not a partnership. [CS1I9]

He cited the district office's lack of consideration of the impact that its decisions had and how these were often announced last minute and insensitively. For example, he described important news arriving by fax and its consequences:

A simple example is of the £750 being cut for training⁵⁸. It was not agreed, it just happened. It meant a loss of £100,000. We were thrown into the negative. [ibid]

⁵⁸ A £750 one-off payment to the provider for their provision of training to each client.

He also spoke of this relationship as concerned almost solely with the legal and financial aspects of the option, while not offering support or interest in delivery issues. Similarly, a survey respondent commented:

[PSI8]: The ES felt that their work needed to be done there and then. It didn't understand we were also working with other young people.

Christina referred to the impact of tight accountability and the need for continual evidencing on the relationship:

because of the big movement of forms and paperwork, there was a climate of a kind of mistrust as to who received what, 'you didn't send me the form', so very often we used to have written evidence of change ... in case we complained, we wanted to back up what we said, so there was this climate of mistrust that generated a lot of paperwork. [CS116]

By the same token, Antoine admitted that it was necessary to hide certain aspects of delivery from the ES, primarily the discretion used with clients:

That we bend over backwards for the majority of clients. We bend the rules as much as we can – converting unauthorised leave into holiday⁵⁹, for example. [CS119]

Relationships with placements

Respondents talked about the need to maintain good relationships with placement providers and emphasised their importance as a resource. This included not sending the wrong kind of clients to them. They had to make judgements on client chances—how difficult or 'ready' they perceived them to be—and therefore which placements would be likely to accept them at interview. Jermaine, key worker, spoke of sometimes holding back information about clients from potential placements:

We'll let placements find out the bad points in interview because that's up to them. I don't want to disqualify someone before they've even been there. I don't give [the placement] any information. I just ask them if there are spaces and give them the person's name and whether they have experience or not. [CS115]

Staff commented on the importance of only sending more challenging clients to placements which were likely to have some empathy with them. Those who tended to employ supportive staff who were "long-suffering" and could "go further" with clients because it was used to working with 'these kinds of clients'. Larger organisations were also seen as more supportive:

⁵⁹ Attendance rules are briefly discussed in the next chapter (p.194).

Jermaine [CS115]: partly because they were well established organisations – nationwide – who have structures, experience and work within the community...

Others felt that the voluntary sector was often too much of a gentle experience:

[PSI6]: Using the Voluntary sector, other than for the most needy is no good because it is not tough enough.

However some also acknowledged that there were advantages to clients taking work experience in organisations with no commercial pressure including clients feeling that they were contributing and that they were working “for their own community.”

Another respondent described the mixture of care and discipline she felt constituted a good placement:

[PSI13]: [The client] was included in everything, attending meetings and so on, but all the while, without her realising, they were also monitoring her, really included but closely supervised. And we have seen the development in her since she’s been there.

Clients for such placements did not have to be so carefully chosen and therefore less work was involved in the allocation process and in monitoring.

Despite provider recognition that placements had differing attitudes to and abilities with dealing with the client group, some front-line staff, such as Judith, were frustrated, nevertheless, by placements that did not think it was their role to work with challenging clients:

They should take it on board that the clients are not ordinary people but with needs. We’ve been dealing with [the Placement manager] for years and it’s like he hasn’t grasped what the New Deal is supposed to be about, he still doesn’t understand that. It’s supposed to be them and us trying to help the clients, trying to understand the clients, and trying to get the clients to learn work ethics. The minute they make one mistake, that’s it, he’s not having them back. [CS118]

The division of responsibility for clients was another source of frustration. Difficulties were frequently cited with communicating with placements to ensure that they were following VS rules over attendance. Respondents mistrusted the extent to which placements were actually managing their clients:

[PSI5]: When you phone up and ask how clients are, you get two syllable answers. If you phone up and hear that the client is getting on “ok” we sometimes say “oh well we would love to come and take a photo of you with the client and put it in the local newspaper.” Then they are funny about this suggestion and say “oh well to be honest, he isn’t doing very well – he doesn’t turn up”.

Some felt that certain placements just could not cope with them:

Joy [Placement co-ordinator, CS117]: [They have] difficulty dealing with this client group ... Don't know if the Manager can handle the group as a whole. We have to have a meeting to reiterate to them about the client group.

Responsible for monitoring placements through visits, Joy acknowledged that most placements asked her to visit more frequently and that since she had been visiting more regularly, drop-out rates seemed to have fallen.

Others felt that it was understandable that placements would not be able to manage attendance:

[PSI20]: It does happen, you can't monitor, it would take an army of people.

Jermaine [CS115]: Many times their complaints are like attitude problems really, clients skiving and not really applying themselves to their training or work ethics in general, maybe they are idealistic...

While providers had to take into account potentially negative placement reactions to clients, they also had to consider those from clients too, particularly in relation to the limits of the voluntary sector in terms of their range and quality of work environments.

A private sector respondent in the survey commented:

[PSI20]: Try and tell a young girl that wants to go [and work in] River Island, 'you're going to Oxfam.' That is why they drop out. There was a young woman doing an NVQ Admin level 2, she complained about the local charity. I looked at the environment, the office she worked in didn't have a computer, no photocopier and that was one of the better providers.

As might be expected from a private organisation, Employ Ltd staff felt that the voluntary sector was limited in relation both to the scope of placements offered and the lack of paid opportunities in the sector for clients to follow into afterwards. Sandra, Jobsearch tutor, commented:

[The placements are] quite restricted, because all voluntary. Wish could have private ones, would be so interesting ... the voluntary sector is under-funded ... I think quality of provision is affected and also [there is] less variety... [CS213].

Randa, a placement monitoring officer also felt that the option needed "more choices", "more private" and "more interesting" placements in hotels, restaurants, leisure centres, upmarket retail outlets and government agencies.

However, views on the option being improved by introducing private sector placements did not come solely from private providers:

Christina [CS1I6]: The voluntary sector is not up to scratch like the profit making companies, the working environment leaves a lot to be desired, how can you go and persuade a young client to go and work for the Salvation Army? That is one thing and usually they don't have enough work to employ someone full time, that's another problem, the staff who work there are either volunteers or people with very little training experience, they're there because of a mission and they're unable, they don't have the necessary skills to train a young person. So there are a lot of problems there. What we call a quality placement was not really a quality placement.

Such opinions contradicted with other views on the benefit of restricting placements in other ways. The policy's community benefit objective, together with concerns about not creating further barriers for clients, meant that the dominant feeling was that placements should be limited to the local—and therefore that clients should not be asked to travel far from their homes—and culturally appropriate. However some respondents critiqued that approach. Speaking of the local nature of most placements, Sandra, the job search tutor at Employ Ltd, said:

They are all in [same borough as the provider] – I suppose that's a good thing but it doesn't hurt to be out a bit more, as they're literally on their doorsteps.' [CS2I3]

The resources used in setting up a placement—and therefore the need to maintain good relationships with existing ones—the emphasis on tracking attendance and monitoring clients, and the conflicts between providers and placements in exercising these functions led to some providers discussing how they had had to reduce the amount of placements:

Dan [Placement researcher⁶⁰, CS1I4]: [We] seemed to be focusing on a few main providers because it was easier to control clients...

These resources were also wasted when effort was put into creating placements for clients who then stopped turning up:

[PSI17]: Clients say that they want something in particular, we set it up then they muck around and lose credibility.

Therefore, on paper, the providers had a wide range of placements on their books but in reality, only used a few of them.

⁶⁰ This was not a formal job title. He had been recently employed to work on In2work's placement portfolio and contacts with employers.

6.2.4 Staff support and development

The chapter has already described the pressure felt by staff to perform and make the VS option financially successful—in order to both keep their jobs and contribute to the organisation as a whole. They also had to ensure they were competitive with other providers. However, various factors impeded their ability to implement the contract successfully, the main ones being difficulties with implementing the contract and working with partners and clients, the paperwork burden and meeting targets. As the client group got more difficult, so too did the targets. The case load was described as unpredictable, with a high turnover, increasing re-referrals and too many clients for the number of staff.

During delivery, staff largely appeared positive, but, in the context of one to one interviews, they admitted feeling overworked. However, some seemed to get their sense of value from being busy. While observing Charles, the office manager at In2work, dealing with several people's enquiries and requests simultaneously, he turned to me and said:

See, I told you, I am indispensable! [CS1I3]

However, most staff expressed their demotivation and frustration. Judith described the impact of front-line delivery:

you're frustrated, you dread the phone and you go 'aghhhh'—you probably just need to go for a long walk, you know it's crazy, because you'd be at home doing something completely different and you suddenly remember someone you have to place or someone who has a possible solution and it still does your head in after you left [name of organisation]. [CS1PI8]

She also referred to the high turnover of clients:

the thing is we don't keep any after 2 weeks, they move on and another batch comes— [ibid]

Some were jaded and negative about their clients' behaviour towards them. As discussed at the end of the above section, staff often put resources into setting a placement up for clients, who would then not attend. Jackie, the Skills For Work trainer at Employ Ltd, expressed her despondency:

A few value what we are trying to do—only a few. In the workplace, this behaviour would lose you your job. [CS2PI1]

However, staff also described a range of behaviours that they found challenging, such as aggression and physical intimidation. Some felt that they were not trained, or it was not in their job's remit, to work with such clients.

In responding to a question about which activities she liked most in her job, Judith talked about enjoying helping her clients, "having to relate to them, trying to resolve their conflicts" was one aspect of her work that she most enjoyed. However, later, she admitted:

I'd say I prefer dealing with paperwork than actually, yes, coz it's got to the stage where I'm fed up with the clients, I'm fed up with the whole system and I'm fed up of the whole things and, erm, yes, I've always been a paper person and admin / paper person. [CS1PI8]

Towards the end of the interview, she confided in me that she was looking for another job, one that was purely administrative and did not involve contact with customers.

Problems coping with clients were made worse by the fact that managers had focused on recruiting staff with administrative rather than people skills:

Paul, In2work's Director [CS1PI11]: You must have heard the story that when I was first saying, 'let's do the VS option, what sort of people?', we thought we'd get lots of youth worker types and then we realised that we'd made a terrible mistake

He went on to explain what he meant:

I couldn't trust them to fill in the forms correctly, didn't get the paperwork right and we got hammered, so in the end we've had to change the staff, so what we have are good administrators who are personable enough to be able to talk to people, rather than very people focused. [ibid]

Managers acknowledged that team building and staff training were needed to meet the challenges of the contract:

I inherited a team with no admin background at all, they all come to [In2work] to be missionaries you see, but that's not what the VS option mission was all about, so it was all about training people to process information, to work with paper and work on the database, also training staff to be able to work with this new client group. It was a lot of training. Team building was another important thing. [Christina, CS1PI6]

However, while managers arranged one to ones with individual staff members as well as frequent team meetings, several respondents spoke of their frustration at feeling that their own training and development had been neglected. The survey responses on questions about training for staff confirmed the impression that providers did not give staff training on how to work with this particular client group.

6.3 Placement provider perspectives

Placement managers had varying degrees of knowledge about and attitudes to the VS and the role their organisations should play in it, which in turn reflected their organisational remits and work with their own client groups. While all the placements were in the voluntary sector, and therefore, by definition, had a client group that were in social need, this did not necessarily mean that they had empathy for or knowledge about the VS client group.

Placement providers' views could largely be distinguished by their approach to referrals from providers (mainly whether they cream-skimmed or not), the policy itself, the way in which it was run by providers and their role in delivering it. Paula, manager of a consumer advice centre placement that cream-skimmed referred clients, told me that Employ Ltd understood their approach:

I think [Employ Ltd] sift through them as well, so they only send us the ones that they know there's a chance of us keeping them. [CS2PPI4]

Luc, another placement manager acknowledged that his organisation had gained from the supply of free labour provided by the VS:

it's been a relationship that's worked pretty well, because they have supplied us with a steady stream of admin workers which we definitely have used to our advantage, so in that respect, it's quite good, otherwise we would definitely have to publicise that we wanted admin work. [CS2PPI6]

Nevertheless, he saw no role for his organisation in taking on less employable or more challenging clients:

You can tell they didn't really want to do it. Really it was a waste of our time and a waste of their time. Well, it was a waste of our time. I don't know if it's a waste of their time, it was definitely a waste of our time because they were just not interested. [ibid]

When I asked his opinion on what providers should do with the clients he didn't want to take on, he replied that they should find out what their interests are. When I pointed out some clients may not know what their interests are, he commented:

Well then isn't that where [Employ Ltd] should come in, to guide them, elicit from them certain areas of interest or training then, if that's the case, rather than saying 'you're here, you've got to be found a placement' and then just sending them anywhere— [ibid]

Despite receiving a fixed payment for each client, he did not see his organisation as having any responsibility for training where there were deficits in clients' skills:

some of them, the typing skills weren't that good and probably training needs were identified, but I didn't think it was our responsibility to provide the training since they were with Employ Ltd. [ibid]

Such organisations felt that their placements carried kudos. However, other placements acknowledged that the work experience was not always stimulating or what the client had envisaged that they would be doing when they signed up to the VS.

Those placements that did not cream-skim, but accepted everyone, had different views on the clients. They were aware that their clients had problems and might not be job-ready:

it's a really sensitive time in someone's life when they're unemployed, especially after they've left college, you've got all these tremendous hopes. [CS2PPI5]

Len, administrator of a crèche that worked with Employ Ltd, talked about Alia (who has been discussed in previous chapters):

I think her personal circumstances are going to influence things a lot. Um, I think she would like to rejoin the program in a few months to complete. I know she wants to work in childcare, but there are a number of personal issues that she needs to address before she manages to secure employment. [CS2PPI3].

Such respondents empathised with their clients' financial disadvantage and feelings of exploitation. Susan, the manager of a farm placement, described the constraints and structural barriers experienced by two clients who had taken the wage option⁶¹ offered by In2work:

this is where New Deal falls down, lets people down. These young people lived on their own, quite a few personal social problems etc., unemployed. They had their rent paid for them and lots of other benefits. We really have got limited income here and we can't take on staff unless there's funding for it, so I think with the New Deal money, their salary was probably made up to about £150 a week. By the time they lost their Housing Benefit, their, it really wasn't worth their while working I think this is where New Deal, if it's set up, they should still be able to keep their benefits for 'X' amount of time. So for me that's a big area where it's fallen down. [CS2PPI2]

These respondents also empathised with their clients' motivational problems and negative responses to the option and its delivery:

[CS2PPI3]: The trainees ought to be given a slightly better financial incentive to participate.

[CS2PPI2]: I think the one day a week training at New Deal is farcical, that's one of the things I've argued with [name of staff member, Employ Ltd], I've got him here, he doesn't go to that because he'll learn a lot more here than he ever will there, I think they're just sort of paying people's salaries to do this, it's being totally wasted, and that I know a lot of New

⁶¹ At some providers, the NDYP was enhanced by various funds. In2work had some Social Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding to provide wages on the option (see Appendix 1 for payments received on option.)

Dealers have found that really, what's the word I'm looking for, they find it demeaning that they've got to go and do it.

[CS2PPI5]: It was the whole manner, and the manner is 'we have the complete right to be as obnoxious as we like' and it's very much policing. It is but you can do it in a nice way perhaps, because that's what the government's doing at the end of the day, they're trying to create something which is going to benefit people but if the people administering it are doing it in such a bureaucratic and officious way, then of course it's not going to be a success, it's going to get people's backs up.

Such respondents were sensitive to the difference between being a volunteer and being on the VS. Susan spoke of her awareness that a lot of people were there not because they wanted to be, but because they had no choice and she did not have the same expectations of them as those that were there on a purely voluntary basis, and therefore:

[CS2PPI2]: I've always been pretty flexible, trying to fit in the hours to suit them—

[CS2PPI5]: ...when people are volunteering, as far as we're concerned we're lucky to have them, but New Deal I know has a slightly different aspect on things, it's like an element of compulsion, quite a lot more.

[CS2PPI4]: Obviously it helps the voluntary sector but it's not really fair on them if they're looking for paid full time work.

These respondents had different views on how to work with clients:

[CS2PPI2]: It's about treating people with respect and showing them that they are valued—

Helen, manager of a lobbying organisation, talked about what the placement should provide for clients:

[CS2PPI4]: I think [a good placement is] one they're happy with, when the training is there, when they actually get work to do, you don't want them coming and sitting twiddling their thumbs, there is actually work for them to do.

They also talked about the limits of their current provision and improvements they would have liked to see. For example, one respondent talked of wanting to do more with clients – of training them in advice work and not only administration—but said that organisational capacity was too limited for that type of training. Financial constraints were also acknowledged:

[CS2PPI2]: I should imagine perhaps in the private sector there might be people after six months, they keep them on because they've got the funding, but like in organisations like this, without the subsidy from New Deal it's really hard to sort of [pause] particularly in the line of work that we've taken on in youth work and childcare, it all depends, if funding is so uncertain you don't know from one project to the next.

Susan commented on the support that clients needed:

I'm an experienced youth worker so when I came here, that was my role, that I would be the support worker and for me with New Deal, something that I would say that when young people are being placed, there should be someone who's experienced, it's all right if they're

going on the big corporates but especially voluntary sector, if you're dealing with young people that have got problems, they need quite a bit of support on site. [ibid]

While such respondents were sympathetic to clients, not all felt able to deal with challenging ones, even those with experience of the client group:

there was quite a violent outburst and I just thought he's not safe around kids, and I spoke to him about it.

She described what she felt had caused the client's violence:

sort of personal stuff, I think he carried. He was a huge fella, really unconfident and unsure of himself, I don't know, real deep rooted stuff, but you can't—where we've got so many kids around them, it just wasn't appropriate, I saw it and I thought "I can't cope with this". [ibid]

Placements also had different attitudes towards the VS rules and the providers' approaches to them. Helen described not having a pedantic approach to timesheet completion:

[CS2PPI5]: I've said to [client name] sometimes, 'hang on a minute, you weren't there', but she says 'if I tell [the placement monitor], it's going to cause no end of the fuss and it's best just to leave it like that and she's happy like that, so I'm fine with it.

Len outlined his approach:

[CS2PPI3]: We're fairly flexible so long as we know what's going on—

He added:

We don't sort of time them to the minute but we do make a note if they're not in any day. We do differentiate between being absent and being sick. Certainly if we don't hear from them for a day or two we will phone them at home to find out what's happening...

Helen felt that the placement was micromanaged and disapproved of Employ Ltd's motivations:

The hours seem to be completely paramount. The first time when we had [name of client], we had [provider's] ring up absolutely all the time, being very officious and nasty, well, not nasty, but just really—really harsh and 'is she there, is she this, is she that?' which doesn't endear the employer to the service. [CS2PPI5]

She described a recent conversation with the placement monitor:

she's very curt and I said '[name of client] has done this and that' and she said 'I'm only interested in the hours'—she said that! I was gobsmacked, I could not believe that she wasn't interested, especially as it's a very creative project.

She continued that she had then "fed it back to the manager":

I just said, 'I don't want your people to be saying this kind of thing because it's really not on', it's just putting out that they're not interested in what the work is, they're only interested in the hours.

Len told me how a client's completion of NVQ units as part of a childcare placement had been jeopardised because the provider's NVQ assessor had not visited to assess them. He also felt that there was too much focus on completing forms:

[CS2PPI3]: they check that the trainees have been in because they sign the time just to say that they have obtained it—

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that taking on a VS contract created considerable pressure for provider organisations. Respondents described knowing that they had to deliver process and target outcomes in order to keep their jobs. They also had to maintain their competitive advantage both within the organisation and with other providers in the ES district.

Pressure was also created by conflict between the contract's objectives and the organisational ethos and values. This was exacerbated by difficulties with understanding the contractual requirements, contractual inflexibility and burdens on resources from the legal requirements, the bureaucracy, the resources required to set up provision and problems working with partners.

They described a range of communication difficulties with personal advisers at jobcentres, which they felt represented inefficiencies, lack of training, lack of understanding of clients but also a desire to push them on. In their relationships with district offices, providers described feeling unequal and unvalued.

Relationships with placements were characterised by a need to take on board the particular organisation's attitudes to their role in the policy and their ability to handle clients. Those perspectives were further outlined in the final section of the chapter and were largely characterised by whether they felt it was their role to take on all clients or simply use the VS to recruit the best unpaid staff they could from those clients referred to them.

Pressure on providers was made worse by an increasingly difficult client group characterised by high turnover, unpredictability and a growing number of re-referrals. This left staff feeling busy and overworked, unable to deal with clients properly, but also neglected themselves. As a consequence, some no longer felt able to work with the client group and were looking for other jobs.

The chapter presents a picture of staff who expressed concern for their client groups but whose work was impeded by the organisational and political pressures and contradictions created by implementing and delivering the VS contract. The next chapter discusses staff perceptions of their clients and their views on delivering training, job search and support to clients with personal problems.

7 Chapter Seven: Delivering the VS Option

7.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on what staff said in interviews about their front-line role working with clients, while also drawing on observational evidence of delivery. It begins by discussing the ways in which staff perceived their clients and the causes they attributed to their unemployment. That is followed by a discussion of their approaches to managing client attendance, which included using discretion and also amending paperwork in order to avoid dismissing clients from the option. Differing views on supporting clients with personal problems are also discussed. The remainder of the chapter looks at the provider's delivery of two other components of the option, namely jobsearch and training.

7.2 Working with clients

7.2.1 Staff perceptions of their clients

When respondents were asked to describe their clients, they referred to their personal attributes, often starting by mentioning gender and ethnicity. They used descriptions such as “pick and mix” and “like a Benetton ad” [PSI11]. Several managers overestimated the proportion of minority ethnic clients and the proportion of minority ethnic people in the local population. Their comments showed awareness of the barriers presented by ethnicity but also oversimplification and distortion of the relationship between ethnicity and unemployment:

[PSI4]: To be honest I find the number of whites worrying—I mean they don't have any barriers, brought up here and so on.

[PSI20]: Young Asian males tend to have work.

[PSI8]: There is a higher proportion of English people on the New Deal⁶².

Some respondents began describing their clients by referring to their lack of qualifications:

[PSI1]: Three quarters of them have literacy problems. Five per cent have degrees.

[PSI3]: ...totally lacking any qualifications, lacking literacy and numeracy.

[PSI2a⁶³]: ...some GCSEs, some no basic skills. Communication problems, literacy and numeracy problems—they don't know their five times table.

One respondent spoke of the barrier that a lack of qualifications presented for one of his clients:

[name of client] came in for the first interview and [member of staff] patted him on the knee to make contact and he started sobbing. He was too scared to go to his placement because he couldn't read or write— [PSI2]

He continued:

he couldn't do the induction week because of the paperwork and people taking the piss out of him. [ibid]

Some attributed their clients' unemployment to poor schooling and the difficulties that it created for picking up new skills on placements:

Christina, Placement co-ordinator [CS1PI6]: It's because they come from very bad school background, they have no other skills because they haven't developed anything else—

However, not all clients were described as lacking qualifications:

Jermaine, Key worker [CS1PI5]: It's very mixed, we have from graduate to semi-skilled to no skill all.

Descriptions of clients were sometimes given as a list of personal problems. These included “not having had a start [in life]”, physical and mental health disability, learning disabilities and special needs, homelessness, drug problems and criminal convictions. They were discussed under the umbrella of a “multitude of problems” and “difficulties with the system.”

⁶² When I queried this, the respondent clarified that she was referring to white people.

⁶³ During this survey visit, two members of staff were interviewed, hence the interviews were recorded PSI2a and PSI2b.

Family background was also spoken about in a way which was consistent with interpretations of disadvantage as transmitted through a culture of poverty (p.29):

[PSI8]: [Their] families hadn't worked. It was the norm—a culture of unemployment.

[PSI3]: It's their families – who are also on benefit. You see them with their children and think 'they'll be our clients next.' They know the system inside out, very practised at giving excuses, know how to milk it.

[PSI2a]: One young man had 'principles' but who was a nice guy nevertheless. One principle that he wouldn't let anyone touch his mother, would go to prison defending her. His mother's partner hit her and so he beat him up and went to prison and has just come out. Now he's homeless, as his mother won't take him back and he accepts that.

[PSI6]: It is hard to get them out of [name of borough]. Canary Wharf could be a million miles away—[they have a] reluctance to go on the underground.

That respondent then added that they were still very dependent on their family and that:
they are uncomfortable at what we consider normal. [ibid]

One manager who had worked with young unemployed people for over twenty years spoke of fathers proud to take their children to sign on at the jobcentre for the first time, describing signing on as a “rite of passage.” She laughed while saying that she often recognised clients' surnames because she had worked with their fathers, even grandfathers, in some cases.

Whether staff had empathy for clients' problems or not, they tended to conflate major personal problems, such as homelessness, with those more specifically linked to employability and attitudes to work. In some interviews, “negative attitudes” were included in the list of personal problems described above, while in others, respondents differentiated between them, with one respondent, for example, stating that his clients had “attitudes not problems.” However, despite asserting that their clients had these negative attitudes to work, there was no discussion of their actual work experience or how it had impacted on their attitudes. Respondents also did not differentiate between clients' attitudes about work as opposed to those about the option. Only a few included the nature of provision in the reasons they attributed to their clients' negative attitudes, de-motivation or non-attendance.

Aside from the reference to families passing on negative behaviour, there was little discussion of how the negative attitudes they perceived in their clients were linked to their previous experience of welfare, although there were some exceptions, such as Mark, who had formerly worked in the VS team at In2work, who wondered at the effect that school might have had:

Lots didn't like the system and for good reason, but that didn't mean that they were demotivated necessarily by not ever having had a start. [CS1PI2]

Judith talked with empathy about clients who did not want to be on the option:

you get some clients that do not want to do this option and feel they have been forced onto the option and they come here already with their backs up, with an attitude and carry that through out, the short time they are on the placement. I say short time because they are determined not to do it and within a week to 4 weeks, they make sure they get themselves out. Some will tell you at the interview stage that look, 'this is a waste of their time' and he doesn't think that he's going to last long. But the thing is of course the jobcentre said you must place them in this or that. And they don't exactly give them a choice. As long as they're signing on they have to go on something. It's like they're calling the shots and clients sometimes feel pushed and come in quickly and go out of the system quickly. [CS1PI8]

Some conceded that clients might feel exploited and let down by the nature of the voluntary sector work experience provided on the option:

[PSI20]: You go into charitable organisations and the working conditions don't bear any resemblance to the real world. The voluntary sector is wrong [as a provider for the VS]. It may stop people getting work. I have nothing against charitable organisations but all they are doing is receiving free labour.

What is more, some acknowledged, as discussed in the previous chapter (p.171), that being re-referred, "coming to the centre three or four times" could be "quite a dislocated process" [PSI4] for clients.

The opinions discussed so far were given in the context of staff receiving limited information about their clients from jobcentres on referral, spending limited time with them once on the option as well and in the context of clients not always being willing to talk to them:

[PSI1]: They may turn up without a CV or any idea of what they want to do. They do arrive with a client form from the job centre but this may have nothing on it.

[PSI4]: One woman turned up when I was away, the person running the centre went through a whole interview with them and then they found out that she was actually already on the option, but sat through a whole interview without saying a word. This person had also been dismissed from the option previously.

As such, some staff commented that they did not understand some aspects of their clients' behaviour:

[PSI1]: Why do [clients] say yes to an assignment and then not go to it? Why do they go on sick leave?

The hope that my research might shed light on such questions was one of the reasons given by In2work for allowing me to conduct my research with them.

7.2.2 Managing attendance

The previous chapter looked at the providers' organisational and managerial responses to taking on a VS contract. This section looks at how individual staff worked with clients. The majority of the 30 hours that clients had to complete on the VS each week were spent at placements, with only a half-day per week attending providers for on-site training and job search. All these hours had to be recorded in a weekly timesheet, signed by clients and placements.

Every interview in the provider survey emphasised that getting clients to attend the requisite hours was one of their biggest challenges:

[PSI12]: Attendance is always a problem.

This respondent's comments were typical: "they don't commit to 30 hours", "they don't turn up" and "they don't want to be here". Jermaine described how hard it was to keep a client on the option:

[if] you put them somewhere, where they haven't asked to be, it's even harder. First sign of trouble, they'll give up. [CS1PI5]

Respondents spoke about having to use discretion to ensure that clients were not dismissed from the option:

[PSI12]: It's pointless to terminate their referral because they just get re-referred.

Staff tended not to be forthcoming in interviews about this aspect of their jobs. This silence was broken by only one person who in response to being asked how many clients they used discretion with, replied "all of them"—adding that without such an approach,

there would be no clients left on the option. Observation at the two case studies confirmed that record of attendance on timesheets was often not accurate.

Most staff used discretion by doctoring the clients' timesheets to meet the requisite number of hours. VS rules divided non-attendance into authorised and unauthorised absences and within that, there were different rules on the number of days allowed for emergencies, sickness and holiday. Jeremy, who managed a placement delivered by In2work, explained how he substituted unauthorised absences with authorised emergencies and holidays in order to keep his clients absences within the limit allowed:

One client was coming up to six months. Hadn't taken her exams yet. I informed the VS option team and then went ahead and changed two unauthorised attendances to a holiday and a home emergency—that's reasonable as she hadn't used up all her days. [PSI1]⁶⁴

This use of discretion to amend timesheets was confirmed by my own participant role as a placement monitor at Employ Ltd. Having visited a client in her placement and accurately recorded the number of hours she had attended that week and the previous one, I returned to the office with the completed timesheets. Randa, one of the placement monitors, looked through them and said that she would have to return to the client and "re-do" the timesheets as the client would get dismissed on the basis of the low number of hours I had recorded. Soon after, I was taken out of the placement monitoring role. In view of these observations and the stresses recorded in the previous chapter it seems unlikely that these cases were exceptional.

Respondents also described doctoring the paperwork of those clients who had left in order to improve job outcomes. When I asked Antoine, In2work's VS manager, how he thought other providers kept themselves at the top of the 'traffic lights' (the performance league tables), he suggested that they were "cooking the books" about when clients have left the option in order to improve the job outcomes and that it was "easy to fiddle" because "nobody checks up."

⁶⁴ Jeremy's interview was coded under placement provider interviews, but he was both a placement manager (of a placement delivered by In2work) and a member of staff.

Staff spent a considerable amount of time trying to get in contact with those clients who were not attending, either by phone or by letter, encouraging (and sometimes threatening) them to attend. Some even spoke about going beyond the requirements of their job, with one respondent describing going round to a client's house when she didn't turn up and standing at her door saying she wouldn't leave until the client went with her back to the provider's. Judith, described trying to get in touch with a client:

I tried to call her and each time I called her she told me she's drying her hair or she's doing this or doing that and can I call her back. I eventually had to text, each time I rang she put down the phone. She'd make sure the connection got cut off or she'd switch off her phone. Eventually I had to use my mobile. Because I felt she knew In2work's number to call her, she still disconnected the phone. I eventually had to text the message to her and I rang the jobcentre to say 'look I have done this, this is the last resort.' [CS1PI8]

Some staff rationalised a tough approach with such clients who didn't attend:

We get clients phoning up and saying, 'I won't be able to get there today' 'Why not?' 'Because I'm in Birmingham' 'Well, we're open until 6 – so we'll be waiting for you, otherwise, you will be dismissed.' [PSI6]

Shortly afterwards, she commented that you had to be straight with clients and that some younger members of staff were too soft with them.

Respondents listed a range of reasons given by clients for non-attendance, including domestic problems, appointments related to health, housing, including homelessness, social security issues, having to attend court as witnesses and family funerals. However, they focused on the reasons they did not believe—the interviews were filled with cynical comments about their clients “excuses”:

[PSI3]: Excuses have included “no soap powder” “I went too far on the tube – so I didn't come back” and “the heat kept me asleep.”

Some staff were keen to show that they knew the scams their clients pulled. One respondent told me “I've been through the system, on benefits” and therefore “I know all the tricks in the book” and that she told clients this before they started giving her all the “same excuses.” Other respondents had similar opinions:

[PSI7]: [They] know how to play the system. [We] have no control over that, neither do the Employment Service PAs.

One respondent spoke of the effect of listening to these “boy who cried wolf” explanations:

[PSI19]: Initially you are sympathetic to problems but you soon harden up.

Negotiating with clients, tracking their movements, evidencing them and doctoring paperwork took up so much time that staff admitted they were left with little time, energy or motivation to carry out any more in-depth one to one work on barriers to employment:

Antoine, VS Manager [CS1PI9]: Lots of paperwork takes the focus off the clients. Even if client support officers are not money conscious, they still know the impact. [This is] a tension to live with.

Christina, former VS Manager [CS1PI6]: I did not like processing client sheets, focusing on little signatures here and there but I understood the importance of that, because clients would often say 'I didn't say that'. I felt that the Employment Service focused too much on these things and not on what the real provision was all about. You've heard that before haven't you?!

7.2.3 Providing support

Many staff had empathy with their clients' personal problems. One Manager talked about the struggle to survive financially in the city:

[PSI6]: Those living in their own council flat can't afford lunch. You always know when you say, 'aren't you going to go out to lunch' and they say 'I'm not hungry.' We all sub them here, but don't admit it to each other. It is too much to pay, once you have the electricity bill, laundry etc.

Speaking of his homeless clients, another remarked that trying to get work while trying also to get a flat left them in a "catch 22." Respondents who felt that supporting clients work through their personal problems was central to their role spoke of client issues with which they had been involved. Having been asked to give a success story, one respondent gave an example a client he had worked with early on in his organisation's delivery of the VS, one whom had been precariously housed:

[PSI1]: [my colleague] took the client down to the local housing office and put his name on the list – he got a place, then a job.

After which, he added:

there are success stories. [ibid]

However, respondents also described their limited ability to support clients who had barriers such as drug problems:

[PSI6]: Even if they had a drugs counsellor, the flimsy structure still can't deal with them.

In discussing the limits of their roles, staff tended to also comment on the limited support provided by the NDYP as a whole. They criticised the uniform approach of the option:

[PSI13]: The New Deal is so restrictive. It acts like everyone is the same – doesn't take into account individual needs.

Six months was also felt to be too short a period of time to work with clients because:

[PSI6]: In times of full employment, there are lots of reasons why these people are not working – 6 to 10 of them have major problems. These need more than 6 months.
[Interview no. 6]

Acknowledging their clients' problems, such staff felt that their role involved:

[PSI6]: a bit of TLC and understanding.

[PI2b]: to boost self-esteem and the language to talk about themselves.

Sandra, Jobsearch tutor [CS2PI3]: Patience and to be open-minded, you need to understand their barriers and relate to that, and to put my experience and knowledge behind. Don't force your opinion on them.

[PI2a]: [Clients] all like to talk about themselves and have someone listen.

Kofi, the Career Start Co-ordinator at In2work, described the value of his employment history in sales and as a church leader in providing him with the crucial leadership skills that he felt were key to working with this client group. Jermaine felt that counselling and pastoral care were most important, adding:

You've got to have compassion! [CS1PI5]

Such staff tended to reject any authoritarian role:

We don't want to behave like teachers. Instead we provide a lot of encouragement. We find out why they're not attending. [PSI13]

Another respondent, working for a provider that had used extra funding to set up team projects for clients that were in addition to normal VS provision, described their organisation's approach:

We normally get the team [of other clients] to write a letter to the missing person, saying 'we are missing you, and need you to finish the project, you're making it hard for everyone.' This usually works. If it doesn't [the person] is kicked off. [PSI11]

More sympathetic staff said that it was important to become the client's "friend first", but that this could take time:

When he first arrived, he wouldn't look me in the eye or acknowledge me in any way by saying 'good morning'. Didn't respect personal space, would come right over, lean over you to get timesheets signed. [PSI2b]⁶⁵

⁶⁵ During this survey visit, two members of staff were interviewed, hence the interviews were recorded PSI2a and PSI2b.

A few moments later, he continued:

after about 9 weeks, we got a rapport and now I know that the guy respects me. [ibid]

They also commented that being associated with jobcentres and potential benefit sanctions⁶⁶ did not help in gaining client trust. One respondent said that clients only tended to open up and tell the staff about their problems when they were at the point of being dismissed.

Those staff who interpreted their clients' problems in terms of negative attitudes saw their role as one of motivating clients. One manager commented on drawing on her psychology qualification to work with clients. Another respondent talked about making things fun being the "key part to motivating" her clients. Such staff also tended to think that getting involved in clients' personal problems was not in their remit, that there should be specialist agencies to help the clients and that they were not professionally equipped to deal with them. While they talked about the need to refer clients, there were few examples of this happening.

7.3 Delivering jobsearch, training and work experience

7.3.1 Placements

As already identified in the previous chapter, cream-skimming was used by some providers and by some placements at the point of referral. However, it also took place at various other points. Respondents at In2work described their waiting lists for placements as a "keep it fair, first come, first served" system. However, when Judith, one of the staff responsible for placing clients, talked about those she judged job-ready, she was quite open about making an effort to place them as quickly as possible.

⁶⁶Sanctions were applied for refusal to enter the VS once they had reached their maximum period of unemployment, for failure to attend, being dismissed and misconduct during participation. They could reduce JSA or withdraw it and be imposed for fixed lengths of 2 weeks (4 weeks if repeated within 12 months) (DWP, 2002). For a discussion of the concerns about sanctioning NDYP participants, see for example the TUC's evidence in the House of Common's Select Committee on Work and Pensions' (2002) third report.

As I see clients I just put their names down and they come on that and there's the first come first served, unless I see an outstanding client and I know I can't leave this for now, I've got to get this guy somewhere and I'll do that real quick. [CS1PI8]

By contrast, more difficult clients were treated differently:

[PSI6]: Some we keep in here for ages – no one can place them. They are just not ready.

Deliberately not placing clients was a device used by some providers. The same manager talked about the function of their week long induction:

[PSI6]: This week is for weeding out the job-ready.

Employ Ltd also kept some clients unplaced beyond the induction period. During observation, I spent some time sitting with such clients—some of whom had been “waiting” for placements for some weeks. Their negative reactions are outlined in the next chapter and also in more detail elsewhere (Mitchell, 2004a). Jackie, the Skills For Work trainer at Employ Ltd, acknowledged that there were problems with this approach:

The individual plan doesn't work, if you've got somebody sitting there for five days a week [inaudible] a lot of people sitting around waiting to be placed— [CS2PI1]

However, one respondent justified it. She spoke of a homeless client and said that she would not put him forward for a placement to then be rejected because it would be bad for his morale. As described in the previous chapter, providers also did not want to jeopardise their relationships with placements by sending them challenging clients.

In terms of managing the clients' experience of placements, observation of provider staff visiting placements confirmed that the emphasis was on making sure clients attended and on evidencing their work. Providers talked about sometimes having to put new procedures into place at placement organisations. Antoine, In2work's VS manager, gave his definition of an unsuccessful placement:

Well, a placement that I honestly wouldn't see as being a success is a placement where we've continually had to support in terms of visits, in terms of setting up systems, in terms of helping them to quantify on paper exactly what it is that clients get out of a placement, is a place like [placement name]. A lot of claims but nothing definite in terms of delivering the placements, they've been delivering the training but not as much of the work experience as one would like to see. But I won't call it failure either, because even the clients, some of them say they enjoy it, but what they really are enjoying is the training and the fact that they can go and turn music into a CD— [CS1PI9]

Observation and staff interviews showed that staff spent a fair amount of time fire-fighting on behalf of placements as various problems with individual clients arose. Providers frequently ended up taking a mediating role when some aspect of the client-placement relationship was in dispute. Here Judith talks about a childcare placement:

Now my client noticed a 10 year old boy beat up, a child younger than he was and she decided to get involved and she swore at him and the placement heard about it and they rang me. I tried to resolve it but it wasn't really going anyway. And a New Deal personal advisor had to be involved and the four of us had a chat together that we kind of gave her a warning and all that and it was resolved. [CS1PI8]

Respondents acknowledged that between managing attendance, evidencing and reacting to problems between client and placement, monitoring the quality of the work experience itself could get neglected.

7.3.2 Training

One half day's training per week in a qualification up to NVQ Level 2 was delivered to VS clients. This section outlines what staff said about the training that their organisation provided. Respondents described the way in which the training element had been pared down over the years that they had been delivering the option. Whereas organisations had previously offered a wider range of both in-house and external training courses, they now tended to provide a handful of courses in-house only.

Training was now seen as a low priority compared to the resources focused on arranging referrals and managing attendance. Respondents attributed the move away from external training to several factors. There were difficulties arranging external training to fit in with the programme's structure:

[PSI1]: The NDYP works on the assumption that many courses are roll-on and roll-off but in reality they aren't and the courses aren't available.

There were also problems monitoring client attendance on external courses. Respondents therefore acknowledged that providers now offered a restricted number of courses, mainly in-house:

[PSI13]: It is due to the lack of funding. There is only so much that we can offer in-house.

Despite the literature stating that the VS provided qualifications up to NVQ Level 2, training offered in both survey and case study providers tended to be either short courses or NVQ Level 1. Examples included NVQ Level 1 in Health and Safety, NVQ Level 1 in Customer Service and a Food Hygiene certificate. Some placements were arranged with in-built training, such as the computer maintenance placements set up as an Intermediate Labour Market (ILM)⁶⁷ with European Social Funding at In2work and placements at crèches which included NVQ Level 1 in childcare.

While a short course, such as Food Hygiene, could be achieved, the interviews and fieldwork revealed that, even those clients who stayed on the option for the full six months could often only achieve several units towards an NVQ in the time provided:

[PSI12]: Clients also think that they are getting the full thing. There is no way you can get an NVQ in 6 months.

He then told me that only two or three clients had got a full NVQ in the years that Employ Ltd had been running the option. He added that:

[Employers] don't understand that units towards is not the same as the NVQ. [ibid]

Respondents therefore felt that six months was too short for any real training to be done. Some commented that there should be more flexibility at the end of the option in order to allow clients to complete qualifications. Therefore, respondents spoke of the limited value of the training provided:

[PSI19]: NVQ Level 1 is also not enough of a qualification to compete to get jobs.

One referred to the training element as “a complete waste of time” because the clients “don't rate the qualifications and neither do employers” [PSI1].

A trainer on In2work's computer maintenance programme did not think it likely that many of his clients would get work. They were being trained to be self-employed in the IT field, yet he did not feel that they had a competitive chance. The qualification they

⁶⁷ ILMs provide waged temporary work of community benefit for the long-term unemployed, with support to move into the mainstream labour market. The best known UK example is the Wise Group, established in 1983 (Marshall and Macfarlane, 2000).

would receive if they completed the course was too basic, their communication skills were insufficient and on top of that, they needed to have their own transport.

One respondent commented that clients were not suited to the NVQ because it had moved away from its practice base and ‘now the emphasis is on the written word’, she continued:

[PSI6]: they are a mockery because standard responses are put in to pass and that those that can fill them out best, can’t do the work.

Respondents also mentioned challenges providing numeracy and literacy training, partly because clients did not sign up for it. This was partly attributed to the stigma of acknowledging problems with basic skills. One staff member at In2work described how the name of the numeracy and literacy course had been changed to “office procedures”, with the idea that a course with an administrative name would not be stigmatising, in an attempt to encourage clients to attend. One to one tutoring on literacy had also been advertised to clients but had had very low take-up. This was confirmed in observation—the full-time designated numeracy and literacy tutor only worked with one or two of the 100 clients on the option at the time of fieldwork.

Staff also admitted that they could not provide appropriate training for clients with existing qualifications:

[PSI12]: [The NDYP] works for people with no experience. But I feel for graduates.

When respondents were asked about the training methods they used with clients, they were generally surprised and made flippant responses, such as Jackie:

A clip round the ear. [CS2PI1]

Asking one Manager about the qualifications and experience that a member of his staff had to train clients on an IT placement, he replied:

He was a programmer who couldn’t find work, so rather than sit at home, he offered to come in and train. [PSI2a]

Others, such as Sandra, jobsearch tutor at Employ Ltd, focused on the disciplinary side of working with the client group:

You have to put your foot down all the time. [CS2PI3]

One Manager commented that one of her staff was suited to working with the VS client group because she had worked in a remand prison and therefore was “used to dealing with young men” [PSI4].

An emphasis on controlling, rather than working with, clients was symptomatic of the challenges that staff faced in coping with client behaviour, particularly in groups, in the context of compulsory participation. It also reflected the low motivation expressed by staff and that they had not received sufficient training themselves at dealing with their client group. Several respondents remarked that they would prefer to work with clients on a one to one as opposed to group basis.

A few providers tried different techniques. As referred to elsewhere, one provider put the clients into teams, encouraging competition through setting up league tables and scoring them on various individual and group activities, such as making presentations, completing application forms and coming up with ideas for community projects. One respondent spoke of using role play and mock interviews but that his clients had difficulties taking these seriously.

7.3.3 Jobsearch

Providers also had to ensure that clients completed three hours of job search per week (or the equivalent by the end of the 6 months). They provided a designated job search room on site and computers, newspapers, stationery and sometimes a telephone, and the sessions were run by one or two members of staff. This is Sandra, describing her role:

Helping people to complete applications, help prepare CVs and cover letters. [CS2PI3]

As with the management of placements and the delivery of training, the focus was on fulfilling contractual requirements by making sure that clients turned up and stayed for the allotted time, and that they signed in and out of the sessions. Dealing with clients who did not want to be there was something that staff found difficult. As a result, some

tutors allowed the clients to sign off and leave the sessions before they had actually attended for that number of hours.

The contract also required evidencing of individual job search activity in the sessions. While the forms for this purpose were designed to list concrete examples of, for example, the positions that clients had applied for, in practice, they were completed using standard phrases, such as “the client has read the newspapers.”

Cream-skimming, as during other parts of provision, took place during jobsearch. The jobsearch tutor at Employ Ltd commented that targets meant she only used her ‘bank of contacts’ with employers for clients she considered the most employable. While they did not feel a need to justify this filtering out of able clients, such an approach could have been rationalised by those staff who felt that:

[PSI13]: more able clients shouldn’t be on this option. But there’s no alternative.

Although the job outcome target had been increased, I was struck by the way in which respondents were more comfortable talking about how their clients did not get work and reasons behind that, than they were answering the question “can you tell me about some success stories?” In several organisations, even one that described itself as “one of the top ten providers”, this question met with silence. When it was answered, several respondents referred to clients that had been on the option when their organisations had first started delivering the option. Another one replied “the odd person gets a job” [PSI7]. Several respondents replied to the question by commenting that there were fewer job outcomes from the contract as delivery, in general, was more difficult because they were being referred more difficult clients.

When job search tutors discussed the ways in which their clients looked for work, they tended, as with their general descriptions discussed earlier, to talk about their personal failings rather than the challenge of structural barriers such as labour market conditions. For example:

[PSI11]: Not many [have had] experience in sustainable proper jobs.

They spoke of lack of focus and motivation and other faults:

Jermaine, Key worker [CS1PI5]: It's to do with how much you want to put into it.

Jackie, Skills for work trainer [CS2PI1]: very immature, more immature than they should be.

Patrick, Senior monitoring officer [CS2PI2]: No clear direction of where they want to go. They haven't got a clue.

Sandra, Employ Ltd's Skills for work tutor, spoke of Bangladeshi families telling clients they couldn't travel too far, that this had made them fear change and that they wanted "things handed on a plate." She felt that clients had to "understand what is out there", that they were always looking for the "perfect job" and that they needed to take what was available and to experiment. Similarly, Joy, at In2work, who had a placement monitoring role on the VS team, commented:

They all want to be a star! [Laughs] Most of them want to be, you know, DJs, pop stars— [CS1PI7]

Others said that their clients needed to push themselves beyond their comfort zones, by, for example, looking for work outside their local areas:

[PSI17]: We encourage them to go further into London. They don't want to. It's all to do with distance. [They are] very reluctant.⁶⁸

Some staff criticised their clients for not being prepared to take jobs in elementary occupations, while others commented that such jobs were:

[PSI13]: ...dead-end work and [the clients] are right – we encourage them not to take this.

While staff discussed the ways in which clients were lacking in certain attributes or were not approaching the labour market in the right way, references to structural barriers, such as this from respondent, were rare:

Jackie, Skills for work trainer [CS2PI1]: There is age discrimination and there are only a few junior positions so it is difficult to get a foothold and they lose confidence and drop out.

Few respondents, even job search tutors, described the local labour market or their knowledge of or relationship with local employers. Employ Ltd was unusual in its inclusion of occasional trips to local job fairs and its distribution of application forms

⁶⁸ Staff opinions on the jobs that their clients should apply for were also in contradiction to their attitudes towards placements, namely that they should be accommodating in terms of being more supportive, local and culturally specific.

received from large organisations in the area such as the post office and some supermarkets. At In2work, I spoke with a member of staff who had been recently recruited to start developing that side of provision. During fieldwork, I learnt that when In2work had first started delivering the option, that they had had employer presentations to clients but that this had not continued.

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the ways in which staff described their clients. They attributed their unemployment to a “multitude of problems” and gave interpretations of their family background similar to those of culture of poverty, underclass and transmitted deprivation theories. Staff did not tend to discuss their clients’ previous experiences of either work or welfare and the effect that these might have had on their current approaches to VS provision and the labour market. However, they did acknowledge that they had limited information about their clients when they arrived and once working with them, even if there was time to get to know them, that clients did not always trust them enough to disclose personal information.

Nearly all respondents spoke about the problems created by lack of client attendance. They described having to use their discretion to amend timesheets and that such doctoring of the paperwork to meet contractual obligations took up delivery time. When not describing that element of their work, staff gave their perspectives on how they worked with their client group. Some felt that it was right that their role should involve supporting clients in working through their problems but that their ability to do this was limited, due, for example, to a lack of time, training and qualifications.

In discussing their role managing the work experience element of the option, staff again focused on evidencing attendance, although other aspects of their roles that were mentioned include negotiating between clients and placements when things went wrong with the placement.

Respondents were critical of the option's training element. Criticisms included that the qualifications obtained were too low, the NVQ was not a suitable qualification both because it was difficult to complete in the 6 months allowed and that it relied on documenting learning, which not all clients were able to do. Staff described the decline of the training element over the course of delivering the VS, in, for example, the reduced choice of external courses offered.

Responses on how jobsearch was delivered again conveyed the central importance of fulfilling contractual requirements for attendance and activity by completing timesheets and other documents. When providers were asked what their role was in this part of delivery, they tended to reply by listing the resources available, rather than describing an active role assisting clients with looking for work.

When talking about their clients in relation to jobsearch, respondents rarely gave examples of their clients finding work. Instead, staff tended to be quite critical, describing a range of qualities that they attributed to their unemployment, including lack of motivation, lack of focus, lack of work experience, cultural barriers, and aspirations which were variously too high and too low. There was little discussion of structural barriers. While cream-skimming was again evident in the way in which staff chose certain clients to help in the process of finding work, by, for example, putting them forward for certain jobs, in general, there was very little evidence of provider engagement with employers, local or otherwise.

8 Chapter Eight: Client experiences of the VS option

8.1 Introduction

This chapter largely discusses evidence gathered from the two case studies between November 2001 and May 2002 in the form of individual interviews with clients and staff, a focus group interview with clients and observational material. However, it also draws on the visits made in the survey conducted from August to November 2001.

As discussed previously, the team leader at In2work—who had invited me to conduct my fieldwork—commented on the organisation’s lack of knowledge as to why clients left and, by implication, the need for client feedback. Similarly, a trainer at Employ Ltd had remarked that clients did not feedback, they just voted with their feet and left. This chapter focuses on client experiences of provision. It starts by providing some context to that discussion by looking at the ways in which clients described being unemployed, reflected on their pasts and talked about their aspirations. That is followed by discussion of their experiences starting the option, then of their participation in its placement, training and job search elements and ends with discussion of their views on the NDYP VS more generally.

8.2 Reflections and aspirations

Chapters one and two looked at some of the assumptions made about young people that contributed to the formation of the policy. These included that they had low aspirations, did not plan or think ahead and did not have preferences for work because they had not had any work experience. Early evaluation of the VS option also identified that providers did not know enough about their clients and recommendations included the need to further personalise their relationships by finding out about their clients’ life histories and difficulties in current circumstances. To continue the thesis’ presentation

of its respondents' experiences of, and influences on, participation, this section briefly reviews their descriptions of being unemployed and reflections and aspirations for their lives more generally.

8.2.1 "Wasting my life"

While some alluded to the difficulties living on a low income, of "just being able to manage" and of being led into trouble by peers, many referred to a pervading sense of waste and lack of purpose. They expressed embarrassment and regret that they had wasted time and not done as well as they should have. These feelings were coupled by a sense of having fallen behind others:

Ed [NDI31]: I do look ahead, but I want to, like, get into college, or get a job, which is hard. If I was rich I'd just go straight into college, I wouldn't even think about it, but I think I want to get things to work and I need to get a career, and if I go to college and study, and get my degree, then I'll be 25, and, it takes at least five years from doing A levels and university. So, it's going to be like 24 or 25 and does it make it too late, am I too old, really to get a good job and career?

Jo defined the beginning of unemployment as when everything "went to pot" and:

I just became unemployed and I haven't the foggiest idea of what to do with myself and I still don't. [NDI40]

Later, she described one year as "a very, very lost year—very wasted." Some, such as Abdul, continued to feel like this about time given to the VS:

Probably sounds yeah, like I'm wasting my life, innit? [ND136]

Respondents described spending a lot of time indoors and alone when they were unemployed. They referred to "being indoors vegetating" and activities such as watching TV and playing video games. These were often solitary activities. Ed spent a year at home after leaving school having become addicted to video games from which he felt a sense of belonging in virtual communities. Negative consequences of his addiction included truanting from school, running up phone bill debts for which he was kicked out of the family home.

Some felt a pressure from their families to get out of the house and do something, to "stop vegetating" but they had few social networks outside of family and, in some cases,

isolation was also exacerbated by poor mental health. Colin described being unemployed after coming out of prison. Socially isolated and spending a great deal of time at home, he became quite paranoid. He spoke of time spent at home looking out at the street and, for example, seeing cars with electronic equipment left in them and thinking that the police had left these as set-ups to catch criminals. However, while he referred to himself as paranoid, it is worth noting that as an Afro-Caribbean man, he was, at the time, seven times more likely than a white adult to be in prison (Palmer et al., 2003).

Male respondents also described spending time outdoors hanging out with friends, during which they often got into trouble by vandalising property, for example. For Aidan, this resulted in having to do community service. Similarly, spending time with his friends meant drink and drug taking and stealing:

Yeah, we're all the same group. But me and Nathan are sort of like fixed up like, decided that with them we just turn into dick heads. It is really bad, they hot-wired a car the other night. [NDI32].

By contrast, relationships with girl and boyfriends were described as having more positive influences. These included, what could also be construed as negative pressure, being a source of motivation or influence to get jobs or return to college:

Sibani [NDI34]: [My boyfriend] is working in a bank (in city). I met him through a wedding. See every week. He says 'Do something! You're just wasting your time.

8.2.2 Aspirations

Respondents' work aspirations could be described as ranging from modest to ambitious. Those with normative aspirations talked about wanting jobs that carried some status, such as administrative work or that were within large, well-known and successful companies. When asked what he aimed for in future work, Aidan replied:

Erm, just work my way up in a successful company. [NDI32]

Such aspirations were often tied to their consumption of various products. For example, respondents talked about working for well-known high street retailers or for the companies that made the video games they owned.

Regardless of having few qualifications or little experience, respondents aspired to jobs that required them because such jobs were seen as high status. Despite being aware of the realities of the flexible labour market and what it could offer, they had unrealistic perceptions of their ability to move away from the jobs in elementary occupations that they had done in the past. Similarly, the aspirations of those in their twenties with no qualifications who believed they could go to university, change direction and improve their job prospects, seemed unrealistic. Conclusions from quantitative research confirm that qualification levels in the UK increase slowly after 19-21 years old and are negligible after 30 years old (Steedman, McIntosh and Green, 2004).

Of those who had ambitious aspirations, some wanted to work in the creative industries and this desire was often tied up with notions of celebrity:

Dave [NDI27]: The future, ummm, I guess to own my own media company, my role model is Bill Gates.

Alike [NDI21]: Don't laugh, will you, [I want to be] a stockbroker?'

Jobs in elementary occupations were seen as stigmatising across the interviews, as somehow no longer acceptable. It was understandable how respondents' perceptions of this stigma could lead to the normative aspirations expressed in many interviews for middle class or professional ideals of work—for the office jobs mentioned above or for jobs that tied in with mainstream consumer messages, such as a job in a well-known retail company.

On the other hand, respondents also conveyed aspirations to celebrity status through work in competitive media industries, something which could not be seen as normative or realistic. The formation of these latter aspirations can be understood in the context of media pressures related to consumption. They could also be understood as serving a function in coping with past regrets and current barriers (Rowlingson, 2000).

Work was also instrumentally important to other short and long-term personal aspirations—for example, to getting their own flat in the short term and buying their own home in the longer term, the latter connected to forming a family. The way in which work and housing were talked about in that example reflected a sense of order in what had to be achieved.

Forming families and the possibility of committed relationships were talked about as things that would happen in the future when jobs and some financial stability had been obtained:

Ian [NDI14]: [I] want children, but meeting mad girls at the moment, not focused on girls now.

Katherine [NDI12]: [I] think quite far ahead, about settling down but not right now. Kids may be in the future—Want to live life, things want to do before children: steady job, be sure about the father and give more to the child than just coping. Guys are 'rootless'—always trying it on, more than Manchester! North, south, east, west, how do you know they haven't got a woman in the other side of London?

Martine [NDI23]: I don't know, I guess get married, have kids, it's going to be difficult!

This perception of work as being achieved within a sequence of other aspirations also operated in the context of arranged marriage. Abdul spoke about the timing of his marriage being attendant on his being more financially stable and having a job. Several women spoke about putting off arranged marriage until they had worked. Male respondents would group the achievement of work, educational and personal aspirations in a sequence which was both normative and which included an image of them as consumers of goods and property owners.

Ian [NDI14]: Next 6 years, making hits—enough money to make family. By 30/35 years old, own a studio in London.

Des [NDI12]: Buy flat, bigger car—certain things I want.

Abdul [NDI36]: I did have goal to get car at the age of twenty-two or something or to get job but it didn't happen.

8.3 Starting the VS

This section starts by looking at respondents' experiences of the Employment Service prior to joining the VS—their experience at the jobcentre, (including relationships with Personal Advisers), on the Gateway stage of the option, their response to being referred to the providers, and, in some cases, previous experience on the option. The remaining sections look at their experience of their initial referral interview with providers, of induction and of waiting to be placed.

8.3.1 Being referred

Many of the clients referred to In2work had been on the Gateway stage of the option for longer than was admitted by ES rules and were referred to as “overstayers”. They had three choices, namely to find a job, join the VS or face losing JSA. Such respondents spoke negatively about their experience of the ES at the point they became overstayers—there were numerous references to feeling “pushed” off the Gateway:

Alike [NDI21]: I've got a good [Personal Adviser] so they won't push me to go anywhere.

Rachel, who had had a positive experience at her jobcentre and was doing the placement and training of her choice, felt that many clients were not as lucky:

It's not like it for a lot of people, a lot of people get put in places where they really don't want to be I think. [NDI37]

When I asked how she knew this, she continued:

I can tell because of the way that [the Personal Advisers] were approaching me, the things they were saying to me, basically if you don't do it you're not going to get any money, so you've got to do it or find a job. [ibid]

Diane described how this jobcentre pressure led to the cycling or churning between jobs and welfare to work discussed in the literature (p.24):

Diane: I always seem to just get any job so that I don't have to sign on, because the whole stress of going into the Job Centre, handing in your book, I know it's a little thing but the looks you get, just the hassle you get, I'd do anything not to come back to this place and that's the reason why I've had so many jobs and ended up quitting, because it's not jobs that I want. [NDI33]

Respondents spoke of feeling processed by the Employment Service:

Aidan [NDI32]: Just felt like a piece of meat, really. Just like, kind of sign on and, I don't know, no will to be on a job, really, you know.

Noor [NDI38]: [the Personal Adviser] just told me briefly what it was about and then he gave me papers, a detailed description of what it was and then I had to sign loads and loads of forms to agree to it.

This perception of being processed was not helped by the lack of time spent with PAs and their high turnover, identified in the literature (p.21), and also described in both discussions with clients during observation and in interviews:

Client: They said I could either go to college or this VSO. G: *How long did they spend with you?* Client: About half an hour. G: *Was it the same person that you've met each time at job centre?* Client: No, different people.

Uy [NDI25]: I have been with 3 or 4 people (Personal Advisers) since first signing on. I don't remember their names.

Clients also spoke about being unable to make choices in the context of being threatened with benefit sanctions:

Sean [NDI10]: They basically said I had to do this or my money would be stopped, because it was quite late I had no other options to do anything so—

Nasima [NDI39]: Because I was going to be kicked out, he said "If you don't go to this place, that's it, that's the end, you're not coming back", so I had no choice in the end but then again this place is alright.

Focus group respondent [NDI29]: I was like seven months overdue or something [over the time limit allowed before having to enter an NDYP option]. They were getting a bit mad at me, and one New Deal woman got sacked, another one come and she started sending me somewhere every day basically, at 9.00 in the morning, until I come here, I said "enough's enough, I'll cut my losses and do this".

Sarah [NDI7]: My case worker, I got a new case worker and it became apparent because sometimes I'd go and she wouldn't be there, I wouldn't see her for four weeks or so and suddenly my time was running out for being on New Deal, and I was given this careers advisor and they said they had this media course, and I came here and they said basically I have to get on this course, because I have overstayed on my time, so I didn't have much choice because it was either that or sign off and sign back on again.

The sentiment that respondents had no choice was expressed throughout the interviews. When asked what she would suggest would improve the programme, Sarah instead replied by referring to lack of choice over whether or not personal advisers put clients forward for jobs:

I don't know because there's not really any point me saying [inaudible] what I want to do, because at the end of the day if they find a job which you can do, they're going to put your CV for it. [NDI7]

Where respondents were put forward for the VS, they spoke about being given only a limited choice of providers:

Sean [NDI10]: They didn't really talk about that, they didn't really talk about the kind of companies, they just talked about jobs and I remember him saying, 'there's a place called [In2Work]', and I said 'is that the only place that does web design for New Deal people?', and he said 'yeah', and I said 'well that's crazy'.

The accounts conveyed respondents' perceptions that no one was listening to them:

Sarah [NDI7]: I just stated that the main reason I want to do the media course, I don't really want to do the computer course but that seemed to fall on deaf ears.

Many interviewees expressed resentment and anger that the system did not care about them as individuals, when describing, for example, being pressurised into accepting being put forward for jobs that they were not interested in or which they considered inappropriate:

Nina [NDI4]: They wanted me to do painting and decorating!

Diane [NDI33]: They're not helpful. I can give you a little example. When I went to see my New Deal adviser, another New Deal adviser said to me, because I was telling them about what I want to do, like I don't want to keep on getting jobs what I don't want. You know what the guy said to me? He said "look, I told you this before, the only way you'll get out of not getting any job is if you get pregnant."

She continued:

I was like "I don't want to get pregnant just to sign on." [ibid]

Equally, there was distrust about the extent to which advisers were prepared to put forward jobseekers for jobs that they did want:

Sean [NDI10]: Yeah, basically [I] turned up and got one of those kind of personal advisors who turned round after about three months or something, or two months and said, 'look I've got this job for you, it's in Tesco's', it was like 'please.'

I asked if they knew his background, to which he replied:

I don't think they bothered looking at my CV, I think I told them 'I'm looking for graphic design work', he just said, 'look, you won't be able to find it'. Really lazy. [ibid]

Winston's perception was that job vacancies were withheld by some advisers:

Yeah, this is the cheek of it now because it's a very sham business, but a woman took the job out the drawer and she goes, 'here, this sounds more [inaudible] you can't do it you haven't been on Jobseekers long enough.' I said 'okay then, fair enough, why have you got the job sitting in the drawer?' She looked at me and laughed. I said 'this is fucking liberties man.' [NDI22]

He added:

people want jobs, jobs are there but they hold them back so they can communicate a number and say 'this is the amount of people signing on' [ibid]

Winston's feeling of being neglected and uncared for extended to cynicism about the NDYP's real objectives:

The government's way of spending people's tax money and then claiming to say 'yeah, these are the people who are eating out of taxpayer's money', which is a load of bollocks at the end of the day, especially when the jobs are there but people can't get them until they've been dictated, why, because they want them to do low paying jobs which you end up doing in the first place. [ibid]

Sean felt that the lack of care at one private provider that ran the Gateway and VS options of the NDYP option, stemmed from his advisers being primarily financially motivated by the targets:

they were just doing it for the money, they didn't really care about whether you found a job, what kind of job you got or whether you're going to [inaudible] as long as you shift so many units, it's like you might get a bit extra. [NDI10]

As outlined above, respondents felt that one of the ways in which this lack of care was expressed was in being forced to attend interviews for jobs that they did not want. They spoke of various techniques for avoiding such interviews:

Aidan [NDI32]: The hardest [job vacancies] that I know never turn up. I was silly enough to tell them in the first one I'll do bar work and shit like that, and the next time I went in it was like, 'oh we've got a job in here', so they made me apply for it and I was like, 'shit.' So after that I just put stupid ones like photographer's assistant, oh, and IT expert—

Focus group respondent [NDI29]: Sometimes, you go for a job interview and you say 'I'm addicted to crack cocaine and if I work in a shop I'm going to rob everything.'

Nina talked about the ways in which she tried to ensure she was not successful at interview for the jobs she had been forced to attend, such as wearing inappropriate clothes and not making eye contact. She referred to jobcentres as depressing places, places that you went into happy, but came out stressed, adding that it was alright if you had contacts in them.

In the context of these negative experiences of signing on, some respondents described how being referred onto the VS became a way of escaping that pressure:

Diane [NDI33]: But at least now I know I've got at least until June to do this work experience without getting hassle from the Job Centre, because I'm actually on the New Deal scheme so they can't hassle me, I don't have to go there!

Both in interviews and discussions during observation, some clients spoke about their resentment at speaking to their personal advisers, during the Gateway and previously, about the possibility of the ES putting them forward for apprenticeships or particular training courses and of having been told that this was not possible:

Focus group respondent [NDI29]: I really want to study, not do all this but because I don't have a choice, I have to do it, because nobody understands. I need to go to college.

Positive experiences of jobcentres were largely dependent on good relationships with adviser. Good advisers were seen as those who gave clients their time and made efforts to arrange suitable placements:

Nasima [NDI39]: we have a personal adviser as well and she was like really, really, really good, she's so helpful and if you don't understand anything, she'd really [pause] if ever I had any problems I'd just phone her and say 'what can I do?' and she was really helpful, she was really good.

While there were positive cases, many clients arrived with a fearful attitude towards the option, often from having been threatened with benefit loss. Such people had a combination of a passive approach, with one person commenting "you don't ask questions when you haven't got a choice" and another, during a referral interview, expressing frustration with the process asking "How many people do I have to see?"

Fearful attitudes towards the VS were sometimes reinforced by previous negative experiences of the NDYP and also by frustration at not understanding why they had to repeat elements of the option, particularly when there had only been a short period of time since they were last on it:

Ed [NDI31]: I said, 'look, I've only just come off, so why do I need to do the induction anyway?

Apart from the repetitious aspect, clients also spoke about receiving contradictory advice from different providers:

Sarah [NDI7]: So every place you go they're saying nothing, they're telling you the opposite from another place so I've heard it all about different times on my CV, you can do this, you can do that, it's just [inaudible] on the same level sometimes.

8.3.2 The referral interviews

In my first case study (In2work), I sat in on some referral interviews. Several were carried out each day by the two members of staff responsible for referrals. They took place in a screened-off section of the reception area, tended to last not more than 15 minutes, and were designed to find out what the client wanted to do but were also about

getting basic information about the client, which may not have been provided by their jobcentres.

Each client would be given a short list of placement types during the interview, such as retail, IT, warehouse, admin, childcare and music. The staff would briefly describe the organisations running the placements under each category, possibly also showing the client some literature from those organisations, such as a leaflet. Different placements were sold to the client in quite different ways, depending on the staff members' particular views and knowledge of those placements and whether vacancies existed. Having asked clients to pick their top 3 choices, the staff would explain that their first choice might not be available. Leaving the client in the reception area, the staff member would then return to the office, check the availability of the placements they had discussed and begin phoning those organisations up, describing the client and trying to book an interview there and then.

The extent to which the clients got their first choice or accepted second or third choices appeared to be a combination of what was available on that day (although there were waiting lists for some placements, putting clients on them seemed to be discouraged), how knowledgeable the client was on arrival about what was on offer and how assertive they were in negotiating with the provider.

Interviews with both clients and staff and observation revealed that clients regularly arrived at In2work without understanding either what it did as an organisation or what they had signed up to on the NDYP VS. For example, one arrived in a suit having understood from his communication with his personal adviser that he was attending an interview for a job. Another man arrived thinking that he would be able to continue attending a course he had enrolled for prior to being on the New Deal, at the same time as attending the VS. In such cases, referral interviews were taken up, less with choosing placements and more with first talking through any misconceptions or lack of understanding that the client might have about the option.

Similarly, those clients who were mandatory referrals tended not to be in a position to discuss their choices in any assertive way. Instead, observation showed that they found it difficult to make their three choices in the limited amount of time available and not having discussed it beforehand. Once they had made those choices, they tended to accept a placement in any of them, regardless if it was their first choice.

Some clients did know about In2work and had been referred to it on the premise of being enrolled on certain placements which they had discussed with their personal advisers. However, at referral interviews, they often still accepted that they could not be placed at their original choice:

Dave [NDI27]: They offered a website program teaching, that's mainly why, this one here [at In2work] I also looked into A Plus which is PC maintenance and stuff like that, so when I came to [In2Work] I asked about them both, A Plus was full up so I thought 'do web design'.

Katherine [NDI12]: Wanted Graphic/web design at [In2work], but it was full, so there was space on A Plus. It wasn't my first choice.

While accepting the situation, such clients sometimes expressed feeling duped in being presented with a choice of placements when in fact no choice existed:

Focus group respondent [NDI29]: I only got [name of placement], that was it, there was no choice...

Focus group respondent [NDI29]: I didn't have a choice, they just put me straight to that place. I didn't have time to think about anything, they said it was very good! [Laughs] It's not what I expected.

Many clients commented on the limits of only being able to work in voluntary organisations and not having access to private sector companies:

Focus group respondent [NDI29]: Right now, there's not enough choices. They give you a choice yeah, but there ain't really a—if you say you want to [work in] a warehouse or you want to be van driver, they won't give you DHL and Furniture Village...

Focus group respondent [NDI29]: They try and get you a suitable place, try and get you somewhere, you know, it's not their fault that they get all the shit places for you to work, you know. Because I think a big company might not want to take me on as people to come and get experience with them, they get all the crap places where they do need people...

At Employ Ltd, clients arrived at the providers for induction and only after starting to attend the provider regularly for job search sessions, they were interviewed by a member of staff and their placements arranged. This is discussed in the next section.

8.3.3 Induction

Following the referral interview, both case study providers asked clients to attend half-day induction sessions, which were either on that day or within the next week. Observation showed that the sessions were almost entirely composed of explaining the rules and regulations of the option and asking clients to fill in forms⁶⁹. This gave an authoritarian and ES-centred perception of the option, rather than conveying what the providers and their associated placements had to offer or providing an opportunity to get to know clients.

In interviews, clients confirmed their dislike of the focus on explaining rules and filling in forms as well as boredom:

Focus group respondent [NDI29]: So you have a whole day here where they talk about the rules.

Noor [NDI38]: We didn't do much actually, we did some paperwork but after we did that, we just sat there, I'm thinking 'give us something more to do, don't make us sit there, give us some more'

Winston commented on the religious ethos of In2work being incorporated into induction:

Kofi told us about [In2Work], [that it was a] Christian community and that you can't work there unless you are Christian. [NDI22]

There was also no time given for individual clients to talk about themselves either to the person leading the session or to other clients. The atmosphere was one in which clients said very little, except to express their not wanting to be there. At In2work, one striking aspect of the form-filling side of induction was that staff asked clients to complete forms using standard phrases, which they wrote up on the board, rather than leaving clients to fill them in individually. At Employ Ltd, the person running the sessions was under-confident and nervous. This led to his finding it difficult to communicate with those clients who did not want to be there and who disrupted induction. More than half the

⁶⁹ Observation notes of paperwork completed or handed out in one induction included client handbook with rights and responsibilities, grievance and discipline policy, 'Health and Safety Explained' and 'Be Safe' booklets, and ES/provider forms relating to support and supervision, employment assessment, training needs, ITP, NVQ and training reviews, client support and welfare details and travel expenses.

induction session was filled by a health and safety video which he had put on and then left the room.

8.3.4 Waiting to be placed

At In2work, after the referral interview and induction, clients did not have to attend again until their placements were set up. From talking to clients and staff, this process could sometimes take a week or several. It was also not clear how many clients did not return. As discussed elsewhere, providers either did not collate some information or were not forthcoming in disclosing it.

After induction at Employ Ltd, clients were asked to continue attending for jobsearch and employability sessions and informally told that the better their attendance, the sooner they would be placed. The placement officer would then pull clients out of these group sessions over the following days and interview them about their placements. While I did not observe one of these interviews, clients suggested that they were quite in-depth and that they felt that the staff member had made efforts to get them suitable placements:

Diane [NDI33]: I had a discussion with [Placement officer], he was really good, he was good, he is good because he listens to you. The first person out of all of the Job Centre, Social, Benefit and all that who actually finds out 'what do you want to do, what kind of thing?' and he listened to me, he said 'okay, because you want to do this I'm going to try and get you into this and it will help you.'

However, having had these meetings with staff about their placements, some clients would then wait a considerable amount of time before they were actually placed. Sibani described waiting for the placement officer to arrange her placement:

to tell the truth, think this place is so boring. They haven't helped in any way. [The placement officer] comes in and says 'I'm getting there'. All they do is check you're here. Don't ask how you are looking for work—I'm always asking [the placement officer about my placement]. The sooner I get out of this place the better... [NDI34]

Later, she commented on the frustration of not being told explicitly why they were still waiting:

I don't know if there's a problem, they should say why. [ibid]

The uncertainty and the implications of not being placed also created a range of negative feelings. Noor went on to compare the experience to being a patient:

I waited four weeks just to get this placement. With me, you don't make me wait, that's the thing, it's like when I was in hospital, don't make me wait for five minutes, I just get so angry, 'why are you making me wait?' [NDI38]

Staff explained this by saying that their attendance was not good enough, that they could not find them placements or that they were waiting for the paperwork on setting up the placement to be processed by the ES.

When clients were asked about the jobsearch and employability sessions they attended while waiting, many commented on the negative impact of being forced to attend sessions that were unstructured, which they described as “sitting around”, “watching the walls” and “watching paint dry.” This experience of time as “dragging” when combined with the compulsion was compared to “doing time” at prison—“the punishment of coming in here.” Aidan talked about the disempowering effect it had on him:

Aidan [NDI32]: That's what I mean, it like totally changes your frame of mind, you know, you're trying to look for work and if you're going to this place that is a shit hole, it don't make you feel that confident at all.

This type of provision was also something that some clients had experienced before:

Jo [NDI40]: It was a training scheme a lot like this, erm, where people just sit around.

Observation confirmed the unstructured nature of this provision. While formally called jobsearch and employability sessions, in reality, they were half day periods when clients, as they described it, were asked to sit in rooms and could do whatever they wanted as long as they were behaved and did not cause disruption. Many clients also verbalised a common sentiment of feeling stigmatised by having to spend time, in group sessions, with other clients:

Noor [NDI38]: Actually most of them were very different, I didn't have anything to talk to them about and that's what I don't like, it's like you don't have specific help for you, it's like everybody's just putting you together.

Observation of non-verbal behaviour confirmed the negative attitudes towards attendance and included clients keeping coats on and hoods up or hats on, drumming tables, listening to walkmans loudly, asking if they could be excused, doodling and scribbling on paper, getting up and walking around or sleeping.

The perverse consequence of Employ Ltd's approach to placing clients by asking them to attend these group sessions first, as evidence of their employability or commitment to the option, was acknowledged by Fraser, the VS manager:

It's a vicious circle, placements depend on attendance, so if you don't show, you don't get placed. [PSI12]

Although some clients responded to the situation by using the delay to try and get off the option by finding a job:

Aidan [NDI32]: Well it suits me, coz I don't want to be over there for voluntary work. So I'm glad.

8.4 Work placements

Chapters 4 and 5 addressed some aspects of clients' personal lives that influenced their participation. This section looks more at the nature and delivery of work experience and what clients found either motivating or negative about it. It draws on individual interview and the focus group responses to questions about work placements and on observation of placements.

8.4.1 Barriers and motivations

One initial demotivating factor mentioned by many clients was the difference between the description of their placement given by either the Personal Advisers or provider staff and their actual experience of it:

Sarah [NDI7]: When I came for the interview, they said they've got media facilities and all that, but then I get here and they tell me they haven't even got a camera so I've talked to people at [In2work] and they've gone, 'speak to your advisor when he comes in'.

Sarah, was one of several respondents, who spoke of placements that did not have enough for them to do and which mirrored the unstructured nature of some provider provision:

There is a lack of teaching here. [Inaudible] just sat using the computer, which is a bit annoying. [NDI7]

The unstructured nature of the work experience and the quiet environment of some placements were confirmed during visits where clients were observed, left, much like they were at providers, to entertain themselves, often using computers.

Another client on a crèche placement commented that there were so few children that she was not getting the experience she needed and would not be able to complete her NVQ in childcare:

Focus group respondent [NDI29]: I said 'no, I'm not doing nothing, I won't get a qualification from it', that's why I want to go to college, but I still think, well because I've been [inaudible] I'm going to get a qualification then, then this crèche thing, if I have a choice to go and go somewhere and do something that I want, because I'm not really doing nothing there, one kid, sometimes two, that's nothing.

Not only did clients feel that such placements were not a proper work environment, but being quiet and not having anything to do were further signals to them that they were stigmatised and not valued. In contrast, they were motivated by being given responsibility, being kept busy and not doing work that was overly-repetitive.

Another demotivating aspect of some placements was that they tended to create hierarchies of their volunteers, placing NDYP clients at the bottom of them. During observation of Alike's placement, I noted that she was kept at the back sorting clothes, while an older, white male volunteer was put on the till. However, in interview, clients such as Alike expressed negative views about the type of people they encountered, either staff or customers, in their placement provider organisations:

Alike [NDI21]: With the kind of people that come here, I would rather be at the back. They are not really general public. They're not well, mentally—don't get me wrong--One couldn't make a choice, another spits, most smell or they're from hostels.

Darren [NDI5]: Didn't work out coz was a gospel recording company and we were not on the same wavelength.

The negative effect of poor working environments was also something that came through many clients' comments about their placements. This also signalled to clients that they were not valued. Observation on visits confirmed that some placement providers were based in deprived and sometimes secluded areas, away from civic centres and amenities, and on top of that, were working out of badly maintained and managed

buildings. They could be cold with little heating, dirty toilets, lack of drinking facilities and poorly maintained rooms (peeling paint and old office furniture, for example):

Sarah [NDI7]: It's annoying because the building, the working environment is cold [inaudible] there's a guy criticising me for [inaudible] I said put a mat downstairs, because the metal stairs when it rains, the metal stairs become slippery and they told me to wear better shoes which I think is a bit sarcastic—

Both poor or 'second-rate' work environments and the client groups they were interacting with reinforced clients' perceptions that they were from a stigmatised group themselves and were being exploited by those organisations delivering the option:

Focus group respondent [NDI29]: They must go to a placement and say 'this ain't suitable'. Just because we sign on, we're not taking the piss. Just because we sign on, you know?

He added:

they're getting paid for us, they get paid to take us so you know? [ibid]

Similarly, while there was an in-built assumption in the policy about the positive effect of clients working in their community, clients did not always want to work in their own local area or with their own cultural group.

Many clients talked about their ambiguous feelings of working, as if they were volunteers, while being forced to participate on the VS. For those on the wage option at In2work⁷⁰, being paid was an important symbol that they had some status and were not being exploited. Not being paid also meant that some respondents would only take so much on board:

Focus group respondent [NDI29]: It is about the money when it gets too much.

Focus group respondent [NDI29]: I do most things they're doing but sometimes I feel 'I don't want to do it, they're not paying me!'

The quality of their relationships with staff at both placements and providers also affected the nature of the work experience. For example, it was important to clients that they were able to feedback problems with the placement to their key workers at providers. However, from observation, the way in which provider staff visits to placements were conducted minimised the likelihood of clients being able to

⁷⁰ Referred to by In2work as the 'wage option', the clients are referring to the choice within the VS payment structure to either receive JSA plus £15.38 per wk or a wage (decided by the provider) (see Appendix 1).

communicate openly about any difficulties. For example, provider staff did not always meet their clients in a private area and placement managers were asked to sign feedback forms after clients had recorded their feedback, thus making it unlikely the client would feel comfortable feeding back in this way. As with other areas of provision, clients commented on the focus being on the paperwork completion, particularly of timesheets.

Clients had various complaints about placement staff including that they did not give them enough work, left them to their own devices and unfairly judged them. Relationships with other clients also featured in the feedback about placements. Negative comments were made about the high turnover of clients creating instability at placements and about other clients' behaviour:

Focus group respondent [NDI29]: at my placement there's some pigs, the reason I say that is because, you've been to my placement and you know like [inaudible] the toilets, and in my actual room there's papers, crisp packets on the floor, orange peels all over the place. I must complain all the time about this.

Friction was also caused at placement between, for example, those In2work clients on the wage option and those who were not or between In2work or Employ Ltd's clients and those from other providers.

Working with other clients was a positive experience where there was good team work on a placement or individuals were informally training each other. Dave, for example, referred to learning from other clients who had been on the course longer than him:

No, I think that's quite good really because they can really share what they've learned with you, and they might be able to explain it better. [NDI9]

8.5 Training

Many of the issues that clients raised about training had been raised by staff. One such issue was the limited choice of training on the option and its consequences, which included clients feeling that they had been enrolled onto training courses that were irrelevant or not of the right level. Several clients felt that the minimal level of qualification available was of no benefit to them and it also contributed to their feelings of stigma. Clients also spoke of having made requests to their personal advisers, before

being referred to the VS, that they be enrolled on training courses and having been refused those requests. One focus group respondent, having had such an experience, commented:

Focus group respondent [NDI29]: They don't want you to study. They want you to get a job and look after yourself.

Frustration was also expressed when elements of provision repeated that clients had had on the Gateway, such as CV writing.

Many clients did not want to attend the training sessions and expressed quite open resistance to this aspect of the option. As discussed earlier in the chapter, most clients expressed dislike of being taught in groups because they felt that they were not like others on the option and were therefore stigmatised by having to associate with them. Comments included "half the class is so thick", "I'm nothing like the other clients" and "I didn't have anything to talk to them about."

Respondents felt that the sessions were not relevant to them:

Noor [NDI38]: you don't have specific help for you. It's like everybody's just put together and they tell you one standard thing.

The idea of discussing their barriers to employment in the presence of other clients was not something that they liked either. Their dislike at being put in a group was revealed in a lack of interaction—behaviour such as not taking their coats off, introducing themselves or making eye contact.

Many clients expressed a desire for one-to-one, rather than group, provision:

Sean [NDI10]: They're not really relevant to me, I've got a good CV and I'd prefer just like a personal, a bit of personal time talking to someone, instead of doing that I'd rather just have an extra personal time slot with somebody talking about Job Search, or talking about contacting companies—

At another point in the interview, he repeated:

What they need is someone who's like a tutor almost who doesn't necessarily teach in a group but just gives one on one time, that would be perfect— [ibid]

Clients also mentioned the benefit of smaller groups:

Dave [NDI9]: They were really good. They were small classes, really small like six or seven people, so you basically got support from the teacher.

Some clients also disliked the use of team building exercises or games, which they found patronising and childlike:

Erm, yeah, but there was one [class], the one I remember anyway, just made me think, 'fuck this class.' It was, uh, we were ship-wrecked and could only take, you've got a list of these things you take, and you can take like ten of them or something. [NDI32]

He continued to talk about the purpose of the exercise:

Just to see how, erm, how well you can adapt or, you know, something like that. Being stuck out in the middle of nowhere and you're going to die and what are you going to bring with you. I don't know, it relates to work somewhere, so, I don't know, I think it's a load of shit. [ibid]

Aidan talked about discussing the point of these exercises with the skills for work trainer:

she tried to make out, her job is, you know, [inaudible] it's her job to do that. Nobody's telling her her job is pointless. I just still think it is. The only point is that, innit, that people are getting NVQs, but [inaudible] that, I can't be bothered putting up with that for an NVQ 2. I feel like it's patronising me. I feel it's taking the piss out of me, it makes me feel stupid especially when half the class is so thick as well. Doing cross words and that, it's silly. [ibid]

Although group work was not well received, other styles of training that did not encourage participation were equally unsuccessful. For example, at In2work, several trainers used a style of teaching that did not involve asking clients to talk about themselves. They used a preaching style which sometimes led to clients not speaking at all during training. Some clients commented that staff lacked experience or skill at training them:

Sean [NDI10]: she's not really that great at all, it would be better to have someone else who's got the experience and skills.

The authoritarian nature of some staff was also picked up on:

Aidan [NDI32]: It's the same, missing agenda somewhere with [name of trainer]. Something going on that no one knows about. I can see her dressed up in all the S&M gear, leather shit and that, saying, 'You've been a naughty boy.'

8.6 Jobsearch

The contractual requirements had several consequences. First, providers had to evidence that they were following contractual procedures and that clients were attending to carry out jobsearch activity. Jobsearch consisted of clients being asked to attend the providers and use their jobsearch facilities. In2work described their provision as the opportunity to explore the internet, telephone prospective employers, browse through a selection of newspapers and to have access to the necessary stationery and equipment to aid jobsearch activities. Clients commented negatively on the quality of these facilities. This was confirmed through observation. Computers at both In2work and Employ Ltd were slow and often froze, with clients sometimes losing work. In2work had only one telephone for client use, located, not in the jobsearch room, but in the main reception area on another floor.

Observational evidence also confirmed that, as at other points in delivery, the emphasis was on attendance, as opposed to the effectiveness of the provision for each individual. This was reflected in the staff focus during these sessions on ensuring that clients signed in and out. This is a client's description of her jobsearch sessions at Employ Ltd:

Nasima [NDI39]: Well, when I go for my Job Search on Tuesday afternoon, I just go in, sign in, sit in the Jobsearch room, you know they have, is it the bulletin, look into one of those and the newspapers...

As discussed elsewhere, client resentment at being forced to attend these sessions was coupled with their awareness that the provider's primary motive was to document their attendance.

Observation again revealed the unstructured nature of these sessions and similar responses from clients. It also showed that staff had limited opportunity to give all the clients the one to one attention that respondents said they wanted. Many were left to their own devices and were either observed using the computers to play games and browse the internet or attempting to write CVs or type letters, but often without the computer skills needed to complete them.

Clients also reacted negatively to being asked to attend jobsearch throughout their time on the option. Some felt that this sent mixed signals about the purpose of work experience:

Winston [NDI22]: That's really frustrating, what's the use of me getting a letter when I've come here for training, now who's going to hire someone who's still not finished their training? What the heck am I doing a Job Search for?

Sean [NDI10]: It's good that you can just like get down and get on with your work and there aren't too many interruptions, they interrupt you a bit about your Job Search thing, which I think maybe a bit of a non-starter.

The chapter has already discussed how Employ Ltd required clients to attend jobsearch sessions until they were placed, with some being placed quicker than others. Clients articulated how this gave the impression that jobsearch was something you were forced to do because you were not good enough to do work experience. As also previously discussed, such sessions were experienced as unstructured and boring.

As outlined above, the contract required evidence of jobsearch activity and clients had to complete forms at each session. However, as with documentation in other areas of delivery, they were often completed in a formulaic fashion with the same standard phrases—such as 'the client has read the newspapers and searched the internet'—used for all the forms and with an emphasis on the process, rather than the end result of the jobsearch activity.

As discussed previously, providers had to meet job outcome targets as part of their contracts. The pressure of trying to meet these manifested itself in several ways including pushing clients, who they did not think were job-ready, to get jobs and putting their most employable clients forward for specific jobs. Nasima had been put forward for a job by Employ Ltd, when asked to comment on the good aspects of its provision, she replied:

Good points, the way they encourage to look for jobs, the way they help you or they help you to do application forms, they phone you up if there's any jobs going that they know of .[NDI39]

I asked for an example:

there was a job for receptionist and [name of staff] phoned me, because I'm busy here, I had training that day and she said 'do you want me to put your CV forward?', 'yeah, that would be good.' [ibid]

Jo, on the other hand, was an example of someone who, had been not been put forward for a vacancy, but had pushed to look for work by the jobsearch tutor:

Jo [NDI40]: When she was telling me off she also gave me the date, cos I had to say yes. I had to say yes cos she was looking at me all disconcerted and everything. And she made absolutely sure I heard every single word of her damning report against me.

She added:

So I was like, you can't say no, so. [ibid]

In terms of job brokerage for the clients as a whole, Employ Ltd's jobsearch tutor searched the papers each day, cut out relevant jobs and pinned them to a notice board in the jobsearch room. There was no such brokerage or daily system at In2work. One staff member's response to being asked why brokerage did not exist as part of In2work's delivery was that local employers were no longer prepared to take on VS clients.

From listening to clients in and out of interviews, as well as during observation, it was evident that some of the processes focused on in jobsearch provision, such as internet searching and CV writing were not the most effective way for clients to get jobs. For example, some commented that most of the jobs for which they applied required the completion of application forms. Having asked Aidan about why he had gone to job fairs, he responded:

Just, you know, to get my CV about. But you don't even need a CV in these days you don't even need a CV in these days. Just got to fill everything out. And that annoys me. Going to the trouble of printing it out and making my CV look good enough, and I bring it and I have to copy it all down again and again and again. [NDI32]

Work with some clients on a one to one basis during jobsearch at both organisations also highlighted, as referred to above, the obstacles for some clients in producing a CV and cover letter in these sessions, not only because of not having the typing and literacy skills but also because many were not used to documenting their work histories in that way. Short of producing a CV on the client's behalf, it was challenging work to empower clients through CV writing within the staffing and other constraints of the setting.

8.7 Conclusion

This chapter started by discussing how respondents talked about their pasts and presents during interview. It showed that they looked on their educations with regret when they had not achieved qualifications and that they were embarrassed about their work experience in elementary occupations. Their aspirations for the future were considered sequentially, starting with finding work in the short term followed by longer term, mostly conventional aspirations of home ownership and family formation. The discussion referred to their work aspirations as often unrealistic in, for example, the way in which respondents spoke of wanting to emulate famous and rich individuals or to have careers in areas which would require their return to college and then university.

When respondents gave their experiences of jobcentres, they spoke about being coerced to apply for jobs that they did not want and about feeling that they had been pushed onto the VS. Although, being referred to the option was also seen by some as preferable to going for interviews for jobs that they did not want.

On arrival at VS providers, the ability to choose a placement was determined by such factors as their level of knowledge of what the option was about and what the provider offered, their level of assertiveness and what happened to be available on the day.

Inductions were experienced as rule-focused and provided little opportunity for clients to talk. Group training sessions, were experienced as boring, demotivating and stigmatising for various reasons, including that they were unstructured and therefore boring. However, clients did not like interacting with each other and spoke of preferring one to one training. This seemed to be partly due to feeling stigmatised by the association with other VS clients.

Work experience at placements was considered good when clients were kept busy, when the work environment was acceptable, their relationships with staff were positive and

they were given some responsibility. The VS training element was viewed largely negatively in that the courses and qualifications offered were seen as too low to be of use and/or not always relevant to clients; they did not like associating with each other in group sessions and did not like some of the methods used. For example, they found team building exercises patronising and childish.

Clients felt that the jobsearch provision was dominated by the providers' need to evidence their attendance. While facilities were provided, the providers' focus on activities such as CV writing, were not always viewed as the most appropriate for supporting the ways in which the clients would apply for work. There was also little evidence of any job brokering or networking with local employers.

The next chapter provides a synthesis of the findings on both experience of the option by clients and staff and on client backgrounds and future aspirations in order to discuss the extent to which implementation of the VS worked against the policy's stated aims.

9 Chapter Nine: Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

After briefly reviewing the study's policy background and methods, this chapter contributes to research examining the effectiveness of the NDYP VS between 2001 and 2002 by presenting a synthesis of the findings on the barriers created by respondents' personal circumstances, their education and work histories and their attitudes to work. It then discusses the finding that provider staff were unable to address client needs and aspirations due to pressures delivering the VS contract. Finally it explores the way in which components of the option replicated its clients' previous negative personal and labour market experiences. The discussion concludes that VS implementation worked against the policy's stated aims by exacerbating churning.

Policy background

The NDYP had ambitious aims. Economic competitiveness and a reduction in welfare expenditure were to be achieved through reforming behaviour—getting people off benefits and quickly into work—as were an increase in employability and a reduction in social exclusion. Some of these objectives were conflicting and had different time horizons (Mitchell, 2003b). The policy also claimed to break from a negative legacy of youth training schemes, in offering more choice and individualised attention than its predecessors through monitored contracts to local organisations working in partnership with the Employment Service (then Jobcentre Plus). The compulsion of the programme was legitimised using a series of supply-side constructs of young unemployed people presented in a discourse of rights and responsibilities in which benefit recipients had a 'right' to benefits but also a 'responsibility to work'. These constructs incorporated not only notions of welfare dependency but also the underclass, criminality and other negative images of youth into, what Taylor (1998) referred to, as a 'totalising essence'.

The NDYP was exhaustively monitored from its inception. Claimed early on to be an overwhelming success, it was used as a central symbol of New Labour's ability to manage the economy. However, it was also strongly criticised by policy analysts (such as Lister, 2001) and economists (such as Peck and Theodore, 2000b) who argued that its positive spin on the flexible labour market neglected the realities of low wage work. Rather than moving up a labour market ladder, as suggested by policy rhetoric, in fact, young people worked in a segmented section of it, from which they had little chance of moving (Green et al., 2000). What is more, different forms of inequalities were also conflated into exclusion from work (Holden, 1999).

Both independent and NDYP evaluations identified increasing numbers of NDYP participants who had been on the option more than once. Providers and the government agreed that further research needed to be done on the scale and causes of this 'workfare recycling' and related complex barriers to employment. Research into disadvantaged young people recommended that welfare providers improve their relationships with clients by finding out about their life histories and current circumstances (Evans, 1998). They argued that this was the way in which diversified and complex transitions experienced by many young people could be connected to policy (Bentley et al., 1999).

However, early evaluation had already identified various ways in which building relationships with clients was impeded by policy implementation (p.21). Personal advisers were limited in their ability to maintain supportive relationships with clients who felt that their choices were constrained, that they were pushed onto options and that training was poor quality. VS providers were limited by their resources and the lack of built-in incentives to work with the most disadvantaged clients. They also felt the contradictions in aiming to develop client-centred relationships while being associated with the sanctions regimes of a compulsory programme. Suggested improvements to the policy included more intensive and flexible provision, including longer periods of support, acknowledging the distance travelled to employability rather than solely focusing on job outcomes, and the need for more employer involvement.

9.2 Method

Evidence in this thesis was gathered using first a survey of all London providers of the VS option between August and October 2001 to provide an overview of the policy, followed by an ethnographic approach, combining qualitative interviewing with observation, in two case studies of London providers, to examine the black box of the delivery process. In-depth interviews with clients aimed at encouraging them to talk freely about their personal backgrounds, work histories, aspirations, attitudes towards work and experiences of the VS. Interviews with staff were designed to provide detailed accounts of VS implementation. These interviews covered the nature of contractual requirements on front-line roles, management perspectives, attitudes to clients and delivery partners. Finally, front-line delivery was also observed during nine months' fieldwork. This included simple observation as well as participation in various roles.

9.3 Discussion

9.3.1 Personal circumstances

This section discusses the study's conclusions on the barriers created to participation by respondents' experiences of family, housing, health and education in current circumstances and over time. The study confirmed the severity of housing barriers to participation in work. Families, particularly in this regard, were respondents' most important source of support (Thomson and Holland, 2004: 20). They not only provided somewhere to live, but helped in other ways—with health problems and reducing the social isolation described by many respondents. However, living with families created further barriers. It involved 'all sorts of compromises, ambiguities and tensions' (ibid: 43). Parents were themselves dealing with a range of challenges from living on low incomes, raising younger children and health and disability needs. One result was that they required their older children, despite their problems, to take on domestic and caring responsibilities (confirming other research, such as Gillies et al., 2001). Additionally,

families exerted social and cultural pressure on respondents about, for example, cultural expectations in relation to marriage or the type of work they should be looking for. Some described living with their family as lacking both physical and psychological space.

Respondents who did not have family support were the most vulnerable (confirming Gillies et al., 2001). Their experiences were examples of the downsides of the uncharted territory that comes from disconnection with family during transition to adulthood (Thomson and Holland, 2004). Respondents who had been or were homeless described the challenges of living in hostels, while also looking for housing and attending welfare to work. Aside from the distressing aspects of hostel culture, such as pervasive drug use, the accounts of those who had been in work while in hostels, spoke of the difficulties of, for example, trying to adhere to hostel closing times. Those on the VS and applying for housing at the same time spoke of the challenge of attending the housing office and meeting VS attendance requirements.

While not as vulnerable as those who were homeless, those who had managed to get a council flat supported by housing and council tax benefit, confirmed the conclusions of early evaluations (p.24) and wider research (Randall and Brown, 1998) that fear of Housing Benefit sanctions on the NDYP and its withdrawal once in work represented one of the most serious barriers to participation. The importance attached to being in independent housing could be understood, not only in relation to a lack of understanding about in-work eligibility to housing benefit but also in relation to past experience of disadvantage and its impact on housing. This included the experience of living with family in adulthood as described above, but also childhood experiences of moving, family break-up through migration, death or divorce, living in overcrowded housing, hostels and living in care.

The nature of respondents' personal circumstances and past disadvantage discussed so far, confirms the findings of larger studies that young people's barriers to participation (and their gendered, racial and cultural dimensions detailed in previous chapters)

combine in mutually reinforcing ways with those of their family and local resources (Evans, 2003). Decisions are made in the context, not only of economic rationalities but social and moral ones as well (Duncan and Edwards, 1999). Mutual support in a low-income context involved respondents taking on different levels of responsibility and autonomy in different domains of their lives and reflected the 'status inconsistency' discussed in conclusions from wider studies of young people's transitions (Hurrelman and Engel, 1989, quoted in Evans and Heinz, 1994; Thomson and Holland, 2004).

The accounts of personal circumstances also confirmed research findings on the tensions between individualized models of adulthood (emphasizing autonomy for example) and the more socialized (or relational) models in which responsibilities of care for others are stressed (Thomas and Holland, 2004). The dominant desire to get independent housing, despite not being in work and the vulnerabilities of homelessness (confirming the findings of Burrows and Rugg, 2001), was one manifestation of individualised adulthood, while the caring roles taken on by many respondents was evidence of the latter. Similarly, while some took pride in those aspects of their circumstances that demonstrated 'accelerated' transitions, others saw positives in those circumstances that allowed their transitions to be 'delayed'. The evidence confirmed the limitations in trying to understand respondents' experiences in terms of either childhood dependence or adult independence and that:

This essentially normative framework for understanding the family lives of young people works to obscure the emotional, material and economic dependence many people continue to share with their families throughout their lives (Gillies et al., 1999: 27).

Respondents described some past experiences of disadvantage which also confirmed that they were perceived as 'critical moments' in the development of subsequent barriers (Thomson and Holland, 2004: 23). Educational experiences had been affected by family migration, health problems and abuse. Negatively impacting on learning and relationships in school, they were connected with lack of concentration, difficulties with English and Maths and behavioural problems including poor relationships with teachers, included feeling misunderstood and unfairly treated, bullying and being bullied.

Consequences included lack of qualifications, social isolation, truancy, exclusion from school and mental health problems.

Accounts of school illustrated the need for further understanding of the timing and nature of resources in the distribution of risk (ibid) and the importance of education as a determinant of social outcomes (Evans, 1998). However, while respondents described feeling let down by receiving what they saw as the poor quality and unsatisfactory nature of these educational experiences, they confirmed MacDonald and Marsh's (2003) conclusion that young people looked back on experiences of under-achieving and disengagement with regret and a sense of having personally failed. This could be seen as evidence of the epistemological fallacy of modernity (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997) embodied in the policy rhetoric in which individuals increasingly take responsibility for the outcome of social processes that are beyond their control. While this sense of educational failure had left respondents feeling stigmatised and lacking in confidence, it also fuelled aspirations of returning to education, particularly obtaining a degree, which was seen as necessary for the achievement of other normative aspirations, such as having a family.

9.3.2 Work histories and related attitudes and aspirations

This part of the discussion looks at participants' work experience and how it related to their attitudes to work and aspirations. The study found little evidence among respondents of the 'workless class' or moral decline (p.12) discussed by policy makers and analysts. Most respondents had work experience and the way in which they talked about being unemployed, of 'lost time', low income, social isolation and related mental health problems, confirmed their sensitivity to the stigma of not fulfilling the social norm to work.

Most work histories comprised the churning described by McCormick and Oppenheim (1998) and others (p.40). The study identified disjointed participation between either a series of dead-end jobs, dead-end jobs and unpaid creative activities or courses and

periods of unemployment. It confirmed the yo-yo nature of extended transition described by Fergusson et al. (2000), including the continued need for support from family and other welfare providers described above. The accounts of those who had participated in a series of FE and HE courses unsuccessfully, those who dropped out due to lack of financial support and those who achieved qualifications but had little or no subsequent work experience raised the question of how educational institutions contribute to churning by not ensuring that students are qualified to take courses, have sufficient financial support and or career guidance upon completion.

Influences on taking dead-end jobs included family and friends in similar work, pressure from jobcentres and, confirming larger studies, chance (Evans, 2002). A range of push factors for leaving them included hours of work, boredom, repetition, poor relationships with manager and redundancy. Respondents' attitudes to the jobs confirmed research arguing that young people tend to disengage from their occupational identities during such jobs and instead view them instrumentally (Wallace, 1994). At the same time, their creative interests were described as their vocations and confirmed other findings that these may protect against vulnerability during difficult transitions and help chances of repairing a damaged career (Clark and Kupka, 1994: 171)

Respondents did not see the value or social inclusion in the jobs they had taken, but rather felt exploited and stigmatised by them. They felt excluded by and not from work (Lister, 2001; Sen 2000 and Smith, 2003). They had established strong attitudes about bad jobs which echoed sociological findings that job quality, as defined by workers, is a central dimension of inequality in industrial societies and will become more important to understand with the increasing diversity and number of non-standard work arrangements and their consequences for job quality (Kalleberg et al, 2000). Dwyer and Wyn (2001)'s findings that young people maintain their aspirations despite the persistence of sometimes negative structural influences were also confirmed in this study. There was little evidence of Hoogvelt and France's (2000) conclusions that negative experiences had cooled down their ambitions. Rather, respondents were more determined to find personally meaningful work (Evans and Heinz, 1994) with intrinsic values of,

particularly, status, but also autonomy, creativity and fulfillment. These came before income in importance (Evans and Heinz, 1994). Chapter 8 discussed how these aspirations were linked to those about achieving normative personal ones, such as home ownership, marriage and starting families.

9.3.3 The effects of contractual pressures on staff and clients

The study supported wider findings on the nature of pressures and their negative effects for providers of the VS contract. The programme's focus on performance measures (Mark and Scott, 1992), particularly the job outcome target, and the complicated nature of the contractual requirements, resulted in the majority of provider delivery time being taken up with managing contracts. This was intensified by the level of their financial dependency on them (Vinten, 1992) which meant that completing and returning paperwork to trigger payments was often vital for organisational survival. These findings reflect Holtham's (1992) conclusion that the effectiveness of the programme in meeting the needs of clients was overshadowed by a focus on monetary efficiency and outcome targets.

These difficulties understanding the contracts, and coping with the associated paperwork, were exacerbated by tensions and lack of trust in partnerships with jobcentres (and placement providers) and by competition between providers. The study confirmed The Tavistock Institute's (1998) description of delivery as taking place in rigid, contractual, low trust environments. While these tensions were affected by sectoral and other differences in organisational cultures, this study confirmed Finn (1997) and Perkins-Cohen (2002) in illustrating that if providers are paid by simple outcomes (rather than progress made by individuals (Campbell and Meadows, 2001)) and there are no in-built incentives to work with more disadvantaged clients (p.25), they will be under pressure to focus on those most likely to get jobs at the least cost, to cream skim and, as the study also illustrated, to 'park' the remaining clients.

The provider and client accounts of their interaction with personal advisers also confirmed early evaluations (p.21) that the problem with incentive structures began at jobcentres with a range of problems with PAs, including not being able to cope with their caseloads, high turnover and lack of training, which then impacted on the way in which clients were referred onto the option.

Early evaluations had already identified an increase in churning through the programme (p.20). The remainder of the chapter examines the processes contributing to churning by looking at the effect of the delivery process on staff and then clients.

Effects on staff

The large caseloads and high turnover combined with lack of resources, paperwork burdens and communication difficulties with jobcentres and placement providers meant that provider staff were under similar pressure to PAs. The result was that, rather than developing individual relationships with clients, they rather dealt with them, as described by Lipsky (1980), on a mass basis. However, staff also admitted that these relationships were further strained by their clients' distrust of them. They attributed this to their organisation's association with a compulsory Jobcentre run programme, its sanctions regime and their clients' negative experiences of PAs directly before and in the process of being referred.

While some staff put considerable effort into providing a choice of placements, their relationship with clients was also affected by being associated with the choice constraints that were first experienced in their interaction with PAs. Cream-skimming made this worse. For example, In2work, in taking on all referrals, and therefore accepting clients that other providers turned away at the referral stage, as well as those who had been inappropriately put onto the option by PAs, were then not able to satisfy all their clients' preferences for training and work experience or their problems. Staff also disclosed in interviews that not only did they not have the time or a sufficient level of trust from clients to deal with these, but that they also did not—again echoing early

evaluation findings on PAs—feel able or qualified to support clients with problems outside the option.

Observation confirmed that staff were further conflicted with the confused roles expected of them by the policy. On the one hand, the importance of enforcing attendance rules and documenting that attendance meant that their primary role was one of policing and administration. As In2work's Director commented, this meant that the criteria for staff recruitment had shifted. On the other hand, providers, particularly voluntary sector ones, were still expected to provide pastoral support and indeed some felt that it was central to their roles. Others were not comfortable with the policing role or said that it was not in their remit. These findings confirmed Finn's (1997) conclusion that these two contrasting roles are best kept separate.

The study confirmed the argument that preconceptions about claimants drive delivery (Hewitt, 1999). Delivery priorities and pressures led staff to adopt the policy's supply side perspective of their clients, attributing their unemployment to negative attitudes to work, lack of motivation, lack of work experience and a culture of poverty among their families. This perspective on clients could be understood, as Lipsky (1980) argued, as a means of coping with the low levels of their own motivation they disclosed in interviews and the unease of working with vulnerable clients that they could not help, and whose complex barriers would reveal the limits of the policy and question its legitimacy. This manifested throughout the option.

From induction at the start and in training sessions, observational evidence showed that the emphasis was given to clients' personal attributes, particularly attitudes and motivation that needed improving, while little attention was given to their structural barriers or previous experience. Similarly, in contradiction to their supply side views of clients, staff also acknowledged that there were problems accommodating those clients who did know what they wanted to do, and, confirming earlier conclusions from top-down policy makers (p.24), who were ambitious and aspirational.

The negative effects of contractual pressure on staff, and their related contradictory attitudes to clients, also manifested themselves in jobsearch sessions. The supply side focus was evident in that connections with employers were virtually non-existent. Not only was there no liaison between providers and employers, little attention was given to what young people wanted from jobs and employers. On the one hand, staff spoke of not wanting clients to take dead-end jobs but, on the other, they spoke of having to get them off the programme and into work in an attempt to meet job outcome targets. Cream-skimming took place in that the job brokerage that did exist was focused on the most employable clients. Their supply side perspective was evident in the way in which they used certain presumptions about clients held in policy rhetoric including focusing on local jobs, even though some explicitly wanted to work out of their local area.

Effect on clients

Confirming earlier findings, respondents described the negative effects of being pushed onto the option by PAs, of having little choice and not being listened to and their perception of the VS as last resort or sink option (p.23). This was reinforced by referral interviews at providers in which they were given little time or individual attention and offered limited choices. They also sometimes found out at this stage that providers did not have the training or work placements that they or PAs had marketed to clients during referral. The findings confirm other studies that the notion of choice is limited in the context of programmes with no exit (p.57). The study also found that the very fact of passing through several people at more than one organization itself had a negative impact, not only in terms of the time this took, the contradictions in how they were treated but also repetitions in the system.

Client accounts of their relationships with providers mirrored the descriptions given above. Confirming staff views that they were not trusted, clients described their negative feelings at experiencing, for example, the authoritarian nature of induction with a focus on imparting the rules of attendance in reinforcing the compulsory nature of the programme and its associated sanctions regime. Something not mentioned by staff that

contributed to lack of trust, was an understanding of the various consequences of contractual pressure outlined above, not only that delivery left little time for a focus on them as individuals but also an awareness of their financial value to providers, particularly that they were subject to the practice of cream-skimming at various stages of the option. Clients were aware of being split between those who were cream-skimmed quickly into placements or jobs and those left waiting (Perkins-Cohen, 2002). For the latter, this reinforced feelings of failure and stigma. It led to some clients taking jobs that they were not interested in or did not feel ready for. Clients were also aware that their attendance and getting a job at the end of the option were more important than the quality of the training and work experience they experienced during the VS.

By bringing the findings on client backgrounds and personal circumstances together with those on their experience of the option and staff perspectives, the study also revealed another dimension to the negative impact of delivery not identified by provider staff, namely, the way in which aspects of the provision reinforced negative experiences of past and current disadvantage. First of all, attending the option had negative impacts on their attempts to address structural barriers in their personal circumstances. Looking at housing, for example, while some staff thought that homeless clients should not be on the VS at all, there was no discussion of what contact they might need with other welfare providers in order to address such problems. In terms of understanding the circumstances of those living on their own, there was acknowledgement that their clients were scared of not attending VS for fear of losing their Housing Benefit and that they thought they would lose their eligibility by finding work, yet there was no provision to help clients make better-off calculations in relation to housing benefit. Similarly, while respondents expressed a range of physical and mental health needs, which, in turn were connected to various problems including homelessness, living alone and drug use, and queried, for example, whether they could get additional financial support, these were not addressed during their attendance.

Training on the option also replicated past educational disadvantage. Both staff and clients commented on the low quality, limited choice and low priority of other training

on the VS, as well as its irrelevance and repetitive content for many—either because respondents had already covered the material in other parts of the option or had been on the VS before. This could be seen as repeating, not only the poor quality of previous education that many respondents felt that they had had but also the regret, failure, embarrassment and shame connected to that education. Respondents' experiences of VS provision of training undermined their dominant aspirations to return to education, and contradicted government rhetoric about its importance and the welfare state's role in assisting in the creation of full employability (p.11).

Reviewing respondents' work histories and their experience of VS placements, the study also found that conditions at some placements replicated the negative aspects of their previous jobs. These included poor relationships with management, not being given responsibilities, boredom and not being challenged, feelings of exploitation (including not being paid) and poor working environments. Negative attitudes to placement conditions were intensified by the fact that, despite the qualities of the work being the same, they were not being paid. The findings also confirmed that the voluntary sector is poorly viewed in the eyes of young people (Cartwright and Morris, 2001). They spoke of it reinforcing their stigma, in that their placements were in organisations working with disadvantaged groups, and with limited resources in poor working environments, that signalled to them that they were second rate. Combined with the compulsion and focus on their attendance, this was enough in some to motivate them to leave the option through finding any work they could. However, placements also had the effect of reinforcing respondents' desire to avoid work that was associated with coercion, surveillance and 'strong time-discipline' (Tilly and Tilly, 1998: 62), a world of dead-end work (Garrett, 2002).

Jobsearch provision also replicated negative experiences. Respondents felt that the jobsearch sessions provided by providers were unconstructive, damaging to self-esteem and stigmatizing in a number of ways. These included repeating previous provision, either on the Gateway or from previous attendance on the VS, the unstructured nature of the sessions in which the focus, rather than providing valuable content, was on

documenting client attendance. At Employ Ltd, they were used to hold clients whose work placements had not yet been arranged. Again, clients were aware of the cream-skimming practices taking place in these sessions, as outlined above.

These sessions had a similar effect to inductions in reinforcing the power imbalance implicit in the provider roles and making the participants, 'the subject of paternalistic supervision' (Shaver, 2002: 331) in a way that some described as similar to doing time in prison (Mitchell, 2004b) or being back at school. This type of provision also reinforced clients' negative experiences of peers either at school or during unemployment. It confirmed Taylor's (1998) argument that people in such circumstances do not want to identify with each other. They spoke of not wanting to spend time with other clients that they did not feel they had anything in common with and that they preferred one to one support. It also confirmed the importance of Randall and Brown's (1998) recommendation that the manner of delivering courses, particularly avoiding a classroom atmosphere, is as important as their content, as many have negative experiences of school and training schemes.

9.3.4 The NDYP in 2008: Lessons learnt

The chapter has so far brought together the study's findings on the clients' personal circumstances and experiences of work with those of the negative effect of contractual pressures on both staff and clients in order to demonstrate how clients' barriers to participation and past negative experiences were being reinforced in delivery. The discussion now provides a brief review of the extent to which clients' needs and experiences have been recognised and delivery problems have been acknowledged and addressed by the government since 2002.

Government publications continue to claim not only that the NDYP has been a success but that it has 'virtually eradicated' youth unemployment (DWP, 2007c, Murphy, 2007) by focusing on the decrease in those young people claiming JSA for more than a year (80,000 when the programme began in 1998 to less than 7000 by 2007 (DWP, 2007c))

and the total number of NDYP participants who moved into jobs over the period⁷¹. However, looking at government publications in the period from 2002 to the present, there is evidence of a significant shift in policy perspective from focusing on getting people into jobs per se, to getting them into ‘not just jobs, but jobs that pay and offer opportunities for progression’ (DWP, 2008: 9) This is described as one of the core principles for modernising welfare.

Nevertheless, despite this change in emphasis together with references to stable and sustainable work, young people are still encouraged to adapt themselves in the face of global competition ‘learning new skills and being able to move between firms and sectors’ (DWP, 2008: 8) in what is still a positive portrayal of the flexible labour market. There is no reference to the barriers created by previous labour market experience for NDYP participants (or indeed those created by previous experience of the programme). There is little mention of addressing employer discrimination and other structural causes of labour market disadvantage, except that this is being looked into by commissions (ibid), and that a jobs pledge is being introduced asking employers to take on 250,000 of the most disadvantaged (ibid). Although, geography is now cited as having one of the largest effects on NDYP outcomes (Beale et al., 2008) with the relatively poor performance of the policy still connected to the difficulties of particular job markets. At the same time, the literature continues to stress the importance of developing employer involvement in the policy, with the success noted of Employment Zones at being attuned to local employer needs and establishing specialist employer liaison staff to search for vacancies and build links with employers (DWP, 2007a).

While dependency and lack of motivation are still attributed to NDYP participants, there has been growing recognition of structural barriers in their personal circumstances. The complexity of the benefit system and particularly misunderstandings about the impact of work on housing benefit are now seen as creating serious barriers to participation

⁷¹ In 2007, the DWP stated that 493,000 of its participants had got jobs but did not give the exact period or the proportion that represented of the total) (DWP, 2007c). A DWP research paper, (Beale et al., 2008) gave the total number of participants as 960,000 by 2005, but did not give the proportion of leavers into jobs.

(Freud, 2007). Similarly, the government have acknowledged the huge pressures of housing costs. Reference in recent DWP publications to greater use of specialist provision in general as well as specific references to the need to provide childcare for ethnic minority women (DWP, 2007c), to support participants' mental health needs and to employ staff with understanding of wider cultural and social issues indicate a growing understanding of some of the personal circumstances outlined in this study. DWP research conclusions also note that characteristics of participants such as low qualifications hide other disadvantage (Beale et al., 2008). While lack of skills has been a continued aspect of the supply side focus of this policy, there has been acknowledgement of the NDYP's low quality of training, the irrelevance of doing training that you have not chosen and the importance of relating training to job opportunities (DWP, 2007a: 24).

There has also been recognition of the importance of getting to know clients, including their barriers and aspirations. In discussing the barriers to achieving that, it has been recognised that provider contracts need to be longer to allow relationships to develop (DWP, 2007c) and that there are problems between stakeholders who want larger contracts and smaller providers who feel unable to compete, one consequence of which has been a squeezing out of the voluntary sector (ibid). Other than that, there has been relatively little discussion of provider reactions to funding incentives and their negative impact on building relationships with more disadvantaged clients. It was conceded that 'a high degree of central control' had been used in the early years of the programme (DWP, 2007a) and that paying providers for achieving job outcomes had led some to cream-skim the most employable clients, while 'parking' the most disadvantaged and offering them minimal support to find work (ibid). DWP commissioned research findings (Beale et al., 2008) confirm the same hierarchy of options exists as indicated by earlier evaluations.

In outlining reform, the government maintain that the solution to delivering labour market programmes is still outcome based contracts. In terms of addressing the cream-skimming, parking and other problems relating to the focus on job outcomes, the DWP

cite the 2006 Leith review's recommendation that retention and progression incentives are introduced into NDYP contracts to ensure that those intangible aspects of good service, the distance travelled to employability, are recognised—that there need to be an added value calculated for those providers working with complex needs (DWP, 2007c). There has also been concession that paying providers for sustained job outcomes (longer than 13 weeks), may lead to an increase in their attention to the nature of the jobs they are encouraging their clients to take. However, it is argued that the government do not yet have the evidence base to deal with these problems (DWP, 2007a) and that there are too many questions. These include whether providers should be paid more to work with the more disadvantaged (and, if so, how much more?) or whether the government should implement penalties or lower payments for failing to work with them and how the more disadvantaged will be identified, whether through administrative rules, statistical profiling or adviser discretion?

The focus of delivery reform is instead on increasing flexibility, discretion and decentralisation through such measures as streamlining the New Deals into one, and thereby moving away from the constrictions of programmes organised by client groups and the options within them and the use of tailored pathways creating a more customised approach. In terms of improving the client relationship with jobcentres, recommendations include giving PAs the tools to get to know their clients (and a PA is quoted as saying “stop thinking that one size fits all as it clearly doesn't” (DWP, 2007c: 58)). These include looking at client JSA histories as these have been found to be a strong indicator of labour market disadvantage, and are being considered as a profiling tool (ibid). Flexibility is also going to be achieved by giving staff more discretion to choose provision, through discretionary funds for PAs and district offices (DWP, 2004), increasing use of the voluntary sector for working with the most disadvantaged clients (despite acknowledged funding problems) and increasing innovation in all sectors.

In discussing policy reform to deliver improved support for structural barriers in personal circumstances, the government have acknowledged that more needs to be done to help claimants understand benefit rules, particularly awareness and understanding of

Housing Benefit as an in-work benefit (Freud, 2007). A one-stop shop bringing together the fragmented delivery of the central benefit system, local authorities and tax authorities have been recommended (ibid). Housing costs, steep tapers in housing and council tax benefits and marginal tax rates are also being addressed with the introduction of exceptions for those in training who are on housing benefit (DWP, 2007c). In relation to responses to educational needs, it is acknowledged that many jobseekers have aspirations to improve their skills and that a new legal right to skills is being introduced, together with improved screening and that a full-time training allowance, rather than JSA, was being considered for a limited time in the new flexible programme (ibid).

9.3.5 Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated how the NDYP policy exacerbated churning and reinforced the previous experiences of clients in terms of failure and low social status. Both the one size fits all nature of the policy and the pressures placed on staff by the way the policy was implemented and evaluated meant that it was very difficult for clients to move into secure employment that paid a living wage. Despite the fact that the sample was extremely small, it is clear that the policy had a negative effect on the part of the client group it was intended to help.

From a wider policy perspective, evidence from this thesis suggests that the theoretical failure to formulate an unemployment policy that included demand and supply side perspectives appears to have led to failure for those who most needed help. Over concentration on supply side policies can be seen as resulting in certain failure for clients who need the active cooperation of their employers if they are to overcome previous negative experiences.

This wider policy failure was exacerbated by government demands relating to policy implementation that expected more of staff than they were trained to deliver. The targets set took no account of low labour market demand for clients with problems and they

were widely seen as impossible to meet without some manipulation of the figures. Staff too were therefore placed in a no win situation.

The complex problems that surround any programme trying to facilitate the employment of disadvantaged young people are becoming increasingly better understood. However, it appears that policy delivery has not been able to address the unemployment of this section of the labour force with any success. The temptation to blame young people, rather than consider the structural factors that contribute so strongly to their situations, seems to have inhibited more constructive research on policy delivery.

10 Bibliography

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Appendices

Appendix 1: NDYP Placement Arrangements by Option

| Option | Type of placement | Payment |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| SUBSIDISED EMPLOYMENT | 6 month placement (with 26 day training allowance) | A wage (decided by the employer but subject to minimum wage legislation) |
| FULL-TIME EDUCATION AND TRAINING | Dependent on no of hours per week, from 26 to 52 weeks at college or other training organizations. If less than 5 days, remaining days either personal study time or work experience. | JSA only* |
| VOLUNTARY SECTOR | 6 month placement (with similar training allowance to subsidised employment option) | Either JSA*+ £15.38/wk or a wage (decided by employer) |
| ENVIRONMENTAL TASKFORCE | 6 month placement, minimum 30 hours per week plus equivalent of one day per week training. | Either JSA* + £15.38/wk or a wage (decided by employer) |
| SOURCE: ES RD REPORT 37, 2000 | | <i>*other benefits e.g. Housing Benefit are not affected</i> |

Appendix 2: Characteristics of NDYP VS Providers in London

| Interview No. | Date | VSO or | London (N,E,S, W) | Sector | Client nos. | VSO staff nos | Contract more than 1 year? | Runs progs? | other | National organisation |
|---------------|----------|--------|-------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|----------------------------|-------------|-------|-----------------------|
| PSI1 | 22/08/01 | VSO | South | V | 80 | <10 | Y | Y | | N |
| PSI2a | 23/08/01 | VSO | South | V | 12 | >10 | Y | N | | Y |
| PSI2b | 23/08/01 | VSO | South | V | 12 | >10 | Y | N | | Y |
| PSI3 | 24/08/01 | ETF | South | V | 15 | >10 | Y | Y | | Y |
| PSI4 | 09/09/01 | VSO | West | V | 6 | >10 | Y | Y | | Y |
| PSI5 | 6/09/01 | ETF | South | V | 20 | >10 | Y | Y | | Y |
| PSI6 | 1/10/01 | VSO | East | V | 10 | >10 | Y | N | | N |
| PSI7 | 2/10/01 | VSO | North | V | 23 | <10 | Y | Y | | Y |
| PSI8 | 8/10/01 | VSO | North | V | | | No longer running it | | | |
| PSI9 | 11/10/01 | VSO | South | Private | 2 | <10 | Y | Y | | Y |
| PSI10 | 16/10/01 | ETF | North | V | 1 | >10 | Y | Y | | N |
| PSI11 | 17/10/01 | VSO | East | V | 12 | >10 | Y | N | | Y |
| PSI12 | 18/10/01 | VSO | East | Private | 4 | <10 | Y | Y | | Y |
| PSI13 | 18/10/01 | VSO | West | V | 0 | >10 | Y | N | | Y |
| PSI14 | 23/10/01 | ETF | South-East | V | 1 | >10 | Y | N | | Y |
| PSI15 | 25/10/01 | ETF | North | Private | 3 | >10 | Y | N | | N |
| PSI16 | 2/11/01 | VSO | South-East | Public sector | 12 | >10 | Y | Y | | N |
| PSI17 | 9/11/01 | VSO | South | V | 17 | >10 | Y | N | | Y |
| PSI18 | 22/11/01 | VSO | West | V | 10 | >10 | Y | Y | | N |
| PSI19 | 27/11/01 | VSO | North-east | V | 0 | >10 | No longer running it. | | | |
| PSI20 | 27/11/01 | ETF | South | Private | 10 | <10 | | | | |
| PSI21 | 28/11/01 | VSO | East | Private | 11 | <10 | Y | Y | | Y |

Appendix 3: Letter to Survey NDYP VS and ETF providers in London.

Template

LSE CASE headed paper

Address

Address

Address

Address

Date

Dear

I am a PhD student based in the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion (CASE), at The London School of Economics researching how clients influence each other while taking the ETF and VS options of the NDYP. As part of this research, I am hoping to do unpaid work (in what ever capacity I could be used) in several London provider organisations from this October for one year, each placement lasting as long as the organisations can accommodate me.

I would be extremely grateful if I could be considered as a volunteer for [name of organization]. My CV and references from (supervisor name) and Prof John Hills (CASE Director) can be supplied on request.

Many thanks

Kind regards

Gerry Mitchell

CASE

Appendix 4: NDYP VS Provider Survey Interview Schedule

PHASE 1: PROVIDER INTERVIEWS – SCHEDULE (2)

Name of interviewee: _____

Organisation: _____

Venue: _____

Interview date: _____ length: _____ in person/telephone

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.1 First of all could I just check what your job title is (*if appropriate*):

2001: _____

1.2 and what your main responsibilities are ?

1.3 And how long have you been with.....? _____

I'd like to just ask some general questions about [name of org] and its New Deal contract. I ask these same questions to everyone.

2. Organisational Background

| |
|--|
| When set up/history/Ethos: |
| How funded: |
| Staff structure/background |
| Since started, run which programmes.... |
| Currently running other programmes? Yes/No. Which ones? |

3. The New Deal

3.1

| |
|--|
| How long has it been running here? |
| Which unit of delivery? |
| Partnership arrangements: |
| Contract details: (running til, targets ie. No of stipulated clients, no of job outcomes – if could explain how it works ..) |
| Changes to contract since start: |
| Supplementary funding |

a) Number of clients

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Cumulative (since beg) | |
| Number at the moment | |
| No. of starts next week | |
| No of job outcomes | |

b) Client profile

| | NOW | At the beginning |
|-------------------------------------|------------|-------------------------|
| From which job centres | | |
| Gender | | |
| Ethnic mix | | |
| Younger or older (age range) | | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| Basic skills needs | | |
| Former employment | | |
| Physical/mental disability | | |
| Learning difficulties/Special needs | | |
| Homeless | | |
| Ex-offenders | | |
| Been here before? | | |
| Mandatories | | |

4a) Process (take through from ES, how much known re: client, induction, typical week, qualifications etc, group work, one to one)

Referral

Induction

Typical week

Training (who does, contracted out or in-house etc...)

Qualifications

4b) Placements (no. of providers, examples, support given, monitoring etc)

4c. Changes in this process since beginning of New Deal

4d. Inspections (types, how many, outcomes etc)

5. Problems

a) particular to New Deal clients here (e.g attendance, excuses, placement experience)

b)What strategies do they use to deal with these?

c) with New Deal (e.g length of ND, type of qualification, job outcome emphasis, paperwork, unrealistic targets, lack of communication with PAs)

6. Outcomes (include their opinion on barriers to work – in their local labour market)

7.Relationship with ES (include New Deal paperwork (or see if mentioned – is better)

8.Current staff (backgrounds, whether done similar programmes etc)

9. Staff training

10.If done other progs, is and if so, how is NDYP different from them?

11. Future plans.

Other notes:

Appendix 5: Characteristics of Case Study NDYP VS Providers

| Case study provider | VSO or London (N,E,S, W) | Sector | Client nos. | VSO staff nos | Contract more than 1 year? | Runs progs? | other | National organisation |
|---------------------|--------------------------|---------|-------------|---------------|----------------------------|-------------|-------|-----------------------|
| In2work | VSO | V | 80 | <10 | Y | Y | | N |
| Employ Ltd | VSO | Private | 4 | <10 | Y | Y | | Y |

Appendix 6: Sites of NDYP VS Provider Case Study Observations

Church meetings (In2work)

Provider offices (at In2work, these were staff only access)

Provider social events (e.g Christmas party)

Providers staff visits to jobcentres (marketing their provision)

Provider staff visits to placements for monitoring and training

ES District office provider meetings

ESOL sessions (I stood in for provider staff in some of these)

Inductions

Informal staff meetings

Jobsearch sessions (I stood in for provider staff in some of these)

Literacy classes

Outside provider building entrances

Placement offices

Placement staff training clients

Placements (various sites in East and South London)

Reception areas

Referral interviews

Staff lunches (off site)

Training sessions (including Food Hygiene, Health and Safety, Office Procedure)

VS team meetings

Appendix 7: NDYP VS Case Study Client Interviews

| Interview No | Case study 1 or 2 | Recorded? Yes/no | Transcription (T) Notes (N) | Pseudonym | Interview date | Gender | Ethnicity | Age | Months unemployed | First time on NDYP? |
|--------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------|--------|----------------|-----|-------------------|---------------------|
| NDI1 | 1 | N | N | Solomon | 08/11/01 | M | Afro-Caribbean | 25 | 24+ | Y |
| NDI2 | 1 | N | N | Des | 08/11/01 | M | Afro-Caribbean | 24 | 11 | Y |
| NDI3 | 1 | Y | T | Hieu | 08/11/01 | M | Vietnamese | 25 | 6 | N |
| NDI4 | 1 | N | N | Nina | 12/11/01 | F | Afro-Caribbean | 22 | 24 | N |
| NDI5 | 1 | N | N | Darren | 13/11/01 | M | Afro-Caribbean | 20 | 12+ | N |
| NDI6 | 1 | Y | N | Marian | 13/11/01 | F | White | 19 | 6 | N |
| NDI7 | 1 | Y | T | Sarah | 13/11/01 | F | Afro-Caribbean | 21 | 12 | N |
| NDI8 | 1 | Y | T | Nicholas | 14/11/01 | M | White | 23 | 13 | Y |
| NDI9 | 1 | Y | T | Dave | 14/11/01 | M | White | 22 | 8 | Y |
| NDI10 | 1 | Y | T | Sean | 14/11/01 | M | White | 24 | 10 | Y |
| NDI11 | 1 | Y | T | Barry | 15/11/01 | M | White | 21 | 6 | N |
| NDI12 | 1 | N | N | Katherine | 16/11/01 | F | Afro-Caribbean | 22 | 10 | N |
| NDI13 | 1 | Y | N | Emmanuel | 05/12/01 | M | Afro-Caribbean | 19 | 18 | N |
| NDI14 | 1 | Y | N | Ian | 06/12/01 | M | Afro-Caribbean | 22 | 11 | N |
| NDI15 | 1 | Y | N | Colin | 06/12/01 | M | Afro-Caribbean | 23 | 24+ | N |
| NDI16 | 1 | Y | N | Ruhel | 12/12/01 | M | Bangladeshi | 23 | 12+ | Y |
| NDI17 | 1 | Y | N | Nick | 12/12/01 | M | White | 25 | 18 | Y |
| NDI18 | 1 | N | N | Tim | 12/12/01 | M | White | 25 | 24 | N |
| NDI19 | 1 | Y | N | Habiba | 13/12/01 | F | Moroccan | 24 | 7 | Y |
| NDI20 | 1 | Y | N | Tom | 13/12/01 | M | White | 25 | 6 | N |
| NDI21 | 1 | N | N | Alike | 21/01/02 | F | Nigerian | 23 | 11 | Y |
| NDI22 | 1 | Y | N | Winston | 22/01/02 | M | Afro-Caribbean | 24 | 12 | Y |
| NDI23 | 1 | Y | T | Martine | 22/01/02 | F | White | 23 | 5 | N |
| NDI24 | 1 | Y | N | Steve | 22/01/02 | M | Afro-Caribbean | 19 | 7 | N |
| NDI25 | 1 | N | N | Uy | 22/01/02 | M | Vietnamese | 21 | 24 | N |
| NDI26 | 1 | Y | N | Nicholas (follow up) | 27/02/02 | M | White | 23 | 13 | Y |
| NDI27 | 1 | N | N | Dave (follow up) | 27/02/02 | M | White | 22 | 8 | Y |
| NDI28 | 1 | N | N | Barry (follow up) | 27/02/02 | M | White | 21 | n/a | Y |
| NDI29 | 1 | Focus Group | T | Focus group | 01/03/02 | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | Y |
| NDI30 | 2 | Y | T | Alia | 25/03/02 | F | Bangladeshi | 22 | 36 | Y |
| NDI31 | 2 | Y | T | Ed | | | | | | |

| Interview No | Case study 1 or 2 | Recorded? | Notes (N) or Transcription (T) | Pseudonym | Interview date | Gender | Ethnicity | Age | Months unemployed | First time on NDYP? |
|--------------|-------------------|-----------|--------------------------------|-----------|----------------|--------|----------------|-----|-------------------|---------------------|
| NDI32 | 2 | Y | T | Aidan | 27/03/02 | M | White | 21 | 12 | Y |
| NDI33 | 2 | Y | T | Diane | 27/03/02 | F | Afro-Caribbean | 21 | 6 | Y |
| NDI34 | 2 | N | N | Sibani | 03/04/02 | F | Bangladeshi | 19 | 12 | Y |
| NDI35 | 2 | N | N | Tara | 03/04/02 | F | Afro-Caribbean | 24 | 6 | N |
| NDI36 | 2 | Y | T | Abdul | 03/04/02 | M | Bangladeshi | 22 | 24 | N |
| NDI37 | 2 | Y | T | Rachel | 04/04/02 | F | White | 20 | 12 | Y |
| NDI38 | 2 | Y | T | Noor | 04/04/02 | F | Bangladeshi | 20 | 24 | Y |
| NDI39 | 2 | Y | T | Nasima | 08/04/02 | F | Bangladeshi | 23 | 6 | Y |
| NDI40 | 2 | Y | T | Jo | 16/04/02 | F | White | 20 | 12 | N |
| NDI41 | 2 | Y | T | Fatima | 18/04/02 | F | Bangladeshi | 25 | 12 | Y |
| NDI42 | 2 | N | N | Pete | 01/05/02 | M | Afro-Caribbean | 19 | 11 | Y |
| NDI43 | 2 | N | N | Imran | 07/05/02 | M | Bangladeshi | 19 | 12 | Y |
| NDI44 | 2 | Y | T | Mohamed | 07/05/02 | M | Bangladeshi | 22 | 12 | Y |

Appendix 8: NDYP VS Case Study Client Interview Agreement Form

Client agreement form

What is the interview for?

It is part of Gerry Mitchell's research into the New Deal for Young People, funded by the ESRC, an independent research council.

Gerry is not employed by [name of organization] or the Employment Service.

Client names will not appear anywhere in the research. Neither will individual client's comments be passed to [name of organization] or the Employment Service/Jobcentre Plus.

Agreement

I(client name).....
have read the above and agree to participate in a 1 hour interview with Gerry
on (date of interview)

It is also ok for Gerry to look through my [name of organization] file. Yes/No.

Client's signature:.....

Gerry Mitchell's signature:.....

Appendix 9: Characteristics of NDYP VS Case Study Clients Interviewed

Ethnicity by Gender and London area

| Ethnicity | Female | Male | East | South | Total Number of clients |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------------------------|
| Afro-Caribbean | 6 | 9 | 4 | 11 | 15 |
| White | 4 | 9 | 4 | 9 | 13 |
| Bengali | 4 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 8 |
| Vietnamese | 0 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 2 |
| Nigerian | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| French Moroccan | 1 | | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 16 | 24 | 15 | 25 | 40 |

Work experience by age

| Age | No work experience | Work experience | Total |
|--------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------|
| 19 | 2 | 5 | 7 |
| 20 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| 21 | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| 22 | 2 | 5 | 7 |
| 23 | 0 | 6 | 6 |
| 24 | 0 | 5 | 5 |
| 25 | 0 | 5 | 5 |
| Total | 10 | 30 | 40 |

Months unemployed

| Months unemployed | Number of clients |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Up to 6 | 9 |
| 7 to 12 | 16 |
| 13 to 18 | 7 |
| Over 18 | 8 |
| Total | 40 |

Housing status

| Age | Lives parent/s | Lives alone. | Homeless? | Homeless past? | Lives with partner. | No permanent address |
|--------------|----------------|--------------|-----------|----------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 19 | 6 | | 1 | 1 | | |
| 20 | 3 | | | | | 1 |
| 21 | 3 | 2 | | 1 | | |
| 22 | 5 | 1 | | 2 | | 1 |
| 23 | 3 | 2 | | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| 24 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | | |
| Total | 19 | 8 | 2 | 9 | 1 | 4 |

Appendix 9 continued: Characteristics of NDYP Vs Case Study Clients Interviewed:

Qualifications

| Qualifications | Number of Respondents |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| No qualifications | 4 |
| NVQ Level 1 or 2 | 10 |
| GCSE (4 A-C) | 2 |
| GCSEs or equivalent (any grades) | 32 (of which 2 =A-C) |
| A Level, GNVQ or equivalent | 14 |
| Further Education | 6 |
| Higher Education Experience | 6 |
| Higher Education Qualification | 4 |

Occupations aspired to

| Occupation | Total clients |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Music/Art/Film/Media Industries | 18 |
| Admin | 2 |
| Accountant | 1 |
| Stockbroker | 1 |
| Academic (Professor) | 1 |
| Teacher/Trainer | 2 |
| Journalist | 1 |
| Welfare worker | 1 |
| Childcare | 1 |
| Police | 1 |
| Painter/Decorator | 1 |
| Unsure | 10 |
| Total | 40 |
| Of which, desired self-employment | 19 |

Appendix 10: NDYP VS Case Study Client Interview Topic Guide

(totalling 3 pages and A3 size)

| Interview Guide Section 1: your history | | | |
|---|-----------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Family | Housing history | Schooling Interests up to 16 | Work experience – 16 up to now |
| Friends | | | Current interests |
| Name Age Location Time | | Date | |

Interview Guide Section 2: your experience of the New Deal

Previous
experience of job
centre

Previous
experience of other
organisations

Pre-ND experience

Experience of New Deal (e.g
Gateway, Personal Advisers)

Experience so far at [name of provider]
Good and bad points
Other clients

Interview Guide Section 3: networks and work

What do you see
yourself doing?

What barriers do you see?

Inspiration/role models

Thoughts on future – type of work,
aspirations

Experience of
applying for jobs

Social networks
(influence in getting work)

Appendix 11. Characteristics of NDYP VS Case Study Client Focus Group

5 people took part in the focus group at In2work. They were not asked to provide personal information. The summary of their attributes below was gained indirectly during transcription of the interview.

| Focus Group Participant Attributes | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Age | Across 18-24 range |
| Ethnicity | Afro-Caribbean/Nigerian |
| Gender | 2 women, 3 men |
| Housing | Some lived alone, some with parents |
| Marital status | All single, one had a child |
| On option before? | 1 |
| Placements | Childcare, IT, music and warehouse |
| Previous employment | Yes |
| Qualifications | Ranging from school to FE level |
| Time on programme | 1 – 5.5 months |

Appendix 12: NDYP VS Case Study Client Focus Group Topic Guide

Thanks to everyone for coming. You are doing me a big favour. Just to go over why I've invited you – I'm interested in each of your views on your placement and on your experience of the voluntary sector option. This will be part of the independent research I'm doing into client experience of the New Deal. I'm a student at the University of London. It is also for me to give In2work some idea of how people experience their service.

Can not emphasise strongly enough, that nothing individuals say will be repeated to any one at In2work or anywhere else. People's opinions will be pooled together, and summarised without being attached to any names, placements etc. I am taping it, as can not be involved in conversation and write down what 3 people are saying! Must emphasise on this too, that no one will listen to this, apart from myself, have my word on that.

I have about 8 main questions to put to you and we have 90 mins to discuss them. We may not want to cover all of them, see how we go. Please say exactly what you think. Don't worry about what I think or your neighbour thinks. We're here to exchange opinions and have a laugh, should be a informal chat. Saying that, we should allow each other chance to speak, and there are no right answers to anything. Try not to talk over each other!

We could start just by introducing ourselves again, where we're doing

work experience and how long we've been there.

People introduce themselves... followed by first question – next page:

MAIN TOPICS WORK EXPERIENCE

Question 1a) What is the first couple of weeks like on the New Deal?

Sub-Q: take us thru some things that happened? what did you think of it? How did it go?

Prompts: First Impressions. Different from initial description or not? What did you think of supervisor? Of other employees? Of what was involved in your work? How friendly. Agreements between staff and client. Any hitches. Did these involve In2work?

1b) What is the first couple of weeks like on a placement?

Question 2: What kind of working environment is the placement?

Sub-Q: what atmosphere? Different from any other workplace?

Prompts: The working environment. How treated. Like volunteer or employee. Given responsibility. Stricter or less. Rules of New Deal. Timesheets. Other clients.

Question 3a: What kind of concerns are there about work experiences?

Sub-Q: If no concerns, what particularly are you satisfied with? If concerns, could you give me a bit more detail of why they worry you.

Prompts: May be with what you are actually doing compared to how you thought it would be. Whether

it will help get you the job you want. Training provided. The environment. Travel to placement. Attitude to you of the supervisor or other staff or other clients. The customers (e.g if shop).

Question 3b) Have you ever talked about these with anyone, how do they turn out?

Prompts: Raised with family and/or friends. supervisor at placement, other clients at placement. People at In2work. People at jobcentre. Any meetings? Did things change. Still same now. Things repeatedly concerned about or concerns changed.

TRAINING

Question 4a: How is the training done on this option?

Prompts: What is each person's package (at In2work, at placement etc)

Prompts: How often. With who and where. One to one, or with others. at certain time each week, random. Demonstration. Learning from manual. Handouts. A File of documentation. When is it reviewed.

Question 4c: How is the training useful for getting work after the option?

Sub-Q: If yes, in what way (could describe it to rest of group). If no, why not?. Raised this with anyone, the response? What would be better for you?

Prompts: Is it what you wanted to do. How chosen. Feel like you're learning anything.

LOOKING FOR WORK

Question 5: How do people's ideas about the kind of work they'll look for change as a result of being here?

Prompts: if do change, how. If not, how the same. In same area as placement. What positions.

Question 6: Does being on the New Deal have any influence in people's lives?

Sub Q: If no difference, why not. If yes, how ..

Prompts: Is it a support? Is it a barrier? The rules – fair or unfair and why. Effect of Sanctions. Seen examples around you of other clients? Causes of unemployment?

Question 7: How do you feel about the system of rules on the option?

Sub Q: if don't mind them, why? If good system, how is it good? If critical, why?

Prompts: 5 unauthorised absences. 3 strikes and you're out. Dismissals. Timesheets. Travelcards. Difficulties attending sometimes? How do placements deal with the rules. How do In2work. Do they bend them – under what circumstance.

Question 8: What is the most helpful bit of the option and why?

Prompts: work experience provided. Training at placement. At In2work. Other support. Jobsearch. Facilities.

Question 8: What is the least helpful bit and why?

Prompts: Restricted range of placements. Only 6 months. Limited training. Wrong type of training.

Question 9: What advice would you give someone who is unemployed?

Prompts: To take this option. To take another. To get a job.

Question 10: Why do some people stay longer on the option than others?

Sub Q: If don't know – what prevents people from coming to work.

Prompts: Attitude. Not right for them. Get job. Do people put themselves into it.

Question 11: How could the system be improved?

What would you suggest as improvements? If you think the system is completely wrong, what would you do instead?

LAST QUESTION: Have we missed anything?

Questions themselves:

HOW...?

WHY...?

IN WHAT SITUATION...?

Why do you feel that way...?

When do you ... use

STAY ON THE TOPIC

Probing Questions (once topic is introduced)

Do we have any other views on...?
Tell me more ... I don't understand,
Can you explain a little more what you mean?

Or group at large
"Does anyone have an experience of that?"

Is this anyone else's experience?

Does anyone have a similar or different experience?

Are there any different opinions on that?

(you all seem to understand what she's saying,

....

Tell me what it is like..

What's the difference between ...

How strongly do you feel about ...?

Do you think .. it would help if ...

How do you feel about ...?

What did you think when you first saw ...?

What factors contribute to ..

If we could share our experience about

* Can try brainstorming to help people out.

Respond to people's facial expressions: "You look puzzled by this ..."

Get clients to probe each other where possible.

Encourage clients to respond to each other ...

Do you agree with that How has it been different for you ...?

My responses stay neutral: "ok" "thank you" "uh huh"

Re-open topics if shallowly discussed.

Probe for CONTRARY opinions

Help people out even when "unfavourable" opinions.

Appendix 13: NDYP VS Provider Case Study Staff Interviews

Case study 1 (In2work) (CS1I)

| Interview No | Recorded? | Transcribed (T)/Notes (N)? | Pseudonym | Interview date | Job title |
|--------------|-----------|----------------------------|-----------|----------------|---------------------------|
| CS1I1 | N | N | Kofi | 21/01/02 | Career Start co-ordinator |
| CS1I2 | Y | N | Mark | 24/01/02 | ESOL tutor co-ordinator |
| CS1I3 | Y | N | Charles | 30/01/02 | Office Manager |
| CS1I4 | N | N | Dan | 30/01/02 | Placement researcher |
| CS1I5 | N | N | Jermaine | 29/01/02 | Keyworker |
| CS1I6 | Y | T | Christina | 26/02/02 | BETs Manager |
| CS1I7 | Y | T | Joy | 26/02/02 | Placement co-ordinator |
| CS1I8 | Y | T | Judith | 27/02/02 | Keyworker |
| CS1I9 | Y | T | Antoine | 26/02/02 | VSO and Gateway Manager |
| CS1I10 | N | N | Sue | 26/02/02 | Receptionist |
| CS1I11 | Y | T | Paul | 20/03/02 | Director |

Case study 2 (CS2I)

| Interview No. | Recorded? | Transcribed (T)/Notes (N)? | Pseudonym | Interview date | Job title |
|---------------|-----------|----------------------------|-----------|----------------|--|
| CS2I1 | N | N | Jackie | 21/05/02 | Skills for work trainer |
| CS2I2 | N | N | Patrick | 22/05/02 | Senior Monitoring Officer, Projects & Placements |
| CS2I3 | N | N | Sandra | 22/05/02 | Jobsearch tutor |
| CS2I4 | N | N | Randa | 24/06/02 | Monitoring Officer |

Appendix 14: NDYP VS Provider Case Study Staff Interview Schedule

VS TEAM - INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 2002:

Name of interviewee:

Interview date: **length:** **in person/telephone**

1. ROLE INFO

1.1 **First of all could I just check what your job title is *(if appropriate)*:**

2002:

Previous job titles

1.2 **and what your main responsibilities are ?**

| |
|-----------------|
| 2002 |
| Previous |

1.3 **And how long have you been with [name of organization]?**

Could I get a breakdown of daily, weekly and monthly activities with % of time spent on each:

Daily:

Weekly:

Monthly:

Out of those, which activities do you enjoy most, and which least:

What are the key skills needed in your role (and for those working with this client group? *(Leadership, empathy, motivating ability)*

CLIENT PROFILE

**2.1 How would you describe your client group?
(are there more than one group?)**

2.2 What would you say are the clients' main problems?

2.3 What would you say are their main needs?

2.4 And their aspirations?

2.5 Has this group changed since you have been working on the New Deal? If so, how?

And why?

3. DELIVERY

The Placements

3.1 Can I just check which group of placements you covered?

3.2 How do you match clients with placements? What are the considerations?

3.3 Could you give me an example of a successful placement?

3.4 And an unsuccessful one?

3.5 Could you give me some examples of the concerns that placements raise when you visit?

3.6 Could you give me some examples of the issues raised in 3 way meetings and how or if they were resolved?

3.7 Could you give me some examples of the situations in which clients have been dismissed?

**3.8 What have been some of your concerns with placements?
(Exploitation, Colluding re: timesheets etc)**

3.9 What do you think about [NAME OF ORGANIZATION]'s placements in terms of:

Range

Location

Quality

3.10 Do you think that clients work best on their own at placements or in a group?

Training

**3.11 What do you think about training package within ND?
(restrictions re: many courses not being roll on, roll off, restrictions re: how it can be used up, 6 months – long enough?)**

3.12 What training methods work best with New Dealers?

Jobsearch

What do employers most want?

How do they view young people?

How do they recruit?

(jobcentres, e/mt agencies, local paid for press, word of mouth/contacts?)

4. OUTCOMES

4.1 If there is more than one subset within the client group (see earlier) – which client type is most benefiting from service that [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] offers?

4.2 What are some of the main reasons that clients drop out?

(transport diffics, accomm diffis, drug/alcohol depend, motivation/attit diffics, literacy/numeracy needs, communic diffics)

4.3 To what extent should the VS team get involved in client's personal issues?

4.4 Do what extent can [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] match clients needs and aspirations?

4.5 How can clients attendance be improved?

4.6 How do you deal with clients' excuses?

4.7 How can client time on the option be lengthened?

4.8 How does the selection process work re: driving lessons, subsidised placements etc?

4.9 Why do some people stay almost to the end and then drop out?

4.10 Could you give me some examples of clients who have found jobs – their backgrounds, the type of jobs they've got, how long they kept them (if known)

4.11 What are the advs and disadvs of subsidised employment?

5. THE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE

5.1 How do you think the ES views the Voluntary Sector Option?

5.2 How do the job centres view [NAME OF ORGANIZATION] ... How does this differ from Adviser to Adviser?

5.3 How does relationship with each jobcentre affect the outcome for clients?

What percentage of clients make an informed choice about coming to [NAME OF ORGANIZATION]?

EMPLOYMENT

5.4 Do you think work will be the route to inclusion for these clients?

5.5 Why do you think most of your clients are unemployed?

5.6 Do you think getting a job, any job is better than remaining unemployed for these clients?

6. THE NEW DEAL

6.1 What do you think about the compulsion element of the New Deal?

6.2 What do you think are the advantages of having placements in the Voluntary Sector only?

6.3 What are the disadvantages (of having placements in the Voluntary Sector only?)

6.4 What influences the types and number of placements?

6.5 What changes would you make to delivery?

7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 Can you describe success in [NAME, OF ORGANIZATION]'s terms and is this different from ES defs of success. If so, how?

7.2 What are the main factors that determine how effective delivery will be ?

Appendix 15: NDYP VS Provider Case Study Manager Interview Topic Guide

Your role

Job title

Previous titles

Main responsibilities

And how long been with In2work?

What are main daily tasks - % of time on each.

What are main weekly tasks - % of time on each.

What are main monthly tasks - % on each.

Tasks every few months?

Out of these, which tasks do you enjoy most and which least?

What are the key skills needed in your role?

Relationship with ES

Could you describe for me some of the main issues that have arisen for both Southwark and Lambeth contracts?

What is your r/ship with them? What most popular form of contact?
Who do you talk to most? And what most common topics?

What is it necessary to hide from the ES?

How would you describe your relationship with other providers?

How does this impact on delivery?

Inspections

What are some of the main areas that have been recommended for improvement in inspections?

Contracts

Can I just recap for each client, how much each stage is worth?

If clients are job ready, during the 6 months, do you lose by finding them work earlier?

The traffic lights: Could you give me some idea of how orgs in the green keep themselves there?

What will it take to move from a medium to low risk?

When has In2work been in green in the past and why?

Could you give me some of the perverse consequences for clients from pressure of traffic lights? (e.g may be situations where you would want to advise a client against taking a particular job ...)

Consequences on staff

Stats: What do you think are the wider consequences of counting someone as employed only 13 weeks after ...

Paperwork

What do you think about the content of:

ND1

ITP

The form that processes claims (why do they only mention particular categories of job type ... find out what they are ...)

Do you think the paperwork is excessive?

If so how could it be minimised?

Stats

Changes in:

Client ethnicity

Gender

Age

% worked before

% criminal record

Client duration on option

Leavers into job %

Leavers into job type%

Relationship between job outcomes and placement type of client

Any analysis of into what job? And how long there?

Any stats on:

% homeless

% illness

Dismissals by category (i.e changes in sickness, misconduct and non-attendance dismissals)

Average time on option before dismissal

% of dismissals

Placements by type

Out of those stats, are there any that aren't required by ES.

Who else do you have to give stats to, how do the requirements differ?

From looking at stats over time, what are your impressions of some of patterns emerging?

Placements

What determines their composition?

What have been some of your concerns with placements?

What do you think about ILMs ...?

Is the quality of placement consistent? E.g CommTech compared to In2work ILM or A+?

Who gets to go where?

Have you noticed a distinct change between performance in allowance clients and those waged.

Training

What determines who gets what training? (offer appears arbitrary)

How many people get training out of In2work?

When training doesn't fit the person's needs, why isn't outside stuff encouraged?

Many of the clients need Literacy, even ESOL – why cant this be offered more widely?

Delivery

How have you had to change delivery as a result of:

losing funding
gaining funding
changing client group

To what extent, is delivery individualised?

What consequences can blips in administration have on clients?
Are there some examples?

How flexible can it be?

What are the particular issues as a result of being a charity?
Staff:

What are the main issues raised by staff in supervisions?

Client Profiles

What would you say are different sets of clients within your caseload?

(if elicited Graduates, severe difficulties ...)

Is your package appropriate for e.g graduates?

Equity Issues

In what areas of your delivery do you most need to watch out for equity concerns?

e.g
whats offered at ND1
which placements they're sent to

How much should you deal with client problems?

How can you avoid them?

Employment

What are the most common types of jobs that clients are finding? In terms of sector, wage etc ..

What are some of the main reasons In2work clients are unemployed?

Do you agree to the argt that actually much of youth unemployment is unproblematic and that the govt has initially “helped” young people the most because they have the highest chance of moving off benefit and so the govt can claim credit for what would have happened anyway?

Do you think getting a job, any job is better than remaining unemployed for these clients?

Do you think work will be the route to inclusion for these clients?

Employers use ethnic, gender and social criteria (such as speech, dress and behaviour) to screen applicants and “have preconceptions

and prejudices about what is suitable work for various kinds of people ...” – how can In2work help the client around this?

How do you deal with clients who have made it through the months, but without a successful outcome?

Do you think there should be more of job creation .. e.g the scheme that Lambeth council is setting up to take a designated number of New Dealers?

The local labour market

Is it mainly a supply or demand side issue?

Do you think it is right to present the market as if there were the right kinds of jobs available for them to work towards?

How can In2work providers be involved in improving the matching of supply and demand at a local level?

Does the placement composition match the demand?

Do you think the problem is mainly demand or supply side?

Appendix 16: NDYP VS Case Study 2 Placement Provider Interviews (PPI)

| Interview No | Recorded? | Pseudonym | Interview date | Organisation type | Job title |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|----------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| CS2PPI1 | N | Jeremy | 27/02/02 | Computer maintenance | Trainer |
| CS2PPI2 | Y | Susan | 11/04/02 | Farm | Director |
| CS2PPI3 | Y | Len | 16/04/02 | Childcare | Administrator |
| CS2PPI4 | Y | Paula | 16/04/02 | Advice centre | Manager |
| CS2PPI5 | Y | Helen | 17/04/02 | Lobbying charity | Manager |
| CS2PPI6 | Y | Luc | 17/04/02 | Advice centre | Manager |
| CS2PPI7 | N | Paula | 29/04/02 | Charity shop | Manager |
| CS2PPI8 | N | Laila | 29/04/02 | Credit union | |
| CS2PPI9 | N | Jun | 30/04/02 | Ethnic minority association | Manager |

Appendix 17: NVivo Node Sets

- 1= All Tree Nodes
- 2= ClientsOnPersonalHistories
- 3= School
- 4= Careers Service
- 5= CareersAdvisers
- 6= Teachers
- 7= DiscussionOfQualifications
- 8= Behaviour
- 9= ExpForeignEduc
- 10= ImportanceOfEducation
- 11= ImptMaths&English
- 12= MovingCountriesInEduc
- 13= ProblemsEng&Maths
- 14= Qualifications
- 15= SchoolClientViews
- 16= ViolenceAtSchool
- 17= PerformanceBySubject
- 18= Bullying
- 19= SpecialNeeds
- 20= Truancy
- 21= ProblemWithTeacherAuthority
- 22= GCSEGrades
- 23= EmbarrassedAboutGrades
- 24= ParentalInfluence
- 25= ExpOnLeavingSchool
- 26= DiscussionOfEthnicity
- 27= SpecialNeedsAssessment
- 28= Expelled
- 29= ExperienceOfLearningSupportCentre
- 30= Housing
- 31= ExperienceOfHostels
- 32= Housing
- 33= Priority~to get own place
- 34= ExpOfHomelessness
- 35= ParentsWantOut
- 36= Housing 2
- 37= Family
- 38= CaringSiblings
- 39= chaotic family life
- 40= embarrassed about family
- 41= FamilyInfluence
- 42= FamilyViews
- 43= lackofparentalsupport
- 44= let them down
- 45= not knowing father's occupation
- 46= ParentalSupport
- 47= ParentalViews
- 48= ParentsOccups
- 49= SignificantOthers
- 50= ParentsRetired
- 51= InCare
- 52= RetiredParents
- 53= SickParents
- 54= childhoodAwayfromParents
- 55= FightingWithSiblings
- 56= Health
- 57= FamilyHealth

58= Mental Health
 59= Health
 60= FamilyMentalHealth
 61= PostSchoolEducation
 62= coursesnotcompleted
 63= EducVersusWork
 64= ExpFE
 65= FEcollegesAdviceExpOf
 66= ReturningToEd
 67= CourseSubjects
 68= PostGCSEQualifs
 69= CrimeExperience
 70= FamilyInfluence
 71= CriminalActivity
 72= DescOfHomeArea
 73= DisruptedEduc~Career
 74= Drugs
 75= Finances
 76= Identity
 77= LivedOverseas
 78= PeerInfluence
 79= Peers'Lives
 80= SpareTime
 81= ExperienceOfCrime
 82= PerformanceByAge
 83= Peers'Lives 2
 84= Local Area
 85= ClientsOnNDYP
 86= OnProviders
 87= JobSearchSessions
 88= ClientsOnProviders
 89= ClientsOnStaff
 90= Computers
 91= ContractorOfficeEnvnt
 92= commentsonJobSearch
 93= NoOrganisedActivity
 94= TakingTimetoGetPlacement
 95= OnChoosingPlacement
 96= OnPlacementMonitoring
 97= Paperwork
 98= OnPlacements
 99= AttendancePlacements
 100= ExpPlacement
 101= JCrolePlacement
 102= JCrolePlacement 2
 103= PerformanceOnPlacemt
 104= PlacementEnvironment
 105= ProblemwithManager
 106= QualityOfPlacement
 107= QualityOfWorkPlacement
 108= TrainingConflictsWithPlacement
 109= BeingBusy
 110= Choice
 111= GenderedPlacements
 112= StaffAsSupport
 113= BeingChallenged
 114= WhydoJobsearchIfstaying
 115= FearofCriticising
 116= OnJobCentres
 117= ClientonJobCentre
 118= ExperienceJobCentre

119= NDAdvisers
120= presentationOfND
121= SabotageInterviews
122= Tree Node
123= YouhavetogetaJob
124= OnJobsearchSessions
125= ExpJobSearch
126= EmployersAppliedTo
127= OnPreviousNDYP
128= ExpGateway
129= PreviousExpOfND
130= PreviousPlacementExperience
131= ViewsOnOtherTrainSchemes
132= OnOtherClients
133= AboutOtherClients
134= OnNDYPPProcess
135= and it's very much policing~
136= Attendance
137= AvoidingND
138= choice on ND
139= ClientInitiativewithND
140= NDasWayOutOfAnyJCJob
141= NDforStatistics
142= NotGettingAPlacement
143= OpinionNDYPitself
144= ThinkOfND
145= ViewsOnCompulsion
146= ViewsOnNDYPRules
147= whatthinkofND~
148= workingthesystem
149= OnTraining
150= TrainingConflictsWithPlacement
151= VolunteerMotivation
152= OnVSOofNDYP
153= VoluntarySectorNatureofOption
154= OnInduction
155= ContractorReputation
156= NarrativeConstruction
157= StaffOnNDYP
158= OnClients
159= StaffOnClientTurnover
160= StaffOnClientViews
161= StaffOnContracts
162= StaffOnDiscipline
163= StaffOnGovt
164= StaffOnJobCentres
165= StaffOnNewDeal
166= ManagersOnNewDealPackage
167= StaffOnOutcomes
168= StaffOnPaperwork
169= StaffOnPlacements
170= StaffOnR-shipwithES
171= StaffOntheirRemits
172= ManagersOnTheirRoles
173= ManagersOnTheirRoles 2
174= StaffOnTraining
175= StaffTraining
176= StaffOnClients
177= Stories of clients
178= SuccessStories
179= StaffOnWhyCUN-e

180= ClientsOnWorkInGeneral
 181= GoodJobs
 182= FutureAspiration
 183= FutureAspiration 2
 184= GoodWork
 185= I want to stick to the plan A
 186= Pay
 187= self-employment~desirefor~
 188= StatusOfProfWork
 189= viewsOnWork
 190= CreativeActivities
 191= Creative+DeadEndCombined
 192= GoodEmployers
 193= BeingChallenged
 194= Autonomy
 195= BadJobs
 196= Dead end work
 197= BadEmployers
 198= BeingExploited
 199= Badworkingconditions
 200= LowPay
 201= Racism
 202= ValuesOfWork
 203= DoesntIdentifyWithWorkshy
 204= I don't care, so long as I get paid~
 205= I want to stick to the plan A
 206= I'll cut my losses and do this"~
 207= Inspiration~RoleModels
 208= rolemodels
 209= Status
 210= OnJobHistories
 211= Care work
 212= ClientAlreadyVolunteering
 213= College+Workcombined
 214= flexible work hours
 215= AgencyWork
 216= frequently changing direction
 217= HistoryOfTakingAnyWork
 218= ReasonsForLeavingJob
 219= ReasonsForLeavingJobs
 220= TheirReasonWhyUne
 221= WorkExperienceIn
 222= WorkExperienceNotUseful
 223= NurseryWork
 224= Employers
 225= ReasonForChoosingJob
 226= WorkForFamily
 227= Something changing daily~ Keep me m
 228= OnUniversity
 229= OnThemselves
 230= ChangeOfDirection
 231= ClientsDescTime
 232= ClientsViewsOnThemselves
 233= College+Workcombined
 234= Failure
 235= let them down
 236= LowSelfEsteem
 237= PoorGrades
 238= Rejection
 239= Bitterness
 240= FalseExpectation

241= PeriodUnemployed
242= ProblemWithAuthority
243= Regret
244= ShortTermism
245= Stigma
246= That's where everything went to pot
247= BlamingOthers
248= Motivation
249= LackofConfidence
250= PuttingThemselvesDown
251= StatusInGeneral
252= Avoidingsigningon
253= Discrimination
254= Paranoia
255= OnApplyingForWorkInGeneral
256= BarriersToEmt
257= BarriersToEmt 2
258= CommentsOnInterviews
259= commentsonJobhuntinginGen
260= ExpJobInterviews
261= ExpLookingForWork
262= JobsAfterND
263= MethodsOfFindingWork
264= NoWorkExperience
265= ThoughtsOnInterviewingTech
266= ObservationOf
267= Providers
268= LackOfClientsAtProviders
269= Time
270= Timesheet
271= PlacementsOn
272= PlacementRecruitment
273= PlacementRole
274= PlacemtThoughtsOnContractor
275= PlcmtsOnClientsAttributes
276= PlntsOnClientPers
277= RespForClient
278= InterviewDynamics
279= Wanting to impress interviewer
280= Narratives