

Routeways: a resounding success

The Routeways to Work project has been hailed as a resounding success by independent evaluators, Atkins Ltd. The two year project was funded through the Cabinet Office under the Invest to Save Budget and involved a variety of local projects working together to support people from Bury's minority ethnic communities to access employment and training. Bury EST had two projects funded through the scheme; our Employer Forum on Diversity and a supported employment service that focused on people requiring extensive support.

The supported employment service resulted in 37 people gaining employment and nine of these being supported through career development to improve their jobs. The project, staffed by Zerqa and Hassanat, was very popular with customers and we would like to thank everyone who contributed their time and comments to the project evaluation. The evaluation is now available to read on our website.

As the evaluation states, "without the project the existing barriers would have prevented people from accessing the workplace and it is unlikely they would stay in the job. The people who were supported would not have benefited from new skills or work experience to become work-ready to access the jobs that they now have".

The project has seen a significant increase in the number of people from minority ethnic communities accessing our Workstep programme and while we don't have access to any funding to continue the project, we will ensure that the links established over the last two years are continued and that we work in partnership with the Asian Development Association of Bury (ADAB) to arrange the best support for those individuals looking to get into work.



We are expecting the Department for Work and Pensions to publish their review of disability employment programmes in early December. The review, led by Dr Martin Hill, has been looking at the effectiveness and value for money of a range of programmes funded by Jobcentre Plus and these include Workstep, the Job Introduction Scheme, Work Preparation and Access to Work. The review, which began over two years ago, reports in the context of the recent Government Green Paper, In Work, Better Off and there will be a 3 month consultation period before any plans are made firm. This consultation will involve a number of regional listening events, including one in the North West.

The impact of the 2008 welfare reforms

Government has set a challenge of getting 80% of working age people involved in work and this will need over a million people to move from incapacity benefits into work. The Department for Work and Pensions have already announced the introduction of Employment Support Allowance (ESA) as a replacement for Incapacity Benefit in October 2008. New claimants will have to undergo a work capability assessment to test whether they are entitled to the employment support allowance or not. Some people will not need to undertake the assessments because of their health or disability. They will be counted as exempt and known as the *support group*. Those people with limited ability to work will be expected to meet regularly with Jobcentre Plus to discuss moving towards employment. Those who do not score highly enough in the assessment will be referred to Jobseeker's Allowance rather than ESA.

The review of disability employment services is aimed at achieving better value for money by increasing the number of disabled people moving into work. They will be designing a new programme to replace Workstep, Work Preparation and the Job Introduction Scheme and this will go out for tender in 2008 with a start date in the autumn of 2009. The Department for Work and Pensions also wants to get better disability employment advisors through improved training and support.

Module 1

Getting a job

Module 2

2 Year Support (max)

Module 3

Long Term Support

Access to Work

Bury EST's Workstep programme is delivered in partnership with services in Oldham, Stockport and Wigan. It has kept an average occupancy of 92% this year, with six people leaving the programme to work independently so far this year, so we are confident that we will be in a strong position to win a contract to deliver the new programme.

Many organisations have argued that Government has done little to support people who are on their first steps back to work. The new programme is likely to fund some of the prevocational support, like work experience, that people need. There is likely to be a three module approach with funding for agencies like Bury EST dependent on customers getting jobs and keeping them. There may be extra rewards for supporting people to free up places on the

programme by working independently for at least six months. This may well be extended to 18 months under the new programme. It is also likely that there will be less funding available to support people on a long term basis through the third module.

One of the ways that DWP might save money is by changing the way that it contracts with providers such as us. The Government has been tempted to contract with larger organisations covering a wider geographical area but there has been a noticeable shift in tone since Peter Hain became Minister and now it looks like there will be more local contracting of support to make better use of specialist providers.

Bury EST has played a full part in discussions on the new programme and we'll bring you more about the likely implications once the review is finally published.

Changes to permitted work for 2008

Changes have been announced to the way in which permitted work will operate after October 2008. These changes coincide with the introduction of the Employment Support Allowance that will replace incapacity benefits.

At the moment we think that these changes will only apply to people who claim the new benefit but we need to clarify any effect on people who are already claiming incapacity benefits. The new rules will differ according to whether claimants have paid national insurance contributions (contributory) or whether they have not and would otherwise be claiming income support (income related). It seems that people claiming the income related employment support allowance will be

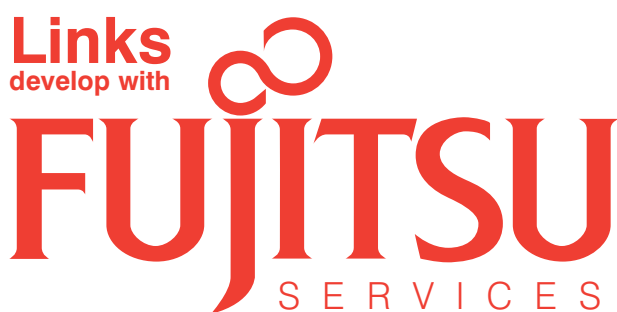
able to work and earn up to £88 for up to 52 weeks without it being considered as income against housing benefit. After 52 weeks the work must be limited to a maximum of £20 per week, the earning disregard.

Those people who are claiming contributory ESA will be able to earn up to £88 on an ongoing basis as long as they are supported by a service such as Bury EST. The income will all count against housing costs, including that earned in the first year.

Confused? We are!

We are trying to clarify the situation and will be lobbying for an increase to the £20 earnings disregard.

	First year		Year 2 onwards	
Employment Support Allowance eligibility	Maximum SPW earnings in first year	Counted as income for housing benefit	Maximum SPW earnings from year 2	Counted as income for housing benefit
Income related ESA	£88.00	No	£20.00	No
Contributory ESA	£88.00	Yes	£88.00	Yes



Bury Employment Support and Training (Bury EST) are expanding their employer engagement strategy to include Manchester. In the initial stages of this strategy Fujitsu Services have agreed to work in partnership with Bury EST. Amanda Marsland, Team Manager for Centre of Excellence at Fujitsu invited a number of staff from Bury EST to visit the Manchester site to gain an insight and understanding of the various job roles and different areas of work that Fujitsu is involved with.

Fujitsu Services, one of Europe's leading IT services companies are now located in new offices in the Central Park development in Manchester. A total number of 900 staff from all areas of Fujitsu are employed at this site.

Fujitsu Services is one of the leading IT services companies in Europe, Middle East and Africa. It has an annual turnover of £1.99 billion, employs 15,200 people and operates in over 20 countries. It designs, builds and operates IT systems and services for customers in the financial services, telecom, retail, utilities and government markets. Its core strength is the delivery of IT infrastructure management and outsourcing across desktop, networking and data centre environments, together with a full range of related services, from infrastructure consulting through integration and deployment.

Fujitsu Manchester are working with Bury EST offering a programme of work experience placements for clients from disadvantaged backgrounds to support them to improve their chances of gaining employment. The first placements offered will be in helpdesk and administration roles. Following successful placements, clients will be encouraged to apply for future vacancies at Fujitsu.



Julie

my journey

(so far) with Bury EST

I was in the midst of an abusive relationship when I lost my job in March 2002. My partner of ten years was an alcoholic, went on binges and disappeared from home for weeks on end. He had frequent affairs which he took no trouble to hide from me. The first affair he flaunted was just three weeks after we moved in together.

He fathered a number of children with these other women. He would continually put me down saying that I was stupid and thick and that I was lucky that he stayed with me. Losing my job was the final straw for me. After ten years of mental torture my one means of escape had disappeared and I went into the depths of a chronic depressive illness and was put on a course of strong anti depressive medication by my GP. At this time I left my partner as I felt that I would die if I stayed in this situation. People asked me why I remained with him for so long but all I can say is that he had a hold on me which I found impossible to break.

I moved to a new address away from the area which held so many bad memories and settled into my new home. I still could not shake off the depression and the experiences I had gone through and, in the New Year of 2004, I considered suicide as my only option. Fortunately my sister in law visited and spotted the pills I was about to take on top of the bottle of spirit I had just drunk. The only harm I came to was an extremely bad hangover from the alcohol. This was a wake up call for me and I decided that I needed help but it still took another six months before I told my GP the full story.

Even though it is still painful for me, I felt that I needed to tell this story as people can judge the extent of the journey I made from this low point in my life to where I find myself today.

In October of 2004 my GP asked Rod Goodwin from Bury EST to have a word with me. Rod was working on a project at Redbank Surgery on behalf of Bury EST and, although I was not really eligible for Rod's project, he told me that he would help me as much as he could. I was very apprehensive at first about telling him everything but he put my mind at rest. He listened to my story and when he said that my relationship was abusive, I was quite surprised. I did not think that I had been abused as my partner had never used physical violence. I realised from talking to Rod that I needed to deal with this and other issues around my relationship and how it had left me feeling.

I certainly did not want to go back to my old life and I talked to Rod about doing things differently.

My partner had me convinced that I could only do factory work because I was thick and stupid but Rod held a different opinion. He asked me what I wanted to do and I said that I wanted to do office work but had no qualifications. He then suggested some ideas which would take time but should get me where I wanted to be.

Firstly, he arranged some counselling sessions with the help of the GP. I was assessed in December and eventually started counselling sessions in March 2005. In the meantime, Rod continued to help and arranged for me to start a beginner's course in IT at Bury College. I really took to this and, by April 2006, I held qualifications with distinctions in all common computer applications. This boosted my confidence and self esteem beyond anything I could have imagined beforehand. I was worried about applying for jobs as I had not had an interview for years. I had talked

about doing clerical work for the Police so Rod took me to meet the HR Manager at Bury Police station. He really put me at my ease and said that, when I felt that I was ready, a work experience may be arranged at the station.

In December 2005 Rod referred me on to another section of the Bury EST team where I began to work with Leanne and, eventually, the Workstep Team. Leanne was brilliant and picked up directly from where Rod had left off. She never stopped working on my behalf. She helped me with benefit problems, she organised work experiences for me and assisted with the numerous job applications I needed to make. She encouraged me to continue with my studies and, in July 2006, I obtained a first class pass in computerised accountancy at Link House training Centre. When I felt discouraged after I had been unsuccessful with interviews she made herself available to boost me up again. I think that Leanne had an obvious belief in me and my abilities and potential and this really helped me to

keep trying. I now regard Leanne as a friend and not her client.

When I was successful in getting a job I think everyone who had helped me was more pleased for me than I was myself.

With Leanne's help, I found a job as a clerical assistant at Fairfield Hospital in October 2006 and am still there today. I continue to receive help from the Workstep team and I am being supported now by Louise who again has been very helpful and encouraging. I love this job as it is the best one I have ever had. I have realised that I am capable of much more and I am

looking for opportunities to progress in my work. I think that the attitude of **"I can do something more with my life"** is now ingrained in me. I am not prepared to let anyone put me down and say that I can't do something. I do not feel yet that I have completed my journey and will keep on going.

I do not know where I would have been without the help of the staff from Bury EST. I think that they have been brilliant. I feel that, left on my own, I may have found myself working in a factory again and unable to reach my potential. I really want to thank everyone who has helped me. My GP, who wanted to help me get out the situation I was in. Rod, who was the first person who told me I could change things in my life. Leanne, who helped me to do so by finding me work and Louise, who continues the support from Bury EST.

“Even though it is still painful for me, I felt that I needed to tell this story as people can judge the extent of the journey I made from this low point in my life to where I find myself today?”

Partnership to improve job outcomes for disabled learners

Bury EST has teamed up with a range of local organisations to submit a successful bid to the Learning and Skills Council for funding to boost our ability to put the LSC's Learning for Living and Work strategy into action.

The funding will be used between December and March to strengthen the partnership, agree our individual roles, get a better idea of customer demand, deliver multi-agency training in person-centred planning and develop better links with local employers. The project will involve Connexions, Bury College, Elmsbank High School, Bolton Bury Education Business Partnership, Bury MBC and GM Chamber.



Workwise: Support for drugs misusers

The Government recognise that support to come off drugs works far more effectively if recovering users are given the additional opportunity to reintegrate back into society in a meaningful way through work itself, or through training and educational courses aimed specifically at developing the skills necessary to enter the working world. Without such opportunities many ex-misusers are faced with the stark choice of staying economically idle and are at greater risk of relapsing back into their old habits or addictions.

Employment Support

within Day Services

Over recent years, Bev Glenholme has been working for United Response to support people with learning disabilities to live independently in their own homes but an opportunity came up to try something a little different and now Bev has been seconded to work with Bury EST for a twelve month period. Her role now entails going around the authority's day services and outreach centres to speak to clients and support staff about employment opportunities for those clients who wish to work.

Bev has been working closely with Nicky Deauville, a day centre officer who is working on a project to involve more people with disabilities in volunteering, as part of the plan to modernise day services in Bury and their work is quite similar in nature. Bev carries out vocational profiles with clients to decide on job ambitions and what level of support might be required.

Although she's only been doing this job for a few months, all the feedback from clients, carers, and family has been positive. There have been some concerns raised by family members regarding benefit entitlement and these issues are dealt with on an individual basis. Bev's role is likely to last for 12 months initially and we'll review progress next summer. Hopefully by this time there should be some clients settled into paid employment and the service can be expanded or integrated with the volunteering support in order to encourage a seamless service.

Therefore, in conjunction with the Government initiative, Bury EST has been commissioned to provide a prevocational service to constructively assist recovering drugs misusers back into society. The Workwise project offers a range of individual support to assist recovering drug users to get into training or work.

Placement Officer Mick Dean has been responsible for delivering the Workwise project since July of this year. He says that the variety of work-focussed opportunities available is proving to be popular amongst this client group, especially the range of educational options.

“This is because,” he continues, “many people who are recovering have led lives where there has been absolutely no vocational or personal development. The nature of drug addiction means that most people, during their addiction, have rarely engaged in any work related activities. When they are recovering they therefore feel a strong desire to re-educate so that they have the necessary skills, confidence and qualifications in order to enter or re-enter the world of work. They have a strong desire to engage into the working world in a manner that is commensurate with their level of intelligence. Entry-level work, for them, would be wholly unsuitable. For example, there is a percentage of recovering users who would like to work in a substance misuse service setting in order to help others recover from their addictions – this is as a result of their own recognition that their lives as an addict has ultimately been pointless and self-destructive. For many this course is a realistic possibility, even desirable, since they have the experience of having gone through addiction themselves to bring to bear, but they do need the necessary academic qualifications in order to achieve this.”

Most simply want to get back into less specialised areas of work but feel that they haven't developed, for example, the literacy, numeracy or IT skills needed for entering a desired job. The acquisition of these skills is essential if they are to be given an even playing field in finding work within the current competitive labour market.

It's not just about education however - the provision of real work experience within the local business community is also a popular option as it gives recovering users the opportunity to build confidence and the necessary practical and social skills needed to engage successfully back into employment. Therefore for many, a two-strand approach of both

education and work experience seems to be proving the most beneficial route.

In the short term, the conversion from education and work experience into employment itself looks very promising. So far most clients seem to be extremely motivated to turn their lives around. Of course it's too early in the project for long term ambitions to be realised – educational courses take time and many have only enrolled at the beginning of this September but current monitoring of all clients' academic progress suggest that success for many of them is assured – we'll keep you posted.

News in brief

Ofsted inspection

Bury EST is being inspected by Ofsted on 11 December. Ofsted will be with us for the day, interviewing staff, employers and customers about the service provided through our Workstep contract. We deliver the Workstep programme as part of a consortium along with Oldham MBC, Wigan MBC and Pure Innovations in Stockport.

Financial and management systems pass scrutiny

We have been audited twice over the last month or two to see if our financial and management systems are up to scratch. The audits by Jobcentre Plus and the Learning and Skills Council check a random sample before making a judgement on the reliability of our systems. Jobcentre Plus staff commented that they had never seen such an improvement over 12 months and called our systems "wonderful". We also passed the Learning and Skills Council audit without any problems being identified.

Pathways to Work in Bury

Pathways to Work finally arrives in Bury on 3 December as part of the national roll out of the programme. Funded by Jobcentre Plus, it will be delivered by Shaw Trust across Bury, Rochdale, Bolton, Wigan, Tameside, Oldham and Stockport. Shaw Trust is opening an office at the Europa Business Centre in Barcroft Street, Bury. Pathways to Work offers a six month support programme to people on incapacity benefits who are ready for work. There are strong links with health support organisations and a part of the programme, the condition management option, will involve support from Salus Health & Occupational Safety in managing personal health. Further details from Shaw Trust at patrick.byrne@shaw-trust.org.uk

Huw speaks to JCP conference

Manager, Huw Davies, spoke to a conference of 200 Jobcentre Plus staff who are working on the implementation of the Employment Support Allowance

as part of the 2008 welfare reforms. Huw offered a provider perspective to delegates with particular reference to the new work capability assessment.

LSC regional conferences

The Learning and Skills Council have announced a series of regional conferences to look at best practice in the implementation of their Learning for Living and Work strategy. The North West conference will be in Preston on 24 January 2008. The strategy envisages further education colleges and supported employment providers working together to improve job outcomes for disabled learners.

Focus group meets

We would like to thank everyone who attended our recent focus group at the Town Hall. The session was well attended and gave us some very useful information to feed into our self assessment report. We'll be feeding back to you shortly about any actions taken as a result of your comments.

Working Interviews start to take off

We continue to push the idea of working interviews as an alternative to traditional recruitment interviews and Bury MBC has recently agreed to pilot them within Environment and Development Services. We already have two people who have successfully requested working interviews. Meanwhile at Six Town Housing, a couple of our customers are currently undertaking working interviews and it looks as though at least one of these is likely to result in a job offer.

Staffing changes

Bury EST's manager, Huw Davies, is leaving Bury EST to take up a regional post with the Care Services Improvement Partnership. His role will be to coordinate a regional policy regarding employment for people with long term mental health needs. Linda Williamson has also left us to start an account manager post with Shaw Trust and we wish her well for the future. We are currently recruiting a replacement. Full details of our current staff team are on the website at www.buryest.org.uk

How are we doing?

We are always striving to improve our services and we want to know what you think we can do better. Please write or email us with your thoughts – we know we can always improve! You can also use the feedback form on our website.

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