

Effective Interventions Unit Moving On Update Summary

Introduction

In the light of the significant increase in the number and nature of services and programmes aimed at helping drug users improve their employability, EIU has produced an Update of the research review 'Moving On: Education, Training and Employment for Recovering Drug Users'. This Update explores in more depth the concept of employability and highlights the importance of **addressing the needs of employers and the demands of the labour market**. We also include, where possible, up to date information on different types of provision and offer key principles and elements of practice.

The Update covers some of the same ground but does not replace the first Moving On. Those who are interested in the evidence from the EIU literature review and the qualitative consultations carried out by Local and Regional Development Planning in 2001 should read the first document. For the Update, we drew on a number of recent reports and evaluations; held discussions with a number of key people and agencies; convened a working group; and ran a seminar with Further Education College representatives.

While, in line with our remit, the focus of the update is on drug users, much of the information and the key principles and elements of practice that we have identified will be **relevant to services working with problem alcohol users**.

What is Employability?

Employability is the combination of factors and processes that enable people to **progress towards or get into employment, to stay in employment and to move on in the workplace**. This will generally include some development of skills and capacities relevant to the labour market. Employment may not be full time but could cover a range of "meaningful" work related activities.

From our review of the evidence and recent reports, we have developed the following working definition:

"Employability entails achieving a match between the abilities, attitudes and capabilities of an individual, the needs, expectations and attitudes of employers and the demands of current local labour market conditions".

Many drug users want to work but find that, even when they have completed education and training programmes, employers are still reluctant to employ them. There are **individual, institutional and labour market barriers**. Employability provision offers a range of activities e.g. confidence building, social skills, basic skills and other work-related activities that create a **'pathway'** to employability, and ultimately to employment. The pathway is likely to have a number of stages and progress may be through slow, manageable steps.

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Job- Readiness

Within the wider concept of employability, '**job-readiness**' is a central component. There are 3 aspects to address:

- understanding what **employers mean by employability** and what value they place on different employability attributes;
- the variation in the **severity of employment** barriers and their impact on **the level of employability attained** by individual clients;
- the impact of the **local labour market conditions** e.g. the number and type of jobs available, the number of vacancies, the nature of the shortages and the buoyancy (or otherwise) of the local economy.

The Individual

For the individual, there may be a difference between **aspirations and expectations**. Low levels of confidence and self-esteem, together with other problems in their lives, may mean that drug users do not feel ready for full-time work without further support or training. For some, expectations might be limited to lower level jobs – and that might be realistic in the prevailing local labour market (at least in the first instance). Others have ambitions to work in social care or drug counselling so that they can use their own experiences to help others. This requires individuals to be stable or drug free and to undertake a period of education and training. It is essential to **engage with the clients** about their aspirations and expectations and to design programmes with clear objectives that offer choice and flexibility within a structured framework.

There is also a difficult balance between holding someone back and putting them forward to employment before they are ready. **Robust and ongoing assessment** is key to this decision. **Aftercare** is also crucial to sustaining employability.

The Employer

Employers need people to run their businesses. In times of high employment they are likely to take a pragmatic approach to employing those usually regarded as "hard to employ". The evidence is, however, that even stable drug users will still face barriers. Raising awareness among employers about the nature of drug misuse and recovery is important. There is also a role for employability services to offer **practical and moral support to employers** as well as the individual in the first months of employment. Employers may be willing to help e.g. with work tasters or placements but seek **a co-ordinated approach from agencies**. An employer's network could also be helpful.

Service Providers

Employability provision can be part of **treatment services, specialist employability programmes or projects, and mainstream education, training and employment services**. Treatment services, for example can offer components of employability such as confidence building or personal and social skills development. Drug users often have multiple problems so no single agency or service is likely to meet all the needs of the individual. Partnership working is crucial to avoid "falling down the gaps". For all services **a better understanding of the needs of employers and the local labour market** should help tailor their programmes towards future employability.

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Key Principles

- **Recognise that recovering drug users are a diverse group of individuals who are at different distances from the labour market**
- **Ensure that the individual gets access to the most relevant services at the right time**
- **Combine clear objectives shared by all and a shared approach with flexibility to allow for the individual's needs and circumstances**
- **Promote a clear focus on progression, however slow, and measure it**
- **Ensure staff are knowledgeable, skilled and supportive**
- **Involve employers in the design and delivery of services to make sure that different needs are met.**

Key Elements for Effective Practice

For Drug and Alcohol Action Teams and agencies involved in planning

- ✓ **Identify the partners** in your area – including treatment services, specialist employability services e.g. New Futures projects, Progress2Work teams, Further Education colleges, training providers, employers – and **engage with them**. The DAAT employability subgroup can act as a forum and a focal point for networking.
- ✓ Engage at both **strategic and operational levels**. Strategic level agreements on shared aims and objectives are essential to drive action at service level e.g. on shared assessment information, referral arrangements, inter-agency collaborations and joint training. Above all, the partners should reach a shared understanding of what employability means and what **outcomes are expected and are realistic**.
- ✓ Work **with local economic development agencies and employers' networks** to gain a better understanding of the local economy and local labour market conditions.
- ✓ **Use the information** gathered by Jobcentre Plus, the local Enterprise Company, Progress2Work co-ordinators, the local authority, New Deal and FE colleges to get a picture of how many people are likely to benefit from employability provision.
- ✓ **Develop a business case** for discussion with employers to show that there are economic as well as social benefits in employing drug users.

For Service Providers

- ✓ **Identify the barriers** to employability among clients and develop strategies to address them.
- ✓ **Make services accessible**. Location and timing are not the only issues although they are important. The name of the service can be a real factor in the decisions by individuals to attend employability services. Recovering drug users looking to make a break from their past often want to **be "students" or "trainees"** in a service with

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a more “neutral” title. It is also crucial for people who have low levels of self-esteem and are fearful of failure that the environment is **welcoming and supportive**.

- ✓ Ensure staff are **knowledgeable about the impact of drug misuse on people’s lives** and aware of the possibility of further problems such as relapse. Staff should have skills in delivering life-skills and personal development training. They need to have a **good awareness of the local labour market** and good contacts with the local Economic Development Agency.
- ✓ **Develop understanding of job readiness.** It may be possible to agree **common criteria** or benchmarks with employers. One positive step might be to set up an **employers’ network** who would meet occasionally with clients and with staff to discuss the potential for work placements and for future employment. It could also help employers to exchange experiences and develop their own approach to supporting new employees who may have difficulty settling into the workplace.
- ✓ **Communicate with other agencies and other service providers.** Better communication will support the development of **jointly agreed protocols for referrals, information sharing and a common approach to assessments**. Agencies and service providers also need to understand more closely what other agencies actually provide.
- ✓ **Drug treatment services** should consider whether it is possible for them to introduce **elements of employability** as clients progress through the treatment programme. These can include confidence building, personal and social skills development, anger management and help with basic skills such as literacy and numeracy. They should also develop **links with employability services** so that staff understand better what such services offer to their clients. Better links will also help to ease transitions. In some cases they may be able to continue to offer support to clients.
- ✓ **Specialist employability services should build relationships with treatment services.** Treatment services may have concerns about the readiness of clients to move on and may lack knowledge of the kinds of support available through the more employability-focussed services. In the other direction, links should be made with the **“mainstream” providers** such as Further Education colleges and training providers who may offer the next steps on the pathway to employability for clients. There are also important links to be made with employers so that the pre-vocational and skills training offered by the specialist services can be focussed towards the needs of future employers, e.g. IT packages, customer handling. Employers may also be willing to offer **work tasters or work placements** which can be a significant step to helping the individual improve their employability.
- ✓ **Mainstream providers can build relationships with other service providers** to improve their understanding of the problems faced by recovering drug users. Mainstream providers could become more accessible by offering “taster” courses in a “safe” or more local venue. They may be able to work collaboratively with treatment services in working with drug users e.g. PHASE programme at Phoenix House. They should agree **protocols and procedures** for helping clients return to treatment services or the specialist employability services if relapse occurs or the individual cannot yet cope with the demands of the new environment.

Chapters 5 and 6 of the Update give information and examples concerning programmes and services that offer employability provision.

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