

Submission to the DWP In-work Progression Commission's call for evidence

Reed in Partnership

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Introduction

It is very welcome that the DWP is keeping a spotlight on in-work progression at a time when a severe UK unemployment crisis is developing. As Government, the employment support sector, the voluntary sector and communities step up efforts to keep existing workers in work and support the growing numbers of unemployed to find new jobs, it is important not to overlook progression. Support for both sustainment and in-work progression is integral to these efforts if we are to tackle both short- and long-term labour market challenges and support more people into good jobs.

Reed in Partnership has been providing employment support services for more than twenty years, starting with the New Deal in Hackney in 1998. It delivers employment support services, all of which include some element of in-work support, in different regions of the UK. It is a crucial part of the service to provide support in the initial months of a new job, which can be a challenging transition for many. In-work support, for both employee and employer, is designed to help someone sustain in work, manage any ongoing issues or barriers (such as a health condition or housing issue) and increase their earnings and/or hours where these are lower or fewer than they need.

We note that the Commission's call for evidence is focused on how best to affect progression for those already in the labour market. In our experience, however, the distinction between people in and out of work seeking progression is far from clear cut - especially at the lowest-paid end of the labour market where many peoples' experience is moving in and out of unstable work. Continuity of support can play an important part in supporting someone achieve a more stable working life and progress.

For this submission we have collated some case studies of our participants that illustrate different pathways and barriers to progression for people who have recently started a job. We have chosen to respond to a small number of questions but our responses cover points relevant to the questions on sectors (particularly the care sector on p4), business constraints to progression and embedding a culture of lifelong learning. Some of the key learning points from our case studies are:

- There is clearly a need for action to improve the scope for secure employment, more stable hours of work and pay progression in the care sector, especially as this is one of the few sectors that still has significant entry-level workforce shortages despite the greater availability of labour supply. This is not a problem specific to any particular region, but a national, sector-wide challenge.
- Expert in-work support from an adviser (for both a recent recruit and their employer) has an important role to play in providing people who have recently

entered the workforce with the support to sustain and progress, build their confidence, access training and other resources, keep their eye on longer-term career plans and effectively manage potential barriers such as a fluctuating health condition, for example. It can also help them to safely transition to another job if necessary.

- As well as the individual's readiness to progress, progression depends on employer commitment to organise jobs and hours effectively and take practical steps to make it possible for staff to progress from lower-paid roles. This might include structuring team leader roles so that they can be done on a part-time basis, improving support for staff managing health conditions or taking active steps to find out why progression rates for staff from a particular ethnic minority background are low, for example.

Questions

How important for progression is enabling and empowering people to change jobs compared to ensuring established progression pathways within specific employers/sectors? What are the barriers to people in low pay from progressing by changing jobs and/or sectors? What interventions would best empower people to overcome these?

Progression with the same employer: Some of our case studies demonstrate that it is possible for lower-paid workers to secure a pay rise or promotion with the same employer. In-work support can play an important role here. For example, the story of Nick¹ in Hereford (Case study two) illustrates how he had the opportunity for promotion at work but was lacking in confidence to submit his application, with Carole (Case study three) also securing promotion with the same employer. Support from Nick's adviser helped him to step up and progress to a team leader role when he lacked confidence. It is also no coincidence that the case studies of same-employer promotion we feature are both in the warehouse and logistics sector - a sector that is growing its workforce requirements in 2020, unlike many other sectors where demand for workers is low.

Another example is that of a participant supported by Reed in Partnership who successfully returned to work following ill-health, increased her hours and then achieved a promotion to a team leader role (Case study 10). One of the enabling factors here was the fact that the employer had clear progression routes and a positive approach to flexibility over hours.

Moving employer: Moving employer is frequently the best route to increase earnings for someone on low earnings, especially if they are on an insecure contract or working fewer hours than they would like. In Binley and Willenhall, Coventry, Reed in Partnership is

¹ Please note that all names for case study participants have been changed, as not all individuals wanted their names to appear.

delivering a DWP-funded employment support pilot for the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) that includes a self-referred in-work progression service for people in low-paid work wanting to access support and training to increase their earnings. Of the people supported on this service, the vast majority have changed their employer in order to progress.

A number of participants accessing this service have been already employed in care sector roles, particularly domiciliary care. Typically they are employed on a zero-hours contract (as 56% of all domiciliary care workers are²), where the hours can be both low and unpredictable. Most find working in the care sector fulfilling but want more hours and more control over when these hours are. Without this, it makes it difficult to take on a second role, access training or other opportunities, manage family responsibilities and take a more planned approach to career development in general.

In order to address the issue of progression in the care sector, there is a clear need for concerted action to support employers to put more stable employment arrangements in place if the sector is to tackle the high turnover and workforce shortages illustrated in Skills for Care's latest report on the adult social care sector³.

Barriers to progression by changing jobs/sectors: One important barrier is access to training and skills development, including support to retrain, for people on low earnings. The Government's plans to increase financial support for workplace learning are crucial if we are to address a long-running decline in workplace training provision and enable people to access training to progress or move occupations/sectors. Increased flexibility around some current schemes, such as the way that apprentice levy funds can be spent, would also improve opportunities for employers to train up employees at a time when training budgets are under threat because of the economic crisis.

Both individuals and employers would also greatly benefit from much more joined-up working between the skills, careers advice and employment support systems, as a recent report of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority's Future-Ready Skills Commission⁴ sets out in detail. The Social Mobility Commission's recent report on the role of training in supporting progression⁵ from low pay also sets out how the various funding streams announced for lifelong learning need to work as a unified system to increase investment, involve employers and focus on outcomes.

A further issue is access to free training (from the national or devolved Adult Education Budget for example) for people who are already in work but cannot access this through their employer, as much of the funding is difficult to secure unless the person is unemployed. We

² *The state of the adult social care sector and workforce in England*, Skills for Care, October 2020.

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Future-ready Skills Commission: A Blueprint for a Future-Ready Skills System*, September 2020.

⁵ Social Mobility Commission, *Learning ladders: The role of adult training in supporting progression from low pay*, November 2020

hope that the Government's Lifetime Skills Guarantee, incorporating the Level 3 Adult Offer, as well as the rollout of skills bootcamps, will be implemented in a way that supports and encourages low-paid individuals to take part in learning that will support progression, and maximises take-up amongst this group.

Role of in-work support: In our experience, proactive, one-to-one in-work support can play an important role in supporting someone to either: maximise their chances of hours or earnings progression in their current role; or leave a low-paid role with no scope for progression and safely transition to a better-paid or more stable role.

Regular support in the first few weeks and months of a job means that the person in work has access to advocacy and problem-solving support to both prevent them falling out of work and to help them increase their earnings or move employer if needed. A further reason why in-work support helps people to change occupation and sector is because it gives them access to career guidance that will explore their longer-term goals, analyse the steps towards that, explore the real opportunities in their local labour market and give them access to the support and training to put their plan into practice. Some of the aspects of in-work support that we have found effective in the early weeks or months of a job to support sustainment and progression include:

- **A highly personalised and tailored approach** to support a particular individual (and their employer) involving the right people/specialist organisations to provide this support. While some people may want minimal contact, many find this a period when support needs to be stepped up to stabilise in the new situation.
- **Responding quickly and effectively** to find solutions to any issues that arise. Changes to benefit entitlements and money management, managing a health condition or the need to form relationships with new people can quickly turn into crisis situations, or can be quickly resolved. A further challenge that often arises for disabled people or those with a health condition is whether, when and how to disclose a disability or condition to their employer.
- **Adapting communications** in recognition that people in work will inevitably be hard to contact, with calls pre-arranged around hours of work or shifts.

Some of the support Reed in Partnership provides to the employer includes:

- Working with the employer and individual where appropriate on specific issues that arise.
- Providing advice and guidance on support available for employees with a disability/health condition and their line managers, such as Access to Work.
- Signposting employers to local training services that offer workplace learning provision to upskill staff.
- Support to 'backfill' vacancies following promotion of staff to new roles within the business.

- Encouraging the employer become a Disability Confident and/or Living Wage employer and providing support in their attainment, as well as providing support on improving diversity and inclusion in their practices and policies.

The points above may also be relevant to the Commission's questions on how Jobcentres can support progression.

What role does transport and connectivity play in workers in low pay not taking up higher paid jobs and other opportunities for progression such as training and apprenticeships? Similarly, do other considerations, such as childcare, play a role in not taking up higher paid jobs and opportunities that could be vital to progression?

Transport is a major issue for jobseekers and low-paid workers seeking to progress in rural areas. A survey carried out by Reed in Partnership of 73 of our Employment and Health and Wellbeing Advisers in February 2020 found that 92% of advisers had worked with a participant in a rural area who was unable to consider or apply for a job because of transport barriers. Bus services in rural areas are the main barrier in restricting choice of job and sector, especially when their desired job role involves shift work at irregular hours, which may be better paid. One adviser in Cornwall wrote: "I had a participant who lived in a rural area and 10 miles away from the employer who was in a main town. They couldn't accept manufacturing work as it was either 6am to 2pm or 2pm to 10pm. The buses started at 8:15 in the morning and the last bus was at 20:30 so they couldn't get to work or back home." In the case studies in this submission, John's story (Case study one) demonstrates that one of the factors enabling him to move into a better-paid job was gaining access to a car, meaning that he could drive to his new job in Durham.

A recent study published by Rural England⁶ also illustrates how transport and connectivity in rural areas is also a significant barrier for young people in accessing further education, training and other educational and labour market opportunities to progress. Findings include:

- Access to vocational courses is more challenging and there is typically a very narrow choice of apprenticeships available.
- Travel is extremely difficult, time-consuming and expensive. Complex journeys are common, as is reliance on parents being able to provide lifts and choices of times to travel are highly restricted where travelling by bus, where available at all.

Digital connectivity is another major barrier for progression, particularly for people trying to either find work or find a better job at this time. With the closure of library and other points of online access during lockdown and increased poverty causing a higher number of people

⁶ *Challenges facing rural 16-18 year olds in accessing appropriate education and work-based learning*, Rural England, July 2020.

to struggle with accessing a device or data, it is challenging for people to undertake career-enhancing activities online.

While rapidly moving support services to remote delivery in the first national lockdown in March 2020, an informal survey of Reed in Partnership staff suggested that just under one in three of all participants had difficulties accessing a device, broadband or data. This proportion was higher amongst participants on services primarily designed to support disabled people or those with health conditions in more deprived neighbourhoods. For example, on our Work and Health Programme provision delivered for the DWP in the North East, the proportion struggling to access a device or data was nearer to 50%.

Disabled people face particularly big barriers when it comes to digital exclusion and career progression. For example, the ONS found that more than half (56%) of all adult non-internet users were disabled people⁷. Some people with learning disabilities or differences face some of the worst digital exclusion when seeking job advice, both in terms of confidence and the usability of many websites.

Childcare is a major barrier to progression and one that has been worsened significantly this year, exacerbated by school and nursery closures. Uneven division of caring responsibilities means that this has a more negative impact on women's pay and progression than men's. But employer flexibility around caring responsibilities can have a big impact in improving progression. For example, a pilot on progression at retailer Pets at Home managed by Timewise⁸ found that men were progressing from shop floor roles into assistant manager positions at twice the rate of women, with the lack of flexible working in the latter roles was a major contributor. Outcomes of the pilot included a process for flexible job redesign in retail manager roles. The need for employer flexibility around childcare (as well as access to good quality, local childcare) is particularly a progression barrier for single parents, as recent work by charity Gingerbread demonstrates⁹.

For people in rural areas (particularly single parents), the issues of transport and childcare can combine to radically reduce job choices. Responses to our survey of employment advisers in rural areas (see above) highlighted that the logistics of a childcare drop-off and pick-up combined with a journey to and from work are simply impossible by public transport in most rural areas. This makes it challenging to secure an entry-level role, for example, let alone consider the longer hours that a role with greater responsibility will usually entail.

⁷ See ONS, *Exploring the UK's Digital Divide*, 2019.

⁸ *Moving up in retail: An employer's guide to enabling talent progression through flexible working*, Timewise

⁹ *Untapped talent: Single parents and in-work progression – the national picture*, Gingerbread, 2020.

Women, younger workers, older workers, ethnic minority background workers, and disabled workers are identified as most at risk of staying in low pay. What are the reasons for this? At what stages would interventions help each of these types of workers seek out and avail progression opportunities?

The barriers to progression posed by childcare detailed above particularly impact on the choices available to women with childcare responsibilities to progress. Gender stereotyping in the labour market¹⁰ is another theme that we pick up in our work with jobseekers and seek to challenge. This can contribute to women staying in roles where there is less scope for earnings progression and not choosing job goals that in sectors such as construction, manufacturing or warehouse roles where pay can be higher.

The use of job carving and an open-minded approach to how job roles are delivered are proven to work in improving progression for both parents with childcare responsibilities and disabled people¹¹. As a Disability Confident leader and a provider of the Government's Work and Health Programme in the North East and South London, Reed in Partnership works with many jobseekers and employers to break down jobs and explore how they can best be done, working in partnership with the participant and employer. We are also working to capitalise on the doors opened by the more widespread use of remote working since March 2020 in order to widen job opportunities for those disabled people who would prefer to work at home.

Older workers: Recent analysis published by the Social Mobility Commission¹² illustrates the importance of age as a factor in being "stuck" or "cycling" in low pay rather than progressing from it. While the impact of the pandemic on the employment prospects of young people is of huge concern, it will also be important to step up tailored support for workers and jobseekers aged 50+ over the coming few years.

Do positive role models and mentorships offer those in persistently low pay the confidence and support to seek a way out of low quality, low pay jobs? We would welcome case studies and examples.

Role models and mentoring can be important elements in building or improving a culture of learning, development and progression, where an organisation is also taking active steps to remove more structural barriers and investing in workforce development, but they need to be part of an approach that analyses the causes of a lack of progression in an organisation (e.g. around shifts, the way that jobs are structured or a lack of training) and can already demonstrate some of the results of this.

¹⁰ [Shifting Stereotypes: Gender and job roles](#), Reed in Partnership, September 2019.

¹¹ See [Increasing Disability Confidence in SMEs](#), Reed in Partnership, June 2020.

¹² [Learning ladders: The role of adult training in supporting progression from low pay](#), Social Mobility Commission, November 2020.

By far the best role models in an organisation are people who have been successful in being promoted from an entry-level role through to a team leader or supervisory role and beyond, particularly if they are from a demographic which is over-represented at the bottom end of the pay scale and under-represented further up, such as employees from an ethnic minority background or women. There is no better role model than someone from the lowest-paid role in an organisation being successful in being promoted to a team leader or supervisor role and then progressing further.

There is also an issue with the implication that workers in these roles are not “seeking out” or “availing” themselves of progression opportunities. This is demonstrated by the story of our participant Nasreen (Case study six) in Coventry. Nasreen prepared to approach her employer to request more hours with her adviser’s help. The meeting went well, but her employer was simply unable to offer her more hours or any other route to progression. Research shows that attitudes of individuals to progression are important, but there are a wide range of factors, such as the availability of workplace training and cost constraints in the workplace¹³, that also need to be addressed. With economic conditions having worsened so significantly, not only support for individuals but support for employers to create jobs will be critical in creating opportunities for people to progress.

¹³ *Progression in Employment*, Institute for Employment Studies, 2019.

Case studies¹⁴

Progression through changing job role and sector

Case study one: John, Sunderland

John relocated to Sunderland from the South where he had been working as a handyman. He was referred by JobCentre Plus to Better Working Futures, the Government's Work and Health Programme¹⁵ run by Reed in Partnership in the North East. One of his considerations was his interest in pigeons, which he needed to visit and look after every morning. This meant that he wanted to find nightshift work that made this possible. He had some cleaning experience and his Reed in Partnership employment adviser supported him to successfully find a job cleaning a gym (employed by a cleaning company rather than the gym directly). In the longer term, he hoped that there might be a route to another role at the gym, such as repairing the machines. He started there doing night shifts but only two weeks in the lockdown saw the gym shut and John did not qualify for furlough, so he fell back on to Universal Credit.

When the gym opened again in July, John went back to the cleaning role, but he found the instability of the work and the environment there at night meant that he was not enjoying the work, as well as struggling somewhat with low confidence and worry as a result of the period on furlough.

Through regular in-work support meetings with his adviser, John started to explore new job goals. He was interested in the warehouse sector and particularly wanted to work for Amazon. His adviser and Reed's local recruitment manager Anoushka supported him through a recruitment process with an agency for Amazon. This was a time-consuming process and involved undertaking online training, for which he needed to come into the Reed office because his only digital access was a phone and very limited data. While he was excited about the role and handed in his notice meanwhile, the role did not materialise. Undeterred, he wanted to keep his focus on getting a job with Amazon and applied through their direct recruitment process, undertaking a similarly thorough process for a role in Durham. One thing that also changed during this period was that John was able to get access to a car, without which he would not have been able to travel to Durham. He was successful in his application and his feedback to his Reed in Partnership adviser is that he is thoroughly enjoying the job and working with a team. It also attracts significantly higher pay than his cleaning role, equating to a pay rise of at least 30%.

¹⁴ Please note that all names for case study participants have been changed as not all individuals wanted their names to appear.

¹⁵ Co-funded by the European Social Fund.

Building the confidence to secure promotion with the same employer

Case study two: Nick, Hereford

When Nick was referred to the DWP ESF-funded Marches Work Routes service in August 2020 he was set on working in a restaurant or bar. He had previous experience in the sector but jobs in the sector were in short supply. He was low on confidence having had some rejections following interviews, so his adviser worked with him on building up his confidence and mindset and exploring other possible sectors and occupations. He was successful in securing a warehouse operative role at the end of September. A few weeks later, an opportunity arose for a team leader role, but he was not confident in going for it. His adviser again worked with him on confidence and preparation, reminding him of the evidence supplied by the feedback from his employer that he presented himself well and had a great work ethic. He was successful in getting promoted to team leader, starting the role at the beginning of November. This brought both a pay rise and a move to a permanent employment contract.

Case study three: Carole, Hereford

Carole was referred to the ESF-funded Marches Work Routes service in July 2020 when she came back to the UK after living abroad for some time. As a 50+ unemployed jobseeker with a lack of local connections, she did not know where to start with her job search and needed support with confidence, getting a CV and searching online. She soon secured a warehouse role, supported with in-work calls from her Reed adviser. She was soon able to apply for a team leader role and was successful in securing the promotion, pay rise and employment contract.

Moving employer and sector to facilitate a longer-term career plan

Case study four: Tara, Huddersfield

Tara worked in a retail role but her employer was reducing costs and her hours were condensed to weekend only. The role was also further from home than she wanted. Tara wished to limit her options to retail, but Tara's Employment Support Officer (on Reed in Partnership's ESF co-funded Better Working Futures service), encouraged her to consider other sectors and a broader range of options within a commutable distance from her home. Her long-term goal was to work in the beauty industry. She successfully found a role in the food and drink sector, with flexible shifts that also enabled her to undertake training as a wedding makeup artist, as well as saving money in travel costs that she could put towards training and development for her business.

Moving into a new job to secure more hours while starting a business

Case study five: Barbara, Coventry

Barbara referred herself to the Connecting Communities employment pilot delivered by Reed in Partnership for the WMCA in October 2019. She had been working for a care agency as a care assistant providing agency cover in residential care homes across Warwickshire. Barbara had found the flexibility of this role suited her as she also ran a small dress-making business.

Despite having a contract for six hours a week with the care agency Barbara had not worked for them since July as she had broken her elbow and had been unable to work. Now it was time for Barbara to return to work, she explained she felt vulnerable and unsure as to whether she would be able to complete her duties as a carer.

Barbara's main concern with finding a new job was the work pattern. She needed enough time and flexibility to be able to run her dress-making business. Along with her dress making business Barbara was also looking to expand into soap making and had been researching how to go about this. She wanted support to understand how finding a new part-time role would affect her circumstances and her universal credit claim. The other support required was to help her identify transferable skills from care and running her own business and find a new role to fit this, as well as becoming confident with interviews.

Barbara's adviser worked with her to complete a Better Off in Work calculation, so she understood the impact of working part time and Universal Credit. Together they discussed Barbara's experience and came up with a list of important transferable skills which Barbara then used to update her CV, as well as receiving support on interview skills.

It was not long before Barbara secured an interview as a retail sales assistant, given her experience of selling products. Barbara enjoyed the interview process reassuring as she was given time to find out about her manager and the realities of the role from current staff who were all positive. She found out later that day that she had been offered a part time role of 16 hours a week. After talking to the manager she was relieved to find out that they could accommodate her need for flexibility and together worked out a shift pattern that worked for both Barbara and her employer.

Barbara is now happily in work and still working on both of her businesses, keeping in regular contact with her advisor. Barbara is hoping that she will be able to send her soap away for testing soon, which is the next step in making her business.

Changing employer to increase earnings and hours around family responsibilities

Case study six: Nasreen, Coventry

Nasreen Joined the Connecting Communities team in November 2019, she was working as a carer for a company in Coventry working 16 hours a week. Nasreen really enjoyed her care role, but 16 hours was not financially sustainable for her. Nasreen's partner was also working and she needed to ensure that both their working patterns enabled them to fulfil childcare responsibilities. Her first step was to prepare to approach her employer to see if there was any option to increase her hours in a way that suited her childcare commitments. Once she felt confident enough to do this, using Reed in Partnership's pitch builder tool, she initiated the conversation with her employer. The conversation went well, but the employer was unable to give her the hours she needed. After discussion, Nasreen decided that she would prefer to look for alternative employment elsewhere. She was also keen for a change as this was the first job she had secured since arriving in the UK.

Nasreen's adviser arranged face-face appointments around her availability, knowing that she might need to change appointments at short notice due to being called into work and maintaining contact via phone and email when she was unable to attend. She was supported with her CV and interview skills, accessing other training and discussing flexible working with employers.

The outcome was that Nasreen secured a stable, full-time role with a care company that is flexible around her childcare responsibilities, enables her to work more hours (40 hours a week) and attracts a higher hourly rate. She reports she is enjoying her job and is still in regular contact with the Connecting Communities team who can help if she needs any further support.

Moving from unstable employment to a job in line with individual career goals

Case study seven: Marcus, Bradford

Marcus had been receiving in-work support from Reed in Partnership's Better Working Futures service in the North East (the Government's Work and Health Programme). His current job role was seasonal and temporary and he had been informed that he would be dismissed in two weeks. His barriers included depression and anxiety and he felt overwhelmed with the prospect of losing his role and having to find a new one. He also had problems with digital access.

Marcus's Employment Support Officer gave him support to update his CV and carry out a Career Progression Review. His longer-term goal was to secure a driving job, so his support officer supported him to tailor his CV to that end. While he had a short period out of work when his temporary job ended, he successfully found a new driving job that he started on 23 October. It attracted higher pay than his previous role and was on a permanent basis.

Managing disability and health conditions to support progression

Case study eight: Paul, Huddersfield

Paul was working eight hours a week for a cleaning agency used by a retail company. His Employment Support Officer assisted Paul to source additional working hours with another employer, supporting Paul with the process due to the need for dyslexia support. Paul was also supported with his communication and behaviour with employers, with his support officer working with the employer to help them better understand this possible clash of personalities. Paul successfully secured a second role where overtime was also available, so he left his initial role to work a regular 20 hours a week with the new employer, with ongoing in-work support.

Case study nine: Lena, Calderdale

Lena was receiving in-work support through Better Working Futures as she worked in a retail role in the Calderdale area. She had recently had a period off work in relation to a mental health condition and her Employment Support Officer needed to support her to mediate with issues at work. While Lena and her Employment Support Officer endeavoured to resolve these issues, it became clear that her employer saw mental illness as a “cloak” for performance issues and that her employer’s attitude worsened her symptoms. Her Employment Support Officer assisted with her transition to a different retail employer. He encouraged her to make an application to Access to Work and to get support from Able Futures, which provides access to specialist mental health support. This put support in place for her next steps after her time on the Better Working Futures service. As her Employment Support Officer says, her initial employer lost out, but this was “another employer’s gain.”

Case study 10: Clare, Coventry

Clare joined the Connecting Communities programme in May 2019. She had not worked since March 2018 due to cancer treatment, resulting in her leaving her previous role. The participant was in remission from cancer on joining the programme and wanted to return to work on a part-time basis while regaining her strength. Her adviser supported her to revamp her CV and prepare for interviews. She was successful in securing a role with the local police force and started work in November 2019. In March, she was able to increase her working hours from 30 to 35, then in August 2020 achieved a promotion to a team leader role.