Reviving the Heart of the West End
Training Strategy:

An Evaluation of the Intermediate Job Market

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October 2001
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Introduction

As part of the continuing evaluation of the Reviving the Heart of the West End Strategy (RHWE) generally and the Intermediate Job Market (IJM) specifically, interviews were conducted with partners, the Strategy Co-ordinator and trainees currently involved with, or participating, in the Project. The purpose of these interviews was to gather the views and perceptions of the participants with the intention of evaluating the effectiveness of the Intermediate Job Market.

Structure of the Report

The report is laid out in sections, which are based around themes and issues that emerged from interviews with Partners, the Co-ordinator and trainees. These are followed by an overall Conclusions section, which includes key points, summaries and findings from all the sections. There is a final brief recommendations section.

Research Methodology

Information for this report was gathered through a combination of documentary analysis and qualitative research methods. The qualitative information was essentially collected through in-depth, face-to-face interviews with staff and trainees currently involved in the Intermediate Job Market. Interviews were tape-recorded and fully transcribed wherever possible to ensure full accuracy and context. A thematic analysis was conducted on all of the interviews to draw out common themes and concerns raised by all of the participants in the Intermediate Job Market.

We can say a lot about the impact the IJM has had on partners and trainees at that point in time when they were interviewed. However, we can say very little about post-IJM experience for trainees and whether they will go on to find work or other training. It is for this reason that this report will focus on what the interview data can tell us about the effectiveness and impact of the IJM on those immediately concerned with the programme.

One of the challenges encountered in any evaluation is whether the views of all stakeholders in the project have been taken into consideration. While it is the case that the views of Intermediate Job Market staff and trainees have been included, it might be argued that on a broader canvas, the views of external agencies operating alongside the Intermediate Job Market have been excluded. These agencies include, for example, established agencies such as the DSS and could perhaps include charitable and other agencies that existed pre-RHWE.
a) The Ethos of the Intermediate Job Market

The Reviving the Heart of the West End Training Strategy aims to “improve the employability of residents of the Reviving the Heart of the West End”. However, the difficulties and barriers that residents may experience to participation on both structural and individual levels are important features of any strategy. When talking of 'barriers', though, it is important to place this local strategy, and the projects within it, in a more national and international context. The concept of 'exclusion' and 'barriers' to opportunities is not a new concept and there has been considerable political debate, which includes the establishment of the recent Government Social Exclusion Unit surrounding the issues. Skills' audits carried out in the West End of Newcastle revealed that there existed:

- Few people with marketable skills, including low levels of basic skills
- Low and declining job aspirations
- Indifferent experiences of education and previous training opportunities
- Reluctance to travel beyond the immediate neighbourhood to work
- High levels of benefit dependency
- Instability in homes, housing and relationships
- Unemployment as a cultural norm
- High levels of stress in other aspects of daily life.

(RHWE Project Appraisal Document)

Some residents of the West End of Newcastle have been excluded or prevented from full-participation in the employment market as a consequence of experiencing multiple barriers. These 'barriers' may be experienced individually or even in multiple combinations. Although no formal, single definition exists, there has been enough debate around the world to prompt various lists of factors associated with barriers. As an indication, The Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) initiated the Job Placement, Employment and Training Programme in Australia. One of the purposes of this programme is to help young people to overcome barriers that prevent participation in education, training and employment. Barriers identified by DETYA include:

- lack of secure housing or access to secure housing;
- drug and alcohol abuse problems;
- sexual abuse or violence;
- behavioural problems including problems exhibited by young offenders on release;
- lack of life skills, e.g., conflict resolution;
- lack of educational achievement and related information;
- lack of work experience and skills base;
- lack of income support;
- dysfunctional family background;
- cultural and religious differences;
- lack of support structures, including family support and role models;
- issues directly related to refugee (and/or asylum seekers) backgrounds, e.g., torture and trauma; and
- other educational issues, training or employment disadvantages.
Although this list of factors includes many experiences and factors which are applicable to residents of the West End of Newcastle, the list is not exhaustive or representative of all residents. One 'barrier' to one person may not necessarily be perceived as a 'barrier' by another, and of course it is quite possible for one individual to experience, or be affected by, multiple barriers in any combination.

The concept of 'barriers' is pertinent to the RHWE Strategy, and one example was provided by the Co-ordinator:

"... at the moment one of the things we're doing is looking at the barriers to training and they went off to this project in the centre of Newcastle where they take people and people are sent in through Employment Services and it's one of the New Deal options... one person wanted to do Photography but they were down there doing Business Admin', you know what I mean? It's totally grinding people down and all you're putting in place is disappointment and failure aren't you?"

There is also a large Asian presence in the West End of Newcastle and ethnicity and gender-related issues are prominent. Some women, for instance, may be doubly excluded from the employment market simply because they are women and from the ethnic community. Within this research, the experiences and perceptions of such women were a key feature of our evaluation of the Intermediate Job Market. Again, such experiences can be replicated nationally, and Oldham Council, for instance has studied the impact that ethnicity has on access to the employment market for young Asians, both male and female. Some of the findings taken from the website report suggest that:

- The influence of family, wider kin, and peers was a central factor in the large numbers of Asian young people attending education. In this regard the educational aspirations of young women showed a less simple relationship than one of 'blanket' parental approval. Indeed the influence of family was markedly gendered.
- Relatively few Asian males entered into youth training, though a considerable percentage of the Asian women did so. The reputation of youth training remained poor amongst Asian young men and this was reflected in their concentration on pre-NVQ level 2 courses.
- Stark ethnic and gender differentials arose with the analysis of patterns of unemployment and disaffection. Bangladeshi males were the least likely to be on unstable pathways and Bangladeshi females the most likely. Indeed the gender divide was more significant than that of ethnicity when it came to the overall question of participation.

Although not explicitly or uniquely targeted at Asian women, the RHWE Training Strategy seeks, as one of it's aims, to overcome these and other difficulties through the provision of an innovative range of initiatives. This includes:

- Provision of individual programmes to overcome the multiple barriers which many residents' face and to help them exploit the talents they have which often remain unrecognised.
- To upgrade basic skills and so get people onto the first rung of the ladder in their progression towards further training/ employment.
- To offer an appropriate starting point for people that will allow them to move towards work/ further training. (RHWE Project Appraisal Document)
The whole ethos of the Intermediate Job Market is about fitting people into jobs at levels of work they are prepared for. However, it is also necessary that the work experience stretches them beyond their current level of job readiness in preparation for the next level of work, which may be another course, further training or full-time employment.

It is clear that, in trying to attract those residents of the West End who have been outside the employment market for long periods of time, it is necessary to have a system that is to a certain extent 'non-traditional'. The strengths of the Intermediate Job Market programme lie in its capacity to respond flexibly and responsively to the unique needs of residents in the West End of Newcastle, attempting to strike a balance between the expectations of the trainees and the realities of the labour market in the area.

IJM appears to complement traditional employment programmes such as the Government New Deal Scheme. While there is a compulsory element in the New Deal, the IJM 'softly-softly' approach is voluntary in nature and may appear a more attractive option for those residents who do not fit easily into mainstream training/employment schemes. The IJM ethos places great stock on the development of ‘soft skills’ such as autonomy, communication skills, self-motivation and initiative and views these as of core importance but without neglecting qualifications and certificated courses. The current partner organisations are able to provide a variety of different work placement experiences that meet the needs of trainees on a range of levels.

The Intermediate Job Market is a training and employment Programme operating within the Reviving the Heart of the West-End of Newcastle Campaign (RHWE). The Intermediate Job Market training programme is composed of a core of partner organisations which collaborate and complement each other in the operation of the Intermediate Job Market. In addition, the West End Health Resource Centre, which operates on New Deal Money, is closely associated with but separate from the core of IJM partners. The Core IJM partners include:

- Offroaders
- Participation in Leisure
- The Millin Centre
- Westgate Community College
- Community House
- West End Health Resource Centre.
b) The Aims and Objectives of the Intermediate Job Market

As part of the evaluation, we were anxious to explore the views and ideas of all those involved - partners, the Co-ordinator and trainees - of the aims and objectives of the IJM.

The primary aim of the Intermediate Job Market is to provide residents of the West End with work experience combined with training. The Intermediate Job Market was designed to deal with the problem of training programmes that simply lead to more training programmes without any 'real work' at the end of them. As the Co-ordinator suggested:

"It is a common complaint really that they do the training but do not end up with a job and they train for years and sometimes don't get a job. I think these schemes are very important in terms of giving that work and experience but with your training built in".

According to the Co-ordinator, The Intermediate Job Market ethos contrasts starkly with the more traditional approaches to combatting unemployment. As the Co-ordinator pointed out, referring to a number of initial negative experiences with a traditional training provider:

"There was again this approach that they adopt which is basically that they tell the person to get on with it and do it, so there is a culture clash".

One of the main points of similarity that emerged among the partner organisations was the unstructured and spontaneous ways the programme was set up and run. This is not meant to be a criticism but is meant to show the incredible difficulties overcome by the various partners in setting up and running the system. What emerges from the interviews with staff is the incredibly steep learning curve they all faced. It is clear that although the core ideas and aims of the IJM were understood by the partners, each of the partners interpreted these aims and purposes quite flexibly and in line with their own particular organisational arrangements. As one partner pointed out, "we didn't know any of the mechanics of the scheme" and another remarked:

"We didn't know anything about the Intermediate Job Market at first.... it has been changing constantly and it hasn't stopped changing yet".

The Co-ordinator highlighted difficulties encountered by all of the partners during the initial set up period of the IJM. All of the partners had a challenging time developing a structure for their particular element of the Intermediate Job Market. The Co-ordinator felt that many of the partners had preconceived views about the way the Intermediate Job Market would operate. The Co-ordinator also highlighted the fact that although good relationships existed between the partners and traditional agencies, there appeared to be a little friction and tension between Intermediate Job Market and these other agencies.
c) Expectations

There was a common feeling among the trainees interviewed that the IJM was somehow different when compared with their previous training and work experiences on more traditional employment schemes. As one of the trainees typically commented:

"This seems more like a job to me than training. I liked the sound of this and I thought I could do it because I have done quite a bit of voluntary stuff in the community".

Although all of the trainees mentioned that they had had prior work and training experience, it seems clear that the Intermediate Job Market was ideal for them since there was the opportunity to participate on a number of different levels. However, it might be argued that since all of the trainees had been in some form of employment prior to their participation in the IJM, that this scheme was perhaps more suitable for those residents of the West End who had perhaps not been engaged in any prior educational, training or work experience. Some of the trainees revealed low expectations of the work they would be required to do during their work placements. They expected that it would involve 'menial' tasks such as cleaning and manual work. Whether this was as a result of negative experiences on previous schemes is difficult to determine. As one trainee told us:

"I thought we would have to clear the equipment away and bring it back in".

Inevitably the Strategy Co-ordinator expressed a view of the IJM in relation to outcomes and effectiveness in terms of cost-effectiveness. It is difficult to examine the concept of 'cost-effectiveness' when referring to 'intangible' outcomes such as increased self-esteem or confidence. Consequently, the Co-ordinator pointed out that the Intermediate Job Market approach to unemployment was perhaps more costly than traditional models or approaches:

"... in terms of unit costs is the most expensive although we've really run it on a tight budget".

Nevertheless, she also suggested that while the focus of traditional schemes is on mass-produced remedies that are indeed cost-effective, they take no account of the individual needs of the trainees. The Intermediate Job Market approach contrasts starkly with this traditional approach in that, as suggested by the Co-ordinator and other IJM partners:

"... what I always say to people is that I can see you, I can see the potential in these people and that I had confidence in these people and that is so rare for people because basically they feel they're being manoeuvred into a job somewhere to do something and nobody is asking what they really want to do and that is what our whole initiative is about. That is what drastically contrasting to what Employment Services are saying because we're saying "what's your dream?" and people then say what they've always wanted to do".
d) Trainee Recruitment and Support

A common problem identified by both the partners and the Strategy Co-ordinator was trainee recruitment. While all of the partners stated that they were happy with the trainees they had taken on, they felt that adequate numbers of residents from the West End had not come forward. Partners felt that one of the reasons for this was limitations placed on recruitment such as the geographical area and age group from which trainees could be recruited. This in effect led to the recruitment of what could be perceived as 'the best of the available crop'. Inevitably, it seems that in many cases, partners ended up with recruits who already possessed the skills that would define them as 'employment ready'. The Co-ordinator raised this as a concern, and stated that many of the trainees were already relatively well qualified and perhaps beyond the remit of the Intermediate Job Market:

"... clearly there are some people who can take up these opportunities and do very well, very quickly and everything is very easy. If you have graduates going in which we have, I think 3 or 4 of the people have been graduates who have found it and recognised the opportunity but I have some reservations being those people as I would argue they have a lot of skills and opportunities and we are not really catering for people who to my mind should have a lot more capabilities. They should be able to access employment essentially but interestingly they maybe haven't which says something about graduates and you do come across graduates who are 10 years on and haven't had a job”.

It is recognised by the Co-ordinator and others that accessing suitable residents for the Intermediate Job Market is a problem. However, there is a long-term consideration of this issue. As the Co-ordinator explained:

"I feel they don't do a lot of what I call "outreach" work which I don't know whether they don't see as their job. [name of individual] runs a drop-in centre but you know, as an Outreach Worker who works with me and whose job it is to keep people informed and that is crucial as not everyone is going to find the office and only certain people will, and you have this predetermined group who are at the stage of saying "right I'll get off my backside and look for a job" and there are isolated people and we're trying to extend”.

A tension exists between the needs of the partners and the skills that trainees already possess. Many of the partner organisations need trainees at certain levels of job readiness and would find it difficult to take on trainees with high support needs. There is a problem in some respects since the partner organisations are to a certain extent 'going concerns'. One partner representative told us:

"We had expectations that they had to meet certain criteria, for example, a person who is working in this building would have to show the potential to greet people in an appropriate way, and to carry out some of the functions of the post that we were asking them to do. So we were prepared to put in a level of training but there were some desirables there to begin with, which I’m pleased with. So it might have been possible that we would have turned down some candidates because we simply didn’t think that they would be able to work at the level that we had required initially". (Partner).
Clearly, staff in partner organisations have their own tasks and duties to fulfil and would find trainees with high support requirements difficult to deal with. There is a need therefore for trainees who can ‘get on’ with the tasks and duties assigned to them. The recruitment phase is a time when partners attempt to determine whether the trainees will show a certain level of commitment to the organisation, i.e., show a willingness to work and to learn and to show a certain flair for the job. One partner described the process involved in turning down a potential trainee:

"The one I turned away was, I just knew he wouldn’t stay, I felt he wouldn’t stay. They get so many chances to come onto placements and if they don’t go on they lose their benefits and this one was obviously on his last chance, last warning and he wasn’t going to stay so I asked him to go away and think about it carefully and he didn’t come back. That’s one of the problems with New Deal really, as they are sometimes forced to come on placements and they don’t want to sometimes". (Partner).

However, as was pointed out by one partner project (a very small organisation in terms of staff numbers), if such a project were to employ a trainee, a person with little or no work-related skills would require additional mentoring and supervision, and with their existing workload, this would prove extremely difficult.

This raises an important issue in terms of who is a ‘suitable’ candidate for the Intermediate Job Market programme. While all of the trainees ‘volunteered’ to take part by applying for the jobs, it would be interesting to examine what impact (if any) an element of compulsion, as is used, for example, in New Deal Schemes, may have on the Intermediate Job Market. However, the Co-ordinator and partners expressed reservations regarding an element of ‘forced’ participation suggesting that this would not be of benefit to the programme or the trainees:

"I’d be uncomfortable with the idea of anyone being pushed into it as I am against those sort of approaches anyway as you then have all sort of resistance to it and it sets it off on a poor footing". (Co-ordinator).

The role of the Intermediate Job Market appears to be regarded as a complementary approach to the problem of unemployment. There is a sense that one of the strengths of the Intermediate Job Market approach lies in its non-traditional approach to dealing with unemployment. While there may be an element of compulsion and inflexibility in traditional programmes, the IJM provides a flexible and individually-based tailored service, which is perhaps a more user-friendly approach for residents who have been unemployed for long periods of time. Applying more traditional approaches may, in fact, be counterproductive in the West End since residents’ prior negative experiences with traditional approaches may deter them from even considering the Intermediate Job Market. As one of the partners pointed out:

“‘It depends on the individual you have got to be flexible enough to deal with them as individuals. You can’t treat them the same.” (Partner).

The Strategy Co-ordinator agreed and said that the Intermediate Job Market is also about being responsive and flexible to meet the needs of trainees:
"... We need to look at those individuals and what they're wanting to do and give them training that enables them to do it and clearly is what it's going to equip them, partly to do the job but partly to progress and to go onto leave that opportunity with something useful".

Another partner agreed stating:

"Yeah, its treating people like individuals and not as this huge enterprise that’s been swallowed up, you know, it’s treating people with respect". (Partner).

Most of the trainees found about the IJM through both formal and informal channels including traditional agencies such as the Employment Service or through one of the RHWE agencies or through friends. Trainees reported a variety of educational, training and work experience prior to their work placements in the Intermediate Job Market. As one trainee pointed out,

"Since I left school I have been on YTS courses but none that I have liked because you were shoved onto things... from the employers point of view they get a young person and they just use them as a skivvy".

One solution to the problem of so-called 'over-qualified' trainees was suggested by one of the partners. He pointed out that:

"I've noticed there are lots of graduates out there. I mean, we have law degrees doing taxis and things and just not getting the jobs, so I think if someone who comes for a position, then to be fair, graduate or not graduate, you should be allowed to be given that opportunity. I know it might be hard for people who haven't got the degrees, but if the people with degrees aren't getting jobs, maybe we need more placements". (Partner)

While it is the case that partner organisations used the criteria specifically laid down for RHWE, it is clear that other implicit criteria were used to identify suitable candidates. Clearly, some partner organisations selected trainees who were well-motivated and needed little, if any, input and supervision from managers. Other partner organisations were less selective. However, it is recognised that there were serious limitations in terms of the age groups and geographical area to recruit from and this resulted in a lack of choice regarding trainees. One manager noted that:

"... We thought, we can't take this person on because they need more support than we can give them".

In contrast, however, views were expressed which were supportive of the concept of selection and retention of trainees on the basis of existing 'desirable' skills. As an example, one manager noted that:

"We were very lucky to get [name of trainee], she has done community work and she is a graduate."

Another pointed out that their trainee:
"... Came out of school with qualifications in that she'd done GCSEs and so forth but the attractive thing was that she'd been to college and had been training in independent organisations..."

This image contrasts with the experience of another partner organization that was receiving money through the New Deal Scheme. This organisation was inevitably less selective and as a result took on trainees with a variety of 'problems', which could also be regarded as 'barriers'. As one manager pointed out:

"... We've had a lot of problems around drug and alcohol issues, around mental health problems, and so two or three of the placements we've had have left before the end of their time".

Another manager pointed out that some people were participating in the Intermediate Job Market (by association with the New Deal Scheme) because they had been compelled to do so:

"We had one chap who just didn't turn up... he never really integrated and I think he was forced to take the placement and he obviously didn't want to be here..."

One other illustrated that with such projects or schemes involving the New Deal, there are expectations of the trainees from the start:

"It's clear to them (the trainees) in the beginning... if we dismiss them or they leave, they'll lose their benefit".

It appears to be the case that the Co-ordinator preferred an informal 'hands-off' approach in her dealings with the partner organisations. An approach that appeared to suit the partners:

"... It's sort of as things happen, you talk these things through and a lot of it is done informally. I don't go and visit projects but pop in with leaflets or something. Those are very useful conversations often and it's more that that happens. I think it has to be, I don't think it would work if I was forever having meetings".

Some managers expressed concern about how this time would affect their capacity to provide adequate supervision and support for their trainees. This appears to be a problem for those organisations which expect their recruits to possess certain levels of competency prior to their work placements and which would enable them to carry out their duties with limited supervision and support. However, the organisation operating with New Deal money recognised - or had become aware - that as the Intermediate Job Market has developed, that some residents of the West End have particularly high-level support requirements. One manager said that she knew of a number of people who:

"... Have been involved in administering the Intermediate Job Market who have been surprised how many needs the trainees have had and that it is not just sort of work needs but also outside needs like housing problems or family problems".

Another reported:
"I think I underestimated the support that people who have been out of the job market for a long time would need in relation to their personal life. I thought practical things like, we will have to get you this certificate or that certificate and we will have to introduce you to college, but it was the personal things that swung me".

And yet another highlighted the differences between trainees in terms of support requirements:

"Philip" and "John"[pseudonyms] are very willing and eager and will use their initiative to go ahead and do things but the majority will sit and wait until you come and encourage them and take them forward..."

It is clear then that an important feature of a project such as the IJM is the acceptance and acknowledgement that each trainee has (or may have) specific, individual needs which might impact on their levels of involvement and commitment.
e) Delivering Training

All of the partner organisations expressed similar views regarding intended outcomes for the trainees. These outcomes revolved around enhancing trainees' confidence and hopefully the acquisition of a qualification or qualifications. Given the nature of some of the trainees and their particular support requirements, partners felt that the duration of work placements should be extended to allow more time for trainees to settle and also for the completion of qualifications.

One common theme that emerged during interviews with partners was the belief that the duration of the work placements did not allow enough time to fully develop the trainees’ skills and experience. The fact that some qualifications sometimes take more than six months to achieve was also highlighted by some of the partners. A typical suggestion was:

"I would say more than a year; 18-24 months. I think more than a year because even NVQs can take 2 years to do." (Partner)

Another commented:

"We advocate for a year, because 6 months is when they’re just starting to get comfortable and are being able to do quite responsible jobs really. They’ve got to come back on a voluntary basis to finish off their portfolios, which very few do and you’ve got to motivate them. After 6 months we would actively job search anyway but they’re not interested." (Partner)

One of the partners suggested that having fixed periods of time to deal with trainees was not an effective approach given the support that some of the trainees required:

"I think 12 months isn’t enough. I think it should be flexible for some people but not for other people. Intermediate Job Market has got to be at the pace and have the length of time needed. You can’t put boundaries on these things". (Partner)

It is clear that there was uncertainty about who would be doing what in terms of training. Two of the partner organisations believed that their role was simply to provide work experience, while other external organisations would provide the necessary framework for trainees to work towards various qualifications. What emerged from the interviews was a picture of the relatively unstructured nature of the trainees' workplace experience and a sense of both formal and informal training and learning experiences. One of the partner organisation staff highlighted that their trainees received informal "training on the job", pointing out that the formal aspects of the training came through the qualifications that the trainee was taking alongside the work experience. Another Partner saw his role as, "supervising their (trainees) work practice", rather than as delivering formal training.

Trainees possessed a variety of qualifications prior to their involvement in the IJM. Qualifications ranged along a spectrum from RSA, CLAIT and GCSEs at one end to degrees at the other end. In at least two cases trainees had been involved in degree level education. Comments included:

"I got O level Maths and English but that was it".
Another trainee seemed to be over-qualified in some respects for the level of work experience on offer,

"I have six GCSEs in English, Maths, Computer Literacy, Design and Commerce, a BTEC in Business and Finance and degree level study in Business and Finance".

Clearly, while the aim of the IJM is to give residents some work experience it appears in some cases, if not all, that many of the trainees were relatively well qualified and perhaps not representative of residents of the West End as a whole.

The Co-ordinator suggested that the most obvious impact of the work placements on trainees was the effect they had on the trainees' self-confidence and self esteem. The Co-ordinator and Partners felt that these had been enhanced and improved as a result of work placement experience. Evidently, some of the partners decided to retain their trainees. The Co-ordinator felt that this was a positive outcome but also felt that it might be best if trainees moved on beyond their partner organisation into employment beyond the IJM.

f) Experience of Work Placements

Most, if not all, of the trainees gave positive accounts of their main duties and roles. Clearly, they believed that they were getting a variety of work experience and that this direct experience was enhancing their confidence and skills. There was also a perception that the work experience and training they were getting was in some ways a step beyond what they had done before. One trainee told us:

"Yes, I did everything... I used to enjoy it immensely, it was just fantastic".

The impression received from the trainees was that they had become literally members of the team. The tasks and duties assigned to them were varied and required a variety of skills. Most of the trainees expressed satisfaction with the work experience and training they had received, although on the whole this appeared to be informal in nature rather than a structured programme. The training in other words was "on the job" and learned through "doing the job". In some respects, the partner organisations had selected the trainees on the basis of their past work experience and perceived skills for the job, thus limiting any problems of integration later.

In terms of formal qualifications, the trainees seemed to be satisfied with the formal qualifications they were working towards. However, one of the trainees was concerned that the NVQ she was working towards was not valued by employers. She mentioned that in the jobs she had applied for, the more traditional qualifications such as GCSEs seemed to figure more prominently:

"... They say it's a recognised qualification but employers don't mention it when they advertise for stuff... I think the experience might do because adverts say one or two years office experience which I have, haven't I?".
g) Measuring the Impact of the Intermediate Job Market

It is accepted generally that appropriate indicators of outcomes - whether they are positive or negative - include *tangible* things like qualifications achieved or numbers of people in full-time employment, and so on. While there was recognition among all concerned that traditional measures of impact such as the number of courses or qualifications successfully completed or the number of trainees now in employment were important, the partners and the Co-ordinator were, nevertheless, critical of such a mechanistic approach. Partners tried to highlight the *intangible* elements such as improved self-esteem, motivation, direction, and perhaps above all, enhanced confidence that have resulted from participation in the Intermediate Job Market and which are underestimated, underrated and, quite importantly, more difficult to 'measure'. One manager in particular was critical of the emphasis on outputs, numbers and monitoring saying that:

"... They're sitting there looking at figures and notes and that's the nature of monitoring, isn't it, it's so rigid and I think to something like this the usual rules can't apply, they just don't work..."

On the other hand, it was noted earlier that many of the trainees were quite well qualified in the broadest possible sense and not just in terms of paper qualifications, prior to their participation in the Intermediate Job Market. Measuring 'success' and impact is always a very difficult task with any programme or strategy. Perhaps an additional measure of success may be revealed when trainees with fewer qualifications and perhaps greater support requirements, come through the Intermediate Job Market and appear to show the same effects as their predecessors. Alternatively, it might be argued that building self-esteem, confidence and motivation in the trainees was one of the primary aims of the Intermediate Job Market, with the acquisition of qualifications as a further dimension. This point was illustrated by the Strategy Co-ordinator, who described the potential intangible outcomes:

"I think I've picked up, from seeing the trainees, that what several people have got is a new sense of direction and I think that is equally valuable. Not everyone has decided that they're going onto a job but they have identified very clearly and almost dramatically this is what I'm now going to do and there is this real determination, and sense of being able to go and do things which is a real shift of expectation for people. I think, to my mind, that is of equal value to someone coming out and looking for the next job".

It might be argued that retention of trainees as employees of the partner organisations is a positive outcome. Certainly, some of the trainees are now in employed status. The partner organisations inevitably will invest a great deal of time and effort training specific trainees in particular skills, which are required for that specific project. What seems to have occurred is that due to limitations placed on the Intermediate Job Market in terms of age and location, those residents who are already well-equipped, applied and were successful, limiting those who were perhaps more ‘suitable’. The Co-ordinator suggested, however, that the partner organisations were ‘going concerns’ and were obliged in some respects to take on people who met their organisation’s particular requirements in terms of prior work experience and qualifications. The Co-ordinator recognised this when she said:
“... The projects are small and can’t afford to be making that commitment without the prospect of someone playing the real role. That’s what the projects have fed back as it involves getting people started and you know, getting them to understand, it’s all that induction. When you lose people after that you feel like you’ve put a lot of effort in for not a lot of reward”.

However, the partner organisations’ perceived investment of time in terms of training and the actual outcomes of the training, i.e., an individual who now possesses the skills required by the partner organisations. This is revealed in a certain reluctance (in some cases) to encourage trainees to move on beyond the IJM and the occasional retention of some of the trainees. Unfortunately, unless the partner organisations can expand rapidly to employ further trainees in the future, there may be little opportunity for other residents of the West End to participate in the Intermediate Job Market. As one partner pointed out:

"I found out just before Christmas that our trainees were leaving and I was gutted with the thought that we’d spent all this time with them".

h) Intended Outcomes

All of the partners were clear about intended outcomes for their trainees. A common expectation was that the trainees would have their confidence enhanced and would leave the work placement with a qualification, or qualifications, of some kind. One Partner described it as:

"Qualifications and a lot of experience, and probably feeling confident".

Another partner suggested that:

"I want them to go away with experience, qualifications and the confidence to apply for jobs in something they like doing as well, not just something they have been stuck in".

Another partner highlighted the importance of a formal, tangible outcome such as a qualification certificate:

"We wanted our candidate to get certificates as it helps them get another job. People don’t know you can do something, I mean I know certificates don’t prove you can do something, but it proves you’ve been working towards something. It’s just something we wanted the candidate to take away because even after a year if they haven’t got a job, they had something to take. It’s very important".

There is a sense that the qualifications on offer are very appropriate in terms of meeting the needs of the trainees. However, it also seems that trainees are still set on traditional approaches that provide a pre-set comfort zone within which the training is structured and organised for the trainees. The NVQ approach is different in that the trainees have to a certain extent got to organise and plan their own work. The Coordinator noticed a reluctance to engage with this approach and a return to a dependency culture on the part of the trainees.
The trainees themselves were asked what impact the training and work experience had had on them. All of them without exception believed that the work placements had had a positive impact on them. The main change mentioned was their improved self-confidence. As one of the trainees put it,

"I've got more confidence in myself. When I first came in and I answered the phone and said, "I can't answer the phone, I don't know who it is", but now I just pick it up when it rings. I definitely have more confidence".

Another suggested that:

"I know there is a lot more to life now from being on the dole. I feel outgoing and wanting to do things. I plan to go straight to college after here".

One of the difficulties encountered by partner organisations was their reluctance to dispense with the services of their trainees. As the Co-ordinator pointed out:

"The fact is they have discovered that they value that person and want to keep them. It is tricky when that happens".

While this could be considered a positive outcome for both the trainees and the partners, it raises difficulties for the partners and for those trainees who will follow the initial intake. The role of the partner organisations should be that of a provider of work experience, which would enhance the confidence, and skills of the trainees. This in turn should prepare them to seek work beyond their partner organisation. As the Co-ordinator suggested:

"It is crucial that they [the trainees] start looking at areas of work and opportunities they could consider".

With regards to the 'soft skills' versus formal qualifications debate, it seems odd that a non-traditional approach to dealing with unemployment should be measured in a traditional way. While traditional targets and outputs that can be measured such as accredited courses completed successfully or parts of NVQs completed are viewed as important, other underrated and perhaps intangible aspects of the training were highlighted by the Co-ordinator. As the Co-ordinator suggested:

"Those [qualifications and course] are meant to demonstrate the effectiveness of what you're doing and I think everyone feels that that far from demonstrates very much really. We could achieve those things and be doing appalling work quite honestly because it is about the quality of what you're doing and the way it works. What people get out of it is not measurable in the length of time they spend doing anything".

It would be desirable that there could be some way of including assessment of so-called 'soft skills' since these appear to be an important part of the work done in the Intermediate Job Market and should not be underestimated by the obsession that funders have with quantification and measurement of outputs. Perhaps it may be possible to incorporate some indication of how the trainees have achieved in these areas and not just in the area of accredited courses. A study carried out by the Institute for Employment Studies attempted to deal with measurement of so-called soft-skills.
and soft-outcomes. (Department for Education and Employment, Research Brief No.219, August 2000).

j) The Progression of Trainees

As mentioned earlier, it is not always possible to determine - nor was it in the remit of this evaluation - whether trainees are finding employment and whether this can be linked directly to their participation in the Intermediate Job Market. Partner organisations were able to provide only limited information about their trainee's progression to jobs beyond the IJM. One partner working with New Deal money for example, suggested during the initial interview that:

"What we don't get is job outcome but what we do get is a confident and enriched person"

However, it was noted during a later group interview that this situation had improved and trainees were now moving quite successfully into employment.

All of the trainees were actively (at the time of interview) pursuing other employment or considering other educational or training courses. As one trainee put it,

"I'm looking for a job and I've sent a few application forms off but I haven't heard anything up to now".

Another said that he was:

"Going to look for work. I know a few people in the leisure business who said they might give me a job".

While another trainee was a little more apprehensive:

"I might go to college, but would it be the same as this and would I stick it?".

Clearly, while the IJM appears to have had a positive effect on this trainee, at the same time the trainee wondered whether anything external to the IJM could match up to the experience. Understandably, a common view expressed by all of the trainees was that they might be kept on as a full or part time member of staff with their work placement organisation. As one trainee put it:

"I'm hoping they will expand my contract. If not, then I'm writing letters and things... to companies asking if they want anyone".

All of the partners were keen to continue with the Intermediate Job Market scheme. The only real obstacles being the limitations placed on them in terms of recruitment, but also acquiring further funding:

"With all these things it depends on relatively short-term funding and that’s not very good. It’s a governmental issue and you can’t start a programme and then say "oh that’s it", as you raise expectations, if you have success and it becomes locally known, which is what we tend to do. There’ll be a story about it in the local paper and then if it says it’s not available anymore, it’s bad news".
"That's the interesting thing as over a period of 3 years we can say we'll reach this certain group of people who are ready to go but next year we'll reach the harder to reach ones. It's the Heineken factor isn't it? There may be people out there who still haven't heard about us. The fact is these things don't penetrate and you have to keep plugging away at all the roots of access into the community and people will still turn round and say, "oh I didn't know about that". That's what [name of trainee] does: she goes out and gets the word out ".

Clearly, the local job market will be a factor that needs to be considered. If the qualifications do not fit in with the pattern local job market then the trainees perhaps require something more to give them 'an edge' in the labour market. Both the partners and the Co-ordinator were aware of the lack of local employment opportunities, but stressed that the Intermediate Job Market should prepare trainees to a certain extent to seek employment beyond the boundaries of the West End. It may be the case that while trainees can access a number of training courses and take any number of qualifications, it is essential that these should be a reflection of the types of work that are available in the West End specifically but perhaps also the North-East more generally.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for partners and RHWE generally is the issue of funding. The Intermediate Job Market is dependent on funding and cannot guarantee real jobs. It would be a great pity if the work that has already gone into building and growing the Intermediate Job Market was not continued. All of the partners were keen to pursue other sources of funding including New Deal money. The only concern may be that with money from traditional programmes there may come with it an increased burden of bureaucracy, restrictions and requirements, such as compulsory trainee attendance, an issue that many of the partners said they would find it difficult to work with.

Probably the Intermediate Job market’s greatest strength is that it is not traditional and is not hampered by excessive bureaucracy. It is flexible enough to adapt to meet the needs and requirements both of partners and individual trainees. It is to a certain extent limited by its location in terms of negative images of the West End and also the lack of employment opportunities in that area and it may fall victim to political priorities at Government level.
Conclusions

A distinction emerges between work experience and training in that some partners believed that their main role was to provide work experience, while formal training leading to qualifications was to be supplied externally by other agencies. This is perhaps understandable given that partner organisations are 'going concerns' and staff have very little time to provide in-house training.

While the Intermediate Job Market appears to have successfully provided work experience and training for a number of West End residents and provides a responsive and flexible approach to the issue of long-term unemployment, there are a number of issues remaining that need to be addressed to make certain that the scheme continues to be a success in combating long term unemployment among young people in the West End of Newcastle.

As the IJM stands, it may be the case that other residents with greater support requirements may not be able to access the Intermediate Job Market on the appropriate level of work readiness. If the Intermediate Job Market is to succeed it needs to reach out to those residents of the West-end who are not applying to take part. The Co-ordinator recognised this and views the issue as one that may be resolved in the longer-term. In other words as the Intermediate Job Market continues to grow and to develop within the West End, its capacity to attract harder to reach residents should grow. If it is the case that many of the residents of the West End possess certain 'soft skills' and hard qualifications, the current partners can probably deal effectively with them. If, however, there are large numbers of residents at various levels of work readiness, it may be necessary to increase the number of partner organisations in which training and work experience can take place to meet these requirements.

Recruitment of trainees appeared to be a major concern. One of the most challenging aspects of the Intermediate Job Market was accessing adequate numbers of residents to take part in the Intermediate Job Market. While all the current partners managed to find suitable trainees that matched their requirements, in most cases trainees were already working at levels of job readiness at or above those necessary to fulfill their roles within the partner organisations in which they were working. In a number of cases these recruits included local people with degrees or people who, it might be argued, already had the necessary skills and knowledge that in reality placed them beyond the scope and range of the Intermediate Job Market scheme. However, it is necessary to contextualise comments about qualifications. Clearly, while some of the trainees did possess a range of qualifications, including in some instances degrees and/or degree level study, it may be the case that even with such qualifications they are still hindered by barriers of a personal/social, gender and ethnic character. Probably one of the successes of the IJM, it could be argued, has been the greater involvement and integration of both white and Asian women in the local employment market. High visibility of women in the IJM can only encourage others to participate in the Programme. However, having said all this, if RHWE is to succeed it still needs to reach out to those who are not applying to take part. Clearly, there may be residents who would really benefit from this kind of training but who have as yet not applied.
Many of the partners held particular views and expectations as to the calibre of the trainees they can effectively consider for placement. This difficulty is also compounded by the fact that response levels to job advertisements attracted limited numbers of suitable candidates from which to select trainees. It might further be argued that trainees with particular skills and in some instances degrees should not be included in the Intermediate Job Market on the grounds that they already possess the requisite skills that should enable them to actively seek and find employment. While there is little doubt that these trainees benefited from their participation in the IJM, it begs the question what about those residents in the West End who did not apply to take part in the IJM and perhaps might have benefited more greatly than the current intake of trainees?

Partners highlighted initial difficulties in recruiting sufficient numbers of suitable candidates for the Intermediate Job Market. Partners also raised concerns about the levels of support that they could reasonably be expected to provide for trainees. Some of the partners felt that if trainees required high levels of support and supervision during their placements, this would place a heavy burden on staff within the partner organisations. There is a contrasting approach to trainee recruitment and support between RHWE partners and one other project operating both within the RHWE Strategy and New Deal. The former organisations appear to have the luxury of selecting trainees while the latter is in the position (due to the fact it is in receipt of New Deal money), of having to accept any, and all, candidates regardless of support requirements.

It appears that the Co-ordinator preferred the informal 'hands-off' approach to collaboration and exchange with the partner organisations. This approach also seems to be agreeable to the partner organisations since it was felt by some that too many formal meetings would be onerous and impractical given the nature of their responsibilities.

An issue that needs to be dealt with is the issue of what constitutes an accurate and reliable approach for measuring outcomes. There must be some way of including assessment of ‘soft-skills’ since these appear to be an important part of the work done in the Intermediate Job Market and should not be underestimated as a means of measuring the effectiveness of the programme. Perhaps it may be possible to incorporate some indication of how the trainees have achieved in these areas and not just in the area of accredited courses. The focus could be on those skills, which may be basic, but necessary and transferable.

Clearly, there is congruence between the views of the partner organisations and the trainees in relation to outcomes. All partners reported that their trainees' self-confidence had been enhanced. This is supported by interviews with the trainees who all stated that they felt more confident as a result of their training/work experience placements.

All of the trainees reported a variety of training, educational and work experiences prior to their IJM placements. There was a common feeling among the trainees who were interviewed that the IJM was in some sense different from previous work experience programmes they had been involved with. Trainees reported qualifications ranging from GCSEs and 'O' levels at one end of the spectrum to degree level study
and degrees at the other end of the spectrum. What comes out of the interviews with trainees on the whole is that their work experience has been positive. All seemed happy with their work placements and satisfied with the training and work experience they had received. A common concern expressed by a number of trainees was the hope that they might be kept on as a full-time or part-time member of staff with their placement organisation. However, most of the trainees stated that they were either actively seeking work or were considering educational courses.

Partners emphasised the importance of the acquisition and development of soft skills such as self-confidence, self-esteem and social and communication skills in their trainees, paving the way for further work experience with greater levels of training and responsibility. Some partners felt that there was too great an emphasis generally on the need to gain qualifications.

In relation to trainees and future employment, it is clear that partnership agencies can only employ a limited number of trainees that were trained in their establishments. What happens to the rest? It would appear to be necessary to keep the trainees on track in terms of seeking further training or employment beyond the Intermediate Job Market or perhaps even within it but in another capacity. The Co-ordinator mentioned that the partnership schemes were relying to a certain extent on her to encourage the trainees to go through job searches two months or so before the end of their placements. This is perhaps something that needs to be looked at in terms of increasing progression to work beyond the training agencies. Another issue that requires attention and is something of a longer-term concern, is the issue of tracking trainees. Determining the effectiveness of any strategy suggests that participants in the IJM be tracked. This will help to determine whether the Strategy is having an effective impact in the long-term.

Partners seemed to be happy with the more or less informal approach to collaboration with other Intermediate Job Market partners. However, it appeared that at the same time there was very little formal communication between partner organisations in terms of moving trainees around to more suitable work placements or perhaps dissemination of good ideas, experience and practice. Although, increased formal links may be onerous to all concerned, it may be useful for partners to explore ways in which they might be able to exchange ideas, experiences and so forth.

The Co-ordinator was concerned that trainee recruitment was not currently broad enough and that some of the current trainees might in fact be over-qualified in terms of personal qualities and possession of qualifications. The Co-ordinator believed, however, that as the IJM continues to develop and grow, the recruitment net will be spread more widely and will bring in a broader range of West End residents.

Although some of the partner organisations subsequently employed some of their trainees - viewing them as trained and thus valuable assets for their training organisation - it is clear that there are only limited opportunities for employment within these organisations. While employment within the partner organisations could be viewed as a positive outcome for partners and trainees alike, we should remember that this was not the original purpose of the Intermediate Job Market.
Recommendations

Although we are making recommendations that may improve the Intermediate Job Market programme, these are suggestions only and are not meant in any way to be prescriptive. They are based on information from staff, trainees and the Co-ordinator. In making these ‘suggestions’, we are aware that there are already a number of constraints that partner organisation staff have to contend with. Probably the most constraining of these is the issue of ‘time’.

- More outreach work to access those residents who are not applying but perhaps should be applying.
- Recruit more partners to deal with those residents on different levels of work preparedness.
- Would recommend that networking and channels of communication between partners be improved.
- Encourage partners to help trainees consider their options beyond the Intermediate Job Market.
References

A list of relevant research briefs and reports is provided included web sites where they can be freely accessed and downloaded.


Reviving the Heart of the West End, Appraisal Document, Project 1410