

WALES FLEXIBLE NEW DEAL

ANNUAL REPORT

1ST APRIL 2009 TO 31ST MARCH 2010

By Martin Jones, Area Co-ordinator (Wales)

Introduction

This report covers the period from April 1st 2009 to March 31st 2010 and is written by Martin Jones the Area Co-ordinator (Wales).

Flexible New Deal (FND) is an initiative set up by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to replace New Deal. The tender process took place from March 2009 to September 2009.

SOVA is contracted to SERCO, prime contractors to deliver FND in the majority of Wales. The contract is for SOVA to deliver the Step 2 and Step 3 parts of the service in Powys. Lesley Evans was appointed Project Manager on 1st January 2010 and Patricia Griffiths was appointed Support Officer on 17th February 2010. The staff are supported by John Leach, Area Manager (West Midlands & Wales) and Martin Jones, Area Co-ordinator (Wales)

Areas covered.

Powys is the largest county in Wales in terms of area and stretches from Welshpool in the North to Ystradgynlais in the South a distance of around 100 miles. Lesley Evans is based in Ystradgynlais and covers South Powys DWP jobcentre areas of Ystradgynlais, Brecon and Llandrindod Wells. Patricia Griffiths is based in Newtown and covers the North Powys DWP jobcentre areas of Newtown, Welshpool and Machynlleth. As Powys is predominantly rural, many clients have to travel many miles to meetings in the relative areas.

Overall aim of the project.

The aim of the Flexible New Deal Project is to enable as many unemployed people as possible to find and sustain employment through the creation, support and challenge of a network of quality providers. The process of Flexible New Deal is in three stages or Steps.

The process

Step 1 is 20 weeks of an individually tailored, demand-led, professional job brokerage service and aimed at helping those clients who are closest to the labour market into sustained work quickly and efficiently. Step 1 requires customers to have face-to-face contact on a regular basis.

Step2 starts on completion of Step 1 and is up to 12 weeks intensive vocational activity which includes a full time 4 week Mandatory Work Related Activity. (SOVA, currently does not provide this service due to resources). Step 2 provides a different kind of intervention for those clients who are not supported into jobs during Step1, increasing their proximity to the labour market.

Step3 follows on from the completion of Step 2 and is up to 20 weeks of additional intensive support for those furthest away from the labour market.

Step 1 of FND is provided by Tydfil Training in South Powys and by Quadrant in the North. Each of these providers transfer clients to SOVA once the term of 20 weeks has been completed (see description above). SOVA then work with each client with the aim of gaining them employment. SOVA has developed an excellent working relationship with each of the step 1 providers.

The contract

As stated above SOVA is contracted to SERCO to provide just Step 2 & Step 3 of the process. There is a pricing structure provided by SERCO for certain levels of service which SOVA carries out including sustained employment of 13 weeks & 26 weeks.

Negotiations are ongoing with SERCO to release SOVA from the Step 2 provision. This is mainly due to the fact that SOVA is unable to provide the Mandatory Work Related Activity as mentioned above. SERCO have been successful in getting a provider to take on Step 2 in the south of Powys but are still trying to get someone to take on the role in the north of the county.

Targets

The target given by SOVA on FND is to get between 2 and 3 clients per month into employment. The client target is dependent on the unemployment situation in Powys but due to the current climate the numbers have exceeded expectations for the first month. The assumption is that, with the increase in unemployment, the number of clients seen on this project are likely to be very high. In the first 2 months of the project SOVA have seen 30 clients but this is very early days! One difficulty faced is that many clients have long standing personal issues which, at times, make it very difficult to find the right type of work for them.

How SOVA helps.

The ultimate purpose of FND is to get people into employment. SOVA's brief is to help whichever way it can in supporting the client in ensuring their path to work is made easier. Step 1 providers develop an action plan which is transferred with the client when moved to Step 2. It is up to the case workers (At present, Patricia & Lesley) to update this action plan during Step 2. They also provide support in

completing application forms for jobs, helping with the production of C.V.'s and many other areas as and when required. One of their main tasks is job search. This is done in many ways, Internet access, newspaper advertising, contact through Jobcentres and contacting employers with the chance of providing work for clients.

Conclusion

Flexible New Deal is a new project for SOVA, starting in January 2010. The recent changes in the Economic climate have highlighted that this initiative to be more demanding, by all parties concerned, than was initially thought. The rurality of the area, the lack of employment (especially long term) makes the ultimate goal of the object very difficult.