

Introduction

The Government's Get Britain Working and Pathways to Work reforms are designed to address a system that has become fragmented, difficult to navigate and insufficiently responsive to local labour market conditions. We are transforming the role of the Jobs and Careers Service, delivering more support for young people through the Youth Guarantee and working with local areas on tackling inactivity. We are expanding access to employment support while strengthening the role of local partnerships, employers and local leaders in its design and delivery.

These reforms recognise that employment outcomes are shaped not only by employment services themselves, but also by health, skills, education, housing and wider public services. Bringing these services together more effectively is central to the Government's ambition to build a more joined-up system around the needs of citizens.

The *Rewiring the State* Cabinet Statement builds on this direction by setting out an ambition to go further in devolving power and responsibility from Whitehall to local leaders. In employment support, this reflects a shift from a predominantly centralised commissioning model towards one in which local areas play a greater role in shaping services around the needs of residents, communities and local labour markets.

Employment support across Great Britain is currently delivered through a combination of centrally designed and commissioned programmes, locally delivered but centrally designed provision, and devolved provision where local areas are given more flexibility to meet the needs of their residents. Jobcentre Plus and work coach support are available across all of Great Britain, while the scope, funding and delivery arrangements for individual employment support programmes vary according to programme objectives and the relevant devolution settlements for the Devolved Governments.

Alongside DWP-funded provision, employment support is also funded and delivered by other government departments, local and regional authorities, and the Devolved Governments in Scotland and Wales through their own policies and programmes. As a result, the employment support landscape differs across Great Britain, reflecting different institutional arrangements, local priorities and local labour market needs.

In England, DWP's employment support offer currently combines centrally designed and commissioned provision with a number of programmes that are delivered through local partnerships. Recent programmes, including **Connect to Work**, reflect a greater role for local delivery through collaboration with Mayoral Strategic Authorities and other local partners. This recognises the role that local areas can play in coordinating support and tailoring provision to local communities, local labour market conditions and service landscapes.

To date, this greater local role has generally involved delegating delivery of centrally designed programmes, rather than devolving responsibility for employment support outcomes and programme design. Under current arrangements, DWP has typically retained responsibility for

setting core programme parameters and approving delivery plans, while local areas have exercised flexibility in how provision is implemented to reflect local circumstances.

The *Rewiring the State* Cabinet Statement sets out an ambition to move beyond delegation towards greater devolution of employment support, including specific ambitions relating to support for young people and those who are long-term unemployed. This is intended to enable local areas to better join-up existing provision and deliver a more integrated offer for citizens. In doing so, the Government aims to build on areas' complementary responsibilities for adult skills, relationships with local employers and education providers, and connections across local government and wider public services to strengthen the overall system of support offered to citizens.

The following sections respond to the Committee's questions in turn.

1) How can the local delivery of employment support best respond to the needs of different places and groups, including by helping to fill local skills gaps and channelling support through institutions people trust?

The Prime Minister has set out a vision for devolved employment support that enables local areas to integrate services around the needs of residents and coordinate support at a local level. This reflects the Government's wider ambition to shift power, funding and accountability from Whitehall to local leaders, recognising that local areas are often best placed to understand the opportunities and challenges facing their residents, employers and labour markets.

One advantage of local delivery is the opportunity to integrate employment support with a wider range of services. As barriers to work are often multifaceted, individuals may benefit from support with skills, health, childcare, housing or transport alongside employment support. Further devolution could enable local areas to bring these services together more effectively, supporting more personalised and joined-up approaches.

Local areas have also developed local Get Britain Working Plans, bringing together employment, health and skills partners around shared responses to local labour market challenges and opportunities. DWP has worked alongside local and regional partners in the development of these plans, supporting more integrated approaches to tackling labour market challenges.

As part of the government's commitment to creating a new **Jobs and Careers Service**, we are developing a modern, integrated, digitally enabled employment service, that brings together Jobcentre Plus and the National Careers Service in England and works hand in hand with employers and local partners. We recognise the importance of designing support to ensure that it reflects the opportunities and challenges in each local labour market and works effectively with services available locally. We are working closely with local authorities, Mayoral Strategic Authorities and partners as we test elements of the new service, ensuring that it reflects local needs and delivers joined-up support for customers. We are also expanding our community-based employment and careers support such as Jobcentre vans and working with local partners to deliver employment and careers support in libraries, GP surgeries and local authority buildings.

Local leaders and partners have detailed knowledge of their economies, employers and growth ambitions, enabling them to align employment support with local labour market needs, employer

demand and adult skills provision. This can help address local skills shortages, support workforce development in priority sectors and contribute to wider local growth ambitions. We know the importance of having a highly skilled workforce as part of delivering improved employment outcomes. That is why through the Machinery of Government changes announced in 2025, we brought responsibility for adult skills provision into DWP. Bringing adult skills development and employment support under one department will bring employment and skills closer together, to improve employment outcomes, particularly for young people.

The Department for Education also recently announced a set of reforms to further strengthen the opportunities for young people. New technical pathways from age 14 will combine technical qualifications alongside GCSEs, careers education and meaningful work experience, helping young people develop skills and progress into further study, apprenticeships and skilled careers. Mayors will offer a high-quality locally tailored technical or vocational route from age 16, underpinned by control of the budget for 16- to 19-year-olds. Strategic Authorities will play a greater role in bringing together education, skills, employment support and wider public services, helping to shape opportunities around local needs and labour markets.

Trusted local institutions can also play an important role in engaging people who may be less likely to access mainstream employment services. Local authorities, voluntary and community sector organisations, and other community-based providers often have established relationships with local communities and can help make support more accessible and responsive. This principle informed the design of **Connect to Work**, with local delivery arrangements and referral routes intended to build on existing relationships with health services, employers and community organisations.

This can be particularly important for disabled people, people with health conditions and those facing multiple or complex disadvantages, including people with experience of homelessness, people with convictions, people experiencing drug or alcohol dependence, victim-survivors of domestic abuse, refugees and care leavers. Local delivery models can make use of trusted referral routes through existing services and organisations, helping people access employment support through relationships they already have.

The benefits of devolution are likely to be greatest where local areas have multiple funding streams to enable this join-up, alongside sufficient flexibility and spending certainty to tailor services to local circumstances, enabling them to innovate and design truly place-based, strategic solutions.

Effective local delivery depends on the right conditions being in place. Engagement with Mayors, Strategic Authorities, Local Authorities and other organisations delivering employment support within place has highlighted the importance of strong partnerships, effective data sharing, local capability and opportunities to learn from delivery and share best practice. Devolution also needs to be underpinned by a shared national framework of outcomes and standards, and clear accountability arrangements. As devolution develops, it will be important to continue building the evidence base on what works in local employment support. The planned What Works Centre will support this by identifying effective practice, supporting evaluation and helping to share learning across areas. Further details are provided in response to Question 6.

Examples of where DWP is already involving local organisations in the delivery of employment support and skills provision:

There is a robust international evidence base for both Supported Employment models that our **Connect to Work** programme utilises. Mayors and Local Authorities had to design their local Connect to Work service in line with these models but were given flexibility in how their programmes were structured, drawing on their local knowledge and relationships with employers, health and support services and their communities. Despite being given this flexibility, Mayoral Strategic Authorities believe that this approach is too constrained and does not give them the ability to design wider systems of support. To secure funding, Accountable Bodies were required to set out how their local delivery approach would reach the programme's intended customer groups, e.g. disabled people, people with long-term health conditions and people with complex barriers to employment - including groups that have historically been underserved by large-scale employment support programmes. In some cases, local areas commissioned additional research to better understand the prevalence and needs of these groups within their communities.

In October 2024, we launched **WorkWell**, an early-intervention health and employment service designed and delivered through the health system. Through 15 pilot areas in England, WorkWell supported 34,000 disabled people and people with health conditions, while providing early insights and delivery learning to inform future service development. Building on these insights, the government announced in January 2026 that WorkWell would be expanded to cover all of England from November 2026. WorkWell gives Integrated Care Board led partnerships with local government, Jobcentre Plus and local community groups funding to lead, design and deliver integrated work and health support and provide a single gateway to local work and health services, tailored appropriately to the Integrated Care Boards' needs. This approach enables local partnerships to design services in a way that meets the needs of their cohorts and makes the best use of the assets within their communities.

Through the **Youth Guarantee**, the government has committed to improving opportunities for young people to access employment, education and training. As part of this commitment, the Government will expand **Youth Hubs** to more than 360 areas across Great Britain over the next three years. Youth Hubs provide joined up support for young people aged 16-24, bringing together employment, skills, health and housing partners to deliver joined-up community-based support tailored to the needs of local young people. This includes co-location and joint working between Jobcentre Plus, local authorities and other partners, with the intention to improve outreach and access to support.

The Government is continuing to invest in both the Economic Inactivity and Youth Guarantee **Trailblazers** in England and Wales during 2026/27, enabling local areas to test innovative approaches to tackling labour market challenges. Economic Inactivity Trailblazers are working with local partners to identify, engage and support people who are economically inactive, particularly those facing health-related barriers to work, through more integrated employment, health and skills support. Youth Guarantee Trailblazers are testing new innovative approaches to access and support more young people who are or are at risk of becoming NEET through strengthening local leadership, coordination and outreach with partners including third sector organisations, employers and colleges to better connect young people with education, employment and training opportunities.

Since August 2026, over 75% of the **Adult Skills Fund (ASF)**, and 60% of **Skills Bootcamps** allocations, have been devolved to local areas in England (predominantly Mayoral and Foundation Strategic Authorities). Devolution of the ASF enables strategic alignment with other local growth measures. Strategic Authorities have developed strong relationships with local businesses which can strengthen provision such as Skills Bootcamps where employer involvement in course design and delivery is crucial. It lets Mayors prioritise funding on provision that is important for economic growth, for the people who are most likely to benefit. This enables Mayors to prioritise funding towards provision that supports local economic growth and reflects the needs of local residents and employers.

Integrated Settlements, through which DWP is investing significant funding over the Spending Review period, are also providing opportunities to test different approaches to local employment support. Established Mayoral Strategic Authorities operating through Integrated Settlements have some additional financial flexibility in the management of Connect to Work funding, including greater flexibility over funding profiles across financial years. Delivery continues to operate within the broader framework and objectives agreed for the programme.

2) Are there any particular areas or groups, including age groups, being ignored or disadvantaged by the main non-Jobcentre Plus employment support programmes and by the extension of devolution?

The Government is significantly expanding access to employment support through a package of reforms that includes the transformation of Jobcentre Plus into the Jobs and Careers Service, the Pathways to Work reforms for those with disabilities and health conditions, and the Youth Guarantee. Together, these reforms are intended to increase the availability of support whilst ensuring that services are better integrated and more responsive to local needs.

The Pathways to Work Green Paper was built on the principle that Government should support those who can work to do so, while protecting those who cannot. It set out our commitment to build towards, by the end of the decade, a guaranteed offer of personalised work, health and skills support for all disabled people and those with health conditions receiving out-of-work benefits.

Pathways to Work combines a package of new and ongoing support with a fundamentally different approach to how that support is delivered.

We have begun to deliver towards these commitments, having introduced around 1,000 (full time equivalent) Pathways to Work Advisers to Jobcentres across Great Britain who are providing voluntary one-to-one support to disabled customers and people with health conditions. Over the past year (since April 2025) more than 100,000 Universal Credit customers with Limited Capability for Work and Work-Related Activity (LCWRA) have accessed voluntary Pathways to Work Adviser support. We are expanding access to specialist and intensive support, through programmes such as Connect to Work, WorkWell and Economic Inactivity Trailblazers.

The Government is also making significant investments in support for young people through the **Youth Guarantee**, reflecting the scale of the challenge posed by economic inactivity and long-term disengagement among some young people. The Youth Guarantee aims to ensure that every young person can access employment, education or training opportunities, while local initiatives

such as Youth Hubs and Youth Guarantee Trailblazers are helping areas test and deliver more joined-up forms of support.

Despite significant investment in employment support, over 9 million people are economically inactive, including over 2 million people who would like to work. There are also around 1.8 million people who are currently unemployed. This reflects both the scale of labour market challenges and the fact that many employment programmes are targeted at particular groups or barriers. The interim findings of the Milburn Review identify challenges relating to the complexity of the current youth support landscape and highlight that some young people may struggle to access the support they need. Greater local flexibility and devolution may create opportunities for local areas to identify and address gaps in provision, while enabling support to be tailored to local priorities, circumstances and labour market needs.

Alongside these reforms, DWP's employment support offer consists of a range of centrally commissioned and locally delivered programmes designed to meet the needs of different customer groups and labour market challenges. Many of these programmes are targeted at specific cohorts or barriers to employment, while Jobcentre Plus continues to provide a universal employment support offer available across Great Britain.

The largest non-Jobcentre Plus employment support programmes by funding per year are Restart and Connect to Work, and therefore we have focussed on these in our answer. We have also provided some overarching considerations on DWP's broader portfolio of employment support, including the focus on young people through the Youth Guarantee.

Contracted employment programmes delivered outside Jobcentre Plus typically include defined eligibility criteria linked to programme objectives. These programmes are commissioned with safeguards and performance frameworks intended to ensure eligible participants receive an appropriate level of support and to mitigate risks such as where harder to help participants are deprioritised over those easiest to help. Minimum service standards and contractual requirements help ensure support is available for those the programme is designed to serve.

The current **Restart** scheme is a contracted employment programme that provides personalised support to people who are long-term unemployed, including young people. It is delivered across England and Wales and within each contract package area the service is tailored to ensure it meets the needs of individuals and the local labour market. For example, providers work with local employers and partners to identify skills gaps and growth sectors and adapt support accordingly. In Manchester, providers collaborated with energy companies to help participants manage cost-of-living pressures so they could focus on finding work, while other areas have developed support to improve English language confidence and employability through local volunteering opportunities. The programme is measured against consistent service standards, contractual requirements and performance measures designed to ensure eligible participants receive an appropriate level of support. The Cabinet statement signalled a new approach to devolution of employment support in England, including for long-term unemployed people and for young people. DWP will work closely with Mayors over the coming months to agree what this means for each area.

Connect to Work is a delegated programme where DWP funds Connect to Work across all of England and Wales with local areas adopting local approaches within national guidance. It has

broader eligibility than many existing specialist employment support programmes. This was a deliberate design choice to ensure that groups who have historically been less well served by employment programmes can access specialist support. During programme design, eligibility criteria were developed in response to feedback from local areas and organisations working closely with target groups. For example, eligibility was extended to include young people aged 16 and over where education and training options had been exhausted, and individuals in precarious, intermittent or zero-hours employment that is not meeting their needs. Individuals who are not eligible for Connect to Work may be able to access alternative support, including through programmes such as Restart and the wider Jobcentre Plus offer.

Government funded but locally delivered and devolved provision can provide greater flexibility to respond to local needs. Programmes such as Connect to Work, Trailblazers, WorkWell and devolved adult skills provision enable local areas to use their knowledge of local labour markets and communities to shape support around specific challenges or opportunities. The degree of local flexibility varies between programmes. In some programmes, such as Connect to Work, core eligibility criteria and priority cohorts are determined nationally, with local areas given flexibility over delivery approaches and service design within that framework. Other locally delivered initiatives may allow greater discretion to respond to local challenges and priorities. This flexibility can result in variation between areas, but it also allows support to be tailored to local circumstances and needs.

In addition to our main non-Jobcentre Plus employment support programmes we also deliver much more targeted provision that serves a specific group to address their specific labour market challenge. Examples include: Prison Work Coaches who support people in prison to be ready for work and help them access employment support if they need it when they are released; DWP's pilot of Jobs Plus which recognises that social housing residents tend to have high incidence of complex needs, and so funds housing providers to offer support aimed at those living in specific social housing estates; and Employment Advisors in NHS Talking Therapies which enables young people and adults with mental health conditions to access combined psychological treatment (NHS Talking Therapies) and employment support.

While individual programmes may target particular groups or operate in specific places, Jobcentre Plus, and in future the Jobs and Careers Service, provides a nationwide service across Great Britain and remains an important universal point of access to employment support, although it is not the only entry point to support. This helps ensure that all customers, regardless of where they live or whether they are eligible for a specific programme, can access advice, guidance and support to move towards and into work.

3) What are the risks and opportunities of devolving more power over employment support, including in areas without elected Mayors?

As set out in response to Question 1, there are a range of opportunities associated with greater local involvement in employment support. In summary, local areas are often well placed to integrate employment support with related services, respond to local labour market conditions, engage employers and communities, and tailor provision to the needs of different groups. Further devolution could enable local areas to make greater use of these strengths, while supporting more joined-up and place-based approaches to tackling labour market challenges.

Existing programmes provide examples of these opportunities in practice. **Connect to Work** enables local areas to tailor support to the characteristics of their populations and labour markets (although Mayoral Strategic Authorities often tell us it should go further), while **WorkWell** and the Economic Inactivity and Youth Guarantee **Trailblazers** allow local partners to shape services around local priorities and circumstances. Early experience from these programmes highlights the value of local partnerships, employer engagement and the ability to connect employment support with wider local services. The Government's Get Britain Working reforms and *Rewiring the State* statement reflect a shared ambition to create a more locally responsive and integrated employment support system, building on the strengths of local leadership while maintaining clear national objectives.

Alongside these opportunities, there are important considerations in designing any future devolved system. One consideration is balancing local flexibility with consistency of outcomes and access across the country. Local tailoring can improve responsiveness, but there is also value in ensuring individuals can expect a high-quality employment support offer regardless of where they live. A clear national framework for outcomes, standards and accountability may help achieve this balance.

Greater devolution also requires careful consideration of how local priorities are aligned with broader national objectives, particularly for groups that may otherwise be overlooked within local commissioning decisions. This could result in variation in the support available across different areas and may create challenges in ensuring consistent delivery of national priorities. As employment support becomes more devolved, it will be important that greater local flexibility is underpinned by common outcomes, entitlements and core standards, helping to ensure that individuals facing the most complex barriers can access appropriate support regardless of where they live. This approach is consistent with other public services where responsibilities are devolved, enabling local flexibility while maintaining clear expectations about the support citizens can receive. National entitlements, such as those being developed through the Youth Guarantee and the Pathways reforms, may provide an important foundation within any future devolved system.

It is also important that accountability arrangements remain clear. Employment support often involves collaboration across national and local institutions, and effective governance arrangements are needed to ensure roles and responsibilities are well understood. In areas with elected Mayors, devolved responsibilities can benefit from a clear and visible layer of democratic accountability, alongside strong local leadership and convening power. As not all of England is currently covered by a Mayoral Strategic Authority, DWP must consider how we continue to support those areas without directly elected Mayors to ensure all residents in England have access to high-quality employment support, regardless of the area they live in. As the Cabinet Statement set out, it is the Government's ambition to ensure every area in England has, or is in the process of establishing, a Strategic Authority by the end of 2027, with Strategic Authorities in place everywhere by the end of 2028. As these new Strategic Authorities are created, DWP will work closely with No 10 North and the Authorities themselves to ensure local institutions have the necessary capacity and capability to deliver high-quality employment support.

Supporting local areas to build the necessary capability and capacity will be an important part of this transition. DWP is establishing the What Works Centre for Local Employment Support, which will help strengthen the evidence base, identify effective practice and support learning across local areas. Alongside this, the Department will continue to work with Strategic Authorities and local partners to build the systems, skills and partnerships needed to deliver high-quality employment support.

We also need to ensure we're building the right conditions for success and providing the necessary structures to empower Strategic Authorities to deliver. For example, Strategic Authorities need to be able to access the right data to design, deliver and evaluate support for their residents. This is necessary to enable a joined-up system of support across organisations, and ensure all support, regardless of who is delivering it, is integrated and coordinated, both for the organisations involved and to ensure clarity for those receiving it. There is a wealth of experience within the diverse provider market in supporting residents move into and to progress through work. As we devolve more power over employment support to Strategic Authorities, we want to ensure this expertise is fully utilised, while enabling effective practice to continue to develop and grow so that locally-commissioned services deliver the best possible outcomes for residents. The wider reforms set out in Rewiring the State, including proposals for greater local control over tax revenues, could over time strengthen incentives for local areas to invest in employment, skills and economic growth outcomes.

4) Which decisions about the design and delivery of employment support should sit nationally, and which should sit locally, and what does this mean for DWP oversight and accountability, including the setting of objectives and outcomes for local areas?

We recognise that there are important questions to work through regarding the respective roles of national and local government in the design, delivery and facilitator of employment support. The Cabinet Statement sets out an ambition to develop new approaches to local accountability, scrutiny and funding arrangements, which will have a bearing on future decisions about employment support and the future role of DWP within an increasingly devolved system.

Existing devolved provision demonstrates how national and local responsibilities can be balanced in practice. Through arrangements such as the devolved **Adult Skills Fund** and the **Trailblazers**, Government sets broad objectives and outcomes while local areas have flexibility to determine how best to deliver against them. Without sufficient flexibility for local areas to respond to the needs of their place, there is a risk of missing some of the key opportunities offered by devolution, including greater service integration, innovation and genuinely place-based solutions.

At the same time, DWP currently retains important responsibilities. Under existing arrangements, the Department remains accountable to Parliament for welfare spending, which is materially impacted by employment support. We would therefore expect national Government to continue to play an important role in setting the overall national framework and strategic outcomes for employment support, alongside developing the appropriate accountability and evaluation arrangements, and providing the enabling functions necessary to support a high-performing system, including evaluation, evidence sharing, data and capability-building across areas.

As employment support is further devolved, choices about accountability and the role of DWP will need to be considered carefully. There is unlikely to be a single model that applies across all forms of employment support, and the appropriate balance will depend on the nature of the provision and the outcomes being sought. As responsibility increasingly shifts towards local leaders and institutions, DWP's role is likely to evolve towards enabling collaboration, building capability, and sharing evidence of good practice between areas.

5) How much flexibility do Jobcentres have to procure and deliver their own employment support, and how effectively do they take advantage of whatever flexibility they do have?

While most large-scale employment support is commissioned nationally, Jobcentres have flexibility to meaningfully tailor support to local labour market conditions and customer needs through discretionary funding, local partnerships and local commissioning routes. This local flexibility operates within a national framework designed to ensure consistency, value for money and equitable access to employment support.

The **Flexible Support Fund (FSF)** can be used to address barriers preventing individuals from moving into work or increasing their hours. Support can include travel costs, childcare, training, equipment, interview clothing and other assistance where it supports employment. Funding is allocated to districts through a national model that reflects factors such as customer volumes and demand to ensure resources are directed towards areas of greatest need. FSF spend is then managed locally, thereby retaining local flexibility to respond to individual and local needs in ways that may not be possible through national programmes alone. FSF budgets are consistently fully utilised by Jobcentres.

This flexibility can be particularly valuable for individuals who face complex barriers to employment, including disabled people, young people and those who are economically inactive. In these cases, relatively small and timely local interventions can help individuals engage with employment support, access training opportunities or move closer to work.

Jobcentres can also use FSF to respond to local labour market priorities. Districts work with employers, training providers and local partners to develop interventions that address skills shortages, recruitment challenges and changing economic conditions. Unlike larger commissioned programmes, FSF can often be deployed quickly, allowing Jobcentres to respond rapidly to emerging needs. For example, following the collapse of Thomas Cook in 2019, the FSF Rapid Response Service and Jobcentre Plus provided support to affected employees, helping around 1,300 former staff return to work.

Jobcentres can also procure provision through the FSF Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS), which provides access to a range of DWP-accredited suppliers and the services they are approved to deliver. Where a Jobcentre identifies a gap in support, it can use the DPS to commission tailored provision from approved suppliers.

Low Value Provision (LVP) allows Jobcentre districts to purchase small-scale vocational training quickly. This gives districts the ability to respond rapidly to emerging employer demand and test

new approaches on a small scale or support individuals to gain specific qualifications required for a job start.

As part of the new Jobs and Careers Service, we are increasing the flexibility and exploring new ways for local Jobcentres to design and deliver employment and careers support that meets the different needs of local labour markets, local people and local employers and works in partnership with other local services.

Taken together, these mechanisms provide Jobcentres and the future Jobs and Careers Service with meaningful flexibility to tailor support to individual needs and local labour market conditions, complementing nationally commissioned provision. Their effectiveness is strengthened by the local knowledge of Jobcentre teams and work coaches, enabling support to be tailored to local circumstances and helping people overcome barriers to employment.

6) How strong is the evidence base for how to optimise employment support outcomes, and what explains the difference between the best and worst performing areas? What can be learned from international comparators?

DWP has a strong evidence base on employment support at the national level across a range of employment support interventions. We have evaluated programmes that demonstrate positive outcomes for a range of different groups of customers in different labour market conditions. We have also evaluated the employment impact of parts of the national DWP core labour market regime and are in the process of updating that evidence.¹

Further evaluations of both the Restart and the Work and Health programmes will be published in due course, which will further strengthen the evidence base over the impact our employment support has had on labour market outcomes.

There have also been evaluations of local employment support schemes delivered under the **European Social Fund**. Evaluation of the 2014-2020 programme in England found that organising ESF funded provision through the then Local Enterprise Partnership (LEPs) model helped to maintain a strong focus on local needs.² Positive relationships between LEPs, funders and delivery organisations were a key factor in the effectiveness of support at delivering employment outcomes. An impact evaluation of the programme in England found positive impact on participants' time spent in employment.³

The evaluation of employment support programmes has revealed that there are differences in outcomes between different areas. For example, while the **Job Entry Targeted Support (JETS)** impact assessment showed the programme had a positive impact in all regions, the highest impact was in the North West (10.8 pp) and the lowest impact was in Central England (6.0 pp).⁴ The reasons for these differences in outcomes from employment support programmes are currently not

¹ For example: [Weekly Work Search Review trial](#)

² Local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) were non-statutory bodies responsible for local economic development in England, bringing together local authorities, businesses, academic and third sector organisations. Funding for LEPs was withdrawn in 2024.

³ [Impact evaluation of the European Social Fund 2014-2020 programme in England - GOV.UK](#) & [Evaluation of the European Social Fund 2014-2020 Programme in England: qualitative case study research - GOV.UK](#)

⁴ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68be8d963f3e5483efdbaabb/jets-impact-evaluation.pdf>

well understood. Potential factors that might explain differences in outcomes between regions include the characteristics of participants and non-participants in employment programmes across regions, the extent of alternative employment support available in different areas, and differences in local labour market trends in different areas.

The evaluations of the **Restart Scheme**⁵ and the DWP's elements of the **Plan for Jobs** employment support package⁶ found limited evidence of local tailoring of employment support with a much stronger focus on tailoring at the personal level instead. Where support providers were well joined up with local areas this tended to be through wider networks that included local skills providers and local government, and through networks of relationships with local employers. There was some evidence of strong strategic partnerships at local levels, though working level staff did not always benefit from these, for example because of a lack of time to engage with all briefing materials and information sent to them.

The Department is aware of international evidence on how devolution of employment support has been used internationally. DWP officials and Ministers regularly engage with and consider the output of international organisations to understand their advice for policymakers on improving labour market outcomes and employment support. This includes recent, relevant research such as the OECD 2026 Employment Outlook: Geographic Disparities in Jobs and Income.⁷ One of the challenges in transposing some of the lessons from these studies is the different institutional and labour market framework in these countries relative to England. For example, countries such as the USA, Germany and Canada have more federalised systems of government than the UK. This means they, currently, have more local or state capacity to deliver employment support programmes relative to the UK.

There is strong evidence on the principles for effective employment support, but there are limitations around the evidence base on what works for effective implementation in different local contexts. Furthermore, for this evidence to inform delivery of local employment support in a systematic way, there must be a process of continuous learning and improvement. To address this, DWP is establishing an independent What Works Centre for Local Employment Support (WWCLES) to support local policymakers and commissioners. This is currently being commissioned and will commence from January 2027⁸. The WWCLES will act as a central evidence 'hub', promoting the systematic and transparent assessment and implementation of what works for local and regional government actors across the UK. As far as possible, the WWCLES will use and promote the most robust methods and encourage initiatives to be delivered in a way that enables these methods to be applied, supporting the development of an evidence base that builds on both central and locally led evaluation. It will also include international evidence in its scope. The WWCLES will complement existing WWCs in the field of employment support, such as Youth Futures Foundation.

⁵ [The Evaluation of the Restart Scheme - GOV.UK](#)

⁶ [Plan for Jobs Cross-cutting Evaluation Wave 1 and 2 synthesis report - GOV.UK](#)

⁷ [OECD Employment Outlook 2026 \(EN\)](#)

⁸ [What Works Centre \(WWC\) for local employment support – UKRI](#)

The Department is also evaluating a range of existing programmes, such as Connect to Work, WorkWell and the Get Britain Working Trailblazers, which will further strengthen the evidence base on delivering employment support in different local contexts.

August 2026