

JOINED UP FOR JOBS

REPORT OF EVALUATION OF
JOINED-UP ICT PILOT

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE USE OF ICT TO IMPROVE
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EMPLOYABILITY SERVICES
USING THE EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS DATABASE

Capital City Partnership
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Background

Joined up for Jobs (JU4J) is Edinburgh's strategy for access to work and economic inclusion. It was launched on 1 February 2002 and is supported and implemented by all the key funder and policy organisations (CEC, CCP, JCP, SEE&L) and the network of provider organisations in the city.

An early aspiration of the core partners was to gather information about provider activity in the city and to know more about the services given to individuals. This gave rise to interest in the possibility of all providers using a common database software for record-keeping and recording. (Both Jobcentre Plus and Careers Scotland have their own database systems but these are not accessible to other providers)

At the same time The Outcomes Partnership, a new two-person company had developed a database called Employment Pathways around the needs of a number of providers in the city. In January 2003 an initial pilot (funded by EQUAL Access) was started with the simple intention of testing whether this database was effective at the basic functions of recording Client records, Employer records and Matching (of individuals and employment opportunities. Four organisations tested it and the verdict on the database ranged from positive to enthusiastic.

In May 2003 the JU4J Strategy Group agreed a specification for a second pilot to test the use of a common database to assist joined-up working. The first phase of this was to research the ITC needs, practices and capacities of the organisations in the provider network. This research was completed in November 2004. The next step was to select organisations to participate in the pilot, which was to be carried out using the Employment Pathways database, on the basis of a partnership agreement between Capital City Partnership and. This agreement allowed for the free and exclusive use of the software in Edinburgh and CCP support to pilot and develop the database for the purpose of supporting the Joined Up For Jobs (JU4J) strategy.

The purposes of the pilot were set out as follows:

1. to pilot and evaluate the use of ICT to assist the operation of providers in the JU4J network and of the network as a whole through improved sharing of information
2. to pilot and evaluate the capacity of the Employment Pathways database as a tool for doing this
3. act as a feasibility study one result of which will be to prepare a specification of the JU4J ICT policy and implementation plan and procurement related to that.

The functions to be tested were:

1. Client records
2. Employer records
3. Matching (of individuals and employment opportunities)
4. Linkages between different sections of the database
5. Sharing of client data - referrals
6. Sharing of client assessments and Action Plans
7. Assessments of distance travelled – within and across organisations
8. Tracking methods
9. Reporting to funders
10. Gathering research and evaluation data
11. Sharing employer and vacancy information; matching between organisations.

A group of providers were selected for participation in the pilot using a number of criteria like their IT capacity, and also their willingness to be involved. They were Nisus Scotland, Wise Move, Edinburgh Retail Academy, Springboard (tourism academy), The Pool, and Employment Access South Edinburgh. This pilot was funded by the Infrastructure Development Programme and ESF Article 6.

In addition the Get On project of the City of Edinburgh Council participated, although the funding for this came from a separate source (EQUAL-funded). This meant that the database was also used by four contractors of Get On – ECCE, Potential Development, Worktrack and Working Links. A steering group was established including these organisations and the JU4J partners.

This document is the report of the evaluation of that pilot.

Summary of findings

1. The database has been shown to have the capacity to perform the functions requested, and to different degrees these functions have been shown to have actual or potential advantages for providers and the provider network.
2. This therefore focuses attention on the less technical issues about relations between organisations and with clients, especially around common assessment formats and client confidentiality. In being involved in the database organisations have had to revisit policies such as data protection, procedures such as tracking and processes such as assessing and recording.
3. The participants generally had a very positive response to the system and a view that it was better than other comparable systems. It was felt that it provides a lot more information on clients and allows far greater monitoring of client progress. It is seen to be very useful in terms of the ease with which reports and summaries of work can be generated.
4. Organisational difficulties arise from the existence of other databases; or the use of parallel paper-base systems; which at one level result in multiple recording (e.g. Wisemove) and at another level reduces the use of the Employment Pathways database (the issue with Job Centre Plus at EASE).
5. The main technical difficulties arose from the specification of equipment that the database has to run on – although consistent with standard current office specifications, some organisations so not have hardware which meets these standards. This could become more of an issue as other organisations start to use the system.
6. Organisations using the database, despite being positive, have generally not used it to the full capacity. Often they have developed ad-hoc solutions to problems or difficulties they have met. In terms of most of these the database could perform the function, but the organisation was unaware of this.
7. Two factors which have limited the useful application have been the levels of capacity of organisations to use IT and to manage data; and the skills and awareness of staff, particularly in the use of database software.

8. While the training given in the pilot was well-regarded, some users requested more comprehensive or 'phased' training – returning to the organisation when they start to use certain functions. Increasing the training and support would also go some way to overcoming the point made above.
9. Big questions are posed around effective data transfer between organisations, specifically the sharing of client data. It has become clear that before this is done there must be clear agreement between organisations; and that if assessments or action plans are to be shared a common format must be in place. However it is also clear that the kind and amount of data which might be shared is different at either end of the Service Delivery Model
10. Two approaches were used. One is the centralised, sub-contracted approach of Get On which allows the database to be built up, monitored and evaluated for a whole programme. In this the data is transferred through a process of merging and splitting the one master database. The second approach is that used by the other projects. In this approach database client records are generated as reports and forwarded to the organisation receiving the referral, which then updates their database with the information forwarded. Relatively few referrals through the database have occurred.. The third option, which hasn't been used in the pilot, would have been to have central database onto which all client records are stored and accessed as and when they are needed by the organisations involved in the project.
11. The pilot's examination of Data Protection issues indicate that it is important to get the right practices in place, which ensure that clients have agreed to sharing of information before this is done. In practice few individuals had any objections. However, it is important that any policy takes into account that a small proportion of people are unwilling to allow sharing of their information with some organisations.
12. Recently an electronic job matching feature has been introduced and has been found to be very useful.
13. It is anticipated that these findings will be filled out as the participating organisations continue to use the database

The future

The current stage of this work is to use this evaluation to formulate the outlines of a policy for implementation within JU4J. To date this has involved clarification of the range of possible objectives, and their achievability, which will be considered by the partners. When these are agreed a number of database programmes, including Employment Pathways, will be examined to assess their capacity to perform these functions.