



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

# How do you evaluate local practice in times of Austerity?

**Lessons learned from two case studies: supporting older Jobseekers in Jobcentre Plus and Local Authority Run Welfare Reform Pilots**

**Andrea Kirkpatrick and Maria Strudwick**

# Research in the Department for Work and Pensions

- We have been managing and designing research in government for last 15 years.
- Mixture of in-house research projects and externally commissioned work.
- Over the last 5 years the balance has shifted towards undertaking more in-house work.
- Research is published on gov.uk (in-house reports, working papers, all commissioned research)
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions/about/research>

# Why the local approach ?

1. **Financial constraint** – fewer large scale research projects are contracted from the centre.
2. **The Localism agenda** – aim for more local ownership and engagement with the policy process
3. **Taking localism further** to develop policies that originate from the base (DWP's delivery agents and partners).

# Local Authority Led Pilots

- DWP supported 13 separate Local Authorities (in the UK) in the development of pilots to inform and support the rollout of Welfare Reform.
- Pilots focused on 5 broad themes – the Local Partnership process, Vulnerable Groups, Digital Inclusion, Work Access, Budgeting and financial management support.
- Pilots designed, delivered and evaluated by each authority, with support from DWP Policy and analytical teams. An '*Analytical Buddy*' was assigned to each authority.
- Each authority committed to monitoring and evaluating their pilot activity and producing a final report at the end of the process.

# What Went Well ?

- Local Authorities very enthusiastic and engaged with the pilot process
- Innovative solutions developed that meet the needs of local communities – (Broadband hot spots in rural community halls, running budgeting support with trusted local partners etc)
- Effective sharing of information between Local authority areas
- The development of increased partnership working in local communities.
- The recording of case studies and individual experience

# What went less well

- Local Authorities struggled to understand the specific monitoring and evaluation requirements of the pilot programme
- Pitching an explanation of the “Evaluation process” at the correct level was difficult. Pro-forma's were developed at a later stage and additional tuition provided.
- DWP over estimated the analytical skills of the Local Authorities and the Local Authorities underestimated DWP’s requirement for evidence.
- Difficulties is establishing the links between Objective setting and outcome measures – use of the Logic model.
- Resource constraints – Staffing and time constraints for both DWP and Local authorities

# Jobcentre Plus pilots with older jobseekers

- Supported two Jobcentre Plus Districts who were interested in testing support for older jobseekers by:
- Providing previous evidence on why this is an issue to JCP: “How ready is Jobcentre Plus to help people in their 60s to find work 2012”  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-ready-is-jobcentre-plus-to-help-people-in-their-60s-find-work-ihr11>
- Encouraging JCP staff to undertake customer insight work prior to developing anything new (short surveys and focus groups)
- Advising staff on monitoring & evaluation
- Providing some practical support (focus groups and interviews)
- Presenting findings to staff in the two pilots areas

## What went well

- JCP Staff were very receptive: pleased to have interest and support rather than demands and diktats.
- Staff conducted some focus groups and short questionnaires to inform the pilots so developed research skills.
- The findings were fed back to managers who had influence to make a change coupled with knowledge of 'the front line'.
- Lessons have been incorporate into good practice guidance for advisers.
- Lessons have been used to encourage other districts consider support for older jobseekers.

# What went less well

- Some of the collection methods were not suitable/did not ask the right questions/know how to
- Staff didn't know how to deal with the information
- Staff turnover meant momentum was not kept up – this affected monitoring arrangements
- Staff wanted to see immediate results

## Lessons learned – things to consider

- Do not overestimate people's understanding, skills and ability to undertake research and evaluation.
- People will require significant amounts of professional support e.g. training, guidance, hand holding so there are real cost implications.
- Don't set your expectations too high and keep your objectives realistic – be pragmatic and flexible. Findings/analysis may not be of the standard you anticipate.
- You need the support and commitment of local managers, they can make or brake a local initiative. (e.g. in the event of staff turnover)

## But it is worthwhile because:

- You can have an immediate and direct impact on local policy environment.
- Helps local practitioners think more analytically e.g. about the impact of their work.
- Empowering – gives local practitioners clearer insight into how evidence based policy making works.
- You get a better insight into delivery in the local context and this experience can help build important relationships for the future.