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**What works? Policies for employability in cities**

**Abstract**

Employability policies targeting urban job seekers have often had a 'work first' focus on quick job entries, neglecting sustainability and progression. This article reviews evidence on 'what works', drawing generic lessons from research on locally-focused urban policy initiatives in Great Britain operationalised in the context of persistent worklessness in many cities. The findings highlight the importance of employer engagement to open up job opportunities, recognising the diverse needs of individuals, the significance of personalised support for those furthest from the labour market, and co-ordination of local provision. It is argued that providers need to ensure workless groups have the skills and support to access opportunities created by economic growth. Robust local policy analysis remains challenging but important in the context of limited budgets, payment-by-results and a fragmented policy landscape.

**Key Words:** Employability, Labour market, Localisation, Welfare to work, Worklessness

## Introduction

This article addresses the question of 'what works' in tackling worklessness in urban labour markets. Evidence is drawn from selected evaluations looking at operation and outcomes of locally-focused policy initiatives in Britain. A key source of evidence is the City Strategy (CS) initiative which empowered local partnership 'pathfinders' to reduce persistent worklessness in fifteen urban areas across Britain (see Green and Adam, 2011; Green et al., 2010). Other material is presented from syntheses of evidence of worklessness interventions in Britain, including the Work Programme (WP) (DWP, 2012a). Although examples are taken from Britain, the ideas and practice have wider applicability, not least because worklessness is an issue faced, to a greater or lesser extent, by cities elsewhere.

Similar to the approach taken by Green and Hasluck (2009), this article identifies generic lessons and good practice elements about what works in reducing worklessness. The question of transferability relates to identifying ideas and principles which underpin good practice rather than on direct transplantation of initiatives from one context to another. Spatial variations in local labour market fortunes and their relative strengths and weaknesses affect the impact and effectiveness of policy responses (Lee et al. 2014, Davies and Raikes, 2014). Thus what works in one context may be ineffective elsewhere. Hence policy transferability is confined to good practice elements.

It is beyond the scope of this article to consider every type of intervention, so particular attention is paid to four topics: personalised support, intensive services for those furthest from the labour market; employer engagement; and co-ordination of local provision. These topics relate to both supply- and demand-sides of the employability equation and their alignment, in addition to questions about optimal organisation of services in a policy landscape where provision is fragmented across numerous providers and policies are formulated at a range of spatial scales.

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3 The article focuses on initiatives and interventions since the 2005 Special Issue. The  
4 context for the initiatives was largely one of economic crisis, albeit some policies  
5 implemented in this period were framed beforehand. Many urban areas already experienced  
6 persistent levels of high worklessness, compounded by increased unemployment in the  
7 recession. Looking at this period is particularly interesting because the economic context  
8 challenged and rejected some of the assumptions on which the policies were predicated and  
9 notions of success were recast.  
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18 When analysing initiatives the article seeks to place them in terms of their specific  
19 objectives, describe who was targeted, and consider whether initiatives had a predominantly  
20 supply- or demand-side focus. Where outcomes or targets are clearly stated, the initiatives  
21 are discussed in those terms of 'success' (increasing skills levels, reducing skills and spatial  
22 mismatches, addressing particular barriers, etc.).  
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29 The next section sets out key features of the economic and policy context in more detail  
30 Key issues relating to evidence and measurement are then outlined, before discussion of the  
31 evidence itself. The four selected key labour market intervention topics are addressed in  
32 turn before the paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of the evidence  
33 presented.  
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### 39 **Context**

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42 An individual's journey from worklessness to work is conceptualised as having three stages:  
43 gaining, sustaining and progressing (in) employment. Worklessness policy may be directed  
44 at some or all of these. Conceptually, gaining employment is largely unproblematic.  
45 Sustaining employment is often defined in policy terms as maintaining employment for a  
46 defined duration; typically three or six months. Progressing in employment includes  
47 advancement with the same employer/organisation as demonstrated by pay rises or  
48 promotion, or by securing employment with a different employer.  
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3 Historically there has always been more focus on getting people into work (or more simply  
4 reducing the benefit count) whether that is through the carrot of support and guidance and/or  
5 through the stick of restricting the levels of and access to out-of-work benefits. Policies have  
6 been criticised for almost exclusively focusing on the transition between welfare and  
7 employment, with very little attention given to keeping people in work, and for taking a 'static,  
8 short-term' view (Mulheirn et al., 2009).  
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13 Since 2005 policy developments have led to a landscape in which responsiveness and  
14 personalisation are key features, but at the cost of increased conditionality: workless  
15 individuals are not only provided with increased support, but they are to be compelled to use  
16 it: welfare support has been restated from passive to active (Fuller *et al.*, 2010). The global  
17 economic crisis and recession have also brought cost-containment to the fore as a policy-  
18 making rationale via austerity measures.  
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29 The financial crisis provides a sharp break in the policy context and challenged the largely  
30 supply-side notions on which policies were predicated formerly. New Labour's worklessness  
31 policies followed a 'work first' approach which conceptualised employment as inherently  
32 beneficial, economically and socially, albeit certain elements of human capital development  
33 could be detected (Lindsay et al., 2007). Frameworks for personal advisers in the public  
34 employment service used targets for benefit reductions and job outcomes, but not for  
35 sustainability (Finn, 2009).  
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44 Governance arrangements have evolved also. There is increased private sector  
45 responsibility for employability services (Wright *et al.*, 2011) and greater localism through  
46 local partnerships (Fuller *et al.*, 2010). The Freud Report (Freud, 2007) was particularly  
47 influential here, with subsequent changes in governance arrangements exemplified in such  
48 policies as Flexible New Deal (FND, introduced 2009) and the WP (introduced 2011).  
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55 The WP is supports the long-term unemployed into work. It uses a payment-by-results  
56 model, in which the bulk of payments to providers are triggered by workless individuals  
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3 achieving sustained employment; (those who are classified as hardest to help attract the  
4 highest payments). It takes a 'black box' approach to service provision; there is no  
5 stipulation of what services should be provided, rather providers are encouraged to decide  
6 what services are most appropriate and how they should be delivered (DWP, 2012a). The  
7 WP has stimulated more concern with issues of sustainability than was the case formerly.  
8 Indeed DWP now produce figures on sustainability payments as part of their regular  
9 reporting on WP performance. Certainly relating payments to sustained outcomes elevates  
10 the issue in minds of practitioners, though good evidence is required of shifts in practitioner  
11 approaches to reflect the policy change. Issues of sustaining work and progressing are  
12 often seen as the remit of employers, who may choose to instigate their own policies in  
13 relation to business case considerations (UKCES, 2012).  
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26 Even though governance of employment/employability programmes has shifted from  
27 centralised models to various devolved models, the voice of service users has largely been  
28 overlooked (e.g. Green and Orton, 2009), though some recent programmes such as Big  
29 Lottery's Talent Match seek to place service users at the heart of programme design and  
30 delivery (CRESR and IER, 2014). Demand-side considerations have also been  
31 underdeveloped, although there has been some limited policy-making incentivising  
32 employers to take on and retain employees, such as the Youth Contract in 2012 and  
33 previously the Future Jobs Fund (Fishwick et al., 2011).  
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43 In summary, the economic and policy climate since 2005 has undergone a series of reforms  
44 and ideological shifts that have played a key role in shaping interventions to tackle  
45 worklessness. The following section discusses the criteria by which an intervention is  
46 considered a success or a failure.  
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### 51 **Evidential and methodological issues**

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55 Ascertaining 'what works' with regard to employability policies in cities depends on  
56 assessment of interventions to produce the necessary evidence. Such assessment is most  
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3 straightforward where an intervention is targeted by population sub-group and/or  
4 geographical area and is implemented uniformly, is informed by a theory of change with a  
5 simple single objective and where there is a clear logic chain of measurable outputs and  
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7 outcomes, and adequate resources are available to conduct assessment.  
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11 There are different types of evidence, including those provided by impact evaluation vis-à-vis  
12 process evaluation. Impact evaluation seeks to understand the causal effect of policy  
13 interventions and (ideally) to establish their cost-effectiveness by estimating the difference  
14 between the outcomes for individuals treated in the intervention and the average outcome  
15 that they would have experienced without it (i.e. the counterfactual) (What Works Centre for  
16 Local Economic Growth, 2014). Process evaluation is concerned with examining the ways  
17 in which a policy intervention is implemented and can help inform policy focus and delivery.  
18 Evidence from both impact and process evaluation is of value in assessing 'what works'.  
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29 The evidence base on 'what works' with regard to employability policies in cities is  
30 quantitatively and qualitatively uneven. Quantitatively, there is more evidence on gaining  
31 employment than on sustaining and progressing in employment; (see Hendra et al. [2011]  
32 for a relatively rare example of evidence on retention and progression in employment).  
33 Qualitatively there are variations in standards of evidence (as measured by scientific  
34 standards [e.g. the Maryland Scale]) and in types of evidence, including whether outcomes  
35 measured are 'hard' (e.g. employment entry) or 'soft' (e.g. enhanced self-efficacy which is  
36 likely to be associated with a workless individual moving closer to employment). In general,  
37 there is more and higher quality evidence available in the public domain on national policy  
38 interventions, which have been commissioned centrally, than on local policy interventions  
39 (Green et al., 2013). In part this reflects the greater resource applied to evaluation of the  
40 former than the latter. This has implications given the drive to greater localisation of  
41 provision; who is responsible for funding and carrying out local evaluation is significant here.  
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3 The reality of policies to enhance employability in cities tends not to be one of simple, clearly  
4 ring-fenced policies, with single goals. Rather it is one of a heterogeneous plethora of  
5 programmes and interventions. The foci of policies may be multiple rather than single, they  
6 may be targeted at several sub-groups and geographical areas, eligibility rules may be  
7 enforced unevenly and how a policy is implemented may vary within and between delivery  
8 organisations. Hence measures of success, as captured by outcomes, vary between  
9 policies. Moreover, an individual may be subject to numerous policy interventions impinging  
10 directly or indirectly on employability, so raising questions about attribution to one  
11 intervention rather than another. Indeed, 'what works' might be more about getting the mix  
12 of policy interventions right in a particular context, rather than any particular 'silver bullet'  
13 (Hasluck and Green, 2007: 15). The trend in policy towards more localised and  
14 personalised interventions operating across policy domains, at a time of pressure on  
15 resources, makes policy assessment both more challenging and more important.  
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30 These issues have implications for interpretation of available evidence. On the one hand  
31 methods used in an evaluation may not capture the success of an intervention (e.g. moving  
32 individuals towards employment is not captured in job outcomes and employment rate  
33 changes), while on the other an individual subject to a policy intervention may have moved  
34 into employment but may have achieved this without policy support (i.e. a deadweight  
35 outcome) (Green and Adam, 2011). As far as possible such issues are taken into account  
36 here.  
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45 The following section examines what works in relation to four topics selected due to their  
46 prominence in recent worklessness initiatives; (it is acknowledged that other types of  
47 intervention could have been included, but space precludes an exhaustive review).  
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## 51 **Selected policy interventions**

### 52 *Personalised support*

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3 Much of the evidence relating to personalised support relates to policies and practices  
4 concerned with individuals gaining work. Personalised support may be more suited to  
5 instances where an individual is distant from the labour market, rather than job-ready  
6 (Longlands *et al.*, 2009). Rationales for personalised support are often given in terms of  
7 providing jobseekers with a 'familiar' face. From a practitioner perspective there may be  
8 operational advantages to individuals being attached to particular advisers. Time can be  
9 saved by advisers being familiar with individual cases, rather than having to start afresh at  
10 each meeting. Personalised support can also mean that individuals are directed to particular  
11 learning and training options which are tailored to them, or individuals receive support and  
12 help to remove particular barriers. Sainsbury (2010) notes the greater use of personalisation  
13 within welfare-to-work services and further work has outlined different typologies within the  
14 personalised approach (Toerien, et al 2013).

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28 A personalised approach may be one way in which service users gain voice within a system.  
29 There is increasing evidence that with some of the wraparound services (relating to help with  
30 caring responsibilities, transport, etc.) an approach based around negotiation and  
31 cooperation, rather than compulsion, is favoured. One approach taken by many CS  
32 Pathfinders was to place the individual at the centre of the process through the practice of  
33 individual learning contracts, or variants thereof. Practitioners regularly talked of money  
34 following clients, rather than clients following money; individuals would be given  
35 training/support best suited to their individual circumstances, rather than being allocated to  
36 training merely because it was available. Service providers have sought to bring users into  
37 the system by basing improvements on user feedback. An approach based on negotiation  
38 and consent, as opposed to compulsion, can be possible in the context where the state does  
39 not place obligations on these individuals to seek work, but looks to encourage them to do  
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55 Mentoring and support may be provided by different types of advisers. For example, the CS  
56 initiative provided examples of partnerships recruiting mentors from local communities,  
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3 selecting people who had often themselves been through anti-worklessness programmes.  
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5 Ethnic minority engagement staff members were used in many CS Pathfinder areas with  
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7 high ethnic minority populations, reflecting the importance of having people to whom  
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9 workless communities can relate and trust. In Nottingham learning champions from local  
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11 communities were employed to engage individuals in priority wards. This experience  
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13 revealed that the role was interpreted in different ways: some learning champions adopted  
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15 an approach of 'engage and refer' whereas others had sought to 'support and mentor'. For  
16  
17 the approach to work well, advisers needed to be well-informed about the range of provision  
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19 available for people to access and be willing to refer to the most appropriate of the provision  
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21 available (as discussed below in the sub-section on co-ordination of local provision). There  
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23 were instances where referrals were made to provision in the same local area rather than to  
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25 provision further afield, which might have been more suitable (Green *et al.*, 2010). Lack of  
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27 adviser skills and knowledge of particular labour markets was also cited in Green *et al.*  
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29 (2013) as a constraint on individuals being able to find the most appropriate work. Reviews  
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31 have also noted the importance of the personal adviser and the positive contribution that this  
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33 can make on an individual's chances of success, provided that the advisers are properly  
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35 resourced in terms of both time and knowledge of local labour market provision available for  
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37 jobseekers (Longlands *et al.*, 2009; Casebourne and Coleman, 2012). Indeed the way in  
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39 which advisers engage with participants initially is important for motivation and commitment  
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41 (Meager *et al.*, 2014). Anecdotal evidence suggests that personalised support is appreciated  
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43 by both individuals and practitioners. Self-referrals to services may be suggestive that a  
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45 particular approach is appreciated by clients, and this is more likely where the support is  
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47 independent of mainstream delivery. The Muirhouse area focus pilot, convened by the  
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49 Edinburgh CS Pathfinder to cover a specific neighbourhood in the city, which involved  
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51 intensive support for certain groups underpinned by mentoring throughout, had high levels of  
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53 self-referral, indicating that the approach was well received by those who had received the  
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55 service and this reputation was spreading through word of mouth to other benefit claimants.  
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3 Reviews have suggested that the key role which personalised support can play in helping  
4 the individual progress towards work in ways which sometimes cannot easily be measured  
5 (Longlands *et al.*, 2009). Working closely with an adviser may increase an individual's sense  
6 of 'ownership' of their journey to employment, improve confidence levels and develop softer  
7 skills which are important for employability. Despite personalised support being valued,  
8 Green and Hasluck (2009) raise questions about personal adviser turnover, how such  
9 support can be funded and whether the funding can match the requirement. Will PAs have  
10 caseloads so large that they are unable to spend the time required with each individual?  
11 The question of how personalisation is being addressed in the 'payment-by-results' model of  
12 the WP shows further tensions. Personalisation of service is a key tenet of WP design.  
13 Newton *et al.* (2012) note that while strong elements of procedural personalisation can be  
14 seen within WP provision, substantive personalisation, in terms of offering distinctive and  
15 individualised provision is 'patchy'. Intentions regarding personalisation are hampered by  
16 reluctance to make referrals to specialist support, though the ability to do so itself is shaped  
17 by the payments model. Work-first approaches continue to predominate, despite the  
18 rhetoric, with less emphasis on human capital approaches (Meager, *et al.* 2014). Given this  
19 it is not unexpected that CESI (2015) notes poor performance for Employment and Support  
20 Allowance groups and people with disabilities compared with other groups.

#### 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 *Intensive services for those furthest from the labour market*

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43 The challenge of working with individuals at some distance from the labour market is that  
44 they may require support and help from a range of specialist providers before they are job-  
45 ready (hence the need for local co-ordination of provision, as discussed below). It remains  
46 the case that many programmes of support and assistance for people to enter paid  
47 employment are predicated on the idea that the problem lies primarily with issues of labour  
48 supply. Yet, the largest challenge to promoting the employability of individuals who are  
49 some distance from the labour market has been provided in recent times by the sheer  
50 numbers of people who are seeking work; especially in urban labour markets.

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3 It is clear that in many cases where an individual is some distance from the labour market  
4 that the process from initial engagement to sustained employment is a long one. At the  
5 outset, there may be problems with simply engaging certain subgroups (Green *et al.*, 2010).  
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7 The experience of CS indicates that as far as engagement is concerned some generic  
8 strategies might be useful, such as community job fairs, taster days, door knocking, etc.. If  
9 certain hard to help workless groups are spatially concentrated in particular neighbourhoods,  
10 then specialist services can be directed to those areas, as illustrated by the development of  
11 neighbourhood plans in the Birmingham, Coventry and Black Country CSP. In East London  
12 it was found that the availability of non ring-fenced funding enabled a more flexible approach  
13 which resulted in engagement of workless people who would have been unlikely to engage  
14 with or benefit from mainstream provision (Green and Adam, 2011).  
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26 CS, through its partnership approach, provided a useful illustration of how to work with those  
27 furthest from the labour market. It adopted a more 'holistic' view of employability and,  
28 though its roots undoubtedly remained supply-side focused, a wider view of that supply-side  
29 was taken. It was recognised that many of these individuals also had issues which although  
30 not directly related to issues of worklessness, nevertheless had a significant impact on their  
31 likelihood of gaining and sustaining work. By working with other services, such as housing,  
32 alcohol and drug charities, and health services, individuals were engaged through services  
33 which traditionally had little to do with worklessness. Working in partnership is discussed  
34 further below, but this element of widening the worklessness agenda to services which have  
35 traditionally been separate is of particular relevance to developing a more intensive service  
36 for those furthest from the labour market.  
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49 Intensive services which link to emerging labour market opportunities are one way in which  
50 long-term unemployed and others some distance from the labour market can be brought into  
51 employment. Major developments are relatively rare, but where they do occur, local  
52 worklessness services need to take advantage opportunities to work with employers in order  
53 to place people into work. Working with employers is explored in further detail below, but it  
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3 is worth noting here that an approach which allies training to demand may be more likely to  
4 be successful. Public sector developments and social clauses in private investments have  
5 been shown to be a useful way to link training to jobs and have proved useful models in a  
6 number of contexts, again especially for people distant from the labour market (Lee *et al.*,  
7 2014, Adam *et al.*, 2014), albeit there are more opportunities for such arrangements in some  
8 urban labour markets than in others. The advantage of training directed towards specific  
9 opportunities is that individuals see the training as relevant and this is likely to increase  
10 motivation and reduce drop-out rates; risks of 'training fatigue' or being allocated to  
11 inappropriate provision are therefore reduced.  
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22 Previous research has noted that those who are in certain categories are more vulnerable to  
23 early job exits (Rigg, 2005; Evans *et al.*, 2004). For example, work has detailed the  
24 increased chances of disabled workers or of lone parents leaving jobs and later research  
25 has tended to address the general issue of the revolving door between out-of-work benefits  
26 and low paid insecure work. Even though churn between welfare and jobs was a known  
27 issue, in the initiatives the authors evaluated they found little evidence of policy (at local or  
28 national level) to address the point. FND and the WP did link payments to providers to  
29 sustained work outcomes.  
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39 Emerging evidence from WP performance has revealed concerns about the ability of  
40 providers to work with those furthest from the labour market. Lack of support with upfront  
41 costs and the higher costs of dealing with participants with multiple needs have led to  
42 smaller specialist providers such as charities or social enterprises withdrawing from sub-  
43 contracted provision (Foster *et al.*, 2014, London Councils, 2013). This suggests that certain  
44 harder to help client groups may not receive the support required and are 'parked' in the  
45 system. Rather than the WP giving more support to claimants distant from the labour  
46 market, the evidence suggests that specialist provision is reduced and the personalisation of  
47 service is limited (Foster, *et al.* 2014).  
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3 Ultimately, though, the challenge of working with an individual who is some distance from the  
4 labour market is that intensive support may take considerable time before the individual is  
5 ready for or gets a job. There may be many milestones which are passed on the way to that  
6 job entry, such as increased confidence, qualifications or new skills (formal or informal)  
7 gained, but frameworks, which look solely at job-entry, are not set up to record these. In the  
8 context of payment by results, the payments structure and the incentives to work with groups  
9 furthest from the labour market need to be examined carefully to ensure that parking within  
10 the system is minimised.  
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### 20 *Links with employers*

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23 There are several important reasons why engaging employers has an important role to play  
24 in employability policies. Most obviously employers are the gatekeepers to jobs. Hence  
25 there is a role of policy makers and delivery partners in understanding employers' current  
26 and likely future needs for labour, since this can help inform design of training and skills  
27 needs matching of individuals to opportunities. They also need to know about employers'  
28 recruitment and selection procedures in order that they can help make these processes  
29 more transparent to job seekers and the one hand and seek to influence employers to  
30 change their perceptions and/or amend their procedures to make opportunities more  
31 accessible to workless individuals (e.g. through ring-fencing of some vacancies and/or  
32 guaranteeing some guaranteed interviews) on the other. Yet despite the crucial role of  
33 employers as key actors in policies to enhance employability in cities activities associated  
34 with engaging and influencing employers traditionally have been under-developed (Green *et*  
35 *al.*, 2010), albeit this may be beginning to change given the increasing emphasis in national  
36 policy on the employer ownership of skills agenda and sector-focused skills policies, which is  
37 in turn reflected in Local Growth Deals in England (OECD, 2015).  
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54 So why has employer engagement tended to be under-developed in employability policies?  
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56 In order to avoid multiple approaches to the same employer, CS Pathfinders posited that to  
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3 be most effective employer liaison and engagement needed to be unified, co-ordinated and  
4 undertaken systematically on a partnership basis at a sub-regional level. However, this is  
5 difficult to achieve operationally given existing practice and vested interests of different  
6 organisations and the challenges involved in recording and sharing such information (Green  
7 *et al.*, 2010). Hence, practically it is easier to focus on delivery of supply-side interventions  
8 to address employability. Moreover, from a political perspective a supply-side focus puts  
9 greater onus on workless individuals' shortcomings for their plight.  
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18 Nevertheless, evidence from the evaluation of CS suggests that positive effects can be  
19 achieved by linking training and work experience of individuals to specific job openings with  
20 particular employers in a targeted fashion. A targeted approach prioritises the quality of the  
21 match between the individual jobseeker and the job, rather than placing any individual in any  
22 job in order to achieve an outcome. 'Fitting' an individual to job to which they are suited, and  
23 endeavouring to map out routes to advancement, either in the same job or in an allied better  
24 paid job, is key to individuals' prospects for sustaining and progressing in employment  
25 (National Audit Office, 2007). Though the issue of what makes a job more suitable than any  
26 other is contestable. Certainly there is literature around what has been termed 'quality  
27 employment' (e.g. Warhurst *et al.*, 2012), though in practice this literature and interventions  
28 are not well aligned. More evidence is required around what makes jobs more suitable for  
29 the individual and more likely to be sustained. A mix of objective and subjective factors is  
30 likely to be important. In the case of the WP, it appears that in-work support is not a major  
31 factor leading to sustained outcomes. As Meager et al (2014) note two-thirds of those who  
32 have received in-work support believed it made no difference to their retention chances. The  
33 question of what factors are most important in job retention is clearly important from a policy  
34 perspective, yet the evidence around this question is underdeveloped, albeit debates tend to  
35 assume that job quality has a key role to play and that work-first approaches which result in  
36 'any' job rather than the most appropriate job will lead to lower levels of sustainability. Other  
37 policies such as Universal Credit (DWP, 2010) also presuppose progression and  
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3 sustainability rather than work-welfare cycling. Given the continued dominance of work-first  
4 strategies within WP provision, factors affecting sustainability and progression ought to be  
5 better researched.  
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10 An apprenticeship scheme devised by four public sector employers in the Southampton  
11 Skills Development Zone also exemplifies how employer involvement and tailored training  
12 opportunities may be structured in such a way as to provide a pathway with training linked to  
13 specific employment opportunities for workless individuals. In this case the employers joined  
14 with the public employment service, a training provider and a local college to set up taster  
15 days, pre-employment training and careers events for young unemployed individuals prior to  
16 recruitment in the apprenticeship scheme. Those individuals who were recruited then  
17 received ongoing support by the partnership during their apprenticeship with the employer.  
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20 47 apprentices started the scheme, 36 successfully completed their apprenticeship  
21 framework and 34 gained employment, mostly with their apprenticeship employer (Fuller and  
22 Rizvi, 2012).  
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33 In large cities one of the key ways to link with employers and provide access to training and  
34 employment opportunities for workless individuals is to make training provision part of the  
35 contract award process for major developments and contracts above certain value as part of  
36 local procurement policies. Utilising such policies, Birmingham City Council stipulated jobs  
37 and skills requirements in the £193 million Library of Birmingham contract, resulting in 306  
38 jobs for Birmingham residents, including 82 apprenticeships, with priority area residents  
39 taking up 54 per cent of these opportunities (Macfarlane, 2014).  
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48 Aside from such targeted interventions which may take the form of a clearly defined package  
49 of support, there are two main generic types of employability interventions in which links with  
50 employers are foregrounded. The first is work placements and work experience. These can  
51 take a range of forms but usually involve unpaid work experience providing an opportunity to  
52 develop and/or demonstrate employability skills. Evidence on whether such interventions  
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3 work is mixed, depending on the nature of the customer group, whether involvement is  
4 voluntary or compulsory and whether any financial assistance is provided. The second  
5 involves subsidised jobs and paying employers a wage subsidy to take on a workless  
6 individual. This type of intervention is expensive relative to conventional supply-side  
7 interventions and so may be difficult to sustain. Concerns about deadweight, substitution,  
8 displacement and providing subsidised recruitment for employers suggest that careful  
9 targeting is needed (Gore, 2005; Casebourne and Coleman, 2012). However, evidence  
10 from the Future Jobs Fund, introduced in 2009 to create additional subsidised jobs of at least  
11 six months duration in areas with high levels of worklessness, suggests that the programme,  
12 which placed over 105 thousand workless people in employment created net benefits to  
13 participants, to employers and to society which easily outweighed the net cost to the  
14 Exchequer (DWP, 2012b). An independent evaluation of the programme indicated the six-  
15 month period of employment was long enough to raise employability and suggests that even  
16 a short period in a subsidised job can provide a gateway into the open labour market for  
17 many participants (Fishwick et al., 2011), with participants valuing that these were 'real jobs'  
18 with 'real pay'.  
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36 Preliminary findings from the WP suggest that good initial job matching is the key to  
37 achieving sustainable employment, and this may 'carry more weight than subsequent in-  
38 work support' (Newton *et al.*, 2012). The strength of relationships between providers and  
39 employers is thought to be highly important to future success, including effective job  
40 matching. However, the evaluation of the WP suggests that employer-provider relationships  
41 are still under-developed, especially among smaller employers (Ingold and Stuart, 2015).  
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49 While the focus in this section has been on links with employers, what is clear from the  
50 selected evidence presented is that many local interventions are part of broader models  
51 resting on local partnership working. Co-ordination of local provision is examined  
52 explicitly next.  
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### *Co-ordination of local provision*

This section sets out the rationale for co-ordination of local employability services provision, with particular reference to lessons emanating from the experience of the CS initiative. It identifies some of the elements that are needed for effective co-ordination of local provision and how such co-ordination may manifest itself. The section also discusses some elements of co-ordination within WP provision, whilst acknowledging the spatial differences in terms of contract areas and governance models under the two initiatives. Finally some key benefits accruing from local co-ordination are outlined.

The diversity of personal, household and other contextual issues posing barriers to individuals in moving towards, entering, sustaining and progressing in employment means that the support individuals may need might encroach upon a range of policy domains, such as health and housing, as well as employment, involving a range of local policy actors from public, voluntary and private sectors. Gaps in provision of employability support across these different policy domains and/or inefficiencies in joining up between them make addressing worklessness all the more difficult. Hence it appears self-evident that benefits will accrue from co-ordination of local provision. Indeed, local and sub-regional partnership working has become a defining characteristic of policies in Britain and elsewhere combatting worklessness and disadvantage more generally (Geddes, 1997).

The need to improve co-ordination of local service provision was part of the rationale for the CS initiative. Attempts to address entrenched worklessness amongst some sub-groups in particular local areas included not so much an absence of organisations delivering services relevant to tackling worklessness, but rather a lack of co-ordination in the planning and provision of such services. In some local areas a myriad of different service providers meant that there were multiple and confused points of contact with the service delivery system (for residents and for employers), relatively few referrals between service providers leading to shortcomings in personalisation of support, and disjointed employer engagement activity.

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3 The theory of change underlying the CS initiative was that bringing local stakeholders  
4 together in partnership to develop a better understanding of the local welfare-to-work arena  
5 and challenges to be addressed would facilitate aligning and pooling of funding and  
6 resources so as to reduce duplication, achieve a more coherent services offer and so  
7 generate additional positive outcomes in terms of moving people into jobs and sustaining  
8 them in employment over and above existing provision (Green et al., 2010).  
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16 Evidence from the CS initiative suggests that for co-ordination of local services to be  
17 successful ideally four key elements should be in place. The first is partner buy-in to the  
18 partnership. Ensuring such buy-in is more easily achieved when co-operation and co-  
19 ordination works to the advantage of individual partners, than when partners see themselves  
20 in competition with one another. In the latter instance they may tend to prioritise  
21 organisational objectives over those of the partnership. The second issue is getting the  
22 geographical scales of activity right in delivery and co-ordination of services (see also North  
23 and Syrett, 2008; North et al, 2009; Etherington and Jones, 2009). Different geographical  
24 scales are appropriate for different types of interventions. So co-ordination of local provision  
25 might entail establishing outreach services to engage multiply disadvantaged individuals at  
26 neighbourhood scale but engaging with employers at city-/sub-regional level. Thirdly, in the  
27 case of a formal area-based partnership a strong, and ideally independent, central team to  
28 lead and provide the secretariat for the partnership in terms of strategic overview is helpful.  
29 These three elements facilitate horizontal co-ordination. The fourth element is joining up  
30 vertically between local service and national policy and provision. Ideally, national policy  
31 needs to work in the same direction as local policy, and vice versa, in order to reinforce each  
32 other's aims. Moreover, partnership working across policy domains between central  
33 government departments at national level tends to help joining-up at local level.  
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53 Co-ordination of local service provision manifests itself in several ways. The most obvious of  
54 these is co-location of services: bringing together a range of local providers all concerned  
55 with addressing the worklessness agenda at a single location, so providing a more joined-up  
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3 and tailored service for individuals and facilitating sharing of information and understanding  
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5 between staff working in different, but related policy domains. An example of this is provided  
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7 by the Single Points of Access set up in each of the boroughs of East London by the East  
8  
9 and South-East London CS Pathfinder, which were designed to provide person-centred  
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11 individually-responsive front-end services available to all workless people and which address  
12  
13 the range of barriers to employment that they face (CESI and Shared Intelligence, 2011). In  
14  
15 practice, how the Single Points of Access were implemented varied between boroughs,  
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17 taking account of pre-existing provision, but in all cases a key step to integration was  
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19 aligning services with physical premises, such that networks of premises became spokes  
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21 from which outreach and engagement could be conducted and through which referral to  
22  
23 appropriate local provision was made. Such cross-referral is a second way in which co-  
24  
25 ordination of local service provision is manifest. An example of a local initiative designed to  
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27 develop and improve navigability of the local service infrastructure to enhance connections  
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29 between large numbers of local contractors and employability providers, while at the same  
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31 time driving up quality, is the development of and Employment Services Directory and  
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33 providers' employability rating system by West London Working (2011). A third way in which  
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35 co-ordination of local provision may be manifest is through joint commissioning at area level.  
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37 An example of this is provided by the Glasgow CS Pathfinder, which implemented an area  
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39 commissioning model for employability services focused on five sub-areas of the city,  
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41 bringing together local, national and European funding sources into a single pot to add value  
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43 to mainstream provision (Green et al., 2010). London Councils (2013) have suggested that  
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45 local programmes provide better outcomes than the WP, partly because of the lack of  
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47 integration between the WP and local services and provision. Fourthly, co-ordination of local  
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49 provision may be manifest through co-design, as exemplified by employer and Sector Skills  
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51 Council involvement in the development of retail skills pre-employment training courses in  
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53 the Rhyl City Strategy area (Green et al., 2010).  
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3 Evidence from the CS initiative (Green and Adam, 2011) and from other syntheses of  
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5 evidence (Casebourne and Coleman, 2012; Meadows, 2008) suggests that from strategic  
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7 and delivery provider perspectives attempts to co-ordinate local employability service  
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9 provision tend to result in greater awareness of local employability challenges and more  
10  
11 appropriate matching of services to individuals' (and employers') needs. For individuals who  
12  
13 are workless co-ordination of local provision is likely to result in enhanced 'wraparound'  
14  
15 services alongside employment and skills focused delivery, either through clearer  
16  
17 signposting to appropriate providers or via a single organisational contact who accesses  
18  
19 other local services on their behalf (Gillinson et al., 2010). Although the WP presupposes a  
20  
21 degree of co-ordination between providers, the evidence thus far points to the need for  
22  
23 improvement. Issues of referrals down the supply chain have been noted; referrals between  
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25 public and private sector organisations are hampered by ideological concerns, a desire to  
26  
27 protect the core business, and poor communication (Newton *et al.*, 2012).  
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### 30 **Conclusion and implications**

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32 This article has focused particularly on four key topics (personalised support, intensive  
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34 services for those furthest from the labour market, work placements and coordination of local  
35  
36 provision) and has sought to analyse their roles in gaining, sustaining and progressing in  
37  
38 employment. It has been argued that these topics all have a role in promoting employability  
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40 for individuals, though the limits to which these approaches can be successful needs to be  
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42 better articulated and better understood.  
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46 The examples contained in this article refer to British urban labour markets. Their relevance  
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48 though is not confined to this context, as the article has concentrated on elements of good  
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50 practice. Given the examples used, the transferability of good practice is likely to be  
51  
52 especially applicable to Anglo-Saxon free market economies. However, the approach of  
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54 focusing on generic lessons rather than on particular programmes - the successes or failures  
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56 of which may be heavily context-dependent, allows for greater transferability and applicability  
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58 of the research findings.  
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3 The article has focused on experiences taken from evaluations which highlight cases of  
4 good practice and/or when certain initiatives have been viewed as successful, precisely  
5 because this sort of information is most publicised and hence more accessible. What has  
6 received less attention is the equally, or potentially more, relevant question of 'what does not  
7 work?' Despite policy makers often advocating 'test and learn' strategies, the context of  
8 competition for funding can be powerful in shaping behaviours, and typically results in local  
9 actors focusing on more positive experiences and outcomes. This generates an evidence  
10 base which provides an over-estimate of the efficacy of various policies and initiatives. The  
11 challenge for policy makers is to create an assessment framework whereby successes and  
12 failures can be recorded without prejudicing future funding bids. This issue for policy makers  
13 is, of course, not exclusive to worklessness policy, but also relates to other domains where  
14 funding is based on prior (successful) performance.  
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28 Additionally, the evidence presented is heavily weighted towards the 'gaining employment'  
29 stage of the journey to employment. Relatively little has been presented relating to gaining  
30 or sustaining employment policies and practices. It has been argued that this focus on job-  
31 entry has been a consequence of economic context and political preferences. Recent  
32 changes, especially to payment mechanisms, may result in more attention being paid to  
33 issues of sustainability and progression, and tentative evidence is included to suggest that  
34 direction of change. This is not to underestimate the possibility that 'shock' effects, such as  
35 those experienced in the recent recession, could result in a reversion to a more hard-line  
36 work-first strategy in future. By altering payment structures to reflect issues of sustainability  
37 and progression it is argued that welfare-to-work providers will necessarily have to give  
38 greater attention to their role in ensuring these outcomes. The evidence which emerges  
39 from WP evaluation work is that behaviour has not changed as much as expected – work-  
40 first strategies continue to be followed, with implications for success in different client  
41 groups.  
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3 Work first strategies, and supply-side strategies more generally, have dominated  
4 approaches to employability, but it is necessary to think more critically about the limitations  
5 of such strategies, especially for workless individuals who are some distance from the labour  
6 market. It is difficult to be critical of efforts which seek to raise esteem and confidence in  
7 workless individuals. Higher levels of both may be viewed as a necessary, but not sufficient,  
8 prerequisite for entry to employment. The evidence presented has shown that for these  
9 individuals especially, the rhetoric of skills development is rarely matched with the  
10 experience. Strategies which are better able to achieve 'fit' between supply- and demand-  
11 side issues are likely to result in better outcomes for these groups, so emphasising the need  
12 for employers to be involved, though questions remain about substitution effects and  
13 concerns around subsidised recruitment for employers are valid.  
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26 Evidence which is provided on what works in the case of localised programmes often comes  
27 from the practitioners themselves, especially in the case of process evaluation, and this is  
28 valuable for informing and developing future approaches. It is acknowledged that the sorts  
29 of evidence which practitioners value may not be the sorts of evidence which are valued by  
30 national policy makers and funders of programmes; broadly national policymakers favour  
31 evidence of impact whereas process tends to be valued more at the local level.  
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39 Of course, when considering 'what works', notions of success are a key consideration. Yet  
40 this in itself is potentially problematic, as 'success' may be defined in different ways. For  
41 example, programmes which aim at job entry may not necessarily produce 'success' in  
42 terms of sustainability or progression. The context of fragmented provision coupled with  
43 devolved budgets make the challenge of assessing what works more difficult. Individuals  
44 may be subject to various interventions (i.e. fragmentation) and localised budgets (in  
45 contrast to national schemes) often lack the resource for evaluation. Questions of  
46 substitution and additionality are particularly difficult to answer in this context. As argued  
47 above funding arrangements, and political viewpoints, tend to overstate the effect of the  
48 dominant supply-side approaches to employability. There is a danger therefore that  
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3 measures which seek to focus more on human capital development than work first  
4 strategies, will also be viewed from the point of view which conceives of success as (quick)  
5 job-entry. From that perspective this leaves human capital development programmes  
6 vulnerable to political attack as their job entry rates are lower and/or take longer to achieve. .  
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11 There is a need therefore to be realistic about what programmes can be expected to  
12 achieve, however unpalatable that might be, and to articulate clearly what the desired  
13 outcomes might be.  
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18 Personalised and intensive support, linked to employer demand, co-ordinated efficiently at  
19 the local level has a key role to play in addressing worklessness in cities, but the limits of a  
20 predominantly supply-side approach focusing on individual employability need to be better  
21 understood and articulated. Widening the debate to consider why certain initiatives and  
22 policies have been unsuccessful is another key challenge which needs to be addressed. If  
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Personalised and intensive support, linked to employer demand, co-ordinated efficiently at the local level has a key role to play in addressing worklessness in cities, but the limits of a predominantly supply-side approach focusing on individual employability need to be better understood and articulated. Widening the debate to consider why certain initiatives and policies have been unsuccessful is another key challenge which needs to be addressed. If this could be achieved policy makers and practitioners would be able to consider a fuller evidence base when formulating policy and practice.

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