

Institution: University of Leeds		
Unit of Assessment: 17 - Business and Management Studies		
Title of case study: Helping unemployed people into employment by engaging employers		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2011 - 2017		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Jo Ingold	Associate Professor of Human Resource Management & Public Policy	17/10/2011 – 31/07/2020
Professor Mark Stuart	Montague Burton Professor of Human Resource Management and Employment Relations	01/10/1992 - present
Dr Danat Valizade	Associate Professor of Quantitative Methods	01/11/2012 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Supporting unemployed people to get jobs has benefits not only to individuals but to wider society and the UK economy. Research by Ingold, Stuart and Valizade has led to improved service provision by the employability service industry including large service providers such as Serco and Public Health England as well as local authorities. It has facilitated significant adoption of best practices across the industry and supported leading professional bodies in providing services and training interventions for their corporate, public and third sector members. Significantly changing practitioners' approaches to strategy towards co-opetitive, relational and needs-focused service delivery has enhanced professionalisation of the sector and supported strategies to influence policy makers.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Government policy to get the unemployed into work has increasingly involved 'employability', 'activation' or 'welfare to work' programmes. Such programmes aim to address deep structural problems that can occur even during periods of labour market buoyancy. Although levels of employment in the UK were historically high between 2015 and March 2020, more than 2.5m people struggled to enter paid employment or 'cycled' between periods of unemployment and paid work. Exemplar programmes in the UK include the New Deal programmes, the Work Programme, and the Work and Health Programme. The Work Programme alone cost approximately GBP3bn¹. Such employability programmes have assumed even greater importance in response to the employment crisis resulting from the global coronavirus pandemic, as seen by the Government's new Kickstart and Restart programmes.</p> <p>Research led by Dr Jo Ingold, with Professor Mark Stuart and Dr Danat Valizade, has examined the 'demand-side' of activation – i.e. how to engage employers – rather than the conventional focus on the 'supply-side' of activation, i.e. individuals outside the labour market. Ingold's research has drawn attention to the lack of engagement in employability programmes by employers and the barriers and enablers to their engagement [1]. The research includes three major projects that together constitute a sustained body of scholarship: a) an exploration of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and their engagement with employability service providers (2012-2013), b) a collaborative project with Prime provider Serco on the delivery of their programmes to activate difficult-to-access claimants with mental health issues, and c) a comparative study on employability programmes in the UK and Denmark funded by an ESRC</p>		

¹ <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/The-work-programme.pdf>

Future Research Leaders grant based on 1503 employer survey responses and 103 employer and service provider interviews (i). The research advanced understanding of employer engagement across four dimensions:

i) Employer Engagement

The research found that employer engagement in employability programmes was central to their success, but this was undermined by employers being excluded from policy development, resulting in low take-up of government programmes [2]. Analysis of the complexity of relationships at the frontline of the UK service delivery supply chain found three key types of activities of employability programme providers: business to business sales; matching of clients to employers' requirements; and building and maintaining trusting relationships [2]. From this, comparative research (i) developed a number of measures of employer engagement. Further, it was found that 'relational' (in-depth, sustained) employer engagement in Denmark was twice that in the UK (60% compared to 31%) [3, 4]. The findings implied that UK policy placed too much emphasis on a "push" approach (i.e. "selling") and not enough emphasis on a "pull" approach (i.e. gaining better knowledge and understanding of employers' needs).

ii) Competition and Co-opetition

The employers' role in employability programmes was further illuminated in [5], where it was found that SMEs had little awareness of programmes and highlighted the intense competition driving service providers' attempts to engage employers through a programme developed without considering employers' interests or their propensity to engage [5]. The findings exposed the plethora of confusing 'products', including apprenticeships, traineeships, work placements and different programmes aimed at niche demographic groups. The UK competitive landscape of employability reduces co-operation between providers, undermining services for both the unemployed and for employers [4]. The research findings suggested that co-opetition – collaboration between competitors – is required to deliver an enhanced service offer to businesses and this informed the activities with practitioners. One aspect of this was a 'single front door' for employers to access programmes in specific labour market areas.

iii) Appropriate services for disadvantaged groups

Research exploring individuals with mental health conditions on employability programmes found that the support they received from employability programmes was not sufficiently tailored to their employment or health needs. Further, the 'problematizing' of unemployed candidates had the effect of reducing rather than enhancing their chances of gaining employment [6]. The need for more tailored services to help unemployed people into work was thus a central finding. It was argued that the existing delivery model that involved participants spending defined amounts of time with different providers did not help those with mental health conditions to make sustained progress towards work. A key finding was that while employability programmes increased employers' probability of recruiting long-term unemployed in the UK and Denmark, they were not able to counter employers' selective hiring practices that were detrimental to the hiring of disadvantaged groups [3] and this was related to the way programmes were delivered.

iv) Benefit conditionality

Drawing from both employers' and providers' perspectives, the research found that employers viewed 'benefit conditionality' negatively [3, 6]. The requirements placed on jobseekers in order to retain access to benefits led to employers receiving large numbers of unsuitable and unfiltered job applications; they viewed this as a product of 'box ticking' and compliance targets. In both the UK and Denmark, providers employed differential strategies to place people in work. Building relationships with employers is crucial to the delivery of these strategies. However, employer engagement and relationship-building was entirely overlooked by UK policy makers, the commissioning of services by governments at national, regional and local levels and in the delivery of programmes by providers on the ground [4].

Two doctoral researchers were associated with this stream of research and their contribution is acknowledged: Meenakshi Sarkar and Frederike Scholz.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [1] van Berkel, R., Ingold, J., McGurk, P., Boselie, P. and Bredgaard, T., (2017). Editorial introduction: An introduction to employer engagement in the field of HRM. Blending social policy and HRM research in promoting vulnerable groups' labour market participation. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 27(4): 503-513. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12169>. [Shows that little attention has been paid to the demand (employer) side of activation programmes, emphasises the role of labour market intermediary agencies and explains employer motivations to engage with or avoid participation in such programmes.]
- [2] Ingold, J., (2018). Employer engagement in active labour market programmes: The role of boundary spanners. *Public Administration*, 96(4): 707-720. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12545>. [Conceptualises the role of boundary spanning organisations (i.e. employability service provider organisations that are in direct contact with employers) in employer engagement, including building and maintaining trusting inter-organisational relationships with employers.]
- [3] Ingold, J. and Valizade, D., (2017). Employers' recruitment of disadvantaged groups: Exploring the effects of active labour market programme agencies as labour market intermediaries. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 27(4): 530–547. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12154>. [Comparative research in the UK and Denmark examines the role of activation programmes in employers' recruitment of disadvantaged groups.]
- [4] Ingold, J., Sarkar, M., Valizade, D., Garcia, R. and Scholz, F., (2017). *Employer Engagement in Active Labour Market Programmes in the UK and Denmark: Final Report, CERIC Policy Report No. 8*. [Presents the findings relating to employers and providers in the UK and Denmark and concludes with a model of instrumental and relational engagement.]
- [5] Ingold, J. and Stuart, M., (2015). The demand-side of active labour market policies: A regional study of employer engagement in the Work Programme. *Journal of Social Policy*, 44(3): 443–462. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279414000890>. [Reports the findings of a survey of 643 businesses and face-to-face interviews with 40 employer engagement staff exploring the engagement processes and employer motivations.]
- [6] Ingold, J., (2020). Employers' perspectives on benefit conditionality in the UK and Denmark, *Social Policy and Administration*. 54(2): 236-249. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12552>. [Compares employers' perspectives on benefit conditionality in the UK and Denmark. In both countries, employers held negative views of conditionality and considered it problematised the supply side thus undermining applicants' chances of gaining employment.]

Grants

- (i) Ingold, J., Economic & Social Research Council. **GBP260,518**. 31.12.13 – 31.12.17. ESRC Future Research Leaders grant. How do inter-organisational relations affect employer engagement in welfare to work programmes in the UK and Denmark? Principal Investigator. Grant Number: ES/K008617/1. Competitive award.
- (ii) Ingold, J., University of Leeds. GBP19,590. Impact Leadership Award. 01.12.19 – 31.07.21.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Ingold's research has had an impact across the employability sector. She is considered a national authority on employer engagement, leading to key advisory and thought leadership commissions with leading industry bodies.

Service delivery

Serco, a leading multinational company, changed its service delivery model for the UK Work Programme as a direct result of Ingold's research on mental health service users. Serco is a leading contractor of major UK government services and was one of the key Prime providers for the Work Programme (2011-2017) [A]. The Serco Director, Employment Related Services confirms: "Up until 2015, Serco had applied a 3-phase model for delivery of services to customers on their 2-year Work Programme journey. For the customer, this meant that they had a change of service provider twice during the course of the programme. ... Your research with this customer group identified that the 3-phase model did not best meet their needs ... In

response to your research, we altered our delivery model at Serco in 2015, allowing customers to spend the entirety of their time on Work Programme with a single service provider, thereby creating a framework which enabled longer-term relationship building and allowed for the consolidation of progress towards employment.” [A]

As a direct result of the research, Serco provided a range of developmental programmes to better equip frontline employment advisers with the skills and understanding to provide more effective support for people with mental health issues [A]. This improved the performance on entry into employment 3 months or longer; the Head of Employment, Skills and Enterprise confirms: *“For the following year the number of people in employment 3 months or longer through our schemes increased by 386 (9.3%) and the number of individuals with a disability brought into employment three months and longer increased from 220 to 284, an increase of 29%. [B]*

Supported by a University of Leeds ‘Impact Leadership Award’, **Ingold** worked with an independent consultant, Tony Carr of 4frontpartners, to help translate the research findings for practitioner audiences and extend the delivery of training provision for industry professionals.

Public Health England (PHE) improved their employment services to people with alcohol and drug dependence, drawing on **Ingold’s** expertise and research on employer engagement. The Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Trial Manager and Project Lead [C] details how the research benefitted the specialist teams (a Best Practice Group) that were trialling a new evidence-based intervention service at seven sites. **Ingold** led a series of training sessions for IPS specialists across all sites in the UK to resolve specific challenges related to the trial. The Trial Manager and Programme Lead stated that the intervention: *“led to a different approach to how they engage with employers. This includes adopting an approach that takes more account of employer needs and seeks to balance those with the needs of those seeking to access employment (the clients). Furthermore, as a result there has been a change of emphasis from an approach of ‘cold-calling’ employers to one based on market intelligence, targeting and relationship management.” [C]*

Promoting best practice and professionalisation of the sector, **Ingold** designed and delivered a suite of training courses for IPS specialists on business engagement (including communications, sales & negotiation, understanding employer needs, market intelligence, problem solving in the context of brokerage roles, and relationship building), with particular guidance on the training requirements needed for new members of staff joining the programme [C]. Furthermore, **Ingold** contributed research evidence and practical solutions to an IPS manual and supplementary manual focused on employer engagement that will be used to guide all current and future IPS delivery across the UK. It was mentioned that *“this document forms a key element of IPS strategy which is critical for the national roll-out of the IPS programme”.* [C]

Further invitations for **Ingold’s** expertise led to engagement with service delivery providers and employment, skills and economic development leads at City of York Council (CYC), including three strategic workshops, jointly mapping service provision and customer needs and developing strategic action plans for employer engagement in the city [D]. This led to a number of tangible strategic changes (e.g. adopting a “single front door” approach) in how CYC manage employer engagement in the city: the setting up of a network of service providers, CYC and other agencies; identifying business needs, adapting to online provision in response to Covid-19 and putting training online; and adopting a set of new principles of needs-led service provision to avoid duplication and streamline the process for business [D].

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) worked with **Ingold** on their Working Well Early Help (WWEH) employment support programme aimed at supporting a return to employment for individuals with a health condition or disability. Their role was to provide evidence and tangible actions to improve engagement with Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs). The evidence on the importance of a needs-led approach and co-opetition has led to re-evaluation at the level of commissioning as to how employer engagement is addressed across the Greater Manchester ecosystem. **Ingold** helped GMCA identify the challenges WWEH faced in SME engagement and better understand existing good practice [E].

Advising professional bodies

Ingold has become a recognised influencer and contributor to the employability sector. She has supported professional associations, helping their development, enhancing their members' collective knowledge and skills and assisting lead organisations in lobbying government:

First, **Ingold** has advised the Institute of Employability Professionals (IEP), the leading organisation for professionals in the UK employability sector with 9,000 members. The IEP Chief Executive states: *"In February 2020 Jo was appointed a Fellow of the IEP; a rare accolade for an academic that signifies the importance of her work to the Institute."* [F]. A co-authored report influenced members to work more collaboratively: *"The report and launch event were a springboard for the IEP in setting out the importance of collaboration to effective delivery of employability services for both jobseekers and employers. This is a game-changer for the industry in enhancing delivery both for customers and businesses and in reducing costs."* [F]. The Chief Executive commented that **Ingold** is *"highly credible and unique in bringing together evidence and policy and prompts IEP members to think expansively about persistent issues for the sector."* [F]. Based on her leadership as an IEP Fellow, the testimony continues: *"Jo has contributed significantly to a sea-change in attitudes and behaviours amongst both commissioners and providers, which are evidenced by the conversations the IEP Board is having and will continue to have as we move into a critical phase of employment service commissioning in 2021."* [F]. Supporting IEP's lobbying agenda, **Ingold** was also invited to give evidence from her research on behalf of the IEP to the Work & Pensions Select Committee on DWP's preparations for changes in the world of work (HC358 – November 2020) [G].

Second, **Ingold** advised the Employment Related Services Association (ERSA) the largest UK providers' organisation with 900+ members. ERSA confirms that **Ingold** has greatly benefitted them as an industry association and intermediary in lobbying government and providing knowledge and research evidence to their membership [H]. The Chief Executive of ERSA stated: *"Ingold has become a respected authority on evidence-based research for the employment services sector and as such we are pleased that we have been able to draw on her insights in our role of lobbying government and influencing the large service commissioners throughout the UK. We are an important institution in advocating for the sector. Her research informed our submission to the UK Government's Improving Lives Green Paper with regard to better understanding the support needs of disabled people ..."* [H]

Third, **Ingold** was instrumental in the formation of an ERSA Employer Engagement Forum that facilitates dialogue on key employability issues and includes over 200 employability sector leaders, commissioners and policy makers. Furthermore, the research has been valuable to the setting up of an Evidence Hub of what works in improving service delivery with **Ingold** advising on the structuring of this resource for ERSA members [H]. In January 2019, findings supporting the importance of a needs-led approach to overcome the complexity of employment programmes for employers were presented as evidence by Samantha Windett on behalf of ERSA to the Work and Pensions Select Committee on Universal Credit: Youth Obligation [I].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [A] Letter from Director, Employment Related Services, Serco (15.02.19).
- [B] Follow up letter from Serco (03.12.20) providing additional data.
- [C] Letter from IPS-AD Trial Manager and Project Lead, Public Health England (received 26.08.20).
- [D] Letter from Skills Manager, York City Council (07.12.20).
- [E] Letter from Working Well Portfolio Manager, Greater Manchester Combined Authority (01.12.20).
- [F] Letter from Chief Executive of Institute of Employability Professionals (16.12.20).
- [G] Work and Pensions Committee Oral Evidence: DWP's preparation for changes in the world of work, HC 358, Wed. 4/11/20. <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/1140/pdf/>.
- [H] Letter from Chief Executive of Employment Related Services Association (26.08.20).
- [I] Work and Pensions Committee Oral evidence: Universal Credit: Youth Obligation, HC 1885, Wed. 30/01/19. Page18-19.