

Local London Listening Exercise

Evidence analysis





Contents

Introduction	2
Strengths	6
Areas for development	7
Key learnings	8
Recommendations	10
Conclusions and next steps	12

Introduction

No Wrong Door (NWD) is a programme commissioned by the Greater London Authority (GLA) to improve employment and skills service provision across London. It is delivered through collaborative engagement with providers, funders, and other public services in the form of Integration Hubs led by London's four sub-regional partnerships. These Integration Hubs target improving access and inclusivity of employment and skills.

Local London is a partnership of nine local authorities in north east and south east London. We work to promote inclusive growth, foster vibrant communities, and ensure the needs of our sub-region are not lost in assumptions about being part of the Capital.



The NWD programme is driven across three strands: integration hubs, research and innovation, and seed-corn funding, ultimately coming together to enhance the quality of service delivery and exploring access routes for London's residents to engage in employment and skills services. Local London's Integration Hub is one strand of the GLA's No Wrong Door initiative. Its focus is on driving improvement and embedding a single-front-door approach to employment and skills provision across the sub-region. This includes improving awareness and access to careers and employment related support for our most vulnerable residents, as well as upskilling the key actors in the employment and skills supply chain to meet the needs of residents.



As part of NWD's research and innovation strand, the Mayor of London commissioned a report from The Young Foundation to explore the opportunities from the integration of employment and skills provision and how it might be possible to support the diverse range of priority groups who rely on this provision. This pan-London report points towards eight thematic areas within which possible solutions to the obstacles in service integration and delivery might be tackled, consolidating findings from a series of sub-regional workshops with a range of stakeholders to identify overarching areas for development. These areas are outlined in the diagram below.

The Young Foundation's research concluded that in shaping the next phase of No Wrong Door, employment and skills provision in London should be a "combination of top-down activity alongside frontline action and learning." At the same time the Young Foundation concluded this, Local London identified a specific need to engage with and listen to those frontline workers, acknowledging that progress will rely on a combination of top-down activity alongside frontline action and learning, provided service providers are able to build the skills and have the capacity to provide a customer-centred approach. Frontline staff provide a necessary and meaningful perspective on how to engage in inclusive delivery, learning from their face-to-face engagement with residents and the day-to-day challenges that face London's employment and skills provision. In order to engage with frontline staff, Local London initiated a series of workshops with five different frontline departments.

The five organisations interviewed were four local authority employment and skills service providers, Bexley Business & Employment (Bexley BE), Greenwich Local Labour and Business (GLLaB), Our Newham Youth (ONY), and Work Redbridge, alongside Maximus, a private company that partners with government and local authorities in employment services. These organisations were chosen because of the breadth of their combined services as a representative sample of the wider sub-region. The listening exercises centred three thematic areas: the team of advisers/colleagues, the customer, and the service. The workshops drew out the strengths of the organisations, areas for development, and

a survey of the profiles of the customers who engage in the services. Attendees also engaged in reflective practice, considering in group discussion what they feel proud about at work, and times when things have not worked out so well. Additionally, the workshops explored the motivations for attendees in undertaking their job role, and finally asked attendees to initiate the preparation of a Team Charter, considering the team and service in terms of their purpose and values, context, and roles, responsibilities, and norms.

The following report outlines the primary observations and takeaways from these listening exercises, aligning the struggles of frontline workers with potential follow-up recommendations to address the obstacles to service delivery and ensuring the best possible access to services for residents.



The Young Foundation

- Flexible funding and targets
- Building skills, knowledge on EDI/MH
- Personalised support: deepening understanding of needs
- Closer working with employers
- Strengthening community connections
- Data pooling and information sharing
- Flexible support for clients
- Tailored support for young people

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Strengths

Each session revealed a number of strengths that the attendees felt were a boon to their organisation. Among the aptitudes of the teams surveyed were: combined expertise, local knowledge, teamwork, administrative skills, the capacity to provide tailored advice to customers, diversity, IAG qualifications, and knowledge of onward referral mechanisms. Other strengths included staff trained in specialist services, confidence in stakeholder engagement, good customer relationships, local connections, technological competence, and good utilisation of data.

The assets among each organisation that improved its service were: varied access routes, a simplified registration process, local reputation and visibility, good relationships with external partners, an affinity with but distinctiveness from Job Centre Plus (JCP), good access to employers, links to alternative support mechanisms, and tailored support for customers. Additionally, attendees noted the benefits of having clarity in the roles of the organisation to establish realistic customer expectations, good data collection and utilisation, the sharing of best practice, empathetic and flexible customer service, good employability support, and having a mix of available programmes.



Areas for development

Each team then outlined the areas for development that are currently preventing best customer support. Primarily, it was found that unmanageable and inappropriate target framing leads to challenges with time management and difficulties in tailoring support to customers, increasing pressure and anxiety among staff and resulting in poor morale.

A lack of staff knowledge is a major obstacle for services, with specific areas for improvement including knowledge of the local job market, training or funded learning opportunities, or available programmes. Poor staff knowledge can also lead to a lack of confidence in engaging with employers or other external agencies, with ineffective relationships leading to inappropriate referrals, or referrals received with little information on the customer. This results in a difficulty in meeting customer expectations. Staff with limited experience of group work also lack the confidence to deliver workshops.

Poor staff training can lead to difficulties in supporting customers with complex needs. Alternatively, it means that some staff may have few technological skills. It was suggested by one group that the service would benefit from a customer information sharing network and the development of a triage and assessment mechanism for incoming customers.

Barriers to service provision include poor links to other providers such as JCP, leading to ineffective referrals and customers that lack accurate programme information. Improvement is also needed for employability support, through better links to flexible and inclusive employers, better links to training providers, better local and future job market knowledge among staff, and a focus on filling positions in less desirable sectors such as construction. According to some attendees, their service would benefit from improved access to wider services and long-term core funding, which would also safeguard the longevity of the service and enable them to engage more with employers.

Learning from the listening exercises



External partnerships



Strengthening connections between partners



Sharing information between agencies more effectively



Giving customers a better understanding of services provided by partners



Meeting customer needs



Targeting training to help engage with complex needs



Building teamwork



Creating a supportive environment

Visibility



Several staff members agreed that there is room for better visibility and accessibility to their service, both in terms of physical location and service promotion. A recent period of change has meant that staff at ONY have perceived a reduced service visibility and some tension around the responsibility of employer engagement, with many not seeing this as part of their role. Additionally, Maximus would value better engagement with Local London, seeing a need to reframe that relationship beyond its current function as purely contract monitoring. It also acknowledged that the function of regional account managers could be improved to better serve both residents and advisers.



Target setting



Focusing on more than just the numbers



Reframing the language around delivery



Understanding the complexity of supporting customers



Data, capacity, and training



Utilising data more effectively



Reducing the administrative burden of new technology



Promoting a culture of lifelong learning among staff and customers

Management



Some frontline staff perceived a lack of support from management among senior staff members, citing respectively between teams a lack of team leader understanding and support of frontline work, and a difference in perception between frontline staff and senior staff in terms of performance management, potentially leading to a point of contention and sense of low morale.

Recommendations

Responding to the key learnings from these sessions, Local London has recognised a number of actions for work across the sub-region to support and enhance the capacity of its service providers. Common pathways for future actions are centred around reframing targets, improving engagement with difficult customers, supporting staff training, and engaging better with partners.

- All teams should undergo a Team Charter exercise, supported by the Integration Hub.
- Reframe language and management around targets with a greater focus on qualitative over quantitative goals and soft outcomes, accounting for caseload complexity. Ensure that the values outlined in the Team Charter are embedded into performance management.
- Review the options to enhance service visibility and access, such as via the council. Review methods of customer information sharing and gain feedback on the perception of the service with other council departments. The relevant council could include note of the service in employee inductions.
- Create or review the policy for working with challenging or disengaged clients and publicise this internally; explore options for supporting clients with low literacy.
- Explore staff training options for increasing client motivation, such as through motivational interviewing.
- Explore options for improving links with other services, training providers, and JCP, including the introduction of a pre-screening route form for JCP to ensure eligible referrals to the best-suited programme for the customer and engaging JCP work coaches to clarify eligibility.
- Explore options to streamline administrative tasks and data entry; expand case study themes beyond funding, to champion the service as a whole and build confidence and recognition among residents.

No Wrong Door
Driving Improvement in the Employment
& Skills Landscape



- Explore training for managers, with a focus on supporting staff to perform effectively while protecting wellbeing.
- Explore options to obtain and act on adviser feedback at regular intervals.
- Rethink WHP delivery to incorporate group work and training, leaving room for one-to-one support.
- Review internal processes to improve efficiency and create simple guidance to ensure consistency; explore light-touch, timebound approaches for supporting customers in work or those who require minimal support to find work.
- Clarify Local London's role and increase its visibility through observations, induction, and detailing when it should be contacted. Explore different methods of access to Local London, such as through drop-ins or workshops.



Conclusions and next steps

This research has recognised a number of areas where the Integration Hub can engage in order to expand the capacity of employment and skills services in the sub-region.

Local London Integration Hub's vision is to create better access to opportunities, as well as the best advice and guidance available to help residents achieve their career goals, while recognising that service providers face resourcing and capacity limitations.

The Integration Hub intends to work with all nine boroughs in the Local London sub-region in order to act upon the findings of this series of exercises.



In order to meet this vision, Local London’s Integration Hub has outlined four objectives for improvement:

1. Gaining a thorough understanding of the challenges faced by our residents, the services and individuals that support them, and the businesses that employ them.
2. Collaboratively working with colleagues to ensure they have the know-how and resources to help our most vulnerable residents.
3. Helping to establish clear processes and interventions that provide remedies at local level.
4. Amplifying opportunities, resources, and best practice to ensure that no matter where you are in our sub-region, your experience is consistent.

Following the listening exercises and the feedback received from them, Local London has been able to engage in a number of workstreams that progress with these objectives and that will form part of an exercise of continuous improvement across the sub-regional partnership. These workstreams are:

Ability Not Disability – Free training and information primarily aimed at employers and businesses that support organisations to be more inclusive.

SEND Board and Community of Practice – A human process intervention aimed at improving the quality of support to residents in the sub-region accessing local authority job brokerages.

Evaluation and feedback loops – These are entirely resident-centred and include but are not limited to: frontline adviser listening exercises, perception surveys and resident focus groups.

Communications and Broadcasts – Targeted at frontline advisers and job coaches, this series is designed to amplify information and referral routes. All broadcasts are recorded and distributed to all those who cannot attend live sessions.

Support for Grassroots Community Groups and Organisations – Supports non-statutory and non-commercial organisations and not for profits that support our residents.

50+ LMI Publications – This strand of work is designed to provide accessible careers information to older residents on Local London's the sub-region's Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) priority sectors. Publications have been co-designed with residents and are intended to raise the profile of work in LSIP priority sectors as well as helping residents to map their careers and learning journey.

Work Connections Website – This website is designed to connect all things employment and skills across Local London.

Evaluation and Feedback loops – For every team surveyed in the listening exercises, Local London recognised further steps to engage with and progress from the information collated in this study and through which Local London might enhance its support and continue to develop its services through the sub-region. The Integration Hub will continue

development work through the provision of organisational development consultancy, and will complete further listening exercise sessions across the sub-region to continue the feedback process.

Team Charter – Each department is encouraged to either complete the Team Charter activity begun in these listening sessions in agreement with their wider team, or to develop a draft Charter using the Local London Integration Hub Team Charter Development Toolkit. It is suggested to review the charter annually, ensuring that its underlying purpose and values extend through all service delivery.

Working groups and champions – Each provider should establish a working group with key individuals within their organisation and the wider sub-regional partnership or their wider network to focus on the identified themes and explore and remedy issues. Local London additionally suggests appointing champions as a CPD opportunity to focus on specific feedback themes. It will then be possible to share working group and champion outputs across the team and wider pan-London network as appropriate. Outputs will be tracked with department advisers to feed into the department and into Integration Hub evaluation activities. Local London will continue observations and monitoring to track progress and outputs.

Additional training – Given the limited resources for local government to engage specialists or providers to initiate training for identified development areas, Local London has provided CPD opportunities for advisers, such as SET training. Within current financial and capacity constraints, authorities should strive to coordinate their inhouse skills and employment support with other relevant support services including voluntary, community, health and other statutory services.

Additional work might be engaged that will explore opportunities for further feedback between other council departments and service providers and to explore methods for customer information sharing between stakeholders.

Further steps and ongoing progress will be continually monitored by Local London, with reviews undertaken at least annually to open up a wider range of feedback routes. The Integration Hub will also explore mechanisms via which individual efforts can be rewarded in the teams across the sub-region, in addition to existing recognition of service

provision. Overall, the outcomes from this research will aim to create more effective and integrated support mechanisms across the sub-regional partnership, with emphasis on Local London's continued contributions and monitoring efforts to ensure its providers have greater and continually improving capacity to provide employment and skills support for residents.

Developing a Local London Standard

The overall findings from the workshops and listening exercises held by Local London point to the need for an integrated and holistic approach across the sub-region, where residents can access the same standard of service regardless of their point of access. This has led to the Local London Integration Hub beginning development of a sub-regional Local London Standard framework for provision, supporting the boroughs and in-keeping with the principles of No Wrong Door. Developing the standard framework requires an ongoing dialogue with boroughs, service managers and front-line staff, embodied in the workstreams listed above.





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