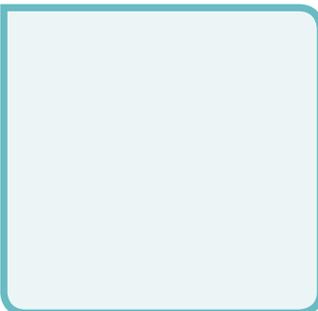
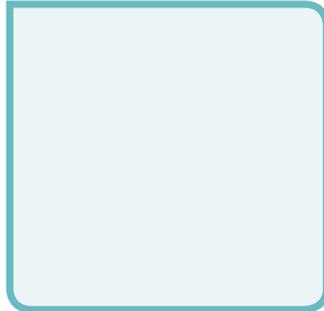


Tackling worklessness

How to help people into employment in rural areas



Introduction

This guide explains the challenges facing local government and its partners when tackling unemployment in rural areas. It gives examples of good practice and suggests how local government can support employment in rural areas, within the national policy and delivery framework.

What is different about unemployment in rural areas?

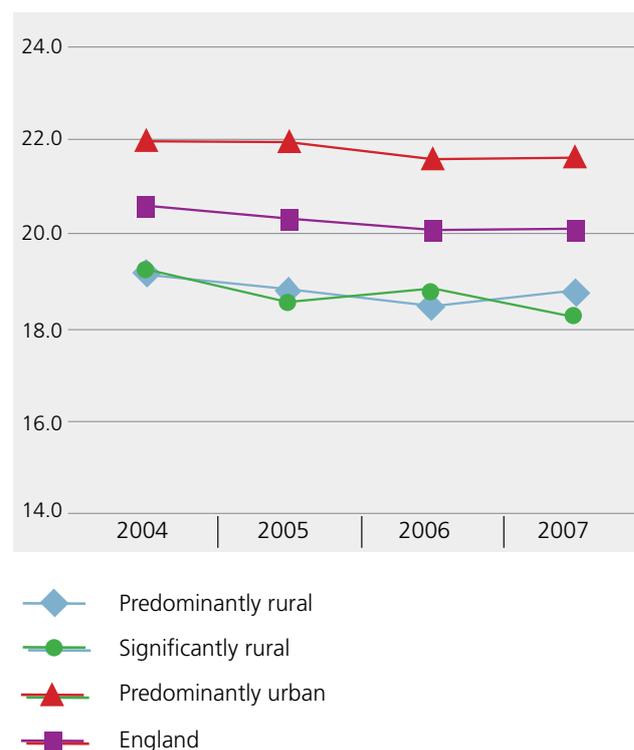
On average, unemployment is higher in urban than in rural, although the difference is only a few percentage points and some rural areas have relatively high levels of unemployment and fewer opportunities for skilled, well paid jobs. Nor are rural areas immune from recession - some of the steepest rises in unemployment rates have been seen in rural districts.

There is therefore a similar level of demand in rural areas for employment support. There are also some distinctive challenges in providing this to people in rural areas. These arise from differences in the labour market, the working population and the practicalities of delivering employment services in rural areas. The points below are based on recent studies named in the useful links section at the end of the guide.

The rural labour market has unique characteristics

- A larger proportion of rural than urban districts meet the 80% employment rate target adopted by central government. However, a significant proportion of rural local authority districts (LADs) in England fall below the national average employment rate, which is generally around the 75% mark
- Self-employment and seasonal employment are more prevalent features of the rural labour market. Self-employment can be a positive choice or a response to a lack of employment opportunities. Seasonal employment tends to result in people 'churning' between benefits and short-term employment
- Business size tends to be smaller than the national average with the vast majority being small, micro or sole traders. This can limit employment and work-related training opportunities
- Many of the areas with the highest proportion of low paid workers are rural
- Progression out of low skilled, low paid employment is a particularly important challenge, because nearly half of those in poverty in rural areas are in working households; a greater proportion than in urban households
- There are lower levels of graduate recruitment amongst small and medium firms & public sector which form a significant proportion of the rural economy.

Percentage of working population economically inactive, 2004–2007



The working age population in rural areas is different to the average

- The proportion of the economically-inactive population that is long-term sick or otherwise incapacitated tends to be greater in rural areas
- Over one-third of adult rural residents have no qualifications
- Around one in four 19 year olds in rural areas fails to achieve a basic qualification
- It is often said that there is a particular problem of 'hidden' unemployment in rural areas (unreported worklessness) but by definition this is hard to prove.

On data and rural definitions:

Two standard definitions of rural and urban areas are used to 'cut' data; the ONS Rural and Urban Area Classification and the Defra classification of local authority districts and unitary authorities. For statistics based on Output Areas the ONS definition is preferred. But many data sets can only be applied at local authority district level and above. For these the Defra definition is used. The district classifications allows 'more' and 'less' rural areas to be compared – typically, the remoter rural areas fare worse on employment and skills indicators.

http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/rural/documents/rural-defn/LAClassifications_technicalguide.pdf

And there are specific rural challenges for delivery

- Providers in rural areas encounter significant barriers to delivery, primarily to do with transport and the difficulties of getting people to services or services to people. Customers are more likely to need help with the costs of transport or even with transport provision, and providers delivering face-to-face services will tend to spend more time and money on the road, travelling to meet customers
- Outlets for support, such as Jobcentre Plus and other providers are also further from the customers and may run a reduced service
- 'Customers' are more dispersed which makes it harder to achieve economies of scale and cost-effective delivery

"Travelling to rural areas takes a considerable amount of time, creating extra staff costs and travel costs. Extra venue costs have to be covered to provide outreach. These factors mean that our funding does not go as far as it would in an urban area where clients can easily travel to advice centres" (Nexstep Provider)

- Businesses are also more dispersed and tend to be smaller in rural areas. This can make it harder for providers to offer employment and training opportunities. Training provision can be more expensive as the diversity of business types, each with few employees, makes 'standard' packages less cost-effective
- Seasonal and self-employment can be more difficult to support and may require special interventions
- Contracts in more rural areas are therefore less attractive to private sector operators and so can be a greater reliance on local authorities or third-sector providers, which limits the diversity of providers and limits competition, which can adversely affect service delivery and limit choice.

However as a plus point some initiatives appear to perform as well if not better in rural areas, such as Apprenticeships and Nextstep (careers advice). Providers in rural areas can benefit from less staff turnover, a more personal relationship with customers and a greater ability to integrate different forms of support.

The role of local government within the national framework

Local government plays a role in delivering national employment and skills programmes such as Future Jobs Fund but most of the delivery is undertaken by nationally contracted providers and their sub-contractors. It also takes initiatives of its own and it is an important employer, especially in rural areas.

The general role of local government and how its importance is growing as a result of the Government's policy reforms are neatly summarised in the IDEa online document Skills, welfare reform and local government www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelD=8665395#contents-1 A number of points can be made about the particular ways in which this relates to rural authorities.

Targeted initiatives

Targeted initiatives such as the Working Neighbourhoods Fund, the City Strategy Pathfinder programme exist to provide additional support in unemployment hotspots. Local authorities are often leading the sub-regional, city region and local partnerships that bid for and manage these initiatives. However, rural authorities tend not to have the concentrations of unemployment that make them eligible for these area-based programmes.

National programmes

Local authorities in rural areas are involved in delivering national programmes at all stages of the 'customer journey' – from first referral (e.g. Nextstep service), to the unemployed (e.g. Pathways to Work or Flexible New Deal programmes); to those striving to progress in employment (e.g. Apprenticeships). Increasingly, these programmes are contracted out by national prime contractors who sub-contract to locally based providers. Often, local authority-led delivery groups are 'on the ground', operating as sub-contractors and competing or working with other private and third sector providers.

Local authority initiatives

Rural local authorities, with partners, have been developing their own initiatives to support employment. Often, these involve improving access to mainstream information and advice services, or outreach solutions to reach scattered populations. A number of examples were developed through the Defra Rural Programme and are available through IDEa [<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelD=7942983>]. As the sub-national review gets put into practice, through for example the new Local Economic Assessment duty, local authorities take a strategic and operational role, organised within Local Area Agreements and Multi Area Agreements.

Cornwall's Routeway to Work programme

This programme arranges work tasters and placements, mainly within Cornwall County Council, but also within the NHS. The programme has helped overcome misconceptions about the long-term unemployed, or those who have a health problem. It also provides into-work support for individuals. This includes help with the initial costs of transport, and an allowance to cover the gap between receiving benefits and wages. The programme is an important part of the Local Area Agreement, which has worklessness amongst its top priorities.

<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelid=8443985&aspect=full#contents-3>

Local government as an employer

Local authorities are often the largest employers in rural areas, so they can support employment through their own recruitment and retention practices. Local authorities amongst others are being encouraged to take the Skills Pledge – a voluntary and public commitment made by employers to train their employees and help them gain new qualifications. Likewise, the Apprenticeships programme is being promoted as a core part of the Local Government Workforce Strategy

www.skillsplus.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelid=4614136

Devon Employment and Skills Boards

Devon County Council, through the Productive Skills for Devon Partnership, a sub-group of the Local Area Agreement's Economic Partnership, has identified priority areas for employment and skills intervention, including rural areas. The Partnership provides a strategic overview of the issues facing Devon and brings together funding from Devon County Council and the LSC (and to a lesser extent Jobcentre Plus) to commission research and interventions across priority areas in Devon. Following formation of four Employment and Skills Boards covering the 'economic functional zones' for the whole of Devon, Plymouth and Torbay, the Productive Skills group also provides a link between the four and with the regional network. Recognising that small and micro firms in rural areas cannot commit to frequent involvement with the EBS, their input is secured through the hosting of 'one off' events often linked to networking functions.

Contact Andrew Lightfoot
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www.devoneconomy.co.uk

Overcoming the challenges

Much of the guidance on supporting employment available to all local authorities applies to those in rural areas, for example other guides in the IDeA 'How to' series www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelid=8589911. Here we concentrate on how some of the challenges that are most pronounced in rural areas can be overcome.

Transport solutions

Transport is typically the main barrier to the effective delivery of employment and skills support identified by those delivering in rural areas. It makes it more difficult and expensive for the customers to access the support and it also increases costs and practical difficulties for the delivery body.

It is standard practice to refund all or a part of the travel expenses incurred by those travelling from rural areas (as from any areas). Additionally, rural providers have funded taxis to the nearest train station or for the customer's first week on the job. Car share schemes are encouraged as a sustainable longer-term solution, along with Wheels-to-Work schemes. There are even examples of contributions to the cost of getting a car through an MOT or for purchasing bus passes. In practice, rural authorities involved in provision should expect to budget for higher transport costs.

The IDeA has launched a new web resource on rural transport provision which contains case studies and access to good practice materials.

www.idea.gov.uk/transport

Staffordshire Jobs Bus

Introduced in 1999, the Jobs Bus is funded by Staffordshire County Council, Jobcentre Plus and Connexions. It provides job support and advice about local employment and training opportunities. Initially introduced as an 18 month pilot, the success of the service has kept it in operation for over 9 years. The original two employees have remained with the bus since the very beginning (one is employed by JobcentrePlus and one by Staffordshire County Council). The vehicle is fully operational, changing location on a daily basis to cover the areas with the most need within Staffordshire. The bus provides a vital outreach service for rural areas which would otherwise remain unserved. Once onboard, clients can access up to date information about local job opportunities (full time, part time, temporary, permanent or voluntary), computer software which gives guidance on possible careers paths and information about training courses on offer at local colleges.

Contact Claire McDougall
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Wiltshire Wheels-to-Work

Wiltshire Wheels-to-Work is a moped loan scheme for people aged 16+ living in rural communities in Wiltshire and Swindon, who have been offered a job or paid vocational training opportunity but cannot take it up due to transport problems. The scheme, which is managed by Community First, works by loaning 50cc mopeds for up to 6 months, along with a fully subsidised Compulsory Basic Training (CBT) test and safety equipment (helmet, jacket, gloves and a hi-viz vest). Riders pay a small fee of £10 per week and are expected to meet their fuel costs. Potential riders are referred to the scheme by Job Centre Plus and Connexions.

Community First
enquiries@communityfirst.org.uk

Additional levels of delivery

Local authorities have been supporting employment support projects to create an additional level of delivery in rural areas. Examples are the Northumberland Community Rural Employability Project (REP), the Learning and Enterprise Access Points (LEAP) in Suffolk and the Newhaven Community Employment Partnership (NewCEP) in Sussex. Some of these were set up, in response to experience (backed up by research) that mainstream programmes were not penetrating the most rural parts of their areas.

The different solutions illustrated by these projects include the use of Community Development Associations trained and resourced to act as advisers and brokers (REP); the creation of an additional and extensive outreach infrastructure in small settlements (LEAP); and the pooling of funding and programmes within a wider community development approach (NewCEP). These projects deliver national programmes such as Pathways and Nexsteps and they all involve delivery bodies such as Jobcentre Plus and the Learning and Skills Council in their partnerships. They also rely on additional funding, often from the European Regional Development Fund via the Regional Development Agencies.

Northumberland Rural Employability Project

The REP is a project supported by Northumberland County Council, which aims to identify a critical mass of clients in rural areas who may have formerly been hidden from the statistics – then to influence and challenge training providers and mainstream services to address the demand for employment and skills support. Two local pilots are now in operation in Seahouses and Wooler. In Wooler, the REP is known as the Wooler Work Web (WWW) and is hosted by the local Development Trust, the Glendale Gateway Trust. Staff at the Development Trust have been trained to assist local people with CVs and online job search, and to signpost to other agencies, including mainstream services. The Core teams are supported by 'expert' wider management teams from the employability field, an arrangement that reflects and promotes Northumberland's commitment to partnership working in addressing worklessness and employability issues in the county.

The Development Trust staff are well known within their own communities and local residents are willing to come in and chat about employment and skills needs. Demand has exceeded expectations and feedback shows that employers want to deal locally. To assist in its employment agenda, the REP successfully piloted the use of digital photoscreens placed in shops, Post Offices and cafés in remote areas; along with an electronic noticeboard in Wooler High Street, to advertise local jobs and training opportunities. The REP service has grown organically and is now an established employability brokerage hub. A direct spin off was the creation of a local learning partnership. This brought in new partners, such as the middle school and Surestart. Training courses are delivered locally, for the first time. Another spin off is a drop-in service for individuals seeking jobs or business start up. The rural employability model which emerged from this project is currently being replicated and tested in other parts of the county.

Contact (for LA enquiries)
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or, for case study enquiries:
Pat Beaumont
beaumontassoc@btinternet.com

Learning and Enterprise Access Points

The LEAP Project provides a unique layer of service delivery, acting as an entry point for national employment and skills programmes. The LEAP project is a unique collaboration between education providers, strategic partners and funding agencies which include University Campus Suffolk, Suffolk Learning and Skills Council, Suffolk County Council and the East of England Development Agency. The project was set up with the aim of increasing access to learning for hard to reach groups disadvantaged by the rural nature of where they live. The service offers support to access learning and training, information, advice and guidance for people looking for educational opportunities including those in work as well as the unemployed. This pathway to employment project will be delivered through a network of 13 LEAP Centres and 100 smaller LEAP Points which will be completed by March 2010. LEAP Centres also work with businesses to improve the skills of their workforce.

Contact Miles Cole
m.cole@ucs.ac.uk www.leap.ac.uk

Newhaven Community Employment Partnership (NewCEP)

NewCEP is run by the Newhaven Community Development Association (NCDA). The NCDA is distinctive in that it is a provider of national employment programmes with a wider social development role in the local area. The NewCEP delivery model provides a mix of support to long-term unemployed and incapacity benefit claimants. It helps people enter work or training and the team negotiates with employers to offer work placements and experience. Central to the offer is the blending of support programmes to meet individual need. For example, the delivery of Nexstep is flexible in the sense that it provides one-to-one sessions with a Nexstep adviser but outcomes may be followed up through other programmes. The NewCEP partnership arrangement also allows any gaps in provision to be filled by referring customers to partner agencies such as Citizens Advice Bureau and Business Link.

Contact Rachel Philpot
rachel@newcep.org.uk

Using ICT

North Devon Pathfinder Trust has established local centres in order to help to improve access to services for residents and businesses in rural areas. In addition, with the use of IT and video conferencing equipment, the organisation is able to provide support remotely. For example, students undertaking a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Advanced IT through Train to Gain can visit any of the eight learning centres across North Devon and speak with a tutor via video link. Less specialised tutors are also available at each of the learning centres to deal with any general issues or questions.

However, ICT does not always provide a full solution to all learning needs and it may be less suitable for particularly vulnerable groups. The least qualified learners may, for example, be least able to make use of 'e-learning' methods.

North Devon Pathfinder Trust

The North Devon Pathfinder Trust grew from a Devon County Council project to provide IT skills to the unemployed in Ilfracombe and support them into work. In 1999, the North Devon Pathfinder Trust was set up, became independent of DCC and expanded through securing charitable status which allowed it to access a wider range of funding streams. With the use of IT and video conferencing equipment, the organisation is able to provide support remotely. For example, students undertaking a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Advanced IT through Train to Gain can visit any of the eight learning centres across North Devon and speak with a tutor via video link. Less specialised tutors are also available at each of the learning centres to deal with any general issues or questions. This approach means that the North Devon Pathfinder Trust does not have to achieve certain quotas of students at each of its learning centres. As long as there are enough students across North Devon studying the subject, the Trust can viably run the course. It also ensures that all students get the opportunity to receive face-to-face tuition through the general tutors based at the learning centres, and that specialised tutors rotate the learning centres from which they deliver remote tutoring.

Contact George Curry
gcurry@path-finder.org.uk

Integrating services and funding streams

The co-location of services at a single point and the joining up of different programmes and funding streams can be both a necessity and to some extent a virtue in rural areas. The experience of rural providers is often that 'stand-alone' delivery of a single programme does not work in a rural context because the low numbers do not justify the costs of maintaining an office. For example a local authority sub contractor of a prime contractor of the Pathways to Work programme in a rural area found that, to be viable, approximately 110 customers per adviser per office was the minimum. The number achieved in the main urban office was 749 whereas in one smaller rural office it was 41. Their response to this was to combine programmes to achieve economies of scale in rural offices.

Working with dispersed and smaller employers

'Clusters' of similar types of employers can be encouraged to establish a sufficient pool of training and work opportunities. It may require some effort however to network and coordinate small and dispersed employers. Unlike with large businesses, there will not be large HR departments to work through. Informal, social networks may be more important than formal business channels.

So for example, joint Local Employment Partnerships have been established in the Northumberland Council-led Rural Employability Project which bring together 6-7 tourism businesses (e.g. hotels, cafes, mountain bike hire), each with less than one full-time position available but who, together, can provide several job opportunities.

Combining private, public and third sector provision

The lack of a concentrated 'market' of unemployed or employers in rural areas often means that there is greater reliance on public and voluntary sector forms of provision. Local government has several advantages in this respect; its ability to operate on a not-for-profit or cost recovery basis, its leadership role within the local area and coordinating role in the Local Strategic Partnership offers the ability to combine different funding streams and complementary services.

The Voluntary and Community Sector is often well placed to serve vulnerable groups in rural areas as its members tend to have good local knowledge, be rooted in the communities they serve, and have lower unit costs than mainstream services.

Ramsey Job Search

The Ramsey Job Search scheme illustrates how a small, volunteer-run project can be run sustainably in a small rural community. The scheme is led by Ramsey Town Centre Partnership, funded by Huntingdonshire District Council. It has been running a weekly drop-in session since June 2004 (and now additional Saturday sessions). It offers information and a job-matching service for job seekers and potential employers, as well as providing advice and guidance to job seekers in order to improve their employability skills. The scheme promotes local vacancies and training opportunities, and engages with local businesses to share their job vacancies, as well as with JobcentrePlus, Connexions and 'Next Step'.

Contact Vera Woolmer
rampart@btinternet.com

Seasonal and self employment

Usually in areas where tourism and agriculture are more significant employment sectors, seasonal and temporary employment can act a barrier to accessing mainstream programmes. People with seasonal work patterns can be excluded from participating in in-depth support schemes such as Flexible New Deal or Future Jobs Fund because they do not meet the minimum length of unemployment.

Self-employment is also a rural feature and providers in rural areas identify a noticeably greater demand for self-employment services. Service Providers are responding by focussing on the development of viable business plans, referring the self-employed on to specialist providers who assist with business planning and ongoing support. This sub-contracting is usually done on condition that self-employment is sustainable and works for at least six months.

Addressing rural issues at a regional level

Local authorities are important players on the multi-area and regional partnerships who consider performance and develop strategy. They can use this position to stress that outreach is important and needs to be planned and resourced; to promote innovative methods of delivering services (such as ICT), and to ensure that the regional evidence base recognises rural/urban variations in levels of worklessness and the effectiveness of programmes.

Top tips

- When analysing data and monitoring the performance of initiatives, breakdown the analysis using an appropriate rural/urban classification so that differences can be understood and encourage local, regional and national partners to do the same.
- Ensure that transport barriers and transport solutions are routinely considered when developing or reviewing employment initiatives.
- Consider opportunities to adopt new approaches to delivering services, using ICT, community outreach or other innovative solutions.
- Be aware of the potentially greater costs of delivering employment and skills programmes to dispersed populations and check that commissioning arrangements do not lead to rural areas being under-served or receive lower quality services.
- Integrate services and encourage co-location to make the delivery of employment support from small centres more economically viable and more joined-up for the clients.

Useful Links

Defra Rural Evidence Hub:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/rural/reh.htm>

Commission for Rural Communities:

<http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/>

Commission for Rural Communities.

State of the Countryside 2008:

<http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/projects/stateofthecountryside/overview>

Commission for Rural Communities, Recession Report:
Employment and the rural labour market:

<http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/files/recessionreport4-2.pdf>

SWQ (2008) Rural Financial Poverty Paper. Report to the
Commission for Rural Communities:

<http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/publications/crc76ruralfinancialpovertyprioritiesforaction>

SQW (2009) The delivery of national employment and
skills support to vulnerable groups in rural England.

Report to the Commission for Rural Communities:

<http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk/publications/>

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