



**A report by HM Inspectors on behalf of the Department  
for Work and Pensions**

**Triage Central Ltd  
Provider Led Pathways  
Forth Valley, Fife and  
Tayside  
1 April 2010**

HM Inspectors undertake independent inspections of the quality of the arrangements made by providers of Pathways to Work and Flexible New Deal by agreement between the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE). Inspection teams include HM Inspectors and Assistant Inspectors. A nominee of the provider also joins the inspection team as a full team member. Information about HMIE is available on [www.hmie.gov.uk](http://www.hmie.gov.uk). This includes information on the inspection process within the *HMIE Handbook for Inspection of Employability Programmes, November 2009*. Information about Pathways to Work and Flexible New Deal is available on [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk).

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the effectiveness of the provider's services in this contract, and to identify strengths, good practice and points for action that the provider should take to improve the quality of its services and the outcomes for participants.

The inspection of the Triage Central Ltd Provider Led Pathways (Triage) programme took place from 1-5 February 2010. The inspection team undertook a range of related activities, including:

- observing interviews;
- observing training sessions;
- visiting participants in the workplace;
- holding discussions with participants, staff members, employers and key partners;
- evaluating participants' action plans and CVs; and
- analysing and evaluating data and documentation.

At the beginning of the inspection process we invited participants, employers and stakeholders to tell us their views on the service by completing a questionnaire before the inspection week. These views are taken into account in the findings noted in this report and are highlighted in Appendix 1.

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## **1. The provision**

HMIE inspected the Provider Led Pathways contract for Forth Valley, Fife and Tayside in February 2010. The provider is Triage Central Ltd. The principal sub-contractor is Working Links. Salus (NHS Lanarkshire) is the sub-contractor for the Condition Management Programme.

Triage is contracted by DWP to manage the Provider Led Pathways service in Forth Valley, Fife and Tayside. Triage and Working Links operate from premises in Stirling, Alloa, Falkirk, Perth, Kirkcaldy, Dunfermline, Dundee, Glenrothes and Arbroath. There have been 8,987 participants involved in the programme as at December 2009.

## **2. Particular strengths of the provision**

- The quality of leadership provided by senior managers in both Triage and Working Links.
- The commitment to customer focus across the organisation.
- The carefully planned and implemented package of support for participants.
- Staff skill and engagement in meeting the needs of individual participants.
- Staff knowledge of the local environment, labour market and the client group, and the effective use to which they put this knowledge.
- Use of strong strategic partnerships to the benefit of participants.
- The provider's willingness to respond promptly to address issues of concern.

## **3. Good practice**

- Staff skills in interacting with participants.
- Effective use of interviews, through the use of the *Cobra* framework, to aid participant progression.
- Close partnership working with Job Centre Plus to improve outcomes for participants.
- Promotion of the programme through effective marketing to voluntary participants.

Further information on identified good practice is available from the provider.

**The evaluations for the Provider Led Pathways Contract, delivered by Triage Central Ltd, for Forth Valley, Fife and Tayside are as follows:**

|                                                                               |           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Overall, how effective is the provision?                                      | good      |
| How well are participants progressing and achieving high quality outcomes?    | weak      |
| How well is the provider enhancing the quality of its services?               | very good |
| How effective are the provider's learning, development and support processes? | very good |
| How effective is leadership and management?                                   | very good |

**4. How well are participants progressing and achieving high quality outcomes?  
Evaluation: weak**

For mandatory participants, the job entry rate outlined in the contract is set at 35% by December 2009. The actual percentage of participants gaining jobs is 16%. This is significantly below the agreed target. The general trend in job outcomes is, however, improving. The sustained job entry rate for mandatory customers is 26%. Information offered by the provider points to an improving trend. Outcomes for voluntary participants are more positive but are still short of agreed targets. The job entry rate for voluntary participants is 43% against the target set for this stage of the programme of 50% of participants. The sustained job entry rate of 39% for combined mandatory and voluntary participants is closer to the agreed target. Overall trends suggest an improving rate. However, at this stage the combined rate remains below the contract target of 55%. This report includes data on participants who have not yet undergone their Work Capability Assessment. It is possible that some of them were found not to be eligible for Provider Led Pathways following the assessment.

The provider is committed to providing strong, personalised support to participants. Staff monitor the progress of participants effectively through a number of methods, including careful use of participant information and close liaison with stakeholders. Advisors use the 'Job Support Fund' constructively to help participants overcome any initial barriers in job search or finding work. This results in constructive support toward participants achieving a positive job outcome.

Staff make highly effective use of Triage's *Cobra* framework to record participants' attendance, attainment and progress. Staff are skilled in using this helpful framework to engage participants in discussion and reflection, resulting in a clear set of actions from which individual participants can move forward. Senior managers make good use of

benchmarking data on participant performance, and have taken some initial steps with other providers to look at the potential of sharing practice. This should be developed further.

Almost all participants are making significant progress towards employment. Participants' confidence, self worth and motivation improve markedly as a result of involvement in the programme. Almost all participants who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire reported that they were benefiting from participation in the programme. They reported that, as a result of participation, they had gained skills and knowledge that would help them find a job. As a result of their growing self belief, participants often become aware that they have the potential to move back into the labour market. In doing so, they become more active and confident citizens. Almost all participants are developing effectively skills in job search and job application processes. Of those participants who take part in training courses, most achieve useful outcomes. In some cases, this results in participants gaining formal qualifications.

**5. How well is the provider enhancing the quality of its services?  
Evaluation: very good**

Staff are highly committed to the values and objectives of the organisation and to those of the programme. They are aware of the targets established in the contract and their own personal targets. Through use of regular team meetings and supportive monthly review meetings with managers, staff are clear on the job targets set and what they should be doing to address these. In-house staff development opportunities are helpful in providing and updating staff with the skills and knowledge required to work more effectively with participants and address their barriers to employment.

Staff benefit from a clear induction and training process. Staff induction procedures are comprehensive and cover important areas such as safeguarding and equality and diversity. These take place during the initial stage of employment with all staff. This helps to ensure that they have appropriate skills and information necessary to fulfil their role effectively. Staff reported that they are encouraged to identify their training needs and suitable training opportunities. In many cases, these are then built into the training programme.

Links between the main provider, Triage, and the sub-contractor, Working Links, are very strong. Senior managers at Triage have been careful to ensure a consistency of approach between the two organisations. This is apparent, for example, in the individual planning around work focused interviews. Both organisations adopt a similar methodology while, at the same time, encouraging elements of flexibility of approach. All of this helps to ensure that the experience of participants involved in the Provider Led Pathways programme is of a high quality and of a consistent level across different geographical areas.

Across the service, the provider is committed to continuous improvement through reflective practices. Staff are encouraged to reflect on their practices and identify ways of improving the quality and range of services and operational procedures. This strong focus now needs to be targeted more specifically to ensure improved job outcomes for some participants, including a more systematic review of identifying and eliminating barriers to work. Almost all participants who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire reported that staff listened to them and acted on their feedback.

## **6. How effective are the provider's learning, development and support processes?**

**Evaluation: very good**

Triage and Working Links staff address the needs of participants very effectively through use of a well-planned, comprehensive and responsive range of provision.

The carefully planned process of work focused interviews, job brokerage and in-work support has instilled successfully a feeling of self belief and worth in almost all participants. This, in turn, has helped to develop participants' motivation and confidence in moving towards employment.

Staff engagement with participants in the course of work focused interviews is impressive. Progression advisors successfully empower participants to take responsibility for their own progress and development. They treat participants with respect. Engagement with participants is positive and constructive and has a strong emphasis on action and progress. This includes a verbal and shared commitment about participants getting back into work. The identified personal support needs of participants are well met through referral to an extensive range of key external agencies and through good use of the Condition Management Programme. In a few instances, advice could have been enhanced through greater specialised knowledge in areas such as college provision or the use of assistive technologies.

Participants receive very comprehensive support from job brokers who work closely with them to identify realistic job opportunities. This includes use of work trials, voluntary and permitted work, and employment. Job brokers work closely with participants to support and advise them in applying for jobs. Other aspects of support include providing tailored assistance in completing job applications and CVs, and in assisting with interview techniques. Job brokers have established close links with key employers. They are often very effective in identifying suitable and supportive employers. Job brokers also support participants' transition into work by briefing employers on participants' skills. Post-participation staff assist customers effectively in settling into the work environment.

Participants have access to the full range of Triage and Working Links' provision and services throughout the period of their involvement in the programme. The use of a Job Centre Plus Disability Adviser to operate on the provider's premises has helped some participants in their willingness to engage in the programme and subsequent activities. This has included helping to deal with any participant apprehension as well as ensuring a positive start to the programme. Staff display commendable flexibility in dealing with participants. Where necessary, appointments are made to fit around the participants' personal circumstances. Where participants experience difficulties in attending appointments, staff make pre-arranged home visits.

Each of the Triage and Working Links offices contains an open access area. This contains a comprehensive range of resources such as IT equipment, telephones and newspapers featuring job adverts. Staff in these areas are skilled in dealing with addressing the needs of individual participants. Participants make good use of access to a range of additional voluntary provision. This includes external course provision and, as appropriate, links to external support agencies. Across all of the offices, premises are clean, attractive and brightly painted. The layout of the offices is designed to encourage access to all of the available services. Disabled customers preparing for entry to the job market have access to work assessment services which help ensure that appropriate adaptations and support are available in the workplace.

All staff demonstrate a strong commitment to equality of opportunity for participants. They are aware of their responsibilities regarding safeguarding and adhere to agreed company policy. Staff are confident in procedures for raising and addressing safeguarding issues arising from their engagement with participants. Designated senior staff undertake the role of safeguarding officers. Participants identified as potentially posing a risk to staff are referred to experienced senior staff who conduct their work focused interviews, where appropriate. The introduction of security receptionists is a response to a review of approaches to ensuring appropriate protection for participants and staff.

Senior managers record and review job entry rates by a number of categories, including age, ethnicity, gender, health condition and job readiness. This helps them to monitor equality of opportunity in their delivery. Triage and Working Links have a recently revised and clear equality and diversity policy which underpins a commitment to be proactive in addressing the needs of individual participants.

**7. How effective is leadership and management?  
Evaluation: very good**

Senior managers have developed a very clear vision with regard to the implementation of the Provider Led Pathway programme. Aspects of their leadership are outstanding. Agreed aims and objectives are shared, realistic and well linked to the needs of the client group. Over the course of the contract, staff have reviewed the needs and obstacles encountered by participants and have adapted and developed practices as a result of this. There has been a clear emphasis on ensuring good service for participants. For example, recent use of participant focus groups is encouraging the use of participant feedback. This approach needs to be developed further. Issues of the quality of performance between offices have been addressed through redeployment of staff. Changes to the model of delivery of the Condition Management Programme are being made to ensure that delivery meets the needs of participants. Development and use of tools, including *Cobra*, have helped to ensure a commendable focus on the needs of the individual participant.

A focus by senior managers on the need for high quality services and provision is a strength of the organisation. Improvement processes now need to be even more comprehensive and systematic. Overall, at an individual as well as a team level, staff are engaged constructively in reviewing and developing practice. Teams and centres apply a range of systems and procedures to gauge the impact of their services. This helps to establish progress against agreed organisational aims and targets. This is supported by a strong focus on continuous professional development. A strong and effective emphasis on team work for the benefit of participants is evident. This includes positive and helpful relationships and very good links with a range of partner agencies. Opportunities for staff to share good practice within the organisation, as well as with other agencies and sectors, can be developed further. Senior managers recognise the need to focus on targeted areas of provision in order to assure quality and drive further improvement. Recently introduced approaches to self-assessment now need to ensure that activities undertaken by the sub-contractor align readily with these procedures.

## **8. How effective is the provision overall?**

**Evaluation: good**

The provision is effective overall and has important strengths. Triage and Working Links help a significant number of participants to find a job. While the number of participants who get a job is high for Provider Led Pathways' programmes nationally, figures for mandatory customers in particular are well below contracted levels. This needs to be addressed further. Triage provides very good training and support for participants. Participants report that they feel safe and are treated fairly. Almost all who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire reported that they are very satisfied with the programme and the support they have been given. Participants improve their self esteem and are increasingly optimistic and enthusiastic about their employment prospects. Advisors are skilled at establishing constructive relationships with participants. Both Triage and Working Links are committed to improving the service offered to participants through a range of effective methods. Leadership of the delivery of the programme is strong. Triage and Working Links should now build on the identified strengths and areas for development to ensure that more participants get, and sustain, positive employment outcomes.

## **9. What happens next?**

As a result of the overall quality of provision, there will be no further inspection activity in connection with this report. In consultation with DWP, HMIE will work with both the provider and DWP to support improvement in job outcomes.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the provider.

- The need to ensure more participants move into sustained employment.
- The continued review and development of approaches to quality improvement to the benefit of participants.

**HM Inspector:** Peter McNaughton

1 April 2010

## **Appendix 1      Key points made by participants**

More than 150 participants responded to the HMIE pre-inspection questionnaire. Responses were extremely positive. There were almost no comments of a negative nature.

### **What participants liked:**

- Staff treat me with respect;
- I find it easy to speak to staff;
- Staff listen to me and act on my feedback;
- When I started, they tried to find out about my own needs;
- I am satisfied with the support I have been given;
- I feel safe and secure during this programme; and
- I have access to the necessary resources, computers and information.

**When we write reports, we use the following word scale so that our readers can see clearly what our judgements mean.**

|                |       |                                                     |
|----------------|-------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| excellent      | means | outstanding, sector leading                         |
| very good      | means | major strengths                                     |
| good           | means | important strengths with some areas for improvement |
| satisfactory   | means | strengths just outweigh weaknesses                  |
| weak           | means | important weaknesses                                |
| unsatisfactory | means | major weaknesses                                    |

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