

Evaluation
of the
Pathways Programme

April 2004

Conor Ryan
Research and Evaluation Office
Blanchardstown Area Partnership

Table of Contents

	Page
Section 1:	
1.1 Introduction and history to the Pathways Programme	2
Section 2:	
2.1 Profile of Pathways Programme Clients	2
Section 3:	
3.1 Aims and Objectives of Pathways Programme	3
Section 4:	
4.1 Feedback from the Pathways Co-ordinator and tutors, LES Manager and FAS	3-4
Section 5	
5.1 Positive aspects of the Programme from the two main parties perspectives	4
Section 6	
6.1 Participants Comments on the merits of the Pathways Programme	4-5
6.2 Theme 1 Tutors	6
6.3 Theme 2 Course Material	7
6.4 Theme 3 Arrangements	8
Section 7	
7.1 Theme 1 Tutors	9
7.2 Theme 2 Course Material	9
7.3 Theme 3 Arrangements	9-10
Section 8	
8.1 Evaluation Recommendations	10-11
Appendix 1	12-1

Evaluation of Pathways Programme

Section 1

1. Introduction and history to the Pathways Programme

The Pathways Programme was established specifically for NEAP clients who are over six months unemployed. It “adopts a cognitive-behavioural approach to learning, which aims to change the attitudes and actions of participants towards employment”. It was designed to cater for a diverse range of learners and to be accessible to individuals with low literacy skills. In Blanchardstown, LES/ Joblink ran Pathways. Jim Brown was responsible for establishing the content of the Programme over the summer of 2003. Vera Hickey formerly of the Local Development Agency (LDA) in Blanchardstown provided input with this task.

A Programme Co-ordinator (Linda Coventry) was appointed to oversee and run the Programme between October and December 2003. This was an ambitious task and it involved many individual elements such as

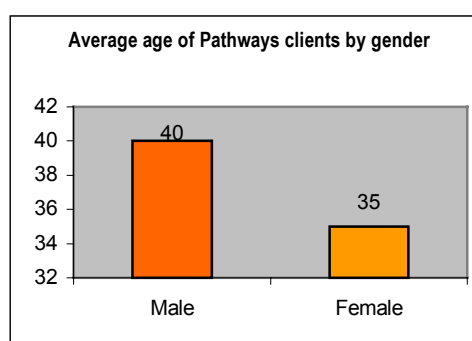
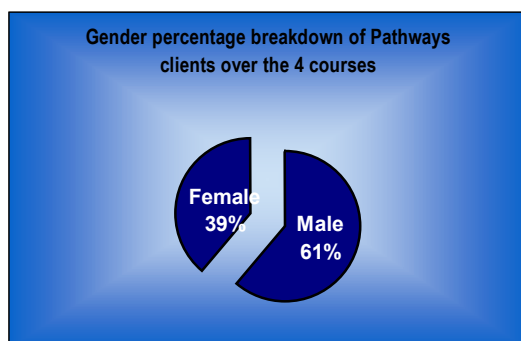
- Designing a structured timetable with appropriate tutor/information slots
- Addressing clients information needs
- Keeping sign in sheets
- Organising participation costs for clients on completion of the Programme
- Liasing with FAS at local and regional level

Blanchardstown Area Partnership re-directed the appointee from its own LDSIP staff resources to co-ordinate the Programme.

Section 2

2.1 Profile of Pathways Programme Clients

In total, 51 NEAP clients completed the four Pathways courses beginning in Sept and finishing up in December 2003. The age spectrum of clients ranged from nineteen years up as far as fifty-four. The majority (61%) of course attendees were male and they in turn were also slightly older on average than their female counterparts. This is not surprising given the higher number and older age profile of males signing on the live register in Blanchardstown. More than one fifth or 22% of the course attendees were non-nationals. The educational and work skills that participants possessed varied significantly. This ménage of clients posed a significant challenge to the tutors in delivering each separate course as will become apparent.



Section 3

3.1 Aims/Objectives of Pathways Programme

It was necessary for the evaluator to establish what the two main stakeholders i.e. LES and FAS perceived the aims and objectives of the Programme to have been. Without arriving at some understanding of what the programme objectives were, it would have been virtually impossible for the evaluator to complete this report. After all, what would the actual programme outcomes be compared against?

According to the *LES Manager* the *programme aims* were twofold;

“To inform participants of what was available to them in the area in terms of education, training and work”¹

“To determine where they’re at and their individual needs. Try and put them in touch with proper channels”

According to *FAS* ²the *programme aim* was

“To assist participants in identifying an appropriate path for obtaining employment or training”

Section 4

4.1 Feedback from the Pathways Co-ordinator and tutors, LES Manager and FAS

Challenging aspects of the programme

There were *several challenging aspects* with the rollout of the programme. According to the course co-ordinator she *“never knew anything about the clients before they arrived on the first morning. The clients came with no information on why they were here”*. In addition *the profile of clients changed radically from one course to the next*. For instance there were higher numbers of non-nationals on certain courses whereas others had a greater number of people with low literacy levels.

The teamwork and ethos of those involved in the *rollout of the programme* was of a very high standard to come to terms with the material, delivery span and to adapt the programme content on each occasion. Because the programme was adapted each time it was delivered, it has ³ *“given an opportunity to amalgamate the best aspects of each programme and provide a higher quality programme to participants”*. The short duration of the course also in the view of the tutors didn’t allow them to get to know people or to get to the real issues people faced.

Building up the trust factor was hampered by the very nature of the initial contact, which is made by the Department of Social Community and Family Affairs Welfare to the participants i.e. letter. It was then left to the tutors to overcome the *“negativity and scepticism held by the participants”*. According to the LES mediator attached to the course, clients felt they had no choice but to attend the Pathways Programme. Due to this referral procedure the clients were

¹ Gerry Keogh Manager of LES

² Paul McCrone of FAS

³ Niamh Sheridan-tutor

instantly more suspicious of the LES service and therefore more assurances were needed around the confidentiality in the mediation/guidance process. From FAS perspective *“the method of issuing a letter inviting clients to participate on the programme worked very well and most people responded”*

Section 5

5.1 Positive aspects of the programme from the two main parties positions

From the perspective of the course co-ordinator ⁴ the most positive aspect of the programme was *“to see the positive change in attitude of clients and the increased knowledge base for future reference of all involved in the programme”*. At the beginning of the course the clients very often presenting themselves were resentful and negative about being there. However by the end of the two weeks the clients had a vision of where they were going. *“It was encouraging to see the positive change in attitude of clients and the increased knowledge base for future reference of all involved in the programme”*.

Similar views were also echoed by a tutor ⁵ *“most people by the end of the sessions did enjoy it and get something out of it”* whereas the LES tutor ⁶ thought that the *“range of assistance available through LES/Joblink for the development of participants was another positive aspect of the programme”*. *“It challenges negative beliefs and opens their minds to new ideas as well as.. getting them out of their houses to look at alternatives to unemployment”*. Finally FAS felt that *“group motivation helps clients to move on ... and that clients are encouraged to make out their own plan to help them get into work”*

Section 6

6.1 Participant’s Comments on the merits of the Pathways Programme

At the end of each course the tutors circulated a standardised questionnaire to each of the participants to derive feedback from them as to how they perceived the Pathways Programme.

For the purposes of gaining an insight into participants’ attitudes regarding the

- Tutors
- Course material and
- Arrangements

an agreement scale was utilised as set out below. In other words participants were asked to indicate their agreement with several statements on a 5 point scale: For the purposes of this report the evaluator randomly choose people’s attitudes from courses two and four. Placed in the appendix are the direct quotes of clients on the three above issues.

5	4	3	2	1
Strongly	agree	undecided	disagree	strongly
Agree				disagree

²Paul McCrone of FAS

⁴ Linda Coventry Pathways Co-ordinator

⁵ Sinead Togher-tutor

⁶ Mary Tighe-tutor

Following on overleaf is a series of pie and bar charts, which depict the responses of clients on a percentage basis to a series of questions in relation to the course tutors and course material. Whilst there are some divergences of opinion on certain topics, there are on the whole many similarities. These comparisons allow conclusions to be drawn further on. Presented below is a snapshot of some of the key findings.

- 74% of clients felt that the tutors thought that the course was ran at a good pace
- 85% of clients felt that the tutors explained things clearly to them
- 83% of clients felt that the tutors provided help to them when they needed it
- 70% of clients felt that the course material was relevant to their own circumstances
- 77.27% of clients felt that the course material was easy to follow

6.4 Theme 3 Arrangements

Evidently the sheer diversity of participants was an issue not only for the tutors but *also* the participants themselves. This was a direct consequence of the *selection process* of clients in the first instance. It also however related back to one of the Programmes aims i.e. to cater for a diverse range of learners. Some individuals held reasonably high qualifications and work related skills whereas others possessed minimal educational qualifications and work skills. As a result many clients felt frustrated with the course length. On the one hand some considered it too short whilst others thought it was too long. This meant that some clients did not benefit to as great an extent as they could have. The error therefore lies in the screening process of clients and the referral mechanisms from FAS to the LES.

“Felt the course could be done in a one week session”

“I think the course should be extended to 4 weeks”

“The diversity of background and needs was not conducive to people getting most out of the course sessions”

Many participants expressed concern in their views about FAS support they received while on the course and also the flow of communications between FAS and the LES. It should be pointed out that the concerns and issues expressed above were most evident on the second course and that they don't appear on any of the questionnaires relating to the later courses. Nevertheless both parties should take on board these concerns in order to progress NEAP clients to as great an extent as possible. Therefore in future the information provided to NEAP clients should be consistent amongst all parties.

“On the negative side of things the follow up and backup was not very positive, nothing to do with the tutors”

“FAS need to look at the back up of course and what they expect of people”

2nd week very bad no help from FAS, lot of contradiction from FAS to what we were told by tutor's”

“There is a feeling of one group not knowing what another is doing i.e. FAS not providing training/funding whereas Pathways/LES said they would. Conflicting information coming from different groups”.

“No one person to link the information together and to develop 1 to 1 an action plan during the course-linking tot the mediator should be emphasised at the start”.

Section 7 General conclusions

7.1 Theme 1 Tutors

90% of all the participants praised the very high standards and teaching practices of the course tutors. They were also very successful in ensuring the vast majority of participants fully engaged while on the course and listened attentively to peoples concerns. The participants also indicated that the tutors were excellent at explaining things through and giving help when it was needed.

"The tutors really seemed to have a genuine interest in helping everyone on the programme"

"Tutor very friendly and encouraging"

"Feed back from Linda excellent, never ignored your questions or queries"

7.2 Theme 2 Course Material

From the participants stance point the course was beneficial because it improved their overall skills levels for the most part and knowledge of various subject matters.

"I am glad I completed the course as it motivated me as I was starting to get in a rut"

"I found out about places and people I can go and see that can help me, which I did not know about"

"Got a lot of information"

With regard to certain statements there was a large undecided opinion and a small but nevertheless significant disapproving opinion aired e.g. 41% of participants were either undecided or expressed misgivings towards the exercises given to them.

"Course could be a little more interesting e.g. use computers"

"Interview skills could be emphasised"

Perhaps the greatest concern that FAS, Social Welfare and LES should consider was the fact that 60% of all the participants were neutral/undecided as to whether the course was relevant to their own experiences. It appears that each of the stakeholders will in future need to try harder and convince the participants that the Pathways Programme is actually of critical importance to improving their eventual job seeking prospects. One way to circumvent this would be for the individual content of the course and exercises asked of clients to be altered and so better meet the needs of participants. That is why it is so critical that the tutors are informed one week in advance of the client's profiles to adjust the course content to better meet their needs.

7.3 Theme 3 Arrangements

Post Pathways support provision will be vital in ensuring that the momentum gained with clients is not lost. This will improve their eventual chances of securing employment.

The selection process of clients is flawed and in need of re-adjustment.

Many clients expressed their frustration with the support and information provided by FAS before and whilst on the course.

Communications between FAS and the LES were found to be far from ideal especially in the earlier stages of the programme.

Section 8

8.1 Evaluation Recommendations

Better communications and co-operation needs to be fostered amongst all the parties to ensure improved outcomes for clients. i.e. LES and ESO's. An improved structure needs to be implemented. If this occurred future clients would come to the programme with correct information and maybe a more positive outlook and attitude to the programme.

In future wherever possible clients referred onto courses should be of similar background and ability. In order for this to occur however, the screening of clients in advance needs to be improved. That way it makes it more likely that clients won't feel as alienated. The upshot of this would be that it would enable the tutors to tailor design the course specifically to participants of similar abilities and therefore more readily meet their needs.

Client screening sessions need to occur at least a week before the beginning of each Pathways Programme.

Language and literacy supports should be provided to clients who display with initial problems. This could be identified via client screening sessions 4-5 days in advance of courses starting. These issues should then be communicated to the LES tutors so that they can adjust the course content to meet the needs of prospective clients. Therefore FAS should provide the LES with a short relevant report on each client being sent onto the Programme.

The Pathways Programme needs to happen when mainstream courses have places available or are recruiting.

A week break in between courses should be standard.

The number of participants should be restricted to 12.

The individual content of the exercises given to clients should be re-examined.

The boundaries and the core things that need to be in every course regardless of composition needs to be examined e.g. the preparation of CV's needs to be included.

Site visits to employers should be an added extra to the course curriculum if appropriate.

More clearly defined progression routes need to be developed when the programme moves into its next phase. This would give the tutors a clearer idea of what is available in the medium to long term for participants.

For those more job ready Pathways clients a follow up jobs club would be more appropriate than mediation *"particularly those who have been inactive and needing more motivation"*

For the remainder continued support through mediation/guidance counselling should be offered to clients in order to help them advance further.

Those clients who have particular English language skills needs should be referred to the local Dublin VEC.

Strengthening the Employment Liaison Officer role in LES/Joblink with a focus on in-depth liaising and working with specific employers to break down barriers in recruitment practices is vital to such initiatives as Pathways.

The Pathways Programme requires its own dedicated staff and should not draw on other staff to ensure delivery.

Brief reports from tutors would enable placement officers to advance the guidance process for clients who have identified progression options. They should also be offered preferential access to courses/programmes. Therefore a post Pathways support infrastructure needs to be put in place.

The programme needs to have varying lengths.

One tutor should deliver the Programme with inputs in career guidance by appropriate specialists.

The loss of secondary benefits for participants upon securing employment needs to be examined from a policy perspective.

Appendix 1

Arrangements	The course material	The tutors
<p>"I think it is very important that a selection process is made"</p> <p>"Selection of participants could be improved, a better balance was needed"</p> <p>"There was too much diversity with participants".</p> <p>"The diversity of background and needs was not conducive to people getting most out of the course sessions"</p>	<p>"I would have benefited from access to computer, some goal setting plans, confidence building, interview skills"</p> <p>"Interview skills could be emphasised"</p> <p>"I am glad I completed the course as it motivated me as I was starting to get in a rut"</p>	<p>"Speakers, tutors and other members of staff were extremely friendly and helpful"</p> <p>"The tutors were excellent"</p> <p>"Some tutors were better than other"</p> <p>"The tutors really seemed to have a genuine interest in helping everyone on the programme"</p>
<p>"Could have been done over one week"</p> <p>"Could fit course into a shorter time"</p> <p>"Felt the course could be done in a one week session"</p> <p>"I think the course should be extended to 4 weeks"</p> <p>"Could be longer with visits to relevant job sites/places"</p> <p>"The length of the course was short because we didn't finish the entire pathways programme: CV session and interview skills"</p>	<p>"Interview notes are excellent"</p> <p>"Course could be a little more interesting e.g. se computer"</p> <p>Other comments</p> <p>"Those long term unemployed should benefit greatly from this"</p> <p>"LES was very informative and a person can avail of it"</p> <p>"Course could be focused to cater for individual needs, social needs, education etc"</p> <p>"I found out about places and people I can go and see that can help me, which I did not know about"</p>	<p>"Tutor very friendly and encouraging"</p> <p>"Feed back from Linda excellent, never ignored your questions or queries"</p>
<p>"On the negative side of things the follow up and backup was not very positive, nothing to do with the tutors"</p> <p>"FAS need to look at the back up of course and what they expect of people"</p> <p>"2nd week very bad, no help from FAS lot of contradiction from FAS to what we were told by tutors"</p> <p>"Follow up with FAS very poor"</p>	<p>"Got a lot of information"</p>	
<p>"People should be given more information when selected for course, people come in feeling very negative"</p>		

<p>“Pathways is probably run at the wrong time of the year to enable people to slot into further education/training programmes”</p> <p>“Courses need to be run and aligned with available FAS courses so that people can stay positive and action what they've learnt through going straight on a course”</p> <p>“There is a feeling of one group not knowing what another group is doing i.e. FAS not providing training/funding whereas Pathways/LES said they would”</p> <p>“Conflicting information coming from different groups”</p> <p>“Should start in September so can get place on FAS course if available”</p> <p>“No one person to link the information together and to develop 1 to 1 action plan during the course- linking to the mediator should be emphasised at the start”</p>		
---	--	--

