



# Small employers, big opportunities

A joint publication from Jobcentre Plus  
and the National Employment Panel

“Practical no-nonsense advice on how to  
do better business with small employers”

Karan F Bilimoria, DL, Founder & Chief Executive,  
Cobra Beer Ltd

# Forewords



Small and medium sized businesses represent a huge and often untapped opportunity for Jobcentre Plus and its jobseeker customers. At the same time, Jobcentre Plus can offer something invaluable to SMEs – a high quality recruitment service.

This is why the National Employment Panel's SME Board has sponsored this good practice guide. The guide is based on findings from an SME engagement pilot conducted in South London during 2003, as well as research in several other districts with strong track records in working with smaller businesses. For front-line Jobcentre Plus staff, it offers practical, no-nonsense advice on how to do better business with SMEs, endorsed by real SME owner-managers.

On the SME Board, entrepreneurs, small business experts and senior Jobcentre Plus people are working together to help Jobcentre Plus provide a better service to SMEs. We passionately believe that by doing so, we can help your business to perform, and offer more and more exciting opportunities to your jobseekers.

**Karan F. Bilimoria, DL**  
**Founder & Chief Executive, Cobra Beer Ltd**  
**Chairman, SME Board**  
**Member, National Employment Panel**



During the last two years, Jobcentre Plus has made great strides towards providing a better service for our employer customers. New technology, improvements to our contact centre infrastructure, targeted marketing and dedicated account managers have all played important parts in this.

I know, however, that it is people working in districts who manage the majority of our employer business – and that this contribution is vital to improving the employer experience. This is particularly true for SMEs – which is why I am committed to providing the right tools and information from the centre to support local delivery to these customers.

This guide is the first in a series of SME products that will be supported by Jobcentre Plus' new SME specialist team. I hope you find it useful and I would welcome any feedback. I am very grateful to everybody who has contributed their ideas and experience to the guide, and to the SME Board members for their support, creativity and business insights.

**Mark Grimshaw**  
**Employer Services Director, Jobcentre Plus**

# Small employers, big opportunities

**Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs)** are essential to Jobcentre Plus performance – and Jobcentre Plus is taking steps to ensure that districts are fully supported in engaging with them.

This guide puts forward SME **good practice ideas** that Jobcentre Plus staff in the field have suggested. It is a first step in a process of sharing good practice, which will be continued by the new **Regional SME Channel Managers**.

Developing a collaborative approach between Jobcentre Plus nationally, Jobcentre Plus locally and SME employers is at the heart of improving engagement with SMEs. The guide is also sponsored by **employers** themselves, through the SME Board of the National Employment Panel.

## **The SME Board is comprised of:**

Karan F Bilimoria, DL – Founder & Chief Executive – Cobra Beer Ltd

Sonita Alleyne OBE – Chief Executive – Somethin' Else

Jonathan Austin – Chief Executive – Best Companies Ltd

Chris Banks CBE – Chief Executive – Bigthoughts

Colin Barrow MBA – Director – Cranfield University School of Management

Anuj Chande – Partner – Grant Thornton Chartered Accountants

Mark Grimshaw – Employer Services Director – Jobcentre Plus

Maurice Ostro – Managing Director – Air Fayre Ltd

# What's in the guide?

The good practice ideas in the guide are broken down into three main areas:

- building local labour market knowledge
- marketing to SMEs
- helping SMEs recruit the right people

At the end of the guide there are some examples of how districts have approached resourcing for work with SMEs.

Some suggestions may be new to you, while some you will already be using. The aim of the guide is to show you some of the things that are working for other people and stimulate your thinking about how SME engagement can be improved.

The guide also contains information on new developments within Jobcentre Plus that aim to improve services to SMEs.

## **The SME team**

The Employer Services Directorate has introduced a new SME team. **Regional SME Channel Managers** will be supporting districts in their work with SMEs. This guide is the first in a series of 'SME tools' they will be promoting. For more detail on what the SME team and the Regional SME Channel Managers are doing, look at the 'What happens next' section at the end of this guide.



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# About the guide

## Who is the guide for?

For staff who work directly with SMEs, such as **Vacancy Service Managers (VSMs)** and **District Marketing Executives (DMEs)**, the guide aims to:

- raise awareness of SME recruitment needs
- suggest approaches to SME marketing
- provide ideas about offering services that meet SME needs

For **advisers**, the guide aims to:

- provide ideas on how to sell SME vacancies to clients
- raise awareness of SME recruitment needs in order to help guide client referrals

For senior staff from **Business Managers** to **District Managers**, the guide aims to:

- raise awareness of how SME engagement contributes to Jobcentre Plus performance
- generate ideas for improving performance with SMEs
- support the business planning process with reference to SME engagement now that the Regional SME Channel Managers are in place

## Where do the ideas in the guide come from?

This guide is **for** Jobcentre Plus staff – and all the ideas come **from** Jobcentre Plus staff. The guide has been endorsed by employers from the National Employment Panel's SME Board.

The guide uses lessons from an SME pilot carried out in Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth during 2002-3. This aimed to raise awareness of SMEs among Jobcentre Plus staff, raise SME awareness of Jobcentre Plus, and improve the quality of service to SMEs.

### **We would also like to thank the following districts who contributed good practice suggestions:**

- Bedfordshire
- Bridgend and Rhondda Cynon Taff
- Cambridgeshire
- Cardiff and Vale
- Cheshire and Warrington
- Devon
- Glasgow
- Gloucestershire
- Norfolk
- North East London
- Sheffield
- Somerset
- Suffolk

# The key messages

Research for this guide brought out some key messages for good practice in SME engagement. They are explored in more detail in the remainder of the guide.

## **Building good local labour market knowledge**

- Develop a detailed understanding of who the local SMEs are – and keep this knowledge up to date
- Make use of external partners' knowledge and experience

## **Marketing to SMEs – what works?**

- Be proactive – take the message to employers rather than waiting for them to come to you
- Work with external partner organisations to develop mutually beneficial approaches
- Use a range of marketing techniques and be creative, taking SME needs into account

## **Helping SMEs recruit the right people, cost effectively**

- Offer SMEs the core services that they will particularly value, such as recruitment and labour market advice
- Promote selected additional services such as application sifting and matching and refer SMEs to appropriate local initiatives and funding
- Provide information and access to wider government services
- Aim to build long term relationships with SMEs and gain their trust in Jobcentre Plus' ability to deliver

### **Working effectively with Jobcentre Plus colleagues**

- Make sure that all colleagues are aware of how SME engagement impacts on their day to day work
- Look at resourcing to see whether dedicated staff can be provided to work with SMEs or whether existing roles can be redefined to meet SME needs more effectively

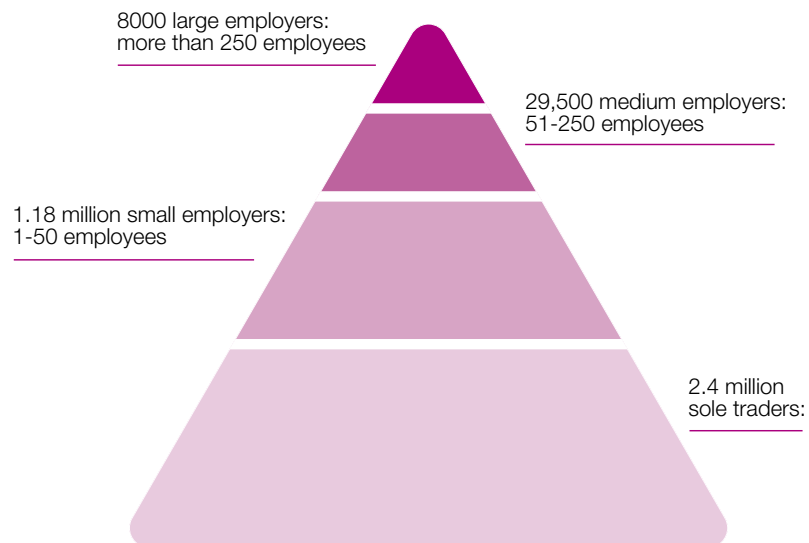


# Understanding SMEs

## What is an SME?

'SMEs' are **Small and Medium-sized Enterprises**. SMEs are businesses that employ 0-250 staff and are often owner-managed.

## The employer pyramid: breakdown of UK employers by size



## Why are SMEs important to Jobcentre Plus?

Attracting and filling SME vacancies is essential for Jobcentre Plus. In all districts, a large proportion of vacancies come from SMEs – and in some districts, SMEs form almost the entire employer base. In the UK as a whole, SMEs generated 2.7 million vacancies during 2003.

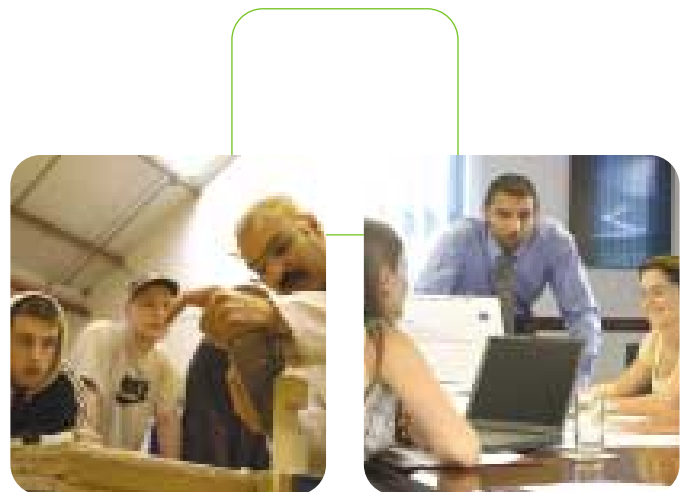
“SMEs are our bread and butter”

– Yvonne Hendry, Business Development Manager, Norfolk

SMEs are also significant because they can increase opportunities for disadvantaged groups. For example, new evidence suggests that engaging with businesses owned by ethnic minorities can improve Jobcentre Plus’ ability to place ethnic minority jobseekers into work.

“We get a narrow range of vacancies from our large employers, and they don’t always meet our clients’ needs – so pulling in a good range of SME vacancies is absolutely vital”

– Neil Garretley, VSM, Devon



## What can Jobcentre Plus offer to SMEs?

Jobcentre Plus has a range of services to offer which have proved to be valuable to SMEs. These include:

### Standard Services

- Employer Direct vacancy notification
- Electronic vacancy display (on Jobpoints and the Internet)
- Apply Direct

### Enhanced Services

- Jobsfairs
- Matching vacancies to jobseekers
- Sifting application forms
- Provision of interview rooms/reception
- Holding initial screening interviews
- Employer response handling
- Access to Work
- Work trials
- New Deal employer subsidies

There may also be exceptional cases where customised services (e.g. consultancy) and bespoke services (e.g. account management) can be offered to SMEs – but **only** if cost/benefit analyses have been undertaken and approval from an appropriate authority has been given.

## What should you know about SMEs?

SME recruitment needs are diverse. For example, a business in a high-value-added sector such as IT will face completely different recruitment issues to one operating in a service or seasonal industry, such as hospitality.

But there are some common themes:

### **SMEs can benefit from Jobcentre Plus' labour market knowledge**

- SMEs tend to recruit infrequently so their labour market knowledge can be patchy. For example, they may not have a good idea of local wage rates for comparable jobs

### **SMEs need information about Jobcentre Plus and what it can offer them**

- SMEs are less likely to be aware of the modernisation of Jobcentre Plus offices and the variety of local services that are on offer, especially if they have not recently recruited

### **SMEs need support to recruit the right people...**

- With SMEs, those responsible for recruitment are often doing this on top of their 'day jobs'. Jobcentre Plus can provide HR expertise that most SMEs do not possess in house
- SMEs cannot afford to make recruitment mistakes as they often operate within high pressure environments where business success is dependent on the performance of a few individuals

### **...in a way that is cost effective**

- SMEs often have little flexibility with their resources, so a service that is free at the point of delivery can be attractive – as long as it does not place large demands on their time. The additional services that Jobcentre Plus offers can reduce the time SMEs need to spend on recruitment

# Building local labour market knowledge

## Using Jobcentre Plus' labour market system (LMS)

- In the latest release of LMS it has become mandatory for the size of business field to be completed, which will begin to give a good picture of the size and nature of the employers Jobcentre Plus is dealing with
- As the size data builds in LMS it will be possible to identify local SMEs that have used Jobcentre Plus

### District SME database

In order to help Jobcentre Plus market to and contact local SMEs, the SME team has created a new database for use on a local level.

Your Regional SME Channel Manager will be able to provide information on the **top 1000 SMEs in each district**, including employers that have used Jobcentre Plus before, and those that are potential new users. For more information, see the 'What happens next' section at the end of this guide.

The SME pilot in Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth also highlighted that it was very difficult for Jobcentre Plus to measure performance in attracting and filling SME vacancies. The SME team is currently developing ways to measure increases in SME awareness and use of services, using the SME database. Eventually, this will make it possible to look at the points generated by Jobcentre Plus' SME activity.



## Working with external partners

- Building relationships with external partners allows you to access their knowledge of forthcoming developments and understanding of local SME needs. Key external partners include: Business Link; Regional Development Agencies; sub-regional partnerships; local strategic partnerships; Employer Coalitions; and local Learning and Skills Councils
- Partnership meetings (usually attended by District Partnership Managers) are a good way to pick up local labour market news, often informally through word of mouth
- Local authority Economic Development Offices and Town Centre Offices are good sources of information on new businesses moving into an area. Local authorities can also provide monthly lists of planning applications

## Getting feedback from employers

- As well as the regular feedback that VSMs get from employers using Jobcentre Plus, some districts have devised other methods to gain information directly from employers

### Accessing employer views

Suffolk district has an 'Engaging Employers Group' that meets regularly to update Jobcentre Plus on employer issues in the district. SME interests are represented by the Chamber of Commerce, the Small Business Service and InBiz (a national organisation that helps unemployed people to start their own businesses).

In Wales, the Jobcentre Plus region is involved in the 'Future Skills Wales' skills group. SMEs are the main consultees and Jobcentre Plus is able to find out about their skills needs first hand.

# Marketing to SMEs – what works?

## What do SMEs need to know about Jobcentre Plus?

Jobcentre Plus has some valuable services to offer to SMEs – but not all SMEs are aware of this. When communicating with smaller employers, it is worth stressing the following:

- Jobcentre Plus **views SMEs as key customers** – Jobcentre Plus is not only aimed at large employers
- Jobcentre Plus services are **free at the point of delivery**. SMEs often think that using Jobcentre Plus services will cost them extra money – but this is not the case!
- Jobcentre Plus offers a whole range of **additional services** designed to support SME recruitment, such as: Vacancy Service Managers to act as a single point of contact within Jobcentre Plus; advice on recruitment methods; distribution of application forms; application sifting; employer interview suites; and signposting to other SME support services
- Jobcentre Plus can access the widest pool of possible candidates. All vacancies received are accessible through the Internet (over 500,000 site visits every week) and from Jobpoints in every Jobcentre Plus local office
- Jobcentre Plus can offer employers **subsidies** through **New Deal** – and employers can also receive support from the New Deal personal adviser
- Through the **Work trials** programme, employers can see if potential employees are suitable before committing to take them on. So SMEs can make sure that they have taken on the right person

### Did you know?

SMEs are responsible for a large proportion of **new jobs** created in the UK. Between 1995 and 1999, the number of jobs in the UK grew by 800,000, and SMEs were responsible for **70%** of this growth.



## Using a mix of approaches

Jobcentre Plus commonly uses mailshots and employer events (e.g. business breakfasts) to market services to SMEs. But there is a range of other ways of attracting SMEs' attention – and successful districts tend to use several of these.

## Accessing partnership networks

- Attending events run by external partner organisations that work with SMEs, or running events together with them, provides opportunities for promoting Jobcentre Plus to SMEs, distributing literature and networking
- External partners are sometimes able to promote Jobcentre Plus services to their clients – for example, in Norfolk, Business Link advisers have been promoting New Deal. In return, Jobcentre Plus is looking at how it can promote Business Link services
- Some partners have their own magazines or newsletters – putting items in these publications is a cost-effective way of reaching SMEs
- Jobcentre Plus can be offered as a venue for local networks to hold their meetings. This provides a good opportunity to give attendees a tour of the office during their visit

'Jobcentre Plus helped us organise a joint event with the Town Centre Office – this was really good in terms of networking. 50 employers attended and feedback was very positive.'

– South Bank Employers Group, Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth



### **Who has contact with SMEs?**

Business Link

Business start-up advice services e.g. InBiz

Chambers of Commerce

Federation of Small Businesses

Industrial sector groupings or networks

Intermediaries such as solicitors, banks and accountants

Learning and Skills Council

Local Authority Economic Development Offices

Local employer forums

Regeneration partnerships e.g. SRB, EQUAL, ESF

Sector Skills Councils

Small Business Service

Town Centre Offices

Training providers

Regional SME Channel Managers will also be working with these organisations and will be able to advise you on how to link up with them.

## Taking the message to them

“Large employers may come to you – but you have to be very proactive with SMEs”

– Linda Laird, Employer Engagement Team Manager, Glasgow

Visiting SMEs at their premises is a very effective marketing method.

Tips include:

- Adopt an informal approach and manner. Show an interest in what they do while bearing in mind that their time is limited
- Check LMS for any previous relationship the employer has had with Jobcentre Plus and make sure they have not also been approached by the Field Account Manager
- Find out what their needs are and focus on services that will be most relevant to them. Try not to inundate them with information
- Target individual approaches to SME employers directly at those likely to have vacancies that will suit existing Jobcentre Plus clients

### Targeting specific employers

In Cambridgeshire, Jobcentre Plus uses a proactive approach to try to secure vacancies in sectors where there are a lot of jobseekers. For example, there are a lot of IT workers in the district looking for jobs, but IT firms tend to assume that Jobcentre Plus cannot supply the right type of clients for their vacancies. To address this, staff send sample CVs to IT firms to show that Jobcentre Plus does attract the sort of clients they need.

### Did you know?

The SME market is very fluid. On average, every day in England and Wales, **over 1000** SMEs start up. **Over 65%** of these trade for more than 3 years.

## Marketing to groups of SMEs

Promoting Jobcentre Plus to groups of SMEs – by taking information to places where they gather – can be very effective. Such places could include industrial estates, business parks or incubation workshops, or places they visit as part of their daily routine, such as builders merchants, catering wholesalers, or office retailers.

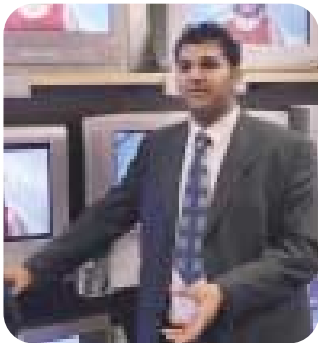
### Getting noticed

In Gloucestershire, Jobcentre Plus promoted New Deal to SMEs by commissioning a bus, which was decorated and sent round industrial estates.

In Suffolk, Jobcentre Plus takes advantage of its local market towns by taking market stalls and promoting services to employers during their lunch breaks.

In Bedfordshire, Jobcentre Plus has a kiosk in the town centre aimed at attracting local employers.

In Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth, the SME team visited industrial estates, handing out tailored publicity leaflets and doing face-to-face marketing with new and existing SMEs. By building up good relationships with managers of trading estates, the team were able to ensure that new businesses moving into the estate received information about Jobcentre Plus.



## Getting SMEs to recommend Jobcentre Plus

Word of mouth is one of the most powerful marketing tools, especially among SMEs, who really value the opinions of other employers like themselves. Deliver an effective service and SMEs will market Jobcentre Plus for you!

“Jobcentre Plus staff are always excellent... I have filled all the vacancies I advertised and would definitely use them again.”

– SME employer, Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth

## Using local media

- Local newspapers will be interested in sponsoring a good story, such as a priority client getting a successful placement. Employers get publicity out of this too. Some districts have regular editorial space in their local papers – a good opportunity to include employer testimonies and news
- Advertisements and slots on local affairs programmes on local radio stations can reach a wide range of local SME employers
- SMEs are less likely to respond to marketing solutions such as bus backs and large poster sites – these are more suitable for consumer campaigns

### **Campaigns on local radio**

Gloucestershire district ran a campaign on a local radio station to encourage employers to notify “One Million Pounds’ Worth of Jobs” to Jobcentre Plus. The campaign ran for one month – and by the end, the salaries of all the vacancies notified added up to five million pounds. The campaign also gave employers the opportunity to go on the radio to talk about their vacancies – a real benefit for smaller companies.

### **Did you know?**

Excluding sole traders, SME employers account for **over 40%** of all employment in the UK.



## Considering SMEs' needs

As outlined above, SMEs have some different needs to large employers. Tips for tailoring marketing activities to SMEs include:

- Providing SMEs with access to wider information they might need – for example on new legislation, tax, HR and equalities issues. Several districts have invited experts on these topics to speak at events and found this to be a good way of attracting SMEs to attend
- Acting as a 'gateway' between SMEs and organisations such as sector bodies, training organisations and the Learning and Skills Council. This can really add value for SMEs, as they may not know what is available to them
- Tailoring mailshots – SMEs receive high levels of mail, so mailings need to stand out and be relevant to them, for example by being specific to their sector. Mailshots may not receive an immediate response, but SMEs often remember them later when they come to recruit. In Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth, for example, the district continued to receive interest from SMEs a year after the SME pilot team sent marketing materials to them
- Using incentives – in Cardiff, Jobcentre Plus sponsored a rugby match and invited employers. This proved a good way of getting them interested in services!

### **SME marketing CD-ROM**

In Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth the SME pilot team developed a CD-ROM with a 'virtual tour' of Jobcentre Plus. This included a PowerPoint presentation explaining how Jobcentre Plus could cater to SME needs and outlining the services that were available. The team got very positive feedback from employers. The SME team is now looking at developing this idea and including similar materials as part of the SME Marketing Toolkit. For more information on the SME team and the activities it will be doing, see the 'What happens next?' section at the end of the guide.



# Helping SMEs recruit the right people

## Helping to fill the vacancies

After vacancies have been notified to Employer Direct, the VSM's first telephone call to employers (made within 48 hours of vacancies being notified) is a good opportunity to see what extra help they can offer SMEs to ensure they get the right person for the job.

In order to attract the right local jobseekers, SMEs will often benefit from honest advice on:

Wage rates:

- current rates for comparable jobs with local employers

Person specification:

- essential and non-essential qualifications and qualities
- availability of local jobseekers who meet this specification

Services available locally:

- identifying local initiatives and funding that would be relevant
- offering interview facilities in Jobcentre Plus and advertisement of SME vacancies in the local media if appropriate

### **Helping employers notify vacancies**

To help SMEs in making their call to Employer Direct, the SME team in Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth designed a checklist or 'aide-memoire' that listed the information employers needed to have to hand when calling Employer Direct. Feedback from employers suggested that it made notifying vacancies much easier for them.

## Finding appropriate clients

### Sifting and matching

SMEs will only want to be referred a manageable number of applicants – and all of them should be able to do the job. Employer feedback shows that this is SMEs' highest priority from Jobcentre Plus.

- SME employers can really benefit from Jobcentre Plus' expertise in finding suitable applicants, since they may not have much experience in recruitment
- Sifting and matching need not have significant resource implications. Volumes of applications and vacancies will usually be smaller than with large employers
- Sifting and matching is a way of encouraging employers to consider priority clients. If employers trust their VSM, they are more likely to give the priority clients they recommend a chance
- Try agreeing with employers that they will guarantee an interview for jobseekers referred through the matching process

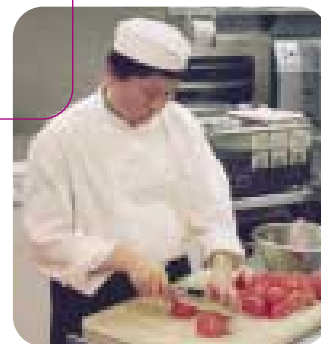
### Finding the right clients – by building a good understanding of employers

Glasgow district has developed a 'More about us' stencil, that covers areas such as benefits of working for the company, travel opportunities, career development, the recruitment process, and the type of person or skills the SME is looking for. The Employer Engagement Team generally liaises with SMEs to gain this information once they have notified vacancies. The information helps VSMs to understand employers better and find the right candidates for their vacancies.

The 'More about us' information has now been made available to all district staff via the district web site. This means that any staff member can access this to add further details or to give jobseekers more information on the benefits of working for a specific company.

### **Cheshire and Warrington – Recruitment Plus**

In Cheshire and Warrington, the district has made it a policy to resource for delivery of comprehensive services to SMEs. For example, under their 'Recruitment Plus' service, after an SME vacancy has been notified to Employer Direct, Jobcentre Plus will offer to: take all initial phone enquiries from jobseekers on the SME's behalf; issue the SME's application pack/form; and receive all completed applications. They will then sift applications, and after checking that basic information is correct, send all "ready for assessment" applications to the SME in one bundled pack. This means that after SMEs have notified vacancies, they do not have to do anything until they have a group of suitable candidates ready to interview. Jobcentre Plus will also offer to arrange interviews for those shortlisted, and facilitate such interviews at the local office, providing meet and greet services.



## Caseloads

Building caseloads of clients in certain industry sectors means that Jobcentre Plus can work very quickly to meet specific employer requests. In some districts, VSMs build their own caseloads, while others give advisers notice of employers that will be recruiting shortly and ask them to build caseloads of clients.

### Caseloads in the construction sector

In Sheffield, the district has a sector-led matching and placement team. An ex-construction worker is employed to assist construction companies in filling their vacancies with people seeking construction work. He has a pool of skilled potential workers, who he is able to match with the specific requirements of local employers. As a lot of construction work is offered on short-term contracts, he has built up a detailed knowledge of jobseekers and employers and successfully secured repeat business from many SME employers.

## Building relationships and thinking long term

VSMs have been most successful where they are able to build up trusting relationships with employers. Providing a personal touch and a single point of contact can pay off in the long term. For example, SMEs are more likely to take on priority clients once Jobcentre Plus has established a good working relationship with them.



**“Jobcentre Plus offered to come and see me to discuss exactly the type of client I wanted. Since then I have been extremely satisfied with Jobcentre Plus and I will continue to use them”**

– SME, recruited 4 staff with Jobcentre Plus in 2002-03

# Working effectively with Jobcentre Plus colleagues

## The role of the Vacancy Service Manager

The VSM role is key to SME engagement and its importance should not be underestimated. The role is not always ring fenced – for example, VSMs are sometimes required to cover advisers' duties in busy offices. However, good performance seems to be closely linked to a tight definition of the VSM role.

Individual VSM performance has a strong impact on employer satisfaction and vacancy filling.

## Awareness raising within Jobcentre Plus

**Where districts have been successful in engaging with SMEs, an essential part of the VSM role has been to raise awareness of SME issues among other staff. This typically includes:**

- communicating regularly with advisers and keeping them 'in the loop' on current and upcoming vacancies, for example through meetings, newsletters, 'top ten' vacancy lists, lists of employers that are interviewing that day and monthly reports on new businesses
- helping advisers 'sell' SME vacancies to clients – by explaining the benefits of working with SME employers, drawing on VSMs' knowledge of individual companies
- promoting SME work 'upwards' – for example by emphasising the importance of SME engagement to Business Managers

Feedback works both ways: advisers can also help VSMs by letting them know what sorts of jobs clients are interested in.

### **Did you know?**

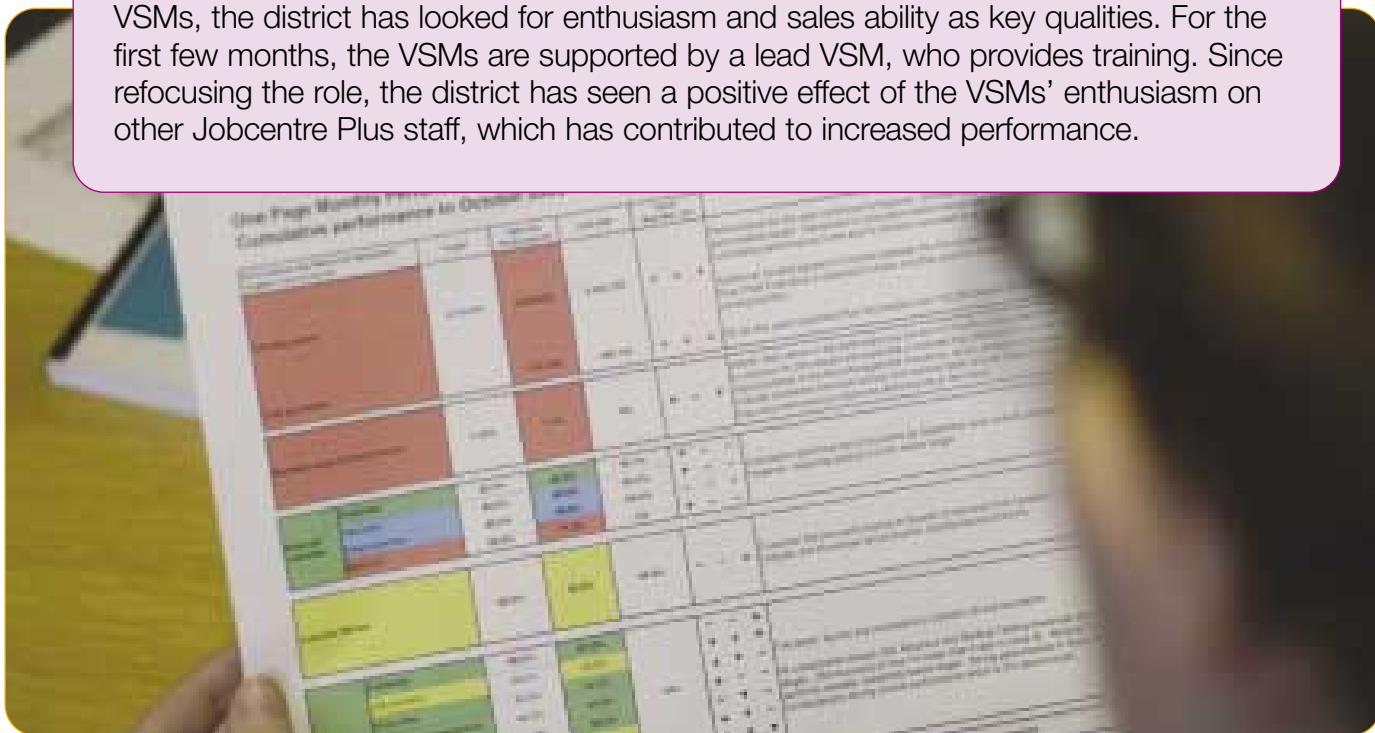
In total, SMEs generated 2.7 million vacancies during 2003.

## Issues for managers: Models of resourcing for SME delivery

There are many different ways of resourcing effectively for delivery to SMEs. The following examples have worked for different Jobcentre Plus districts. While they illustrate different approaches to supporting the VSM, in each case, the role of the VSM is key.

### Cambridgeshire: refocusing the VSM role

In Cambridgeshire, the VSM role has recently been refocused. They are now very proactive, and focus on **selling** Jobcentre Plus – to employers, clients, and partners – and, essentially, on selling vacancies to Jobcentre Plus colleagues. When recruiting new VSMs, the district has looked for enthusiasm and sales ability as key qualities. For the first few months, the VSMs are supported by a lead VSM, who provides training. Since refocusing the role, the district has seen a positive effect of the VSMs' enthusiasm on other Jobcentre Plus staff, which has contributed to increased performance.



**Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth SME pilot: putting a district team in place to improve service delivery to SMEs**

In Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth, the district piloted an SME Local Account Manager role, supported by an SME Local Account Officer. The team developed marketing materials, carried out marketing activities, worked with Business Managers to put on employer events, worked with intermediaries, and supported VSMs in service delivery. They also raised awareness of SME issues among district staff, provided coaching for VSMs, monitored SME activity by taking snapshot samples from LMS, researched the local SME base and built a stand-alone database of local SMEs for marketing purposes. Evaluation showed that SMEs' awareness of Jobcentre Plus within the district rose significantly over the time the pilot ran.

The district has now mainstreamed pilot activities by ensuring that support is available to SME employers that VSMs identify as needing additional services or specialist help.

“The SME pilot provided good value for money – the overall cost was low, and the results in terms of job points were higher than expected.”

– Chris Nicol, District Manager, Lambeth, Southwark and Wandsworth

### **Bedfordshire: dividing VSM duties into two roles**

In Bedfordshire, Business Development Officers (BDOs) are in place to market Jobcentre Plus to SMEs. In most cases, each BDO works with a VSM, although in smaller offices, the same person carries out both roles. BDOs are responsible for marketing to and engaging with employers, and account management of some vacancies. BDOs have the resource to build up long term relationships with employers. They develop detailed knowledge about the local labour market through face-to-face marketing activities with SMEs and by keeping closely in touch with key external partners such as the Local Authority Economic Development Office. They then act as local experts, feeding knowledge upwards within the district.

VSMs, meanwhile, are responsible for promoting vacancies internally and making sure they are filled. VSMs are assisted with matching and sifting applications by any district staff who have capacity to do this at a given time. Branches are encouraged to view themselves not as individual organisations but as part of the district and each office is willing to provide staff to 'pitch in' if necessary. Care is taken to make sure that there is internal clarity around roles and responsibilities – and that employers have a consistent 'vacancy service management' experience.

BDOs and VSMs have recently been set new targets for achieving job entries with priority client groups.

*“The BDO/VSM model paid for itself within one year in terms of vacancies brought in...We have been able to maintain our relations with employers through tough labour market conditions...It's a long term strategy”*

– Rilesh Jadeja, District Manager, Bedfordshire

# What happens next?

Jobcentre Plus now has a new framework to support SME marketing and networking activity. This reflects the fact that SMEs are crucial to Jobcentre Plus – and that a collaborative approach within the organisation is the best way to fully engage them.

## Regional SME Channel Managers

Regional SME Channel Managers (RSMECMs) have been put in place to provide a focus for SME marketing activity.

Their remit is to raise awareness and usage of Jobcentre Plus services among SMEs through creative local and national marketing campaigns and by building effective operational relationships with SME networks – and to deliver this by working **collaboratively** with colleagues in the field.

RSMECMs will shortly be talking to District Managers and District Marketing Executives to identify ways of supporting SME delivery in each district. This is likely to include:

- helping to develop ‘SME champions’ within each district
- identifying and developing operational relationships with partner and networking organisations
- supporting the development of district SME marketing plans
- working with the field to develop a better understanding of SME needs
- identifying intermediaries that Jobcentre Plus can work with locally to raise SME awareness, such as banks, solicitors and accountants
- ensuring local and national marketing activities are complementary
- providing support for large-scale recruitment exercises for SMEs
- sharing good practice around the country

## SME champions

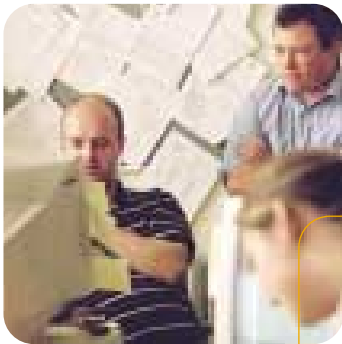
RSMEECMs will be working with District Managers to identify 'SME champions' within each district. SME champions will have responsibilities such as pushing forward the SME agenda locally, liaising with the RSMEECM and helping to develop SME marketing. Using their local knowledge of the SME market, SME champions will have a key role to play in working with RSMEECMs and District Managers to produce district SME marketing plans.

## SME database

From September 2004, RSMEECMs will be able to provide districts with a ready-made, reliable database of local SMEs to market to. Jobcentre Plus has purchased data on the top 100,000 SMEs nationally and each district will be able to access data on their top 1000 local SMEs. The data will be compared with LMS to identify current customers and prospects.

## SME Marketing Toolkit

A new SME Marketing Toolkit will also be available from September 2004. This will give districts access to various marketing products, such as direct mail pieces, event packs, press advertisements, radio advertisements and giveaways that will be specifically targeted at SMEs. This will complement national direct mail campaigns, and enable districts to undertake local activity by using the SME database.



# The SME team

National SME Channel Manager:	Darren Smith 07800 676292
PA to Darren Smith:	Gillian Lambert 0115 989 5854
Regional SME Channel Managers:	
Scotland	Frank Ritchie 07837 034013
North West	Jane Rushton 07837 034011
North East	Darren Pringle 07837 034010
Yorkshire and Humberside	Charlotte Rainey 07971 994862
East Midlands	Marie Fitzgerald 07971 996714
West Midlands	Rachel Banks 07837 034016
East	TBC – recruiting currently
London	Deborah Parry 07837 034012
South East	Jonathan Eccles 07837 034014
South West	Lyndsey Anderson Tusk 07971 996102
Wales	Sian Anstee 07837 034015



[www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/employers](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/employers)

[www.nationalemploymentpanel.org.uk](http://www.nationalemploymentpanel.org.uk)

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