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Working their way out of offending: an evaluation of two probation employment schemes

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“The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy).”

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The link between unemployment and crime is well established, and criminal justice agencies deploy a range of interventions to try to enhance offenders' employment opportunities and thereby reduce re-offending. However, there is a general lack of information on the impact of probation employment schemes in this country. This report presents a 3-year evaluation of two innovative Education, Training and Employment (ETE) projects, based in Inner London and Surrey, which worked with offenders under probation supervision. It discusses the development of the schemes; their targets and outcomes; the views of probation officers, project staff and offenders; the impact of New Deal; and the results of a one-year reconviction study.

The findings are generally promising. The report details encouraging employment and training outcomes achieved by both schemes and describes positive feedback from those involved, whether as providers or clients. It also identifies factors that contributed to the success or otherwise of the schemes, providing constructive pointers for future policy and practice. While both schemes were developed before effective practice principles had been widely adopted in the Probation Service, their experiences offer a useful contribution to the development of "What Works" in this field.

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Summary

This report examines the findings of two innovative probation-based employment and training schemes, ASSET in London and Springboard in Surrey. The schemes, established in the spring of 1997, both involved advice and guidance, training, work placements, mentoring and the provision of employment opportunities. Traditionally probation-based initiatives have only managed to access a small proportion of offenders despite high levels of unemployment amongst the target population. These two schemes both aimed to bridge this gap. They each had funding in excess of £1 million from the Henry Smith Foundation and elsewhere over a three-year period. The two initiatives differed in approach and objectives. However, they were both primarily designed to improve the employment and training prospects of unemployed offenders on probation in their respective areas and thus ultimately to reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

The evaluation covered a three-year period and was undertaken as two separate but complementary exercises. We shared a common research design across both sites and where possible used the same research instruments. For both schemes databases were established on those passing through the schemes, interviews were carried out with project staff and management, referring probation officers, professionals from link organisations, and with participating offenders. The findings below cover the period April 1997 to March 2000.

Key findings of the ASSET Project

The ASSET project worked with young offenders in two inner London boroughs. Support, guidance and onward referral were available to those aged 16–25. The key aim of the project was to provide offenders with the necessary skills and work experience to enable them to obtain and sustain employment in meaningful employment.

- Between July 1997 and March 2000, 758 offenders were referred to, and assessed by, ASSET.
- Offenders valued the one-to-one support provided by project staff. Many felt the project had a positive impact upon their lives. Generally there was a feeling there should be more schemes of a similar type.
Probation officers spoke highly about project staff and valued the work of the scheme. Many felt the project complemented the work of the probation service and offered specialist expertise that they themselves felt ill-equipped to provide.

Forty-three per cent of those participating in the ASSET project in the first year were reconvicted within a year of first contact. This compared favourably with the figure of 56 per cent for those who were referred to ASSET but did not attend. This difference was statistically significant.

Participants who were reconvicted were also somewhat slower to reoffend than non-attenders, with an average gap of 151 days from first appointment to the date of their next offence compared with 132.

The scheme profited from a strong partnership arrangement with the London Retail Centre. This was mainly down to the dedication and commitment of staff in the partner organisation. Ninety jobs were secured through the London Retail Centre and 12 offenders gained NVQs.

Despite considerable effort the project found it extremely difficult to sell the idea of mentoring to the client group. In total 24 volunteers were trained as mentors but only two of these were ever matched with offenders.

In spite of some successes the project met few of its Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) Challenge Fund targets. Nevertheless, many offenders in contact with Jobtrack and the London Retail Centre felt their knowledge, confidence, motivation and employability had increased.

ASSET’s experience demonstrates the need for a strong management team set within a clear managerial structure who are receptive to, and supportive of, staff. The under-performance of the project was fundamentally the result of poor staff/management relations which were only resolved half way through the second year.

Uncertainty over the project’s future during its final six months highlights the need for long-term forward planning to ensure the successful evolution of schemes.

There was a general feeling that ASSET and its clients had not benefited significantly from the introduction of New Deal. Fifty-eight per cent of a sample of 138 young offenders under probation supervision in Lambeth left New Deal before joining an option. Twenty per cent of all leavers took up employment but for the overwhelming majority (65%) their immediate destination was unknown.
Key findings of the Springboard Project

Surrey Springboard carried out initial assessments for offenders under probation supervision. These were mandatory; failure to attend could be treated as an unacceptable absence counting towards breach proceedings. The objective was to offer assistance on a range of issues relating to employment, training, accommodation and leisure needs.

- Springboard’s aggregate statistics show 452 employment outcomes throughout the three years, during which time 1,957 new referrals were seen. Over half of these outcomes were achieved in year three.
- Interviews with a sample of offenders suggested that few attributed securing a job directly to Springboard. However, many considered the help they received to have had a positive effect on their employability, and on their accommodation status.
- The scheme was increasingly successful at recruiting ex-offenders to work on its sheltered employment component. During the second and third year, eight were taken on, of whom six were still in post in May 2000.
- Thirty-two per cent of those seen by Springboard in the first year were reconvicted within 12 months. Among 16-25 year-olds (the age group targeted by ASSET) the figure was 45 per cent. This is two percentage points higher than ASSET, but 16-25 year olds at Springboard had more extensive criminal histories.
- Despite scepticism early on in the project, probation staff came to value the work of the scheme, praising the commitment of its staff. Help with housing emerged as the area in which Development Officers’ knowledge was most appreciated.
- There is merit in a holistic approach to resettlement which addresses accommodation and leisure needs as well as employability, employment and training.
- The organisational context of the partner probation service is important in shaping staff views of a scheme’s value and effectiveness.
- Linked to this, if the partner service undergoes radical change, schemes of this nature must be wary of assuming responsibilities that may not be within their remit or resources.
- It is vital to ensure that in seeking to establish economic viability, schemes avoid the temptation to expand too rapidly.
- Plans for future development should include consideration of the implications this may have for staffing levels and training.
Common themes emerging from the two schemes’ evaluation

- Offenders valued both projects and many felt there should be more schemes of a similar type. Generally they found guidance workers supportive and considered the help they received to have a positive effect on their attitude to employment and training.
- Probation staff welcomed the work of the schemes as they provided specialist expertise and freed up probation officers to undertake more offending related work.
- Interviews with probation staff and offenders demonstrated that both schemes benefited from employing highly motivated and dedicated staff.
- Schemes of this nature are more likely to achieve tangible results once they have been up-and-running for some time. Regular supervision and support for all staff is an essential ingredient of an effective and well-managed project. Schemes can stall badly without this.
- Similar numbers of 16–25s on both projects reoffended (43% for ASSET; 45% for Springboard) leading to a conviction within a year of having contact with the initiatives. The reconviction rate for offenders referred to ASSET who did not attend was 56 per cent. These results are consistent with a programme effect but other factors (for example, the selection of more motivated offenders on the ASSET scheme) cannot be discounted at this point.
- Difficulties in obtaining longer-term monitoring data made it hard to draw firm conclusions about whether offenders sustained employment or training outcomes. However, the situation for both schemes improved in year three.
**Pointers for policy**

Our experience of evaluating both schemes leads us to offer the following recommendations to those planning to set up similar initiatives:

**DO** focus projects on factors that are directly related to offending. A key principle of effective practice is that programmes seeking to reduce offending should concentrate upon criminogenic needs.

**DO** ensure that both funders and those running projects are aware of the scope of the scheme’s operation. Confusion over a project’s objectives may lead to disappointment if expectations are unrealistic.

**DO** prioritise the recruitment and retention of capable and appropriately-trained staff. This is particularly relevant if the focus of a scheme should shift.

**DON’T** base contracts with training providers on block grants. Instead, they should be tightly managed, and tied to outputs/outcomes.

**DON’T** begin accepting referrals until sufficient time has elapsed for key components of a scheme to ‘bed in’.

**DON’T** regard ongoing monitoring or evaluation as an optional extra when running projects of this scale. Such schemes should have clearly-defined objectives, outputs and outcomes, and devote appropriate resources to tracking employment and training sustainability.
Two innovative Education, Training and Employment (ETE) projects were established in April 1997 to work with offenders under probation supervision. Each was funded for three years, with a view to increasing employability and reducing the rate and seriousness of reoffending. The Advice and Support Services for Education and Training (ASSET) project was based in the boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark, and worked with 16–25 year olds in contact with the Inner London Probation Service (ILPS). The other project, run by Surrey Springboard, was county-wide and targeted all offenders under supervision of the Surrey Probation Service (SPS). This report presents the results of a three-year evaluation of both schemes.

This introductory chapter begins by considering previous research on the link between unemployment and crime and what we know about ETE programmes. There is then a discussion of the aims, organisation and history of the ASSET and Springboard schemes, including the role of New Deal. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the aims of the evaluation and the research methodology.

The link between unemployment and crime

It is well established that convicted offenders are more likely to be unemployed than others. For example, a study of over one thousand offenders under probation supervision found that only 21 per cent were in employment compared with around 60 per cent of the general population (Mair and May, 1997). The figure for those leaving prison seems closer to 10 per cent, with ex-prisoners constituting between 2 and 3 per cent of the average monthly in-flow to the unemployment pool (Fletcher et al. 1998). It has proved harder than one might expect to tease out the causal relationships between unemployment and crime. Having convictions can cause unemployment, as much as unemployment is likely to lead to offending.

One approach has been to examine statistics of crime and unemployment at an aggregate level. Lipsey’s (1995) meta-analysis of 400 control or comparison group studies from 1950 to 1990 reported on various types of treatment intervention conducted on over 40,000 juveniles aged 12–21. Employment was found to be the single most effective factor in reducing the reoffending rate; however, Lipsey noted that the small number of studies
precluded definitive conclusions. Nevertheless, Lipsey’s proposals—intensive contact with offenders, close monitoring, offering multi-modal treatment packages focused around behavioural, training or skills issues—have had a significant impact on the ‘what works’ literature.

Other aggregate studies have reached contradictory conclusions. On one hand, Box (1987) found a link between levels of unemployment in one year and levels of crime in the next. On the other, Orme (1994) concluded there was no firm evidence of a consistent correlation between unemployment and recorded crime at police force level. Tarling (1982) argued that unemployment was more likely to be an indirect than a direct cause of crime, given that so many crimes are committed by those of school age and that many crimes are committed by those in employment. He suggested that the relationship between unemployment and crime was likely to be complex and interactive, both problems being related to other aspects of social deprivation or economic disadvantage.

Studies focusing on specific samples of offenders have helped to clarify the relationship. Thus when Farrington et al. (1986) compared the self-reported job history and official criminal records of the 411 young males followed up in the Cambridge delinquency study, they found that the rate of offending during periods of unemployment was significantly higher than during periods of employment. Consistent with this, May’s (1999) study of more than 7,000 offenders who started community sentences in 1993 found that, in all six of the areas studied, unemployed offenders were significantly more likely to be reconvicted within two years than those whose records showed them to be in employment.

One reason for these findings may be the difficulties offenders face in obtaining work once they have a criminal record. In a study by NACRO (1997) 190 questionnaires completed by offenders working on different NACRO employment schemes were analysed. This was supplemented by one-to-one interviews or group discussions. The results indicated that, as far as these offenders were concerned:

- few jobs were available for unemployed ex-offenders
- most of those who did find work were in part-time, temporary or casual, low-paid jobs
- many ex-offenders were handicapped by their criminal records, a lack of skills and qualifications and insufficiency of specialist services
- most had other problems which also made entering work problematic.
Fletcher et al. (1998) undertook a literature review, spoke with key individuals in the offender employment policy community in the UK, and studied five examples of employment interventions in the criminal justice system. They concluded that among the main barriers to employment for offenders were:

- employer attitudes
- criminal records and offenders’ concerns about disclosing their records
- low self-esteem, confidence and motivation
- behavioural problems
- poor health
- lack of qualifications, including poor basic skills
- lack of recent work experience
- participation in segregated social networks (which meant they lacked informal contacts for jobs)
- poverty and debt which meant they had no money to tide them over as they tried to become self-employed or move from benefits to work, or to cover the costs of attending interviews or buying clothing or equipment
- insecure housing.

Nagin and Waldfogel (1995) re-examined data from Farrington et al.’s study to model the link between convictions and job opportunities. The results of this exercise indicated that early criminal convictions can deny young offenders job opportunities throughout their lives by precluding entry into apprenticeships and training opportunities. Thus, young offenders’ long-term career advancement is limited and this, in turn, puts a ceiling on their potential earnings.

Under these circumstances it is unsurprising that central government has begun to emphasise the need for probation services to improve offenders’ practical and employment-related skills as well as using cognitive behavioural techniques to encourage offenders to desist from offending (Vennard and Hedderman, 1998). The probation service has a long history of working with other agencies such as NACRO and the Apex Trust to improve offenders’ employability. However, most of this work has taken the form of smallscale special projects, few of which have been evaluated (Crow et al. 1989). Thus, there is very little evidence on how far they increase offenders’ employability and employment or reduce their reconviction rates, or on which types of schemes are most effective.

One recent British study has suggested that direct probation intervention to help offenders gain work can be of value in reducing reoffending. Bridges (1998) examined the
experiences of 739 offenders under supervision by 11 probation services. These cases included those supervised on probation orders, combination orders and on automatic conditional release from prison. Sixty-five per cent (n=480) of the sample were unemployed at, or shortly after, the commencement of the supervision period. Among the main findings were:

- twice as many offenders who were unemployed at the time supervision started, and who received employment interventions, got jobs as those who received no help with employment
- despite this, in 55 per cent of cases where the offender was unemployed, no intervention was attempted
- high local unemployment rates could be overcome
- poor motivation could be overcome.

These findings should be treated with a degree of caution given that small numbers of cases were taken from each of the probation areas involved and that some of the effects may be due to differences in recording practices. Also, the report is unclear about how far the unemployed offenders who received help differed from those who did not receive an intervention. The fact that 20 per cent of the latter started a job indicates that at least some did not need help, whereas some others may not have been available for work (e.g. because of domestic responsibilities).

The ingredients of successful programmes

While there is a general lack of information on the impact ETE schemes in the UK have had on employment and offending, some US evidence is available. For example, Finn (1999) evaluated four prison-based programmes that aimed to prepare those in custody for employment. All four initiatives succeeded in placing large numbers of ex-offenders in employment. Collaboration with other agencies and the provision of support services and follow-up to clients emerged as key elements in this process. These conclusions are in line with the results of a number of UK process evaluations which have examined the way different schemes operate and commented on the ingredients of ‘successful’ programmes. For example, Fletcher et al. (1998) obtained details of the way 190 local projects in England and Wales were run and concluded that project development was often uncoordinated and unsystematic and that this was likely to reduce effectiveness. Conversely,

1 In the absence of outcome information, “successful” in this context can really only be taken to mean that programmes were used rather than effective.
where strong local partnerships had been built, this ensured that they were used and led to the establishment of closer and more productive links with employers. Successful partnership work was also identified by Roberts and colleagues as one of the most important factors contributing to the success or failure of community-based initiatives (Roberts et al. 1997). They also suggested that to be most effective, training must be related to real employment opportunities and tailored to the needs of local economies and labour markets.

Both Roberts et al. (1997) and Downes (1998) suggested that project failure is linked to funding being short-term and too limited. Roberts et al. (1997) also noted that tight timescales and short lead-in periods make new projects look ineffective when compared with projects which have been running for some time. Downes (1998) went on to question the quality of recruitment and selection criteria for offenders, the narrow scope of some of the employment training provided, and the failure to take account of offenders’ interests and ambitions.

The ASSET and Surrey Springboard Schemes

In 1997, ILPS and SPS each received in excess of £1 million from the Henry Smith Foundation and the SRB to set up and run two innovative, but quite different, three-year programmes designed to enhance offenders’ employability and employment. As our review shows they did so against a background of considerable interest in helping offenders into employment but little clear evidence of what effective ETE programmes would look like. With this in mind, the Home Office decided to fund an evaluation of both schemes so that the results could be disseminated to other probation services with a view to improving ETE provision across the country. The pioneering status of both projects should be borne in mind, as there was no pre-existing template for schemes of this nature.

The original aims of the schemes and changes which have occurred in each are described fully in Chapter 2 (ASSET) and Chapter 4 (Springboard). At this point, however, it is useful to sketch out each one’s key features and to note similarities and differences between them. We have also commented on a few changes which happened during the course of each project, including New Deal, because these had consequences for the evaluation.

The ASSET project was initially developed to work with repeat offenders between the ages of 16 and 25 in two inner London boroughs, Lambeth and Southwark. The initiative was designed to meet the following SRB strategic objectives:
- enhance the employment prospects, education and skills of local people, particularly the young and those at a disadvantage, and promote equality of opportunity
- promote initiatives of benefit to ethnic minorities
- tackle crime and improve community safety
- harness the talents of the local community.

The key aim of the project was to provide young (in particular black) offenders 'with the necessary skills and work experience they will require to enable them to obtain and sustain employment in real jobs'.

Surrey Springboard originated following initial charitable trust funding to establish a crime prevention project. The original aims were to:

- address the employability of offenders
- respond to the full range of individual needs
- work with serious and persistent offenders
- work with offenders in an empowering way
- use the potential of a social business (sheltered employment) to sustain the work.

Where other schemes have attempted to tackle unemployment either by training or improving business links, Springboard aimed to reduce crime in the community by providing employment, training, accommodation and leisure opportunities. They sought to do this both for offenders under the supervision of the probation service, and for those with lifestyles which might lead them into offending.

The schemes were similar in that:

- most referrals came from supervising probation officers
- guidance workers in ASSET and development workers in Surrey Springboard were employed to provide assessment, career guidance, practical help and onward referral
- both used volunteers/mentors to provide support for the offender; and
- both became New Deal Gateway providers.

The main differences between the schemes were:
• They were being run in areas with very different employment rates and prospects. At the time both projects were set up estimates of unemployment rates within Surrey Probation Service and ILPS caseloads were 50 per cent and 60 per cent respectively.2
• ASSET targeted young and primarily black offenders, whereas an assessment for Springboard was a mandatory part of the assessment of all offenders on probation;
• ASSET had contracts with training providers
• As a registered company limited by guarantee, Springboard was also able to trade, operating a recycling business designed to provide self-financing sheltered employment
• Springboard contacted prospective employers with a view to matching them with suitable probationers for employment
• Springboard also sought to provide assistance around accommodation and leisure needs
• ASSET continued to work solely with offenders, whereas Springboard developed a wider role as a New Deal Gateway provider.

New Deal
New Deal was designed to facilitate young people, the long-term unemployed, lone parents and those on incapacity benefits becoming economically self-sufficient. Its introduction in April 19983 meant that if both projects were to avoid directly competing with the government’s ‘Welfare to Work’ initiative they had to fit into its framework. Both schemes therefore chose to become New Deal Gateway providers, which involved offering impartial assessment and guidance to offenders before they move on to voluntary or paid employment or to training. This status allowed the projects to forge new links with the Employment Service and the Training and Enterprise Councils (TECS). Furthermore New Deal afforded additional links to employers and training providers signed up to the Welfare to Work initiative, thus providing additional options for both New Dealers and other probationers over the age of 18.

New Deal had little impact on numbers of offenders passing through the ASSET project. However, Springboard’s goal of working with the wider socially excluded group led to a large expansion in activities. In addition to the Gateway was the ‘Follow-on’ option, available for those who had yet to find employment. Two projects were established – the

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2 The Surrey Probation Service figure was an extrapolation of estimates for the South East (ACOP, 1998); the ILPS figure was from pre-sentence report monitoring for January to June 1998.
3 Lambeth was a Pathfinder Area. New Deal started in this borough in January 1998.
Environmental Task Force and Voluntary Service Option. These involved Springboard finding placements, interviewing clients, and then matching the two up. Springboard submitted five “Innovation Bids” to the Employment Service, aiming to provide three social firms, a transportation scheme, and extra support for employers who provided work for New Deal trainees. Volunteer mentoring was also extended. Initially, Springboard recruited and trained volunteers to offer support solely to offenders. These volunteers also provided this service to New Deal clients and expanded into parts of Southwest London and West and East Sussex.

Other changes to the schemes
During the lifetime of each project there were a number of strategic changes which not only affected the initiatives but also widened the boundaries of the research. From the outset, ASSET expanded its target population from repeat offenders to all those on orders between the ages of 16 and 25 and scaled back the full-time intensive nature of the support programme as it was set out in the initial bid.

Our first year interim report noted a number of problems around the management of ASSET which were seen to be limiting the overall effectiveness of the project. What were at first seen as ‘teething problems’ became more pronounced as the implementation of key components such as the mentoring and Jobtrack support programme were delayed. These difficulties also affected the research during the summer and early autumn of 1998. In particular, the extended absence of a key manager meant the project drifted without direction for a number of months. This had implications on the evaluation as the research team could not implement any long-term monitoring programme to track individuals with positive outcomes.

ASSET was affected by numerous staff changes during its initial two years. Low morale and feelings of disempowerment amongst staff are likely to have contributed to the high level of staff turnover. Additional posts were also added to the original team of five including a guidance worker with responsibility for mentoring, an administrator and a literacy tutor. Staff changeovers resulted in problems of continuity and a variable level of service at probation offices especially where temporary staff were employed to fill gaps. This was highlighted in interviews with probation officers. Such changes also affected the evaluation as the lack of experience amongst new staff and drops in referral rates from probation officers made the process of accessing offenders more difficult.

Finally, in January 2000 a draft exit strategy for the project was presented to the Steering Group. This provided a framework of future service delivery, staffing requirements, and
necessary budgets. At that time it became increasingly evident that the generous funding afforded to the project during its three-year pilot could not be re-secured. Consequently, a scaled-down project built around evidence of ‘what works’ was promised by the management team. Many of the new posts required for the revamped project had different job descriptions and skills from those of the guidance workers and ASSET staff were notified that their contracts would end in line with the end of the pilot period (although they could apply for new positions). Given the uncertainty over funding and the nature of the project’s future remit, it was unsurprising that all but two members of staff left at the end of their contracts, with the result that by June 2000, only two individuals remained in post. Naturally, referral rates fell in the final quarter and those staff who remained had less time to provide details of referrals and outputs to the evaluation team. The implications of the shortfall are discussed in Chapter 2.

Following the end of the evaluation, we understand that ASSET secured funding from ILPS, the Employment Service, the Further Education Funding Council and SRB to continue to support offenders into employment and training. Taking account of a number of the findings discussed in this report, the new project centres on the creation of new ‘guidance counsellor and employment link advisor’ posts. These posts put on a more formal footing the commitment to work with offenders from initial assessment through to training or job placement, with appropriate monitoring of courses attended, qualifications achieved and jobs obtained. Another key element is the secondment to the project of an Employment Service advisor who will provide information onsite in probation offices about current vacancies, screen and match offenders to jobs, and identify and process suitable offenders for New Deal options. The project has not been able to afford to renew its contract with the main training provider (MBA) but will instead second a member of MBA to work with ASSET staff so that offenders can be screened and matched to MBA vacancies and job interviews arranged. ASSET will no longer train its own mentors but, where a mentoring need is identified, these will be accessed from other providers (e.g. SOVA).

The main change to report in relation to Springboard has been its expansion. The acquisition of European Social Fund (ESF) money enabled the project to employ two additional Employment Liaison Officers, and continued funding for a third. Staffing levels also increased considerably: 13 employees were listed in the first interim report; by the end of year three there were 39. As with ASSET, staff turnover at Springboard was high. In the first two years, this made liaison with supervising probation officers difficult and hampered the collection of follow-up data. More recently, staffing stabilised, especially amongst those who carried out initial assessments of offenders (Development Officers, known as DOs). In fact, many of those currently employed in this role have been in post longer than a number of SPS officers. As discussed in later chapters, this affected the perception of Springboard among probation staff.
Research aims and methods

The evaluation was designed to examine the impact of the ASSET and Springboard schemes in terms of assessments, referrals and attendance; qualifications and jobs obtained; and to document the characteristics of the schemes so that successful elements could be replicated elsewhere. The overall aims of the evaluation therefore were to examine:

- the extent to which participant employability increased;
- the degree to which the schemes achieved their expected target outputs; and
- features which contributed to the success or otherwise of the schemes.

The evaluation spanned a three-year period. During the first two years the Criminal Policy Research Unit (CPRU) at South Bank University had responsibility for evaluating ASSET and Portsmouth University for Springboard. However, from July 1999 the CPRU assumed responsibility for evaluating both schemes. At the outset a similar approach was adopted to evaluating both sites; thus the change in research personnel had no important consequences for the evaluation.

In carrying out this research we used a range of research methods, including:

- obtaining referral, attendance, follow-up and outcome data on all offenders referred to the schemes during the three-year evaluation period as well as details of their current offences; socio-economic characteristics; work experience; educational background; employment interests; short-and long-term aims; and training needs
- conducting semi-structured interviews with the project staff and management; referring probation officers; probation management; and representatives of training providers involved in each scheme to obtain their views on how it operated and how valuable they thought it was
- carrying out semi-structured interviews with 124 offenders seen by ASSET, and 164 from Springboard, to discover their views on the help they received and how they felt it might affect their future employment, employability and offending. Follow-up interviews were also undertaken with a small number (13) to track their progress through the ASSET project
- conducting a one-year reconviction study of 216 individuals passing through ASSET and 442 from Springboard during the first year of operation; and, in the case of ASSET, comparing reconviction results with a sample of 90 offenders who were referred to ASSET but did not attend any appointments, and a group of London-based offenders (N =26) who had not been through the scheme.
The most difficult aspect of this research was obtaining a representative sample of offenders who had been referred to the scheme. Despite trying a number of methods and offering an incentive payment of £10, interviews with offenders often proved difficult to obtain. A number of methods were explored to boost numbers. These included: advertising block periods of time when researchers would be present at probation offices; writing to large numbers of offenders inviting them to be interviewed; and asking ASSET guidance workers and Springboard’s development officers (DOs) to mention to offenders on their caseload that we were undertaking paid interviews.

Inevitably interviewees tended to be drawn from those who did attend each scheme as opposed to those who were referred but failed to attend. This probably means that the sample was biased towards offenders with more positive views of the schemes and those who were committed to finding employment or training. To counterbalance this selection effect we also interviewed a sample of ASSET offenders who attended only one interview about why they had not turned up to further appointments. Three of the six offenders interviewed who had only attended one interview gave reasons for not returning to see ASSET. One said he wanted to sort out his accommodation problems first; the other two felt they had enough help at that time.

Following concerns raised in our first interim report, the Home Office asked us to further explore the extent to which those on the ASSET scheme were also accessing New Deal. This involved obtaining data from the Employment Services’ JUVOS and New Deal databases on 503 offenders under probation supervision in Lambeth. These individuals were between the ages of 16 and 24 and under probation supervision between June 1997 and December 1998. Ninety-eight (28%) of the 345 offenders on whom national insurance numbers were available were recorded as also having contact with ASSET. We obtained historical records of unemployment benefit claims for those matched up to and including April 1999. This enabled us to examine the outcomes of probationers who joined New Deal.

Both schemes made strenuous efforts to improve the quality of the data provided on those assessed. However, while the majority of assessments did result in some forms being sent to the researchers, we did not receive data on every case and the degree of detail on cases varies enormously. Both schemes also found it difficult to provide output and outcome data. This problem was particularly acute in Surrey during the first two years of the evaluation when it was not always possible to distinguish initial outputs (e.g. preparing a CV) from outcomes (obtaining and starting a job). In addition, both ASSET and Springboard found it very difficult to obtain follow-up

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4 Unfortunately JUVOS could not provide us with data on claimant histories for other benefits such as Incapacity Benefit.
data about whether offenders remained on a course or kept a job. Again the problem in Surrey was more acute, perhaps because Springboard’s action plan did not form part of the probation supervision plan, so there was no routine way of obtaining follow-up information from supervising probation officers once Springboard’s direct involvement with an offender came to an end.

ASSET initially tackled this problem by phoning probation supervisors and training providers to check on progress. From May 1999 guidance worker monthly reports were amended to provide data on relevant outcomes. During the final year of the project it was agreed two snapshot exercises would be mounted to collect longer term monitoring data. In the end one postal survey of about 450 clients seen by the project since April 1998 was undertaken in November 1999. The response rate was very poor with only 21 forms being returned.

In August 1999 several refinements were made to the data collection process for the Springboard scheme. Up to that point, Springboard systems for collating information about cases were not fully in line with the needs of the evaluation. During the third year, Springboard were asked to explore ways in which provision of information could be revised. This request was well received as it fitted well with the effective practice agenda (Underdown, 1998) to which all probation services were expected to work, which stressed the need to monitor and evaluate the impact of work with offenders so that what is held up as best practice is evidence-based. Key among these changes was a more detailed understanding of the difference between outputs and outcomes. The implications of this for the evaluation of Springboard are explained in Chapter 4.

Staff agreed to provide more information on outcome forms on the type of job obtained or course enrolled upon, along with a check on employment status both three and six months subsequent to gaining work. Springboard also supplied us with names and dates of birth of those who moved into employment following Springboard contact. These offenders were sent a short questionnaire, asking them about the nature of the work contained; whether or not they were still in this job; what other jobs, if any, they had done since then; and Springboard’s role in assisting them in this. In addition they were briefly asked questions about other key areas in which Springboard offered intervention.

Further adjustments were also made to Springboard’s data collection forms, to better reflect the volume of work undertaken with offenders. Some may not necessarily have been seen by the scheme, but may nevertheless have taken up a DO’s time; for example, the case may have involved telephone referral to a variety of types of accommodation. Other points clarified on summary and outcome sheets were: being more specific about which element of a Job Skills Workshop an offender had attended; and ensuring that accommodation
outcomes only included offenders who had changed their accommodation status, and not those who had refused a bed. Clearly these changes were desirable, but they make comparing data from the third year and previous two years difficult (see Chapter 4).

Outline of the Report

Chapter 2 describes the ASSET project in detail and the characteristics and problems of those it reached. It also examines the scheme’s success in assisting offenders into employment and training and assesses the impact of New Deal on offenders in Lambeth. Chapter 3 discusses how those involved in the project viewed it. Chapter 4 explores the nature and development of the Springboard scheme, which offenders were referred to it, and how it affected their employment and training. Chapter 5 examines how the scheme was viewed by probation and Springboard staff and by offenders. Chapter 6 outlines the impact of the schemes on the rate and seriousness of reoffending. The report concludes with a discussion of some of the lessons to be learned from both schemes and implications for the way future employment work with offenders is conducted.

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5 Job Skills Workshops were held at probation offices and run by Springboard Development Officers with the assistance of volunteers. They involved provision of advice and information on a range of services and skills.
The ASSET Project

The scheme

The ASSET project was established in April 1997 to work with young offenders between the ages of 16 and 25 under probation supervision in Lambeth and Southwark. Working on the basis of voluntary referrals by probation officers, the initiative was established to assist the probation service in its key aim of reducing reoffending through the provision of employment and training opportunities.

At the outset a multi-agency steering group was set up which included representatives from the Inner London Probation Service, London Action Trust, Focus Tec, London Southbank Careers, Metropolitan Police, London Borough of Southwark, Lambeth Employment Service, South Bank University, Lambeth College and TVE. The steering group met three to four times each year to consider progress reports from ASSET and the evaluation team.

At its inception, the ASSET team comprised five members of staff: a co-ordinator and four guidance workers. During its lifetime this increased to eight members of staff with the appointment of an administrator, literacy tutor and additional guidance worker with responsibility for mentoring. There were also between 16 and 24 mentors affiliated with the initiative at any one time who voluntarily gave up their time to work with scheme participants.

ASSET guidance workers based at probation offices in Lambeth and Southwark assessed offenders’ education, employment and training needs; carried out full guidance interviews; and together with offenders produced action plans. The purpose of initial interviews was to identify offenders’ work and training interests, examine self-image, discuss potential obstacles to employment, boost confidence and to interest offenders in various work and training opportunities. Subsequent follow-up meetings were used to provide advice, guidance and assistance to help offenders move into employment, training and other positive outcomes. The project also offered its clients grants to help fund travel, clothing, equipment and course fees if their circumstances required it. Additionally, other support mechanisms were built into the scheme to aid the progression of participants towards obtaining tangible outcomes. These aspects of the initiative, which set it apart from other probation ETE schemes, included:

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6 Regular visits are also made to probation centres, bail hostels, Youth Justice and Young Offender Institutions.
- a support programme (Jobtrack group work and basic skills provision)
- links with local training providers
- links with the Princes Trust business start-up programme
- mentoring.

Support programme

The support programme, Jobtrack, was developed to assist offenders who needed more intensive help with basic skills and finding employment and training. Jobtrack was designed to empower participants by equipping them with relevant skills to undertake job searches and develop their confidence and motivation. The programme offered two distinct elements.

The first, a part-time group work programme lasting eight weeks, was run at regular intervals. Offenders could start Jobtrack at any given time provided that the programme was running. Initially the group work component was a single accredited London Open College Network (LOCN) unit, and covers topics including: barriers to employment; identifying skills and strengths; how to make careers choices; job search and interview techniques; and advice on disclosing convictions to employers. During the final year of the project a further seven accredited LOCN units were added to the group work programme (five basic skills, one Information Technology and one personal development). This substantially increased the number of qualifications available to offenders. At the same time a franchise was established between ASSET and Lambeth College. This meant that all Jobtrack participants could be officially registered as students at Lambeth College and had full access to their facilities.

In late 1998 a new dimension was added to the support programme. A literacy tutor was employed to run a programme for those with basic skills needs. Offenders referred to this element were assessed and given personal tuition in accordance with their needs. During the course of 1999 the service was made more widely available partly because of a £10,000 grant awarded by SOVA which was used to train volunteer literacy workers to provide basic skills training from probation offices, hostels and premises of Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) in both boroughs. The assumption was that the literacy tutor would continue to assess offenders but the volunteers would undertake the majority of one-to-one teaching. Unfortunately once trained many of the volunteers left to take up other work. Jobtrack also had an open-door policy in that, regardless of whether they were on a Jobtrack programme, offenders registered with ASSET could make use of computers and telephones, access help with job search, and obtain resources such as envelopes and stamps.
Training providers

The initial bid to the Henry Smith Charity identified four vocational areas likely to have employment vacancies, promotional prospects based on personal ability and good opportunities for careers development. Established training providers offering regular NVQ training starts in ‘Hotel and catering’, ‘Construction’, ‘Office skills’ and ‘Retail’ were therefore contracted to deliver vocational training and to generate work placements. The purpose of these links was to provide fast track employment-based training for offenders leading to an appropriate qualification. The target number of trained individuals obtaining qualifications over the project lifetime was 90.

After the first year it became apparent that some of the contracts established with training providers were proving unsuccessful (Sarno, et al. 1998). In our first interim report we noted that despite over £50,000 being paid to office skills and catering training providers there had only been five NVQ starts between them. As a consequence two major changes were implemented. First, contracts for office skills, catering and construction training were terminated during the summer of 1998. The London Retail Centre (LRC), the most successful of the link organisations, was contracted to provide office skills training in addition to the retail courses they offer. ASSET maintained its links with Lambeth College, the construction course training provider, and continued to refer individuals to its courses although no further money was paid to this institution.

Second, in the spring of 1999 the contract with the London Retail Centre was renegotiated so that payment was partly related to numbers of referrals and job outcomes. The LRC offered two distinct types of training:

- an intensive two-week job preparation and customer care course was tailored so that course participants understood the needs of employers
- ASSET in Action was a work-based NVQ in retailing for those already in employment. This was designed to improve the levels of educational attainment of those in work, thus increasing their chances of promotion and facilitating movement through the job market. Incentives, including subsidised travel to work, were used to encourage offenders to start NVQs.
The Prince’s Trust

Links were developed with the Prince’s Youth Business Trust which offered advice on undertaking business plans and applying for Prince’s Trust grants and loans. The Trust itself provides a range of financial funding for 18–30s who are either unemployed or underemployed and have a viable business proposal or personal circumstances which merited support. These include:

- market testing grants of up to £250 to research markets for the product or service to be offered
- bursaries of up to £1,500 for individuals and £3,000 for partnerships to purchase equipment and pay for items such as advertising or training to enable applicants to establish themselves in their chosen trade or profession
- startup low interest loans of up to £5,000 per business to acquire fixed assets or working capital or to fund additional training for applicants in their chosen profession.

The original target outcome for the ASSET project was 15 business start-ups over the three years, but none were achieved.

Mentoring

To support the transition of offenders into employment from training, the project aimed to train a pool of mentors each year, with a target of 150 over three years. Mentors are volunteers recruited from the local community. The aim of the programme was to ‘set in place a partnership between two individuals who will work together in an endeavour to support and empower the mentee to value their skills and abilities and develop confidence to achieve future goals’ (ASSET Mentoring Programme, The Framework: A discussion paper, June 1998). The objectives of mentoring were to:

- assist in the recognition and achievement of potential and develop aspirations
- help young offenders to develop their interpersonal skills
- encourage appropriate behaviour and assist with action plans
- help prepare young offenders for the world of work
- discuss and develop awareness of opportunities and routes into further education and/or employment
- build confidence and foster communication skills
- empower them to make decisions and take control of their lives.
A large amount of work was put into developing and advancing the mentoring programme. Following a slow start, a guidance worker with responsibility for mentoring was recruited in 1998 to build a mentoring programme from scratch. In fact, only 24 mentors were recruited, police checked, trained, given on-going support. Two of these were matched with offenders. Links were also forged with local organisations recruiting mentors and the scheme was advertised in probation offices and beyond.

Project staff noted that the difficulty with mentoring is that it is hard to sell it to the client group. This is because a mentor may be just another individual involved in their lives on top of a social worker, ETE worker, housing officer and probation officer. One member of staff cited that offenders were: ‘wary about more eyes in their lives ... they don’t want people looking over their shoulders when they are not here’. Another believed: “Trying to do [matching] on a one-to-one basis does not appear to work at all. It does appear that where projects use a group approach that does have more of an impact in relation to setting pairings up.” There was also a feeling that if mentoring had been packaged a different way it may have been more successful. Rather than matching an individual mentor to an individual mentee it was suggested that meetings take place between groups of each. In addition, matching mentors and offenders for 12 months was felt to be too long and likely to inhibit participation. Nevertheless, staff were impressed by the quality of the work done by the guidance worker responsible for mentoring and his levels of commitment.

**Offenders’ characteristics**

Referrals to the ASSET project started in the summer of 1997. Between July 1997 and March 2000, 758 offenders were known to have been referred and assessed. Numbers assessed decreased sharply in year three. In the first year (to March 1998) 262 offenders were assessed. This increased to 289 in year two and then fell to 207 in the final year. There are three possible reason for the fact that fewer offenders were assessed in the third year:

- the number of offenders receiving community penalties decreased in the year ending March 2000 by 15 per cent across the Inner London Probation Service
- uncertainty about the future of the project discouraged probation staff from referring offenders to it
- despite our best efforts we believe that we did not receive all completed referral, assessment and outcomes forms.

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8 397 in Lambeth and 361 in Southwark.
Age, sex and ethnicity
In line with its targets, the project recruited a high number of offenders from ethnic minority backgrounds. In fact, 60 per cent of all offenders assessed were of ‘non-white’ origin, compared with the project target of 50 per cent. Within the Inner London Probation Service about 59 per cent of offenders starting orders are white.9 White offenders constituted the largest single ethnic group closely followed by Black Caribbean (see Figure 2.1). Five per cent of offenders considered themselves to be ‘Black British’.

Figure 2.1 Ethnic breakdown of offenders assessed (758 valid cases)

The age profile of participants varied slightly over the three years. Totals for the project are presented in Table 2.1. The most marked change was the percentage decrease in the number of 16 to 17 year olds seen in year three (down from an average of 15% in the first two years to 9% in the final year). This may be associated with the introduction of Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) in mid-1999 which served to reduce the number of young offenders being dealt with by the probation service.

The ratio of males to females is just under 9:1. The aggregate ILPS caseload figure for Lambeth and Southwark is about 7:1 (April 1999), suggesting that females are underrepresented on the project. Whether this reflects differences in availability for employment (e.g. because of sole responsibility for childcare) is not known, although previous research (e.g. Mair and May, 1999) suggests that this could be a factor.

9 This figure is based on the ethnicity of offenders starting supervision orders within ILPS for two weeks in September 1999 (ACOP Enforcement Audit, 2000).
Table 2.1: Age and gender of participating offenders (n=750, 8 cases missing)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>16/17</th>
<th>18-20</th>
<th>21-25</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>% TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>656</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% TOTAL</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unemployment amongst offenders assessed by ASSET was largely unchanged over three years. In total about 6 per cent of those assessed were in some form of employment. Almost four in five (n= 600) were unemployed at the time of assessment (see Figure 2.2).

For those for whom we had data (532/600) 39 per cent (201) had been unemployed for less than six months; 46 per cent (251) had not worked for more than six months; and 15 per cent (80) had never been employed.

![Figure 2.2 Employment status of offenders at time of assessment (758 valid cases)](image)

Current offence and sentence

Information was available on the offences committed by 728 offenders who were sentenced for 1130 offences. A third of offenders (250) were sentenced for more than one offence. The most common single offence was robbery. Eighteen per cent of all offences were robberies for which three in ten offenders were sentenced. One in five were convicted for either violence or sexual offences.
Figure 2.3  Categorised current offences (n=1,130, offenders =728)  

Figure 2.4  Offence categories by offenders (n= 1,130, 728 offenders)

10 All Other includes failure to comply; sex offences; going equipped; allowing to be carried; vagrancy; etc
Table 2.2: Sentencing/Status of ASSET clients (n=758)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% of cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Probation (various)</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YOI Licence</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bail</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACR</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Service</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCR</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/ Missing</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>758</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given the serious nature of their offending profile, it is not surprising that 37 per cent (280/758) of those assessed by ASSET were being supervised on release from prison or youth custody.

Previous education and training
Levels of educational attainment among assessed offenders was poor, with 37 per cent having no qualifications (281/758). Close to a third (240/758) had left school before the age of 16. About a quarter of all ASSET clients had GCSEs at grades A-C, of whom a third (N=55) had five or more such qualifications (see Table 2.3). In 1998/99 the national average for GCSE passes among year 11 students with five or more GCSEs at grades C and above was 48 per cent. In Southwark and Lambeth the figure was 30 per cent and 32 per cent (DfEE Secondary Schools Performance Tables http://www.dfee.gov.uk/performance/schools_99.htm).

11 This includes awaiting sentence, money payment supervision, caution, resettlement leave, etc.
Table 2.3: School qualifications at initial assessment (n = 711)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No school qualifications</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4 GCSEs (Grades A-C)</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5+ GCSEs (Grades A-C)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSEs Grades D-G only</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other school qualifications¹²</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/ Missing</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>758</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.4: Offenders’ pre-ASSET qualifications (July 1997 – March 2000) n = 758

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No formal qualifications</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE passes only</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCSE passes + other qualifications</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No GCSE passes but other qualifications</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown/ Missing</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>758</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Between leaving school and seeing ASSET 56 per cent (423) started post compulsory education or training courses. Of these, about 70 per cent (288) gained qualifications. Although two-thirds (370/556) of courses started were completed the rates of completion for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) were somewhat lower. Only 55 per cent of NVQs (114/208) and 53 per cent of GNVQs (42/79) were completed. The highest rates of completion were for ‘WordPower’, ‘NumberPower’ and Health and Hygiene certificates primarily undertaken in prison. The most common post school qualifications held included: NVQs (114), City and Guilds (44) and GNVQs (42). Of those offenders starting post-school qualifications, half without school qualifications completed City and Guilds, NVQs or GNVQs, whilst the rate for those with five or more GCSEs at grades A-C was 80 per cent.

¹² For example ESOL or non-UK school qualifications.
Previous work experience
Approximately three-quarters of offenders assessed had previous work experience (573/758).\(^{13}\) Between them they held a total 1,158 employment positions. Unfortunately, data on lengths for which positions were held was not always available, but for the 500 cases in which this was known the average (mean) duration of previous employment was 7.5 months and the median was four. A quarter of previous jobs were held for one month or less (123). The longest continuous period of employment recorded was just under nine years; the shortest was about four days. Many of the jobs were part-time and/or casual. We suspect that this – coupled with the fact that there is a large amount of missing data – may indicate that the actual average is lower than reported above. Of those with no work experience half (76/134) had recently served a custodial sentence. A quarter (36/140) were aged 17 or under.

Figure 2.5 Categories for previous work experience (573 offenders)

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\(^{13}\) Data on previous work experience was missing for 44 cases or 6 per cent. 141 (19\%) individuals had no previous work experience.
Table 2.5: Classification of previous occupations (n = 1,158 positions, 573 offenders)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managers, professional and technical</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical and secretarial</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craft and related occupations (manual)</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and protective services (mainly manual)</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales occupations</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant and machine operatives (manual)</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other manual occupations (manual)</td>
<td>432</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,158</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Just over 40 per cent of previous positions were in low-skilled, manual work including labouring, packing, cleaning, portering and warehouse work. Twenty-three per cent were sales occupations. About two-thirds of all previous employment involved manual work and only one per cent was classed as managerial, professional or technical.

**Employment and training interests**

The assessment conducted by ASSET guidance workers included asking offenders about the sorts of work they were interested in doing. The single largest category centred around skilled building trades such as bricklaying, plastering, electrical installation, glazing, carpentry, plumbing and painting and decorating. Despite the fact that nearly 30 per cent of offenders expressed an interest in these trades, only 8 per cent (58) were referred to construction courses. This should not be taken as a sign that referrals failed to reflect offenders’ interests as the most common explanation offered for this in interviews with offenders was that they did not feel the need for training in this area. Nevertheless, the record of Lambeth College of retaining participants and getting them through courses was poor. We have no record of anyone completing a construction course at the college.
Table 2.6: Offenders’ employment and training interests (July 1997 - March 2000)
(n = 727 offenders, 1,084 responses, 31 missing cases)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% cases</th>
<th></th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skilled building</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>Catering (Rest/ Bar)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail/ Sales</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>Skilled workshop</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labouring/ Packing</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>Office/ Admin</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports/ Leisure</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Computer/ Technical</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music/ Creative Arts</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>Social/ Care</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving/ Transport</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost 40 per cent of all offenders (286/758) had interest in more than one occupation. In the second year of the project the proportion of offenders with interests in Sports/Leisure dropped from 21 per cent to 11 per cent as did that interested in Music/Arts (down from 29% to 18%). In all three years, these interests rarely translated into short- or long-term aims (n=30), which suggests that these were more likely to represent hobbies rather than employment plans. Interest in IT was unchanged at 15 per cent. There was also interest in more ambitious occupations including journalism, accountancy and dressmaking. ASSET's formal links to training providers concerned retail, administration, catering and construction. Interests outside these fields were not well catered for. New Deal arrangements might have been able to accommodate such ambitions but, as discussed below, offenders rarely seemed to make use of them.

Attendance

Each month guidance workers were expected to calculate aggregate monthly statistics for the number of appointments attended in relation to total appointments booked. The attendance rate for all clients referred was 53 per cent. Attendance for new referrals was 52 per cent. This improved to 58 per cent of clients who had attended at least once before. These figures are an undercount because there was no standardised approach to calculating attendance data when the project began and some temporary staff also failed to submit attendance data.

Probation centres and bail hostels tend to have much higher rates of attendance (81%) (345/426 appointments attended) as it is a courtordered requirement that offenders be on site each day as part of their supervision or bail conditions. When hostels and probation centres cases are excluded from the sample, attendance at the three main referring probation offices was 49 per cent.

14 Unfortunately, it was not possible to distinguish how many times any one individual turned up for follow-up appointments.
Outputs and outcomes

In considering the outputs achieved it is worth noting that changes made to the way the project was run had implications for the targets set at the start of the project. In particular:

- while moving from targeting repeat offenders to all individuals on supervision orders with ETE interests may have increased numbers, it has also reduced the time guidance workers can spend with each offender
- the support programme was originally to be an intensive six-week full-time programme, with basic skills training forming an integral part of the programme. The decision was made to accredit the programme, scale it down and make it less intensive which meant it did not start as the Jobtrack component until March 1998
- the mentoring programme commenced in the second year (summer 1998) and only two mentors were ever matched with offenders.

The latter two changes may have made it more difficult for those with basic skills needs to obtain or sustain employment and training.

Halfway through the project it was recognised that some of the initial targets were over optimistic and these were revised. For example, the number of offenders expected to gain qualifications was revised down from 150 to 90. A list of the main original and revised targets and numbers actually achieved are listed in Table 2.7.

15 Offenders can gain units of a qualification by studying at Jobtrack.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.7: Project outcomes April 1997-March 2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of young people to benefit from the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people obtaining qualifications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of training weeks completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of trained people obtaining jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of employment positions obtained</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of trained people obtaining construction jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of people entering self employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of individuals doing voluntary work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 24 mentors were recruited and fully trained. Only two were matched with offenders. There were also four literacy volunteers.

Aside from the number of people being seen by project workers, these results look very discouraging. They reflect the project’s inability to track offenders once they have been referred to training or employment. Instead, the project relied heavily on the following means of keeping track of its clients:

- yearly statistics from training providers with whom the project had links
- hearsay from others working with the offender usually probation officers
- a one-off postal survey of all participants seen by the project during its last two years of operation which yielded only 21 replies.

As a consequence, while we are able to report on the number of offenders assessed, referred or otherwise helped by ASSET, follow-up data was rarely available. Thus, it is seldom possible to say whether those starting courses completed them, whether those interviewed for jobs got them or whether those starting jobs sustained them (except in the case of courses and jobs started through the London Retail Centre). This lack of monitoring had two important consequences for ASSET. First, as it was not possible to identify offenders who failed to start or finish a course, there was no way of identifying those who might

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16 Trained people includes individuals who completed the two week LRC retail training programme and those who attended Jobtrack.
17 Construction jobs includes labouring.
benefit from additional help. Second, the impact of the programme can only be accurately assessed in terms of referrals rather than jobs obtained and sustained or courses completed and qualification obtained.

**Training courses completed and qualifications obtained**

We have calculated the number of referrals to training providers and individuals who were given assistance to start a course. These included:

- 114 offenders were referred to either the Jobtrack group work or basic skills options
- 18 were referred to New Deal training to start training options
- 208 were referred to training providers with whom ASSET had links
- 81 offenders were offered training places elsewhere with some input from ASSET.

Of the 208 referrals to linked training providers, 140 were referred to the London Retail Centre. The two-week customer care training course was particularly popular (n=95), although it does not lead to a qualification. A further 13 offenders gained qualifications through the LRC. Twelve gained NVQs at level two. Another gained units of an NVQ. All but one qualification were in retailing. The other was in administration.

Fifty-five individuals were either referred or assisted in gaining places at Lambeth College of whom 17 never started, three withdrew and only two completed (GNVQ in Leisure and Tourism and a literacy course). One client gained at NVQ in catering at Butlers Wharf. Eleven individuals who attended Jobtrack gained credits at either entry or level one of the LOCN basic skills unit.

**Employment**

In total 102 offenders (13%) secured employment over the lifetime of the project. Twenty-three participants gained more than one job thus making the total number of jobs gained 134. Two-thirds of the jobs obtained were in retailing (N=82). Ninety-three were permanent; 111 were full time.

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18 Staff changes at the end of the project meant we are unable to say whether the remainder are still at college or have withdrawn.
The London Retail Centre was very successful in placing individuals in employment. Over the three years 90 employment positions were gained for ASSET clients through the LRC. However, alongside the success of LRC in placing offenders into work, it is worth noting that a high proportion have been unable to sustain their employment. During the final two years of the project LRC kept detailed employment records of those it helped into jobs. During this period 26 individuals had their employment terminated. Reasons for being sacked included: poor time keeping; falling asleep; caught stealing; non-attendance; and having a poor attitude to work. One individual lasted only one day. Another held his job for only a week. A further eight quit their jobs without going to another position. The main reason cited for this were the fact they were unhappy with low rates of pay (n=5).

The project suffered from low numbers gaining employment outside the field of retailing. The recruitment of an Employer Liaison Officer, tasked with identifying potential employers, never materialised.

**New Deal and offenders in Lambeth**

New Deal is the cornerstone of the government's social and employment policies. Designed for young people, the long-term unemployed, lone parents and those on incapacity benefits, the primary objective of New Deal is to achieve increased levels of social justice through the recreation of individual economic self-sufficiency. Piloted from January 1998 in 10 per cent of the country including Lambeth, the New Deal for 18–24s went nationwide on 6 April 1998. New Deal aims to take 250,000 18–24s unemployed for six months or more off benefit and into work. Thus, assessments are mandatory for all those within the target groups who have been claiming Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) for six months.
Entrants to New Deal are initially assessed and offered guidance through either their New Deal Personal Advisor (NDPA) or an impartial Gateway Provider.\(^{19}\) During the Gateway period short basic skills courses, independent careers advice and additional support aimed at confidence building and helping job seekers into work are available. Following on from the Gateway participants are then offered one of the following five options:

- A subsidised job with a private sector employer who will provide one day per week structured education or training leading to a vocational qualification.
- Young people without basic education qualifications may study whilst on benefit. This will offer training or education for up to 12 months.
- A six-month work placement with a voluntary sector employer with one day a week of structured training or education.
- A place on the Environmental Taskforce, the aim of which is to improve young people’s employability through community benefit projects that will help the government meet targets for energy conservation.
- Those interested in starting their own business can access support and advice. Additionally assistance can be given to draw up approved business plans.

Early research findings point to the notion that New Deal may not be reaching many young offenders on probation (Sarno et al. 1998). Research by Conalty\(^{20}\) (1998) jointly funded by ASSET, ILPS and Lambeth ES (Jan 1998 - Sep 1998) matched the names of New Deal clients with those on probation service supervision\(^{21}\) in Lambeth. This snapshot found that only 21 per cent of the caseload of the field teams were part of the New Deal cohort. Given high levels of unemployment amongst offenders on probation (57%+) and that offenders claiming the Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) in Lambeth are eligible for early entry into New Deal, this low figure is something of a surprise. During the same period only 15 New Deal clients had contact with ASSET.

In Lambeth we matched the names of 345 of 438 offenders under supervision in Lambeth between July 1997 and December 1998 and aged between 18 and 24\(^{22}\) with unemployment benefit claims. This enabled us to draw upon information on Job Seekers Allowance claims (JSA) and offenders who joined New Deal.

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19 Usually local voluntary sector organisations involved in careers advice and guidance.  
20 Julie Conalty was seconded to Lambeth Employment Service from ILPS to train NDPAs on dealing with offenders and to undertake research into New Deal and young offenders.  
21 18–24 yr. olds and includes field and community service supervision.  
22 18–24 on 1 January 1998.
JSA claims
During the period January 1998 to April 1999 69 per cent (n=237) of our matched subjects signed on. In total 390 claims were made (range 1–6 per offender). The short length of most claims was noteworthy, suggesting that there might be large-scale signing off at around six months so as to avoid New Deal startup interviews.

However, as Figure 2.7 graphically illustrates, of the 277 claims which both started and terminated during the above dates almost 70 per cent (n=191) lasted less than three months (13 weeks). Almost 90 per cent (n=245) lasted for less than six months (26 weeks). The reasons behind signing off are less clear. Of the 191 who signed off within three months (191), 21 per cent (n=41) found work; 3 per cent (n=5) claimed other benefits; and a further 3 per cent (n=5) left the country. Only 5 per cent (n=10) joined New Deal. Fifty-eight per cent (n=111) of offenders were recorded as having simply failed to sign on and thus had their benefit claim curtailed.

![Figure 2.7 Cumulative percentage of offenders signing off JSA within the first three months of making the claim (191 out of 271 claims)](image)

New Deal starts
In total 40 per cent (138/345) of matched offenders joined New Deal within the first two years of its operation. Thirty per cent joined New Deal within three months of signing and a further 20 per cent did so after less than six months on JSA. Thus half the sample made an early entry into New Deal. However, as Figure 2.8 indicates, there was a steady decline in the number of offenders joining New Deal over the two year period, particularly during 1999. In fact none of our sample joined New Deal between October and December 1999. Some of this decrease may be explained by the fact that as time progressed some offenders will have become ineligible for New Deal on the grounds of age, but it is unlikely that this accounts for all of the fall.

23 This figure was two-in-five (138) by the end of September 1999.
In total 60 (43%) of the 138 who joined New Deal were assessed by ASSET. Thirty-five individuals or a quarter of our sample joined an option. In total these individuals started 41 options: Employment 7; Education and Training 15; Voluntary Sector 15; and Environmental Task Force 4.

Seventy-one per cent (n=99) of the 138 who joined New Deal prior to the end of December 1999 had left within the same period. Seventeen (12%) left within a month Forty (29%) did so within three months. Twenty per cent of leavers left to start unsubsidised employment; 9 per cent signed on to other benefits. For the overwhelming majority (65%), however, the immediate destination of New Deal clients was unknown. When compared to the overall New Deal cohort nationwide these figures do not stack up well. Nationally 42 per cent of New Deal entrants left to start unsubsidised employment. Furthermore, those for whom their destination was unknown totalled 28 per cent.
In fact, as Figure 2.10, shows 81 per cent (80) of offenders who left New Deal did so prior to joining one of the five main options. Put another way 58 per cent (80/138) of all those who signed up to New Deal left before joining an option. These figures support the view that at least in Lambeth young offenders are not benefiting from New Deal, and the figures concerning the reasons for signing off JSA do not suggest that this is because they are starting work.

![Figure 2.10 Stage at which offenders left New Deal (n=99)](image)

**Figure 2.10 Stage at which offenders left New Deal (n=99)**

- Pre-Gateway: 19%
- Gateway: 62%
- Full time education/training: 2%
- Voluntary sector: 4%
- Environmental Task Force: 1%
- Follow through: 12%
New Deal may be suffering from the legacy of previous government programmes. Young people’s past experiences including those of school may militate against offenders either joining the scheme or putting their trust in it. Thus there is a clear need for trust between personal advisors and young people (New Deal Task Force Working Group, 1998). Previous research on young people has shown that for many government schemes are associated with: broken promises; inappropriate training; a lack of ongoing support; low pay; and unsuitable qualifications (NACRO, DfEE; and Focus Tec references quoted in New Deal Task Force Working Group Report, 1998). Other factors which may discourage offenders from participating in New Deal include an offender’s personal circumstances, and a perception that they will make more money if they work in the informal economy or by committing crime.
3: Perspectives on ASSET

This chapter discusses ASSET from the perspective of those running and administering the scheme, probation officers making referrals to it, training providers working with offenders and, perhaps most importantly, individuals who have experienced the scheme. During the lifetime of the scheme we conducted 26 interviews with project staff and management, 27 with those making referrals to the scheme, six with representatives of training providers and 124 with offenders. While comments made in all of these interviews inform the following discussion, most weight is given to third year interviews to ensure that we are reporting comments about the fully fledged project and not teething problems.

Views of project staff and management

Exit interviews were undertaken with all but one (n=7) members of staff and three managers in the third year of the ASSET project.

During the first two years there was considerable dissatisfaction with managerial decisions undertaken during the first 18 months, many of which were seen to be in part responsible for the under-performance of the project. This was in spite of concerted effort being made by managers to resolve the staff/management split in difficult and often sensitive situations.24 A range of areas were singled out for criticism including: the types of staff employed by the original management team; the split ILPS/LAT management structure25 the management of training provider contracts so that money was given out as block grants rather than being tied to performance; a lack of support and supervision received by guidance workers; and perceived powerlessness in decision making on behalf of ASSET staff. Staff expressed particularly strong views about the way managerial decisions were made without genuine consultation and how this led to a general sense of disempowerment:

“I think we are misinformed, uninformed. I think there is a pretence that we are consulted but it is a pretence. I don’t feel I am taken seriously ...... I think it goes higher than the line manager.”

“Things are up for discussion, but what we don’t really realise is that decisions have already been made.”

24 Efforts to improve staff/management relations included frequent meetings to resolve issues; external supervision for one guidance worker; and a trouble shooting session run by an outside facilitator for staff and managers.
25 The running of the project was initially managed by ILPS but staff were employed by the LAT. In early 1999 LAT took over full management responsibility for the project.
Another commented:

“There is a lack of understanding of team work, of the acknowledged experience of the staff and the clients they are working with. There is a lack of experience of staff management, a lack of decisiveness .......... and problems with decision-making.”

In the third year, many of these problems, including the split management structure and the issues around training provider contracts, had been resolved. However, staff were instead critical about what they saw as a lack of consultation concerning the project’s future and the lack of a clear exit strategy even in the final months of the last three years:

“There is no openness or willingness to consult people. The people on the ground. Those who are more informed. That has been my experience from day one of my involvement.”

“The worst thing about the project is how decisions are made. I just don’t think the way decisions are made has been beneficial to the continued success of the project.”

Guidance workers were sure that the work they did was valuable. The fact that it was designed to tailor interventions to individual offenders rather than offering a ‘one size fits all’ approach was seen as particularly important. However, they also suggested a number of ways in which the service might be improved, including: more direct contacts with employers; improved staff training; the creation of a resource library of information and contacts for staff; and better organised administrative support.

Another factor identified as critical to ensuring the project’s success was the support of probation officers at referring offices. One worker said “I think they’ve been very good. It’s developed over the three years. I think they’ve trusted ASSET and been happy with our work ...”

Both staff and management believed that the introduction of New Deal had not had much impact upon the project or been of much assistance to offenders. One of the main criticisms of New Deal was its lack of referrals to ASSET as a Gateway Provider. According to one manager ASSET was not alone in thinking that they had fewer New Deal referrals than they expected. “There have been some fairly major organisations that initially in the excitement over New Deal bid for contracts and then subsequently pulled out”. However, they also commented that the shortfall could not be blamed entirely on the Employment Service. “Equally it’s incumbent on the project to really be proactive about getting systems which ensure that we do get people through onto New Deal ... I don’t think we’ve maximised an opportunity there and there’s still some work to be done on that.” Furthermore there was a
feeling that the Employment Service were “... learning as they go along and making changes and they are receptive to new ideas and different ways of working to make New Deal work ... A year from now New Deal might be the real flagship that we were led to believe it was when Labour first launched it.”

One factor identified by staff and managers alike which had interfered with delivering good work was said to be the accommodation provided by ILPS in terms of space and resources. The problem was particularly acute in relation to Jobtrack which was based at one of the referring offices. This accommodation was universally considered to be too small and unsuitable for training. The problems this created were seen by members of the evaluation team to affect the way they carried out their job. For example, excessive amounts of time could be spent simply trying to finding an interview room in which to meet offenders. However, it was accepted by staff that probation staff and other link organisations had the same problems.

Current managers expressed some frustration about the way the project was set up, not just in terms of its management structure but also its original aspirations. One said: “When the project was set-up there was no real clarity about its purpose. It was all rather vague and woolly ...” Another believed the poor implementation of the scheme meant: “There is not a strong team culture that is proactive to go out and develop and do things. It has been more about coming together only around what is not happening rather than coming together to make plans for what could happen.” One individual went on to add: “I think it is such a shame that so much energy has been wasted on internal wranglings. If all the energy had been diverted into outputs this would have been an outstandingly successful project.”

Changing the management structure in the second year of the project was generally considered to have provided much needed clarity to decision-making. However, this also had the effect of making the ASSET project more autonomous. One individual thought this had some negative side effects as it made contact with probation less frequent and meant that ILPS played a less formative role in the later stages of the project. One saw it as “... a bit of a double edged sword because whilst I think there is now that clarity it has affected the way we have worked as a partnership ... whereas we had to have a lot more contact in the past there isn’t as much contact now and there is a sense of LAT going its own way with the project ...”

However, others felt that, though painful, the process of learning how to carry out work in partnership had been invaluable and could be carried forward to other work. As one manager commented: “I think we have learned a lot indirectly through this whole process.
We have learned a lot about how not to set up things as well as how to set things up. We were very new to SRB. We were very new to external streams of funding per se.” This uphill learning process meant: “Certainly from our own perspective we are now in a much better position to look at other tranches of funding which could help support more initiatives.”

Finally, it is worth noting that staff favoured the project being evaluated both because they thought this would ensure that other projects learned from their experiences but also because it helped to keep the project on track: “I think it’s great! It is really good that it is happening ... too many just set them up and don’t look and see how they work and what works and doesn’t work” and “... it has been the only attempt to rein it in ... it is the only thing that has been keeping an eye on the reality of what has been happening”.

The views of probation officers making referrals to ASSET

Each year we carried out interviews with probation officers and representatives of training providers. In most cases this meant that we interviewed the same individuals except when they had left their post. In the final year we spoke to 12 probation officers, five in each of the two main referring offices (Stockwell Road and Great Dover Street) and two from the Tulse Hill Bail Hostel. Throughout the three years officers’ comments indicated support for the project: “For us here it has continued to fill a resource gap which we have always recognised as needing.” They recognised the value of expert input on (sometimes fast-changing) training and employment issues. It also freed them up to work on pressing offending related work. One officer claimed that prior to ASSET “… there was such a gap, nothing was being done. We felt like we were being connected to something much bigger.” Another stated: “It’s just so indispensable to me as a probation officer. The ASSET staff know what I want, and they feedback. I just find it a very, very, accessible service to use. Also the people that I have worked with from ASSET have been extremely professional.”

We initially questioned officers about the extent to which they referred offenders to ASSET. Most maintained they referred almost everyone. One officer noted: “We are expected to refer everyone unless there is a reason. There are specific reasons obviously. If they are working or are already in college or they’ve got childcare commitments and are not presently interested in work.” Other reasons cited for non-referral included: chaotic drug or alcohol misuse; homelessness; and mental health issues.

Officers were questioned on what they felt were the best and worst things about the project. Most comments were positive. The referral process was largely seen to be straightforward.

26 ILPS has a policy of ‘inclusive referrals’ which means each offender should have reference to ETE in their supervision plan. Only those falling into specific categories are exempt.
and not demanding upon officers’ time. Most of those interviewed considered referral forms to be clear and easy to complete; however, one officer felt it was too repetitive so “by the time you get down to the [section on] training interests you can’t be bothered”.

Many commented on the ASSET staff’s commitment to assisting offenders and the positive feedback they had received from those referred from their caseload. “I think the best thing about ASSET is the staff. They are, you know, very approachable... They’re always there, they’re committed, they’ll come back to you if you need any kind of information ... and the clients rate them. Clients come back and say I really enjoy seeing [name of guidance worker]. You get a result.” and “I get a lot of positive feedback about ASSET... [offenders] find them supportive and sympathetic. ASSET staff have a sort of compassionate dimension. They understand the sort of situation [offenders] are in.”

The fact that the scheme operated in probation offices and had on-site literacy support was also highly rated. “The best thing is that they are here in the office, we have access to the ASSET worker and we can refer people” and “One of the things that ASSET has done is literacy work. That has been used by a number of my clients and has been very effective.” Links with training provider, London Retail Centre, and Jobtrack were also noted as good things about the project.

The principal concern expressed during the first two years was that the scheme’s services were not consistent in terms of their quality or availability. They attributed this to staff turnover and what they perceived as the variable quality of service provided to clients by different members of staff. There was also some concern that guidance workers were spread too thin. In some cases this was seen to be increasing the waiting time of clients to see workers. By the third year, these concerns were rarely mentioned. Instead concerns centred around how the project might be further developed, including: the need for more motivational work with offenders; the lack of access to employment based training; few links with employers; and the need for improved and more frequent statistics about the project. There was a feeling that the project should move more towards a job placement approach.

Officers were also questioned on how they felt ASSET fitted into New Deal. Few had strong views about this in some cases this was because they were hazy about what New Deal involved. Some felt that there should be a more proactive relationship between the Employment Service and ASSET and that it should be better organised. Others were more positive maintaining that New Deal added other options for clients.

Finally a number of probation officers expressed concern about the future of the project: “I
think it is a very good project. I think it’s a shame. I don’t know if I’ve got this wrong, but I know that there are moves afoot to kind of change it. And while I think that change isn’t necessarily a bad thing, I hope it won’t doom the emphasis of what ASSET is all about. I hope they look after their staff because at the end of day if it weren’t for the calibre of the staff certainly ASSET wouldn’t be as it is.”

The views of training providers
The project initially had formal links with four training providers. This number fell to one in year two – although unpaid links still existed with the construction training provider, Lambeth College. For our second interim and final reports we only interviewed one member of staff at one external training provider, the London Retail Centre. In both interviews the respondent maintained the LRC provided a good service to ASSET clients and that its programmes were flexible and catered to offender needs. The short retail training course and comprehensive job search was seen to be successful in preparing and providing work for ASSET clients. “I think it was very successful. Some of the clients who came via the training course were very low in confidence at first or they certainly weren’t in a position where they could have gone for an interview … for a lot of them the course was very good because it did give them that confidence to be able to do things like that.”

The issue of employment sustainability was seen to be complex. Some clients had lost up to four jobs. For these offenders the respondent suggested the real issue was around their motivation to work in the first place. Other possible explanations included: “That it may have had something to do with some of the employers rather than just the clients.” Late wage payments and commission rather than wages were cited as having occurred early on in the project. When questioned whether low pay might have been a factor the respondent maintained “… although the money wasn’t great it wasn’t that low. I think it’s probably just the nature of retail work. Long hours, unsociable hours, weekends. I imagine most shops have a quite high turnover of staff anyway.”

The concept of a flexible ETE project for young offenders was welcomed. The best things noted about ASSET include the fact it is a voluntary scheme; it offers flexible and independent advice; it operates out of probation offices; and guidance workers are supportive of clients. On the less positive side was the fact that guidance workers did not follow the progress of clients for long enough once they had been referred.

On a final note females were cited as being more motivated and committed to finding work than males: “There was definitely a big difference between working with girls and working with guys. The girls were far more motivated. I don’t think it’s a generalisation but
practically every girl that we had was quite motivated in terms of finding work.” The question of whether there are genuine motivational differences or a selection effect remains to be investigated given that referrals are not being made in proportion to the number of girls and women under supervision (see Chapter 2).

**Offenders’ experience of ASSET**

Interviews were undertaken with 111 offenders across all three years. This constitutes about 15 per cent of all those assessed by ASSET. It was acknowledged from the outset that the sample was never likely to be representative because it is so hard to contact those who fail to attend.27 It should be noted that by sampling those in contact with ASSET we probably collected the views of those who were satisfied with the service they got from ASSET more often than not.

The majority were under supervision at either the Stockwell Road (47) or Great Dover Street (45) probation offices. Fourteen interviews were undertaken with participants on the Jobtrack programme.28 Almost equal numbers were interviewed from each borough (Lambeth 55, Southwark 56). Thirteen were followed-up and re-interviewed within six months of their initial interview. Details of respondents’ demographic details are set out in Table 3.1 below. The sample was fairly representative in terms of the age and sex of offenders assessed. There was, however, an over representation of black respondents relative to the ILPS caseloads in both boroughs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.1: Age, gender and ethnic origin of respondents (n = 111)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White European</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Caribbean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black African</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% TOTAL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the time of the interview two-thirds of respondents were unemployed (72) although six of these were doing part-time training. Twenty-two (20%) were in training and 14 (13%) had jobs (10 full-time). The mean number of meetings with guidance workers among those

27 The way in which interviews were obtained is described in Chapter 1.
28 The other 15 took place in Kimpton Road probation office, Tulse Hill bail hostel and Sherborne House probation day centre.
interviewed was five. The median was four. Clients were asked if this was the first time they had been convicted; 51 per cent (57) said it was. The other 54 respondents had an average of five previous convictions. Seventeen (15%) had been arrested since starting their current orders. Ten were charged; five had no further action taken against them; and two were bailed for further enquiries.

Respondents were questioned about the type of assistance they envisaged getting from the project. Thirty-seven wanted help to find training; 33 with training or employment; and 18 to find a job. The remainder had various needs which included: help with getting and completing applications or doing a CV (8), improving job search and/or communication skills (5), a clothing grant (3), a creche place for a child (2), and improving basic skills (2). Nine stated that they came to see what was available and had no prior expectations. Only two suggested they had not wanted to attend but had been told to do so by their probation officers.

Over 80 per cent of those interviewed felt they had got the help they wanted. Sixty-four offenders on average had two interviews for either jobs or training. Sixty-one maintained they secured places on training courses of which: 14 completed; 9 did not finish; 35 were still in training; and three never started. The majority who had finished their studies completed the London Retail Centre two-week job preparation and customer care course; three gained LOCN units from Jobtrack; and two had NVQs. Seven had started jobs in areas including: office work; retailing; security; driving; scaffolding; and warehouse work.

All but 6 per cent of the offenders interviewed valued the support of ASSET staff. Seventy-five (68%) maintained they were very supportive and 29 (26%) judged them to be quite supportive. One maintained “She talked to me as a person – did not preach to me. She wanted to know about me not my crime.” Another felt “[name of guidance worker] believes in others, that we can achieve our goals ... she is kind, considerate, non-judgemental, honest, understanding, caring and self-disciplined”.

Offenders were asked to what extent they agreed with a set of statements about the scheme, offending, and employment issues. Answers are summarised in Table 3.2.
Table 3.2: Offender views on selected issues (n = 110)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree strongly</th>
<th>Agree to some extent</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Disagree to some extent</th>
<th>Disagree strongly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It's harder for someone like me to find a job</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's up to me to spend my time usefully</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's normal for young people to get into crime</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's not really anyone's fault if they get involved in crime</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel okay about dealing with professional people</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's easier for people who aren't working to get into offending</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSET has helped me feel I can get a job</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have got more out of my probation order/licence because of ASSET</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSET was a waste of my time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, 104 felt the help they had received was useful. Most, despite not starting jobs or training, felt they got the help they wanted. As noted, those who attended so many meetings with ASSET workers and agreed to be interviewed might be expected to have positive views on the scheme. However, negative comments were also voiced. For example, one client felt that ASSET had lost him his course place by not processing his travel grant quickly enough: “[name of guidance worker] let me down and ASSET let me down ... they did not help me at all”.

Overall, the consensus amongst those interviewed was that the service offered by ASSET was more ‘client centred’ and differed from help they had received in the past from others such as the Employment Service. One offender claimed ASSET is a “Great scheme for all people of all
levels ... it can change people. ASSET gives people a chance to change their lives.” Another maintained “It’s not very easy for black people with a record to get a job. Any help has got to be a good thing.”

On the whole offenders were extremely positive about the project. Clearly not all offenders experienced encouraging outcomes at the time of interview. Nevertheless, it appears that the accommodating personalities of the guidance workers had given many a sense of hope that someone was willing to help them and that there were opportunities out there for offenders. One client claimed “It’s really good. It really gives young offenders a chance in life if they want to make something of themselves.” Another stated “... it’s helpful because there are a lot of people out there who think that there is no hope – but ASSET has showed there is. Life now doesn’t seem so bad anymore.” Thirty per cent (n= 33) of offenders believed that the project had changed their lives. A further ten believed that whilst it hadn’t altered their lives it had set in motion a positive change that could, if there was a beneficial outcome, make a real change. This was succinctly put by one respondent who stated “It’s a good idea. It gets people working. By providing another way of life through jobs and training you won’t need to commit crime.”

Conclusions

There was a sharp contrast in the views expressed by staff and managers throughout the duration of the project. Staff were highly critical of the way the scheme was managed, in particular the way in which decisions were made and their perceived exclusion from those processes. Managerial interviews highlighted a certain level of unhappiness that staff focused too much of their efforts on ‘what was wrong’ with the scheme and not enough time on improving the way the project worked. There was also a perception amongst managers that lessons had been learnt particularly in respect to joint working with partner organisations. While the gap in staff/management perspectives was only to be expected in the first two years, the fact that it persisted in the third may partly reflect the difficulties of ever fully recovering from such a poor start. Recognising this, managers argued that the decision to effectively re-launch ASSET in the manner described in Chapter 1 seemed the only way of ensuring that the project learnt from its initial difficulties without continuing to be being dogged by them.

It is also important to note that in contrast to this rather unhappy picture of how ASSET operated from the inside, both probation officers and the offenders they supervised were generally positive about the scheme. The commitment of ASSET staff was praised and the project was viewed as filling an important void by providing much needed ETE advice which probation officers felt ill equipped to offer.
Surrey Probation Service (SPS) set up Surrey Springboard as a charity in spring 1997. The objective was to reduce crime in the community by providing employment, training and leisure opportunities for offenders under the supervision of the Probation Service. The scheme aimed to deliver an innovative programme tailored to the needs of individual offenders. Initial assessments were to be made during the first twelve weeks of supervision. They were mandatory, with the exception of substance misuse cases and those subject to a pilot scheme introduced in spring 2000 at the Staines office. Failure to attend for assessment could be considered an unacceptable absence and could therefore count towards breach proceedings. Attendance at follow-up appointments was not mandatory.

The initial assessment was carried out by a Development Officer (DO). It covered: offenders’ educational and work histories; leisure interests; and accommodation, training and employment needs. Following the assessment, Springboard either referred clients to a range of external services, or provided services itself. If the offender was unemployed and was considered to have adequate skills and motivation, a ‘job ready’ form was completed by the DO and passed to the Employment Liaison Officer (ELO) who tried to place the offender in a job. The DOs also helped offenders find their own employment through Job Clubs, and arranged for volunteers to assist offenders on a variety of skills, either through one-to-one tutoring or groupwork. Two DOs became senior DOs during the autumn of 1999. They continued to act as DOs, one overseeing the new pilot project at Staines, the other assisting in the training of sessional DOs.

Springboard operated a recycling business, which aimed both to allow for the sheltered employment of offenders not yet ready for the job market, and to contribute income to the Springboard trust. Items collected were used toner and ink jet cartridges; plastic waste; aluminium foil; and computer hardware and office furniture. Members of the Springboard social firm also assisted community service offenders in upgrading bicycles donated by the police and members of the public. These bicycles were in turn made available to offenders so that they could attend work, supervision etc. Springboard also aimed to provide advice and support for offenders seeking to become self-employed. It did this by referring to specialist agencies: the Prince’s Trust Business Start-up Programme for those under 25 and Surrey Business Enterprise for those over 25.
Changes in Year 1

Springboard’s goal of working with the wider socially excluded group soon led to a large expansion in activities. Becoming New Deal Gateway providers29 in May 1998 allowed the project to forge new links with the Employment Service and the Training and Enterprise Council. Furthermore New Deal afforded additional links to employers and training providers signed up to the Welfare to Work initiative, thus providing additional options for both New Deal and other probationers over the age of 18.

In addition to the Gateway was the ‘Follow-on’ option, available for those yet to find employment. Two projects were established – the Environmental Task Force and Voluntary Service Option. These involved Springboard finding suitable work placements, interviewing clients, and then matching the two up. Volunteer mentoring was also extended. Initially Springboard recruited and trained volunteers to offer support solely to offenders; these same volunteers went on to provide this service to New Deal clients. They offered mentoring in areas of southwest London and West and East Sussex, as well as Surrey.

As well as becoming a New Deal Gateway provider in 1998, Springboard took up opportunities to tender for Community Service and to widen its operations into the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, East Sussex, and Middlesex probation areas, although these plans were ultimately unsuccessful.

Changes in Year 2

Success at developing new income streams led to the creation of several new posts during 1998/99, including:

- An Accommodation Advisor
- A Development Liaison Officer appointed as part of the volunteer team to liaise with New Deal providers in order to recruit mentors in both Surrey and Sussex, train them up, and deal with referrals from the Employment Service
- A Training and Development Officer (TDO) and a part-time TDO assistant
- An additional Employment Liaison Officer for West Sussex, who was appointed in October 1998, and moved four months later. He was replaced after the end of the second year
- Two Probation Support Workers in Highdown Prison, providing induction, advice and bail information work.

29 The Gateway provision involves an individual receiving assessment for up to 16 weeks before referral to one of the New Deal options.
Changes in Year 3

In the summer of 1999 SPS underwent a significant reorganisation. The jobs of several administrative staff and members of support services were lost. Many of those who had held these posts were offered and took the opportunity to become Case Management Officers (CMOs). This job title was also assumed by existing Probation Officers. From July 1999, CMOs who had not trained as POs held their own caseloads, although these were restricted to low- and medium-risk offenders.

Within Springboard, the following elements were reorganised in the third year:

- The ELO role involved a scheduled surgery at the four principal probation centres in Surrey, for half a day on a weekly basis.
- In-house provision of some training previously available through SPS.
- Job Skills workshops began or recommenced at two of the field offices from November 1999.

At about the same time ‘Skillbuild’ was set up. This was a European Social Fund project aiming to improve the basic and key skills of lower-paid and lower-skilled staff in small- and medium-sized firms in both Surrey and Sussex. Two new members of staff, and one pre-existing one, conducted skills audits, analysed training needs, and offered training towards nationally-recognised qualifications. All were offered free.

The ETE Manager and one of the SDOs also began training volunteers for sessional work, shadowing the work of DOs in 1999. By April 2000, five had been trained, one of whom was due to begin a three-month spell as a paid sessional in May. By the end of the third year the number of volunteers available to the Co-ordinator had risen to around 75 throughout Surrey and Sussex. In Sussex volunteers were actively involved in mentoring young people coming through the New Deal Employment Initiative. New Deal had also impacted on the work of volunteers in Surrey, who also received referrals on these clients as well as offenders.

30 Also known as PEPSEA 2 (Probation Employment Partnership for the South East Area).
At the time of this report (May 2000) Springboard staff with responsibilities in Surrey were:

- the Director
- the senior manager
- a PA, an administrator and a receptionist/admin assistant
- a research and development manager
- a training and development manager
- a development liaison officer
- two New Deal co-ordinators
- a manager with responsibility for ETE
- two senior Development Officers (SDOs)
- four Development Officers
- one Employment Liaison Officer covering Surrey and part of West Sussex, and one working in East Sussex and West Sussex (south)
- a volunteer co-ordinator
- a senior recycling worker, supervising four workers
- one Accommodation Advisor for Surrey and one for West Sussex
- an Environmental Taskforce co-ordinator
- three probation support workers based at HM P Highdown
- two Development Officers for the Skillbuild scheme, based in Hove and covering Surrey and East and West Sussex.

Thus, the number of Springboard staff had increased from 13 at the time of the first interim report to 39 at the end of year three. In addition, five members of staff joining in year two had previously been on the programme, along with a further three in year three. Six were still working for Springboard in May 2000.

A new pilot project began at the Staines office in the spring of 2000. The pilot altered the hitherto mandatory referral so that those offenders deemed of low risk of reoffending received a less intensive screening than the standard initial assessment. Full mandatory assessments continued to be conducted with those of high or medium risk. For these cases, full initial assessments also incorporated the objectives from the resultant action plan into the Supervision Plan, a feature the Springboard Director had long hoped for.

The reporting scheme for offenders, which had previously involved volunteers throughout the county, is currently (May 2000) only active at two offices. Meanwhile, volunteer involvement as mentors, and possibly first line assessors, may increase further via a new project. This will offer all CS offenders the chance to work towards an NVQ level 1 in a variety of key...
skills. In addition to this, volunteers have been offered the opportunity to train as sessional Development Officers, providing paid cover for DOs when the latter are unavailable. Five had taken advantage of this training by April 2000. Finally, early 2000 saw the commencement of volunteer work in the magistrates’ court local to the Redhill probation office. This involved obtaining information from convicted suspects awaiting sentence, to assist the Court Liaison Officer in the preparation of pre-sentence reports.

A new pre-groupwork programme, due to begin operating soon after this report was written, promised to involve volunteers in several capacities. The volunteer co-ordinator anticipated that assistance would be needed not just administratively and at the reception area, but also to provide support throughout the series of five-week sessions, possibly including mentoring. Additional future plans at various locations – such as a children’s creche at Staines and a cookery project at the region’s only probation hostel in Guildford – all provided opportunities for volunteers.

Springboard has undergone significant reorganisation at least once a year since it was set up. A further management review took place towards the end of the third year. While the scope and speed of changes in SPS and Springboard year on year partly reflect the expansion and development of its activities, the pace of change has been perceived by staff in both organisations to be unremitting (see Chapter 5). In fact, the pace of change in SPS seems to have worked in Springboard’s favour to some extent as it has come to be seen as a consistent element in an otherwise changing universe.

**Offender characteristics**

Table 4.1 shows the age, gender and ethnic background of offenders for whom an initial assessment was conducted, for each year and overall (n = 1,808). While information on age and sex was available in 96 per cent of all cases, it was missing in 10 per cent (n = 174) where no initial assessment was received, and for which only follow-up data were available. The picture for ethnicity was distorted by the fact that in a quarter of cases (n = 450) the information was not recorded. This was chiefly due to shortfalls in year one, when 177 (38%) lacked such data.
Table 4.1: Yearly and overall demographic data for assessed offenders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year One (n = 464)</th>
<th>Year Two (n = 558)</th>
<th>Year Three (n = 612)</th>
<th>Combined total (n = 1,808)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average age</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age range</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion male</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion white</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Current offence and sentence

Data received from Springboard did not show details of current offences. We drew upon details of 243 of the 442 offenders included in the one-year reconviction study. These showed more than a quarter of offenders being supervised for motoring offences (largely comprising of drink-driving and driving whilst disqualified) and the most common type of crime as property offences. Details are shown in Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1: Offences for which under supervision (n = 243)  

Information on supervision type was available in 1,455 cases (80%). Slightly over half of those referred to Springboard and on whom this information was available (734) were on probation orders. Of these, 43 had a condition attached to their order by the sentencing court. Combination orders and various types of licence each accounted for an identical number (both totalled 329; each 18% of all 1,808 cases); 20 (1%) were on Community Service Orders.

31 “Other” includes sexual offences, perjury, and other indictable offences. “Other violence/public order” includes possession of offensive weapon and kidnapping.
Current and previous employment

The breakdown of employment status at initial assessment is given in Figure 4.2 below. Of the 1,808 cases, 1,005 (56%) were not employed at the time of assessment. Most of these (805) were listed as unemployed, of whom 21 had never worked. A further 141 were on sickness or incapacity benefit. The proportion unemployed remained similar for each of the three years, although there was a rise in the percentage in full-time employment – from 20 per cent in the first year, to 30 per cent and 31 per cent in years two and three.

Offenders often had a hazy recollection of the precise details of their employment history. As a result DOs were only able to ascertain clear information about how long the offender had currently been unemployed in 580 of the initial assessment forms we received. In other words, just under two-thirds of cases lacked this data.

Of the 580 on whom data were available, over a quarter (146) had not worked for over three years. There was little fluctuation in this figure over time. On the other hand, over a third (204) had been without a job for less than six months prior to assessment. Here, there was greater variation, with proportions of 32 per cent in year one, increasing to 40 per cent in year two, and dropping back to 33 per cent in year three.

Those in employment (n = 587) had a range of jobs. Skilled building, construction and other manual work were mentioned by 327 offenders (56% of those in work). The proportion varied across the three years, beginning at 54 per cent, falling to 49 per cent, and totalling 62 per cent in 1999-2000. Around 9 per cent each were employed as drivers, in catering or in retail.
Previous education and qualifications
Data were unavailable for 13 per cent of the sample. Of the rest, just under half (691 of 1,569) had gained no academic qualifications whatsoever. This was similar to the end of year two, when just over half the sample were without such qualifications, and higher than in year one, when around a third of the dataset had no qualifications at all. Figure 4.3 shows the highest level achieved.

Figure 4.3: Highest educational qualifications achieved before contact with Surrey Springboard (n=1,569)

Of the 898 holding academic qualifications, 376 (42%) also possessed at least one of a range of other vocational skills. Among those with no academic qualifications, other attainments were less common; nevertheless, this group held 440 other qualifications between them, 90 of which were NVQs at a range of levels. Between them, the entire sample held 1,155 non-academic qualifications, most commonly National Vocational Qualifications at various levels (in 221 cases), and City and Guilds (in 198). Others featuring prominently were health and safety certificates, building industry qualifications, and HGV or other advanced driving licences.

Self-assessed skills, job preferences and action plans
During initial assessment, offenders were asked to indicate their needs in six main employment-linked areas: literacy; numeracy; spoken English; job search skills; computing and budgeting. Of the 1,264 for whom data were available on all six factors, only 173 (14%) rated their abilities as high in all of them. The year-on-year breakdown was: year one, 41 offenders (9% of those referred that year); year two, 81 (15%); year three, 51 (8%). Computing, budgeting and job search skills were the main areas where shortfalls were noted in all three years, with three out of four rating their computer abilities as low or average.
Offenders were asked what type of work they were seeking, and could list up to four areas of interest. Twelve per cent of those asked (n = 1,539 – data were missing in 15% of cases) expressed no preference. A fifth were keen to pursue skilled building and construction work; 13 per cent were interested in a range of manual occupations (labouring, cleaning, warehouse or factory work). Others mentioned the caring and protective professions (10%), computing and information technology (10%) and skilled jobs in workshops (10%).

Preferences for computing and information technology jobs increased across the three years (7% to 12%), as did the proportion who did not express any job preference (10% to 13%). Larger increases were seen between years two and three in the proportion seeking manual labour (9% to 15%) and posts in caring and protective professions (8% to 12%). Missing data became less of a problem – whereas 17 per cent of cases lacked job preference details in 1997-98, the figures for subsequent years were less than 4 per cent.

Attendance at initial assessments

Researchers received initial assessment forms, and summary sheets detailing follow-up contacts and output and outcome information, for the three-year period from September 1997 to March 2000. The South Bank University team assumed responsibility for receiving these data in June 1999. For the first two months of the final year, therefore, Springboard development staff continued to send information to Portsmouth University.

The first and second year reports (Sarno et al., 1998; 1999) drew attention to the quality of the data available on outputs and outcomes in relation to Springboard’s intervention. As explained in Chapter 1, over the final year, steps were taken to improve this situation. This meant that data presented for years one and two were not collected on exactly the same basis as that for year three. Consequently, certain comparisons below were made only for part of the three-year period.

Both previous interim reports also expressed concern about the volume of information reaching the research team, and highlighted difficulties in ensuring that the data received accurately reflected the number of assessments made.32 Data received over the three years total 1,808 cases. This broke down as follows: 464 initial assessments in year one, 558 in year two, and 612 in year three. However, this largely reflected the fact that DOs sometimes saw offenders, or advised and referred them over the telephone, without making a full initial assessment. This applied to 174 cases – 21 in year one, 64 in year two, and 86 in year three. The only data available on the outstanding three cases was a three- and six-month follow-up check on employment status.

32 These issues, and the efforts made by all parties to address them, are discussed earlier on pages 13-15 of the Introduction to this report.
Comparison with aggregate statistics distributed by Springboard suggested that, in the first and second year, researchers received 70 per cent (464/665) and 86 per cent (558/645), respectively, of all initial assessments made. In the third year, almost the full complement of initial assessments reached researchers (612/647). In 174 cases no initial assessment was received.

Springboard aggregate statistics showed 2,939 new referrals from Surrey Probation Service for an initial appointment with a DO up to the end of March 2000. Of these 1,957 were seen. In the first year 987 initial appointments were arranged of which 665 were kept by the offender. In the second 645 of 966 appointments were kept and in the third year the figures were 647 of 986. The proportion of new referrals seen was therefore consistently around two-thirds. This was unsurprising given that referral to the scheme was mandatory and the caseload remained relatively stable.

In year three Springboard began trying to establish why non-attendance occurred. In the majority of these cases (59%) no reason was apparent; 27 per cent were offered another appointment date (although the original reason for non-attendance was unclear) and 5 per cent were ill. A range of reasons was recorded for the remaining 37 from forgetting the appointment date to being involved in an accident.

**Outputs and outcomes**

As explained in Chapter 1, the definition of what constituted an outcome (eg getting a job, starting a training course) as opposed to an output (eg preparing a CV) was refined by Springboard when the South Bank team took over the evaluation. This reflected the way that thinking on the distinction between the two had become a key element in supporting the probation service’s effective practice agenda (see Chapman and Hough, 1998).

Surrey Springboard’s initial list of outputs/ outcomes included:

- employment: the offender getting a job*
- self-employment: starting own business*; full-time contracting out but not claiming benefits*
- internal employment: a job with Springboard*
- other internal provision: completing a CV; attending a drop-in; a session on adult directions; use of a volunteer; guidance on interview techniques; attending Disclosure of Offences Workshop; supplying offender with advice about disclosure under the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
- training/ education: attending a course*
- participation in constructive leisure activity: taking up a leisure activity, hobby or interest
- other community provision: devising a business plan; Citizen's Advice Bureau; grants; bicycles; purchase of tools, work equipment or furniture; any Employment Service provision
- internal basic skills provision: Learning for Living
- external basic skills provision: adult education course in literacy, numeracy or English as a second language.

Those marked * have been treated by evaluators as outcomes, and all others as outputs.

### Follow-up work

Surrey Springboard aggregate data showed 3,322 follow-up appointments made since the scheme began. Of these, 2,452 (74%) were kept. Given the attendance rate for initial assessments of about 66 per cent, this suggested that offenders saw considerable value in Springboard’s help.

Our dataset combines follow-up appointments, involving face-to-face contact with Springboard staff and/or volunteers, with daysheet information received on outputs and outcomes, which did not necessarily stem from a follow-up meeting on the date specified. The database shows follow-up work, or advice and referral work instead of a full initial assessment, took place with 1,006 (56%) of those in the dataset. Over 30 per cent (547) had at least two follow-up meetings. Three offenders received assistance on 15 or more occasions.

As noted above the number of new offenders seen each year remained the same. However, Table 4.2 shows that increases in the number of Springboard staff enabled more follow-up support for offenders.

| Table 4.2: Change in follow-up work as a percentage of initial assessments |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Initial appointments seen   | 464                        | 558                        | 612                        |
| Follow-up work conducted    | 295                        | 633                        | 1,477                      |
| Follow-up work as % of initial assessments | 64%                        | 113%                       | 241%                       |
Initial assessments and follow-up work

Reasons for probation staff’s referral of an offender to Springboard were known in 1,186 cases; information was unavailable in the remaining 622 cases (34%). Employment emerged as the most frequent factor, specified for 41 per cent of all offenders (n = 741). Education (37%), accommodation (33%) and constructive use of leisure time (also 33%) both featured prominently. Literacy was only highlighted by referring probation staff in 9 per cent of cases (n=162), though this may have reflected initial reluctance on the part of offenders to disclose issues in this area. In less than a fifth of cases (288 out of 1634) did a DO record that the initial assessment resulted in no need for any further action.

As Table 4.3 shows below, DOs advised offenders directly or referred them to other members of Springboard about a range of needs. Employment encompassed job search skills, work placements or assessments, job interviews, and strategies to look for work. Education included work around literacy and numeracy and the provision of basic skills as well as details of training courses and qualifications. Accommodation covered not only advice and referral regarding fresh premises, but also around rent deposit grants, available to those seeking private rented housing. ‘Other’ comprised advice around a variety of issues, computing being the most common.

Referred cases indicated that an attempt was made to access a facility; applied cases were those in which offender and/or DO requested details about job, training, accommodation or leisure opportunities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provision</th>
<th>Advice</th>
<th>Referred</th>
<th>Referred</th>
<th>Applied</th>
<th>Applied</th>
<th>Ref/ App &amp; Int/ Ext.</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>698</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>829</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>239</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Results of initial assessments over three years (n = 1,634)

33 One probation service interviewee commented that new versions of PSRs, shortly to be used, would include a section on an offender’s numeracy and literacy skills.
Because of the overlap between definitions of outputs and outcomes in the first two years, Springboard agreed to conduct a trawl of past contacts, supplying names, dates of birth, and case record numbers for the offenders who moved into employment during the first two years. As the total included some offenders who had gained more than one job, and because in some cases it proved hard to satisfactorily determine an offender’s stable address, the postal questionnaire was eventually sent to 186 individuals. Ten responses were received, precluding detailed analysis.

In a separate exercise to determine employment sustainability, a sample of probation files was examined by researchers. The exercise was conducted early in 2000, with cases being drawn from those whose supervision had begun during the first three months of 1999. This period was chosen as it was potentially sufficient time for changes to occur, whilst offering up-to-date information on those whose supervision was scheduled to last twelve months or longer. Some cases were selected because they had seen Springboard; others because the dataset did not record them as having done so. In all, 38 files were seen; 28 had seen Springboard. The small numbers involved should be borne in mind when considering the results.

Findings were as follows:

- Sixteen of those known to have seen Springboard were in work before supervision began; the last reference in their file to employment showed only 14 had a job
- Eleven of these had retained the same job; however, three who had not initially been in work had subsequently moved into employment
- In addition to the 11 who had not changed or lost their job, and irrespective of their initial or current situation, eight had held at least one job during the period in question
- The reason for losing, or not gaining work, where known, was typically that the offender had gone into custody
- Of the ten who had not seen Springboard, three had not been employed prior to supervision, rising to four according to the most recent file entries
- Status beforehand for the non-Springboard group was not clear in one case, nor in two cases on offenders’ current circumstances.

It is difficult to be firm about the extent to which Springboard contact encouraged those previously without work into employment. In eight cases the jobs gained were held for only a short time; in five the employment gained (labouring, bar work, clearing houses) did not
seem dependent on any intervention listed by Springboard in the file. Other records show that appointments had been made by the supervising officer for the offender to see Springboard, but there was nothing further in the file, suggesting that the offender had not kept the appointment. Reoffending was an obvious factor influencing this. Between beginning their period of supervision in January-March 1999, and the time of the trawl during March 2000, eight had served time either on remand or in custody. Spells in prison, where known, ranged from a few weeks to over a year.

However, there was clear evidence of services being provided around employment and employability – disclosure of offences, CV preparation, information on vocational courses and literacy skills were all mentioned. In some of these there was a discernible link between the intervention and the subsequent gaining of employment. One offender had obtained tools with the help of a volunteer arranged through Springboard, and the following month began work as a bricklayer.

The overall picture emerging from the exercise was that those not seeing Springboard fared no worse in terms of gaining a job than those who did. However, among the latter group, provision of Springboard advice and information, as listed in the files, was often high. Unfortunately a number of offenders were unable or chose not to attend appointments. Therefore, although records show assistance being made available, it was often not taken advantage of.

Aggregate figures for the three years showed a total of 452 offenders moving into employment. The year-on-year breakdown was 110, 114, and 228, meaning that the total for 1999-2000 represented a doubling of the number securing jobs. Based on information from daysheets and outcome forms, our dataset showed that for the three-year period, 286 offenders gained work. The type of work involved is listed in Table 4.4 below. Whilst this was still short of the total shown by Springboard’s aggregate statistics, it suggested that the disparity between the two sets of data was successfully addressed in the past twelve months. A total of 88 jobs were discernible from outcome forms at the time of the second interim report – at that time barely a third of the aggregate figure of 224.
Table 4.4: Type of employment gained over the three years where full data sets were available (n = 286) - aggregate data = 452

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Number starting work</th>
<th>Percentage of those starting work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skilled/unskilled manual work</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers/administrative/office</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving/transport</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening/farming</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring/protective professions</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catering</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative arts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport and leisure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other unknown</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of cases in which the nature of the work was unspecified was unfortunately high; however, of these, the majority (76) originated from the first two years’ worth of data received. By year three it was possible to describe the type of work commenced in a far higher percentage of cases. The value of continued contact with offenders was shown by the fact that four-fifths (228) of these offenders gained employment after one or more follow-up appointments. Four found work after ten sessions with a DO.

The three- and six-month checks on employment sustainability provided data on 188 offenders who obtained jobs. This showed that while most succeeded in keeping their jobs after three months (125, including four in either part-time or casual employment), others left for a variety of reasons. Some indication of the transient nature of the job world for many offenders, noted in the first interim report, was evident from the fact that 15 (8%) had found new employment. Table 4.5 documents progress.
In all, nearly three-quarters of all those initially in work (n = 140) were known to still have a job three months later. Comparisons with Springboard aggregate data were not possible as the scheme did not collate this information in its first year. Nevertheless, aggregate figures for 1999-2000 (up to January) showed a similar sustainability rate, of 73 per cent. This also represented an improvement of 9 per cent on aggregate data to the corresponding month of 1998-99.

The picture was less clear after six months, as in 43 per cent of cases no follow-up details were known. All 188 cases were considered, the justification being that an offender who was initially employed may have lost a job after three months, then found another one three months later. This proved the case for five individuals. In all, 74 (39%) of the original 188 were known to be employed at the six-month stage.

Reasons for no longer being employed are shown in Table 4.6. Offending-related matters emerged as the most common factor. These included problems around disclosure of previous criminal history to an employer (3), as well as new offences (16). Other pressing issues, such as accommodation (2), substance misuse (4) and health problems (9) were also frequently mentioned, though voluntary reasons for leaving, such as leaving the area (6), going to college (5), or having a baby (3), were equally prominent.

### Table 4.5: Employment sustainability over three and six months (n = 188)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Type</th>
<th>After Three Months</th>
<th>After Six Months</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed part-time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual employment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed in new job</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As described in the methodology section, comparison of Springboard aggregate statistics with database information across the entire period was difficult due to changes in the provision of information made throughout the life of the evaluation. Aggregate figures from Surrey Springboard showed 2,186 accommodation referrals made since the scheme began: 856 in year one, 535 in year two, and 795 in year three. The dataset, based on information received from the development team, contained a total of 944 accommodation referrals for the entire three years. Of these, 230 were referrals for a rent deposit grant.

Springboard data since 1997-98 showed exactly 1,000 accommodation outcomes during the first three years. Again, the first year proved the busiest (accounting for 464 of these), while the next two years showed 313 and 223 respectively. Our own dataset listed 330 outcomes to the end of March 2000, the year-on-year breakdown being 47, 94 and 187. Taking into account successfully acquired rent deposit grants (which we have classed as outputs) increased this by 37, chronologically consisting of 14, 5 and 18, making a combined total of 367 outputs and outcomes.

### Table 4.6: Reasons for losing employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AFTER THREE MONTHS (N = 45)</th>
<th>AFTER SIX MONTHS (N = 26)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing/substance misuse/health issues</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offending-related issues</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left employment of own accord</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment was temporary only</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacked</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.7: Throughputs between June 1999 and March 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Advice</th>
<th>Referral</th>
<th>Output</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent deposit grant</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostel</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private rented</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External employment</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employment</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal employment</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other internal provision</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job interview with ELO</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal work placement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External work placement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training/education</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructive leisure activity</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other community provision</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic skills (internal)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic skills (external)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The general decrease in numbers apparent from aggregate data, compared with the overall rise shown by the daysheets, reflected the past problems, and subsequent improvements, in gathering throughput and outcome data. The South Bank team was able to audit ten months' worth of data, those sent to them between June 1999 and March 2000. Table 4.7 was derived from these and shows figures for advice, referral, outputs and outcomes.

Over the three years 109 places were gained on training programmes. The range of courses in question is presented in Table 4.8. The distribution across the three years was 20, 45 and 44. However, in four out of five cases no details were available of the type of course undertaken.
Table 4.8: Training and education (n = 109)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Number of offenders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computing/IT</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled workshop/manual work</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring/Protective</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driving</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catering</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalism</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Safety</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince’s Trust</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Springboard have produced a draft business plan for the development of the organisation. Dated January 2000, the underlying premise is that the primary purpose is to move the long-term, socially excluded unemployed into long-term, secure employment. The primary group towards whom this will be focused is current offenders.

The plan is divided into three stages:

- the move to being employable
- the move from employable to employed
- the move from employed to securely employed

Stage one involves three developments. The first will see distinctions between Springboard Development Officers and New Deal co-ordinators removed, replacing this with one role, that of case manager, who would work with either client group. Secondly, development of the social firm aspect of Springboard’s activities, with an investigation of the potential for joint initiatives and partnerships. An example is a project providing bicycles, in association with Surrey Oaklands Mental Health Trust. A third feature will be delivery of specific training to meet locally identified skill shortages. This is something Springboard have hitherto avoided, on the basis that the diverse nature of employment in Surrey made such single topic work non-viable, but now feel it appropriate to reassess.

Stage two has four strands. Responsibility for an individual case will pass from the DO to the Employment Liaison Officer, once the person is judged to be employable. Secondly, the
same service will be offered to all groups Springboard work with; to date, the ELO has not assisted in finding work for New Deal clients, despite the fact that Springboard receives extra funds for people on the scheme who move into work. Thirdly, with sufficient funding, the scheme will look at carrying out a similar role for other client groups. Finally, Springboard aims to increase the support offered to employers, to encourage them to be well-disposed towards the scheme.

Stage three comprises three elements. The first is continued provision of training to employers, via the Skillbuild project. The second is expansion of these activities to offer a wider range of services, either directly or through brokering. The third will see an increase in service to encompass individual advice on training and related issues to individuals who others have placed in sheltered employment within Springboard. This would entail Skillbuild workers assuming a case manager role.

Other areas of proposed development:

- pre-assessment: awareness of opportunities to expand work within the prison system
- accommodation: investigation of the potential of partnership(s) with a housing association, with a view to direct provision of accommodation for difficult-to-place individuals, such as sex offenders
- volunteers: extension of volunteer work to all geographical and operational areas Springboard operate in. This will include, respectively, work in East and West Sussex, and support for the ELO by mentoring
- geographical location: prioritisation of work within current areas of operation – Surrey, West and East Sussex, and the London Boroughs of Sutton, Merton and Kingston. Beyond that, the focus will be within the boundaries of the Government Office for the South East of England.
This chapter discusses Surrey Springboard from the perspective of those running and administering the scheme, those referring offenders to it, training providers and offenders. Over the first three years of operation, a total of 61 interviews were carried out with project staff, 70 with those referring to the scheme, five with training providers and 164 with offenders. While comments made in all of these interviews informed the following discussion, most weight was given to third year interviews to ensure that we reported comments about the fully-fledged project and not teething problems or previous arrangements. This was particularly important given the number of changes made to the Springboard scheme over this period.

As noted in Chapter 4, both Surrey Springboard and SPS experienced a high staff turnover in the three years. This meant that we rarely interviewed the same people twice. Consequently (and unlike ASSET) only a few respondents were able to comment on changes in the delivery of the project.

**Staff views**

By the end of the third year, Springboard’s managers were generally pleased with the way the project had developed. In particular, it was not dependent on any single funder, and the operation did not stand or fall on whether or not the recycling business turned in a profit. Income of over £1m had been generated in 1999-2000, largely through charitable trusts, European Social Fund money, New Deal, and SPS. This compared with just under £600,000 in year one.

The recycling component was also making slow but steady progress in employing offenders to run it rather than simply be employed by it. Other achievements in the third year included an increase in the number of employment outcomes achieved by offenders seeing Springboard staff, although there was keenness that this should not be taken as a sign that other work which did not result in a direct employment outcome was less valuable. The Staines pilot of shorter assessment procedures was also considered to be an important development, not least because it was said to incorporate SMART\textsuperscript{34} outcome measures.

\textsuperscript{34} An acronym drawn from the adoption of output and outcome measures that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time scale attached.
Other positive developments were the high profile the project had managed to achieve among sentencers and voluntary associations in Surrey. A Springboard website (www.surreyspringboard.com) had also been revamped to further disseminate information about the project.

High staff turnover in Surrey Probation Service had meant that much of the resistance development staff had encountered in previous years had largely disappeared. New SPS staff had generally welcomed Springboard’s input in relation to employment and accommodation.

Continuing problems concerned:

- referrals to DOs. These were not always made promptly, with the result that Springboard sometimes assumed a crisis intervention role, for which it was not set up or staffed
- liaison with SPS over the incorporation of Springboard action plans into supervision plans, which had been raised early in the project but was still not operational other than at the pilot site. Reorganisation of Surrey Probation Service, and the contraction of the team at SPS headquarters, had created “absolute chaos” and made the situation much harder
- restructuring of SPS made publicising the project’s existence a continuous process
- access to the SPS computer system for those employed by the social firm which was being resolved by setting up a discrete Springboard system.

Staff changes in SPS had created anxieties about Springboard’s future as it had taken some time to renegotiate Springboard’s contract, though this had now been done.

Concerns raised in earlier reports that when Springboard became a New Deal Gateway provider, offenders and non-offenders would receive joint services had not been borne out as workshops were not run jointly for both groups. Only the Gateway option of New Deal was offered at probation centres, and this had been little used. Fusing the DO and ND advisor was regarded as rationalising Springboard’s activities to minimise duplication and fragmentation of services.
The project team
In contrast to year two, DOs interviewed at the end of the third year had been in post for some time, all of them since at least September 1999. Most shared the view that the staff were now more consolidated, and that a better base existed as a result. Four felt the scheme had expanded at a surprising rate, and that as a result there was always something new to learn. One believed the pace of change 18 months previously had in fact been “pretty frightening”, and that the organisation had grown too quickly in that period.

Opinions on the desirability of Mandatory Initial Assessments (MIAs) varied by office. Three had noticed an improvement in its enforcement over the last 12 months. They attributed this either to their own efforts in reminding SPS staff, or to the fact that SPS staff recruited during the summer 1999 restructuring were now more aware of this aspect of their role. One DO’s view was that enforcement of the process was “the SPO’s responsibility, and ours thinks the CMOs [Case Management Officers] should decide”. One stressed that the purpose of the MIA was crisis prevention – the earlier the facts were available, the more effective work could be achieved.

All members of the team felt they enjoyed good working relationships with SPS staff. Those who had been in post longer underlined how this had improved over time. One commented:

“In the past it was a horrible environment, dreadful. Not friendly. Now, probation staff are coming in fresh, a lot of them from support services, and at the same time Springboard is more established. We’ve earned respect. Also, I now know how to say ‘No’. In the past, because there was a bad atmosphere, I wanted to please them, so I’d do anything, and it sets bad precedents, things would snowball completely out of control and you couldn’t backtrack. There’s far more liaison now, and more discussion.”

Poor referral rates was one of many repercussions initially felt by Springboard following the influx of new probation staff due to restructuring. Two mentioned how difficult it had been for them to access SPS-run training, which resulted in Springboard paying for the same courses delivered by the same trainer. Three expressed concern that CMOs had not received sufficient training, and that this had altered the nature of the service Springboard was providing:

“There’s been pressure on DOs because the reorganisation has put pressure on SPS staff. DOs get infected with the panic when an offender has a sudden need. It’s hard not to get sucked into the human aspect, and to overstep boundaries. If someone’s down there in distress, it’s hard to say ‘Sorry, I’ll see you in a few days’ time.’”
Springboard staff were asked how well they felt various aspects of the scheme worked. Five felt the ELO role had been much more effective since the system of regular booking times at each of the four main offices was introduced in November 1999. Two reported good feedback from nearly all offenders. Prior to that the focus of the work had been in forging linkings with employers. The benefits of this were considered less immediate, though one DO bemoaned the lack of local sympathetic employers, saying there were none in two of the three boroughs covered by the probation centre. The main difficulty mentioned was the fact that constructive ELO work often required more than one meeting with an offender, and this left current resources stretched.

Following the appointment of the first volunteer co-ordinator towards the end of 1997, a more streamlined service was reported. Those who could draw on experiences before the third year shared the view that great strides had been made in volunteer work over the last 12 months. The co-ordinator was particularly valued for her enthusiastic and committed approach to a very time-consuming job, and volunteers’ assistance with job search skills was also rated highly. Problems noted above in recruiting and retaining volunteers meant that there was a shortage of those available to assist with literacy and befriending tasks. Other suggested areas for improvement were: greater availability of volunteers at short notice, more systematic and practical reporting back from volunteers to the co-ordinator – which she was in the process of organising – and an option to contact volunteers directly (rather than through the co-ordinator) for routine tasks such as literacy help.

Most staff felt they were well managed. Line management was described as “open-minded and forward-thinking”, “very informal and positive”, “excellent, supplying all the information I need”, and “really supportive”. Some concerns were expressed, however. One felt that the level of contact above that was minimal, making it easy to forget that often decisions conveyed by the line manager had in fact been taken at a higher level within the organisation. Two commented that delivery of training had been too sporadic, and supervision had taken place either too late or not at all. This was attributed to staff absence through sickness, and a perception that, over several months, a lot of Springboard’s organisational energies had been devoted to the abortive CS takeover.

Few members of the team had seen New Deal clients. Only one had a strong desire not to work with them, whilst fully understanding the financial benefits of Springboard’s involvement.

There were mixed feelings about the pilot project at Staines. Incorporation of SMART targets was hailed as a good idea. However, doubts were expressed about the degree of
confidentiality and safety afforded by the redesigned, open-plan reception area. Two raised the practical consequences of giving over such a large area to the pilot when interview space elsewhere in the building was at a premium. An alternative suggestion was to staff the area at two designated times each week. The wisdom of abandoning the MIA, when experience had shown useful work could still be done with low-risk offenders, was also questioned.

A range of other concerns were expressed. Four believed that, despite the progress Springboard had made, it was hampered by scarce resources, and partial planning. This was exemplified by one interviewee:

“We can’t yet compete with bigger organisations in terms of publicity. Plus, there are grand ideas, and good intentions, but there is no substance behind some of it. There’s very much a suck-it-and-see approach, dealing with problems as they arise. There needs to be more back-up, resources and training to support initiatives, and [a] look at ways of making things work effectively in practice.”

Four felt more training would be appropriate, especially on issues that were not strictly within their remit, but which they quite often dealt with in practice, such as benefits advice. One emphasised that, although formal training was important, there was a need to acknowledge the on-the-job nature of DO skills acquisition, believing that it was unrealistic to expect a DO to master all aspects of the role within a matter of weeks. The need for higher profile SPS support was also mentioned.

Views were split on the proposed forthcoming withdrawal of Springboard access to CRAMS. This was best expressed by one interviewee:

“It’s not such a bad thing to have to go into a PO’s office to look at an offender’s file - it maintains contact. The downside is it makes the break wider between the two agencies. Not having CRAMS will put the ball back in SPS’ court. At present we spend far too much time chasing paperwork. We don’t stick to protocols, and it papers over the cracks. If things go wrong, we’ve then set ourselves up as a target.”

Springboard’s business plan, documenting the organisation’s future direction, was broadly welcomed. Three felt it justified, with appropriate training input, to fuse the DO role with that of the New Deal Claimant Advisor, and to strengthen links with other Springboard staff. With increased levels of staff, there was also support for handing job-ready cases over to the ELO; it was felt that the demands of the role made it sensible to spread the ELO
workload. Some reservations were expressed though: five were concerned about how the theory would translate into practice and two were concerned about how the focus of the job might shift. As one put it:

“Making new links is fine. We should be speaking more to the Support Workers at Highdown, and I’ve never met any of the New Deal advisors. The problem is time. Most if not all the team would have to be there for training on the same day. Also, some might say New Deal will take priority, because every time we see a New Deal client, we get money.”

Volunteers

The eight volunteers interviewed in the third year of the project were generally more experienced and had been with the project longer than those in the previous years. Four were entirely satisfied with the sufficiency of training they had received, though one felt the induction had been rather slow, and two continued to feel daunted when taking literacy tuition. All three of those who had firm expectations (to learn about and work within the criminal justice system) said these had been fulfilled. One even expressed surprise at the level of involvement possible for volunteers, and at the range of interventions Springboard offered.

Activities undertaken included: the job skills workshop, literacy and numeracy, court liaison work, disclosure of offences, assisting in the co-ordination of reporting schemes, provision of benefits advice, groupwork, accompanying offenders when spending grants, and work with New Dealers. Most volunteers both approved and saw the logic of Springboard’s involvement in New Deal.

Most found offender attendance unreliable. However, this varied depending on the type of activity. Two felt the job skills workshop, for example, was well used. Overall, there was a pragmatism that non-attendance went with the client group.

Contact with SPS staff varied both in level and quality. On the positive side, volunteers spoke of great supportiveness and willingness to chat after reporting sessions.

Direct feedback from offenders was rare. Satisfaction came from being valued by Springboard staff and achieving things with an offender. Concerns ranged from practical matters, such as confusion over travel expenses, to lack of knowledge about the progress of an offender, to procedural misunderstandings which had led to confusion around the court work, literacy tuition and sessional training. One, echoing key points of the new business plan, suggested that Springboard seemed fragmented, and that it should be condensed, as resources were limited and employees were categorised into overly narrow bands.
Probation staff

Interviews in year one revealed considerable variation in views according to which probation team they belonged to and how long they had worked for the service – with newer staff expressing more positive views. Staff interviewed in year two saw three main advantages to Springboard: the specialist expertise it offered; the fact that POs could spend more time addressing offending behaviour; and the fact that it gave offenders the opportunity to engage with someone who was not a representative of a criminal justice agency. However, half of those interviewed regarded the MIA as a waste of time or an erosion of their discretion. Eight of the 28 interviewed felt Springboard’s expansion into New Deal had left it insufficiently focused on offenders, and half wanted better procedures to ensure the scheme was delivering what it promised.

Reaction from those interviewed in year three was consistently more positive. There was widespread appreciation of the work done by the Springboard development team. All those who had fixed expectations said that these had been met, and in some cases exceeded. Some said that, though their expectations had initially been modest, these had grown as they had become more aware of Springboard’s capabilities. Respondents praised members of the development team for their professionalism, knowledge, resourcefulness, prompt provision of information, and observation of role boundaries.

As noted above most respondents were not the same people who had commented on Springboard in the previous two years. However, those who had spent sufficient time supervising caseloads in SPS compared Springboard’s work favourably with the achievements of their predecessors, the Community Programme Development Officers.

Assistance offered to probationers by DOs on housing issues was especially valued by all those interviewed in year three. The extent to which Springboard helped offenders directly into employment was viewed with more scepticism. Volunteer input was generally well received, especially in relation to literacy skills and through assistance in running reporting schemes, although three officers were concerned that volunteers sometimes overstepped role boundaries.

MIAs were welcomed by all but two interviewees in year three, though a further five described it as “occasionally slight overkill” and felt more discretion for lower-risk cases would be appropriate. Officers differed in their views on Springboard representation at team meetings. Overall, staff did not favour a routine presence throughout each meeting, but thought inviting DOs for input on specific issues might be beneficial.
New Deal involvement was not a major concern for respondents in year three. Worries still existed that offenders would rub shoulders with New Deal clients at probation offices, but these were now less prevalent. Most did not have strong views on this provided the service to offenders was not compromised. The logic of developing new income streams, and of staff broadening their expertise, were both mentioned, as well as perceptions on the part of the client that Careers Service and Job Centre staff came across as judgmental on occasion.

Several ideas were put forward by year three respondents on how Springboard might be improved. Suggested refinements to existing practices were:

- more resources/staff
- reducing paperwork and using email instead. Some felt bombarded by almost too much feedback
- redesigning the referral form to enable clearer prioritisation of interventions
- greater discretion for probation staff in the referral process
- increased focus on the practical issues of jobs, training and housing, as opposed to leisure activities
- more clarity from senior levels of SPS on their requirements of Springboard
- better demonstration of outcomes.

Possible new initiatives mentioned were:

- training on risk management
- clearance to accompany probation staff on visits to prisons outside Surrey, to see offenders due to be supervised by SPS on licence
- raising Springboard’s profile
- taking a bigger role in developing more partnerships
- exploration of the capacity to further integrate Springboard into the supervision process.

Views of employers and training providers
Four employers were interviewed at the end of year one. Three had positive views, while one was less positive. Each had employed between one and four offenders from Surrey Springboard. The three content with the service all trained applicants on the job, and none had an explicit policy about disclosure of offences, leaving this up to the individual. One suggested it would be useful to be more aware of Springboard’s vetting process, and stressed that regular visits from the ELO were important. All said they would incorporate Springboard into their recruitment strategy in the future. The fourth company experienced
difficulties with two of their placements who it later emerged were substance misusers. Lessons learned for employment liaison were: the need for thorough appraisal of the work at prospective placement sites; the importance of proactive contact, especially in the early stages of a placement, between ELO and employer; and ongoing clarification of an offender’s ‘job-readiness’.

During year two we interviewed the student services manager of a local college offering courses in tree surgery, landscaping and animal care. Springboard had contacted him to see if the college could assist its clients in any way. Typically offenders attended on work experience, to gain awareness of what the college had to offer. The manager felt that offenders had less confidence than other students, and saw part of the college’s role as encouraging offenders to assume more responsibility, not simply teaching them. Springboard had offered the college the opportunity to attend their meetings, and overall he found them very flexible and considerate.

**Views of offenders**

One hundred and ten offenders were interviewed by the Portsmouth team in the first two years and 54 were interviewed by South Bank in the third year. As noted in Chapter 1, those interviewed are likely to be biased towards those with a positive view of Springboard.

About 90 per cent of respondents were male and more than 95 per cent were white. The average age was 30 in the third year and 28 in the previous two years. Fewer interviewees in 1999-2000 were employed – 16 (30%) as opposed to 52 (47%) in the previous years. Only three of these (all interviewed by the Portsmouth team) said they had obtained their job directly through Springboard. Around three-quarters of the offenders interviewed had previous convictions. Two-thirds of those interviewed were on probation orders. The rest were split equally between licence cases and combination orders, with three on community service orders.
Table 5.1: Responses of interviewed offenders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Years 1 and 2 (n = 110)</th>
<th>Year 3 (n = 54)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you consider Springboard a good idea before you saw them?</td>
<td>95 (86%)</td>
<td>30 (56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you consider Springboard a good idea once you had seen them?</td>
<td>84 (76%)</td>
<td>45 (83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were Springboard supportive of your needs?</td>
<td>100 (91%)</td>
<td>36 (92%(^{35}))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did the help Springboard offered prove useful?</td>
<td>83 (75%)</td>
<td>42 (86%(^{36}))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you return to see Springboard in future if your needs changed?</td>
<td>105 (95%)</td>
<td>49 (91%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you been breached since starting your current order?</td>
<td>17 (15%)</td>
<td>10 (19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you been arrested since starting your current order?</td>
<td>28 (25%)</td>
<td>15 (28%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 5.1 shows, offenders interviewed during the first two years had higher expectations but lower satisfaction levels than those interviewed in year three. However, more than three quarters of both groups felt Springboard was worthwhile following contact. Constructive use of leisure time receives equal billing alongside employment, training and accommodation in Springboard’s list of aims; however, it was consistently mentioned by smaller proportions of both samples as an issue which Springboard sought to address.

In the third year, high proportions of offenders felt that Springboard staff had been supportive and had offered useful help.

Those interviewed in the third year were similar to those in the previous two years in terms of age and sex. They also had lower expectations of Springboard before contact and slightly higher rates of breach and rearrest. This makes it unlikely that sampling differences would favour Springboard in the third year. Rather the results suggest that as the programme has developed it has provided a better service to offenders and been more highly valued by them as a result.

\(^{35}\) Only 39 were asked this question.

\(^{36}\) Only 49 were asked this question.
Conclusions
Perceptions of Springboard became more favourable as the scheme progressed. In part this reflected the bedding-in process that often occurs with new partnership initiatives. However, it was clear that praise for Springboard, both within the organisation and from probation staff and volunteers, also stemmed from the quality of assistance to offenders on a variety of issues. Increasing numbers of interviewed offenders spoke positively of the contact they had had with Springboard. The scheme’s aim of working with offenders and other socially excluded groups was generally welcomed. However, training, resources and publicity were all earmarked as areas that needed improving. The extent to which Springboard could play a full role in assisting offenders was also shown to be highly dependent on the structure and staffing of Surrey Probation Service.
This chapter presents the preliminary results of a reconviction study. We discuss its rationale, its methodology and its significant limitations. The analysis compares reconviction rates for the Springboard and ASSET offenders, as well as comparable groups of young offenders.

The ultimate objective of both schemes was to reduce reoffending. Although varying methods were used to achieve this goal both projects endeavoured to do this through the provision of ETE advice and support leading to sustained employment in real jobs. Examining reconviction rates is a standard approach to assessing whether an intervention (in this case ETE advice) has had an impact in reducing reoffending. Reconviction rates are an important indicator of whether a particular input has been effective (Hedderman, 1998).

Nevertheless, there are a number of limitations and complexities when comparing the reconviction rates of varying inputs (Mair et al. 1997). These are as follows:

- reconviction rates are not necessarily a true measure of reoffending
- they are a product of a multiplicity of factors including police and prosecution practice which varies over place and time
- numerous factors are likely to impact on rates of reconviction including: age; sex; number and rate of previous convictions; the type of sentence they received; and social factors such as whether they have a drug addiction
- distortions within reconviction databases can occur, for example, when a conviction occurs in the reconviction period for an offence that was committed before the current penalty was imposed. A situation could also occur when an offender commits an offence within their reconviction period but is not convicted until after the follow-up period. These anomalies (pseudo-reconvictions and pseudo-nonconvictions) can be difficult to unpick and are likely to distort actual reconviction rates. Despite the use of PNC data, and its emphasis on the date of reoffence, pseudo-reconvictions can occur if an offender is reconvicted subsequent to their Police National Computer (PNC) record being used
- it is extremely difficult to construct accurate reconviction databases.
In exploring recidivism we have examined the reconviction rates of participants on both the ASSET and Springboard projects. In the case of ASSET we have undertaken a comparative examination of reconviction rates between:

- scheme participants (n = 216)
- offenders referred to the project but who did not attend (n = 90)
- and a sample of young offenders who will have received a ‘normal’ dose of ETE advice in a similar borough (n = 26)

The intention here was to test whether offenders who received advice and support from the ASSET project had lower rates of reconviction than the two comparative samples. No comparison work was done in Surrey as the Springboard scheme was mandatory for all offenders passing through Surrey Probation Service, and we were unable to assemble an appropriate comparison group from elsewhere.

We compared one-year reconviction rates of a sample of all offenders seen by the ASSET and Springboard schemes up to and including March 1998. We could not collect two-year data for the full sample. Data were collected for the same period for participants on the comparison project in Hackney and those referred to ASSET who failed to attend. The samples included offenders who at the time were either serving community penalties such as probation or community service orders or were on licence following release from prison. They were matched with conviction and caution data from the PNC.

The decision was made to use PNC data following cross-checking between this and the alternative reconviction database, the Offenders Index (OI). This revealed much lower rates of reconviction on the OI files – even when we discounted cautions recorded by PNC. Perhaps the most likely explanation is inconsistent returns from courts who supply OI data, though it is possible that lower OI rates reflected the fact that offences resulting in a caution were not included. Another potential reason was that the returns are made to the Home Office at a much later stage than for the PNC. A further benefit of using PNC data was that it provided the date of offences as well as the dates on which cautions or convictions occurred. It makes more sense to use reoffending dates than reconviction (or caution) dates in a reconviction study, as it is the offending behaviour that we are interested in, rather than the administrative consequences. We therefore calculated a one-year reference period for each offender, from the date of first contact with the scheme, and any offender who was recorded as offending within the reference period was treated as being reconvicted.

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37 16-25s who received ETE advice from the Apex Trust in Hackney.
Comparing schemes

Table 6.1 compares reconviction rates (excluding cautions) for 16-25 year olds on the schemes. Of the participants on the ASSET project, 43 per cent committed an offence resulting in a conviction. Including cautions, the figure rose to 48 per cent. In comparison the reconviction rate for those who were referred to the project but did not attend was 56 per cent (or 59% including cautions). This difference was statistically significant \( p < 0.05 \), 1-tail chi-square). Finally, the comparison group from Hackney had a reconviction rate of 23 per cent. Although this rate was much lower than that of the ASSET attenders, numbers were small and the difference was not statistically significant.

Just under a third of the total Springboard sample (32%) were reconvicted. Including cautions, the figure rose to 34 per cent. To make a fair comparison with ASSET, however, one must focus on participants in the 16-25 age bracket: their reconviction rate was 45 per cent, two percentage points higher than ASSET’s.

In weighing up the meaning of these overall figures we must take into account several factors. First, we cannot say whether attenders did better than non-attenders as a result of the help they received from ASSET. The competing explanation is that non-attenders were a less compliant group than attenders, and that this was reflected both in their non-attendance and in their reconviction rates. In other words, the difference may have been a selection effect, rather than a programme effect. Thus the results of the analysis were consistent with a programme effect, but could not prove its existence. Secondly, we were able to follow up only 26 participants of the Apex Trust scheme in Hackney. Leaving aside issues relating to sampling error, there was a strong possibility of selection effects, where the very limited ETE resources in Hackney were targeted on those who most stood to benefit.
Table 6.1 Comparative statistics on 16-25 year olds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ASSET</th>
<th>Springboard</th>
<th>ASSET non-attenders</th>
<th>Hackney</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage reoffended</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within one year resulting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in a conviction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean 2 year OGRS rate</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age at time of referral</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of males</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean age at first conviction</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of previous</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guilty appearances</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean number of previous</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>youth custody</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with previous</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>burglary convictions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with previous</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>breach of order convictions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Springboard cases within the 16 to 25 age-range had more extensive criminal histories than ASSET’s, despite the fact that they were on average slightly older when they registered their first conviction. Nevertheless, the percentage of those under 25 who were reconvicted was only marginally higher than those attending ASSET, and rather lower than those whom ASSET did not see.

Further analysis
For the time being, this reconviction analysis has yielded promising but inconclusive results. To be more conclusive we need to compare reconviction rates with more robust comparison groups. One option would be to revisit the Offenders Index and collect data to enable us to calculate two-year reconviction rates on the full sample. This could then be compared to OGRS scores. It will be noted that our one-year reconviction rates based on PNC data were substantially below the two-year OGRS rates. Whether this gap would persist with two-year rates based on OI data remains to be seen. In planning such analysis we would have to give some thought as to whether the two-year reference period should start on the date of
first contact with the scheme, or whether it should be the date of conviction or release from custody which predated contact with the scheme.

An alternative would be to get more PNC data on offenders from Surrey and South London, and to construct multivariate models for reconviction. Predictor variables would include participation in schemes at ASSET and Springboard, as well as demographic variables and details of criminal careers. This PNC analysis would be functionally equivalent to a comparison between observed OI reconviction rates and expected rates as reflected in OGRS scores.

Appendix A examines in more detail variables that could be associated with reconviction. These include age; sex; the number of previous court appearances ending in conviction; current offence; whether previously convicted of burglary or breached on orders and finally the number of previous youth custody periods.
7: Conclusions and recommendations

In considering the way the ASSET and Springboard projects have been run and their impact on employability, employment and offending it is important to remember that both were planned and began operating in 1997. Some of the ‘what works’ principles described in Table 7.1 had begun to influence work in a few probation areas at that stage. However, ideas were only just beginning to form in many other areas about how these rather general principles, developed on the back of (mainly) North American meta-analyses, should influence the design of individual programmes and the conduct of day-to-day work.

This position has changed dramatically over the past three years. As the two employment programmes described in this report were being set up, the Home Office, HMI Probation and ACOP were planning the effective practice initiative. This was designed to review and, where necessary, reformulate the probation service’s work with offenders in the light of ‘what works’ principles.

### Table 7.1 The ingredients of effective intervention (derived from Vennard, Sugg and Hedderman, 1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Targeting dynamic risk factors - programmes</td>
<td>Focus on factors directly related to offending</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk classification - more intensive programmes</td>
<td>Targeted at high risk offenders. Lower risk offenders should receive less intervention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-based - programmes which otherwise</td>
<td>More effective when delivered in the community than in a custodial setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment modality - interventions</td>
<td>Combining training in social skills, problem solving and cognitive behavioural modification seem to be most effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsivity - the way a programme is delivered</td>
<td>Should reflect the learning styles of offenders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme integrity - programmes should be</td>
<td>Run by well-trained staff and properly managed. Aims and objectives should be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clear and adhered to consistently</td>
<td>Clearly defined and adhered to consistently</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

38 The publication of McGuire’s ‘What Works: Reducing Reoffending’ (1995) was central to this as it provided a comprehensive, practitioner-friendly account of the research literature and, crucially, discussed its implications for making probation work effective.
Two recent developments have increased the pace of that change over the last year. First, probation service and prison programmes are now assessed and the best are ‘accredited’ by a panel of international experts. Second, new money from the Crime Reduction programme has been pumped into bringing existing probation and prison programmes up to accreditation standards, and into the development of new initiatives.

Did the schemes meet ‘what works’ principles?
It is a useful exercise to take stock of the extent to which these principles were embedded in the two schemes. However, the above potted history should make it clear that it would be invidious to criticise either the ASSET or Springboard project for not being set up strictly in line with ‘what works’ principles. In saying this, we are not seeking to excuse the projects where delivery has fallen well short of these standards.

Targeting
Considerable care was taken in both areas to set up projects which were tailored to their local offending population and job markets. Thus, ASSET successfully focused particularly on assisting young black offenders. Furthermore, certainly in the earlier stages of the scheme links were established with organisations offering vocational training in areas considered to have employment vacancies, the chance of promotion and good prospects for career development. Springboard filled a gap in the local economy by setting up its recycling business while using it to offer sheltered employment to offenders so that they became job-ready for the wider job market.

Springboard’s broad focus on employability, employment, accommodation and leisure rather than a more traditional pure ETE approach also now seems prescient given new central government focus on a broad range of resettlement problems. However, evidence of its impact in terms of offenders entering and completing training or entering employment is really restricted to the last year as agreement to distinguish between outputs (drawing up a CV) from outcomes (starting a job) was only reached at that point.

Risk classification
Arrangements with Surrey Probation Service have hitherto seen Springboard operate a mandatory initial assessment process. While this was not without its critics, this feature has gradually become more accepted. The pilot scheme in Staines sought to focus full assessments on higher-risk cases, with the results forming part of the supervision plan. This was in keeping with the recommendation that programmes targeted at lower-risk cases receive less intervention. However, some reservations were expressed about this development, on the basis that while some offenders might constitute a low offending risk, this did not mean that Springboard could not carry out useful work with them.
Conversely, ASSET, under the proposals laid down in their bid, were to target repeat offenders between the ages of 16 and 25. At the start of the project, however, this was expanded to all 16 to 25s considered to have ETE needs. Gradually, the net was further widened with the introduction within ILPS of an inclusive referral policy to ETE providers in 1999. Therefore, all offenders under supervision had to be referred for ETE advice unless there were exceptional circumstances such as chaotic drug use or mental health issues, or if an individual was already in education.

**Community-based programmes**

The two projects worked with offenders on community orders and upon release from prison. Springboard also sited three members of staff at one of the local prisons, where they provided induction, advice and bail information work, and also bid, unsuccessfully, for the prison’s ‘Welfare to Work’ contract. On occasions ASSET guidance workers made prison visits. ASSET also had regular surgeries at bail hostels in Lambeth and Southwark and the Sherborne House Probation Day Centre.

**Responsivity**

In both schemes offenders clearly liked the way that guidance workers treated them and avoided patronising them. This positive outlook indicated that workers effectively tailored their approach to the learning styles of offenders. The following two comments exemplified this. The first was from a 32-year old male seen by Springboard: “They’re like friends – not biased towards you because you’ve been inside. You’re not just an ex-con.” Similar views were expressed by a black 19 year old male on the ASSET project: “It’s open! It’s not like going back to school! They give you the chance to do what you feel you need to do. Any way they can help, they do.”

**Treatment modalities**

Springboard placed less emphasis on improving business links with a view to identifying job opportunities; they focused more on meeting offenders’ employment, training, leisure and housing needs. This entailed providing, both directly and through volunteers, assistance on such issues as literacy and numeracy, spoken English, and budgeting skills, as well as advice about disclosure of offences, form-filling, and job search skills. ASSET’s focus was on increasing the employability of offenders so they could sustain work in real jobs. This was undertaken by offering employment and training assessments; employment based training; mentoring; basic and key skills provision; and help with job search. For both Springboard and ASSET this left probation officers free to concentrate on other factors related to offending.
Programme integrity

Initial problems with the way ASSET was set up offer a number of useful cautionary lessons for other schemes. Particular difficulties arose as a result of the initial division of management responsibilities between LAT and ILPS in which paths of line management were unclear. While the decision to offer block grants may have been partly inspired by a concern that potential training suppliers needed tempting into the ring, the result was that they got paid no matter how few offenders they saw. During its second year, and, crucially, under new management, these difficulties were overcome. LAT took over direct management of the project, more formal partnership arrangements were created with ILPS, administrative and financial procedures were tightened and contracts with providers were renegotiated so that payment was more closely related to referrals. At this time the project was probably at its most effective.

Across the three years we believe the partnership arrangement between ASSET and the London Retail Centre worked well. Ninety employment positions were gained; 12 gained NVQs at level two and close to 100 were referred to the two-week customer care course. The reasons for their success are likely to include: the skills and commitment of LRC staff in engaging, working with and retaining offenders on their programme; flexibility of the courses on offer; and their close links with employers. We also felt the Jobtrack group work and basic skills programmes were effective in engaging and motivating offenders. The effectiveness of the group work programme, however, suffered from low numbers of referrals and poor accommodation in its final year. There was some suggestion from guidance workers that they were unsure about the role and function of the programme.

Unfortunately, plans for funding the project once the Henry Smith Foundation’s funding came to an end were only presented to the ASSET Steering Group in the final two months of the third year. Rather than building on the project’s success, these plans proposed taking a somewhat different approach. The new emphasis on evidence-based practice means that while it is still possible to obtain funding to pilot new ideas, only tried and tested approaches are likely to succeed in bids for money to run mainstream work. With this in mind, the Steering Group asked for the plans to be revised. The current plans take account of a number of the findings discussed in this report, including the need to ensure that guidance workers are providing a consistent level of service and that the outputs and outcomes achieved are recorded.

While the early phases of Springboard’s development could not have been more different to ASSET’s, it was an uncomfortable time for Springboard and Surrey probation staff – as their comments in this and earlier reports make clear. As the Service moved to a case
management style of supervision, which included staff without probation qualifications supervising offenders, many staff chose to leave the area. This created heavy work pressures on the remaining staff and their morale reached a very low ebb. As these staffing changes took place, Springboard’s management were setting out to make the project economically viable by expanding its remit. This included opening up its services to non-offenders when it became a New Deal gateway provider. Some probation officers objected to the possibility of mixed groups for offenders and non-offenders, and this may also have made them antagonistic towards the scheme.

One consequence of this expansion was that Springboard staff had difficulties with the pace of change. Training also seemed to lag behind rather than precede staff taking up new responsibilities. These problems contributed to a high staff turnover in the first two years of the project. The slow pace of training and high staff turnover also meant that some probation staff who referred offenders to Springboard came into contact with inexperienced staff and this led them to question the value of Springboard’s input. However, it is important to note that while the way Springboard developed may have been painful for some of those involved, it was successful in putting the organisation on a sound financial footing. Also, during its third year, Springboard built on consolidating its activities rather than expanding them further. Meanwhile, because of staffing changes in SPS, more of those referring offenders to the scheme benefited from high quality input delivered by experienced staff. Springboard’s most recent internal review focused on reorganising its staffing from a specialist model to a more generalist one. The intention is that development staff can respond to employment, training and accommodation needs presented by the wider socially excluded, not solely offenders.

The experience of both schemes supports Roberts et al.’s (1997) conclusion that projects of this sort stand a better chance of becoming effective once they have been up and running for some time. Only in the third year was Springboard’s value appreciated by most SPS staff - prior to that the scheme was viewed with as much suspicion as it was welcomed. ASSET’s slow start implied the need for a greater lead-in time for ETE projects to fully develop programme initiatives and sort out early teething problems. The implementation of key components occurred in the second year, suggesting the project became more effective over time.
General points for future projects
Our experience of evaluating the two schemes leads us to offer some guidance on establishing and running future ETE projects.

Setting schemes up
- One of our main recommendations, drawn from our experience in evaluating this and other rehabilitative programmes for offenders, is that success is highly dependent on the recruitment and retention of appropriately trained and capable staff. The same point is also made in the ‘what works’ literature (eg Vennard, Sugg and Hedderman, 1997 and Underdown, 1998). This may appear obvious but the comments of interviewees in both areas suggested it was a problem for both initiatives.
- Management arrangements in partnership projects should be clear. Split management structures between two organisations can create difficulties. Partners in these types of projects should clarify which organisation does what and what to do if things start to fail.
- Should one of the partners undergo radical change after the scheme has been established, the need for explicit definition of role boundaries becomes more urgent. One by-product of Surrey Probation Service’s reorganisation was a greater reliance on Surrey Springboard staff. Whilst this may have been a testament to the high regard in which the scheme came to be held, it risked expanding its role into one for which it was not equipped in terms of staffing or resources.
- While teething problems can occur even in the best thought-out projects, short-term funding for initiatives may encourage schemes to start operating before all the kinks are ironed out or even before key staff are in post or fully trained. To judge from the comments of those involved, in the case of ASSET, too little time was spent in the first year setting up the mentoring and Jobtrack programmes. This meant when the scheme started referring clients there were few support mechanisms to aid those offenders who were not job or training ready. As a result many are likely to have fallen through the net. Issues of this kind can diminish confidence in a scheme and may persist long after the problems have been resolved.
Characteristics of schemes

- Sheltered employment schemes are attractive, and Springboard's was beginning to “bed in” well by the end of the evaluation. Whether it is realistic to expect the schemes to be self-financing or even income-generating remains to be seen. Springboard’s success in providing sheltered employment owed more to effective “grantsmanship” than to profit from the business.

- Mandatory initial assessment was supported by most of the development workers we spoke to in Surrey, and some of the probation interviewees. Nevertheless, the compulsory nature of the process led to resentment among some probation staff who viewed it as taking away their discretion. Although opposition reduced in year three, Surrey Springboard staff had to deal with the consequences of this. Initiatives of this sort should be prepared for the possibility that a mandatory assessment procedure may be resented, or even ignored.

- Mentoring schemes, although potentially effective, are complex to implement. Locating mentors and training them can be a protracted process, and matching mentors with offenders is also hard. Some of the benefits promised by mentoring schemes may be achievable through the use of volunteers with a less specific mentoring function or accessing other organisation’s mentors where a particular need for such assistance is identified.

- Contracts with training providers need to be tightly defined. Contracts with payment tied to outputs and outcomes are preferable to fixed-price contracts or block grants. This is because there is no guarantee that clients will start courses. When a full quota of clients fail to start or complete courses money can be wasted.
Outputs and outcomes

- Whilst both schemes encountered a range of difficulties in the course of the evaluation period, both succeeded in meeting a need, from the perspectives of probation officers and offenders alike.
- Probation officers welcomed the schemes partly because they offered a range of additional services, and partly because they lightened workloads. Offenders valued the schemes because they felt they were treated properly, and given tangible help.
- However, we cannot yet claim to have established that the schemes reduced reoffending. The ASSET sample did significantly better than those who were referred to ASSET but did not attend. However, the latter group may simply have been less compliant and more at risk of re-offending.
- Adequate reconviction studies either need to use data from the Offenders Index, and compare results with OGRS scores, or they need to use PNC data, including an adequate comparison group. Both routes are technically complex and time-consuming.
- Reconciling this complexity with the need for hard evidence of success is difficult.
- Our evaluation has also been dogged by problems in getting reliable outcome data relating to employment experience. Tracking offenders’ progress after leaving schemes is difficult and time-consuming, and the results are probably biased towards those who do well. As the two postal questionnaire exercises indicate it is practically impossible to collect information retrospectively.
- Procedures for collecting employment outcome data should be agreed and implemented thoroughly from the outset – not just added on during the course of a project.
- Schemes should also collect and analyse data on those who are referred to ETE workers but who fail. The results could be used to improve targeting strategies to support and encourage those at risk of non-attendance.
Appendix A

Reconviction and criminal history variables

ASSET participants

Previous studies have found reconviction to be closely associated with both age and sex (Lloyd et al. 1994). The pattern presented below in Table A1 indicates that males (44%) were more likely to be convicted than females (33%). Furthermore, the youngest age band (16-17s) had a greater percentage of reconviction (54%) as compared with 18-20s and 21-25s. One notable feature was the fact that males and females in the 18-20 year old age group had similar rates of reconviction. It should, however, be recognised that the number of female offenders in the sample totalled 21 of whom only seven were reconvicted.

Table A1: Number of ASSET clients reconvicted by age and sex (n = 92)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age categories</th>
<th>ASSET male</th>
<th>ASSET female</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16/17</td>
<td>21/38 (55%)</td>
<td>1/3 (33%)</td>
<td>22/41 (54%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-20</td>
<td>38/93 (41%)</td>
<td>4/10 (40%)</td>
<td>42/103 (41%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>26/64 (41%)</td>
<td>2/8 (25%)</td>
<td>28/72 (39%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85/195 (44%)</td>
<td>7/21 (33%)</td>
<td>92/216 (43%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We also examined the reconviction rates in relation to offenders’ principal offences at the time they were first seen by ASSET. The results mirrored those of previous studies (Lloyd et al. 1994 and May, 1999) which indicated low levels of reconviction for sex offenders (there was none) and high rates for burglary. Figure A1, however, illustrates that the highest levels of reconviction were for those under supervision for theft or handling offences. There were no reconvictions for individuals who were convicted for criminal damage.
There was little difference between the rate of reconviction of offenders who had served youth custody sentences and those who had not. In total 43 per cent (n=75) with youth custody were reconvicted compared with 41 per cent (n=17) who had not. Figure A2 shows the relationship between the number of previous guilty court appearances and rates of reconviction.

Previous research (Lloyd et al. 1997 and May, 1999) has indicated that those with no previous convictions are the least likely to be reconvicted. It was therefore surprising to discover that in the present study those with no convictions had a greater rate of reconviction than those with between one and three previous court appearances ending in conviction. Having examined, and discounted, the possibility that this was the result of high reconviction rates amongst 16- and 17-year-olds, the reasons for this result were not clear. The reconviction rate was highest (68%) for offenders with seven or more previous guilty appearances, although caution should be used when viewing these figures due to low numbers in the sample.
About six in ten (57/92) of those who reoffended and were later reconvicted did so within six months of seeing an ASSET guidance worker. The average number of days from the date they were seen to the date they reoffended was 151. The median was 143. For reconvicted offenders who were referred to ASSET but never attended, 68 per cent (34/50) were reconvicted within a six-month period. The mean number of days from date of joining ASSET to the date they reoffended was 132. The median was 110.
The main offence categories for which offenders were reconvicted included theft and handling (32); drugs (12) and violence (12). Twelve of the offences in the theft and handling category were shoplifting; half (6) of drugs convictions were for possession of a class B drug; and a third (4) of violent convictions were for common assault. Eighteen per cent (16) of reconvictions were for either robbery or burglary.

**Springboard participants**

Reconviction data were received on 442 offenders who had been seen by Surrey Springboard between the start of April 1997 and the end of March 1998, following a referral from Surrey Probation Service staff. The age and sex of the sample are shown in Table A2. Details on age were missing for four offenders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 and over</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>385</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>438</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Men accounted for 88 per cent of the sample, though a quarter of those in their early 30s were women. Those 20 and under were the single largest age group. Over 40 per cent of the sample (n = 180) were aged 16 to 25.

Just under a third of the sample (143/442 = 32%) had reoffended, resulting in a conviction, within 12 months of their initial contact with Springboard. A further 50 had reoffended and been reconvicted, though this occurred over a year after this initial contact. An additional 12 members of the sample who had reoffended were given a caution. Table A3 shows the distribution of reconviction within a year according to age group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Number of cases</th>
<th>Number reconvicted within one year</th>
<th>Percentage reconvicted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 and over</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Direct comparisons with ASSET were not possible, as the age groups spanned different years. Only two of the Springboard sample were aged under 18. However, the youngest age group again proved to harbour the greatest percentage of those reconvicted. All but six of those who reoffended within 12 months were male, and of the women, only one was aged under 26. Reconviction rates appeared less rosy for those aged up to 25, and particularly for those who were 20 or under.

Unlike ASSET, those who had previously served a period of youth custody also proved more likely to reoffend, and to be subsequently reconvicted within a year. This applied to 71 out of 101 (70%), compared with 36 per cent (122) of the 341 who had not been imprisoned as a youth. As Table A4 shows, those with three or more previous spells of youth custody were more likely to be reconvicted.
Table A4: Reconviction within one year according to youth custody (n = 143)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of periods of youth custody</th>
<th>Number of cases</th>
<th>Number reconvicted within a year</th>
<th>Percentage reconvicted within a year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three or more</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Figure A5, reconviction is shown against the number of earlier court appearances resulting in a conviction. Fewer proportions of those with no such appearances, compared with those who had one to four, were reconvicted. This was again in contrast to ASSET findings, although the difference, at 3 per cent, was only marginal.

Figure A5: Reconviction by number of previous guilty court appearances (n= 442)

Figure A6 shows the offence types which individuals had committed within a year of first seeing Springboard and for which they had been reconvicted. In common with ASSET, theft proved the most common; 41 offenders (29%) were reconvicted for this. Compared with the ASSET sample, motoring offences featured more prominently, while there were no robbery cases at all. This may be due to the older profile of the Springboard sample.
Figure A6: Reconviction offences among Springboard participants (n = 143)
Working their way out of offending: an evaluation of two probation employment schemes


NACRO (1997) Offenders and employment: offenders talking about their search for work. London: NACRO.


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