



Work on Demand: Contracting for Work in a Changing Economy

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Swimming against the tide? The challenge of implementing inclusive return-to-work schemes in a neo-workfare state

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Despite the spread of Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) over recent decades, there remains variation both between and within countries in respect of the design, ethos and implementation of such interventions. Through an in-depth case study of an ALMP in a deprived post-industrial region of the UK, we reveal the tensions that arise when local actors seek to move away from an embedded paradigm of coercive workfare. Through interviews with commissioners, managers and workers within the programme we find evidence of the weak conditionality, high levels of professional autonomy and network control that are characteristic of the French model of 'insertion'. However, we argue that in the UK, these ambitions to deliver intensive support to enable clients to transition into sustainable high-quality jobs are compromised by ambiguities around new professional roles, a lack of deep networks in local labour markets, and the low expectations around entry level jobs generated by previous forms of labour market intervention by the state. In effect, these forms of state intervention are therefore ambiguous and caught between different and competing organisational roles and labour market related actors.