

# Is There a Rationale to Coach the Unemployed Right from the Start?

## Evidence from a Field Experiment

Frank Cörvers, Andries de Grip, and Bert van Landeghem

**Abstract:** There exists well-documented evidence that a period of long-term unemployment permanently reduces one's self-confidence, skills and cognitive abilities and physical and mental health. Despite the paramount importance of the topic, studies that can measure the causal impact of Active Labour Market Policies on employment chances are still relatively scarce, and their conclusions are generally discouraging: these programmes are often found to have a small or no effect. However, programmes often exclusively target towards the long-term unemployed, and the climate of austerity is spreading a tendency to further reduce the basic counselling for the entrants. It is plausible, however, that interventions have a much reduced impact when they start at a later stage in the unemployment spell as the erosion of cognitive and noncognitive skills has already been progressing.

This study will investigate the impact on employment chances of a relatively light and inexpensive programme (comprising of a collective information session followed by a short one-on-one interview), when it is offered right after the start of the unemployment spell. In a field experiment carried out with an employment office in Flanders, a random selection of clients (the treatment group) were invited to the programme 1 month after being enrolled as unemployed, while the control group were invited 5 months after that date. We measure a substantial intent-to-treat effect in the first four months after the start of the unemployment spell, and the early intervention seems especially beneficial for those with low education.