

# Supporting Random Assignment

The Role of Technical Assistance in ERA  
Demonstration Project

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# Outline

- The problem
- Technical assistance in ERA design
- Technical assistance in reality
- Lessons/issues

# The Problem

- Random assignment usually implemented within existing institutions – delivery mechanism
- Institutions which are usually already delivering a range of existing complex interventions/services – control group services
- The new intervention will represent a departure from usual practice
- Administrators responsible for delivering services being evaluated, services to control group & implement research design
- How do we encourage cooperation, fidelity to the programme and research design?

# Technical Assistance in ERA

- Each site had a TA with one TA manager who had oversight
- Recruited from Jobcentre Plus but received training in research methods
- Reported to evaluation project team & steering group, rather than local JC+ manager
- Role to ensure
  - random assignment worked & was understood (crossovers/contamination)
  - accurate & timely data were collected (baseline data)
  - monitoring caseloads
  - policy implemented as intended
- The interface between front line staff, site management & the evaluation/project teams
- Provide early warning & allow project teams to take corrective action

# TA Role in Reality

- Supported random assignment (early months)
- But main focus was on:
  - Recruitment of WTC participants & **caseload issues**
  - Ensuring emphasis given to **post-employment support** – particularly advancement
  - Staffing levels & competing priorities
- More of a role in the formal evaluation

# Concluding Comments

- ERA was an ambitious design – TA role vital!
- Random assignment really wasn't the problem – caseload, sticking to policy design, staffing issues were
- Technical advisers play an important role where:
  - Complex and innovative
  - Incentives structure
  - Programmes are non-mandatory
  - Subversion and manipulation
- Recruitment of TAs key
- Simple, mandatory programmes may not require TAs
- Time constraints may make it difficult to establish the role quickly