

The 2013 ESF Leavers Survey: Qualitative Fieldwork Findings

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of qualitative interviews undertaken with participants who had been supported by three ESF projects, and forms an additional element of the 2013 ESF Leavers Survey. The report presents the methodology adopted, the findings of the discussions, and lessons learnt about how to secure the contribution of vulnerable groups within future ESF Leavers studies.

Qualitative interviews were undertaken with 46 interviewees drawn from across three ESF projects, namely Cyrenians (26 interviews), the Peer Mentoring project (19 interviews) and the Life Skills project (1 interview). Of the 46 interviews completed, 12 were with current participants and the remaining 34 were with project leavers. Current participants were targeted in an opportunistic manner at a venue used to deliver support by one of the projects (Cyrenians). Project leavers were targeted using contact data supplied directly by each project provider.

A number of difficulties were encountered in identifying and recruiting leavers namely difficulties associated with obtaining agreement from project providers to be involved in the study and difficulties in accessing databases for project leavers. There was also a poor response rate to initial efforts to make contact with leavers largely due to telephone numbers no longer being in use and the reluctance of leavers to accept calls when contact was made.

In terms of the profile of interviewees, well over half of all interviewees were men, just under a third were aged 30 and under, and all but one were of White ethnicity. Nearly half had a long-term illness which affected the amount or type of work which they could do. Over half of all interviewees lived alone. Seven interviewees spoke Welsh. The vast majority of interviewees were either unemployed and looking for work or not in or looking for paid work when they came into contact with the ESF project. Around half said they had been out of work or unemployed for most of the time since leaving school whilst a third had been in paid work for most of this time. Since leaving the ESF project over half of the leavers interviewed had been either continuously out of work or looking for work, although a small number recorded positive changes in their employment status post intervention.

The most commonly cited reason for not being able to find work (both prior to intervention and at the time of interview) related to alcohol or other drug dependency issues, health related problems and having a criminal record. A large number of interviewees had led very chaotic lives which restricted their ability to find work or engage in any other voluntary or training programmes.

The nature of support accessed was largely determined by the type of project which had provided support to interviewees. Support could be categorised into two types of provision – firstly, personal support which was geared to helping participants overcome and move on from specific health, welfare and dependency issues and secondly, support geared to supporting participants to become employable via the delivery of volunteering, training and job searching related activity.

The qualitative interviews revealed extremely high levels of satisfaction with the support provided across the projects included within the fieldwork. It would appear that those most removed from the labour market were the ones most likely to report that the intervention had proved to be a life changing experience. Many of those interviewed also reported that the support provided had contributed to positive changes within their lives including changes to their lifestyle, health, welfare and accommodation arrangements. In addition, some participants were reporting other more general benefits from having been involved with the project including gaining confidence, developing new skills, obtaining new experiences relating to training or volunteering opportunities, dealing with social settings and an improvement in their personal skills.

In terms of the lesson learnt the study showed that:

- an exceptionally low response rate was obtained when attempting to make initial contact with project leavers in a unsolicited manner;
- using project providers as a conduit to approach interviewees proved particularly effective;
- using both ESF project and programme level surveys can result in a duplication of effort among project providers to obtain feedback from participants;
- some of the interviewees would not have participated in a quantitative telephone survey, and the majority of these leavers preferred a face to face qualitative interview;
- future leavers' response rates could be improved if consideration be given to collaboration with project providers, ensuring clarity about the purpose of the discussion, and the timing of contact and the interview.
- results suggest that offering a financial incentive for interviews would not have improved response rates for this particular study.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Old Bell 3 Ltd., in conjunction with Cardiff University and IFF Research, was commissioned by WEFO to undertake the 2013 ESF Leavers Survey. This survey builds upon previous ESF Leavers Surveys conducted by the same team between 2009 and 2012.

The objective of 2013 ESF Leavers Survey research was to provide an insight into the effectiveness of labour market interventions delivered under the ESF programme. An additional element of the 2013 ESF Leavers Survey involved attempting to conduct 75 qualitative interviews with participants who had been supported by a small number of ESF projects targeted at particularly vulnerable individuals.

The rationale for including qualitative interviews largely stemmed from the issue that particular types of participants, notably those furthest from the labour market, have been underrepresented in previous Leavers Surveys. There are several reasons why these participants might have been underrepresented in previous surveys including (a) those projects targeting vulnerable groups might be less likely to be included in the sample of ESF leavers made available to the contractors by WEFO for use in the phone survey mainly due to the difficulties associated in identifying project 'leavers' but also possibly because of concerns about participants being approached on two occasions to provide feedback i.e. via project and programme level surveys; (b) vulnerable groups, particularly those in transient situations, are less likely to keep the same contact details, meaning a lower than normal success rate and (c) vulnerable groups may be less likely to want to participate in survey work, leading to a higher than normal refusal rate. However the participation of these vulnerable groups is important in improving representativeness and obtaining a better understanding of the overall success of ESF funded projects.

1.2 Report Objectives

The objectives of this report are three-fold:

- to outline in detail the methodology adopted and steps taken in securing the contribution of 'vulnerable' ESF leavers via qualitative interviews so that the experience and lessons learnt from this approach can be shared for future consideration;
- to present the findings of the fieldwork with 46 ESF participants in terms of their characteristics and outcomes and the contribution made by the particular project with which they have been engaged;
- to present the findings of the fieldwork about the willingness of such participants to take part in research and our own views on how the contribution of vulnerable groups could be better secured in future ESF Leavers studies

1.3 Structure of the Report

In the remainder of this report we:

- Outline in detail the methodology adopted in undertaking the qualitative fieldwork (Section 2);
- Present the findings of the fieldwork with participants, including a profile of those who contributed and their circumstances prior to and following intervention (Section 3);
- Present the views of participants on the ESF support that they received, including the nature of provision accessed, levels of satisfaction and the difference made (Section 4);
- Discuss how the views of vulnerable participants could be better captured in any future similar research (Section 5).

Chapter 2: Methodology

Chapter Summary

- Qualitative interviews were undertaken with 46 interviewees drawn from across three ESF projects, namely Cyrenians (26 interviews), the Peer Mentoring project (19 interviews) and the Life Skills project (1 interview).
- Of the 46 interviews completed, 12 were with current participants and the remaining 34 were with project leavers. Current participants were targeted in an opportunistic manner at a venue used to deliver support by one of the projects (Cyrenians). Project leavers were targeted using contact data supplied directly to Old Bell 3 by each project provider.
- A number of difficulties were encountered in identifying and recruiting leavers. There were difficulties associated with obtaining agreement from project providers to be involved in the study and difficulties in accessing databases for project leavers. There was also a poor response rate to initial efforts to make contact with leavers largely due to telephone numbers no longer being in use and the reluctance of leavers to accept calls when contact was made.

2.1 Introduction

This section outlines the overall approach taken for the qualitative fieldwork (Section 2.1) and specific approaches for each of the projects included within the study namely Cyrenians (Section 2.2), the Peer Mentoring project (Section 2.3) and the Life Skills project (Section 2.4).

2.2 Overall approach

It was agreed that the approach adopted for qualitative interviews would involve interviewing individuals from a small number of ESF projects. This approach was considered to be appropriate as it would make the recruitment of respondents easier by only requiring liaison with a small number of projects. It was also thought that this approach would improve the ability to analyse the qualitative data.

A short-list of six projects was initially agreed upon: **New Day, Coastal, Peer Mentoring, Life Skills, Cyrenians and Increasing BME Employment.**

These projects were selected as they had been under-represented in previous ESF Leavers Surveys and tended to target vulnerable participants. It was agreed that three of these projects would be selected and that 25 interviews would be undertaken across each one, unless a strong case emerged for a different split in the course of making arrangements.

It was also agreed during the inception phase that the contact data for these qualitative interviews would be sought directly from the project providers rather than using contact data held by WEFO which was used for the main Survey. The main reason for doing so was to minimise the risk of gaps or errors in the data, in the belief that project staff who had had regular contact with the participants were more likely to have accurate and up to date contact data. However, it was also the case that only a handful of participants from these six projects were included in the data transmitted from WEFO for the main Survey. For instance no contact data was made available for three of the projects (New Day, Cyrenians and Life Skills) and only a very limited number of Coastal participants were included¹.

It was also agreed during the inception phase that whilst the ESF Leavers Surveys focused on project leavers it would be worth including some current project participants within the qualitative research. No specific quotas were set at the outset for the split between existing and previous learners although it was agreed that this split be monitored and reported to WEFO on a regular basis. It was assumed at the outset that recruiting current project participants would be much easier than previous learners on the basis that (a) projects

¹ It is worth noting however that WEFO's participant database contained plenty of ESF participants for some of these projects but had no 'leaving date' recorded against them. For instance, no leaving date was recorded for over 1,000 Coastal participants and 4,000 New Day Convergence participants.

had reliable and updated contacts for them and (b) it would be possible to interview participants as they accessed support.

During the inception phase the possibility of sampling participants who suffered from multiple labour market disadvantages (e.g. BME women) was discussed as their feedback could potentially add some useful insight.

However, adopting such an approach to the sampling work proved impossible due, firstly, to the fact that detailed data highlighting such disadvantages was not made available to the research team and secondly, to the low response rate to the attempt to set up interviews, which meant that the research team could not afford to be select only those who suffered from multiple labour market disadvantages.

It was also agreed during the inception phase that the qualitative topic guide would be structured around the key quantitative questionnaire but would also include open ended questions to gain better depth and understanding. The topic guide adopted has been appended at Annex 1.

Of the short-listed projects it was initially agreed that Old Bell 3 would approach three of them (Coastal, New Day and Cyrenians).

However it became apparent that including the New Day project in the sample would not be practical as the project had come to an end in 2012 and there were no 2013 leavers available to target. The research team concluded that including leavers from the year 2012 would prove problematic because the contact data may be out of date and the participants may struggle to recall the support they received on the project.

In addition, the Coastal project declined to participate during November 2014 due to other work pressures. Project staff also believed that there would be very few participants willing to contribute given their previous involvement in an independent evaluation of the project.

It was therefore agreed with WEFO that the Peer Mentoring project would be included as a second project instead of New Day and that the Life Skills project would be included as a third project to replace Coastal.

The steps undertaken to arrange qualitative fieldwork for each of the three projects included in the Leavers Survey - Cyrenians, Peer Mentoring and Life Skills - are detailed in Sections 2.3 to 2.5.

2.3 Cyrenians

The Cyrenians project was awarded £3.8 million funding in March 2009 via the ESF Convergence Programme Priority 2 to deliver a programme aimed at supporting severely marginalised groups of people to find work and to provide training and support to vulnerable groups to develop skills, knowledge and confidence which would lead to further education, training and employment outcomes. The project built upon the work of the Cyrenians Charity which had a specific focus upon supporting homeless, alcohol and drug dependent people within the Swansea Bay area. Some of the project's provision was made available via a community drop-in centre based in the city centre while other elements were delivered through outreach activities in other venues.

The Cyrenians model of provision adopted four phases which included reaching out to homeless people, people with alcohol and drug misuse problems, and those with chaotic and unsettled lifestyles through its community centre. Participants could also access accredited training, work experience and volunteering opportunities as well as support via the Cyrenians Employment Support Agency with CV development, employability training, careers advice and job searching.

Initial contact was established with the Cyrenians project towards the end of September 2014 and various members of the team were consulted over the course of the following weeks to discuss the best approach to the study. The project team are to be highly commended for their efficient responses to our numerous requests and their commitment to the study proved to be the most

critical factor in ensuring the success of the fieldwork with Cyrenians participants – in all, interviews with 26 participants were completed.

Given that the Cyrenians project was still live at the time of fieldwork it was agreed that both current and previous participants would be interviewed.

Furthermore it was agreed with project representatives that it would be worth including feedback from project participants who had benefited from two key elements of support; support provided via the drop-in centre and support made available via outreach services. It was agreed that contact data for previous participants would be supplied directly to Old Bell 3 for the purposes of recruiting individuals by phone to meet with a researcher on a face to face basis. It was also agreed that current participants would be recruited on a 'drop-in' basis whilst using the facilities and support available at the Cyrenians centre in Swansea².

In terms of previous participants, Old Bell 3 was initially provided with a sample of 589 participants who had been reported as having achieved an outcome by the project during 2013 – it proved impossible to identify whether they had 'left' the project during this year. Of this number, 268 participants were reported as having secured employment during 2013 and 321 participants were reported as having achieved a qualification or participated in a training course during the same year. A total sample of 80 participants (40 securing employment and 40 achieving a qualification / participating in training) was selected by Old Bell 3 and contact data requested for them.

These participants were selected because they were recorded as having achieved the outcome during the latter part of 2013. By targeting this cohort,

² By comparison an independent evaluation of the Cyrenians project focused upon surveying those project participants who had secured employment as an outcome of intervention over a six month window prior to undertaking the evaluation.

we hoped they would be able to recall the support they received more easily than those who would have left the project during the earlier months of 2013.

Contact details were provided for these 80 selected participants. At least two attempts were made to contact every participant (except where we were able to talk to someone in person in the first instance). Whilst attempting to contact those who were reported as having secured employment, it was discovered that the contact data did not tally with the names selected. Cyrenians were able to supply updated correct details for these participants. Whilst this did not affect the qualitative interview arrangements, errors of this kind could very well affect a quantitative telephone survey response rate.

Using the initial sample of 80 participants provided, eight interviews were arranged, a response rate of 10%. Of the original 80, 23 contact details were outdated or no longer in use, and five participants declined to participate – two because they were too busy, two because they did not want to and one because they felt that they had not been involved with the project enough to be able to comment adequately.

In light of this a further sample of 80 participants (again 40 securing employment and 40 receiving a qualification, reported by the project towards the latter end of 2013) was requested and provided. At least one attempt was made to contact each participant and six interviews were arranged – a response rate of 7.5%. A much higher number (38) of contact details were outdated or no longer in use, and one person declined to participate as they felt they had not been involved with the project enough to be able to comment effectively.

In total, 14 interviews with previous participants from the Cyrenians project were undertaken via this approach. Of these 14, two interviews had to be re-arranged – one was due to a 'no-show' and one asked for the date to be changed in advance of the scheduled meeting. All interviews were arranged to

take place at a 'neutral' venue – typically a café or other meeting point close to the interviewee's home or place of work.

In terms of current participants, it was agreed that the best method of interviewing these individuals would be at the drop-in community centre run by the Cyrenians project in Swansea city centre.

The fieldwork at the Cyrenians centre took place over the course of two visits during November 2014 and a total of 12 interviews were undertaken. It was agreed in advance (with the team at Cyrenians) that informal 'semi structured' interviews would be undertaken with service users, as they 'dropped in' to use the centre. Morning sessions were selected because this was the busiest time, with people calling in to eat breakfast, shower, use the Internet and attend appointments with the nurse/other support staff. This opportunistic approach to speaking with participants was very successful and provided a steady flow of service users to interview. It also provided ample opportunity to approach a wide range of interviewees to take part in the research. Interviews were undertaken in a library space, adjacent to the main hall. This provided sufficient privacy to allow discussion of fairly sensitive issues, yet also ensured that both the interviewer and interviewees remained in full-sight of the project team – an important safeguarding consideration given the potential volatility of the client group. Interviewees appeared to be happy with this arrangement, and after being given a cup of coffee, tended to open up quite quickly, and freely offer their stories and feedback on the services they have accessed.

Interviewees were approached and asked if they would be happy to be interviewed by the interviewer and the Project Manager. This 'introduction' by the Project Manager was essential in terms of explaining the purpose of the research, and helping overcome any initial reservations around taking part. On estimate, approximately three-quarters of those approached agreed to be interviewed.

In terms of the style of the interviews, effort was made to adopt a relaxed, friendly tone, and to build a rapport with the interviewees. The interviewer was dressed smartly, but not formally, to give the session a more informal feel. A full explanation of the work was given at the beginning of each interview, with an emphasis placed on wanting to hear 'their story'. This approach appeared quite successful, and participants displayed an incredible amount of candour, especially given the sensitive nature of some of what they had to say.

2.4 The Peer Mentoring Project

The ESF funded Peer Mentoring Project was delivered between October 2009 and March 2014 with the aim of assisting ex-substance misusers across Wales to enter employment or further learning. The project was led by the Welsh Government and delivered by six different providers. Participants accessed a range of provisions including a variety of training courses, opportunities for volunteering or work experience, access to a peer mentor and other activities to raise motivation and prepare for work.

The Welsh Government Project Manager was approached in the first instance to discuss the best method of sourcing contact data for project participants. Since the project had ended in April 2014 and delivery was devolved to local partners, some concerns were expressed around the possible lack of capacity within delivery partner organisations to provide previous participants' contact data. It was however agreed with the Welsh Government that a sample of 40-45 contacts across each of the project providers would be drawn up in the hope that 25 interviews could be achieved in all. In liaising with the Welsh Government Old Bell 3 stressed that we were particularly keen not to introduce any element of bias into the selection of participants and emphasised that the intention was to interview a cross-section of previous learners and not necessarily focus on those who have achieved a positive outcome in terms of jobs or qualifications.

In the event, a sample of 50 participants was selected at random by the Welsh Government. Five of the six project providers provided contact data for their participants who were included in the sample.

This method was generally unsuccessful and only two interviews (a response rate of 4%) were secured via this method. As such each of the five project providers who had supplied the initial contact data were approached directly by Old Bell 3 requesting whether they could supply contact data for participants who were known to them and who they thought would be happy to meet with a researcher. Whilst this approach may have introduced some bias into the sample selection, this had to be considered as it was proving impossible to arrange any interviews via the random approach.

The additional steps taken across each of the project providers were as follows:

- CAIS: provided contact details for five additional participants they thought would be willing to participate in the survey and interviews were conducted with all five. An additional interview was also set up with a sixth participant who was identified via contact with Communities First in the area. In total six interviews were arranged and undertaken across this project provider.
- Kaleidoscope: provided contact details for 19 additional participants they thought would be willing to participate. Where we were unable to speak to someone on the telephone number provided in the first instance, at least two attempts were made to contact the participant. In total we were successful in setting up three interviews with participants from this list – a response rate of 16%. Two participants refused to participate because they felt the project had done nothing for them. Kaleidoscope then provided contact details for a further 24 participants. At least two attempts were made to contact participants on the list. Where they had provided a mobile number, an initial phone call and answerphone message (where possible) was followed up by a text message in response to suggestions from earlier fieldwork with

participants. The use of text message resulted in one interview being scheduled. An additional interview was scheduled by phone. In total five interviews were arranged and undertaken across this project provider.

- Drug Aid Cymru: We were able to secure an interview with one of the initial ten participants identified at random by the Welsh Government. Of these ten participants, four of them said that they had previously requested not to be contacted in relation to the project, two of the phone numbers supplied for participants were outdated, one participant declined to be interviewed on the grounds of ill health and one participant had entered jail since leaving the project. Contact details for further participants were supplied in two tranches and we succeeded in setting up interviews with five of these additional names supplied. In total six interviews were arranged and undertaken across this project provider.
- WCADA: Of the initial five participants identified, all had active telephone numbers on which we tried to contact them at least twice. We managed to speak to two of these participants, who both said they had wanted to participate in the Peer Mentoring project but had not received support. Requests were therefore made for additional participant contact details but as these were only supplied towards the end of the study no interviews were arranged.
- Cyswllt: Of the initial ten participants identified, an interview was secured with one person. Telephone numbers for four of the participants were outdated/no longer in use, and one participant refused to participate in the research as she could not remember the project. Three attempts were made to contact all other available contacts. In response to our request, Cyswllt then provided contact details for ten additional participants. Telephone numbers for six of these participants were outdated/no longer in use. We were able to secure an interview with one participant from this additional sample. In total two interviews were completed with participants from this project provider.

In total 19 interviews were completed with Peer Mentoring leavers.

2.5 Life Skills Project

The Life Skills project was an all Wales project funded with £14 million via ESF and National Lottery funding and managed by the BIG Lottery Fund in Wales. The aim of the project was to deliver support for people who were economically inactive to engage or re-engage with education, learning, volunteering and employment. It was focused on supporting four specific participant groups: care leavers; carers and former carers returning to work; economically inactive families; and older people aged 50 and above. It has been delivered by a range of providers who secured project funding via a competitive tendering process.

Initial contact was made with BIG Lottery staff during early December 2014 and it was agreed that the Life Skills project could be included within the qualitative sample for this research. Some concerns were expressed by the project team about the danger of over-burdening project participants given that they had been previously approached to participate in a project evaluation survey during 2013. However, it was concluded that an adequate period of time had elapsed since this evaluation survey had been undertaken to allow for the qualitative interviews to take place. The independent evaluators had attempted to survey all Life Skills participants³ therefore there was no 'clean' sample available which had not been previously targeted for survey work.

It was agreed that the recruitment for the qualitative interviews would focus upon three of the Life Skills sub-projects (Barnado's, Llamau and Ceredigion County Council) as these would yield a good geographical cross-section and

³ Adopting both a telephone survey approach as well as opportunistic methods via project providers.

would include some of the most hard to reach groups supported by the projects, including care-leavers.

A database containing contact phone numbers for 36 participants across these three sub-projects was made available to Old Bell 3 towards the end of January 2015. All participants had contributed to the evaluation survey during 2013. Of these, telephone numbers for 13 were found to be outdated/no longer in use and one further participant had moved away from the address provided. All participants were contacted by phone on at least three occasions. Two interviews were arranged but only one completed during February 2015 (a response rate of just over 2 per cent).

Chapter 3: Profile of participants

Chapter Summary

- Well over half of all interviewees were men, just under a third were aged 30 and under and all but one were of White ethnicity. Nearly half had a long-term illness which affected the amount or type of work which they could do. Over half of all interviewees lived alone. Seven interviewees spoke Welsh.
- The vast majority of interviewees were either unemployed and looking for work or not in or looking for paid work when they came into contact with the ESF project. Around half said they had been out of work or unemployed for most of the time since leaving school whilst a third had been in paid work for most of this time. Since leaving the ESF project over half of the leavers interviewed had been either continuously out of work or looking for work, although a small number recorded positive changes in their employment status post intervention.
- The most commonly cited reason for not being able to find work (both prior to intervention and at the time of interview) related to alcohol or other drug dependency issues, health related problems and having a criminal record. A large number of interviewees had led very chaotic lives which restricted their ability to find work or engage in any other voluntary or training programmes.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the demographic profile of the participants interviewed (Section 3.2), their backgrounds (Section 3.3) and current situations (Section 3.4).

3.2 Personal characteristics of participants

Of the 46 people who were interviewed over half (27) were men. However the gender split by individual projects varied. In the case of Cyrenians 15 of the 27 Cyrenians sample were women – interestingly the majority of the leavers' sample were women (possibly accounted for by the dominance of craft related courses which had attracted women in the main) whilst the majority of the current sample were men (all current participants were homeless people

interviewed at the drop in centre). In contrast the majority of the Peer Mentoring respondents (15 of 19 interviewees) were men⁴.

In terms of age, a broad cross-section was secured with just over a quarter of the sample aged 30 and under and a quarter aged 55 and over, as shown in Figure 3.1. Of those 41 participants who gave a specific age the average age was 39.

Figure 3.1: Age profile of interviewees (Base=41 responses)

	Number
19 - 21 years	2
22 - 24 years	2
25 - 30 years	9
31 - 40 years	8
41 - 54 years	10
55+ years	9
Not disclosed age	4

Almost all the interviewees were White: 34 of the 46 respondents were White Welsh and 10 were White Other British. One respondent selected any other white background and one selected Mixed (White and Black Caribbean).

The majority (35) were born in Wales and all but one of the remaining respondents were born elsewhere in the UK.

All but one noted that English was their first language. Seven respondents could speak Welsh and six of these could also read Welsh. A further six could understand Welsh. Four could write Welsh.

Nearly half (21 of the 46 respondents) noted that they had a long-term illness, health problem or disability and all but one of these agreed that this illness or

⁴ This is in keeping with the project's gender profile as the project level evaluation report states that over two-thirds of the Peer Mentoring project participants were men.

disability affected the amount or type of work which they could do. When asked to rate their current health a mixed picture emerged with around a quarter stating their health to be excellent and a third rating their health as either fair or poor, as shown in Figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2: Health status of interviewees

	Number
Excellent	11
Very good	9
Good	11
Fair	10
Poor	5

As shown in Figure 3.3 below, over half of the interviewees lived alone and a quarter lived in joint households with a spouse or partner:

Figure 3.3: Household composition of interviewees

	Number
Lived alone	25
Joint household with spouse/partner – no children	6
Joint household with spouse/partner – with children	5
Single parent – with child/ren	5
In family home with parents and/or siblings	3
In shared accommodation with other adults	1
No response	1

In nine cases respondents noted the number of children within their household aged under 19 were financially dependent upon them: in seven of these, this was a single child and in one case each respondents had two or three children financially dependent upon them.

A majority considered themselves to be the main income earner in their household (30 of 46): 12 disagreed and four did not respond.

3.3 Interviewees' Backgrounds

The vast majority of interviewees were either unemployed and looking for work (20 respondents) or not in or looking for paid work (a further 21 respondents) when they first came into contact with their ESF project, as shown in Figure 3.4 below. In terms of their circumstances since leaving school, Figure 3.5 shows that around half said that they had mostly been out of work or unemployed, although a third reported having been in paid work for most of this time. Only two said they had been in paid work continuously since leaving school. This pattern is very different from that for respondents to the quantitative Leavers Survey.

Of those who were looking for work at the time when they came into contact with the project, the most commonly cited reason for not being able to find work related to alcohol or other drug dependency issues (cited by 18 interviewees) followed by health related problem (12 interviewees) and the fact that the individual had a criminal record (11 interviewees) as shown in Figure 3.6 below.

Fig 3.4 Interviewees circumstances when joining ESF funded project (prompted)

Not in or looking for paid work (for example looking after children or relatives)	21
Unemployed and looking for work	20
Working on a self-employed basis	2
Doing voluntary work	3

Figure 3.5: Best description of their circumstances since leaving school (prompted)

In paid work for most of this time	14
Mostly unemployed or out of work	13
Continuously out of work	10
Other	4
Continuously in paid employment	3
In education or training for most of this time	2

Figure 3.6: Factors that created difficulties for interviewees to find work (prompted)

Alcohol or drug dependency	18
Health problems	12
Having a criminal record	11
Other reasons	8
A lack of qualifications or skills	6
Having caring responsibilities	6
Lack of relevant work experience	5
Lack of appropriate jobs where you live	4
Your age	2
No specific reason	2
Transport difficulties and it being hard to get to appropriate work	1
Believing you would not be better off financially in work	1

We now look in more detail at the interviewees' backgrounds for each project.

Cyrenians

The vast majority of those interviewed at the Cyrenians centre (i.e. current participants) were either homeless and living rough or were in temporary accommodation (hostels, bedsits or staying with friends). Interestingly however, when asked about the nature of their household composition interviewees tended to perceive themselves as 'living alone' rather than 'sharing accommodation with others'. This could possibly be due to factors such as accommodation instability and regular change of circumstances.

Eight had dealt with, and many were still dealing with, substance and alcohol abuse issues, often from a very young age. One such individual (C2) had

begun taking heroin when he was 17 and was kicked out of his house by his family – he became homeless and had to sleep rough on the streets as a result. Another interviewee (C8) mentioned having taken a heroin overdose and was now on a methadone programme. Others had suffered as a direct result of their partners' substance misuse – in one such case (C4) the interviewee had faced depression and lost his home as a result of his partner's drug addiction. It was evident that these interviewees conveyed a real sense of despair:

'I had lost everything and I didn't really know what I was doing' (CF4).

Many of the interviewees suggested that they had not previously been in a position to maintain regular, steady employment. In many cases this was attributed to their substance misuse issues. Indeed several interviewees suggested that 'things had spiralled out of control' in that their substance misuse was making it impossible to hold down a job and that this led to issues of depression which further fuelled any alcohol or drug dependency.

Several of these interviewees had been to prison or had experienced previous trouble with the law. Three interviewees admitted to having had previous prison sentences and a further two had been in difficulties with the law. One such interviewee (C2) admitted to having been constantly in and out of prison and had only just been re-released at the time of the interview. As a result of his drug abuse this particular individual (C2) had amassed a very large number of convictions against his name. Another (C5) had managed to hold down jobs from time to time but as his drug abuse had worsened over time he acknowledged that the likelihood of him being able to work had drastically reduced. Another (C10) went to prison at the age of 19 and was only released after just over a seven year custody period.

Around half of the interviewees who were interviewed at the Cyrenians centre referred to their previous or current mental health issues - be that depression, anxiety or other specific issues. It was clear that these interviewees thought that their mental health problems had made it (or would make it) difficult for

them to hold down any work for a particular length of time. One such interviewee (C6) for instance admitted to having been diagnosed with a bipolar disorder, but that his excessive drinking had masked the problem for years:

‘The bipolar was apparently impossible to diagnose when I was drinking so heavily – the doctors thought I was drunk.’ (C6)

Another interviewee (C8) recounted how he had suffered a period of bad depression during his drug abuse whilst another (C11) noted that she had suffered agoraphobia, panic attacks and weight problems during her life.

Two of those interviewed (C4 and C9) referred to facing difficulties in terms of family life, notably in relation to the knock on effect of their personal circumstances upon their children. In one case an interviewee had been required to give up their child for adoption as a result of her drug and alcohol dependency. She noted:

‘I haven’t had it easy, and when I lost my boy I thought what the hell and just gave up.’ (C9)

Most of the interviewees who were interviewed at the Cyrenians centre had left school with few qualifications although one (C12) noted that she had achieved O and A levels at school before progressing into a nursing profession which lasted for 27 years. However alcohol problems had resulted in this interviewee losing her job.

Not all were in such dire circumstances when they came into contact with the project: one interviewee (C3), for example, had worked most of her life in the retail industry but had been referred by a probation officer to Cyrenians for support after having lost her job and experienced a few ‘bumps in the road’.

The cohort of 14 Cyrenians leavers interviewed had a very different profile to the current participants interviewed at the centre. In the first instance the majority of the leavers were women and nearly all had at least some (though

not regular) previous experience of working since having left school. No major barriers were cited by this group in terms of looking for work.

It is impossible to generalise about the backgrounds of these interviewees as they had such varied backgrounds which frequently consisted of several jobs in different sectors, various qualifications and prior training experiences, various family circumstances and child dependency issues, elderly parents to care for and some with health problems.

Three of the Cyrenian leavers were full time mothers (e.g. C14) at the time of coming into contact with the Cyrenians project – two had become full time mothers shortly after achieving their GCSEs at college whilst the third reported that she had taken a career break from employment after having children. Another mother reported having already gone back to work when they came into contact with the project whilst another leaver (C22) was actively looking to get funding for a care role for her elderly parents after having taken voluntary redundancy.

The type of jobs previously held by this cohort varied and included those who had held occasional work at the minimum wage to those who had well paid roles, as in the case of a registered social worker (C20) who had worked as a social worker for 18 years before taking a career break as a grandmother.

One of those interviewed was also volunteering with the Cyrenians project. This interviewee (C19) had been dealing with her alcohol dependency problems in a rehabilitation centre and was looking to retrain as a nurse.

Two of the four men included in this sub-sample (C23, C24) were well educated – one with an NVQ Level 3 in Electronics and the other with a Law degree, but both had found it difficult to hold down their previous jobs. Factors such as poor performance as well as not liking the work involved were cited as reasons for moving on or losing work. Three of the four men who fell into

this group also suggested some drifting between posts had occurred during their working career.

Peer Mentoring

In the same manner it is impossible to generalise upon the previous circumstances of the 18 Peer Mentoring interviewees when they first came into contact with the project, although a common thread to the vast majority related to alcohol and drug misuse. The majority were not working at the time of the intervention but did have at least some previous paid employment experience.

Two had been employed for the majority of their working life. One interviewee (PM9) had held the same job for twenty years before taking a house-husband role in order for his wife to work full-time given that she was on a higher salary. This interviewee had then taken up a part time job which he lost because of drinking problems and had subsequently been out of work for eight months. Another (PM16) had worked in local government for 21 years and had worked up to managerial level but had lost his job because of alcohol related problems. Other interviewees (such as PM8) had no previous work experience – in this case the interviewee had dropped out of school without any qualifications, had faced domestic abuse from an ex-boyfriend and found herself mixing with a bad crowd which had led to a drug addiction. This interviewee had never applied for a job or held a job previously.

In terms of the type of post held interviewees reported having held a mix of jobs. Five interviewees were previously in elementary, low-skilled jobs which included café work, retail work, bar work and delivery/driving positions. Two had worked in the building trade and two had held retail/catering managerial positions. Another three had held more professional roles such as in local government, engineering and journalism. One such interviewee (PM12) had become addicted to heroin whilst in a professional job, having started on recreational drugs whilst as a teenager. In this case the interviewee in question reported that he had been earning a good wage but that all his spare

money had been spent on drugs. He later lost his job because of a change in his attitude towards work and the fact that he no longer wished to be there.

Indeed it was noteworthy that just over half of those interviewed across the Peer Mentoring reported having lost their employment due to their substance dependency. Six interviewees reported that they had been out of work for at least a couple of years (e.g. PM4 and PM5) due to their substance misuse problems. A fair number also recognised that they were not fit for work at the time they came into contact with the project whereas three interviewees were looking for work at that point.

Six of the interviewees had come from very chaotic family backgrounds. For instance one (PM7) had lived with an abusive father who also had a drug addiction. She had found herself homeless as a result and despite studying for an Access Humanities course in college she had failed to complete it. She had also failed to hold down a job in the retail sector. Another (PM17) explained that her father was a heroin addict and her background was seen as generally unstable and unsupportive. She had started taking drugs at the age of 11 and had left school with no GSCEs. She subsequently left her family home at the age of 16 to move in with her heroin addicted boyfriend. In addition to her drug use she also admitted to drinking excessively at this stage and would often consume a bottle of rum a day. This particular individual was aware that she was not in a position to hold down any job as she 'kept getting sacked, to be honest'.

Other interviewees reported additional problems and circumstances including issues of self-harm (PM7) or losing custody of children due to their drinking related problems (PM11). Another (PM1) reported that her criminal record was a particular barrier to her returning to work in the childcare sector where she had been previously working.

Life Skills

The interviewee from the Life Skills project (LS1) had grown up in north Wales but moved aboard with his family at a young age. Language difficulties and various family issues led to the interviewees return to a foster care home in Wales. His negative experience at a further education college coupled with a lack of GSCE qualifications led to his referral to the Llamau project.

3.4 Interviewees' present situations

Since leaving the ESF funded project over half of the leavers interviewed (19 interviewees) had been continuously either out of work or looking for work. In all 21 of 46 interviewees were out of work or looking for work at the time of interview. Under a quarter of all interviewees (10 interviewees) were in paid employment at the time of interview with an additional eight interviewees undertaking voluntary work. Overall, however, this represented a fairly significant change compared to circumstances prior to engagement with the ESF project: a net increase of eight participants who were in employment (from a base of two at the start of participation) and a net increase of five of those volunteering (from a base of three at the start of participation)⁵. Figures 3.7 and 3.8 present this data.

Figure 3.7: Interviewees' circumstance since leaving the project (Base=34 leavers) (Prompted)

Continuously out of work	16
Continuously in paid employment	4
In paid work for most of this time	4
Other	4
Mostly unemployed or out of work for other reasons	3
Continuously in education or training	1
In education or training for most of this time	1
No response	1

⁵ By comparison an independent evaluation of the Cyrenians project found that in excess of 15% of project participants had secured a job outcome with 64% of these participants still in employment after at least six months of having received support.

Figure 3.8: Interviewees' current circumstances at time of interview (Base = 46 interviewees) (Prompted)

Not in or looking for paid work (for example looking after children or relatives)	13
Doing paid work as an employee	10
Unemployed and looking for work	8
Doing voluntary work	8
Other	5
In full-time education or training	1

As shown in Figure 3.9 the main factors which were thought to create difficulties in securing work for those who were still out of work at the time of interview were similar to those issues cited prior to receiving support, namely alcohol or drug dependency issues, health related issues and having a criminal record.

Figure 3.9: Factors that created difficulties for interviewees to find work at time of interview (Prompted)

Alcohol or drug dependency	7
Having a criminal record	5
Health problems	5
Lack of appropriate jobs where you live	5
A lack of qualifications or skills	4
Lack of relevant work experience	4
Your age	2
Having caring responsibilities	1
Transport difficulties and it being hard to get to appropriate work	1
Were there any other reasons why it was difficult for you to find work	1
None of these	1

Current participants

Most of the current participants interviewed (i.e. at Cyrenians) were still not in a position to start looking for work in that they were focused on addressing other complex issues such as health, substance misuse, accommodation and confidence related issues. A small number were still trying to deal with their drug dependency issues (e.g. continued use of methadone for instance). Others were receiving counselling and psychiatric support – for instance C3 did not feel ready to go back to work as:

'My head isn't really where it needs to be to look for work yet, but that's the next step.'

A number of the interviewees were making progress, for instance C6 stated that:

'I am in a much better place now, and when I look back I realise how bad things got, I was drinking, I was violent and I'd be up in the middle of the night screaming at the neighbours.'

Two current participants in particular noted that they could not work because of substance addictions and poor health with one (C9) having been to hospital on four occasions in the week leading up to the interview and C10 waiting to enter a rehabilitation programme. Indeed not all interviewees thought that the prospect of working in the near future was a realistic possibility - for instance PM8 was still taking methadone and even though she was volunteering she did not think that any prospective employer would be particularly understanding about her need for regular visits to obtain her supply of methadone.

Two of the current participants stated that they were volunteering and making some progress towards an eventual return to work – one such interviewee noted that they now felt 'in a good place' and another (C4) thought they were starting to put their life back to some sort of order. Another three interviewees (such as C5) added that resolving their accommodation issues and having somewhere to live on their own was an important aspect in helping them make the eventual transition back to normality (as opposed to having to share accommodation with other substance misusers at hostels for instance). A handful of the current participants added that they were living in close proximity to the centre and attached great value in being able to drop in easily.

Project leavers

Turning to explore the present circumstances of the leavers interviewed, around a third of the Cyrenians cohort of leavers reported good progress

since having left the project. A few had progressed on to another training programme (for instance two interviewees were undertaking nursing courses and another had enrolled on to a silversmith course at a local college). Others reported having secured paid employment (for instance C13 secured a job which he had been able to retain for over a year and C14 reported having secured a part time job on the minimum wage since her child had started school).

In the case of the Peer Mentoring project, eight of the leavers had obtained qualifications which would open up volunteering and employment opportunities across the substance misuse support sector. One leaver was looking to apply for work on a project aimed at people aged 50 and over who had issues with alcohol. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the nature of the training made available, at least five of these interviewees had obtained employment and volunteering opportunities across drug rehabilitation services after accessing support (PM1, PM12, PM13, PM15 and PM16). Some of these had secured work on the Peer Mentoring project itself and in the case of one individual when this project had come to an end:

‘I carried on and kept working. This is the third or fourth job I’ve had now in [Name of Provider] and if it hadn’t been for Peer Mentoring I just wouldn’t be here now.’ (PM15)

Some of the Cyrenians and Peer Mentoring leavers thought that their personal circumstances restricted them from looking for work and some (e.g. PM4) admitted to just not being ready to return to work. For instance C14 was raising a family and expecting her fourth child whilst C15 had become ill since leaving the project and was recovering from recent surgery. C20 was not looking for work as she had retired: however her involvement with the Cyrenians project had been of help in developing appropriate skills and knowledge which she was now using in volunteering work at a local church. C22 (who was working on a part time basis) could not take on more hours due to a need to care for an elderly parent. PM10 was not particularly motivated to look for work due to a number of complex factors including nearing retirement

age, the tragic loss of his wife and his reluctance to travel by bus and to leave the house. He added:

'I don't have enthusiasm now ... I have a problem motivating myself ... can't be bothered. I think to myself that there are people younger than me that can't get a job so I haven't got a chance at 59'.

Three interviewees (e.g. PM2, PM3) specifically stated that they had experienced a substance misuse re-lapse since having received support and were not in a position to find employment at the time of interview. In one case (PM17) this re-lapse had started almost immediately after the withdrawal of the project:

PM17 relapsed for around three weeks immediately after the Peer Mentoring project came to an end. PM17 explained that this was because of the sudden loss of the support network which had been in place during the project's duration. She had been focused on obtaining a volunteering experience and planned on securing a job eventually as a Peer Mentor. However despite the Peer Mentoring project having come to an end she secured a volunteering opportunity and was still planning on obtaining work eventually within the substance misuse sector in the future.

Five of the Cyrenians leavers specifically reported that they were looking for work but were finding it difficult to do so. In one particular case (C18) a lack of confidence was cited as the main reason the interviewee found it difficult to return to the workplace after taking time out to raise a family – in this particular case the interviewee was attending a six week confidence building course run at her local job centre. Another (C23) had been in and out of work since his contact with Cyrenians had come to an end and this example tends to reinforce the churn of clients across supported employment provision:

C23 received help from Cyrenians to register with a recruitment agency and secured a job with an electronics company as a night security guard working between 6pm and 6am. As he didn't have much to do he was caught sleeping on the job one night and lost his post. He then

returned to JobCentre Plus who directed him into voluntary non-paid work for a charity, which he did for a month. He then succeeded in securing a fulltime job with a large distributor in Swansea, which involved nightshifts. He had been led to believe that the buses were running at convenient times for his shifts but this had not been the case. As a result he gave up the position on the basis of having to 'wait ages' for the bus. JobCentre Plus then put him in touch with Working Links who supported him with CV development and job applications. Then after registering with another recruitment agency he went on to secure casual employment with another employer before finally moving on to a fourth employer and at the time of interview was currently employed to carry out manual duties to cover sick and holiday leave of permanent employees.

Indeed the take up of casual temporary work was a common theme to emerge from some of these interviews and a few (such as PM6) observed that they had drifted from one casual job to another over time – often having left positions as they considered these were not 'working out'. A few interviewees added that their employment positions had not worked out simply because they had been unable to cope due to health reasons. PM7 is a prime example:

Having suffered from both drug and alcohol abuse as well as mental health problems from a very young age PM7 secured a Jobs Fund position at one of the Peer Mentoring project providers (and later became a project participant). When her contact with the project came to an end she secured a call centre job with a media and communications provider which required her to work long shifts over a four day week. Despite having explained her conditions to the recruitment agency she eventually lost her job as a result of not being able to cope with the work. Similarly she secured work with a housing and support provider but despite making it clear that she could not work night shifts because of her mental health issues she was instructed to do so. She lost her job after an incident at work – with a breakdown in

her mental health which had coincided with night shifts cited as a contributing factor.

3.5 Comparison with the Quantitative Survey

Overall men, young people and individuals with long term limiting illness/work limiting illnesses were more likely to have been included within the qualitative interviews than the quantitative survey. Welsh speakers were less well represented than in the quantitative survey.

The cohort of leavers who contributed to the qualitative interviews were more likely to be inactive prior to their ESF involvement and were more likely to be either unemployed or out of work for most or all of their time since completing compulsory education. Very few interviewees had been in continuous paid employment since completing compulsory education.

Interviewees were much more likely to cite medical and health issues, alcohol or drug dependence and having a criminal record as difficulties associated with finding work.

Interviewees were much less likely to be in paid employment at the time of the qualitative face to face interview compared to those surveyed in the quantitative ESF Leavers Survey and were much more likely to be either unemployed or economically inactive. However, the proportion of net transitions into employment seems broadly in line with those achieved by formerly inactive participants in the quantitative survey, at around a fifth of all participants.

Chapter 4: Involvement with the ESF projects

Chapter Summary

- The nature of support accessed was largely determined by the type of project which had provided support to interviewees. Support could be categorised into two types of provision – firstly, personal support which was geared to helping participants overcome and move on from specific health, welfare and dependency issues and secondly, support geared to supporting participants to become employable via the delivery of volunteering, training and job searching related activity.
- The qualitative interviews revealed extremely high levels of satisfaction with the support provided across the projects included within the fieldwork. It would appear that those most removed from the labour market were the ones most likely to report that the intervention had proved to be a life changing experience. Many of those interviewed also reported that the support provided had contributed to positive changes within their lives including changes to their lifestyle, health, welfare and accommodation arrangements. In addition, some of these participants were reporting other more general benefits from having been involved with the project including gaining confidence, developing new skills, obtaining new experiences relating to training or volunteering opportunities, dealing with social settings and an improvement in their personal skills.

4.1 Introduction

In this section we first present an overview of the support that was accessed (Section 4.2) before moving on to discuss levels of satisfaction with the support received (Section 4.3)

4.2 Nature of involvement

As would have been expected the type of support received varied according to the project in question. The support accessed by Cyrenians participants differed for those who had or were using the drop-in centre and for those who had come into contact with the project specifically for training or employment related support.

Interviewees reported that the support accessed at the drop in centre included:

- Basic personal services such as showers, use of the washing machine, food, warm drinks and a safe environment to sit and chat;
- Access to facilities such as computers, the internet and newspapers;
- Advice and liaison work relating to temporary accommodation and housing;
- Benefit related advice and support including appropriate referrals;
- Counselling services and referrals to rehabilitation programmes;
- Advice and support on family related issues;
- Health services including nursing and dental care (including check-ups and sexual health advice) and referrals to other GP services;
- Training courses such as health and safety, food hygiene and first aid in the workplace as well as hobby related courses e.g. arts and crafts;
- Volunteering opportunities – primarily kitchen work.

Cyrenians leavers who had not had any involvement with the centre tended to report that they had come into contact with the project via other means, such as a local library or family centre (often by accident as opposed to specifically looking for support). Frequently this created some misunderstanding about who had provided the actual support which was being discussed during the research interview. Some were unclear that the support had been provided by Cyrenians, and viewed the provision as something that the 'family centre' or 'JobCentre' had arranged.

Some three-quarters of the Cyrenians leavers (ten interviewees) had attended various training courses delivered by the project including training on food hygiene, first aid, jewellery making, craft courses, pain relief and control courses, a Dylan Thomas project and IT training. Some of these training courses had been one day sessions whilst others were delivered over a four to six week period. Most of these interviewees, albeit not all, cited that they had obtained certificates and qualifications as a result of having attended these training courses.

Four of the interviewees explained that they had accessed support from Cyrenians specifically to help find and apply for job (although one of these had also attended Cyrenians courses). These included:

C22 was out of work and was looking to return to employment when she first came into contact with the project, with the aim specifically of helping to secure a job: she did not require support to deal with any specific personal issues. The support which she had accessed included an accredited computer course, CV preparation, on-line job applications, interview preparation and other advice such as relating to benefits. In addition she received a £50 reward when she secured a job.

C13 was looking for work at the time when he came across the Cyrenians team by chance at his local library. He received regular weekly contact with the project and was determined to take advantage of all the available options for him in order to secure a job. He was signposted to other sources of help and advice and also completed a Level 2 Food Hygiene course with the project.

In the case of Peer Mentoring, many of the leavers had already been in contact with the project provider as part of their substance rehabilitation programme whilst others had been referred to the project by a specialist such as a GP or a local Treatment and Education Drug Services.

Peer Mentoring leavers gave the impression that project support had been well structured and some two-thirds cited that it had involved three days a week of provision which accounted for around 25 hours a week of their time.

The majority of interviewees added that they had participated on the project until it had come to an end⁶. The intervention had included both one to one

⁶ In contrast an independent evaluation of the project found that on average clients remained with the project for around seven months. However the independent evaluation also found that participants had engaged with the project in an intensive manner – on average for some

sessions with a peer mentor as well as regular courses. One (PM15) stated that 'there was about 15 different courses offered and I did all of them to keep myself busy'. Indeed some four interviewees suggested that the intensive nature of the provision had been a welcome distraction from their personal issues and two argued that the provision has been of value in developing a regular routine (which would be beneficial when eventually returning to volunteering or work).

Not all Peer Mentoring interviewees' involvement had been as intensive however – one interviewee (PM8) for instance noted that he would meet a mentor from the project about once a week for an hour or so as well as attend the occasional short one day course.

The type of provisions accessed by Peer Mentoring interviewees included:

- one to one mentoring sessions and drop in sessions with a peer mentor;
- courses including one day courses on aspects such as domestic violence, multi-agency, recovery coaching, substance misuse, money budgeting, child protection, sexual awareness and anger management;
- Outdoor work including community clean up work, beach clean up and gardening work;
- Voluntary work e.g. working at a dogs' shelter.

Nearly all peer mentoring leavers interviewed explained that they had required help to deal with their drug or alcohol dependency and make general improvements to their lives, and it was these factors that had motivated them to get involved. In one such case an interviewee noted that 'I was drinking too much and wanted help with that' (PM10). However a much smaller number

110 hours of activities and that individual face-to-face contact with peer mentors or staff accounted for 23 hours on average.

argued that they had accessed the support in order to find work – in one case for example (PM9), the interviewee had required help to find work as his previous efforts of contacting potential employers and working through JobCentre Plus had proved futile. His main difficulty had been the lack of IT skills in order to search for jobs online and the Peer Mentoring project had been able to work around this:

‘My main purpose was to get back into work. I went there once a week and we’d (he and his mentor) look on-line and see what jobs might suit and apply for them’.

Obtaining qualifications did not feature particularly high on the agenda of the peer mentoring leavers interviewed – they tended to attach more importance to the fact that courses were just a means of ‘getting me out of the house’(PM6). Despite this seven of those interviewed had achieved qualifications which would enable them to become a mentor or counsellor as a result of the project.

Whilst it is impossible to generalise upon any one single Peer Mentoring participant journey the following case is an interesting illustration:

PM11 had been referred to the Peer Mentoring project by a local Treatment and Education Drug Services and her primary motivation for getting involved was to deal with her alcohol issues and regain custody of her children, which she eventually did. She initially participated in weekly two-hour confidential group sessions focusing on different skills that would help participants both with their recovery and their research for work. In all it was estimated that the participant undertook some 30 sessions with the project. The themes covered included confidence building, motivation, sleep disorder, attitudes to substance misuse, assertiveness, stress management and goal setting. In addition other employment related topics were covered included CBV writing and interview skills. She then progressed to undertake training to become a volunteer with the project and completed a Level 2 and Level 3 volunteer training course. She was unable to secure volunteering work with the

project itself due to its abrupt end but secured general volunteering work with a drug counselling charity.

4.3 Satisfaction with project support

The qualitative interviews revealed extremely high levels of satisfaction with the support provided across the projects included within the fieldwork. It would appear that those most removed from the labour market were the ones most likely to report that intervention had proved to be a life changing experience.

In the case of the Peer Mentoring project some four interviewees made comments along the following lines 'it totally changed my life ... gave me something to focus on' (PM17).

In the case of the Peer Mentoring project interviewees stated that the quality of the peer mentors themselves was a particular strength of the provision⁷. Several interviewees appreciated the fact that Peer Mentors had themselves been through similar situations and were frequently considered as 'inspiration' to participants. In one case an interviewee (PM 13) noted 'I had two brilliant mentors – I'm still in touch with them now'. Several interviewees also thought that the social interaction within group activities and courses had been particularly helpful.

Likewise in the case of Cyrenians most of the current participants commented upon the approachability of project staff and their ability to empathise with their circumstances⁸. One such interviewee (C6) for instance said:

⁷ An independent evaluation of the Peer Mentoring project also reported upon the positive levels of participants' satisfaction with frequent references made to the value of advice and support being made available by a mentor who had been through similar difficulties and who understood the issues facing participants.

⁸ Similarly, an independent evaluation of the Cyrenians project reported that the participants surveyed were satisfied with the support provided.

'The nurse here understands what I've been through, and knows about alcohol and bi-polar'.

Amongst the other positive comments made about the services of the Cyrenians centre were:

'Whenever you walk in, two or three staff ask you how you are and talk to you about how things are going.' (C2)

'The staff here are great ... and the food is cheap and tasty. If you need help with anything, you just have to ask and they do what they can.' (C8)

'This place helps me stay off the booze, and I'm able to chill out and feel safe when I come here.' (C9)

Indeed many of the current participants noted that they felt much more comfortable accessing support such as medical support at the centre, as opposed to visiting a GP surgery.

Some areas for improvement were suggested, although these should not detract from the overall high levels of satisfaction expressed by interviewees.

For instance across the Peer Mentoring project:

- Interviewees would have appreciated a greater consistency in the peer mentor allocated to them. In one case (PM8), the interviewer had received support from about five or six mentors during her contact with the project and building new relationships each time was considered an issue 'I wish they kept me to one mentor';
- Interviewees commented upon the abrupt ending to the project which had left some participants 'high and dry'. One interviewee, who was volunteering with the project at the time, added that the project closure had proved problematic for some participants: 'it was chaos ... most of the mentors were just phoning up their clients and telling them that it was closing ... a couple took it really bad' and were known to have relapsed;

- Occasionally it was suggested that the case load allocated to each peer mentor were too large and that some participants had found it difficult to access face to face support.

4.4 Benefits of project support

It was clear that the cohort of current Cyrenians participants interviewed at the drop-in centre were able to report that the provision had already been of benefit to them and in some cases had led to life changing experiences. These changes were not necessarily related to work but rather in terms of making positive changes to their personal lives, for example leading less chaotic lifestyles, improvements to their health, improvements to their living accommodation and access to welfare benefits. Aligned to this, many of them were reporting that they were making some progress in tackling substance misuse issues largely as a result of being able to spend time in a safe environment which did tolerate substance misuse – although had some way to become clean of these dependencies.

In addition four of these participants were reporting other more general benefits of having been involved with the project including gaining confidence, developing new skills, obtaining new experiences relating to training or volunteering opportunities, dealing with social settings and an improvement in their personal skills.

Furthermore two of these participants believed that the support that they were receiving was enabling them to turn their lives around. For instance one such interviewee (C3) added 'I don't know where I'd be now if I'd stayed on the same path, coming here has helped turn things around'. Another stated: 'I have started to turn my life around, and a lot of that is down to the work that these guys have done. They accept you for who you are, and whatever your problem they'll help you with it.'

The benefits experienced by the cohort of Cyrenians leavers these interviewees were most likely to relate to becoming more employable, which

had arisen from having been engaged in training and support which was focused on returning to employment. These types of benefit included:

- developing new skills which could be applied in a range of settings including community groups and charities as well as within the workplace for those who went on to secure work;
- achieving qualifications particularly employment related qualifications such as first aid, food hygiene etc.;
- developing a sense of self-worth ('I didn't feel a complete loser [afterwards]')
- keeping active and engaged in activities as opposed to doing nothing with their time;
- confidence building and start consider future possibilities, rather than (as one interviewee stated) 'just being a mum'.

In the case of around half of the Cyrenians leavers one of the main benefits of being involved was either securing work (or at least improving their prospects of obtaining work in the future by developing their job-searching capabilities).

Many of these interviewees were eager to stress that the support had helped them develop a more professional CV whilst others argued that a key benefit had been the opportunity to become familiar with on-line job searching sites and making on-line applications. Indeed, despite not securing work most interviewees felt they were better equipped to undertake job searching and applications themselves in the future (a particularly important point for those who seemed to drift from one casual job to another).

Whilst it is impossible to generalise upon the experience of the Cyrenians leavers interviewed, one case study provides an interesting illustration:

Having spent six months in a rehabilitation centre C12 had been extremely anxious about being exposed to new situations - particularly situations which involved meeting other alcoholics and substance misusers. 'It was my first step back into the real world, and it allowed me to dip my toe back in the water and experience normal living again. The

Cyrenians team were brilliant and I knew straight away that the volunteering was going to help me get back to where I needed to be.' She obtained volunteering experience in the Cyrenians centre kitchen and undertook a food hygiene course. She gained invaluable experience of dealing with people and gained an insight into the work of the organisation with homeless people. With support from Cyrenians she successfully secured a place on a nursing course adding that 'My tutor showed me the reference that Cyrenians wrote and I was really touched that someone had taken the time and care to write such positive things about me. It all helps to boost your confidence and make you realise that you can do good things'.

Finally, many benefits were cited by the interviewees who had been involved with the Peer Mentoring project. One of the most common benefits cited by this group was the benefit of attending regular sessions which offered routine and structure to their previously chaotic lives. It was not uncommon to hear that the routine offered had 'put me back on the straight and narrow' (PM6) and 'helped me take control of my life' (PM13). In a few cases it was also thought that the intensive nature of the support had prevented some from relapsing. One interviewee (PM12) openly admitted that he 'would definitely have relapsed by now' had it not been for the project. Likewise quite a few interviewees added that the project had been instrumental in helping them survive – for example one interviewee stated that 'without the project, I would be on the street or dead by now.' (PM4)

In addition to these benefits, Peer Mentoring interviewees were also prepared to acknowledge that they had become more employable as a result of the intervention, with a few examples identified whereby they had taken some further steps along the journey towards voluntary work and paid employment.

Many of them argued that having started from a very fragile base in terms of feeling very anxious in social settings, they had developed better social skills as a result of dealing with other participants on the project. Not unsurprisingly

many examples of interviewees having obtained qualifications were identified during the fieldwork with several stating that they had worked through various NVQs in Health and Social Care and Peer Mentoring work. Some ten interviewees had been able to progress into volunteering work – most of these with the project whilst it was being delivered – and more recently with other substance misuse support providers. A few (six interviewees) had also been able to secure paid employment and these interviewees were very likely to attribute their success in securing work to the Peer Mentoring project. One such interviewee stated ‘without the project I wouldn’t be in work’ (PM5).

Chapter 5: Future engagement with survey work

Chapter Summary

- Using project providers as a conduit to approach interviewees proved particularly effective in terms of engaging people, especially current participants.
- The use of both ESF project and programme level surveys can result in a duplication of effort to obtain feedback from participants, as well as create reluctance amongst project providers to share data for the purposes of undertaking the Leavers Survey.
- One of the biggest challenges encountered was the exceptionally low response rate obtained when attempting to make initial contact with project leavers in a random manner.
- Had the same interviewees been targeted with a quantitative telephone survey then we are of the view that not as many completed interviews would have been achieved. Despite this a large number of leavers would have been prepared to complete a phone survey had their contact details been provided for the survey.
- However, the majority of the leavers we spoke to preferred a face to face qualitative interview which clearly offered them an opportunity to open up more about their background than they would have done so via a scripted phone survey. Many difficulties were identified by interviewees in undertaking phone surveys including lack of confidence, issues of dis-trust and weak telephone conversational skills.
- Many interviewees suggested practical ways for improving the response rate and quality of responses to any future research and these suggestions covered methods of making initial contact, collaboration with project providers, ensuring clarity about the purpose of the discussion, and the timing of contact and the interview.
- We conclude that offering a financial incentive for interviews would not have improved response rates for this particular study although we believe that there would be merit in doing so in the future under specific circumstances i.e. where a project provider promotes the opportunity for participants to engage in interviews.

5.1 Introduction

In this section we discuss the lessons learnt from the qualitative fieldwork in terms of engaging with hard to reach groups (Section 5.2) and consider the

implications of these lessons for undertaking future research with such groups (Section 5.3). Finally we consider the use of making available financial incentives for interviewees.

5.2 Lessons learnt from the qualitative fieldwork

In the first instance it is important to consider whether the need to substitute the original selection of projects had any significant bearing upon the findings of the research or the lessons learnt in terms of conducting future leavers' surveys. In our view it is clear that all six shortlisted projects had a remit of supporting vulnerable groups into training, volunteering and/or employment opportunities - albeit that the specific characteristics of these groups did vary from one project to another. Naturally this would have bearing upon the research findings in terms of the type of support provided and the characteristics of interviewees. For instance the inclusion of the Coastal project within the research would probably have resulted in a higher number of interviewees citing issues relating to illness and disability in terms of returning to work whilst the inclusion of the New Day project would probably have resulted in a higher number of interviewees citing issues relating to criminal record and time spent in prison. However we do not believe that these substitutions have had any bearing upon the general lessons learnt in respect of future research with vulnerable groups, as we believe these conclusions are likely to be relevant to individuals from a range of vulnerable groups, rather than specific to the homeless and those with drug and alcohol issues.

What worked?

The large majority of interviewees appeared pleased to be asked for their opinion – particularly the cohort of current participants supported at the Cyrenians centre and a large number of the Peer Mentoring leavers. Many of this client group led chaotic, often isolated lives and as such, having the opportunity to engage in an informal discussion about their life experiences over a cup of coffee, was a welcome experience. A representative at the Cyrenians centre observed that: 'some of these guys are quite lonely, and

don't often get asked for their opinions, so they'll be quite happy to talk to you'.

It was also clear that approaching interviewees via the provider organisations (and in the case of the current participants actually conducting the research at the delivery centre) proved particularly effective in developing trust and acceptance amongst interviewees. In the case of the current Cyrenians participants all interviewees were introduced to the research by the project lead whom they clearly knew and trusted implicitly. This association effectively 'opened the door' for the interviews, and helped secure buy in from people who might have otherwise been reticent to participate.

Furthermore a number of the current participants were leading chaotic and challenging lives. Because of their serious drug and/or alcohol addictions, interviewees readily conceded that they sometimes struggled to plan their days and keep to appointments. This implies that it would have been very difficult to pre-arrange interview with this audience. As such, the drop in model provided a useful compromise and was reinforced as an appropriate approach by a Cyrenians centre representative:

'Even when people agree to come in to take part in a survey or to offer feedback, they often forget about it, or get the dates wrong. It is very difficult to work in a planned or structured way with people who forget things and in some cases are heavily under the influence of drink or drugs. The secret of Cyrenians' success is that we work in an opportunistic way – we bring service providers to our centre, and then work with the clients as and when they come in. Therefore, any survey work would need to be set up in the same way to be successful'.

One other key factor at play was the overwhelming desire of interviewees to tell someone how good they thought the project was and how much it had helped them. Once they had understood that the research was linked to their experiences on the project, their strong motivation to offer positive feedback facilitated willing participation. This was a particularly important finding from

the perspective of current participants interviewed at the Cyrenians centre (who participated at random) although some care must be taken when considering these views from the perspective of Peer Mentoring project leavers given the eventual reliance upon the project providers to suggested potential leavers for inclusion in the research.

Another factor which contributed to the success of the qualitative fieldwork was the use of a discussion guide, as opposed to a closed survey approach. This enabled interviewees to convey their personal journey and experiences of support in an open and honest manner. Using closed questionnaires would have restricted the feedback provided and it would have been challenging for some of the interviewees (particularly those with mental health issues and learning difficulties) to have answered some of the specific questions contained in the questionnaire.

What challenges were encountered?

The biggest challenge encountered in undertaking fieldwork across those projects working with the hardest to reach groups was the exceptionally low response rate obtained when attempting to make initial contact with project leavers using a database of random project leavers. For instance in the case of Cyrenians the response rate was just under 9% and was 0% in the case of the Peer Mentoring project. For the Peer Mentoring project alternative methods of identifying and recruiting interviewees were adopted which introduced an element of bias into the research. The hardest to reach audiences were the least likely over a certain period of time to keep the same phone number, the least likely to retain the same household address and the least likely to answer their phone to an unknown number (given previous issues such as criminal record, debt issues etc.).

Another challenge encountered, and raised by many interviewees, was that those with very challenging previous personal problems simply did not want to dig into their past again, having managed to put it behind them and move on with their lives.

Finally one unique project issue encountered related to the abrupt ending of the Peer Mentoring project. It is possible that this had some bearing upon the quality of contact data held and provided to the research team (i.e. it is likely that the providers did not have adequate project closure resources to ensure that databases were as comprehensive and accurate as possible) as well as the fact that the sudden withdrawal of support created some element of distrust amongst project participants.

5.3 Future research with hard to reach groups

Our experience of undertaking qualitative interviews across some of those ESF projects targeting the most hard to reach audiences has shown that arranging interviews with those participants facing the greatest issues (including homelessness, drug and alcohol dependency and mental health issues) presented the greatest challenges for the research.

Quantitative phone survey vs qualitative face to face interview?

Based upon feedback from the interviewees it is likely that had the same contact data for the three projects targeted via the qualitative interviews been made available for the quantitative telephone survey then fewer interviews would have been achieved. Despite this a large number of leavers indicated that they would have been prepared to complete a phone survey had they been approached in this way. However some differences emerged across the projects in this respect – for instance Cyrenians leavers were the most likely to state that they would have been prepared to complete a phone survey whilst Peer Mentoring leavers were the least inclined to think this. From the Cyrenians project two leavers said that they would have preferred a phone interview⁹ and one noted:

⁹ Had individuals requested a phone interview at the time of making the arrangements for fieldwork this was accommodated by the research team.

'I would have preferred a phone interview ... it would have been quicker and I could have fitted it around work better. I'm here because I think so much about what Cyrenians do.'

Overall however it was clear that the majority of leavers preferred a face to face interview and the informal approach adopted had clearly offered them an opportunity to open up much more about their backgrounds than they would have done so via a scripted phone survey. A few interviewees also suggested that the interview had given them a reason to leave the house and get some company and this had been appreciated. A number also stated that they had enjoyed the discussion and commented that the researcher had been 'a nice person'.

Many interviewees acknowledged that they lacked telephone conversation skills (particularly given their personal issues and a general reliance upon texting and social media communication). As a result a few (around half a dozen) specifically stated that they would not have participated in a phone interview at all, including the following individual:

'I don't like telephones, often I bottle my way out and don't answer it.'
(PM8)

One project leaver who had secured a job with the project provider was keen to stress that the difficulties encountered by some individuals made it difficult for them to discuss things over the phone:

'If you're talking to people who've had quite strong issues and experience, they really might not be prepared to speak with someone about it over the telephone ... they would much prefer to meet face to face in a place they're comfortable with.' (PM13)

Indeed one leaver (LS1) added that he had already participated in a telephone survey with a company who was conducting an evaluation of the Life Skills project and from his perspective he had been asked 'loads of stupid questions, in which I was asked to rate my experiences out of 10'. He had

found this survey very difficult primarily as he 'couldn't see the point of a lot of the questions asked.' This particular interviewee had much preferred his experience of having an open-ended conversation with a researcher on a face to face basis.

Based upon such feedback it would seem that being able to offer interviewees a choice of completing a phone survey or face to face interview would be appropriate in the future to accommodate these different preferences.

Mobile Phones

Nearly all interviewees who contributed to this research owned a mobile phone, even the hardest to reach current project participants. However it was noted that mobile phones were frequently lost or stolen, users regularly changed their numbers and perhaps most importantly interviewees admitted to being suspicious of unknown numbers and would not therefore take the call. Interestingly the Cyrenians project often text users to forewarn them to expect a phone call from them given this issue and also often remind users that they have appointments (for instance with the nurse or dentist) via a texting service.

Internet

Most interviewees had access to the internet and had an email address (with those out of work citing the necessity of being able to access benefits and search for employment on-line). However, the qualitative interviews revealed that a minority of interviewees did not actively use the Internet or check their e-mails regularly. Furthermore it became evident that the hardest to reach interviewees were the least likely to be prepared to complete an online survey.

It also became apparent that some interviewees had learning and basic skills difficulties, which would restrict their ability to complete surveys online. Overall only a few interviewees stated that they would have been prepared to complete an on-line survey.

Paper Surveys

None of the interviewees were particularly enthusiastic about completing a paper survey. Indeed in many cases interviewees explicitly stated that they would not have participated in the research had the study adopted this approach.

Other considerations raised by interviewees

Many interviewees also suggested practical ways for improving the response rate and quality of responses to any future research, although it must be stated that many of these are of course already being implemented. They included:

- *Ensuring clarity about purpose of discussion and questions which will be asked:* Several interviewees suggested that it would have been useful to know in advance the sort of questions which they would be expected to answer (although a few did acknowledge that they had received an appropriate briefing such as in one case whereby an interviewee stated that ‘the woman that rang me to arrange the interview was very detailed about what would happen today and what to expect ... I got enough information’. A handful of other interviewees had been less clear about the purpose of the meeting and these tended to be individuals who had a poor recollection of the support that they had received and had misunderstood the purpose of the interview;
- *Making initial contact by text and/or social media:* so as to forewarn participants of the research and to inform them to expect a call (a high number of the contacts provided did not answer the call when arrangements were being made for this study);
- *Collaborating with project providers:* Several interviewees (from across the Peer Mentoring project) reinforced the fact that they had been more likely to participate in the research after having been made aware of the study and/or approached by their project provider to get involved – this in their view gave the research a degree of credibility and eliminated any element of dis-trust associated with the interview;

- *Providing written confirmation of appointment:* A couple of interviewees thought that it would be useful to confirm any appointments in writing (by text or e-mail) and this would allow the interviewee to check the researcher's credentials;
- *Timing of making contact:* Some interviewees commented that the time which had elapsed since their last contact with the project and being invited for the qualitative interview had been too long: 'it's been a long time since the course ... [it was] a shock that it was being followed up, it would have been nice if I'd been contacted nearer the time;'
- *Convenience of interview time:* Many interviewees stressed the importance of being offered a convenient time to have either a phone or face to face discussion, as opposed to being put on the spot to complete an interview on the first contact. This included being offered interview slots outside of working hours (for those in employment) as well as taking advice from project providers on the most appropriate times to make contact e.g. one project leaver who was volunteering with the Peer Mentoring project suggested that 'there's no point calling any of them before 11am';
- *Nature of questioning:* Adopting an informal conversational approach to the interviewees as opposed to a closed questionnaire approach was clearly favoured by interviewees particularly those who had a complex life journey to convey and those who would find it difficult to answer some of the more specific questions included in questionnaires.

5.4 The Use of Financial Incentives

In approaching the qualitative fieldwork the option of offering a financial incentive was discussed but it was agreed that this would not be made available. However it was agreed that the potential use of financial incentives for future research be explored within the interviews.

Mixed views were conveyed by interviewees about the use of financial incentives to encourage participation in the qualitative work. Many interviewees did not think that making a financial offer for interviewees' time was appropriate although a small minority did think that this might have secured the input of other leavers to the study.

In our view, given that the biggest issue faced was the low response rate achieved when attempting to make initial contact with leavers (largely due to the high number not answering calls and phone numbers no longer working), the offer of a financial incentive would not have made much difference to the response rate achieved. However the offer of a financial incentive might be appropriate for circumstances whereby a project provider promotes the opportunity for participants to engage in interviews. Such an approach had in fact been adopted by the Cyrenians project in the past whereby other organisations had provided small cash incentives of between £5 and £10 to contributors attending research and consultation events arranged in conjunction with the project. These events had been well attended.

ANNEX A: TOPIC GUIDE FOR QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS WITH BOTH LEAVERS AND CURRENT LEARNERS

INTRODUCTION

- Thank you for agreeing to talk to me today about your experience of [name of project]. We are talking to a number of people who have been involved with the project;
- I work for a company called Old Bell 3 and we are conducting research on behalf of the Welsh Government and the European Social Fund – who have funded the project;
- [For leavers] The purpose of this conversation is to find out how useful the project has been to you and to see what you have done since;
- [For current learners] The purpose of this conversation is to find out what you think of the project and how it may benefit you in the future;
- This will help towards improving projects like this in future;
- All your answers will be treated in the strictest of confidence and what you say will not be shared with [name of project] or anybody else. Results will be reported in an anonymised format.
- I expect our discussion to take around ¾ hour to an hour. I'd like to record our discussion as well as take some notes of some of the things that you say – is that OK? Do you have anything you want to ask before we start?

IF NEEDED:

- The European Social Fund helps finance courses and provision that aim to improve work-related skills. This can include training in or out of the classroom; work experience; and personal and social development.
- We work strictly within the Market Research Society Code of Conduct
- Contacts at Old Bell 3 are Nia Bryer and Claire Miles if they would like to find out more about the research (01558 822922).
- Welsh Government (Welsh European Funding Office – WEFO) contact is Jennifer Alstrom on 0300 062 8835
- Interviewee details were supplied to us by the project.
- Participation in the study is completely voluntary.

NOTE: Background briefing details may be available for interviewees e.g. language of interview or issues relating to personal circumstances.

Interviewee Details

Interviewee Name	
Name of Project	
Current learner or leaver?	
Date of Interview	
Interviewer	

SECTION A: INTERVIEWEE’S BACKGROUND AND WHAT THEY WERE DOING PREVIOUSLY

A1 First of all tell me a bit about yourself? Ask as appropriate warm-up questions about where they live, family, what they were doing prior to getting involved with the project;

A2 What you were doing when you got involved in the project? **CODE IF THEY WERE:**

Doing paid work as an employee	1
Working on a self-employed basis	2
In full-time education or training (IF YES: what course or training was this?)	3
On a government funded employment or training programme (IF YES: what course or training was this?)	4
On a training course that was not government funded (IF YES: what course or training was this?)	5
Unemployed and looking for work	6
Doing voluntary work	7
Not in or looking for paid work (for example looking after children or relatives)	8
(DO NOT READ OUT) Can't remember	X

A3 Did your circumstances on joining the project reflect what you have done since leaving school (i.e. since compulsory education at 16)? **CODE which one of the following best describes what they had been doing up to the point when they become involved with the project:**

Continuously in paid work (either full or part time)	1
Continuously in education or training (either full or part time – ignore breaks due to holidays etc., ignore part time or seasonal employment)	2
In paid work for most of this time (only occasional spells of education/training, unemployment or being out of work for other reasons such as caring for family members, ill-health)	3
In education or training for most of this time (only occasional spells of work, unemployment or being out of work for other reasons such as caring for family members or ill-health)	4
Mostly unemployed or out of work for other reasons (such as caring for family members or ill-health) with only occasional spells in work or education or training	5
Continuously out of work (neither working nor in education or training)	6
(DO NOT READ OUT) OTHER (specify)	7

- A4 Tell me a little about the sort of things you've done since leaving full time education at the age of 16? [Respondent may wish to flag up any previous issues they've experienced such as ill-health etc.]
- Ask about work
 - Ask about training or courses that they've attended before
 - Ask about volunteering
- A5 Before you joined the project what was the highest qualification that you had obtained?
- Ask for type of qualification
 - Ask for level and grade
- A6 **[If they were out of work before getting involved]:** Tell me a little about your time out of work:
- How long had you been out of work?
 - Have you ever had a paid job? If so, what was the nature of your previous job?
 - Were you actively looking for work when you joined the project? [IF YES: what sort of jobs?]
- A7 **[If they were out of work before getting involved]** What made it difficult for you to find work? **CODE ALL THAT APPLY:**

A lack of qualifications or skills	1
Lack of relevant work experience	2
Lack of affordable childcare	3
Having caring responsibilities	4
Health problems	5
Your age	6
Alcohol or drug dependency	7
Having a criminal record	8
Lack of appropriate jobs where you live	9
Transport difficulties and it being hard to get to appropriate work	10
You only wanting to work part time	12
Believing you would not be better off financially in work	13
Were there any other reasons why it was difficult for you to find work (SPECIFY)	14
(DO NOT READ OUT) Don't know	X
(DO NOT READ OUT) None of these	V

A8 **[If they were in work/self-employed when they got involved with project OR if they had some previous recent working experience before getting involved]:**
Tell me a little about the job you had EITHER when you got involved with the project OR in the past:

- What did job entail – ask about job title and responsibilities
- Was the job: permanent, casual, temporary contract, zero contract hours
- How many hours per week did you usually work for?
- How long had you been in this post?
- Approximately, what was the salary for this post?
- [If appropriate] Why did this post come to an end?

SECTION B INVOLVEMENT WITH THE PROJECT

B1 How did you first come to hear about the project?

- Were you referred to the project by another organisation? If so, by who?

B2 What did the course/training/project involve?

- Ask about where support was provided
- Ask about the number of hours per week that they typically spent on the course
- Ask about how long they were on the course/are expected to be on the course
- Ask about the content of the course(s)/support that they have been involved with
- Explore whether they have been on a number of different courses and what each one involved

B3 Why did you get involved with the project and what were you hoping to get out of it?

- Prompt with improving skills, getting a job, getting a qualification, returning to learning, that they were recommended to do it
- How important was it that the course(s) led to a qualification that would be higher than what you already had?

B4 Did you have any personal issues which you were hoping that the project would help you with? What was the nature of these issues?

SECTION C: SATISFACTION WITH PROJECT

- C1 How satisfied are you/have you been with the support and courses that you've been involved with? Why do you say that?
- C2 Is the project meeting/did the project meet your initial expectations?
- C3 What is/was good about the project?
- C4 What is/was not as good about the project? How could these be improved?
- C5 Did you complete/have you already completed any courses offered by the project? [For leavers, if no]. If not, why not?
- C6 Did you obtain/have you already obtained any qualifications or accredited certificates as a result of being supported by the project? If so,
- What type of qualification was this?
 - What level/grade?
 - [Check given earlier responses] So was this at a higher level than any qualifications which you already had before joining the project?
- C7 **[Current learners]** Do you think you'll complete any [further] courses offered by the project? If not, why not?
- C8 **[Current learners]** Do you think you will obtain any [further] qualifications or accredited certificates as a result of being supported by the project? If so,
- What type of qualification will this be?
 - What level/grade will it be at?
 - [Check given earlier responses] So this will be at a higher level than any qualifications which you already had before joining the project?

SECTION D PRESENT SITUATION

D1 **[For leavers]** What did you do immediately after your involvement with the project came to an end?

- Did you look for/find work?
- Did you look for/take up any other training, volunteering or learning opportunities?

D2 **[For leavers]** Since leaving the project have you started any other education or training courses?

- What does/has this course involved?
- What qualification are you working towards/have you obtained?
- Did the project play any role in referring you/making you aware of this further course?
- Would you have undertaken this further training anyway had it not been for the project?

D3 **[For leavers]** Since leaving the project, what you have been doing? **[Code which of the following options best described their circumstances]**

Continuously in paid work (either full or part time)	1
Continuously in education or training (either full or part time – ignore breaks due to holidays etc., ignore part time or seasonal employment)	2
In paid work for most of this time (only occasional spells of education/training, unemployment or being out of work for other reasons such as caring for family members, ill-health)	3
In education or training for most of this time (only occasional spells of work, unemployment or being out of work for other reasons such as caring for family members or ill-health)	4
Mostly unemployed or out of work for other reasons (such as caring for family members or ill-health) with only occasional spells in work or education or training	5
Continuously out of work (neither working nor in education or training)	6
(DO NOT READ OUT) OTHER (specify)	7

D4 **[For Leavers]** What are you doing at the moment? **CODE** which of the following best reflects the interviewee's situation:

Doing paid work as an employee	1
Working on a self-employed basis	2
In full-time education or training	3
On a government funded employment or training programme	4
On a training course that was not government funded	5
Unemployed and looking for work	6
Doing voluntary work	7
Or Not in or looking for paid work (for example looking after children or relatives)	8
(DO NOT READ OUT) Other (SPECIFY)	9

D5 [For those still on provision] Apart from participation in the project, what else [if anything] are you doing? [CODE responses]

Doing paid work as an employee	1
Working on a self-employed basis	2
In full-time education or training	3
On a government funded employment or training programme	4
On a training course that was not government funded	5
Unemployed and looking for work	6
Doing voluntary work	7
Or Not in or looking for paid work (for example looking after children or relatives)	8
(DO NOT READ OUT) Other (SPECIFY)	9

D6 [If they are currently out of work]: Are you looking for work?

- [If yes] Probe for what type of work.
- [If not] Why are you not looking for work?
- What difficulties, if any, are you encountering in looking for work?

[CODE BELOW]

A lack of qualifications or skills	1
Lack of relevant work experience	2
Lack of affordable childcare	3
Having caring responsibilities	4
Health problems	5
Your age	6
Alcohol or drug dependency	7
Having a criminal record	8
Lack of appropriate jobs where you live	9
Transport difficulties and it being hard to get to appropriate work	10
You only wanting to work part time	12
Believing you would not be better off financially in work	13
Were there any other reasons why it was difficult for you to find work (SPECIFY)	14
(DO NOT READ OUT) Don't know	X
(DO NOT READ OUT) None of these	V

- D7 **[If they are in work/self-employed]** Tell me a little about the job you have:
- Is it the same job as you had before you got involved with the project?
 - What does the job entail – ask about job title and responsibilities
 - Is the job: permanent, casual, temporary contract, zero contract hours?
 - How many hours per week do you usually work for?
 - How long have you been in this post?
 - Approximately, what is the salary for this post?
 - How satisfied are you with this job? Explore any issues raised e.g. salary, working hours, ability to fulfil potential
- D8 **[If they are in work/self-employed]** What contribution, if at all, did the project make to you obtaining your current post?

SECTION E: BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT

- E1 Do you think you've benefited/are benefiting from being involved with the project? If so, in what way?
- Ask about personal confidence and how they feel about themselves
 - Ask about dealing with or overcoming personal problems
 - Ask about new interests and making friends
 - Ask about attitudes to learning
 - Ask about job and career prospects
- E3 Have there been any disadvantages to you from being involved with the project? If so, what are/were they?
- E3 Can you tell me more specifically what was it about the project that led to these benefits [at E1]?
- For example, was it meeting others, specific advice or guidance received, getting back into a routine. Ask for examples.
- E4 What sort of skills do you think you've gained or improved/you're gaining or improving from being involved with the project?

E5 Has the project helped you/Do you expect the project to help you find work or progress in work at all? If so, in what way?

- Ask about whether project was vital or helped get them a job/becoming self-employed
- Ask about changes to job satisfaction
- Ask about changes to job security
- Ask about changes to salary

E6 **[As appropriate]** Do you think your involvement with the project will help you find a job in the future?

E7 **[As appropriate]** How much contribution would you say the project has had in helping you achieve these changes relating to work, skills and personal circumstances? For instance has the support of the project been:

- Vital or very important
- Fairly important
- Not particularly important
- Or of no importance at all to these changes?

E8 Had you not got involved in this project, what do you think would have happened/what would you have done?

SECTION F: USE OF OTHER SUPPORT PROVIDERS

F1 Have you received any help, support or training from any other support providers over the last couple of years?

- Ask about help relating to improving skills or qualifications
- Ask about help relating to finding or progressing in work
- Which organisations have you had help from?
- What type of support have you received?
- Which, if any, has been particularly useful, and why?

SECTION G FUTURE

G1 What are your plans for the future in terms of employment?

G2 What support do you think you will need in order to achieve these plans?

SECTION H ENGAGEMENT WITH SURVEY WORK

H1 We often find it difficult to get people to participate in telephone surveys for us – these surveys ask very similar questions to what we've discussed today. Why do you think that is?

- Had you been approached via a cold telephone call by a researcher, would you have been prepared to answer the same type of questions over the phone?
- Why do you say this?

H2 What could we do to get more people who have participated in projects such as [name of project] to provide feedback on their experiences and what they are currently doing?

- Ask about preferred method of contact (e.g. exit interview with project staff vs. contact with independent researchers; telephone, internet, face-to-face survey)
- Would you complete an online survey? Do you have an e-mail address?
- Ask about type of questions asked
- Ask about other issues e.g. time of day to contact them, length of survey

FINAL SECTION ON DEMOGRAPHICS

Finally I now just have a few questions about yourself. These are just to help us analyse the results.

1 CODE GENDER

Male	1
Female	2

2 **Can you please tell me your current age?**

Exact age in years _____

- 3 Which of the following best describes your ethnic group? READ OUT BOLD CATEGORIES THEN RELEVANT MORE DETAILED CATEGORIES. SINGLE CODE.**

White	
Welsh	1
Other British	2
Irish	3
Any other white background (SPECIFY)	4
Mixed	
White and Black Caribbean	5
White and Black African	6
White and Asian	7
Any other mixed background (SPECIFY)	8
Asian or Asian British	
Indian	9
Pakistani	10
Bangladeshi	11
Chinese	12
Any other Asian background (SPECIFY)	13
Black or Black British	
Caribbean	14
African	15
Any other Black background (SPECIFY)	16
Other ethnic group	
Arab	17
Gypsy / Romany / Irish Traveller	18
Any other (SPECIFY)	19
Refused	X

- 4a) Were you born...(READ OUT)?**

In Wales	1
Elsewhere in the UK	2
In the European Union	3
Elsewhere (SPECIFY)	4
(DO NOT READ OUT) Refused	X

4b) READ OUT AND SINGLE CODE PER ROW.

	Yes	No	Don't know
A) Is English your first language	1	2	3
B) Can you speak Welsh	1	2	3
C) Can you read Welsh	1	2	3
IF NO AT B AND C			
D) Can you understand Welsh	1	2	3
ASK ALL			
E) Can you write Welsh	1	2	3

5 Do you have any long-term illness, health problem or disability - by long-term, we mean that it can be expected to last for more than one year

Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	3

5a Does this illness or disability affect the amount or type of work you can do?

Yes	1
No	2
Don't know	3

6 In general would you say your health is ...READ OUT. SINGLE CODE

Excellent	1
Very good	2
Good	3
Fair	4
Or poor	5
(DO NOT READ OUT) Don't know / refused	X

7 In which of the following type of household do you currently live...READ OUT?

Do you live alone	1
In a joint household with a spouse or partner but no children	2
In a joint household with a spouse or partner and children	3
As a single parent, with your child or children	4
In a family home with parents and / or siblings	5
In shared accommodation with other adults	6
Or in some other situation (SPECIFY)	0
(DO NOT READ OUT) Don't know	8
(DO NOT READ OUT) Refused	X

ASK ALL EXCEPT IF CODES 1 OR 2 AT H7

8 What is the number of children in this household aged under 19 who are financially dependent on you?

None	0
Number	_____
Don't know / refused	X

9 Do you consider yourself to be the main income earner in the household?

Yes	1
No	2
Don't know / refused	X