



EVALUATION OF THE LIFT PROGRAMME

Phase 1: The Logic of the Lift model Summary

1. Background

- 1.1 In March 2015, Welsh Government (WG) commissioned Wavehill to undertake an evaluation of the Lift Programme. Lift is designed to respond to the WG's Tackling Poverty Action Plan 2013; specifically to a commitment to provide 5,000 training and employment opportunities to people in long-term workless households by the end of 2017. It operates in nine delivery areas based on twelve Communities First (CF) Clusters across Wales. In each delivery area, small teams of job brokers have been recruited to engage working age adults living in long-term workless households (i.e. households out of work for at least six months).
- 1.2 Eligible participants access the programme voluntarily with the brokers assessing a participant's aspirations for employment, training or education and helping them to develop personal development (action) plans to structure their move towards work. Brokers identify suitable training and employment opportunities locally based on the participant's action plan, whilst WG departments, public bodies and others identify suitable opportunities nationally for the participants to engage in.
- 1.3 The first Lift delivery area became operational in January 2014. The Programme was formally launched in March 2014 and the last of the nine areas commenced work in Summer 2014. The Minister for Communities & Tackling Poverty recently agreed a Programme budget for 2016-17 and 2017-18 to enable the Programme to continue up to March 2018.

2. Aims and methodological approach

2.1 The evaluation has two overarching aims:

- (i) To assess how the programme has been set up in each of the nine delivery areas and how it is being operated; and
- (ii) To provide an indication of its effectiveness in helping participants to find work or to undergo activities that significantly boost their job prospects.

2.2 The evaluation is being delivered over three phases, with the first phase focused on understanding the inherent logic model underpinning Lift. That is, testing the extent to which Lift is based upon a plausible 'theory of change' and the extent to which the programme is conforming to this model in the Delivery Areas.

2.3 The research involved:

- Desk based research on the strategic and policy context within which Lift is placed and a literature review of what contributes to our understanding of worklessness.
- Scoping consultations with those involved with the design and initial implementation of the programme as well as Cluster Managers and Senior Brokers/Mentors involved in its delivery.
- Development of the programme's logic model considering the key assumptions associated its operation.

3. Summary of Findings

3.1 The Lift programme offers outreach as a central element to the model. Eligible participants access the programme voluntarily with the brokers assessing a participant's aspirations for employment, training or education and helping them to develop personal development plans to structure their move towards work. Brokers identify suitable training and employment opportunities locally, whilst WG departments, public bodies and others identify suitable opportunities nationally for the participants to engage in.

3.2 Flexibility is another important component of the programme's operation. Each delivery area is allowed to implement Lift in a flexible way reflective of the local circumstances. The model also benefits from diversity of support, particularly in terms of the range of employment and training opportunities and supplemented by the use of the Barrier Fund, which acts as a tool to respond to any specific issues encountered.

3.3 The Lift model aims to address the range of adverse impacts arising from unemployment and economic inactivity, including reduced income, higher risk of poverty and material deprivation. It also builds on the notion that a mixed package of support, tailored to the needs of the individual, is a critical success factor in programmes of this nature.

Targeting Lift in CF clusters

3.4 The targeting of provision in CF Clusters relates to a reported strong relationship between the number of employment-related benefit claimants (which are typically higher in CF Clusters) and workless households. In addition, the programme's delivery

through CF Clusters provides a significant degree of efficiency as it provides a useful community-based infrastructure from which to identify and engage target groups. Cluster alignment also provides access to a range of complementary activities, which broaden the offer for participants likely to have a series of complex barriers restricting their ability to move towards or into employment. The approach heavily relies on effective interaction between the Lift Programme, the Cluster teams and other service providers. Poor relationships and poorly integrated service provision appear to be the greatest risks to the successful delivery of the Lift programme.

- 3.5 The introduction of Communities for Work in the Cluster areas provides further scope for effective integration, if implemented successfully, or competition, if a delivery area suffers from ineffective interaction. Using a triage system to assign residents to the most appropriate support on initial engagement is a reflection of positive partnership working amongst providers. Whilst this appears a highly effective way of handling initial engagement of residents, it is only possible where there is mutual agreement amongst service providers as to the attribution of outcomes across programmes or services.
- 3.6 The judgements for awarding Clusters with Lift funding drew on several factors. To certain Clusters, the funding allows testing the Lift model in various demographic scenarios. Whilst various factors are likely to be influential, research identifies links in performance to the strength of relationship with other support providers, employers and training providers that may offer opportunities to these groups.

Role of Broker/Mentor

- 3.7 The model places heavy responsibility on the role of the Broker/Mentor in each delivery area. Building and sustaining strong relationships with the target cohort relies on them. Their role requires the ability to build an element of trust with participants, to identify or unearth complex needs and to respond to these needs. They also build relationships with the support infrastructure, to ensure that the brokerage of support is appropriate to a participant's needs/goals. Although they have risen to this challenge so far, the limitations of staffing resource pose a risk on the continuity of support in each area in case of any turnover of staff.

Voluntary engagement

- 3.8 The Lift Programme relies on voluntary engagement, thus it places much emphasis on the assumption that people want to work. It also assumes that the opportunities available to participants match their interests and needs and that participation in these opportunities assists them in gaining sustainable employment. In some areas there is evidence of a mismatch between the supply of opportunities and the nature of opportunities demanded by participants. The extent to which this mismatch exists is unclear so further investigation may provide useful insight into the patterns of participant demand.
- 3.9 Despite some evidence of a mismatch in opportunities, the programme is performing well, surpassing target against overall opportunities and securing higher conversion rates to employment than anticipated. As the programme progresses, it will be interesting to monitor the conversion rates to employment as the initial successes may reflect those individuals who are better equipped to actively engage in, and benefit from Lift. However, the long-term support provided to individuals is likely to maintain the conversion rate seen to date and the harder to reach/help may increasingly

engage with it considering how its profile grows in each delivery area.

Spillover effects

- 3.10 The targeting of workless households rather than individuals assumes that spillover effects will emerge for the family. Although this is plausible, the increase in workless households is primarily a result of changes in the nature of occupancy in housing, with single parent households being the most common profile of a workless household. In these circumstances, spillover effects within the household will be limited but wider spillover effects (to peer groups and the rest of the community) may take place.

Monitoring data

- 3.11 WG currently receives a monthly update of the number of opportunities taken up, alongside a quarterly return detailing the characteristics of the participants and the opportunities provided. The Lift teams have the role of “data controller”, which requires them to capture and store all beneficiary data related to the programme’s delivery. Each team has designed their own systems and forms for capturing relevant data for each participant due to the limited guidance associated with capturing this information. Thus, assessing the comprehensiveness and accuracy of monitoring systems for each area is challenging. The lack of consistency in data recording provides risks in judging the effectiveness of the intervention.
- 3.12 Being in a workless household is a dynamic status, which needs to be monitored on a continuous basis since it constitutes the main eligibility criterion for the programme. An audit of data capture systems has recently commenced to explore the ways in which each delivery team is recording information relating to participant eligibility, activities and outcomes. If data capture is insufficient or inaccurate, it could prove difficult to determine participants’ ongoing eligibility for the programme. Robust data capture will also aid in accounting for the outcomes achieved and in judging the effectiveness of the programme.

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