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# SHELL Evaluation of Traineeships 2015 to 2019: Interim Report

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## Executive Summary

1. This interim report contains the findings from the first phase of research undertaken by Learning and Work Institute (L&W) and Wavehill Research to evaluate the Welsh Government's Traineeships programme.
2. The overall evaluation aims to assess the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the second phase of the Traineeships Programme for the period of January 2015 to March 2019. It will consider and present the findings for both West Wales and the Valleys (WWV) and East Wales (EW), as well as for the programme overall. In particular, the evaluation explores:
  - The impact the programme has had in both its hard and soft outcomes.
  - The overall value the programme has added through a cost-benefit analysis.
  - Lessons learned for the future delivery of similar programmes and how good practice can be replicated and benefited from.
3. The evaluation is being delivered between April 2017 and March 2019. It includes the following elements:
  - Desk based review and secondary data analysis.
  - Analysis of the Wales European Funding Office 'ESF Participant Survey' data.
  - Interviews with Welsh Government Officials and key partners.
  - Interviews with providers and subcontractors delivering the Traineeships programme.
  - Interviews with employers and learners participating in the programme.
  - A counterfactual and impact assessment.
  - A cost-benefit analysis.

4. This interim report contains the findings from the initial stages of the evaluation, completed by October 2017, interim conclusions and recommendations. It is based on the following elements:
  - Desk-based review and early secondary data analysis of the Progress Output Result Reports for the January 2017 ESF claim.
  - In-depth interviews with seven Welsh Government Officials and partners.
  - In-depth interviews with 17 Traineeships providers, including nine lead contractors and eight subcontractors (including private and third-sector contractors).

### **Findings from scoping and desk review activities**

5. The proportion of 16-18-year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Wales has, except for a dip in 2005 and 2006, remained above 10 per cent for the past two decades; the latest provisional figures (end 2016) show it at 10.4 per cent.<sup>1</sup>
6. Long-term NEET status can have serious detrimental impacts on an individual's future labour market prospects, their health and a range of other outcomes.
7. Traineeships combine a mixture of soft and essential skills training with a period of work experience. The current programme, focused on 16-19-year olds, aims to reduce the proportion of young people in Wales classified as NEET and to facilitate progression into employment or further learning.
8. As of December 2017, EDMS data shows that WWV had achieved almost two fifths (35.3%) of the 2014-2022 target of 25,698 Traineeship completions and that EW have achieved almost a quarter (24.5%) of the target of 18,418 completions.
9. Neither region is on track to meet the target of 28 per cent entering employment (17.4% in WWV and 20.7% in EW), and EW is not on track to meet the target of 56 per cent of Trainees gaining qualifications upon completion (53.7%). However, WWV has exceeded its target (60.7%) gaining qualifications upon completion and both regions are exceeding their target of 20 per cent progression into education or training (49.6% in WWV and 53.8% in EW).
10. Neither region has met the targets of 20.6 per cent of Trainees declaring themselves to have a disability and/or learning difficulty, or work-limiting health condition (19.7% in WWV and 18.6% in EW). However, both regions have exceeded the target of 1 per cent of Trainees declaring themselves as having caring responsibilities (1.4% in WWV and 1.6% in EW). For EW, BME participation is far exceeding their 2.2 per cent target (10.3%), although WWV is not currently on track to meet it (1.5%). Within both regions, female participation is over the 50 per cent target, although it is higher in EW (57.0%) than WWV (54.6%).
11. From April 2019, Welsh Government will replace the current suite of employability skills programmes including Traineeships, Jobs Growth Wales, React and the Employability Skills Programme with a new, single employability programme – Working Wales. The Working Wales programme will support individuals who are aged 16 and over and ensure that they receive the bespoke support required to progress towards, and enter, sustainable employment.

### **Findings from in-depth interviews with officials, stakeholders, and providers**

12. Providers, officials, and partners were generally positive about the Traineeships model, considering it effective for the cohort of young people and a useful stepping stone in progression towards employment, providing learners with a taster of a particular sector or occupation and enabling them to develop a broad platform of skills, particularly in relation to employability.

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<sup>1</sup> 2017, Young people not in education employment or training (NEET), Gov.Wales

13. Providers praised the high degree of flexibility of the Traineeships programme, enabling them to utilise provision (either directly delivered or delivered by third party providers) that best meets the needs of young people.
14. Most providers interviewed described a steady fall in the number of young people being recruited on to the Traineeships programme. Typically, providers perceived that the fall in numbers reflected a lack of promotion of the programme. Some also referred to changes in the eligibility criteria.
15. Social media is increasingly seen as a key route to promotion of the programme and is actively used by all providers but particularly so by those in the private sector; 'word of mouth' was also cited by many providers.
16. The majority of providers raised concerns about the referral process. Some questioned the impartiality of Careers Wales based on the perception that there was an imbalance in the volume of referrals to each provider.
17. Most officials and partners voiced concerns about the appropriateness of referrals to different strands, with a widespread view that those most in need of the Engagement strand were not necessarily getting on to the programme due to some providers' reluctance to take on "more challenging individuals".
18. There was a general agreement amongst providers and partners that young people engaging with Traineeships display an increasingly complex set of needs and barriers, with mental health issues deemed particularly prevalent.
19. Providers vary in the extent to which they utilise the Additional Learning Support budget, with some providers not accessing it at all and others actively targeting these resources. Providers not accessing these budgets cited complexity, availability of resources and lack of intelligence regarding Trainees' backgrounds as reasons for this.
20. With regard to cross-cutting themes, providers agreed that Traineeships help to tackle poverty by providing young people with work opportunities and by tackling barriers to employment, and that equal opportunities are an embedded element across training provision. Sustainable development was the least evidenced cross-cutting theme in interviews with providers. Most providers identified their commitment to supporting the Welsh language by aiming to have at least one Welsh speaking member of staff.
21. Officials and partners were confident that the programme would achieve its overall targets. However, there were concerns that participation was mostly at Engagement and Level 1 and that subsequent progression was often in-programme or into FE courses. Most officials and partners raised concerns about the Bridge-to-Employment strand, with an awareness that take-up of this strand was low which may limit progression opportunities into employment.

## **Interim Recommendations**

It is recommended that:

1. Welsh Government issue guidance and worked examples of the flexibility available to providers around suspension, to enable them to understand the rules and requirements for contact during a suspension period. This would prevent participants who require specialist support from having to re-start the programme unnecessarily.
2. Effective partnership models between Careers Wales and providers are shared more widely via provider meetings in order to ensure these are replicated. It is also recommended that Welsh Government review the resourcing allocated to referral processes, to secure a more efficient and stream-lined process.
3. Welsh Government develops and disseminates models and worked examples of effective multi agency partnerships, for example where local authorities are involved in the YEPF referral process, to inform partnership working in the delivery of the new Working Wales programme.
4. Welsh Government explores the wider use of positive messages, case studies and marketing material to promote Traineeships. This could be tailored to the motivations and interests of different stakeholders, such as schools, parents and young people, to promote the programme and reduce any stigma currently associated with it.

### **Next Steps**

The full evaluation report will be submitted to Welsh Government in March 2019. The next stages of the evaluation include analysis of 'ESF Participant Survey' data, interviews with employers and learners, a counterfactual and impact assessment and a cost-benefit analysis.

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Available at: <https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/evaluation-traineeships-programme/?lang=en>

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