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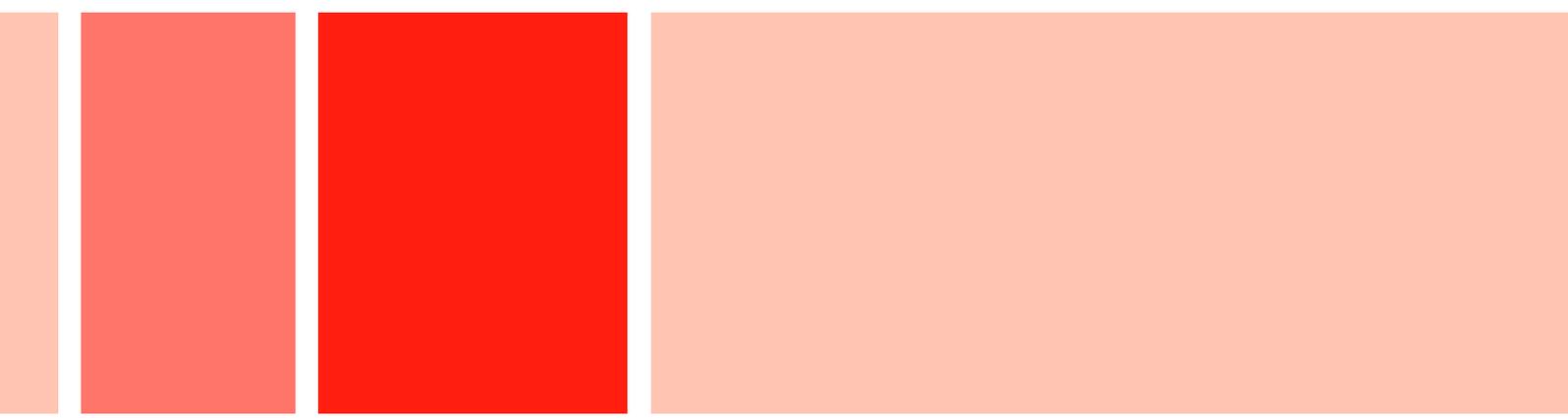
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Final Evaluation of the Pathways to Apprenticeship programme



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BMG Research

Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the WG.

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Glossary of acronyms

EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance
ERP	Economic Renewal Programme
ESDGC	Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
FEI	Further Education Institution
GCSE	General Certificate of School Education
ILA	Individual Learning Agreement
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LLWR	Lifelong Learning Wales Record
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
ONS	Office for National Statistics
OCN	Open College Network
PLA	Programme-Led Apprenticeship
PtA`	Pathways to Apprenticeship
QCF	Qualifications and Credit Framework
SSC	Sector Skills Councils
WEFO	Welsh European Funding Office

Executive Summary

Introduction

In September 2012 BMG Research was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the Pathways to Apprenticeship (PtA) programme. The essence of this programme was an innovative, intensive one year course in Further Education, including a guaranteed work placement, to prepare young people for Apprenticeship at Level 3. The programme ran from 2009/10 to 2013/14 and was supported from 2010/11 onwards by funding from the European Social Fund (ESF).

The evaluation intended to assess the value of the PtA programme as a contribution to the Welsh Government's (WG's) efforts to combat youth unemployment and as a route towards rewarding, sustainable employment for the programme's young learners.

The evaluation of PtA has had two annual periods of evaluation activity. The first period ran from commission of BMG Research into late 2013. A report from that time period was published in May 2014. A second period of evaluation, starting in the summer of 2014, has delivered additional data and intelligence in order to allow this final evaluation of the programme.

Both evaluation periods employed similar methods of evidence collection. These included qualitative interviews (with WG officials, FE colleges, SSCs, employers, and learners), surveys (of current and past PtA learners and of employers who offered work placements to learners), and analysis of programme management information. A cost benefit analysis was also undertaken in order to estimate PtA's returns to public investment in the programme.

This Executive Summary sets out the main findings of the evaluation.

Outputs of the PtA programme

Overall outputs:

- The number of PtA learners was close to the overall annual target of 2,000 learners per year in the early years of the programme but declined from 2011/12 onwards.
- PtA, reflecting the Pathways on offer, was much more frequently taken up by young men than by young women.

Pan-Wales PtA programme:

- Completion, attainment and success rates in PtA were high and somewhat higher than those for other learners in Further Education.
- The proportions of learners who completed their PtA course who then progressed into apprenticeships rose from 2010/11 to 2012/13 but the proportion at its highest, in 2012/13, of 35 per cent, was clearly short of the WG's target for the programme of 75 per cent progression into apprenticeship.
- Combined, progression into apprenticeship, Level 3 learning, or employment was achieved by 64 per cent of learners.
- Only 4 per cent of learners became unemployed on leaving their PtA course.

ESF project (16 to 19 year old learners in the Convergence area of Wales):

- From the European Funding perspective, all targets except one were met and exceeded. The exception was the target that 5 per cent of participants should be from minority ethnic backgrounds. This target was not met.

Delivery of the PtA programme

Delivery from the management perspective:

Discussions with *PtA managers, designers, and deliverers* at the later evaluation stage essentially carried the same messages as those at the

interim evaluation stage, respondents in these later discussions tending to reiterate observations made at that earlier stage. Thus:

- The programme was generally believed to have had a sound rationale given the economic circumstances at the time of its introduction and for a period thereafter; and, overall, was seen as delivering a valuable learning experience leading to enhanced employability for participants.
- Early difficulties were recognised: lack of clarity as to the roles of SSCs and colleges leading to tensions between them; some communication difficulties between the partners (WG, colleges, SSCs) involved in delivery; administrative and data recording issues; and changes in personnel in the WG management team. However, with time, familiarity, and stabilisation of management, these difficulties had largely been eliminated though it was clear from the later discussions with these strategic and operational partners that some early problems had continued to colour perceptions of the programme.
- Marketing of the programme was believed to have been adequate in that sufficient work placements with employers had been established. There was, however, a suggestion by several SSCs that PtA had not been sufficiently promoted in schools as, for example, an alternative to 6th Form study, but rather, had been used mainly as an entry or progression route for Further Education students; and, overall, the programme, after 2011/12 did not engage target numbers of learners.
- The work experience element of PtA continued, in the later evaluation stage, to be seen by SSCs and Colleges as the key aspect of the programme which distinguished it from other FE vocational courses – this element being critical to the development of high levels of employability amongst PtA learners.

Delivery from the employer perspective:

Employers were broadly satisfied with delivery:

- Substantial numbers of employers who offered placements did so on repeat occasions.

- Most reported that PtA requirements had been clearly explained to them before they committed to it.
- Programme administration was not a substantial burden for employers.
- Employers were mainly positive about their PtA learners' attitudes and abilities.
- Overall, they saw the programme as well-organised.

Delivery from the learner perspective:

Learners, as at the interim evaluation stage, were also shown in the later evaluation stage to be positive about their experiences on the programme:

- Most PtA learners were able to get on to the Pathway they wanted.
- Although they had considered many other alternatives to PtA (staying on in 6th Form, getting a job, applying directly for an apprenticeship, or entering Further Education other than through PtA), they were satisfied with their actual choice, were clear that their chosen Pathway was the basis of a long-term career, and were universally enthusiastic about having got on to their course.
- The great majority (91 per cent) had made an Individual Learning Agreement with their College (as PtA required).
- Learners gave very positive ratings to all aspects of their College provision.
- PtA Educational Maintenance Allowance had been received by 90 per cent of learners (though in a substantial percentage of these cases EMA may not have been critical to their participation).
- Around 9 out of 10 learners reported having a work placement. Where they had not had a work placement, it was because of early departure from the course or (as Welsh Government officials separately explained) because colleges were given special dispensation by the Welsh Government to offer in-college work-related training as an alternative.
- Most learners received adequate or good support from their college while on the placement.

- Overall, over 80 per cent of learners were satisfied with their PtA experience and very few (4 per cent or less) were dissatisfied.

Delivery in respect of equality, sustainability, and Welsh language policy objectives:

Delivery in support of WG and ESF objectives with regard to *equality and diversity, sustainability, and Welsh language objectives* was discussed in various ways with employers, learners and managers/deliverers of PtA.

Some key points are:

- Few *employers* (12 per cent) reported that they had been encouraged by Colleges to take male or female learners into non-traditional sectors or roles. However, rather more (22 per cent) said that Colleges had discussed the possibility of taking a PtA learner with Welsh language skills and, in a majority of these cases, the employer had done so.
- Few *learners*, too (10 per cent), said that Colleges had encouraged them to consider Pathways which were non-traditional for their gender. However, many more (74 per cent) had been encouraged to act in environmentally-friendly ways on their courses and 63 per cent said that they had had classes or training sessions in which environmental issues were discussed. Fourteen per cent of learners spoke Welsh as their first language or equally with English. Most of these (10 out of 13 cases) had been offered the opportunity to take all or part of their course in Welsh and around half (7 out of 13 cases) had been offered a work placement in a Welsh-speaking business.
- *Colleges* reported:
 - that equality and sustainability policies and practices were embedded in the whole of their delivery and, hence, were extended to PtA courses as a matter of course.
 - that their PtA provision was responsive to demand for Welsh medium provision and that the needs of learners with an ‘in Welsh’ preference were met as far as practicable.

The further general perspective on ESF part-funding of PtA was that this allowed a larger volume of provision than would otherwise have been possible. The price of this – administrative complexity and a requirement to supply detailed evidence of delivery – was generally accepted as one worth paying.

Outcomes of the PtA programme

The great majority of learners undertook work placements which provided industry-specific work rather than general support work and 91 per cent said their placement was useful in developing industry skills.

Two-thirds of learners (63 per cent) reported that their destination on leaving PtA was their preferred destination.

A third of the learners (32 per cent) who did not progress into apprenticeship reported that this was because an apprenticeship was not available to them and a further 8 per cent applied for an apprenticeship but were unsuccessful.

As with learners, employers almost always said that their work placements were helpful in preparing young people for work in their industries and in preparing young people for working life generally.

7 in 10 per cent of employers also said their business had benefited from their placement, usually because it had provided additional staff support for a period or had helped with recruitment.

Almost half of the surveyed employers had taken on a PtA learner as a full apprentice. In half of these cases the apprenticeship had been created specifically to accommodate the learner.

43 per cent of employers said that their PtA experience made it more likely that they would engage with Apprenticeship in future and 96 per cent said they would offer work experience opportunities to other programmes in future.

Managers, designers, and deliverers of PtA (from the Welsh Government, SSCs, and Colleges) generally believed that the programme developed employability and industry-readiness.

The fact that PtA had fallen well short of its target for progressions into apprenticeship was widely recognised by programme managers and deliverers but a number of arguments concerning this fact were made, broadly to the effect that the target was arbitrary or misconceived and that other positive outcomes at least partially compensated for this shortfall.

Cost benefit analysis estimates that PtA generated benefits to learners in terms of projected increased lifetime earnings and to public budgets from long term direct and indirect tax revenues which are calculated to exceed the costs of delivering the programme. These benefits are ones which will accumulate over a lengthy future period in which PtA learners work, earn, and contribute to national revenues.

Overview of the PtA programme

Pathways to Apprenticeship was introduced as a time-limited programme in the specific context of difficult economic conditions and, particularly, of high and rising youth unemployment. It was an exploratory programme in that it piloted a mix of relatively intensive vocational learning over a one year period supported by a high-quality work experience for the reasonably well-qualified and well-motivated young people who took the course.

In that context, PtA was in many respects a successful programme. Its key success was that the programme of learning was, in itself, strong. Indications of this are various but they include high levels of completion and attainment, high levels of satisfaction with the programme amongst learners, and the belief both of learners and employers that work placements were valuable in

developing industry-specific skills and in preparing young people for working life.

However, the programme also had weaknesses. The principal weakness is the programme's failure to meet some targets. The table below summarises the programme's achievement against Welsh Government and European Funding targets:

Welsh Government targets	
Target	Achievement
Progress 75 per cent of learners into an apprenticeship in each year of the programme	The highest observed annual rate of progression into apprenticeship, of 35 per cent in 2012/13, shows that this target was not achieved by a large margin.
Increase the standard number of learning hours delivered by FE from a minimum of 16 hours to a minimum of 21 hours per week	Surveys of learners suggest that a minority of learners may not have received the minimum specified hours. However, discussions with other stakeholders suggest that learning hours were, in fact, quite demanding and it may be that some learners were inaccurate in estimating the amount of learning hours they actually undertook.
Provide the opportunity to gain Level 2 qualifications that will maximise their potential to ensure that they are job-ready.	The opportunity to gain Level 2 qualifications was not provided for learners in the construction Pathway (who learned towards Level 1 and some, but not all, elements of a Level 2 qualification). This, therefore, prevented this target being universally met. However, a key outcome of the evaluation of the programme is that, irrespective of level of study, it generated a significant degree of job-readiness.

Deliver qualifications to learners that will meet identified employer needs within the region as well as wider key skills and additional relevant vocational qualifications.	PtA completion, attainment, and success rates were high. The programme delivered over 9,000 completed learning activities in each of the years for which data is available (2010/11-2012/13). These included both certificated vocational qualifications and key and essential skills certification. SSC involvement in course specification assures that qualifications delivered by the programme were those that employers need.
Utilise direct employer engagement through the work placement element of learner programmes.	It is estimated (using data from employer surveys allied to estimated learner numbers) that around 1,900 employers have supplied work placements. Employer engagement has, therefore, been substantial.
Prepare learners for entry into employment via the apprenticeship programme where they will work towards their Level 3 award.	At its maximum, in 2012/13, only 16 per cent of learners progressed into Apprenticeship (Level 3). However, most Construction learners and some Automotive learners progressed to a Level 2 Apprenticeship as agreed by the Welsh Government and Further Education College and SSC partners.
ESF targets for the Convergence area (16-19 year olds only)	
2,200 total participants in the Convergence area.	2,453 participants achieved (PtA lifetime).
47.5 per cent progression into employment including apprenticeship up to 2010/11; 40 per cent making this progression from 2011/12 onwards.	48 per cent made the progression (PtA lifetime).
10 per cent progression into further learning up to 2010/11; 60 per cent progression into further learning from 2011/12 onwards.	68 per cent made this progression (PtA lifetime).

100 per cent achieving qualifications up to 2010/11; 85 per cent achieving qualifications from 2010/12 onwards	91 per cent achieved qualifications (PtA lifetime).
42.5 per cent gaining other positive outcomes up to 2010/11; 60 per cent gaining other positive outcomes from 2011/12 onwards.	67 per cent gained other positive outcomes (PtA lifetime).
400 employers collaborating with education/training providers.	Estimated 600 employers collaborated (PtA lifetime).
5 per cent of PtA learners to be from BME backgrounds.	1 per cent of learners were from BME backgrounds (PtA lifetime).

The ESF-funded element within the programme as a whole achieved nearly all its targets.

However, in respect of Welsh Government targets for the whole-Wales programme, PtA failed to achieve its key target, for progression into Apprenticeship, by a substantial margin. A further significant limitation of the programme was that it required a high rate of administrative and organisational input in relation to its scale of delivery.

Overall, PtA, over its lifetime from September 2009 to July 2014, provided a valuable experience for eight thousand learners – it gave them valuable skills and qualifications and gave them a degree of employability which is likely to have enhanced the career prospects and lifetime earnings for many of those young people. It did so at a cost which is, over time, expected to generate a net benefit for public budgets.

However, the programme was not able to secure the principal objective which the programme's name embodies – it was a pathway to apprenticeship only for a third of its participants – and, from a management point of view, its costs were high.

The key question which PtA leaves is whether PtA's key strength – that of providing an effective, integrated package of study, work experience, and qualifications – is replicated more widely via the Learning Area Programme approach to post-16 funding of learning provision which has been extended across Wales. If this is so, then the generality of vocational preparation for young people in Wales should receive the positive response which Pathways to Apprenticeship received from its young learners.

1. Introduction: the PtA programme and its evaluation

Introduction

- 1.1 In September 2012 BMG Research was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the Pathways to Apprenticeship (PtA) programme.
- 1.2 The evaluation intended to assess the value of the PtA programme as a contribution to the Welsh Government's (WG) efforts to combat youth unemployment and as a route towards rewarding, sustainable employment for the programme's young learners. More particularly, the evaluation is intended to address the extent to which:
 - the WG's objectives for learner achievement and progression are met
 - within these, the objectives of the European Social Fund (ESF) contribution, for learner achievement and progression within the (West Wales and the Valleys) Convergence area of Wales¹, are met
 - the desired scale of employer engagement has been achieved
 - there has been compliance with the requirement to establish Individual Learner Agreements for all learners
 - course requirements (targeted level of qualification, minimum learning hours, work placement specifications, etc.) have been met
 - compliance with WG and European Union expectations with regard to equal opportunities and environmental sustainability has been met.
- 1.3 The evaluation of PtA has had two annual periods of evaluation activity. The first period ran from commission of BMG Research into late 2013.

¹ The Convergence area covers: Isle of Anglesey, Conwy, Denbighshire, Gwynedd, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen.

A report from that time period was published in May 2014². A second period of evaluation starting in the summer of 2014, has delivered additional data and intelligence in order to allow a final evaluation of the programme.

1.4 The report has four further chapters. Chapter 2 reports outputs of the programme; that is, the numbers and characteristics of learners engaged by the programme. Chapter 3 discusses the effectiveness of the process of delivery of PtA. Chapter 4 reports on outcomes of the programme; that is, the benefits for the young people who participated and for employers who provided the work experiences which the programme required. A final chapter, Chapter 5, discusses the overall achievements of the programme including an examination of the extent to which it met its formal targets.

1.5 Before that, this chapter:

- briefly reviews the background to the programme
- describes the programme's format and intended mode of operation
- outlines the method of the evaluation

Background to the PtA programme

Growing youth unemployment

1.6 The PtA programme was originally introduced in 2009/10. That introduction was preceded by a period in which:

- In the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, unemployment amongst 16 to 19 year olds in Wales had risen from 20.9% in 2007 to 27.1% in 2009; whilst amongst 20 to 24 year olds, unemployment had risen from 10.9% in 2007 to 15.4% in 2009³.

² *Interim Evaluation of the Pathways to Apprenticeship programme*, Welsh Government, May 2014

³ Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics, 'ILO measure' of unemployment

- Correspondingly, the number of unemployed claimants aged 18 to 24 in Wales rose from 15,600 in 2007 to 27,600 in 2008⁴.
- The number of Foundation Apprenticeships and Apprenticeships for young people was declining⁵ in consequence of funding constraints, the introduction of new Apprenticeship frameworks, and economic pressures on employer take-up of the programme.

1.7 The need for a Welsh Government response to difficult economic conditions in general, not solely to respond to rising youth unemployment, was recognised at the Wales' 4th Economic Summit in March 2009. However, the problem of youth unemployment was particularly identified and, in this case, decisions were taken to stimulate Apprenticeships for young people as a counter measure. The Young Recruits programme offered a wage subsidy of £50 per week for one year to employers who recruited a young Apprentice, aged 16 to 24, when they would not otherwise have done so. Alongside this, the PtA programme was quickly designed and implemented. It was initially intended to run for only one year but was subsequently extended, during a time of continuing recessionary or near recessionary conditions – the essence of this programme being a one year course in Further Education to prepare young people for Apprenticeship at Level 3.

1.8 Pre-apprenticeship programmes, as with the new PtA programme in Wales, were not unprecedented⁶. There were numerous examples offered within the UK by a variety of providers, including colleges, private training providers, and large companies in England, Sector Skills

⁴ Claimant count statistics, Office for National Statistics

⁵ For example, 7,510 16 to 18 year olds undertook a Foundation Apprenticeship in 2005/6. By 2008/9, this figure had declined to 4,880 (Source: Further Education, Work Based Learning and Community Learning in Wales Statistics, Welsh Government, 2010).

⁶ See the interim evaluation report of PtA, cited earlier, for a fuller discussion of predecessor or contemporaneous pre-Apprenticeship programmes offered elsewhere and of their evaluations

Councils in Northern Ireland, and the Scottish Government in Scotland. Other examples can be seen in North America and in Australia in which educational institutions or the government (in the Australian case) prepare young people for participation in apprenticeships.

- 1.9 The rationales for these programmes have been mixed. Some pre-apprenticeship training has had a particular focus on raising the employability of disadvantaged young people, those with low qualifications and often, low motivation; whilst other programmes have focussed on giving well-motivated young people, who are just short of the qualification levels necessary for full apprenticeships, the entry qualifications they need.
- 1.10 Generally, however, evidence of the effectiveness of pre-apprenticeship programmes has been limited or absent. Evaluations of pre-apprenticeship training have mainly been based on anecdotes or on demonstrations of individual young peoples' successful progression rather than on systematic evidence.
- 1.11 Thus, consideration of the background to the PtA programme in Wales allows a number of summary points to be made:
 - The PtA programme in Wales had a clear initial rationale based on rising youth unemployment in difficult economic conditions.
 - Examples of other pre-apprenticeship training programmes were widely available from other locations in the UK and beyond and, hence, there was a prima facie case for the value of pre-apprenticeship training.
 - This training could focus variously on 'social' rationales – countering disadvantage – or on 'skills' rationales in which the training was made available only to those who clearly had the potential to succeed in a full apprenticeship. In the case of PtA in Wales, the second rationale predominated since, for the most part, PtA targeted Level 2 achievement, involved Sector Skills Councils in

programme design and validation, and, in product literature, aimed at young people, stressed commitment, intensive training, and ambition.

- Systematic evaluation of pre-apprenticeship training is scarce and, therefore, evaluation of PtA was both necessary – the prima facie likelihood of the programme’s value needed to be tested – and could contribute to a wider understanding of apprenticeship programme design in Wales and beyond.

PtA programme characteristics

Strategic aims of the PtA programme

1.12 The PtA programme aimed to provide a flexible route for young people to acquire the underpinning knowledge and skills that would be required for successful completion of the full Apprenticeship framework. Thus, the programme offered young people the opportunity to develop employment-related skills within a further education institution on a full-time intensive training programme following a framework set by the relevant SSCs. The WG intention was for the programme to:

- increase the standard number of hours of learning delivered by FEIs from a minimum of 16 hours per week to 21 hours per week as standard and up to a maximum of 30 guided learning hours per week in order to deliver a blend of a set curriculum and of work experience⁷ identified by SSCs as meeting the needs of employers
- provide the opportunity for learners to gain, in the main, Level 2 qualifications
- deliver qualifications to learners that would meet identified employer needs within the region as well as wider key skills and additional vocationally relevant qualifications

⁷ The programme requires learners to take part in a work placement with an employer lasting a minimum of 25 days and a maximum of 12 weeks.

- enable up to 550 learners per year in Convergence areas to gain, in the main, a qualification at level 2 or above
- utilise direct employer engagement through the work placement element of the learning programmes
- prepare learners for entry into employment via the Apprenticeship programme where they would work toward, in the main, their Level 3 award.

1.13 Early employer engagement, generated by SSCs and colleges, was required to ensure opportunities to gain an apprenticeship were available at the end of the initial training programme.

1.14 Training in the chosen vocation commenced in September at the start of the Academic Year. There were 2,000 places per year available on the programme, which was delivered by Further Education Institutions (FEIs) across Wales.

1.15 It was intended that FEIs would ensure that a high percentage (target 75 per cent) of learners would have the opportunity to progress onto a full Apprenticeship and that the numbers of PtAs started would reflect employer demand in their areas before the programme of study commenced.

1.16 Thirteen SSCs or Bodies developed programmes of qualification to meet their industry requirements (though not all programmes were available in all years in which PtA operated):

- Institute of Motor Industry (Automotive)
- Construction Skills (Construction)
- Construction Skills (Insulation and Energy Efficiency)
- COGENT – Chemical, Pharmaceuticals, Nuclear, Oil and Gas, Petroleum and Polymer Industry (Energy)
- Creative and Cultural Skills (Technical Theatre & Live Events)
- E Skills (IT skills and Telecoms)

- HABIA (Hair and Beauty) (since discontinued)
- IMPROVE (Food Manufacture)
- LANTRA (Agriculture, Horticulture, Floristry and later Land Based Engineering which replaced the Floristry route)
- People 1st (Hospitality)
- SEMTA – Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies Alliance (Engineering)
- Skills Active (Sport and Leisure)
- Summit Skills (Plumbing, Domestic Heating, Refrigeration and Ventilation, and Electro technical).

1.17 However, whilst the WG endeavoured to run PtA programmes in all these sectors, demand for IMPROVE and COGENT Chemical, Nuclear, Oil and Gas - during 2010/11 and 2011/12 - did not materialise.

Eligibility for the programme

1.18 To be eligible for entry onto the PtA scheme, a learner had to be:

- aged 16-24
- a resident ordinarily living in Wales
- attending an FEI in Wales delivering the PtA programme
- able to meet the pre-requisite skills for the Pathway they would study⁸.

Financial support to learners

1.19 All eligible learners were able to apply for a non-means tested training allowance (PtA Education Maintenance Allowance) of £30 per week during the lifetime of study, including work placement taken outside of term dates, up to a maximum of 52 weeks. All eligible learners were entitled to a toolkit up to the value of £200.

⁸ These might, for example, include the hand skills necessary to successfully undertake a construction or engineering course.

Measuring progression

1.20 Providers of PtA learning were required to identify the progression of learners following the end of their PtA courses. The key positive measurable progression for a Pathway to Apprenticeship learner was progression into an Apprenticeship on completion of the programme. However, two further indicators were also seen by WG as positive measures of progression:

- Progression into employment, which is of 16 hours or more per week with an intended duration of a minimum of 13 weeks.
- Progression into further learning at a higher level.

The PtA learning process

1.21 The FEI firstly had to ensure that all new learners were assessed either prior to or immediately upon entering learning. The purpose of initial assessment was to identify previous learning, the current learning requirements, and any support needs of individual learners in order that an Individual Learning Agreement (ILA) could be produced that detailed the learner's needs. The ILA had to be agreed by the learner, the FEI and, where applicable, the employer. Further learning and support needs were identified through regular progress reviews and reflected in updates to the ILA.

1.22 Thereafter, the learner's course of study was according to a specification designed in collaboration with the relevant SSC. The specifications varied in detail but, in essence, established entry requirements (typically ability to pass aptitude tests supported, in some cases, by minimum GCSE requirements), qualifications to be pursued, minimum teaching days and hours, and specification of work placement arrangements (which had to be of between 5 and 12 weeks duration). Different courses had different funding costs with some being more expensive (to the WG and ESF funders) than others. The average cost was around £5,000 per

learner with engineering the most costly at around double the average cost (however, this formed the first year of a three year Apprenticeship).

Participating Further Education Institutions

1.23 The Pathways programme was delivered at 16 participating FEIs, with each College able to offer a range of Pathways skills sector routeways according to their teaching specialisms and capacities:

- Bridgend College
- Cardiff and Vale College
- Coleg Ceredigion
- Coleg Gwent
- Coleg Llandrillo (as from September 2012 merged to become Grŵp Llandrillo Menai)
- Coleg Menai (as from September 2012 merged to become Grŵp Llandrillo Menai)
- Coleg Morgannwg (as from September 2013 merged to become Coleg y Cymoedd)
- Coleg Powys (as from September 2013 merged to become GrŵpNeath Port Talbot College)
- Coleg Sir Gâr
- Deeside College (as from September 2013 merged to become Coleg Cambria)
- Gower College Swansea
- Merthyr Tydfil College
- Neath Port Talbot College (as from September 2013 merged to become GrŵpNeath Port Talbot College)
- Pembrokeshire College
- Yale College Wrexham (as from September 2013 merged to become Coleg Cambria)
- Ystrad Mynach College (as from September 2013 merged to become Coleg y Cymoedd)

1.24 Young people could seek entry to the programme either by direct enquiry to one or more of these participating Colleges, via the Skills Hotline⁹, and/ or by contacting a local outlet of Careers Wales.

The European dimension

1.25 The programme was supported by ESF funding (planned contribution of £14 million between August 2010 and October 2014)¹⁰. Following re-profiling¹¹, the ESF contribution had particular targets (for 16 to 19 year olds in Convergence areas only) in addition to those set by the WG, referred to previously. These (from 2011/12 onwards) were:

- 2,200 total participants (over total duration of project)
- 85 per cent achieving qualifications
- 60 per cent entering further learning
- 60 per cent gaining other positive outcomes
- 40 per cent progressing into employment (including Apprenticeships)
- 5 per cent of learners to be from ethnic minority backgrounds
- 400 employers collaborating with education/training providers (over total duration of project).

1.26 There was also a specific requirement to operate the Pathways programme in a way which promotes ESF cross-cutting themes of Environmental Sustainability and Equality and Diversity. The latter would in any case be expected under the WG's vision for Equality, Diversity and Human Rights in Wales.

⁹ businessskillshotline@wales.gsi.gov.uk

¹⁰ *Business Plan Outline, Version 5*, Welsh European Funding Office, 31st March 2014

¹¹ See Chapter 5 for description of re-profiling

- 1.27 Opportunities in all sectors were intended to be equally available to female and male learners. Marketing material was designed to attract male and female candidates equally.
- 1.28 The project was also expected to support the European Union's Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) 'cross-cutting theme'. In practical terms, this required that delivery of the programme involved practical steps (such as minimising the use of paper documentation, using recycled and recyclable materials, and minimising travel requirements) to minimise the project's total environmental impacts.

Planning and funding of Pathways

- 1.29 Under the planning and funding system for FE, programme-related uplifts were paid to reflect additional costs associated with either the mode of delivery or the subject being delivered. Thus, there were uplifts for Welsh medium or bilingual delivery and for learners resident in educationally deprived wards. Colleges also used their hardship funds to support learners' childcare costs where these were present and met eligibility criteria.

Evaluation method

- 1.30 In the first evaluation period (2013/14), qualitative interviews (with WG officials, FE colleges, SSCs, employers, and learners), surveys (of current and past PtA learners and of employers who offered work placements to learners), and analysis of programme management information were used to supply intelligence and data as the basis of an interim evaluation.
- 1.31 In the second evaluation period (2014/2015), a similar range of sources has been used. Thus, inputs to the latest round of evaluation include:
- 13 depth interviews (undertaken by telephone) with programme managers and stakeholders (2 with Welsh Government officials, 6

with representatives of Sector Skills Councils, 4 with FE Colleges, and 1 with Careers Wales).

- A telephone survey of 67 employers who had supplied work experience placements to PtA learners.
- Follow-up telephone depth interviews with 7 employers who, in the survey above, had consented to a more detailed discussion of their engagement with PtA.
- A telephone survey of 90 past participants – PtA learners who had completed their PtA course in July 2013.
- Follow-up depth interviews with 2 past participants who had consented, in the survey above, to a more detailed discussion of their PtA experiences.
- A telephone survey of 34 current participants – PtA learners who were still on their courses at the time of the survey interview.

1.32 Sample sizes in the surveys identified above were partially determined by the numbers of contacts made available to the evaluation by the Welsh Government. These contacts (c.200 employers, c.300 past participants, c.90 current participants) were restricted to respondents who had previously given prior consent to research contact. Sample sizes were then further determined by the accuracy and 'up-to-dateness' of contact details, by the availability of respondents, and by their willingness or otherwise to take part in surveys or discussions.

1.33 Because of the sampling method (essentially achieving responses from all available contacts who consented to interview, who were actually contactable, and who were willing to take part in interviews) and because of the small sample sizes which resulted, the survey samples cannot be assumed to be representative and, even if the samples are

representative, they do not have a high degree of statistical reliability¹². Data from the telephone surveys needs to be interpreted therefore as offering the best available picture of respondents' experiences and views not necessarily as statistically robust estimates of those experiences and views.

1.34 All survey questionnaires were designed by BMG and signed off by the WG. Surveys were undertaken between August and October 2014 and were made available to respondents in English or Welsh language. All survey interviews were designed to take around 15 minutes to complete.

1.35 Because of small survey samples, most analyses of findings do not distinguish sub-groups of learners or employers. Data from the survey of 34 current participants is usually presented in terms of numbers because of the particularly small size of that sample. Data from the surveys of past participants and of employers is mainly presented in terms of percentages but it will be noted that these percentages are based on quite modest total sample numbers (90 cases and 67 cases respectively). Where percentages are used, these are rounded to whole percentages and consequently some totals may not add exactly to 100 per cent.

1.36 Where qualitative or 'depth' interviews were undertaken, these were usually of 20 to 40 minutes duration. They were undertaken by telephone on the basis of semi-structured discussion guides approved beforehand by the WG. These guides ensured answers to common questions but gave interviewees scope to make wider comments and observations. These interviews were audio-recorded, with respondent

¹² Note: Samples from the interim and final phases of the evaluation were not combined in order that any change between the two phases could be observed.

permission, for subsequent transcription in order to assist analysis of their contents.

1.37 In addition to intelligence gathered in primary research, as above, further data on learner participation was gathered from programme management information as recorded in LLWR (the Welsh Learner Record system) or as output by the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) for the purpose of measuring PtA participation against the targets required by the European Social Funding which partially supported the programme.

1.38 In the report which follows, in order to arrive at a final evaluation statement in respect of PtA, a mix of information from the first evaluation period (as previously reported in the interim evaluation report) is blended with more up-to-date information from the second evaluation period – the former being attributed as 2013 statistics or findings, the latter being attributed as 2014 statistics or findings.

2. Outputs of the PtA programme

Summary points

Overall outputs:

- The number of PtA learners was close to the overall annual target of 2,000 learners per year in the early years of the programme but declined from 2011/12 onwards
- PtA, reflecting the Pathways on offer, was much more frequently taken up by young men than by young women

Pan-Wales PtA programme:

- Completion, attainment and success rates in PtA were high and somewhat higher than those for other learners in Further Education.
- The proportions of learners who completed their PtA course who then progressed into apprenticeships rose from 2010/11 to 2012/13 but the proportion in 2012/13, of 35 per cent, is clearly short of the WG's own target for the programme of 75 per cent progression.
- Progression into apprenticeship, Level 3 learning, or employment was achieved by 64 per cent of learners.
- Only 4 per cent of learners became unemployed on leaving their PtA course.

ESF project:

- From the European Funding perspective, all targets except one were met and exceeded. The exception was the target that 5 per cent of participants should be from minority ethnic backgrounds. This target was not met.

Overall outputs

2.1 The evaluation was supplied with limited data on outputs of PtA – the numbers and distribution of learners on the programme – by the Welsh Government. This evidence is drawn from data on learners submitted electronically to Wales’ Department for Education and Skills by the Colleges at which PtA programmes were delivered. The data is held in the Department’s LLWR system.

2.2 Table 2.1 shows the distribution of ‘starts’ on the programme by gender.

Table 2.1: PtA starts by academic year and gender¹

	2009/10*		2010/11		2011/12		2012/13		2013/14		Total	
	No.	%										
Male	1,475	77	1,420	75	1,325	90	1,210	89	1,270	91	6,700	83
Female	425	23	490	25	135	10	155	11	120	9	1,325	17
Total	1,905	100	1,905	100	1,465	100	1,365	100	1,395	100	8,035	100

¹ Rounded to nearest 5

Source: LLWR

* Note: PtA was not funded by ESF in 2009/10

2.3 The table shows that PtA, over its lifetime, had around eight thousand learners. In later years, the annual number of PtA learners declined substantially.

2.4 The programme has mostly been of value to the young, male population. Because the Pathways which were developed were related to occupations which are heavily ‘gendered’, relatively few young women were assisted by the programme. (This outturn is broadly consistent with Apprenticeships themselves. For example, LLWR statistics show that, in 2010, 98 per cent of construction Apprentices in Wales, 94 per cent of manufacturing Apprentices and 85 per cent of agricultural Apprentices were male).

2.5 2.4 per cent of PtA learners were from other than white ethnic groups (compared with 6.5 per cent of the 16-24 population of Wales¹³). Eight per cent were identified in LLWR as having a disability or learning difficulty of some kind.

Destination of PtA learners

2.6 Outputs of the programme can also be considered in terms of attainment and learner destinations. Table 2.2 (following) shows attainment from the PtA programme in the years 2010/11 to 2012/13. [Prior to 2010/11 data is not regarded as reliable and 2012/13 is the latest data available.]

2.7 The table shows: (a) the number and percentage of learners who completed learning activities; (b) the percentage of those who completed the activity who obtained the qualification; and (c) the number of those who attained the qualification as a proportion of all those who started the learning activity:

¹³ Source: Annual Population Survey, 2011

Table 2.2: Learning activity, attainment, and success rates for PtA, 2010/11 to 2012/13

	Completed learning activities (n)	Completion¹ (%)	Attainment² (%)	Success³ (%)
<i>2010/11</i>	9,275	91	92	84
<i>2011/12</i>	9,815	92	93	85
<i>2012/13</i>	9,670	94	94	89

¹ Percentage of learners who completed learning activities

² Percentage of learners who completed who attained the qualification

³ Percentage of those who attained the qualification as a proportion of all those who started the activity

2.8 These figures suggest that:

- Completion, attainment, and success rates in PtA have risen over the later course of the programme.
- Possibly as an effect of the particularly careful selection of PtA learners, all three rates are higher for PtA than for other FE programmes¹⁴ undertaken by people in the same age range (completion in PtA 94 percent, FE 92 per cent; attainment in PtA 94 per cent, FE 93 per cent; success in PtA 89 per cent, FE 81 per cent).

2.9 Following PtA participation, a variety of outcomes occur. These conform to a hierarchy of desirability from the point of view of PtA objectives: (1) progression into a full Apprenticeship (hence employment); (2) progression into a Foundation Apprenticeship; (3) progression into a Further Education course at Level 3; (4) progression into a Further Education course at Level 2. These progressions are identified using a

¹⁴ FE rates taken from 'Learner Outcome Measures for Further Education, Work Based Learning and Adult Community Learning', Welsh Government, Statistical First Release (SDR 57/2014)

data-matching methodology developed by government statisticians. However, where information on learner progression is not available, the destination of the learner as recorded by the learning provider has been reported. Published data on ‘other outcomes’ separates this data from the Apprenticeship and Further Education outcomes because it is regarded by government statisticians as less robust. However, for simplicity the data in Table 2.3 combines the two categories. The table shows the immediate destinations of learners who completed their programme. Data is supplied up to the latest available date, that is for 2012/13:

Table 2.3: Progressions/destinations of learners completing PtA programmes, 2010/11 2012/13

Progression/Destination	2010/11 (%)	2011/12 (%)	2012/13 (%)
<i>Progressions</i>			
Apprenticeship	12.7	13.9	15.9
Foundation Apprenticeship	14.3	19.3	19.2
Further Education (Level 3)	25.9	20.1	23.4
Further Education (Level 2)	17.1	17.3	14.1
Other learning	4.8	4.5	3.7
<i>Destinations</i>			
Employment	6.8	6.9	5.1
Further learning	5.6	7.9	5.6
Seeking work/unemployed ¹	5.2	5.0	4.2
Other ²	1.6	0.9	0.4
Not known	6.0	4.0	8.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Progressions from Pathways to Apprenticeships Programme 2012/13, Statistical Article, Welsh Government, November 2014

2.10 It can be seen that:

- The proportion of learners progressing into Apprenticeship rose over the 3 years for which data is available, from 13 to 16 per cent; whilst the proportion progressing into Foundation Apprenticeship

rose from 14 to 19 per cent. However, the combined proportion for 2012/13, 35 per cent, clearly does not meet the original target for progression into apprenticeship of 75 per cent.

- More positively, it can be seen that very few learners were reported as seeking work or unemployed at the end of their course, only 4 per cent, and that all others (except those with an unknown destination – the ‘not known’ proportions in Table 2.3) took destinations which, while not necessarily positive from the point of view of PtA’s formal objectives, may well have been satisfactory from the learner point of view. Particularly, if a positive progression is regarded as one into a full apprenticeship, into Level 3 learning, or into employment, then two-thirds of learners (64 per cent) who completed made such a progression in 2012/13 – slightly above the 60 per cent who made these progressions in 2010/11 and 2011/12.

2.11 Also, as most programme managers and deliverers observed, destinations of PtA learners varied considerably according to the Pathway which they pursued. For example, at one extreme, in 2012/13, 38 per cent of those following an engineering or manufacturing Pathway went into Apprenticeship (Level 3) while 8 per cent went into a Foundation Apprenticeship (Level 2). In the case of the agriculture, horticulture, and land-based engineering Pathway, 24 per cent went into Apprenticeship and none into Foundation Apprenticeship. Contrastingly, at the other extreme, the balance in the case of the automotive Pathway was the other way round (5 per cent Apprenticeship; 34 per cent Foundation Apprenticeship) as it was in the case of the construction Pathway (6 per cent Apprenticeship; 41 per cent Foundation Apprenticeship).

Outputs from the European Funding perspective

2.12 It was noted in Chapter 1 that the programme was required to meet a set of targets specifically as a condition of the ESF support it received in the Convergence area only. These targets related only to PtA learners aged

between 16 and 19 and were not, therefore, directly comparable with the Welsh Government's pan-Wales and age 16 to 24 targets for PtA. Original targets set out in the Business Plan for the ESF-funded component were subsequently re-profiled (see Chapter 5 for description of this). Following re-profiling, the adjusted targets (from 2011/12 onwards) were:

- 2,200 total participants (over total duration of project)
- 85 per cent achieving qualifications
- 60 per cent entering further learning
- 60 per cent gaining other positive outcomes
- 40 per cent progressing into employment (including Apprenticeships)
- 5 per cent of learners to be from ethnic minority backgrounds
- 400 employers collaborating with education/training providers (over total duration of project).

2.13 There was also a specific requirement to operate the Pathways programme in a way which promotes ESF cross-cutting themes of Environmental Sustainability and Equality and Diversity. The latter would in any case be expected under the WG's vision for Equality, Diversity and Human Rights in Wales.

2.14 The data reported below as achievement against the ESF targets is not directly comparable with other data used in this report (in that it refers only to participants for whom claims on ESF budgets have been made).

2.15 Performance against targets is set out in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4: Achievement of ESF targets

	Target	Achievement
Total participant numbers (number)	2,200	2,445
<i>Achieving qualifications</i>	85%	91%
<i>Progressing into further learning</i>	60%	68%
<i>Gaining other positive outcomes</i>	60%	67%
<i>Progressing into employment (including Apprenticeship)</i>	40%	48%
<i>Percentage of learners from BME backgrounds</i>	5%	1%
Employers collaborating with education/training providers (number)	400	600

Source: WEFO claim June 2015

2.16 Overall, thus, in respect of ESF PtA targets:

- In terms of overall numbers of participants, 111 per cent of the target figure was achieved.
- Targets for progression into employment/Apprenticeship, for achievement of qualifications, for entering further learning, and gaining other positive outcomes have been exceeded.
- The target for ethnic minority participation was not achieved
- The number of employers engaged substantially exceeded the target for this number.

3. Delivery of the PtA programme

Summary points

Those involved in managing, designing and delivering PtA, employers, and learners were asked in surveys and in-depth discussions to give their views on the delivery of PtA.

Discussions with *PtA managers, designers, and deliverers* found that:

- The programme was generally believed to have had a sound rationale given the economic circumstances at the time of its introduction and for a period thereafter; and, overall, was seen as delivering a valuable learning experience leading to enhanced employability for participants.
- Early difficulties were recognised: lack of clarity as to the roles of SSCs and colleges; communication difficulties between the partners; administrative and data recording issues; and changes in personnel in the WG management team. However, these difficulties had largely been eliminated though some early problems had continued to colour perceptions of the programme.
- Marketing of the programme was believed to have been adequate in that sufficient work placements with employers had been established. There was, however, a suggestion by several SSCs that PtA had not been sufficiently promoted in schools; and, overall, the programme, after 2011/12 did not engage target numbers of learners.
- The work experience element of PtA continued to be seen by SSCs and Colleges as the key aspect of the programme which distinguished it from other FE vocational courses.

From their point of view, *employers* were broadly satisfied with delivery:

- Substantial numbers of employers who offered placements did so on repeat occasions.
- Most reported that PtA requirements had been clearly explained to them before they committed to it.

- Programme administration was not a substantial burden for employers.
- Employers were mainly positive about their PtA learners' attitudes and abilities.
- Overall, they saw the programme as well-organised.

Learners, as at the interim evaluation stage, were also shown in the later evaluation stage to be positive about their experiences on the programme:

- Most PtA learners were able to get on to the Pathway they wanted.
- Although they had considered many other alternatives to PtA they were satisfied with their actual choice, were clear that their chosen Pathway was the basis of a long-term career, and were universally enthusiastic about having got on to their course.
- The great majority (91 per cent) had made an Individual Learning Agreement with their College (as PtA requires).
- Learners gave very positive ratings to all aspects of their College provision.
- PtA Educational Maintenance Allowance had been received by 90 per cent of learners (though in a substantial percentage of these cases EMA may not have been critical to their participation).
- Around 9 out of 10 learners reported having a work placement. Where they had not had a work placement, it was because of early departure from the course or (as Welsh Government officials separately explained) because colleges were given special dispensation by the Welsh Government to offer in-college work-related training as an alternative.
- Most learners received adequate or good support from their college while on the placement.
- Overall, over 80 per cent of learners were satisfied with their PtA experience and very few (4 per cent or less) were dissatisfied.

Delivery in support of WG and ESF objectives with regard to *equality and diversity, sustainability, and Welsh language objectives* was discussed with

employers, learners and managers/deliverers of PtA. Some key points are:

- Few *employers* (12 per cent) reported that they had been encouraged by Colleges to take male or female learners into non-traditional sectors or roles. However, rather more (22 per cent) said that Colleges had discussed the possibility of taking a PtA learner with Welsh language skills and, in a majority of these cases, the employer had done so.
- Few *learners*, too (10 per cent), said that Colleges had encouraged them to consider Pathways which were non-traditional for their gender. However, many more (74 per cent) had been encouraged to act in environmentally-friendly ways on their courses and 63 per cent said that they had had classes or training sessions in which environmental issues were discussed. Fourteen per cent of learners spoke Welsh as their first language or equally with English. Most of these (10 out of 13 cases) had been offered the opportunity to take all or part of their course in Welsh and around half (7 out of 13 cases) had been offered a work placement in a Welsh-speaking business.
- *Colleges* reported:
 - that equality and sustainability policies and practices were embedded in the whole of their delivery and, hence, were extended to PtA courses as a matter of course.
 - that their PtA provision was responsive to demand for Welsh medium provision and that the needs of learners with an ‘in Welsh’ preference were met as far as practicable.

The further general perspective on ESF part-funding of PtA was that this allowed a larger volume of provision than would otherwise have been possible. The price of this – administrative complexity and a requirement to supply detailed evidence of delivery – was generally accepted as one worth paying.

Introduction

3.1 This chapter considers the delivery of PtA – the extent to which the programme was organised and managed effectively. Delivery is considered from the perspective of three groups of ‘stakeholders’ in PtA: (1) officials from the Welsh Government, from Sector Skills Councils, and from Careers Wales who had roles in the management and operation of the programme, and representatives (usually College principals or deputy principals) of the Further Education Colleges which, on behalf of the Welsh Government, delivered PtA learning programmes; (2) employers who provided work experience placements for PtA learners; (3) the young learners who received PtA education and training.

Delivery from the point of view of government officials and of other agencies involved in PtA delivery

Results at the interim evaluation stage

3.2 Discussions with programme managers, designers, and deliverers – Welsh Government officials, Sector Skills Councils, and Colleges – at the **interim evaluation** stage resulted in a number of summary points:

- The basic motivations and design characteristics of the programme – a short, relatively intensive programme combining off-site learning and good work experience – were positively perceived by all these stakeholders.
- It was widely recognised that rapid introduction of the programme had led to operational difficulties in PtA’s early months.
- These difficulties included: precise identification and co-ordination of the roles of the three partners; the different capacity of different SSCs to deliver what was required of them; bureaucratic complexities; frequent changes in operational details as a result of programme improvements; communication failures; and a perception by some stakeholders that Colleges did not adjust to PtA’s demands.

- Significant administrative problems had occurred in the first year of PtA's operation. Some of these had been resolved by stabilisation of management personnel, better quality of management, and intensive management effort but the administrative burden, in relation to the scale of the programme, continued to be perceived as high by one senior government official.
- The ESF funding contribution to PtA from its second year of operation was recognised as fundamental to maintaining the programme's character and increasing the volume of delivery.
- ESF involvement had, however, generated information requirements which were not initially met and subsequently required intensive effort to provide the necessary data. Some Colleges stressed the bureaucracy burdens which ESF involvement placed on them whilst others, while recognising the burden, accepted it as an inevitable accompaniment of beneficial funding.
- ESF funding also added additional emphasis on PtA's compliance with the existing WG requirement for learning provision to pay due attention to Environmental Sustainability and Equality and Diversity principles. Given existing procedures, this emphasis was not regarded by Colleges as problematic and aroused no great threat.
- The programme has had resource implications for Colleges – largely related to information demands and the sourcing of employer engagement – which were higher than those of standard FE provision.
- Marketing of PtA had not been costly and, in consequence, had been somewhat low key. There had been little formal feedback as to its effectiveness (in the form, say, of information on young people's or employers' awareness of PtA). However, given the limited nature of PtA, this was not seen as particularly important and, as a key measure, the ability of PtA to attract learners had not, at that earlier point, posed a major problem.
- Engagement of employers to offer work placements had been somewhat more difficult. There were early ambiguities as to the

responsibility for this in the eyes of some stakeholders. However, by the time of the interim evaluation, responsibility was more clearly placed with Colleges.

- Discussions with Colleges did not suggest any significant demand for PtA provision in the Welsh language. Colleges asserted that should demand arise, they could and would meet it.

Effectiveness of different features of the PtA course

3.3 For the **final evaluation**, a further round of discussions with these stakeholders was held. The substance of these discussions is used to provide further insights into stakeholder views on PtA delivery.

3.4 Generally, stakeholders remain of the view that the **original rationale** for PtA was a sound one, located in its aspirations to raise employability and to meet young peoples' needs in different economic conditions. For example, one college remarked on the programme's value in getting young people into jobs whilst a representative from Careers Wales recognised PtA's underlying driving force:

'I've been working in further education for over fourteen years now, and prior to that in a private training provider. This probably is, in my opinion, one of the best programmes I've seen at getting young people into real jobs'. (FE College)

'I think that as a nation we were aware that there is an issue with young learners up to the age 24. There was talk of a 'lost generation' of young people finding it difficult to get into work. This initiative aimed to put them on the right track. It was in line with the Jobs Growth Wales initiative as well'. (Careers Wales)

3.5 A small number of respondents, whilst recognising the underlying value of PtA, placed caveats on that view – in two cases, that the programme had been introduced quickly which had limited its early efficiency and, in one case, that the programme's focus on progression into apprenticeship as an outcome of participation was too strong and it

should, rather, have taken improvements in employability as its key measure.

3.6 The interim evaluation had noted that the management and delivery **partnership** of PtA – including the Welsh Government, Sector Skills Councils, and colleges – had not always run smoothly. Discussions to inform this final evaluation suggested that, although the partnership was manifestly successful in that the PtA programme was put in place and operated, partnership problems were still recognised as having occurred:

- Sector Skills Councils variously suggested, for example, that *‘some of the FEIs that I’ve worked with in delivering PtA in my sector don’t really understand how to engage employers’*, that *‘one college had misunderstood what they were supposed to be doing’* and *‘there have been issues in that we didn’t feel that colleges were promoting the course’*, and that *‘I don’t think the college we dealt with really got on board from the beginning with the actual employer relationship side of it’*.
- For their part, colleges sometimes saw SSCs in a negative light. One college remarked *‘we were probably fairly critical of the Sector Skills Councils’* and another observed variation in the SSC contribution *‘In terms of the SSCs, some are great and some aren’t. It’s as simple as that’*.
- Two Sector Skills Councils were also critical of the Welsh Government contribution. One observed *‘I thought they couldn’t communicate effectively’* whilst another said *‘there were internal difficulties in the Welsh Government department that handles the Pathways programme. We saw changes in our contacts which didn’t help with consistency’*.

3.7 For its part, a Welsh Government representative’s view was that *‘There were a lot of stumbling blocks in the first year of the programme because the opinions of colleges and Sector Skills Councils weren’t meeting in*

the middle but once we got over that hurdle, I think that communication was really good the relationship with Sector Skills Councils and colleges worked well, it was triangulated'.

- 3.8 Overall, it appears that lack of early clarity about the respective roles of SSCs and colleges raised early partnership difficulties which, to some extent, have continued to colour these organisations' views of each other. Alongside that, the Welsh Government's contribution to partnership was weakened by changes of personnel as the programme proceeded – leading to a perception from some SSCs particularly that communications and consistency of management had, on occasions, been compromised.
- 3.9 In respect of **programme administration**, the interim evaluation observed that there were significant problems in the first year of PtA's operation but that these had mainly been resolved. The latest interviews confirmed this view. Whilst one college noted that 'any ESF project is burdened by massive amounts of bureaucracy and this one is no different', the consensus of response was to note again that early administrative difficulties had been significant but, albeit that PtA's part-funding by the ESF budget necessarily continued to require significant administrative input, that the difficulties which occurred in the early part of PtA's lifetime were essentially resolved as colleges became familiar with the necessary procedures.
- 3.10 Reflecting on **programme marketing** in this second set of stakeholder discussions, one college noted that, by its third year, PtA had become sufficiently well-known that it had become 'self-promoting', with students requesting admission to PtA courses, and other colleges saw marketing as adequate. However, a view expressed by several SSC representatives was that the PtA intake had been too dominated by colleges and that PtA was not promoted as an option by schools to 16 year old pupils when they were considering their post-16 options. These SSCs saw two forces at work: colleges converting their 'normal'

learners into PtA learners as a progression route; and schools, in competition with FE Colleges, seeking to retain their pupils rather than giving them an equal opportunity to choose, as with PtA, a college-based option. As noted earlier, from 2011/12 onwards PtA did not attract its annual target for the number of learners who would engage with the programme.

- 3.11 In the latest set of evaluation discussions, both SSCs and colleges continued to recognise the value of the **work experience** element, this being described by different respondents as ‘the strongest part of the programme’ (an SSC) or ‘incredibly helpful’ (a second SSC) or ‘the critical part of the programme’ (a college) – the key strength of this element being generally seen as that, when combined with ‘theoretical’ learning, it developed the employability of a young person more strongly than did a purely college-based course.
- 3.12 Engaging employers to supply the work experience element was varied in difficulty. Some respondents from colleges and SSCs reported that employer engagement had been good but others noted that sectors varied in their willingness to offer work experience, that small firms could sometimes not offer the required quality of experience or were reluctant to offer work experience at all, and that there were particular difficulties finding placements offering particular types of experience in rural areas because of travel distances or simply because the required types of business were few in number.
- 3.13 The role of **ESF funding of PtA** and its impacts were also discussed with these stakeholders. The basic perception was that this funding had been a critical factor in permitting PtA to operate on the scale at which it had – expanding the volume of provision and, as reported by one SSC, allowed the development and offer of qualifications in some Pathways which would not otherwise have been available. The requirement to supply large volumes of detailed information as the price for this funding

was not welcomed but was recognised as an inevitable side effect of European funding.

3.14 When asked about the impact of the ESF requirement for equality and sustainability objectives to be reflected in programme delivery and to be monitored, the common response was that these requirements, under influence from the Welsh Government, were already a standard feature of college provision:

- Colleges all had standard equality, diversity, and sustainability policies in place.
- There was thus no bias or discrimination in entry to programmes.
- Several colleges took part in initiatives to increase the participation of non-traditional genders in particular sectors (typically, ‘women into construction’ or ‘women into engineering’ initiatives), these initiatives, however, being more general than PtA and, it was noted by respondents, without any great effect.
- One college offered a support network for young women who did take ‘non-traditional’ courses (again, more widely than PtA).
- ‘Equality’ monitoring was a standard process for all colleges.
- Classes on sustainability, for example, on recycling and waste management as part of technical courses or Education for Sustainability Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) classes were standard elements of provision.

3.15 Some of these points are illustrated by selected quotations from discussions with college principals:

- General avoidance of discriminatory selection for courses:
‘Our provision is open to everyone and the entry criteria are transparent. We fully believe in inclusive and equal opportunities for all regardless of background, ethnic groups, etc. It comes down to, “do you have the requisites to come on the programme?” If you do, then great. If you don’t, then you don’t. It is as simple as that.’

- Standard assessment of 'equality' issues:

'As part of our self-assessment process we review gender performance and I know that it's very marginal in terms of gender. There's a one percentage point difference between females and males across college in terms of successful outcomes. As it so happens, the male students are 1% better than the female students. A year ago it was still a one percentage point difference.'
- Standard 'embedding' of sustainability:

'A part of Welsh government strategy is to embed sustainability into the curriculum and we spent a lot of time working on that with our staff. We're looking for every opportunity to embed or take advantage of naturally occurring opportunities to discuss sustainability and environmentally-friendly actions and activities in our lessons. We have focussed very much on staff development days, learning and teaching days. As a consequence, our observation of lessons shows that there's been a significant improvement in taking advantage of those naturally occurring opportunities to flag up, where appropriate, activities and matters that relate to sustainability.'
- Practical measures to reduce wastage within a general 'sustainability' framework:

'These days they're a common part of technical courses anyway. In construction, they study a unit in 'Sustainable Construction' and in 'Sustainable Development'. Likewise, in engineering, 'Design for Sustainability'. Not only that, when they're in workshop environments, it's about making sure we're utilising resources as best we can, recycling as much as we can, and reworking as much as we can. If a student has a practical task, if they don't get it right on the practice attempt, they don't just scrap it. They're issued with a second drawing where the dimensions are scaled down, so they just have to reuse the existing material rather than discarding the first attempt and

starting again with a fresh piece of material. That became a standard part of the programme. Students would get into the fact that they were recycling, and were looking to reducing costs. We would also get them involved in community events and exercises around the college and the local community, in local primary schools. Internally within the college we run sustainability events’.

3.16 Essentially, therefore, the college response to questions on the equality and sustainability agendas was ‘we already have the requirements of these agendas embedded in all our procedures and courses and they were, therefore, extended to PtA as a matter of course’.

3.17 In respect of PtA’s ability to support use of the **Welsh language**, colleges all reported, as a Welsh Government requirement, that they were required to assess all students’ requirements for Welsh language support and tuition on entry – and PtA, therefore, followed this requirement. Thereafter, the colleges’ approach was broadly demanded: if PtA students needed or requested teaching or a Welsh-speaking work placement, this was provided as far as possible.

3.18 For example, one college noted that a whole-‘Welsh’ course was impracticable but additional support was provided:

‘We don’t have huge numbers of Welsh-speaking staff or students on PtA. We have three in construction, two in engineering. All students are screened when they first enter the programme, and we ask what their preferred language is and how they would like to be assessed and taught. If it isn’t possible to deliver the whole programme in Welsh, those who state Welsh as their first language will be given additional support, such as receiving translations of technical terms or additional tutorial support. We find some of the technical maths and sciences are quite difficult to translate English to Welsh, so putting on additional tutorial support for Welsh language

students has helped. We also encourage our English-speaking students to develop their Welsh language skills.'

3.19 A second college described its approach in similar terms:

'It's a very strong English speaking community. However, in line with Welsh Government strategy and policy, we offer Welsh tutorials and the access to bilingual learning materials and where we have Welsh speaking members of staff, they will pick up on Welsh speaking first language students, also converse to them through the medium of Welsh. There is Welsh medium support. We don't actually deliver formally through the medium of Welsh, but we can provide support. If students want to submit assessments in Welsh, we accommodate that and we encourage that as well.'

Delivery from the employer viewpoint

3.20 At the interim evaluation stage, evidence was gathered in a postal survey from 67 employers and in in-depth telephone discussions from 3 employers. At that stage, evidence from the evaluation suggested that programme delivery processes were generally seen as effective by employers. Satisfaction with the programme was high and the administrative burden was low. There were some minor issues – some perceived limitations in the abilities and attitudes of learners, some failures of communication between Colleges and employers, and the view of some employers that placements should be longer. However, these limitations were raised in numbers which were low enough to suggest that they constituted the niggles which accompany any organisational process rather than systematic failure of the programme.

3.21 Essentially the same overall positive view of PtA was identified in the final stage of the evaluation in which further evidence was collected in a new telephone survey of 67 employers and from in-depth discussions with 7 employers [Note: the 67 employers in the interim and final

evaluation surveys were different sets of employers – the equal sample sizes on each occasion, of 67 employers in each case, were a matter of chance not an indication that the same employers were interviewed in each survey.]

3.22 As context for presentation of this further evidence, characteristics of the employers surveyed in the more recent evaluation survey are described:

- The 67 employers were spread across a variety of sectors, with the main ones being construction (1 in 4 cases), automotive (1 in 5), engineering (1 in 6), hospitality (1 in 10), agriculture and related (1 in 10), and food and drink manufacture or processing (1 in 20).
- Employers were more likely to operate just from a single site (two thirds of cases) than from more than one site (one third of cases).
- The employer sites at which PtA work experiences were taken up had a range of sizes (in terms of employment at the site): almost half had fewer than 10 employees, a third had between 10 and 49 employees, and a fifth had 50 or more employees.

3.23 Overall, thus, work experiences offered to PtA learners were quite varied in that they were delivered across a range of industries and in a range of workplaces of different sizes. In relation to the overall distribution of sectors and sizes of workplaces in Wales, PtA placements were more likely to be located in manufacturing, automotive, and construction sectors and in larger-than-average workplaces.

3.24 Reflecting the variation in sizes of the workplaces where work experience was offered, varied numbers of placements had been offered with a similar number of employers having had just one placement (24 cases in the survey) as the number having had between 2 and 4 placements (23 cases) and having had 5 or more placements (20 cases). As an indirect indicator that offering PtA placements was a satisfactory experience for employers, the majority of employers who

had had more than one placement (6 in 10 of the total) had offered placements in more than one year – that is, they had been willing to repeat their initial engagement with PtA.

3.25 Most employers had become aware of the PtA programme through a College (7 in 10 cases) or through an approach by a young learner (nearly 1 in 10 cases). In more than half of cases where a College had suggested that they offer a place (6 in 10), the employer had an existing relationship with the College. Overall, thus, it can be calculated that in about 4 out of 10 cases, Colleges drew on their existing employer bases to establish PtA work experiences, but in the remainder of cases, more varied linkages were involved in setting up the work experience opportunities.

3.26 Some of the variety in how engagement with the programme occurred can be seen from these extracts from depth interviews with employers:

‘Someone in the technical college came to speak to us about it. We knew nothing about it prior to that’. (Car dealership)

‘We spoke to JobCentre Plus and said it’d be nice if we could find people to give work experience to on a regular basis. They phoned the pathways people up and a lady came to the premises to have a chat. We had a long chat about what it involves, how the process would go. We were interested so gave it a try’. (Disability charity)

‘We were approached by College A and they asked us if we were able to provide work placements. We were happy to oblige’. (Construction Company)

3.27 Employers gave very varied reasons for offering placements¹⁵ but some more common responses were that they:

- wanted to help young people (37 per cent of cases)

¹⁵ Respondents were able to give more than one reason

- needed help with their workload at the time (15 per cent)
- wanted to help out the College or had a good relationship with the College (15 per cent)
- knew or were approached by a particular young person (8 per cent)
- were looking to recruit a young person or to establish an Apprenticeship (8 percent)
- or it was company policy to offer work experience (2 per cent).

3.28 Generally, thus, employers gave largely positive reasons for offering placements. Some further flavour of employer reasons for supporting PtA is given by the following extracts from depth interviews:

‘Our young person had already done a year in college and needed practical experience in doing the trade, so he approached us. We took him on to give him an insight into what the career is all about’. (Electrical contractor)

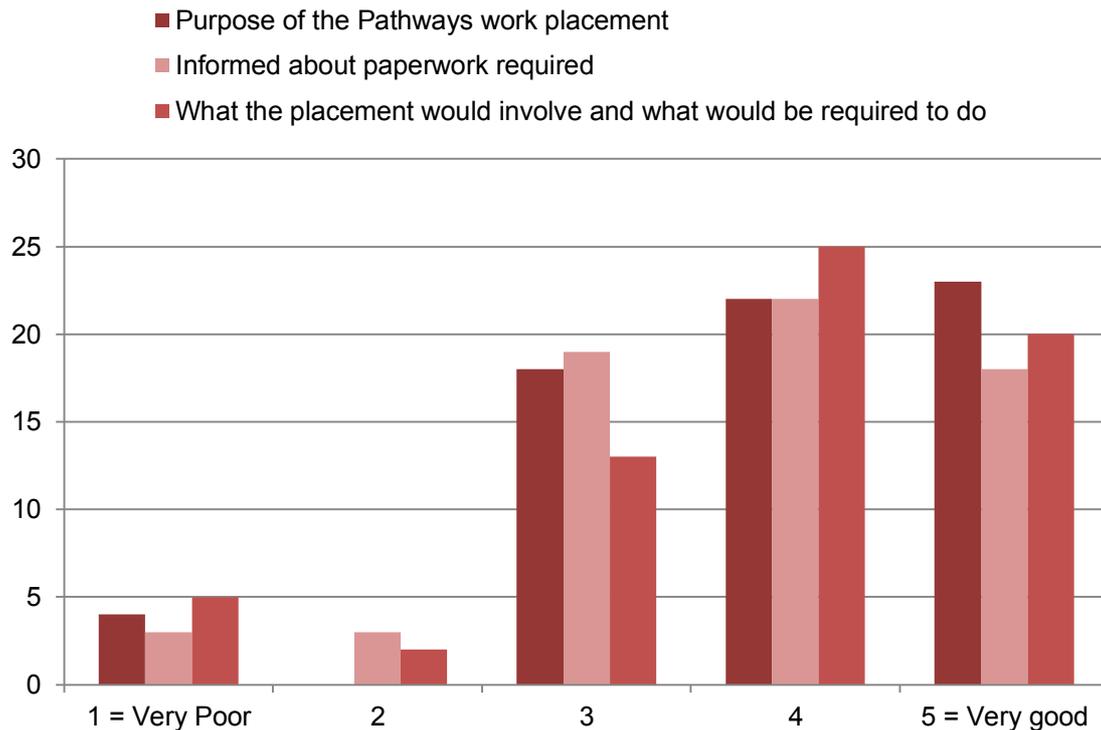
‘We were getting more and more work coming in and we felt it would help us to get work done quickly.’ (Disability charity)

‘It provides invaluable experience for young individuals trying to get employment, also to help towards their qualifications’.

(Construction company)

3.29 As a first direct indicator of the satisfactoriness of delivery of PtA from the employer perspective, employers were asked about the preliminary explanation of the programme to them. They were asked to rate three aspects of this on a ‘very poor’ (rating of 1) to ‘very good’ (rating of 5) rating scale. Figure 3.1 set out their responses:

Figure 3.1: Rating of information given about the work placement (numbers)



Source: Survey of employers, 2014; base = 67

3.30 Overall, thus, it appears that most employers were reasonably well informed about PtA requirements but, in a small number of cases, explanations were deficient.

3.31 Employers interviewed in depth interviews reported on PtA’s administrative processes. Mostly, as the following comments suggest, these were not burdensome:

‘We had to meet up with one of the college lecturers to sign a few forms, making sure that we had the correct credentials and insurance to take someone on’. (Electrical contractor)

‘They did regular visits. From College A it was weekly. From College B it was once a month but they’d spend quite a bit of time when they came out’. (Garage)

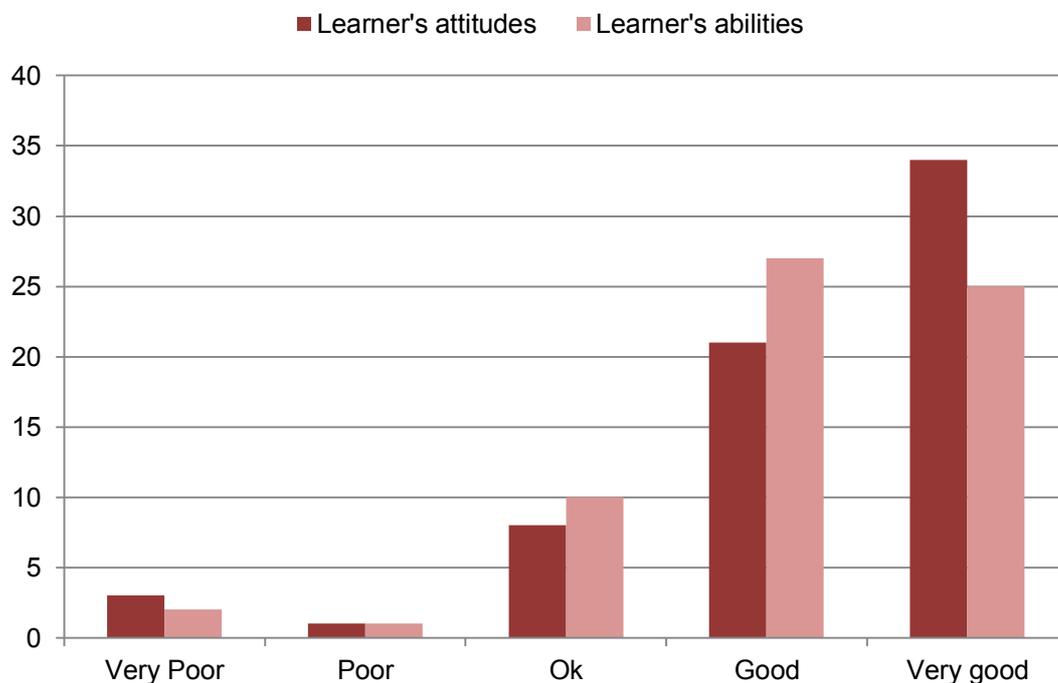
‘The college was very supportive. They visited and phoned regularly’. (Car dealership)

‘The only paperwork we are required to do is training records and evidence’. (Car dealership)

'We had to receive CVs, select appropriate individuals, speak to them individually in interviews, log those, and then have a final interview'. (Precision engineering)

3.32 In respect of the learners for whom they provided placements, most employers rated them at least reasonably highly in respect of their attitudes and abilities:

Figure 3.2: Employer ratings of their learners' abilities and attitudes (numbers)



Source: Survey of employers, 2014; base = 67

3.33 Further, when asked about specific limitations in their learners' work-readiness and work-related characteristics after an appropriate allowance had been made for learners' age and experience, 8 in 10 employers said their learners had no limitations. The remaining 2 in 10 employers identified one or more limitations. As proportions of all employers in the survey, around 1 in 10 mentioned laziness, poor verbal communication, poor literacy, and/or lack of initiative and around 1 in 20 mentioned poor numeracy, poor attendance, and/or lateness.

3.34 Employers interviewed in depth were also mainly positive about the young people for whom they provided work experience:

'He performed well. He was a pleasant and hard-working person'. (Car dealership)

'He was very good – hard-working and had good timekeeping'.
(Electrical contractor)

'They performed well. They were interested, motivated, hard-working and had good timekeeping.' (Precision engineering)

3.35 Employers interviewed in depth interviews were also asked to give an overview of programme organisation. Employers in these cases were very positive:

'It was very well organised. Our engagement was very good.'
(Car dealership)

'It's done quite well. There have been no problems. There's no way that our engagement with the programme could have been improved'. (Car dealership)

'It was very well organised. We had a number of conversations before, during, and after the start of the placement. They (the college) said "if there's any problem or you want to talk to us about anything, ring us up at any time and have a chat".'
(Disability charity)

3.36 In line with Welsh Government and European Union policy, the PtA programme had the objective that it should be delivered in a way which promotes equality. As context, employers were asked whether they saw their placements as more suitable for young men or young women or equally suitable for either. Two-thirds of employers (66 per cent) saw their placements as equally suitable for either young men or young women. The remainder all saw their placements as more suitable for young men. This latter finding may be assumed to reflect existing employment patterns in the construction, engineering, automotive, and agricultural sectors (in which many work placements were located) such

that male employment predominates. Thus, when employers who gave the 'more suitable for young men' response (23 cases) were asked why this was the case, 16 respondents said 'this type of work is usually done by young men and not the other sex' and 7 respondents said 'this type of work is more suitable for young men'.

3.37 To some extent, this pattern may have been reinforced or, at least, not challenged by Colleges. Where Colleges had offered employers a choice of candidates for placement (23 cases), in 12 cases, candidates of both sexes had been offered. However, in 8 cases only young men had been offered contrasted with the single case in which only young women had been put forward.

3.38 Further, all employers were asked whether the College had done anything to encourage them to take young men or young women in non-traditional roles. Only 12 per cent (of all 67 cases) said that this happened, 82 per cent said that it had not, and 6 per cent didn't know either way.

3.39 Some employers interviewed in depth made no distinction between potential male and female candidates:

'Whether they were male or female did not make a difference to who we chose. It was down to the CV and what courses they had done in college and then how they performed when we saw them.' (Disability charity)

'We took on a young man but would have taken on a woman if the college had put one forward.' (Construction company)

3.40 Another employer, who had taken three young men on placements, reinforced the perception that traditional gender roles persist:

'The expectations are different. We haven't had a female candidate from any of the colleges for a few years. We would have considered a woman if they'd been put forward but girls

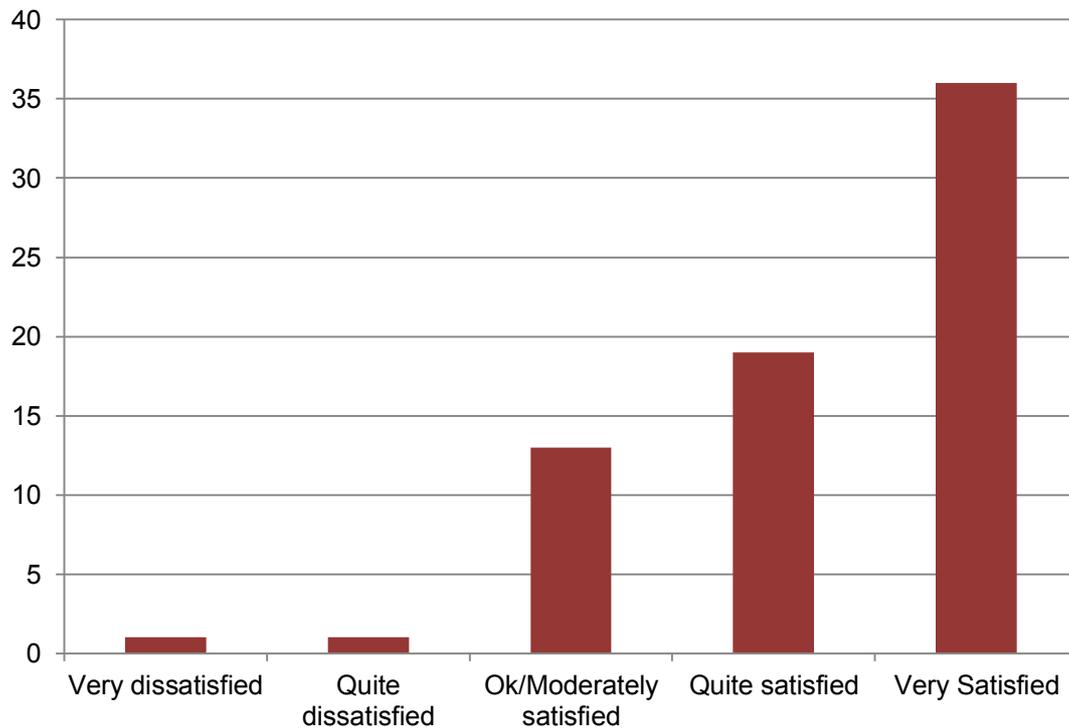
have a different expectation of what working in a garage is like’.
(Garage)

3.41 Action in furtherance of government policy to protect and strengthen the Welsh language was somewhat more positive: 22 per cent of employers (15 cases) reported that Colleges had discussed the possibility of taking a Pathways learner with Welsh language skills and in 9 of these 15 cases the employer had taken on a learner with Welsh language skills. However, in 6 of the 7 depth interviews undertaken with employers, the employers reported that the College had not discussed Welsh language issues with them. In the other case, the issue was raised, but they had no particular requirement for Welsh language skills:

‘The college spoke about it, but there wasn’t a high need for a Welsh language speaker on the computer section’.
(Construction company)

3.42 In summary of employer perceptions of PtA, when asked how satisfied they had been with their involvement with PtA, the majority of employers in the latest (2014) survey were satisfied or very satisfied

Figure 3.3: Employers' overall satisfaction with their PtA involvement (numbers)



Source: Survey of employers, 2014; base = 67

Delivery from the learner viewpoint

Results at the interim evaluation stage

3.43 At the **interim stage** of evaluation, surveys of 200 post-PtA learners (those who had completed their PtA course) and of 270 current PtA learners (those still on their courses) were undertaken. These surveys assessed delivery of PtA from the learner point of view by asking them to describe their experiences and to report their satisfaction with those experiences.

3.44 Overall, participant responses in these surveys suggested that learners were very positive about their PtA experience:

- They entered with positive motivations and with enthusiasm.
- Most learners got advice on the programme.
- Most got the programme area they wanted.
- They rated their College experience highly and were enthusiastic about the work experience element of the course.

3.45 Within this generally satisfactory picture, there were a number of issues affecting minorities, mostly small minorities, of learners:

- For around 1 in 10 learners, the nature of the course they undertook (the fact that it was a PtA) was not clear to them until they had actually started on the course and, for some, not until some months into the course.
- An Individual Learning Agreement was not established for 6 per cent of respondents and, for more than this, the Agreement was of insufficient significance for them to recall whether it was established or not.
- The survey of past learners reported that 12 per cent of learners did not have a work placement as part of their course. Responses from the small number of people reporting this show that some (9 out of 24 cases) were because of early withdrawal from the course. However, absence of work experience for the remaining minority of cases (around 8 per cent of the total sample) may imply that some courses failed to supply the blend of off-site and on-site experiences which is a principal strength of the PtA approach. However, as an alternative explanation, work experience offered on-site at the FEI and agreed by the WG on an individual basis could account for these cases.
- As a critique not of PtA itself but of its ancillary support element, very substantial numbers of respondents said that their participation in PtA was not dependent on the Educational Maintenance Allowance which they received. This data suggested that Pathways EMA may have low 'additionality': young people's entry into PtA may not have been strongly conditional on the availability of EMA¹⁶.

¹⁶ This finding conformed with findings about EMA in England. Research undertaken by the National Foundation for Education Research (Submission of evidence by NFER to the House of Commons Education Committee, February 2011) included a finding that only 12 per cent of

However, some further responses in in-depth interviews with learners suggested that the availability of EMA was critical to individuals in disadvantaged circumstances.

The final evaluation stage

3.46 For the **final stage of the evaluation**, smaller samples of past PtA learners, 90 cases, and of current PtA learners, 34 cases, were obtained. Findings from these surveys insofar as they allow evaluation of learners' experiences of their PtA courses are set out below and, in some cases, set alongside comparable findings from the interim stage.

Prior learning and status

3.47 As context, the average number of learners' qualifications prior to entry to PtA are shown in Table 3.1. Figures for the two later surveys are compared with figures from the earlier surveys undertaken at the interim evaluation stage. It can be seen that the averages for all types or levels of qualification appear to have risen as the PtA programme matured (though the small sample bases of the later surveys mean that this conclusion can only be a cautious one). Generally, however, it can be seen that PtA attracted a reasonably well-qualified cohort of participants whose average level of qualification was at least at the '5 good GCSEs' level (that is, having 5 GCSE passes at Grade C or above):

students in receipt of EMA would not participate if EMA were not available. Welsh government findings – jo to forward

Table 3.1: Table 3.1: Participant qualifications gained prior¹ to joining PtA

	Interim evaluation		Final evaluation	
	Average number per past participant	Average number per current participant	Average number per past participant	Average number per current participant
GCSEs at Grade C or above	6	5	7	7
GCSEs at 'Pass' or above	5	4	6	6
A/S or A levels	1	0	1	1
Work-related qualifications other than an Apprenticeship such as a City and Guilds or BTEC or RSA qualification	1	1	2	2
<i>Base (n)</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>270</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>34</i>

1 Respondents were asked 'Before starting your Pathways to Apprenticeship course, how many of the following qualifications did you have?'

Source: Surveys of past and current PtA learners 2013 and 2014; average numbers are rounded to whole numbers

3.48 Immediately prior to their PtA course, the majority of learners (in the two final evaluation surveys) were in school (34 per cent), in College (34 per cent) or waiting to move from one to the other (15 per cent). Eight per cent were in employment (4 per cent in full-time work and 4 per cent in part-time work). Six per cent were looking for work or in other statuses. Generally, thus, the most usual route into PtA (as also shown in the interim evaluation) was directly from prior education or training.

Motivations and alternatives

3.49 Participation in PtA was seldom a straightforward choice for learners.

The great majority considered other options. It can be seen that in the latest evaluation surveys, the likelihood of considering most other options increased substantially – with the likelihood of considering moving into employment increasing to a high level. This may reflect improving economic conditions and opportunities in the more recent period. It also appears that applying directly for an apprenticeship has risen in its attractiveness to these young people:

Table 3.2: Alternatives to PtA considered by learners

	Interim evaluation		Final evaluation	
	Past	Current	Past	Current
Staying on in the 6 th Form or going to 6 th Form College	19%	14%	23%	27%
Working towards a qualification in a Further Education College or other training provider	30%	27%	47%	41%
Going to University	18%	6%	22%	18%
Getting a job	51%	38%	70%	77%
Staying in a job you already had ^(a)	18%	5%	14%	24%
Taking a gap year	8%	6%	16%	6%
Just doing nothing much – not working or training or studying	8%	1%	4%	3%
Applying for an Apprenticeship	52%	20%	68%	71%
Something else	1%	1%	4%	3%
Nothing else considered	13%	17%	1%	3%
Don't know	0%	4%	0%	0%
Base (n)	200	270	90	34

(a) In the surveys only small percentages said they were working before the course, which seems to contradict percentage responses to this item. It may be that individuals had interpreted the response option differently than we expected.

Source: Surveys of past and current PtA learners 2013 and 2014

3.50 As well as choice of PtA from within a spectrum of other possible 'routes', learners had a choice to make as to what PtA subject area they wished to pursue. In the most recent survey of past learners, around 8 out of 10 learners (78 per cent) only wanted to prepare for the type of apprenticeship which they did prepare for. Of the 20 cases (the remaining 22 per cent) who considered preparing for other types of apprenticeship, only 1 individual reported pursuing the PtA course they actually pursued because they had been unable to get on another PtA course which they would have preferred. Most of these cases simply made a choice amongst the types of course they considered.

- 3.51 Thus, at the time they started their course, the great majority of participants – 92 per cent – were at least fairly certain that they wanted to pursue the type of work for which their course prepared them as a long-term career (including 57 per cent who were totally certain of this); and 99 per cent of participants described themselves as enthusiastic about having got a place on the course.
- 3.52 At this stage, too, the great majority of participants, 90 per cent, were at least reasonably certain (including 69 per cent who were totally certain) that they wanted to progress into a full apprenticeship.
- 3.53 Generally, thus, the PtA programme was successful in attracting a cohort of students who, though they had almost all considered other alternatives, had mostly got on to the particular type of course they wanted, saw that area of work as one which they wanted to pursue in the long term, were enthusiastic about having been accepted on their course, and wished to proceed to a full apprenticeship.
- 3.54 However, that desire to proceed to full apprenticeship was recognised by most PtA learners as an aspiration rather than as being certain of fulfilment – since most learners, 87 per cent, reported that it had been explained to them that progression into full apprenticeship at the end of their PtA course was not guaranteed.

Effectiveness of different features of the PtA course

- 3.55 Respondents in the participant surveys were also asked a series of questions about specific aspects of their course.
- 3.56 Firstly, they were asked whether they had made an Individual Learning Agreement with the college. The great majority, 91 per cent, had done so; 3 per cent said they had not (only 4 cases out of the total of 124 cases in the surveys of past and current learners undertaken in the final evaluation phase); and 6 per cent were uncertain whether they had or

not. Over 9 out of 10 Individual Learning Agreements (93 per cent) had been made at the start of the course or in its first 4 weeks and the remainder within 5 and 8 weeks of starting the course.

3.57 Secondly, respondents were asked to rate various aspects of their colleges' performance on a scale where 1 meant 'very poor' and 5 meant 'very good'. Ratings for most aspects were very positive – a finding which has persisted through both stages of the PtA evaluation:

Table 3.3: Ratings of different aspects of College provision

	Interim evaluation		Final evaluation	
	Past learners	Current learners	Past learners	Current learners
The expertise and knowledge of the teaching staff	4.4	4.5	4.4	4.6
The support you received from teaching staff	4.4	4.4	4.5	4.5
Helpfulness of other staff at the College	4.2	4.2	4.2	4.3
The toolkit provided	4.2	4.3	4.2	4.4
Other resources available (for example, books, materials and computers) to help with your training	4.4	4.3	4.4	4.7
The financial support available such as the hardship fund or the PTA EMA scheme	4.2	3.9	4.2	4.7
The quality of the teaching	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.6
<i>Base (n)</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>270</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>34</i>

Average rating on scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is 'very poor' and 5 'very good'

Source: Surveys of past and current PtA learners 2013 and 2014

3.58 Overall, most respondents reported their colleges' attitude to their training positively: 96 per cent gave this a 'very' or 'quite' positive rating, including 58 per cent who gave it a very positive rating.

3.59 Thirdly, participants were asked whether they had received or, in the case of current learners, were receiving the PtA Educational

Maintenance Allowance. Ninety per cent of learners had received or were receiving EMA.

3.60 However, as in the interim evaluation, answers to a further question as to whether learners would have undertaken the course in the absence of EMA, cast doubts as to its influence on participation in many cases:

Table 3.4: Extent to which EMA influenced participation

	Interim evaluation		Final evaluation	
	Past	Current	Past	Current
Very likely I would still have done it	64%	40%	51%	71%
Quite likely I would still have done it	18%	29%	19%	13%
It is balanced as to whether I would have done it or not	9%	15%	4%	7%
I probably would not have done it	6%	9%	15%	6%
I would definitely not have done it	4%	3%	11%	3%
Don't know	0%	3%	0%	0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%
<i>Base (n)</i>	<i>171</i>	<i>247</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>31</i>

Source: Surveys of past and current PtA learners 2013 and 2014

3.61 Fourthly, respondents were asked whether they had undertaken a work placement. In the most recent evaluation surveys, 89 per cent of past participants said they undertook a work placement; 11 per cent said they did not. Of current participants, 94 per cent had undertaken a placement; 6 per cent had not yet undertaken one. In the case of past participants who had not undertaken placements (10 cases), 3 respondents had withdrawn early from their course and, hence, did not reach the stage in their course at which a placement would have been undertaken. One respondent reported difficulty obtaining a placement. Six respondents were unsure why a placement was not arranged for them. In cases where placements were not undertaken (other than

because of early exit from the course) it may be that, as noted in the interim evaluation, colleges were given a dispensation from the Welsh Government to substitute an in-college work-related experience.

3.62 Fifthly, PtA required learners to undertake at least 21 hours in learning per week. When asked (in the latest survey of past participants) 'While in College, how many hours per week on average did you spend in classes or any other type of training or study sessions?' 62 per cent of learners said 30 hours or more and 21 per cent said between 21 and 29 hours (3 per cent couldn't estimate). Thus, at least 83 per cent of learners reported that they fulfilled the learning hours requirement. However, 13 per cent of learners said they had spent less than the required 21 hours. This may imply instances of College failure to supply the required volume of learning hours but may simply have been miscalculation by learners or misunderstanding of the question asked of them in the telephone interview.

3.63 Seventy per cent of respondents who had a work placement reported receiving a visit from college staff while on the placement. Most learners who had placements reported that it would not have been helpful to have had more visits from college staff, but a fifth (22 per cent) would have preferred more visits.

3.64 The most recent survey of past participants also gave some insights into the extent to which the PtA programme supported some specific European Union and Welsh Government policy objectives:

- When asked whether their colleges encouraged them to consider Pathways that people might consider as more suitable for people of the opposite gender to their own, 10 per cent of respondents said this had happened, while 88 per cent said it had not happened.
- When asked whether they were encouraged, whilst on their course, to do anything which was environmentally-friendly, 74 per cent of respondents said this happened. Of these, 57 per cent had been

encouraged to recycle, 28 per cent to minimise waste, 18 per cent to dispose of waste correctly, and 8 per cent to involve themselves in environmental issues.

- When asked whether their course had included classes or sessions in which environmental issues were discussed, 63 per cent of learners said that this was the case, 29 per cent said it was not the case, and 8 per cent could not remember whether these classes or sessions had occurred or not.

3.65 Support to the Welsh language was also addressed by the survey:

- 3 per cent of learners said that Welsh was their usual spoken language, 11 per cent said they used Welsh and English equally, 86 per cent said that English was their usual spoken language.
- Those who usually or 'equally' spoke Welsh were asked whether their ability in Welsh was assessed or recognised by the College: 85 per cent (11 out of 13 cases) said that it was.
- 10 of these 13 learners also reported that they were offered the opportunity to take all or part of their course in Welsh.
- Of these 10 cases, 2 learners took that offer up.
- Of the 8 people who did not take up the offer, 7 said that they were as happy to use English as Welsh or that using Welsh would have made the course more difficult for them.
- Of the 13 Welsh or 'equal' Welsh and English speakers, 7 had been offered a work placement in a Welsh-speaking business and 4 of these had taken up that offer.

3.66 To summarise their overall perceptions of PtA, learners were also asked to give a general view of their PtA course (see Table 3.5 following). A substantial majority found it to be satisfactory or very satisfactory and there was little change between the interim and final survey points.

Table 3.5: Learners' overall views of PtA

	Interim evaluation		Final evaluation	
	Past	Current	Past	Current
Very satisfactory	63%	51%	64%	68%
Quite satisfactory	23%	34%	20%	21%
OK but not great	11%	9%	11%	12%
Quite unsatisfactory	2%	1%	1%	0%
Very unsatisfactory	2%	*	3%	0%
Don't know	0%	4%	0%	0%
Total	100%	100	100%	100%
<i>Base (n)</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>270</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>34</i>

* Less than 0.5%

Source: Surveys of past and current PtA learners 2013 and 2014

Delivery in respect of ESF equality and environmental sustainability objectives: summary

3.67 This chapter has set out a variety of inferential evidence (from stakeholders, employers, and learners) in respect of PtA's delivery of the ESF's environmental sustainability and equality and diversity requirements. It is inferential because it derives from surveys and discussions which cannot be readily allocated to participants in Convergence areas only¹⁷. However, if it is assumed that overall, all-Wales findings broadly apply to the Convergence areas, then some indications in respect of these ESF 'cross-cutting' themes become available and are summarised below.

¹⁷ Samples were too small to permit reliable estimation from sub-sets of data and discussions with stakeholders did not ask them to differentiate the Convergence area from the all-Wales picture

3.68 Firstly, substantial numbers of the 67 employers surveyed in the evaluation's latest employer survey had environment-friendly policies and procedures: environmental management system for waste disposal and packaging (61 cases); for efficient energy use (36 cases); for use of recycled paper (45 cases); for travel constraint and vehicle policies to reduce carbon dioxide emissions (29 cases); and for measures to develop an environment-friendly culture among staff (55 cases). Eighteen of the 67 employers had built sustainability measures into the provision of goods and services supplied to the Welsh Government.

3.69 The latest evaluation survey of past learners shows that:

- 74 per cent of learners had been encouraged to act in environment-friendly ways. These ways included: recycling materials (57 per cent of those who had been encouraged); reduction in wastage (28 per cent); following current waste disposal methods (18 per cent).
- 63 per cent of learners recalled having had classes in which environmental issues had been discussed.

3.70 The general view of other stakeholders – government officials, SSCs, and Colleges – was that sustainability policies are now universally established in all post-16 educational and training activities and that the PtA programme was an automatic beneficiary of this general position.

3.71 In respect of equality and diversity:

- SSCs and Colleges reported widely that they recognised gender imbalances in particular sectors. At a minimum, they marketed courses as being equally open to both genders and in some cases, particularly in engineering and construction, made particular efforts to attract more women into the sector. These general efforts were applied in the case of PtA.
- However, interviews with employers suggested that there was a tendency for colleges to offer placement opportunities for only learners of one gender in a significant minority of cases and only 12

per cent reported that they had been actively encouraged to take young men or young women in non-traditional roles. Further, the most recent survey of participants showed that only 10 per cent of learners were encouraged to consider non-traditional Pathways for their gender.

3.72 Generally, thus, in respect of ESF sustainability and quality issues, evaluation findings suggest that:

- the influence of WG and European programmes over many years has established an institutional environment in which responsiveness to sustainability and equality and diversity is widely embedded and corresponding procedures are routinely applied to the provision of learning – including, as here, the PtA programme
- majorities of employers who hosted PtA learners on their work placements had environmentally-friendly policies in place
- in combination, these factors were sufficient to ensure that PtA was conducted in an environment in which the majority of learners were actively made aware of environmental matters.
- Against these positive perspectives on these issues, it can be noted, however, that a substantial minority (24 per cent) of past PtA learners were not conscious of having had a ‘sustainability’ element as part of their course; and, as above, efforts to challenge traditional gender-related employment patterns were quite limited.

4. Outcomes of the PtA programme

Summary points

- The great majority of learners undertook work placements which provided industry-specific work rather than general support work and 91 per cent said their placement was useful in developing industry skills.
- Two-thirds of learners (63 per cent) reported that their destination on leaving PtA was their preferred destination.
- A third of the learners (32 per cent) who did not progress into apprenticeship reported that this was because an apprenticeship was not available to them and a further 8 per cent applied for an apprenticeship but were unsuccessful.
- As with learners, employers almost always said that their work placements were helpful in preparing young people for work in their industries and in preparing young people for working life generally.
- 7 in 10 per cent of employers also said their business had benefited from their placement, usually because it had provided additional staff support for a period or had helped with recruitment.
- Almost half of the surveyed employers had taken on a PtA learner as a full apprentice. In half of these cases the apprenticeship had been created specifically to accommodate the learner.
- 43 per cent of employers said that their PtA experience made it more likely that they would engage with Apprenticeship in future and 96 per cent said they would offer work experience opportunities to other programmes in future.
- Managers, designers, and deliverers of PtA (from the Welsh Government, SSCs, and Colleges) generally believed that the programme developed employability and industry-readiness.
- The fact that PtA had fallen well short of its target for progressions into apprenticeship was widely recognised by programme managers and

deliverers but a number of arguments concerning this fact were made, broadly to the effect that the target was arbitrary or misconceived and that other positive outcomes at least partially compensated for this shortfall.

- Cost benefit analysis estimates that PtA generated benefits to learners in terms of increased lifetime earnings and to public budgets from long term direct and indirect tax revenues which exceed the costs of delivering the programme.

Introduction

4.1 Chapter 2 discussed outputs of the programme in terms of overall numbers of learners and of their achievements. 'Outcomes' of the programme discussed in this chapter broadly concern the benefits which accrue to those who participate in the programme, either as learners or employers. Other outcomes clearly occur, such as income to Colleges from the WG and the generation or maintenance of employment in managing the programme and in teaching PtA learners. However, these latter types of outcome, which are relatively minor in relation to Wales' post-16 education and training programmes as a whole, are not considered. The programme is also likely to have positive benefits for the economy of Wales over the longer term. However, given the relatively restricted size of the programme, these benefits are not estimated.

4.2 Information on outcomes in this chapter mainly derives from surveys of, and interviews with, PtA learners and employers and from discussions with other stakeholders including government officials, SSCs, and Colleges.

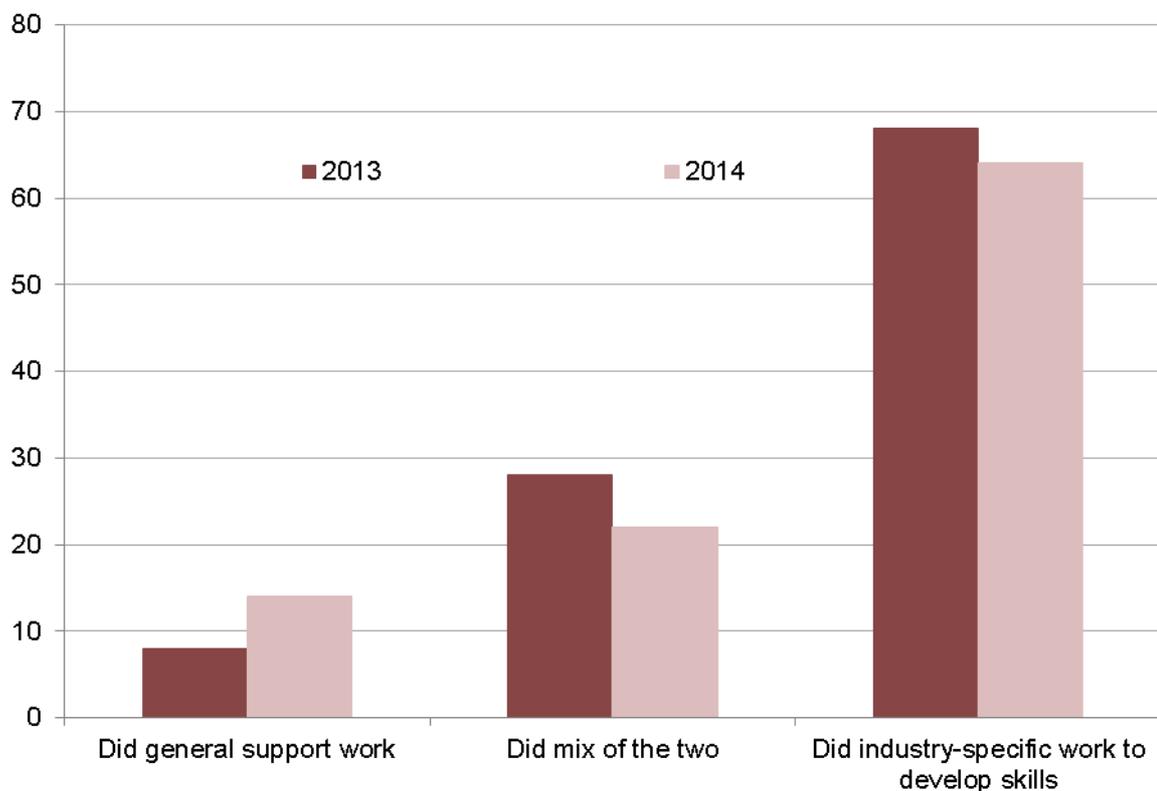
4.3 Additionally, results from a cost benefit analysis of PtA which was undertaken at a mid-point in the evaluation are set out in a final section of the chapter.

Outcomes from the PtA learner perspective

4.4 Additional insights in PtA outcomes are derived from surveys of, and in-depth interviews with, PtA learners.

4.5 Firstly, the interim and final evaluation survey of past learners asked respondents about the nature of the work they undertook on their work placement, as shown in Figure 4.1. Their responses are included here as an ‘outcome’ in the sense that they indicate whether learners did or did not develop skills on their work experience which are likely to be valuable to them in future.

Figure 4.1: Nature of PtA work experience (percentages)



Source: surveys of past PtA learners, 2013 and 2014

Bases = 176 (2013) and 90 (2014)

- 4.6 The data suggests that a substantial majority of learners developed industry skills during their work experience.
- 4.7 When asked directly how useful their placement was in developing skills, in the latest (2014) survey 91 per cent said it was useful ('very useful' 70 per cent, 'quite useful' 21 per cent).
- 4.8 A second insight arises from the most recent survey of past learners. Ten per cent had not completed their course. These respondents, 9 cases, were asked why they didn't complete. The reasons were varied but 2 respondents left either because they got a job while on the course or left to get a job. One because they decided they didn't like the type of work they were preparing for. Other respondents left because they weren't performing well or for personal reasons. Only one respondent left because there was no prospect of getting an Apprenticeship at the end of the course.
- 4.9 The destinations of past learners following their courses are set out in Table 4.1. It can be seen that most learners in the two surveys gained a positive outcome in the sense that they progressed into a full apprenticeship, Further Education, or employment. The figures in this table can be compared with progression outcomes recorded as management information. The latter shows: (1) lower proportions progressing into apprenticeships than in the survey (35 per cent versus 40 per cent); (2) lower proportions entering work than in the survey (6 per cent versus 24 per cent); (3) higher proportions progressing into FE than in the survey (37 per cent versus 20 per cent). It is not known if these discrepancies are a result of sampling error or whether survey respondents answered the survey question on progression in a way which management information did not register. For example, learners who got a job briefly between the end of PtA in July and the start of an FE course in September may have reported their progression as being into employment where management information would have recorded progression into FE:

Table 4.1: Main activity of past learners immediately following PtA completion

	Past 2013	Past 2014
Got a full Apprenticeship in the same sector as my PtA course	38%	28%
Got a full Apprenticeship in different sector to my PtA course	2%	0%
Stayed on at College and do more qualifications	20%	21%
Went to University	1%	0%
Got employment in the same sector as my PtA course	16%	14%
Got employment in a different sector to PtA course	8%	18%
Other including unemployment	9%	13%
Refused/not known	3%	6%
Total	100%	100%
<i>Base (n)</i>	200	90

Source: Surveys of past PtA learners 2013 and 2014

4.10 For the majority of respondents in the latest (2014) survey of past learners, 63 per cent, their destination was their first choice of activity, for 27 per cent it was not (24 respondents), and 10 per cent were unsure about this.

4.11 When the 24 respondents for whom PtA was not a preferred first destination were asked what their preferred destination was at the time of leaving their PtA course, over half, 14 out of 24 cases, said they had wanted to progress into apprenticeship but had not done so. Eight had wanted to get a job. Two respondents were unsure what alternative to their actual destination they would have preferred.

4.12 Learners who did not undertake an Apprenticeship after their PtA course were asked (in both interim and final evaluation surveys) why this was the case. The responses are set out in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Reasons for not entering an apprenticeship following PtA participation

	Past 2013	Past 2014
Decided they don't like/are not suitable for the type of work an Apprenticeship course would prepare them for	14%	5%
It was not possible as they did not complete/get qualifications	10%	0%
It was not possible – no apprenticeships available	33%	32%
Applied for an apprenticeship but wasn't successful	N/A	8%
They wanted to get more qualifications in College	8%	8%
They wanted to get a job	12%	16%
They wanted more money	2%	10%
Already employed	9%	0%
Other reasons	21%	29%
Don't know	0%	8%
<i>Base (n)</i>	<i>113</i>	<i>62</i>

Source: Surveys of past PtA learners 2013 and 2014; N/A = not asked; the question asked for a single reason in 2013 but for all reasons in 2014.

4.13 This data shows that an Apprenticeship was not available to a third of learners who did not progress onto an Apprenticeship, but employment or College were preferred alternatives for others and some learners decided they didn't like the type of work for which PtA prepared.

4.14 The interim and evaluation surveys of past learners also established what those learners were doing at the point at which they were interviewed rather than, as earlier, immediately after their PtA course. Responses (shown in Table 4.3) indicate 'current' positive outcomes (study, training, or employment) for 80 per cent of past PtA learners in the 2013 survey and for 71 per cent of past learners in the 2014 survey. Other learners were unemployed or in 'other' statuses. The main variation between immediate post-PtA destinations (as in Table 4.1) and 'current' activities shows a transfer from learning in Apprenticeship or at

college to employment. Essentially, as time has passed, some participants have moved from their pre-employment education and training into employment itself:

Table 4.3: Current status of past learners

	Past 2013	Past 2014
Currently in a full Apprenticeship in the same sector as PTA course	21%	17%
Currently in a full Apprenticeship in different sector to PTA course	3%	1%
At College and do more qualifications	13%	8%
At University	2%	1%
Currently employed in the same sector as my PtA course	28%	16%
Currently employed in a different sector to PTA course	15%	29%
Unemployed	9%	16%
Other	11%	12%
Total	100%	100%
<i>Base (n)</i>	<i>200</i>	<i>90</i>

Source: Surveys of past PtA learners 2013 and 2014

4.15 Past learners were also asked to say how valuable they felt their PtA courses were in generating these 'current statuses'. In the latest survey, 89 per cent said their course was very valuable (61 per cent) or quite valuable (28 per cent). Two per cent said their course was not very valuable. Only 4 per cent said it had no value.

4.16 Very similar proportions said their PtA course was valuable or not in relation to their long term career aims (58 per cent 'very valuable', 32 per cent 'quite valuable', 7 per cent 'not very valuable', 2 per cent 'not at all valuable'). Further, 87 per cent thought their course was very or quite valuable in preparing them for apprenticeship and 86 per cent thought it very or quite valuable in preparing them for employment in general.

Outcomes from the employer perspective

- 4.17 Some further insights into outcomes of PtA derive from the most recent evaluation survey of 67 employers who had provided work experience placements. A majority of these employers said that their placement developed industry-specific skills (confirming learner accounts of this aspect of their course). Only 1 out of 67 employers said their learners mainly did general support work.
- 4.18 More directly, 65 employers out of 67 said that their placement was very helpful (46 cases) or quite helpful (19 cases) as preparation for working in their industry and, similarly, 67 employers (all respondents) said the placement was very helpful (46 cases) or quite helpful (21 cases) as preparation for working life in general.
- 4.19 Benefits for learners were more particularly identified (in response to an open question rather than one in which options were offered to respondents) as valuable work experience (36 respondents), work-related skills (25 respondents), gained insight into a particular industry (8 respondents), gained a good work ethic (7 respondents), or gained communication skills (6 respondents).
- 4.20 Turning from employer perceptions of their placements' benefits to learners to their benefits to the business, 46 out of the 67 employers said that their businesses benefited from the placement in various ways. Some specific ones were:
- helped with workload (22 cases)
 - helped with recruitment of staff or apprentices (11 cases)
 - helped the local community (5 cases).
- 4.21 The benefits of the programme were such that 31 of the 67 employers had taken on a PtA learner as a full apprentice, 10 had considered doing so but not yet gone ahead, and 18 would consider doing so depending on circumstances. Only 8 of these employers would not consider offering

an Apprenticeship to a young person who was on a PtA placement – mainly because they did not need Apprentices in their operations. Only 1 of these 8 cases was because of the unsuitability of the PtA learner.

4.22 Where employers had taken on a previous PtA learner as a full apprentice, in 52 per cent of these cases the apprenticeship was created specifically to accommodate the Pathways learner. In the remaining 48 per cent of cases, the apprenticeship would have existed even if the employer had not had the PtA learner on placement.

4.23 Employers interviewed in depth interviews also gave some insights into outcomes, both for learners and for the business itself. All of these employers saw the placement experience as useful for the learner, one employer observing: ‘If I had the opportunity myself when I was younger, I would have found it extremely helpful’. All reflected positively on the value of the work experience, for example:

‘They benefit from actually doing work in a real environment rather than in College. The hands-on experience you get is different from sitting in a classroom.’ (Disability charity)

‘We have the range of customers and types of work which allows the young person to get involved in lots of different skills within the sphere of engineering.’ (Precision engineering)

4.24 From the business point of view, these employers identified benefits in terms of management of workload:

‘We can get through more work than we did before. Some of the jobs are much easier with two people rather than one.’
(Electrical contractor)

‘Customers haven’t got to wait as long if there’s an extra person working, so we got increased customer satisfaction and increased productivity.’ (Disability charity)

4.25 Two of these employers had used PtA as a route to recruitment and reported the benefits of this:

'The way the individual progresses and what he learns is going to be added value to the business in a few years when he'll be able to apply all the processes and learning he's done in the business to make it improve.' (Motor dealership)

'Ultimately, you get a good worker even though while they're training they cost more than they earn.' (Garage)

4.26 As a final outcome of employer engagement, the latest survey of employers asked if their engagement in PtA had any general impact on their likelihood of taking on an apprentice:

- 43 per cent (29 cases) said it had made this more likely.
- 54 per cent (36 cases) said it had made no difference.
- Only 3 per cent (2 cases) said it made future engagement in Apprenticeship less likely.

4.27 And the great majority of employers, 96 per cent, said they would offer work placements for other programmes in future if asked to do so.

Outcomes from the stakeholder perspective

4.28 At the interim evaluation stage, government officials, SSCs, and Colleges were asked in a series of depth interviews to give their views on PtA's achievements. These may be summarised:

- The deployment of a strong programme which substantially enhanced learners' employability and skills and developed 'industry-ready' young people.
- The fact that the programme had proved to be valuable for SSCs in developing better linkages with their employer bases.

4.29 Against these positive outcomes, a major negative factor perceived by all stakeholder groups (WG, SSCs, Colleges) was that the programme had not achieved its targets for progression of learners into full apprenticeship. Various observations were made on this failure:

- That economic circumstances, particularly in the earlier years of PtA and particularly in some sectors, made this progression difficult (a general perspective).
- That measurement of instant progression (at the end of the PtA course) into apprenticeship might not allow for the fact that some learners progressed into apprenticeship at a later point (a WG perspective).
- That the original 75 per cent target for progression into apprenticeship was unrealistic and was never going to be achieved 'in the real world' (a College perspective).
- That Colleges sometimes offered too many PtA places; if they did not offer a Level 3 apprenticeship programme themselves in a particular sector, were too ready to retain PtA completers in non-apprenticeship FE courses rather than identify an alternative provider; and generally were not sufficiently committed to the progression into apprenticeship of PtA learners (an SSC perspective).
- That PtA would have had stronger progression outcomes if it had been linked more closely as a 'feeder' mechanism to Young Recruits and Shared Apprenticeship programmes and if it had been directly tied into the allocation and funding of Level 3 apprenticeships (an SSC perspective).
- That some SSCs were not active enough in helping to secure apprenticeship opportunities (a College view).
- That there was a gap in synchronisation between PtA courses ending and some ESF-funded apprenticeship provision coming on stream which hindered progression (a College view).
- That it should be recognised that PtA was conceived as a pilot of a new approach. As such, it was not logical to critique the programme simply in relation to targets which were inevitably arbitrary in an exploratory context. Rather, it should be viewed as an 'exercise in R&D' from which lessons should be learned for the

future development of a combined training and work experience programmes (a WG and College perspective).

4.30 Depth interviews with these stakeholders at the final evaluation stage reiterated some of these points but the main emphasis of observations on outcomes, from all parties, was that employment or educational progression outcomes were strong and should be recognised as a positive result of programme participation which is equally as valuable as progression into apprenticeship:

'When we started the programme, the Pathways to Apprenticeship programme obviously had a specific outcome. What we are finding is that lots were going on their work placements and being given full-time employment, which is obviously also a positive outcome. So we've needed to revise what we think are positive outcomes of this programme. Over a period of time, when Pathways to Apprenticeship was introduced, it was at a time of economic downturn, where it was much harder to get apprenticeships and employment. As we're coming out of that, I think more apprenticeship opportunities are coming about so the success rates are increasing slightly after the programme.' (Welsh Government Official)

'It has given learners a superior programme to reach apprenticeships. Also, if you look at all the other outcomes that go along with this, so, into employment, or into higher or further education, then I'd say that it's a reasonably successful programme.' (Welsh Government official)

'So not only people going onto apprenticeships, but there are also young people that go to, obviously, employment and onto further courses. I think that each of those, for those individuals, is a success, but because it may not necessarily be the criterion of what counts for the success of this programme, then it looks like it has not gone as well as perhaps we might consider it has.'
(SSC A)

‘Colleges have actually been penalised for their success in a way. They’ve lost students to employment perhaps midway through the programme and the college will have been penalised in the way of not retaining students and losing some funding. They’ve been penalised because they’ve done a good job by getting students in to employment. Obviously, as a result of that, their retention figures would be affected and consequently their funding for those students would be affected as well.’ (SSC B)

‘I think we need to give credit and thank the Welsh Government for looking for funding streams to support this additional input. They may feel that it’s not been the greatest of successes and that maybe the case in terms of how many of young people have got into apprenticeships. The more holistic view is that these young people are better qualified and better experienced to get out into the world and work and earn a living, contribute to their economy, and that’s what we want.’ (College A)

‘It was a shame that because outcomes were measured purely on progression into apprenticeship, rather than progression per se, it was perceived to be less successful by Welsh Government that we felt it to be.’ (College B)

4.31 Additionally, some stakeholders also outlined that progression can occur over a longer time period, a factor which is not captured by official statistics:

‘I’m afraid I do have mixed confidence in the accuracy in progression successes that you’re after because I think it’s greater than that. Many learners have gone off, left college, and have gone into employment. There is lots of anecdotal evidence which isn’t being recorded by the colleges, of these learners, once they engage with employers, having gone on to work for them. That isn’t being recorded consistently by the FEIs.’ (SSC A)

'We deliberately went for a level two programme looking for a level three apprenticeship outcome. We could have gone for a level one and two and got 90% apprenticeships. The issue we've got is that the people are on a level two programme and carrying out level two functions with the employer. They continue for a year or two but they're not on the level three position, where we want the apprenticeship to be. As time goes on, we're finding that those from two or three years ago are completing level three as they've got more experience. That's where the majority of our outcomes are. We've had some exceptional individual outcomes. That would never have happened if they hadn't been on this programme.' (SSC B)

'Some of those people might have eventually done an apprenticeship maybe a year later, or certainly done an equivalent. So one of our disappointments was that it was being measured very much on its title. I can understand why the focus should have been, and needed to be, on apprenticeships, but I think there should have been more recognition of the benefits of progression into work or higher courses.' (College)

Value for money outcomes

4.32 A cost benefit analysis of PtA was undertaken to assess the returns which PtA brings for learners and public budgets. The method of this analysis was, in essence¹⁸:

- Propensity Score Matching was used to identify, from all learners in the LLWR database, a group of learners who were comparable with a substantial cohort of PtA learners (all those who had completed their course at the point of analysis). A variety of characteristics were used to match the two groups (PtA learners

¹⁸ A full technical description of the cost benefit analysis was provided to the Welsh Government

and other learners). These characteristics included dates and duration of learning, gender, age, ethnicity, time since left school, and highest level of prior qualification.

- LLWR data was used further to identify the highest qualification obtained by learners in both groups (either obtained at the end of the particular course or subsequently in other training or education within the period which analysis of LLWR data was able to observe). This outcome variable was coded as:
 - Foundation apprenticeships ('Level 2')
 - Apprenticeships ('Level 3')
 - Higher Apprenticeships ('Level 4')
 - Other FE (Entry Level)
 - Other FE (Level 1)
 - Other FE (Level 2)
 - Other FE (Level 3)
 - Other FE (Level 4 and above)
- The lifetime benefits of these qualifications were then measured by the increases in future earnings resulting from returns to qualification compared to qualifications at lower levels, which are expressed in Present Values (PV) using discounting as proposed in the HM Treasury Green Book in order to account for the fact that a higher weight is generally put on present than on future income.
- To estimate these lifetime increases in earnings, external estimates were used, derived from research¹⁹ commissioned by the UK Government' Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS).

¹⁹ BIS (2011) Returns to intermediate and low level vocational qualifications, BIS Research Paper Number 53

- The estimates of increased earnings attaching to the achieved qualification outcomes of individuals in the 'PtA learners' and the matched 'other learners' groups were then accumulated for each group. Subtraction of the total value of lifetime gains for the 'other learners' from the total value of the lifetime gains for PtA learners allowed the total net benefit to PtA learners to be calculated. Essentially, this process estimates the benefits to young people of progressing through PtA against the counterfactual of their alternatively having behaved as 'other learners'.
- In addition, net benefits occur for public budgets from increased earnings since enhanced earnings result not only in increased income tax revenues and National Insurance contributions, but also higher subsequent spending in the wider economy and increased indirect tax receipts. The BIS research referenced above estimates that the marginal propensity to consume out of enhanced income stands at 0.64. A similar calculation, as above, which calculates the net gains to public budgets from PtA participation as against participation in other learning was made.
- The net total benefits for learners and public budgets were then separately set against the total cost of delivering the PtA programme to the cohort of PtA learners which was included in the analysis.

4.33 The result of these calculations was that:

- the total net benefit to learners was £88,316,000.
- the total net benefit to public budgets was £61,906,000.
- the total cost of delivering PtA was £29,260,000.

4.34 Thus, it is estimated that PtA will generate £3.02 in increased earnings for PtA learners for each £ spent in delivering PtA; and will generate £2.12 in increased direct and indirect revenues to public budgets for each pound spent in delivering PtA.

4.35 These estimates apply to a specific cohort of learners and to a specific expenditure on PtA available to the analysis at the point at which it was undertaken. However, given that subsequent PtA outputs and delivery costs have remained broadly similar, the overall conclusion of the analysis is that (based on the assumptions used in the analysis) the PtA programme will generate, albeit over a lengthy period ahead, a 'net profit' in terms both of learners' lifetime earnings and of benefits to the public budget.

5. Overview

- 5.1 Pathways to Apprenticeship was introduced as a time-limited programme in the specific context of difficult economic conditions and, particularly, of high and rising youth unemployment. It was an exploratory programme in the sense that it piloted a mix of relatively intensive vocational learning over a one year period supported by a high-quality work experience for the reasonably well-qualified and well-motivated young people who took the course.
- 5.2 In that context, PtA was in many respects a successful programme. Its key success was that the programme of learning was, in itself, strong. Indications of this are various but they include high levels of completion and attainment, high levels of satisfaction with the programme amongst learners, and the belief both of learners and employers that work placements were valuable in developing industry-specific skills and in preparing young people for working life.
- 5.3 All PtA stakeholders in the Welsh Government, Sector Skills Councils, and Colleges recognised these essential points.
- 5.4 More particularly, the evaluation has shown that the programme was delivered as intended. For example, most learners developed their Individual Learning Agreement with their Colleges and received a satisfactory work placement as planned. Learners gave high ratings to each of various aspects of their College's delivery and organisation of their courses. Employers reported that organisation of work placements was efficient and that administrative requirements were not onerous.
- 5.5 The effectiveness of the partnership between the Welsh Government, SSCs, and Colleges on which delivery of PtA depended is somewhat ambiguous. On one hand, partners were (in evaluation discussions) critical of aspects of the performance of other partners. On the other, they reported various positive developments including the development of valuable and effective relationships between some SSCs and

Colleges, effective inter-college working, and supportiveness of the Welsh Government PtA team. SSCs also observed that PtA comprised a valuable opportunity for them to engage with their respective employer bases. Overall, it can be concluded that, though there were some partnership difficulties, particularly in the early stages of the programme, the underlying relationships between partners in PtA management and delivery were sufficiently effective as not to seriously impede the programme's delivery as a whole.

5.6 However, the programme also had weaknesses. The principal weakness is the programme's failure to meet some targets. The table below summarises the programme's achievement against Welsh Government and European Funding targets:

Table 5.1: PtA performance against targets

Welsh Government targets	
Target	Achievement
Progress 75 per cent of learners into an apprenticeship in each year of the programme	The highest observed annual rate of progression into apprenticeship, of 35 per cent in 2012/13, shows that this target was not achieved by a large margin.
Increase the standard number of learning hours delivered by FE from a minimum of 16 hours to a minimum of 21 hours per week	Surveys of learners suggest that a minority of learners may not have received the minimum specified hours. However, discussions with other stakeholders suggest that learning hours were, in fact, quite demanding and it may be that some learners were inaccurate in estimating the amount of learning hours they actually undertook.
Provide the opportunity to gain Level 2 qualifications that will maximise their potential to ensure that they are job-ready.	The opportunity to gain Level 2 qualifications was not provided for learners in the construction Pathway (who learned towards Level 1 and some elements of Level 2). This, therefore, prevented this target being universally met. However, a key outcome of the evaluation of the

	programme is that, irrespective of level of study, it generated a significant degree of job-readiness.
Deliver qualifications to learners that will meet identified employer needs within the region as well as wider key skills and additional relevant vocational qualifications.	PtA completion, attainment, and success rates were high. The programme delivered over 9,000 completed learning activities in each of the years for which data is available (2010/11-2012/13). These included both certificated vocational qualifications and key and essential skills certification. SSC involvement in course specification assures that qualifications delivered by the programme were those that employers need.
Utilise direct employer engagement through the work placement element of learner programmes.	It is estimated (using data from employer surveys allied to estimated learner numbers) that around 1,900 employers have supplied work placements. Employer engagement has, therefore, been substantial.
Prepare learners for entry into employment via the apprenticeship programme where they will work towards their Level 3 award.	At its maximum, in 2012/13, only 16 per cent of learners progressed into Apprenticeship (Level 3).
ESF targets for the Convergence area	
2,200 total participants in the Convergence area.	2,453 participants achieved (PtA lifetime).
47.5 per cent progression into employment including apprenticeship up to 2010/11; 40 per cent making this progression from 2011/12 onwards.	48 per cent made the progression (PtA lifetime).
10 per cent progression into further learning up to 2010/11; 60 per cent progression into further learning from 2011/12 onwards.	68 per cent made this progression (PtA lifetime).
100 per cent achieving qualifications up to 2010/11; 85	91 per cent achieved qualifications (PtA lifetime).

per cent achieving qualifications
from 2010/12 onwards

42.5 per cent gaining other positive outcomes up to 2010/11; 60 per cent gaining other positive outcomes from 2011/12 onwards.	67 per cent gained other positive outcomes (PtA lifetime).
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400 employers collaborating with education/training providers.	Estimated 600 employers collaborated (PtA lifetime).
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5 per cent of PtA learners to be from BME backgrounds.	1 per cent of learners were from BME backgrounds (PtA lifetime).
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5.7 It can be seen that **ESF targets** – which applied only to 16 to 19 year old learners in the Convergence area of Wales – were largely met. The proportions of total learners, of those progressing into employment/apprenticeship or further learning, of those gaining qualifications or having other positive outcomes, were all exceeded²⁰. The target for the number of employers to be engaged in the programme was also exceeded. Only the target for participation by ethnic minority learners was not met.

5.8 However, in respect of **Welsh Government targets**, it can be seen that PtA failed to achieve its key target, for progression into Apprenticeship, by a substantial margin. The several possible reasons for this failure cannot be given individual weights but they include:

- The possibility that the target was over-ambitious.

²⁰ It may be noted that the original Business Plan case for ESF funding of PtA had an overall target for learner participation of 4,000 individuals. Observation of the actual level of delivery of PtA and of its progressions and achievements led to re-profiling of the ESF-funded element of PtA. This included reduction in the overall target for learner participation and to adjustments of some of the other targets in order to make them more attainable in the light of actual circumstances.

- General scarcity of Apprenticeship opportunities and competition for those opportunities from candidates who were not PtA learners.
- The fact that PtA was not formally linked to full apprenticeship: the programme was not designed in a way which had a secured apprenticeship allocated to a PtA place.
- The proposition (of some SSCs) that Colleges were not wholly committed to securing apprenticeships for PtA learners at the end of their courses and were content for them to continue in further College learning – resulting in the observed below-target rate of progression into Apprenticeship and above-target rate of progression into further learning.

5.9 A further significant limitation of the programme was that it required a high rate of administrative and organisational input in relation to its scale of delivery. This input included the complex and considerable data collection and submission processes needed to provide evidence for receipt of ESF funding, the requirement to find high numbers of work placements of sufficient quality, and the management and organisation of the three parties involved in managing and delivering the programme. At the interim evaluation stage, it was the view of at least one Welsh Government official that the administrative cost of the programme outweighed any additional value which PtA delivered above that of standard FE provision.

5.10 Overall, thus, PtA, over its lifetime from September 2009 to July 2014, provided a valuable experience for around eight thousand learners – it gave them valuable skills and qualifications and gave them a degree of employability which is likely to have enhanced the career prospects and lifetime earnings for many of those young people. It did so at a cost which, over time, is expected to generate a net benefit for public budgets.

- 5.11 However, the programme was not able to secure the principal objective which the programme's name embodies – it was a pathway to apprenticeship only for a third of its participants – and, from a management point of view, its costs were high.
- 5.12 Stakeholders who place the programme's intrinsic value to young people above the achievement of formal targets or administrative costs regret its passing. Three SSCs in recent evaluation discussions observed:
- 'It's been a win, win, win situation. Certainly as far as colleges, learners and employers are concerned it's been fantastic. It's been great for me, not just in engaging with colleges and employers but also engaging with the learners as well. Being able to talk to them about career options and trying to enthuse and to actually think seriously about what they're doing to do with their futures. Everybody else that I've spoken to has said that it's very sad to see it not continuing.'* (SSC 1)
- 'I think the programme has been more successful than has been measured for all kinds of reasons. If the Welsh Government looked at the interviews and reviews that I've done in my sector, every single learner has indicated that the best, most successful part of the programme is the work experience. Those messages are getting lost. They should stick with the programme because it's an excellent programme and provides a real value to the employers, to get to know people of a younger age, to identify potential employees, but more importantly it has a real value to the learner and sadly that's getting lost in all of this.'* (SSC 2)
- 'It always seems strange that something starts to get established then the plug is pulled. If they ran the Pathways for another two years, they'd probably have seen a vast improvement, of course, with the economy picking up. The FE colleges would probably have employers queuing up at their doors for these young people.'* (SSC 3)

5.13 The key question which PtA leaves is whether PtA's key strength – that of providing an effective, integrated package of study, work experience, and qualifications – is replicated more widely via the Learning Area Programme approach to funding of post-16 earning provision which has been extended across Wales. If this is so, then the generality of vocational preparation for young people in Wales should receive the positive response which Pathways to Apprenticeship received from its young learners.