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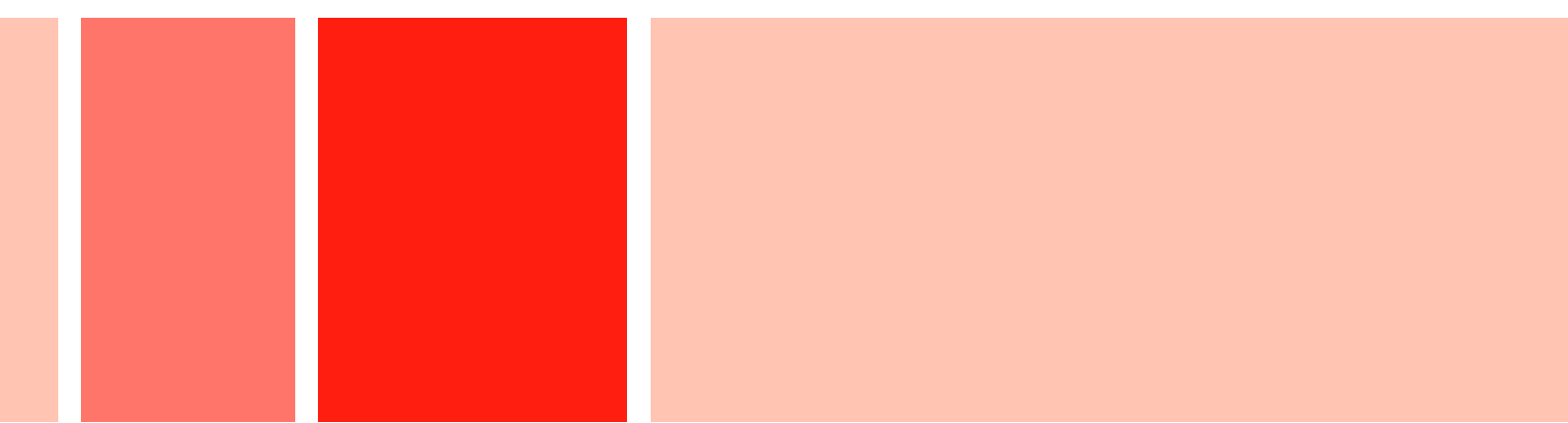
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Evaluation of the Integrated Skills Health Check Process Pilots in Wales



Evaluation of the Integrated Skills Health Check Process Pilots in Wales

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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Summary

The Skills Health Check (SHC) pilots concept was established as a result of 'Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills', also referred to as 'The Leitch Review of Skills' published in 2006 which concluded that 'people need an integrated employment and skills (IES) service to ensure that they receive the help they need to get on in work today and an end to the current fragmentation'¹.

The (then) Secretaries of State of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS)² jointly presented a paper to parliament 'Opportunity, Employment and Progression: Making Skills Work'³ in November 2007 which set out an ambition to put in place 'Skills Health Checks to fully assess the skills and learning requirements needed to support a return to work'⁴. In England, IES trials were launched in September 2008 and designed to test the key elements of the proposed service in advance of any national roll out. A similar IES approach was developed in Scotland where the IES trials began in February 2009.

Responsibility for developing and implementing policy on skills in Wales is devolved to the Welsh Government, while employment policy is the responsibility of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

The Welsh Government's Employability team began work on a project to pilot the SHC process in Wales in September 2008, working with Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales officials. The aim of the SHC pilots⁵ was to test joined-up approaches aimed at helping individuals back into sustainable work more quickly by identifying and addressing any skills needs.

¹ Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills. The Leitch Review of Skills. Final Report, December 2006. Page 122. The Review was chaired by Lord Sandy Leitch,

² At the time, Peter Hain MP was Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and John Denham MP was the Secretary for State for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

³ Opportunity, Employment and Progression: making skills work, November 2007
See: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/making-skills-work.pdf>

⁴ Ibid. Page 17.

⁵ Specification for Phase Two Evaluation of the Integrated Skills Health Check Process Pilots in Wales. Page 2.

Three key organisations have been involved in the design and delivery of the SHC pilots in Wales, namely the Welsh Government via the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus.

The three organisations agreed to pilot a Skills Health Check process between January 2010 and March 2011. The pilots tested three approaches, namely:

- Office based pilots in four Jobcentre Plus locations identified by Jobcentre Plus District Managers;
- A redundancy support pilot in North West Wales;
- An offender/ex-offender pilot in Gwent involving the Prescoed Prison Resettlement Team.

This evaluation of the SHC pilots in Wales was commissioned by the Welsh Government to 'assess the effectiveness and impact of the SHC process pilots operating across Wales in order to inform the development of services to support individuals back into sustainable work more quickly by identifying and addressing skills needs'⁶. The work builds on a first stage evaluation of the SHC pilots which was undertaken by the Welsh Government's Social Research Division.

The work programme for this evaluation was conducted between January and March 2011 and involved desk based research to review key policy, research and evaluation documents, a telephone census survey with SHC customers in Wales and interviews with key stakeholders from the Welsh Government, Jobcentre Plus, Careers Wales and Prescoed Prison.

The key findings of this research in terms of the background policy context and rationale are that:

⁶ Specification for Phase 2 Evaluation of the Integrated Skills Health Check Process Pilots in Wales. Page 5.

- There was a supportive policy context at both UK and Welsh Government levels which provided a clear basis and rationale for the development of the SHC pilots in Wales.
- The policy context at a UK level has remained supportive after the change of UK Government in 2010. Indeed the Coalition Government's welfare reform plans continue to emphasise the importance of collaborative approaches to getting people into work.
- The IES trials in England show that the SHC concept is broadly sound and that a more integrated approach has become more embedded in adviser practice. Co-location has played a key part in enabling the progress that has been made in this respect, though it is by no means an easy solution.
- Further improvements in the context of the English trials are needed around improved communication and mutual understanding of the aims and objectives of the pilots, particularly amongst frontline Jobcentre Plus staff. Processes relating to referral and ICT systems have also been identified as areas that need further development and are seen as potential ways in which to improve customer attendance levels.
- In Wales, there were similar early stage concerns (to those in England) surrounding the SHC pilot's objectives amongst Jobcentre Plus staff and in relation to low referral numbers and customer attendance levels which were highlighted at an early stage as being an area of concern.

In terms of the implementation of the SHC pilots in Wales, the key findings of the research are that:

- The SHC pilots in Wales have made a valuable contribution to promoting joined up approaches to employment and skills. They have done this by facilitating closer working relationships which in turn have reduced cultural and organisational barriers between Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales. This has led to a much clearer understanding and appreciation of each other's roles in relation to helping people into work.

- The co-location element of the SHC pilots has been a very important driver in promoting joint working and there is evidence to suggest that there is a clear link between co-location and improved referral mechanisms. However, co-location is not a particularly easy option and (as was the experience in England), the general lack of space in Jobcentre Plus offices has been a consistent problem.
- The SHC pilots have involved different implementation approaches in different areas. This variety reflects a largely non-prescriptive approach to the targeting and implementation strategy at the design stage and despite guidance being issued, local stakeholders have not been clear about the aims and objectives of the pilots.
- The fact that there has been no project specific budget to deliver the SHC pilots in Wales means that there has not been a traditional commissioner – provider relationship between the main partners and has increased the reliance on the goodwill of those involved to get things done. The overall coherence and focus of the pilots in Wales could also have been improved had there been a project manager in place to oversee the pilots throughout the implementation period.
- The management information systems used to report progress within the SHC pilots in Wales have been fit for purpose, but they have been complicated by the fact that different Careers Wales Companies use different approaches. There are also fundamental issues to be addressed in terms of improving the degree to which Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales IT systems link with each other.
- The Skillcheck Live diagnostic tool received a mixed reception from Careers Wales advisers. A minority think it is very good, while the majority have varying degrees of concerns about its appropriateness.
- The Skills Action Plan was seen by Jobcentre Plus advisers as potentially the most value adding part of the SHC pilots, specifically in terms of closing the information loop between themselves and Careers Wales. While the concept and the plan itself is sound, the process of ensuring that plans are disseminated to the right people (particularly

Jobcentre Plus Advisers) at the right time and that proper use is made of them has been patchy.

- It is unlikely that any substantive efficiency savings have, as yet, been generated by the SHC pilots. However, if certain processes (e.g. referral and ICT systems) can be improved and further integrated, there is every reason to be optimistic that efficiency gains could be achieved in the future.

In terms of the customer journey, the key findings of the research are that:

- In line with the objectives of the SHC pilots, the majority of customers were unemployed when they came into contact with their Careers Wales adviser.
- Only a minority of the respondents to our survey said that they had missed an interview session, suggesting that the extent of non-attendance from a customer perspective at least may not be as great as that perceived to be the case by the delivery stakeholders.
- The majority of SHC customers have had appropriate advice relating to skills and qualifications, previous experience and work options.
- Feedback on the SkillCheck Live tool from a customer perspective was broadly positive (including the job ideas offered by the system), suggesting a contrast in terms of the perceived utility of the tool compared with the views of some advisers.
- Most, but by no means all, of the SHC customers that we surveyed said that they had received a Skills Action Plan. The majority of those that recalled receiving an action plan said that they found it useful and had managed to implement at least some of the recommendations contained in it.
- The overall picture in terms of job outcomes was quite positive. The majority of SHC supported customers had applied for a job and a significant proportion (though less than those that had applied) had also managed to secure job interviews. Just under half had also gone on to start new jobs.

- The overall picture in terms of training and learning outcomes was also quite positive. A significant proportion (though not a majority) had considered possible training courses following their SHC with just under a quarter having actually started a course. This suggests (as might be expected) that the end goal for customers was more about employment than about training.
- The overall attribution levels (i.e. the extent to which customers felt able to link their job/training outcome to the SHC intervention) was, overall, reasonably good with most (60%) saying that it had helped them get a job.
- Most of surveyed SHC customers provided positive feedback from their SHC experience and were of the view that the SHC process had helped them become clearer about their own skills related strengths and weaknesses.
- Most of the SHC customers supported at the Prescoed prison pilot had found the SHC interviews with their Careers Wales adviser useful in providing advice and information on possible career options post-release.

The research concludes that there is little doubt that the SHC pilots in Wales have made a valuable and positive contribution in moving the IES agenda forward. In particular, the pilots have improved the level of understanding and joint working relationships between Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales. The fact that this has been achieved at no extra cost to the taxpayer in Wales is very positive.

Importantly, the SHC pilots in Wales have also begun to tackle entrenched cultural and organisational divides. The report concludes that the challenge now will be to build on this positive start and to ensure that joint working becomes much more systemic in nature and less dependent on the goodwill of a few committed individuals.

The report recommends that:

- The Welsh Government, Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales should build on the strengths and momentum of the SHC pilots by moving to a roll out phase. In doing so, the project management board needs to communicate strategic aims and objectives simply and clearly to Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales managers and advisers. This should involve preparation of more detailed operational guidance and agreeing targets for each participating Jobcentre Plus location. This work should be taken forward by a project manager and targets be set which include as a minimum a referral (output) target well as job and training (outcome) targets for each location .
- The roll out phase should consolidate the co-location arrangements in the pilot areas but should also aim to increase the number of participating Jobcentre Plus sites by including between four and six additional offices within the first year.
- Progress in relation to the roll out phase and the new co-location sites should be reviewed towards the end of 2012 with a view to full mainstreaming of SHCs in Wales from the beginning of early 2013 onwards.
- The roll out phase should be clearly focused on developing the co-location model and should be based on a specific targeting strategy aimed at referring those who would most benefit from the SHC process. The targeting strategy should be based on supporting individuals (regardless of age) that are out of work and disengaged from the labour market (i.e. have been out of the labour market for some considerable time) and who would, (on the basis of the assessment of Jobcentre Plus advisers), benefit from information and advice on their skills, coupled with well-informed guidance on local employment opportunities.

- While highly challenging, the roll out phase should continue to be funded from within the existing resources of Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales. As such, managers in both organisations will need to ensure that advisory staff are fully committed to the concept of implementing the SHC process and are equipped to take it forward as a core and integral part of their work rather than seeing it as a bolt-on, voluntary project activity.
- The Welsh Government should explore all possible avenues to resource and appoint (possibly via offering a secondment opportunity) a project manager to oversee the roll out phase. The project manager should lead work to communicate the strategic aims and objectives of the roll out phase to key operational stakeholders (in Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales), including preparation and dissemination of guidance on an on-going basis. .
- The project manager, working closely with colleagues in the Welsh Government Social Research Division, should develop and agree an evaluation plan for the SHC roll-out phase.
- The Skills Action Plan should be taken forward and refined. This needs to include establishing more systemic processes of ensuring that the Action Plans are distributed in a timely and efficient manner to Jobcentre Plus advisers so that they can be actively used to help inform their work with customers in the roll out phase.
- Jobcentre Plus should, as a member of the project management board, seek to urgently explore ways in which it can do more to share data and information via its ICT systems with Careers Wales advisers involved in the roll out phase. Enabling better data sharing should be seen as an absolute priority in progressing the integration agenda and full advantage should be taken in ensuring the compatibility of Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales systems under the new unitary

structure of Careers Wales. This should also be seen as a key priority in terms of tackling the issue of non-attendance by customers.

- There would seem to be some logic in exploring the feasibility of a single, ICT based skills/careers diagnostic tool that can be deployed as one part of a well-rounded information, advice and guidance process and which takes account of local labour market intelligence. This should be taken forward and, if there is agreement that such a tool is needed, it should be procured as part of the new unitary structure for Careers Wales to ensure maximum cost efficiency.
- While the main focus of taking the SHC process forward in Wales should be co-location, resources permitting, the Welsh Government, in conjunction with Careers Wales should give careful consideration to the potential roll out of the prison based SHC pilot. This should include continuation of the work at Prescoed Prison. Key considerations in moving forward with the roll out of the SHC prison model will be to explore its appropriateness in other prisons and to take account of other forms of support being offered in those locations as part of resettlement programmes.

1 Introduction

Background

- 1.1 In January 2011 Old Bell 3 Ltd. was appointed by the Welsh Government to undertake an evaluation of the Integrated Skills Health Check (SHC) Process Pilots.
- 1.2 The SHC pilots concept was established as a result of ‘Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills’, also referred to as ‘The Leitch Review of Skills’ published in 2006 which concluded that ‘people need an integrated employment and skills (IES) service to ensure that they receive the help they need to get on in work today and an end to the current fragmentation’⁷.
- 1.3 The (then) Secretaries of State of the Department for Work (DWP) and Pensions and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS)⁸ jointly presented a paper to parliament ‘Opportunity, Employment and Progression: Making Skills Work’⁹ in November 2007 which set out an ambition to put in place ‘Skills Health Checks to fully assess the skills and learning requirements needed to support a return to work’¹⁰. In England IES trials were launched in September 2008 and designed to test the key elements of the proposed service in advance of any national roll out. A similar IES approach was developed in Scotland where the IES trials began in February 2009.
- 1.4 Responsibility for developing and implementing policy on skills in Wales is devolved to the Welsh Government, while employment policy is the responsibility of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

⁷ Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills. The Leitch Review of Skills. Final Report, December 2006. Page 122. The Review was chaired by Lord Sandy Leitch,

⁸ At the time, Peter Hain MP was Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and John Denham MP was the Secretary for State for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

⁹ Opportunity, Employment and Progression: making skills work, November 2007

See: [http:// www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/making-skills-work.pdf](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/making-skills-work.pdf)

¹⁰ Ibid. Page 17.

1.5 The Welsh Government's Employability team began work on a project to pilot the SHC process in Wales in September 2008, working with Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales officials. The aim of the SHC pilots¹¹ was to test joined-up approaches aimed at helping individuals back into sustainable work more quickly by identifying and addressing any skills needs.

1.6 Sitting beneath this aim are a series of objectives which are to:

- Establish a joint process that identifies individual customer skills' development needs and informs actions required to meet these needs;
- Test the appropriateness of using 'SkillChecklive' (a software based skills and employment diagnostic tool) as part of the above process;
- Test models for closer working between Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales;
- Determine whether the process improves the overall customer experience;
- Test a process for data sharing between Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus;
- Test the potential for efficiency gains through application of the process as outlined above¹².

1.7 Since the commencement of the SHC pilots project in January 2010, the objectives have been refined to include the need to test:

- Joined up approaches by Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales aimed at helping individuals into sustainable work more quickly by identifying and addressing any skills need;
- The effectiveness of a SHC tool and process.

1.8 Three key organisations have been involved in the design and delivery of the SHC pilots in Wales, namely the Welsh Government via the

¹¹ Specification for Phase Two Evaluation of the Integrated Skills Health Check Process Pilots in Wales. Page 2.

¹² Ibid. Page 2.

Department for Education and Skills (DfES)¹³ as the lead department, Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus.

1.9 The three organisations agreed to pilot a Skills Health Check process for between January 2010 and March 2011. The pilots tested three approaches, namely:

- Office based pilots in four Jobcentre Plus locations identified by Jobcentre Plus District Managers; Shotton, Caerphilly, Morriston and Alexandra House, Cardiff;
- Redundancy support pilot in North West Wales;
- Offender/Ex-offender pilot in Gwent (involving the Prescoed Prison Resettlement Team).

1.10 The Jobcentre Plus and prison pilots commenced during the period January to March 2010 while the redundancy pilot in North West Wales was delayed because no suitable large scale redundancy upon which to test the model was identified.

1.11 As part of the pilot process, a skills and employment diagnostic tool, SkillChecklive was procured under licence by the Welsh Government for use in the SHC pilots to identify and highlight specific skill needs and potentially appropriate career progression routes for the participants.

Evaluation Aim and Objectives

1.12 This is the second phase of a two phase evaluation of the SHC pilots in Wales. The first phase of the evaluation (which we review in Section 4 below) was undertaken by the Welsh Government's Social Research Division. The First Phase Evaluation drew on information gathered by the SHC management group including meeting notes, monthly log

¹³ At the time this research was commissioned the Department was known as the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS). The Department's name was changed to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) following the May 2011 National Assembly for Wales election.

sheets, management information data and other relevant material¹⁴. The aim of this evaluation is to 'assess the effectiveness and impact of the SHC process pilots operating across Wales in order to inform the development of services to support individuals back into sustainable work more quickly by identifying and addressing skills needs'.¹⁵

1.13 Sitting beneath this aim are a series of 10 evaluation objectives, shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Evaluation Objectives

- Assess the extent to which the overall aims and objectives of the SHC pilot projects are being met;
- Review the overall management and implementation of the pilot projects;
- Evidence best practice examples of the joint-working relationship between Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales;
- Assess the effectiveness of the pilots in promoting service integration;
- Assess the effectiveness of the SHC process, particularly the use of the SkillChecklive diagnostic tool, used in the pilots;
- Identify the key strengths of the pilots and any constraints/issues that may have impeded the pilot projects' effectiveness;
- Assess customer satisfaction with the pilot projects in supporting their progression towards/into sustainable employment;
- Assess the efficiency gains of the pilot projects in relation to staff resource and an improved customer experience;
- Identify the contribution(s) the pilot projects have made to achieving the vision and targets of One Wales and Skills that Work for Wales;
- Provide recommendations as to how the Welsh Government, Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales can best build upon the pilot

¹⁴ Commissioning Note. Page 3.

¹⁵ Specification for Phase 2 Evaluation of the Integrated Skills Health Check Process Pilots in Wales. Page 5.

projects, drawing on best practice/ lessons learnt from the pilots and, where appropriate, other similar schemes.

Methodology

1.14 The work programme for this evaluation involved the following elements:

Desk Based Research

1.15 Desk Based Research: A number of key policy, evaluation and project related documents of relevance to the SHC pilots were reviewed. The findings from this work are outlined in Chapter 3.

Fieldwork and Analysis

1.16 The fieldwork for this evaluation involved undertaking a series of semi structured interviews with a range of key stakeholders, including officials from the Welsh Government, Jobcentre Plus, Careers Wales and Prescoed Prison. In total, 24 stakeholders were interviewed. A list of those interviewed is at Annex 1 to this report.

1.17 The research also involved undertaking a telephone census survey with SHC customers. Details of the response rate to this survey are outlined in Chapter 5.

1.18 Finally, face to face interviews with eight offenders, each of whom participated in the SHC process at Prescoed Prison were undertaken.

2 Review of SHC Related Documents

2.1 In this chapter, we review a number of key policy, and operational documents relating to the SHC pilots. The review of policy documents focuses on both UK and Welsh policy, while the operational documents focus on the background and rationale for the SHC pilots in Wales. The chapter explores the policy context in which the SHC pilots in Wales were established and the key policy commitments which they were intended to help deliver during the implementation phase. We also consider more recent developments in the policy context, highlighting key developments at a UK level since the general election in 2010. Finally, we analyse the findings of previous evaluations relating to IES trials in England and the first phase evaluation of the SHC pilots in Wales.

Key findings outlined in this chapter include that:

- There was a supportive policy context at UK and Welsh Government levels which provided a clear basis and rationale for the development of the SHC pilots in Wales.
- The policy context at a UK level has remained supportive after the change of UK government in 2010. Indeed the Coalition Government's welfare reform plans continue to emphasise the importance of collaborative approaches to getting people into work.
- The IES trials in England show that the SHC concept is broadly sound and that a more integrated approach has become more embedded in adviser practice. Co-location has played a key part in enabling the progress that has been made in this respect, though it is by no means an easy solution.
- Further improvements in the context of the English trials are needed around improved communication and mutual understanding of the aims and objectives of the pilots, particularly amongst frontline Jobcentre Plus staff. Processes around referral and ICT systems have also been

identified as areas that need further development and are seen as potential ways in which to improve customer attendance levels.

- In Wales, there were similar early stage concerns (to those in England) surrounding the SHC pilot's objectives amongst Jobcentre Plus staff and in relation to referral numbers and customer attendance levels which were highlighted at an early stage as being an area of concern.

Policy Context - UK

- 2.2 At a UK level, the need for a more integrated employment and skills system was set out in 'Prosperity for all in the global economy – world class skills' also referred to as the 'The Leitch Review of Skills'. The Leitch Review called for the creation of 'a new integrated employment and skills service, based upon existing structures, to increase sustainable employment and progression'.¹⁶
- 2.3 A key element in moving towards a more integrated system outlined in the Leitch Review was that 'all adults should be entitled to a free Skills Health Check, building on the success of a similar approach in Sweden, that would identify an individual's skills needs and strengths' and that 'following on from this, advisers will ensure that people are advised on the most effective action, whether that is going on a course, doing work experience or learning at work, to tackle their needs and develop their career'.
- 2.4 In making his recommendations, Lord Leitch outlined the view that a more integrated employment and skills service should lead to (amongst other impacts) 'individuals having a greater awareness of the value of skills development and easier access to the opportunities available' and 'workless people having a better chance to find a job through effective diagnosis of their skills needs and greater support as they make the transition into sustainable work'.¹⁷

¹⁶ Page 5.

¹⁷ Page 5.

- 2.5 The Leitch review also recognised that while skills is a devolved policy area, employment policy is not and as such, and in taking the IES concept forward, ‘in...Wales...the devolved administration should consider how best to integrate their careers services with employment services so that this approach can work across the UK’.¹⁸
- 2.6 Following on from the Leitch Review, the then Secretaries of State for Work and Pensions and Innovation, Universities and Skills presented a joint paper to the UK parliament entitled Opportunity, Employment and Progression: making skills work¹⁹ This paper outlined the intention that ‘every customer on benefits... unable to return to work quickly’ would receive as part of an ‘initial screen’ an ‘in-depth Skills Health Check’²⁰. The paper went on to say that the SHC would ‘fully assess the skills and learning requirements needed to support a return to work’ and that the ‘results of the Skills Health Check will inform personal advisors’ decisions about whether the claimant needs to be referred to work-focused training in order to enhance their prospects of finding work’²¹.

¹⁸ Page 18.

¹⁹ November 2007. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions at the time was Peter Hain MP and the Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills was John Denham.

²⁰ Ibid. Pages 15 and 16.

²¹ Ibid. Page 16.

- 2.7 The paper also put forward the proposal that ‘customers still on JSA after six months and with basic skills needs who have not previously engaged with the adult advancement and careers service, will be mandated to attend a Skills Health Check’²².
- 2.8 It also set out the aim that SHCs and action plans should be delivered for ‘up to half a million workless people and a further half a million adults in work, targeting those with low skills or who need to retrain to progress’ by 2010-11.
- 2.9 More recently and since the general election of May 2010, a key policy driver at UK level has been the planned welfare reforms being taken forward by the Secretary of State for work and Pensions.²³
- 2.10 The UK Coalition Government’s plans to reform the Welfare to Work system are outlined in the white paper entitled ‘Universal Credit: welfare that works’²⁴. In it, the Government states its intention to ‘reform the benefit system to make it fairer, more affordable and better able to tackle poverty, worklessness and welfare dependency’ and that to achieve this, new legislation will be introduced to create a new ‘Universal Credit’ aimed at ‘radically simplifying the system to make work pay’.²⁵
- 2.11 The Universal Credit is intended as an ‘integrated working-age credit that will provide a basic allowance with additional elements for children, disability, housing and caring. It will support people both in and out of work, replacing Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, Housing Benefit, Income Support, income-based Jobseeker’s Allowance and income-related Employment and Support Allowance’²⁶.
- 2.12 The white paper also sets out the Government’s intentions to introduce a ‘strong system of conditionality’ which essentially means that

²² Ibid. Page 16.

²³ Iain Duncan Smith MP.

²⁴ Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions by Command of Her Majesty, November 2010

²⁵ Universal Credit: welfare that works. Page 2.

²⁶ Ibid. Page 3.

‘unemployed people who can work will be required to take all reasonable steps to find and move into employment’ and that this will be ‘supported by a new system of financial sanctions’ intended to ‘provide greater incentives for people to meet their responsibilities’²⁷.

2.13 The white paper also makes clear that Jobcentre Plus advisers will be given ‘clear powers to mandate people in both the work preparation and active job search categories to undertake activity to address a skills need’²⁸.

Policy Context - Wales

2.14 In Wales, the high level policy context for skills and employment during the SHC pilot period was set by the then Welsh Assembly²⁹ Government’s One Wales coalition agreement³⁰ which set out a vision of a ‘Wales where there is a strong and enterprising economy and full employment based on quality jobs’. One Wales also outlined a commitment to ‘equip people with the skills they need, at all levels, to enable them to make the best possible contribution to the economy and their communities, and to fulfil their individual potential’.³¹

2.15 Sitting beneath One Wales is Skills that Work for Wales: A Skills and Employment Strategy and Action Plan. This document, though now somewhat dated, outlines the former Welsh Assembly Government’s Commitment to seeing ‘skills, employment and business development as [being] inextricably linked’ and prioritises ‘flexible, joined-up skills, business support and employment programmes, providing integrated services focused on the customer’³² to be delivered on the basis of a ‘Careers Ladders Wales Model’.³³

²⁷ Ibid. Page 4.

²⁸ Ibid. Page 28.

²⁹ Note that the Welsh Assembly Government is only referred to in a historical context. Current references are made to the Welsh Government.

³⁰ One Wales. A progressive agenda for the government of Wales. An agreement between the Labour and Plaid Cymru Groups in the National Assembly. 27th June 2007.

³¹ One Wales. Page 13.

³² Skills that Work for Wales. Page 9.

³³ Skills that Work for Wales. Page 43.

2.16 In June 2010, the then Welsh Assembly Government published its Economic Renewal Programme (ERP). The ERP prioritises six key sectors where, ‘with better targeted intervention, Wales can gain competitive advantage and benefit from growing markets’.³⁴ The six priority sectors are:

- ICT;
- Energy and environment;
- Advanced materials and manufacturing;
- Creative industries;
- Life sciences;
- Financial and professional services.³⁵

2.17 The ERP also reaffirmed the then Welsh Assembly Government’s commitment³⁶ to integrating employment and skills in Wales outlining the intention to ‘work closely with the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) and Jobcentre Plus to help young people and adults into jobs... we have a shared ambition for better planning and integration of employment, skills and other programmes’.³⁷

2.18 In September 2010, the then Welsh Assembly Government published ‘Future Ambitions. Developing Careers Services in Wales.’³⁸ The purpose of the review was to examine relationships between key organisations that make up the ‘family’ of careers and employment related services in Wales and to suggest how these might be improved.

2.19 The terms of reference for the Future Ambitions report were revised in light of an announcement by the then Minister for Children, Education

³⁴ ERP. Page 36.

³⁵ ERP. Page 37.

³⁶ Outlined in Skills that Work for Wales.

³⁷ ERP. Page 29.

³⁸ Future Ambitions, Developing Careers Services in Wales, September 2010. The Review was chaired by Dr. Haydn E. Edwards.

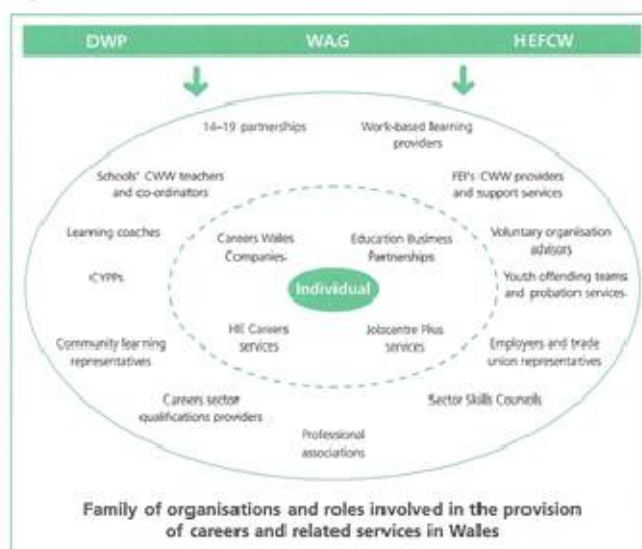
and Lifelong Learning³⁹ that a 'unitary structure will be established for Careers Wales'. In his announcement, the Minister stated that 'the current structure of six independent Careers Wales companies, plus a seventh jointly-owned company which is a servant of the six, is problematic'. The Minister went on to announce that 'I am convinced that a unitary structure is now the right way forward to provide the strong leadership identified as being required'. The Minister also announced that Welsh Government officials would commence work on scoping unitary structure options for the reorganisation of the Careers Wales companies.

2.20 Future Ambitions mapped out a number of key organisations (including Jobcentre Plus as well as Careers Wales) involved in the so-called 'family of careers advice services' in Wales. The report went on to say that 'the formation of a more closely knit family of careers service providers can help identify and reach agreement on key priorities, including the bespoke targeting of services, where appropriate' and that 'much of the strategic change needed to realise the vision involves, but is not restricted to, Careers Wales. It involves all of the players within the wider system; and it concerns the way these players interact with each other and maximise the impact of available resources'⁴⁰.

Figure 2: Family of organisations involved in the provision of careers and related services in Wales

³⁹ Leighton Andrews AM in a written statement on 28th January 2010. See: <http://wales.gov.uk/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2010/100128careers/?lang=en>

⁴⁰ Future Ambitions, Page 14.



Source: Extracted from Future Ambitions

2.21 The Future Ambitions report outlines a view that employer representatives would welcome an improved careers service for adults – with greater alignment to Jobcentre Plus (and the report includes a direct reference to the SHC pilots in this context)⁴¹.

2.22 Future Ambitions also highlights the importance of creating an online (shared and more integrated) Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system operating across the family of careers organisations which would include better sharing of management information through improved administrative arrangements⁴².

Documents Relating to the SHC Pilots in Wales

2.23 The original Project Commissioning Note⁴³ prepared by Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS)⁴⁴ officials, which established the SHC pilots in Wales outlined that the purpose of the pilots was to ‘test the operational changes needed within Jobcentre Plus to support the overall programme of work to integrate employment and skills in particular working with the [then] Welsh Assembly

⁴¹ Ibid. Page 57.

⁴² Ibid. Page 88.

⁴³ Prepared in January 2009.

⁴⁴ The Department has since changed its name to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)

Government and Careers Wales in order to support Jobcentre Plus customers'.⁴⁵ The paper also referred to the objective of 'determin[ing] the value in rolling out IES nationally in Wales'⁴⁶ and to 'look in particular at how best to integrate the new and existing services to ensure a seamless service'.⁴⁷

2.24 Specifically, the commissioning note outlined that 'we must achieve through testing and piloting' (summarised):

- Co-location of Careers advisers and Jobcentre Plus advisers in Jobcentre Plus offices;
- An effective and timely referral process that supports skills development and job search;
- A fully operational and comprehensive SHC process, available face to face and able to accurately diagnose an individual's skills needs;
- Access and referral to appropriate provision supported via a training allowance;
- A fit for purpose data sharing agreement;
- Jointly owned objectives for achieving sustainable employment goals and increased skill levels.⁴⁸

2.25 The commissioning note also explained that the SHC pilots should 'give customers what they need; it must be an enabler not an obstacle in developing employment-focused skills to support labour market engagement and progression. Equally the service must ensure that individuals understand their rights and responsibilities and that realistic opportunities to improve their employability are taken early'.⁴⁹

2.26 Moreover, the commissioning note also outlined the importance of 'smooth flows between Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales in making

⁴⁵ Commissioning Note. Page 1.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Page 1.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Page 3.

⁴⁸ Ibid. Page 3.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Page 4.

personal development and job search a truly integrated activity' and that 'disjointed handoffs between advisers must not become part of the service'.⁵⁰

2.27 The pilot projects have been overseen by a project management board comprising of Welsh Government, Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales officials.

2.28 The SHC pilot projects did not have a specific budget allocation. Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales were expected and agreed to develop and deliver the SHC pilots from within existing resources. The only additional financial resource made available in terms of the delivery of the SHC pilots related to the procurement of the license to use the SkillChecklive diagnostic tool. No specific output targets were set for the SHC pilots (e.g. in terms of numbers of individuals supported).

Relevant Evaluation and Research Work

2.29 In England, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills jointly commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies to undertake an evaluation of the Integrated Employment and Skills trials, from their launch in September 2009 through to their completion in August 2010. The report 'Access to work-related training'⁵¹ was published in 2011.

2.30 The evaluation concluded that a more integrated approach to delivering employment and skills services is becoming 'more embedded in adviser practice' but that this progress is set against a 'difficult background' of increased volumes of jobseekers and reduced space in Jobcentre Plus offices as well as a 'complicated landscape'⁵² of options for Jobcentre Plus advisers making referrals.

⁵⁰ Ibid. Page 4.

⁵¹ Research Report No 749 authored by Claire Johnson, Paul Sissons, Joy Oakley and Sara Dewson. See: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2011-2012/rrep749.pdf>

⁵² Ibid. Page 55.

- 2.31 Similar to Wales, co-location was a key feature of the English trials and the evaluators conclude that the co-location of Next Step advisers (broadly the equivalent of the Careers Wales service in England) within Jobcentre Plus offices helps ‘improve communication and mutual understanding’. The report also concludes that co-location tends to work best where ‘Jobcentre Plus advisers are assigned to the same Jobcentre Plus office on a regular basis and where they are highly visible and proactive in talking to Jobcentre Plus advisers’⁵³.
- 2.32 The evaluators also conclude that while the referral process between Next Step and Jobcentre Plus ‘appears to be effective’, Jobcentre Plus advisers’ understanding of the SHC and ‘how it can benefit claimants has not improved’. This lack of understanding is thought to have negatively affected the referral process and contributed to low attendance rates since claimants in some instances had ‘not been told what to expect’⁵⁴ and how they might benefit from their SHC appointment.
- 2.33 The quality of the Skills Action Plans prepared by Next Step Advisers as part of the SHC process in England was thought to have improved and that co-location had ‘aided the smooth transition of claimants’. However, the evaluators concluded that ‘many action plans still do not reach or are not used by Jobcentre Plus advisory staff’ and that this ‘continues to limit the outcomes’ of the IES approach⁵⁵.
- 2.34 Data sharing and tracking systems were found by the evaluators to be problematic and particular attention was drawn to ‘the lack of a shared MI system’ as a ‘barrier to more effective joint working’⁵⁶.
- 2.35 Overall, while the evaluators concluded that there were many positive examples emerging from the English IES trials, the ‘claimant journey is still fragmented’ and that the aim of ‘smooth, seamless transitions’

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid. Page 56.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

between Jobcentre Plus and Next Steps 'has not yet been fully realised'⁵⁷.

2.36 The evaluators make a series of recommendations aimed at taking the IES trials forward. It seems implicit from the recommendations that the work around the IES trials will continue in England and as such the recommendations put forward by the evaluators focus largely on process related improvements aimed at improving the customer journey. The evaluators recommend the need to improve the flow of information and communication between the two key operational partners (i.e. Next Steps and Jobcentre Plus). They also recommend that co-location should be a key part of improving joint working in the future and that improvements to 'computer systems and better data sharing' would also fundamentally 'help move towards a 'truly integrated system'. Recommendations are also made around the need to simplify the 'referral and booking system' and to regularly update provision directories which show the availability of training services. Finally, the evaluators recommend a more rigorous approach in terms of future monitoring and evaluation which compares key indicators (such as referral rates, attendance rates, referrals to training, customer satisfaction and job outcomes) against non IES districts⁵⁸.

2.37 The Department for Work and Pensions also published research in 2011 on 'Identifying claimants' needs: Research into the capability of Jobcentre Plus advisers'⁵⁹. The aim of the study was to consider 'how Jobcentre Plus advisers conduct skills screening and the capability of Jobcentre Plus advisers to identify claimants' needs'⁶⁰.

2.38 The researchers concluded that 'by-and-large, Jobcentre Plus advisers were actively engaged in assessing claimants' existing skills and

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid. Page 57.

⁵⁹ This work was undertaken for DWP by the Institute of Employment Studies and authored by Anne Bellis, Joy Oakley, Maria Sigala and Sara Dewson. Research Report No 748. See: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rports2011-2012/rrep748.pdf>

⁶⁰ Ibid. Page 6.

identifying skills gaps that were blocking or impeding their chances of finding work'. However, the researchers found that Jobcentre Plus advisers did not commonly use phrases like 'identifying skills needs' and 'skills screening' to describe what they were doing⁶¹.

2.39 The research found that some Jobcentre Plus offices 'seemed to have more effective and comprehensive (whole office) approaches to skills screening than others' and interestingly, that this had been 'regardless of whether they had been involved in the IES trials' in England. A key attributing factor in terms of the effectiveness of skills screening activity was found to be 'the management role in influencing adviser behaviour and driving up quality'⁶².

2.40 The 'Review of the Development and Implementation of the Skills Health Check Pilots in Wales' was an internal report prepared by members of the then DCELLS Research Branch of the Social Research Division within the Welsh Government. The review focused on:

- Preparation for, and communication about, the pilots;
- The referral process, including signposting to and feedback from the process;
- Use and appropriateness of the SHC diagnostic tool;
- Customer awareness of and satisfaction with the pilots;
- Identification of barriers to the success of the pilots;
- Staff views on collaborative working;
- Examples of best practice from the pilots.

2.41 The review highlighted that 'all pilots were to operate within the same eligibility criteria for identifying suitable individuals for referral to the SHC process i.e. those:

⁶¹ Ibid. Page 39.

⁶² Ibid.

- Having basic, generic employment, or specific occupational skills development needs preventing them from achieving their immediate job goal;
- or
- Needing to understand their skills and options in order to focus on suitable occupational areas and possible skills development for future sustainable employment'.⁶³

2.42 The review also referred to the fact that 'guidance for those implementing the pilots was developed and, in practice, the office based pilots followed the overall guidelines issued but some local differences did emerge'. However, the review identified that, in practice, the pilots were being delivered with a reasonably high level of operational discretion at a local level, which led to the finding that 'whilst different practices were expected due to local working arrangements and requirements, the scale of the office based pilots makes it difficult to assess whether these localised differences have had any major impact on the take up of the service'.⁶⁴

The Stage 1 review also concluded that progress was being made towards agreeing co-location arrangements between Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales in the four office based pilots. However, the report drew attention to the fact that despite the pilots being 'operational in all areas' there was some evidence to suggest that 'participants [i.e. advisers] may not have fully understood the pilot process or the core aims that they were working towards'.⁶⁵

In this context, the Stage 1 Evaluation found that there may have been 'some uncertainty surrounding the pilot objectives and the role that the pilot areas were to play, and a common theme around a lack of firm

⁶³ Page 7.

⁶⁴ Page 7.

⁶⁵ Ibid. Page 8.

understanding of the process seems to be emerging at this stage⁶⁶. In terms of referral processes, the Stage 1 report concluded that 'at this point in the pilot, it is difficult to assess the impact in terms of case-loading and closer working arrangements between Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales'.⁶⁷

However, the report went on to find that 'all office pilot areas and the Prescoed Prison Pilot highlight a perceived low level of referrals and, in the case of the office based pilots, take up of the service is an area of concern and one which requires improvement'. Moreover, the report found that 'all areas mentioned both the low volume of the use of the service as well as a high proportion of participants failing to attend various stages of the intervention as both a strain on resources and on staff involved in the process'. This low level of take up was however set in the context that it had not been 'stated clearly at the outset what the anticipated and expected take up of the service was likely to be'⁶⁸.

The Stage 1 report also drew attention to 'a high attrition rate from the point at which customers were initially seen by Jobcentre Plus to those who eventually received a Skills Health Check Action Plan'. Indeed the report suggested that only 27% of the initial referred cohort received a full SHC and led to the conclusion that 'the volume of customers that have been seen are disappointing'.⁶⁹ There were also 'concerns about the number of customers who were not attending their appointments once referred onto the programme' which in one case had led to the decision 'to discontinue the co-location of the careers adviser at the job centre due to a lack of referrals and a need to optimise the advisers time'⁷⁰.

The Stage 1 Evaluation reported mixed (some positive and negative) feedback concerning the appropriateness and relevance of the

⁶⁶ Ibid. Page 9.

⁶⁷ Ibid. Page 9.

⁶⁸ Ibid. Page 10.

⁶⁹ Ibid. Page 10.

⁷⁰ Ibid. Page 11.

SkillChecklive diagnostic tool, while findings in relation to collaborative working arrangements between Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus were largely positive, with some evidence to suggest that in one or two cases this was already 'expanding beyond the remit of the SHC process'.⁷¹

⁷¹ Ibid. Page 14.

3 Implementation of the SHC Pilots in Wales

Introduction

3.1 In this chapter, we consider the findings of our interviews with stakeholders involved with the SHC pilots, the telephone survey with customers and discussions with offenders at Prescoed prison. We consider the extent to which the SHC pilots achieved their overall aims and objectives, review overall management and implementation systems and assess the effectiveness of promoting service integration. We also consider, from a process perspective the effectiveness of the Skillcheck Live diagnostic tool and the Skills Action Plans, before going on to assess the potential of the SHC pilots to offer efficiency gains. Under these headings, the chapter also highlights a number of examples of good practice in terms of joint working and constraints that have impeded the effectiveness of the pilots.

Key findings outlined in this chapter include that:

- The SHC pilots in Wales have made a valuable contribution to promoting joined up approaches to employment and skills. They have done this by facilitating closer working relationships which in turn have reduced cultural and organisational barriers between Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales. This has led to a much clearer understanding and appreciation of each other's roles in relation to helping people into work.
- The co-location element of the SHC pilots has been a very important driver in promoting joint working and there is evidence to suggest that there is a clear link between co-location and improved referral mechanisms. However, co-location is not a particularly easy option and the general lack of space in Jobcentre Plus offices has been a consistent problem.
- The SHC pilots have involved different implementation approaches in

different areas. This variety reflects a largely non-prescriptive approach to the targeting and implementation strategy at the design stage and despite guidance being issued, local stakeholders have not been clear about the aims and objectives of the pilots.

- The fact that there has been no project specific budget to deliver the SHC pilots in Wales means that there has not been a traditional commissioner – provider relationship between the main partners and has increased the reliance on the goodwill of those involved to get things done. The overall coherence and focus of the pilots in Wales could also have been improved had there been a project manager in place to oversee the pilots throughout the implementation period.
- The management information systems used to report progress within the SHC pilots in Wales have been fit for purpose, but they have been complicated by the fact that different Careers Wales Companies use different approaches. There are also fundamental issues to be addressed in terms of improving the degree to which Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales IT systems link with each other.
- The Skillcheck Live diagnostic tool received a mixed reception from Careers Wales advisers. A minority think it is very good, while the majority have varying degrees of concerns about its appropriateness.
- The Skills Action Plan was seen by Jobcentre Plus advisers as potentially the most value adding part of the SHC pilots, specifically in terms of closing the information loop between themselves and Careers Wales. While the concept and the plan itself is sound, the process of ensuring that plans are disseminated to the right people (particularly Jobcentre Plus Advisers) at the right time and that proper use is made of them has been patchy.
- It is unlikely that any substantive efficiency savings have, as yet been generated by the SHC pilots. However, if certain processes (e.g. referral and ICT systems) can be improved and further integrated, there is every reason to be optimistic that efficiency gains could be achieved in the future.

Extent to which overall aims and objectives are being met

- 3.2 Stakeholders from the Welsh Government, Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales took the view that overall, the SHC pilots had made a meaningful contribution towards the aim of testing joined-up approaches to helping individuals back into work by identifying individuals' skills needs. In particular, these stakeholders felt that the pilots had contributed to joined-up approaches by facilitating closer working relationships between Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales and this was welcomed as a logical step by each of the organisations. A high degree of goodwill and commitment from managers in both organisations to implementing the pilots was also evident and was highlighted as good practice in joint working despite no additional, project specific resources being available. One Welsh Government official commented that 'there was no compulsion for the partners to get involved. There were no funding levers that we could pull'. In this respect, Welsh Government officials stressed that they were keen to manage expectations of the pilots at the outset, given that both Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus were experiencing very heavy caseloads as a result of increased redundancies brought on by the recent recession.
- 3.3 In large measure, stakeholders thought that improved joint working had come about as a result of the impetus the SHC pilots had given, on the one hand at a strategic level (i.e. bringing the various partners together as a project management board) and on the other at an operational level, where the focus on co-location (which we explore in more detail below) had been a key factor in driving forward collaborative approaches.
- 3.4 In one instance, however, the SHC pilot was essentially considered an extension of a pre-existing arrangement where Careers Wales advisers had for some time prior to the pilots been co-located at a Jobcentre office. In this case, a Careers Wales official commented that 'it worked well before the pilot started and it still works well now'.

- 3.5 There was also a view from the majority of stakeholders concerned that the aim and objectives of the SHC pilots remained relevant in light of the UK Coalition Government's welfare to work reform plans. A handful of stakeholders from the Welsh Government, Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus cautioned however that while the conditionality and sanction elements of the new welfare to work proposals were intended to remove disincentives to individuals finding work, these measures did not necessarily sit comfortably with the culture and working practices of others in the family of careers support organisations in Wales (outlined in Future Directions). One Careers Wales official commented that 'conditionality and sanctions go against the grain for Careers Wales. We're really not keen on those elements and we never say [to customers] you must'. The evolving nature of the welfare to work reform agenda led one Welsh Government official to comment that in Wales 'all of this means that there's an even more important emphasis on IES⁷² now'.
- 3.6 Despite what some perceived (in line with the evidence from the phase one review) as a relatively slow start (the causes of which are explored further in later chapters of this report), a minority of stakeholders felt that the SHC process had been delivered largely according to plan. One Welsh Government official commented that 'from the point of view of process, the pilots are pretty well being delivered as envisaged' while a Jobcentre Plus official commented that 'It's gone fine. We've delivered what we've been asked to deliver'.
- 3.7 Most other stakeholders commented however that the decision not to link measureable output or outcome targets (including targets relating to specific customer groups) to the objectives at the start of the pilots (largely driven by the fact that no additional resources were being made available) meant that both Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus were afforded 'a great deal of freedom' to decide how they were going to deliver. While some stakeholders thought this had been positive in some

⁷² Integration of Employment and Skills.

respects (e.g. allowing activity to be tailored to local circumstances), the absence of quantifiable targets and a targeting strategy meant that there was a perceived lack of clarity about the overall aim of the pilots which also made it more difficult for those involved in delivery to monitor and analyse progress against objectives. One Careers Wales official commented that 'it's difficult to say there was an original design. There wasn't. We were given this idea of working more closely with Jobcentre Plus but behind that we weren't given any direction on how'. A Jobcentre Plus official commented that 'it would have been nice to have been told: this is what we're looking at, this is what we want you to find out – just do that'. Several others commented that this had resulted in the pilots feeling like a series of stand-alone and rather disjointed projects with a perception at delivery level that there was not a particularly coherent or strong overview being taken. In part, this perhaps reflects the expectation outlined in the Welsh Government's original commissioning note that that there would be 'many different elements to the pilots'⁷³.

Management and Implementation

3.8 The majority of stakeholders thought that the lack of a specific budget meant that traditional project management structures and relationships, typically characterised by a purchaser - supplier or grant awarding and grant recipient body were diluted in the SHC pilots. The fact that there had not been a Project Manager during the last eight months of the pilots was also highlighted by a number of stakeholders as having been a disadvantage. One Welsh Government official commented that 'having a dedicated project manager would have been hugely beneficial'. At the early stages, there was a dedicated official within DCELLS⁷⁴ who held responsibility for co-ordinating the development of the SHC pilots, but after this individual retired some eight months into the pilots (in August 2010), the department was unable to resource a replacement post.

⁷³ Integrated Employment and Skills in Wales. Commissioning Note. Page 4.

⁷⁴ Seconded in from Careers Wales Gwent in September 2008 to help explore options for implementing Skills Health Check pilots in Wales.

- 3.9 While acknowledging that the SHC pilots would have benefitted from a project manager throughout the lifespan of the pilots, one or two stakeholders thought that in the current climate of spending cuts, the SHC pilots were a very good example of collaborative working without having to spend additional, project based money on additional staff resources.
- 3.10 Some of those involved in drafting guidance issued by the project management board to assist Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus advisers with the setting up and implementation of the pilots, thought that on reflection, the guidance itself could have been more detailed. One Welsh Government official commented that 'the speed we had to turn this around meant that unfortunately, the guidance suffered'. At an operational level, advisers from Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus said that the guidance had not been as useful as it might have been and was thought to have resulted in delays in getting things underway. One Jobcentre Plus adviser commented that 'you like to have a clear and consistent process and idea about what you are doing. We never had that with this pilot'. This latter finding ties in closely with the early stage findings of the phase 1 review and suggests that while the clear intention that the pilots should be responsive to local environments may have been thought to justify a lack of prescriptive guidance, from the point of view of front-line staff, problems arising from what was perceived as a lack of clear guidance early on were never fully resolved.
- 3.11 Efforts were made at the outset of the SHC pilots to ensure that participating staff (in Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus) were aware of the aim and objectives of the SHC pilots, for example a briefing session for operational staff was held in March 2010. However, a common theme to emerge from interviews with stakeholders was that while the objectives of the SHC pilots were well understood at managerial level, this had not filtered through to operational level staff and this had been exacerbated in some cases by staff turnover in Jobcentre Plus which

meant that awareness levels of the pilot's specific objectives were inconsistent and sometimes low. One Jobcentre Plus official commented that 'I came out of the March [2010] meeting thinking - what was all that about? The objectives were unclear. It was a fundamental problem from the start that they [the project management board] didn't have a clear aim'.

3.12 The knock on effect of the lack of clearly understood aims and objectives and detailed operational guidance has been that the SHC pilots have been interpreted differently in different areas. To some extent, this was always part of the plan, with the Prescoed Prison Pilot and the North Wales redundancy pilots being based on different models to the office co-location concept in the other areas.

3.13 However, a clear theme from the stakeholder interviews was that Careers Wales and, to a lesser extent Jobcentre Plus had effectively changed their delivery models as the pilots progressed. This had meant different approaches to targeting the SHC service, effectively moving away from the original criteria as laid out in the original DCELLS commissioning note, with some pilots initially targeting 18 to 24 year olds on the basis that this was seen as a priority group following the recession (but later relaxing this criteria), while others did not apply specific age related eligibility criteria, rather basing the decision on an assessment of whether the customer would benefit from undertaking a SHC. One Jobcentre Plus adviser stressed that in any future pilot of this nature, a clearly defined and well communicated targeting strategy, referring only those that would benefit from undertaking an SHC, regardless of age would be essential and suggested that 'a blanket referral strategy would not be a good move'.

3.14 The diversity in terms of delivery approaches meant that while the pilots were being tailored and adjusted to meet evolving local labour market circumstances and the perceived needs of customer, one stakeholder argued that this had fundamentally 'distorted the intention' of the pilots.

- 3.15 However, an emphasis on tailoring support and advice to meet local labour market conditions was thought to be particularly important for the offenders leaving Prescoed Prison: ‘there’s no point in them being advised to take some training course to get a particular skill if that skill isn’t needed in the area in which they will be released.’ In this respect there has been a concerted effort by Careers Wales, Jobcentre Plus and Prison based staff to engage job centres in the towns/regions where the offender wants to be released in order to determine local labour market conditions to help inform the post-release choices and decisions.
- 3.16 In terms of monitoring the progress of the SHC pilots, the Careers Branch of DfES received monthly update reports from the participating Careers Wales companies which included details of supported customers and a more general narrative (based on a template reporting format) providing commentary on progress and any issues in relation to the pilots. The reporting structure for the SHC pilots was considered by most stakeholders in DfES and Careers Wales to have been fit for purpose and proportionate in scale to the pilots themselves (in terms of required inputs), though they are by definition rather limited in terms of measuring progress given that no output targets had been set for the pilots.
- 3.17 A key shortcoming in terms of measuring and attributing outcomes to the SHC pilots has been the lack of integration with Jobcentre Plus’ management information systems suggesting that this objective of the pilots has only been partially achieved. This has prevented the tracking of individual customer progress, and was seen by several stakeholders as being a major barrier to further integration and ‘closing the information loop’.
- 3.18 Overall, stakeholders took the view that the management information systems and specifically the databases used by the participating Careers Wales companies in capturing customer information as part of the SHC pilots had been fit for purpose. Essential personal details

(including age, gender, ethnic origin and language preference) have all been collected in most instances. The data and information collected by the individual Careers Wales companies has been reported to the Welsh Government in a competent way, enabling officials and the project management board to keep a close eye on progress and to identify any issues (for example via monthly log sheets containing narrative on things that were working well and things that needed improving). However, there is clear potential for a more integrated and consolidated approach to be introduced in terms of how the various Careers Wales companies handle management information, and this would seem to be an important efficiency consideration in the context of a unified Careers Wales structure going forward.

Service Integration

3.19 Most of the stakeholders we spoke to thought that the logic of using the SHC pilots to explore service integration between Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales was sound and that the pilots themselves had provided a welcome opportunity to put long held discussions (since the publication of Leitch in 2006) on integration into practice. One Jobcentre Plus official for example said that 'it's a real achievement that Jobcentre Plus, Careers Wales and WAG are actually sat down around the same table with a shared understanding and a shared desire to actually make this work'. A Welsh Government official agreed with this, saying that 'the project management board is a big step forward', bringing together in a co-ordinated and focused way, the Careers Branch and Business and Skills Divisions of DfES as well as Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales.

3.20 Within Prescoed Prison, the pilot supports a continuation of momentum built by the offender through earlier contact with Prison based training and advice including the support of Careers Wales. Gaps in support are thought to be a significant barrier to progress: 'There is a fair amount of training and support available in prison. But if they [the offender] get some [non-Pilot] advice from say a Careers Wales adviser and then there is nothing for a period of time until release then all the momentum

is lost'. The Pilot provides input at a crucial point and helps maintain this momentum.

3.21 However, since the SHC pilot input comes relatively late in the sentence, this does risk 'losing' offenders that are moved to other prison locations: 'At the end of the sentence they can be moved at a moment's notice, and there's nothing we can do.'

3.22 Stakeholders involved in the delivery of the pilots (both from Jobcentre plus and Careers Wales) were under no illusions however as to the scale of the challenge that service integration would present. For example, one Careers Wales official commented that 'you can't expect this to happen overnight – you are challenging some pretty ingrained organisational practices and cultures'. Indeed, several Jobcentre Plus officials pointed out that while commitment to the pilots was high in principle, in practice the pilots were instigated at an 'extremely busy time' with high numbers of redundancies following the economic downturn affecting the caseloads of advisers and their subsequent capacity to proactively engage with the pilots.

Co-location, Referral and Attendance

3.23 While the pilot areas were each starting from a different point in terms of the quality and maturity of pre-existing relationships between Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales at a localised level, co-location was seen as being a key vehicle for achieving increased integration of services in the areas trialling this model.

3.24 Co-location was viewed by several of the stakeholders we spoke to as being an important building block in developing the level of understanding between Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales of each other's services. In this respect, a common theme to emerge from the stakeholder interviews was that both sides now have a better understanding and appreciation of what the other does as a result of co-location. One Careers Wales official stated for example that 'simple

things - like putting faces to names - really helps break down barriers' while another commented that 'Jobcentre Plus advisers understand Careers Wales services much more now. The pilot opened the door that allowed us to have the conversation with Jobcentre Plus. We wouldn't have had the leverage to do that without WAG's involvement'. The fact that the SHC pilots had helped break down organisational barriers and had facilitated a better understanding of each other's roles was considered by several stakeholders to have been good practice in joint working arrangements.

3.25 There have, however, been a number of practical challenges to establishing co-location arrangements. The most notable of these has been the lack of suitable office/desk space at Jobcentre Plus locations for Careers Wales advisers. All of the Careers Wales advisers we spoke to stressed the need for there to be confidential space available at the Jobcentre locations to undertake SHC interviews in order for customers to feel at ease and to avoid the concern that what they say may be overheard by Jobcentre Plus officials and could end up affecting their benefits.

3.26 The majority of stakeholders from Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus made a direct link between co-location and improved referral processes and saw it as a potential opportunity for Careers Wales to access a cohort of customers that may not normally have been inclined or motivated enough to attend an information, advice and guidance session at a Careers Wales location. This was also thought to have been an example of good practice in terms of collaborative working. However, a handful of Careers Wales officials were keen to stress however that co-location should not be seen as a 'silver bullet' in terms of engaging hard to reach customers and that outreach facilities (for example in community locations) already operated by Careers companies across Wales are also essential in engaging individuals in information, advice and guidance sessions that would not necessarily be Jobcentre Plus customers.

3.27 Several of the advisers we interviewed from Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus emphasised the importance of having efficient referral processes in place, but commented that this had not always been the case within the SHC pilots. A common theme to emerge was that the referral processes and systems had not been rigorous or efficient enough at the beginning which had resulted in some customers not attending SHC sessions (an issue highlighted in the Stage 1 Evaluation report). Indeed, some of the monthly reports provided to DfES by Careers Wales highlighted low numbers of SHC referrals (from Jobcentre Plus to Careers Wales) as recently as November 2010. One report for example commented that 'in the October log sheet, details were provided of a meeting that took place [between Jobcentre plus and Careers Wales] on Friday October 1st to discuss ways of increasing referrals'. The report went on to say that 'at that meeting it was decided that the Careers Wales adviser would use the Jobcentre Plus Managers room to interview clients every Wednesday i.e. full co-location arrangements. This started on Wednesday October 20th and happened again on Wednesday October 27th. On both occasions the Careers Wales Adviser had four pre-booked appointments, with three clients attending on each day'. The report concluded that focusing on co-location was a crucial element in increasing referral and attendance rates, stating that 'whilst there is still room for development, this represents a significant improvement in recent referral and attendance rates'.

3.28 Some stakeholders suggested that the wide range of employment support services available to customers can be confusing and they thought that in some cases this might be having a negative impact on attendance rates. These stakeholders argued that simplification was needed within the system which would lead to increased clarity for customers and improved attendance.

3.29 Others involved at a delivery level argued that in some instances, non-attendance happened because the customers were not in a position to benefit from or not suited to the SHC process. This, it was argued was a particular problem early on in the pilots, but had begun to improve as the pilot went on. 'It's improved – we get better referrals now - and it's come from speaking to Jobcentre Plus to tell them the sort of people we think will firstly attend and secondly will get the most from the SHC'.

3.30 The fact that the objectives of the SHC pilots were not particularly well understood and that the guidance on targeting the support was seen as ambiguous by operational staff had not helped referral processes. One Jobcentre Plus adviser commented that 'we had to get the handover to them [Careers Wales] speeded up and the feedback from them [the Skills Action Plan] coming back quicker'. This issue was true of the co-location pilot areas as well as the redundancy pilot area. In this latter context, a Careers Wales official while critical of the amount of information customers were equipped with when they first arrived from Jobcentre Plus was also sympathetic to the challenges Jobcentre Plus advisers face. 'The Jobcentre are quite good about telling them [customers] about ReAct... then they refer them to us. When they turn up to our office all they know about is ReAct. I think we have the luxury of time [with the customer] that they [Jobcentre Plus] don't. I can sympathise with what they have to do... the pressures they face'.

SkillChecklive

3.31 A key part of the additionality offered by the SHC pilots over and above regular referrals from Jobcentre Plus to Careers Wales was the introduction of the SkillChecklive diagnostic tool, the license for which was procured by the Welsh Government for use by Careers Wales advisers in the SHC pilots. While we deal with the relevance and usefulness of this tool from a customer perspective later on in this report (Chapter 5), we encountered some very mixed views about it from a process and integration perspective.

- 3.32 Having evaluated a number of similar IT based skills diagnostic products (including the systems used in the English pilots and a system used by some Careers Wales companies⁷⁵), the Welsh Government decided to opt for the SkillChecklive tool on the basis that it offered the best mix of user friendly features relative to the target group of unemployed people in Wales.
- 3.33 A minority of stakeholders (managers who were not actively using the tool themselves) from Careers Wales were very enthusiastic about SkillChecklive saying that their advisers 'love it' and that they were, at the time of our research exploring its use beyond the SHC pilots. It was stressed however that SkillChecklive needed to be used in a complementary way and as one part of the wider information, advice and guidance provided by the Careers Wales advisers. At present, different Careers Wales companies use different diagnostic systems and as such the enthusiasm for adopting SkillChecklive varied across the pilot areas.
- 3.34 Other Careers Wales advisers actively using SkillChecklive said that it was 'very important to contextualise' the information provided by the system and to interpret it based on local labour market conditions and a rounded assessment of each customer's relative strengths and weaknesses. One of these advisers commented that 'it can add value to the role of the Adult Guidance Officer [Careers Wales adviser] provided it is used in appropriate ways with people who are open to ideas and career progression'. This adviser went on to say that SkillChecklive was less useful when working with clients 'who just want a job' and thought that on balance, the tool probably worked better with '30-40 year olds thinking about a career change' than it did in 'guiding new claimants aged 18-24'. Another adviser thought that it was a 'useful tool and can be quite thought provoking if used in the right way especially for lone parents and those out of the workplace for a long time and where confidence might be very low'.

⁷⁵ Adult Directions.

3.35 In contrast however, other Careers Wales officials we interviewed were less enthusiastic about SkillChecklive. One adviser commented that ‘the skills bit of it is quite good’ but argued that ‘the jobs it turns out are ridiculous... the one that comes up time and again is theatrical agent’. Another adviser (from the pilot area where managers claimed that their advisers ‘love’ SkillChecklive) commented that the system’s main shortcoming was in relation to the suggested jobs that it produced at the end of the diagnostic. ‘That’s the worst bit about it. It’s really embarrassing and I have to warn clients in advance because they just laugh when it comes up with suggestions like becoming a politician! This part of it is diabolical and to be honest, I rarely use this part of it with clients’.

3.36 Jobcentre Plus advisers who were interviewed and said they were familiar enough with SkillChecklive to comment on it were generally sceptical that the system had added much value in terms of integration. One commented that ‘I would get rid of the computer package. The suggestions it comes up with just aren’t suitable. It looks the part when you first see it but the list of jobs includes becoming a politician – which comes up often’. Indeed, one adviser was concerned that SkillChecklive had undermined progress on integration on the basis that the unsuitable job suggestions it produced had in a small number of instances ‘disengaged the client’.

Skills Action Plans

3.37 Another key additional element introduced as part of the SHC process in the drive for better service integration was the Skills Action Plan. We comment later on in this report about the perceived usefulness and relevance of the Action Plans from a customer perspective.

3.38 From a Jobcentre Plus perspective, the Action Plans and specifically the sharing of completed Action Plans with Jobcentre Plus advisers was seen as potentially the most value adding part of the whole process by ‘closing the information loop’ and the concept was seen by some as an

example of good practice in moving towards improved joint working arrangements. In this respect, a Jobcentre Plus adviser commented that the strength of the Skills Action Plan was that the information relating to skills strengths and areas for improvement was 'based on more in-depth work with the person', enabling a greater level of detail to help inform subsequent advisory sessions between Jobcentre Plus and the customer. This adviser stressed that without the involvement of Careers Wales via the SHC process, this level of detailed skills analysis would not normally take place as part of the Jobcentre Plus advisory process. 'What I wanted [from the Plans] was detail on what the person's done, what the gaps in their skills are and how we can help them'.

3.39 We encountered mixed views as to how effectively the Skills Action Plans had been used to help inform Jobcentre Plus advisers. Most stakeholders thought that the format of the plans, which was based on guidance issued by DfES⁷⁶ to Careers Wales advisers and contains three main section headings (relating to 1. personal data, 2. skills and experience and 3. future skills and work goals) was fit for purpose. Some also acknowledged merit in having a separate Action Plan for the SHC pilots which were more 'employment focused' than the standard Careers Wales 'Moving Forward Plan' which in contrast was felt to focus more on longer term skills and careers issues for individual customers and would not as a matter of course be shared with Jobcentre Plus.

3.40 As with the referral processes, several operational staff said that the process of 'closing the loop' by passing the Skills Action Plan back to the Jobcentre Plus adviser had been 'a bit hit and miss'. One Jobcentre Plus adviser said that 'we don't always get the Skills Action Plans after the interview with Careers and we should do'.

3.41 In most instances, the handover of the Action Plan would be in hard copy format since Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales IT systems are not linked and respective advisers were not e-mailing completed Plans to

⁷⁶ DCELLS at the time.

each other. We also heard that in some areas, getting a completed Action Plan to a Jobcentre Plus adviser could be largely dependent on the level of administrative support available at the Jobcentre Plus location, which was described in one case as having been 'cut right down to the bone'.

3.42 More generally, however, several Careers Wales advisers said that they had now begun to establish ways of making sure that the Skills Action Plans found their way to the relevant Jobcentre Plus adviser, though in reality it would seem that there is scope for both Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus to formalise this process with a view to making it more systemic and reliable.

3.43 Moving beyond the process of ensuring that the Action Plans are shared with the right advisers, some stakeholders were concerned that the Plans themselves may not have been fully utilised. One Jobcentre Plus official commented that links had not yet been made 'between the action plans and how we actually take forward the skills agenda'. This person commented that hitherto, the pilots have concentrated on developing, embedding and monitoring processes rather than looking at 'how we use the action plan... which should be a key document'. This interviewee added that 'it's only in the latter stages that we've actually focused on the standards that should be there when careers advisers prepare the action plan... what Jobcentre Plus would be looking for'.

3.44 A number of stakeholders also questioned the need for a separate Skills Action Plan format given that Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales already have templates in place. One Careers Wales adviser explained that they were having to complete the SHC Skills Action Plan as well as a Careers Wales 'Moving Forward Plan' for each SHC supported customer even though the customer was only issued with the former.

Scope for Efficiency Gains

3.45 Welsh Government officials had made it clear from the outset that, given there was no additional budget available to deliver the SHC pilots in

Wales, delivery would not be a drain on existing resources for either Jobcentre Plus or Careers Wales. 'We had to commit to Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus that this wouldn't impact on their resources and capacity'. However, it is clear that in practice, a significant amount of time and energy has had to be invested by Careers Wales, Jobcentre Plus and Welsh Government officials to operationalize the pilots.

- 3.46 One Careers Wales company explained that the Careers Wales European Social Fund project which partially funded a number of their adult advisers was a crucial element in being able to deploy adviser resources to the SHC pilot in their area. They explained that without the ESF funding, it would have been 'very difficult' to allocate adviser resources to the SHC pilot.
- 3.47 None of the stakeholders that we spoke to felt able to say whether and to what extent efficiency gains may have been achieved as a result of the SHC pilots being instigated. One Jobcentre Plus official commented that 'it was a little naïve to sell the pilots on the premise that there would be no additional burden'. Both advisers and those involved in compiling management information had fed back to the project management board that the pilots entailed significant additional inputs. 'We expected the whole process would start quickly and smoothly with lots of benefit for little effort. But in practice it wasn't like that. You have to set up agreed systems and processes'.
- 3.48 As such, most stakeholders thought it unlikely that after just over 12 months of being operational, the SHC pilots will have resulted in net cost savings for either Jobcentre Plus or Careers Wales to date.
- 3.49 One concern raised by Careers Wales was that although intended to occur at a much earlier stage in the support journey, the SHC pilots potentially risk being seen as a substitute to services that the Department for Work and Pensions already commission via the Flexible New Deal Contracts and (in future) contracts under the new Work

Programme. One Careers Wales official cautioned against potential duplication where 'DWP is already paying providers to do some of this work [i.e. preparing people for employment] and these pilots are not intended to make up for any shortcomings in those services'.

3.50 However, this is not to say that efficiency gains could not be a realistic ambition in the future and stakeholders identified a number of key areas in which, having gone through the initial set up costs, potential savings could be made.

3.51 Improving the referral process was thought to be an obvious way of generating efficiencies. While we have already explored some of the issues and constraints around this, officials from Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales were of the view that more advanced integration of ICT systems could substantially reduce duplication in the diagnostic stages of the 'customer journey'. It could also be used to adopt a more sophisticated and responsive appointment booking system so that Jobcentre Plus advisers can have 'real time' access to book customers in for SHC sessions with Careers Wales advisers. One Welsh Government official commented that while 'ICT is a massive hurdle' and that 'it's very restrictive because of Data Protection issues' a logical and 'long overdue' next step would be to allow Careers Wales advisers access to Jobcentre Plus data concerning individual customers in the context of undertaking SHCs.

3.52 However, there are some examples of good practice that the SHC pilots have already enabled in terms of joint working with the aid of ICT. In one pilot area where co-location was taking place for the first time, the Careers Wales adviser identified that their time was not being used efficiently as they were unable to access the Careers Wales database remotely. After each SHC session, Careers Wales advisers are required to update the Careers Wales database with case notes on each customer. In order to overcome this issue, ICT staff from both organisations worked together to facilitate a reliable, remote link from the

Jobcentre Plus office (and using the Jobcentre Plus network) to the Careers Wales database which meant that the adviser could update the database with a reliable connection while still at the Jobcentre office. This enabled the adviser's time to be used much more efficiently.

4 The Customer Experience

- 4.1 In this chapter, we consider the findings of our telephone survey with SHC pilot customers and a series of eight face to face interviews with offenders who participated in the SHC pilot at Prescoed Prison. In analysing the findings of the survey with SHC pilot customers, we have sought (where appropriate) to compare key findings with the 2010 Careers Wales Adult Survey⁷⁷.
- 4.2 This chapter firstly outlines the telephone survey methodology and considers the overall profile of SHC supported customers (including their employment status prior to the intervention). Secondly, it considers the nature of the support received by customers and explores the issues discussed in SHC sessions and reasons for non-attendance. The chapter goes on to present the survey findings in relation to the customer perspective on Skillcheck Live and the Skills Action Plans. Fourthly, the findings in relation to employment and training and learning outcomes are analysed and the attribution of the SHC intervention in this respect is explored. Finally, the chapter presents customer feedback on their SHC experience including the findings of our qualitative fieldwork with participating inmates at Prescoed prison.

Key findings outlined in this chapter include that:

- In line with the objectives of the SHC pilots, the majority of customers were unemployed when they came into contact with their Careers Wales adviser.
- Only 11% of the respondents to our survey said that they had missed an interview session, suggesting that the extent of non-attendance from a customer perspective at least may not be as great as that perceived to be the case by the delivery stakeholders.
- The majority of SHC customers have had appropriate advice relating to

⁷⁷ Undertaken by Beaufort Research Ltd.

skills and qualifications, previous experience and work options.

- Feedback on the SkillCheck Live tool from a customer perspective was broadly positive (including the job ideas offered by the system), suggesting a contrast in terms of the perceived utility of the tool compared with the views of some advisers.
- Most, but by no means all of the SHC customers that we surveyed said that they had received a Skills Action Plan. The majority of those that recalled receiving an action plan said that they found it useful and had managed to implement at least some of the recommendations contained in it.
- The overall picture in terms of job outcomes was quite positive. The majority of SHC supported customers had applied for a job and a significant proportion (though less than those that had applied) had also managed to secure job interviews. Just under half had also gone on to start new jobs.
- The overall picture in terms of training and learning outcomes was also quite positive. A significant proportion (though not a majority) had considered possible training courses following their SHC with just under a quarter having actually started a course. This suggests (as might be expected) that the end goal for customers was more about employment than about training.
- The overall attribution levels (i.e. the extent to which customers felt able to link their job/training outcome to the SHC intervention) was overall, reasonably good with most (60%) saying that it had helped them get a job.
- Most of surveyed SHC customers provided positive feedback from their SHC experience and were of the view that the SHC process had helped them become clearer about their own skills related strengths and weaknesses.
- Most of the SHC customers supported at Prescoed prison had found the SHC interviews with their Careers Wales adviser useful in providing advice and information on possible career options post-release.

Survey Method and Response Rate

4.3 Before outlining the findings of the telephone census survey, we first provide a brief description of the process involved in undertaking the survey itself. The work involved:

- Developing and piloting a bilingual survey questionnaire for the purpose of undertaking telephone based interviews with SHC pilot project customers;
- Compiling and utilising a database of 303 contact names made up of databases supplied by the six Careers Companies participating in the pilots;
- Conducting telephone interviews with customers over a three week period between 14th of February and 4th of March 2011.

4.4 A total of 122 interviews were completed, representing a response rate of 40% against the total of 303 contact names provided in the combined databases. Of the 303 contact names supplied, 20 did not have any telephone contact details and a further 59 contacts had unobtainable numbers – therefore just over a quarter of the database (26%) could not be contacted by the research team. The response rate amongst those that could be contacted was therefore 54%.

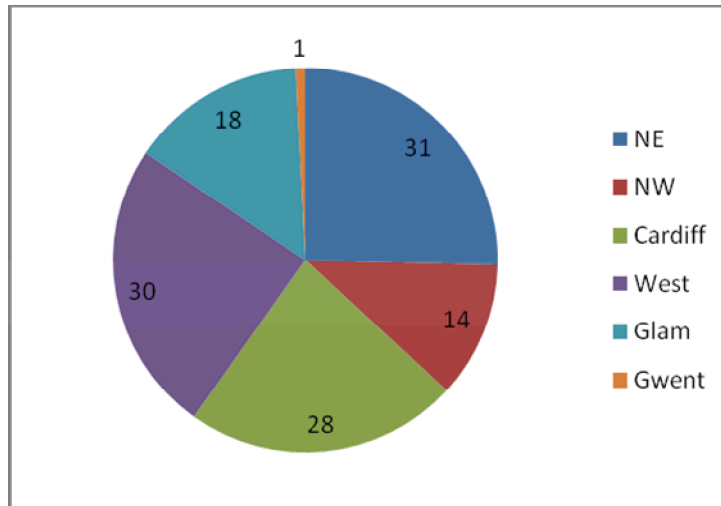
4.5 Very small numbers could not recall the support received (four customers or 1%), refused to respond to the survey (11 customers or 4%), were unable to participate due to reasons such as ill-health (4 customers or 1%) or gave other reasons for not responding (two customers or less than 1%). At least six attempts each were made to contact the remaining 81 customers.

Profile of SHC Customers

4.6 The number of customers surveyed by each Careers Wales Company is shown in Figure 3 below. The sample is very much in line with the total number of customers supported by each Careers Wales Company with

customers supported by North East, West and Cardiff and the Vale accounting for the largest proportions of surveyed customers. As only one customer was surveyed for Gwent (one of eight ex-offenders from the Prescoed prison pilot on a database provided to us) care must be taken when interpreting any findings for this area.

Figure 3: Surveyed Customers by each Careers Wales region



Base=122 respondents

Gender

4.7 Men accounted for 62% of the surveyed sample (76 respondents) and women accounted for 38% (46 respondents). This reasonably closely reflects the gender profile of all SHC customers – of the 303 customers supported by the SHC pilots, 67% (or 204 customers) were male and 33% (or 99 customers) were female. This compares with a client profile for Careers Wales of 70% male and 30% female as reported in the March 2010 Careers Wales Adults Survey.⁷⁸

Age

4.8 Just under two-thirds of surveyed respondents (66% or 80 respondents) had been born between 1985 and 1994 i.e. they would have been between the ages of 16 and 25 when support was provided.⁷⁹ The

⁷⁸ Ibid. Page 8.

⁷⁹ Calculated on the basis that the large majority of customers received support during 2010.

remaining third who received support were generally well distributed between the ages of 25 to 61. Interestingly the age profile of surveyed respondents varied substantially between the six Career Companies. Respondents from the North East and Cardiff and the Vale were predominantly young with all but one of these surveyed respondents born between 1985 and 1994 whilst the surveyed respondents supported by the North West Career Company were predominantly older customers (which may be expected given that this pilot focused on supporting those about to be made redundant) – with all but one of the 14 respondents born in 1980 or earlier. Surveyed customers supported by Mid Glamorgan and Powys as well as the West Career Companies demonstrated a generally wider distribution of age than others.

Work Status Prior to Intervention

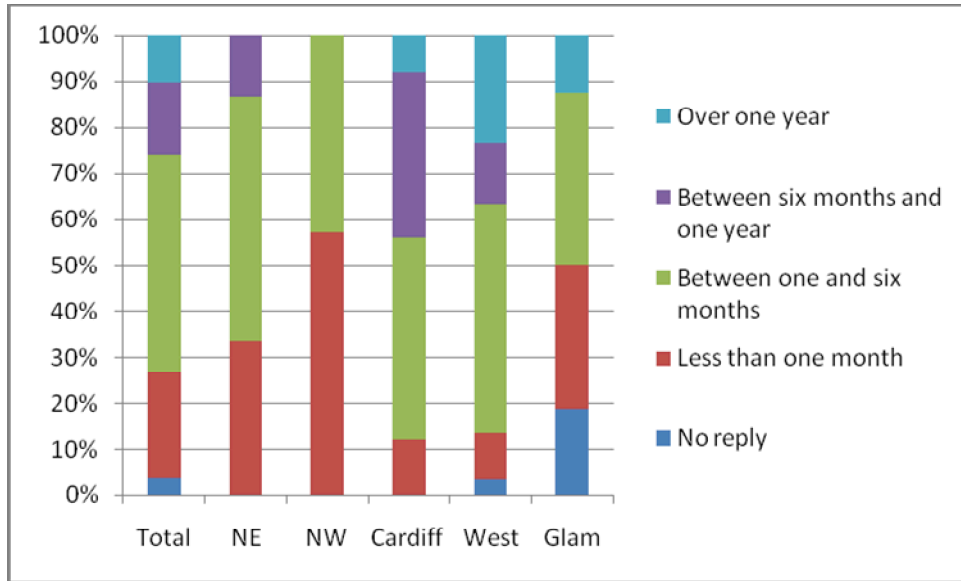
- 4.9 In line with the objectives of the SHC pilots, the majority of surveyed respondents (108 respondents or 89%) were unemployed when they came into contact with their respective Careers Wales adviser. This compares with a client profile of 68% unemployed⁸⁰ at the time of interview with a Careers Wales adviser as reported in the 2010 Careers Wales Adults Survey.
- 4.10 Of the remaining few, a small number (7 respondents or 5%) were in work but facing redundancy and a further two respondents (2%) had just been made redundant. Most of the remaining few respondents cited other circumstances, including being in employment but wanting to pursue another direction.
- 4.11 The majority of the surveyed respondents who stated that they were unemployed when they came into contact with their adviser had been out of work for a relatively short length of time i.e. up to a year⁸¹. Just under a quarter had been unemployed for less than one month (25

⁸⁰ Made up of 30% made redundant in last six months and 38% unemployed.

⁸¹ This may suggest that the risk of overlap with Flexible New Deal/Work Programme beneficiaries may not be particularly great since these DWP programmes are targeted at people who are longer term unemployed.

respondents or 23%) and a further half (51 respondents or 47%) had been unemployed between one and six months. Surveyed respondents supported by Careers Wales North West had all been unemployed for less than one year (reflecting the nature of this pilot in supporting those about to be made or recently made redundant) whilst respondents supported by Careers Wales Cardiff and the Vale and Careers Wales West were more likely than others to have been unemployed for a longer period with 44% (11 of 25 respondents) and 37% (11 of 30 respondents) at each of these regions unemployed for six months or longer. Surveyed women tended to have been unemployed for a longer period than men, with 31% (or 13 of 41 respondents) unemployed for six months or more, compared with 22% (or 15 of 67 respondents) of men.

Figure 4: Length of Unemployment Prior to Contact with Adviser

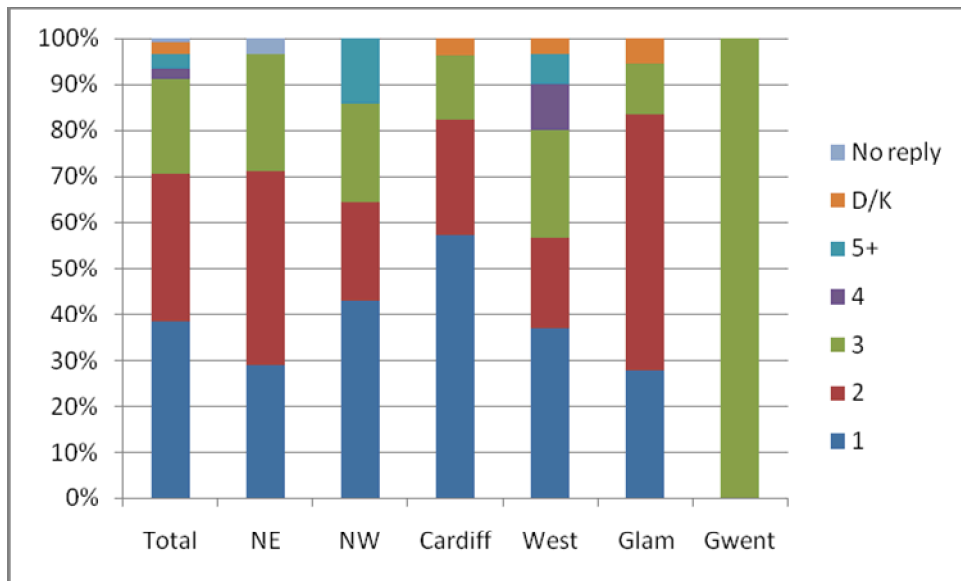


Base=108 respondents

Nature of Support Received

4.12 The majority of surveyed customers (70% or 86 respondents) had received either one or two interview sessions with their SHC adviser, as shown in Figure 5. Some differences emerged at Career Company level with those customers supported by Cardiff and the Vale and Mid Glamorgan and Powys Career Companies more likely to have received up to two advisory sessions than others. Customers who had received support from Careers Wales West were more likely than others to have received a higher number of advisory sessions, with 12 of their 30 respondents (or 40%) stating that they had received either three or more advisory sessions each.

Figure 5: Number of Advisory Sessions Received



Base= 122 respondents

Non Attendance

4.13 Only 11% (or 13 respondents) claimed to have missed any interview sessions arranged for them with their respective SHC adviser and in the majority of cases customers had only missed one interview session. The respondents who had missed interview sessions were more likely to be from the Cardiff and Vale region (five respondents) and West region (four respondents). The main reasons provided for missing any interview sessions were:

- Appointment was not convenient (cited by four respondents);
- Customer had forgotten about appointment (cited by three respondents);
- Customer did not think that the interview would be worthwhile (cited by two respondents);
- Weather related conditions i.e. snow (cited by two respondents);
- Customer had something else on (cited by one respondent);
- Customer had found work (cited by one respondent).

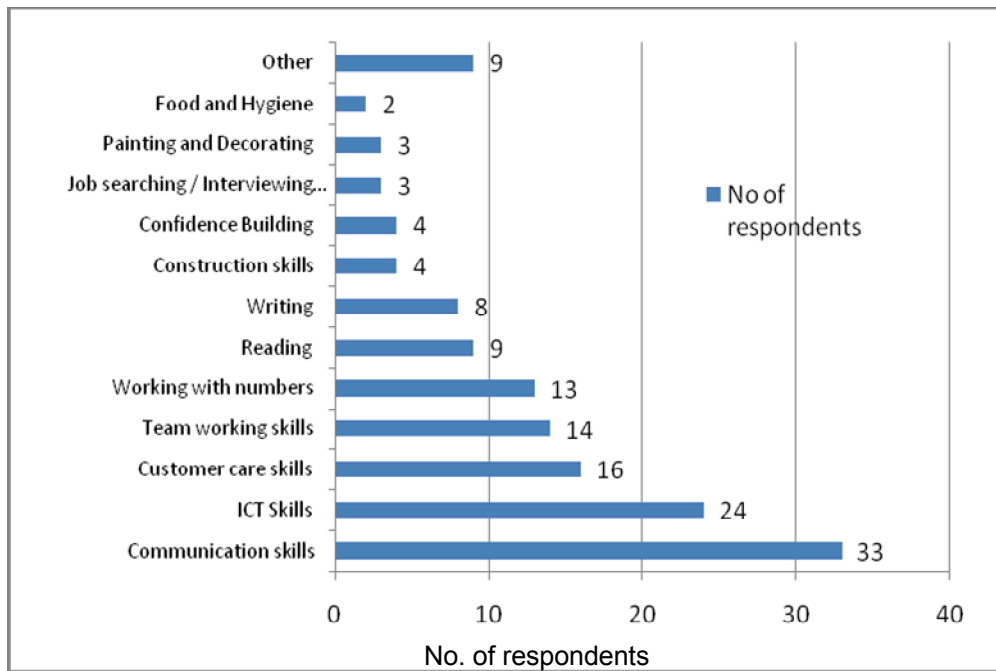
Issues Discussed

4.14 It would appear that the majority of surveyed respondents discussed a range of issues during their interview(s) with their adviser:

- 98% (or 119 respondents) discussed the type of work they would like to do in the future;
- 95% (or 116 respondents) discussed their own skills and qualifications;
- 91% (or 111 respondents) discussed the type of work they had done in the past. This proportion was slightly lower (at 81%) amongst customers supported by North East Careers Company – possibly given the younger profile of this cohort which did not have any previous work experience to discuss;
- 90% (or 110 respondents) discussed the skills areas that they would want to develop in order to get a job. This proportion was slightly lower (at 71% or 20 of the 28 customers) amongst the Cardiff and Vale cohort;
- 86% (or 110 respondents) discussed possible training or learning opportunities.

4.15 Respondents who stated that they had discussed the skills areas that they would want to develop in order to get a job were asked to identify these skills. The most popular skills that were identified as important ones to develop were communication skills, followed by ICT skills and customer care skills (see Figure 6). Some also cited specific sector related skills such as construction and food hygiene. Basic skills featured quite low in importance.

Figure 6: Skills that were identified as important ones to develop



Base=122 respondents. Respondents could select multiple responses.

SkillChecklive

4.16 The majority of surveyed respondents (74% or 90 respondents) stated that they, or their adviser, had worked through a questionnaire on the computer during their interview. 15 respondents (or 12%) stated that they had not done so whilst the remaining 17 respondents (13%) could not remember. The proportion of surveyed respondents who stated that they had worked through a computer questionnaire was lower in Mid Glamorgan and Powys (at 33% or 6 of 18 respondents) and at Cardiff and the Vale (at 54% or 15 of 28 respondents). The proportion was much higher in the two Career Company areas of West and North East Wales.

4.17 Surveyed respondents who had worked through a computer questionnaire were asked whether it had identified suggested jobs for them. A total of 84% (76 respondents) agreed, 7% (six respondents) disagreed and a few (9% or 8 respondents) could not remember.

4.18 Most of the surveyed respondents who had received a computer generated list of potential jobs thought that the jobs suggested were either very suitable (9 respondents or 13%) or fairly suitable (41

respondents or 60%) which would seem to contrast somewhat with the perceived utility of this part of the tool from an adviser perspective. However just over a quarter (18 respondents or 26%) did not think that the jobs suggested were suitable for them.

The Skills Action Plan

4.19 A total of 57% of those surveyed (or 70 respondents) stated that they had received a written Skills Action Plan following the interview with their adviser whilst 34% (or 41 respondents) said they had not. A further 11 respondents (9%) said they did not know. This compares with a quarter (25%) of clients saying that they did not recall having received a Careers Wales Moving Forward Plan in the 2010 Careers Wales Adults Survey.⁸²

4.20 Interestingly, the database of all customers provided by the participating Careers Wales Companies contained information relating to the Skills Action Plan on 61 of the surveyed respondents which showed that 43 of them (70%) had received a Skills Action Plan and 18 (30%) had not. A further 60 customers had no information in this respect. This suggests that recollection of receiving Skills Action Plans may be lower than the actual proportion.

4.21 The number of surveyed respondents who reported having received a written Skills Action Plan varied significantly across the six Careers Wales Companies. The rate was at its highest in the North West at 93% and North East at 74% and lowest in Mid Glamorgan/Powys at 17% and Cardiff and the Vale at 29%.

4.22 The Skills Action Plans which were provided covered a range of issues:

- 87% (or 61 respondents) noted that it covered the type of work they would like to do in the future;

⁸² The equivalent figure for 2009 was 31%. Ibid. Page 16.

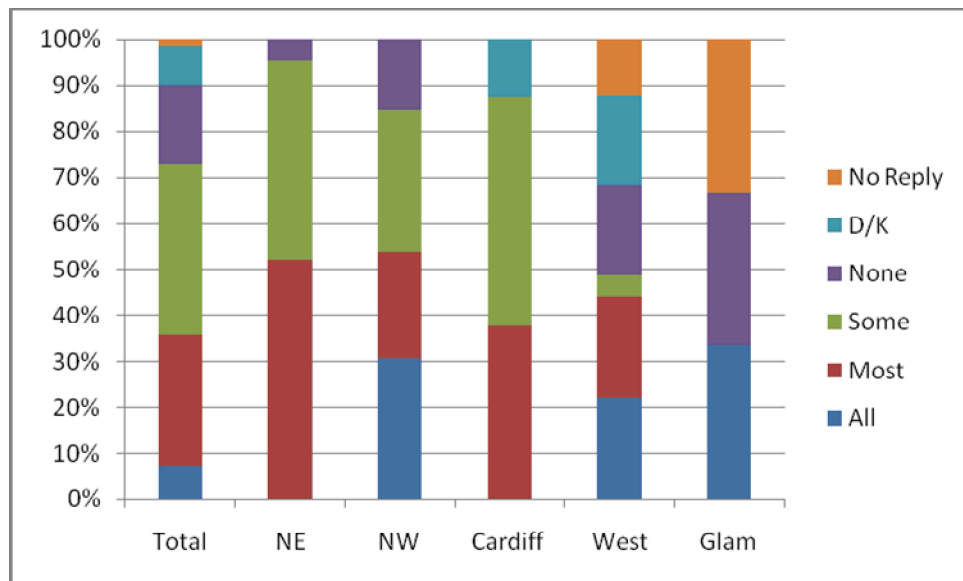
- 84% (or 59 respondents) noted that it covered the skills areas that they would want to develop in order to get a job;
- 81% (or 57 respondents) noted that it provided an assessment of their own skills and qualifications;
- 80% (or 56 respondents) noted that it covered possible training or learning opportunities.

4.23 It seems that the majority of surveyed respondents who thought that they had received a Skills Action Plan (73% or 51 of 70 respondents) had been able to implement at least some of the agreed action points provided in their Plan (compared to 40% in the Careers Wales Adult KPI Survey, 2010⁸³) but of these, only five respondents (7%) had managed to implement all of them (compared to 20% in the 2010 Careers Wales Adults Survey⁸⁴). When looking at the breakdown by each Career Company area, there is a stark difference between the actions carried out by customers (see Figure 7), although care must be taken given the relatively low number of responses for some of these areas (particularly Mid Glamorgan and Powys). This is in contrast somewhat to the more consistent pattern shown in terms of actions carried out from Careers Wales Moving Forward Plans in the Careers Wales 2010 Adult Survey, though it should be borne in mind that the actions in the SHC Action Plan are more employment oriented and therefore arguably more challenging to implement.

⁸³ Ibid. Page 16.

⁸⁴ Ibid. Page 16.

Figure 7: Implementation of Skills Action Plan by surveyed respondents



Base=70 Respondents

4.24 Twelve respondents had been unable to carry out any aspect of their Skills Action Plan⁸⁵. Seven of these respondents stated that they managed to secure a job before being able to implement the actions and as one respondent noted 'I got a job and didn't have to make any reference to it'. The remaining respondents provided other, more negative reasons for not having actioned points in their Plan including limiting health, lack of confidence and disinterest: 'not looked at the action plan – not sure what it contains'.

4.25 The majority of surveyed respondents who had received a written Skills Action Plan had found it either very useful (26 respondents or 31%) or fairly useful (30 respondents or 43%). Four respondents did not think the Action Plan had been of much use and the remaining ten did not know.

4.26 Several respondents noted that it had been useful to have the discussion with the adviser documented on paper as this could be used as a reference point afterwards. For example 'the written format and a

⁸⁵ Six respondents said they did not know whether they had actioned any of the points in their Skills Action Plan and one did not respond to this question.

to do list was extremely useful and easy to work from' and 'everything I needed to know was written down' including in one case 'contact details'. Some respondents referred to the practical nature of the Action Plan, for example:

- 'It had points to help me what to say at interviews and how to present myself';
- 'The Skills Action Plan helped me make up my CV and now I can refer to it when filling in application forms';
- 'I've now got a written goal to work on'.

Employment Outcomes

4.27 It was encouraging to find that the majority of surveyed respondents (107 or 88%) had applied for a job since their interview with the Careers Wales Adviser. This compares with 55% having made a job application in the Careers Wales 2010 Adults Survey, though it should be noted of course that a lower proportion of the Careers Wales customers generally (i.e. the non SHC cohort) were unemployed.

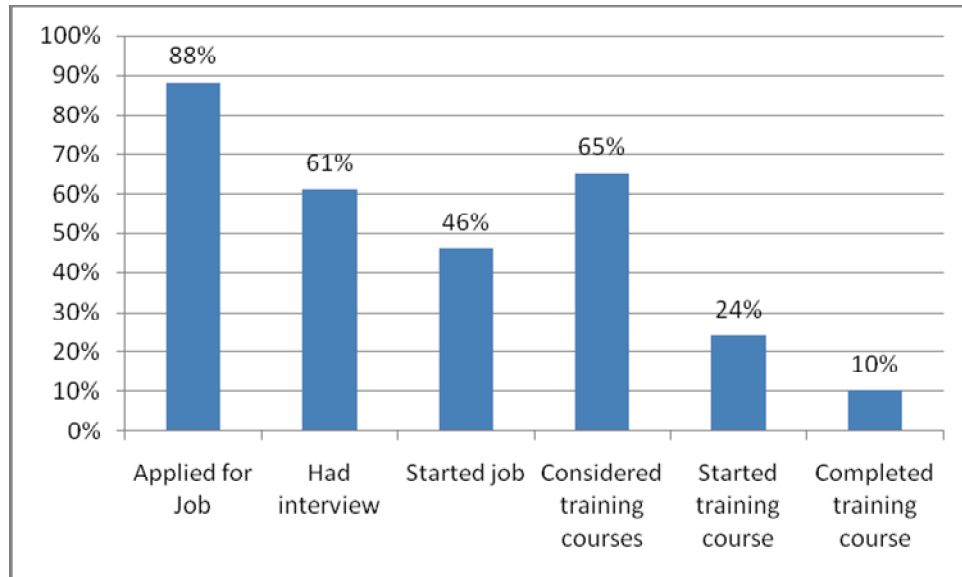
4.28 A lower proportion had managed to secure a job interview (74 respondents or 61%), though this is still substantially higher than the 39% who said that they had been to a job interview in the 2010 Careers Wales Adults Survey, though again it needs to be noted in this context that fewer of the non SHC Careers Wales customers were unemployed.

4.29 It was encouraging to find that a decent proportion had then actually started a new job (56 respondents or 46%) as shown in Figure 8 below. (This compares with 39% of all clients having started a new job in the 2010 Careers Wales Adults Survey).

4.30 The proportion of respondents who had started a new job was higher in the two regions covered by North East and Cardiff and the Vale Career Companies at 61% (19 respondents) and 57% (16 respondents)

respectively where the age profile of supported customers was predominantly younger.

Figure 8: Progress made by surveyed respondents since receiving support



Base=122 Respondents

4.31 The work status of surveyed respondents at the time of the survey was as follows:

- 47% (57 respondents) were unemployed;
- 42% (51 respondents) were in paid employment – of these 30 respondents were in full time and 21 in part time employment;
- 2% (3 respondents) had secured an offer of work and were about to start a new job;
- 6% (7 respondents) were engaged in learning (three at Higher Education level, three at Further Education level and one at a private training course);
- Less than 1% each (i.e. one respondent) had taken retirement or was on long term sickness benefits;
- Less than 2% (i.e. two respondents) did not respond to this question.

4.32 Surveyed respondents who had been supported by Careers Wales North East were much more likely to be employed at the time of survey

(with 16 of the 31 or 52% in work at the time) followed by those in the Cardiff and Vale region (at 43% or 12 of 28 respondents). Respondents from the North West region were the least likely to be in work at the time of the survey (with only four of the 14 interviewed or 29% in work at the time of the survey). This is perhaps a little disappointing given that these customers would have only been unemployed for a relatively short period of time and were arguably therefore not as disengaged from the labour market.

- 4.33 It would appear that those who were in employment at the time of our survey had received on average a greater number of advisory sessions than those who were still unemployed. For example just under half of those currently unemployed (26 respondents or 46%) had received only one advisory session compared with a third of those in employment (32% or 16 respondents).
- 4.34 Interestingly, having a Skills Action Plan in place did not appear to have any effect upon the employment status of surveyed respondents as 43% (or 30 respondents) who had received a written Skills Action Plan were in employment at the time of survey compared with a very similar proportion at 41% (or 29 respondents) of those who were unemployed.
- 4.35 Encouragingly, the majority of respondents who were working at the time of our survey were in the same job as the one they had first gained after receiving support from their adviser (at 81% or 38 respondents). Respondents supported by Careers Wales North East were the least likely to be in the same job (at 69% or 11 of 16 respondents).
- 4.36 Seven respondents had started a new job since receiving support from an adviser but were no longer in work. Five of them had been on fixed term contracts, one had resigned and the remaining respondent had failed to secure enough trade for their business (self-employed). Five of

these respondents had been in work for between one and two months whilst two had been in work for between two and six months.

Training and Learning Outcomes

- 4.37 In terms of progress made with training opportunities, a significant proportion (65% or 79 respondents) had considered possible training courses but only 24% (29 respondents) had actually started a course (compared with 21% who had actually started a course in the 2010 Careers Wales Adults Survey), suggesting that the end goal for respondents was much more focused on employment rather than training. Respondents supported in the North East region were much more likely to have considered and started training courses whilst those from the West region were the least likely to have considered or started a training course.
- 4.38 Less than half of those respondents who had started a training course had completed it (i.e. 12 of the 29 respondents, or 10% of the overall surveyed sample). However this is possibly not unexpected given the fact that most respondents would only have received support during the last 12 months. Indeed, when the 17 respondents who had started a training course but had not completed it were asked the reason for this, a significant number (10 respondents) stated that they were still attending the course. Two gave different reasons – one had accepted a place on a course due to start in September 2011 and the other had attended a course where the centre delivering the training had closed down.
- 4.39 Of the 29 respondents who had started a training course since receiving their SHC, a third (35% or 10 respondents) had enrolled on a Further Education course; a quarter (24% or 7 respondents) had enrolled on a Higher Education course, a fifth (21% or 6 respondents) with Work Based Training Providers and the remaining fifth (21% or 6 respondents) with another type of provider. All but one of the Further Education providers selected by the surveyed respondents were close to their

home and included Deeside College, Barry College, Neath Port Talbot College and Fforestfach College. Similarly all but one of the Higher Education providers selected by surveyed respondents were based in Wales.

4.40 The training courses undertaken covered a wide range of areas with some of the most popular courses covering construction related training, ICT, business and administration, bodyguard/protection training and some higher education degrees in various subjects. Where respondents knew the level of qualification of their course the majority stated that it would lead to either an NVQ Level 2 or equivalent qualification (five respondents) or a vocational or work-related qualification (five respondents). Two respondents noted that the training would lead to an NVQ Level 3 or equivalent qualification, a further two led to a Degree and one to an NVQ Level 4 or 5.

4.41 It was encouraging to find that over three quarters of those who had started a training course (79% or 23 of 29 respondents) noted that the training course had been identified as part of the interview with their adviser.

4.42 Some 49 respondents stated that they had considered possible training courses during their SHC interview but had not taking up any training courses at the time of the survey. The main reasons for not doing so were as follows :

- No suitable courses were available (cited by 11 respondents);
- The respondent had secured a job (cited by 11 respondents);
- Courses were not available at convenient time or location (cited by six respondents);
- The course had not yet started (cited by six respondents);
- Personal circumstances (cited by four respondents);

- Respondent could not see the value of attending training (cited by three respondents).

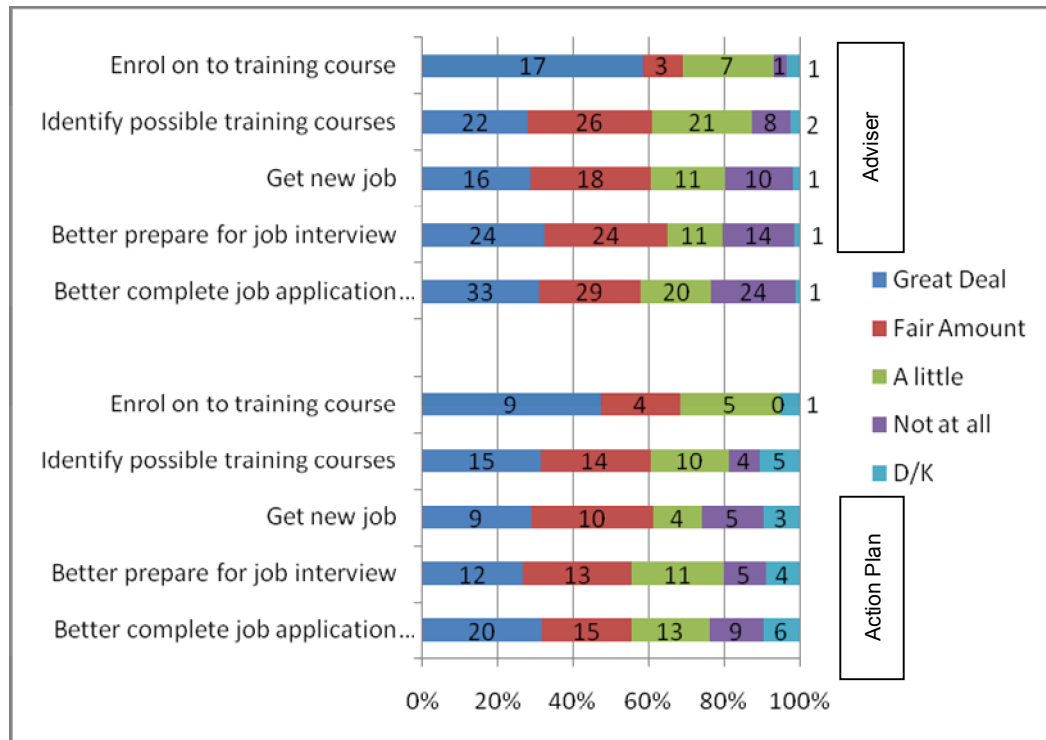
Other reasons cited by no more than one respondent each which included awaiting further information on courses, lack of funding, not being accepted onto a course, reluctance to enrol on a vocational course because of the necessity to do 'written work' and having failed to find the training venue.

Attribution of Support

4.43 Figure 9 (below) shows the responses of the SHC customers we surveyed when asked about the extent to which the interview with their adviser and/or their Skills Action Plan had contributed towards employment or training outcomes. Overall, the information in Figure 9 suggests that:

- Overall, attribution levels are reasonably good with at least 50% of respondents saying that the adviser support and/or Skills Action Plan had in their opinion either helped a great deal or a fair amount in each of the categories;
- The strongest attribution relates to (the relatively small number of) customers enrolling on courses, (around 70% of customers said that the adviser and the Action Plan had helped a fair amount or a great deal);
- On the key measure of the extent to which the support had helped them get a job, just over 60% of the respondents that had secured a job said that the adviser and the Skills Action Plan had helped a fair amount or a great deal.

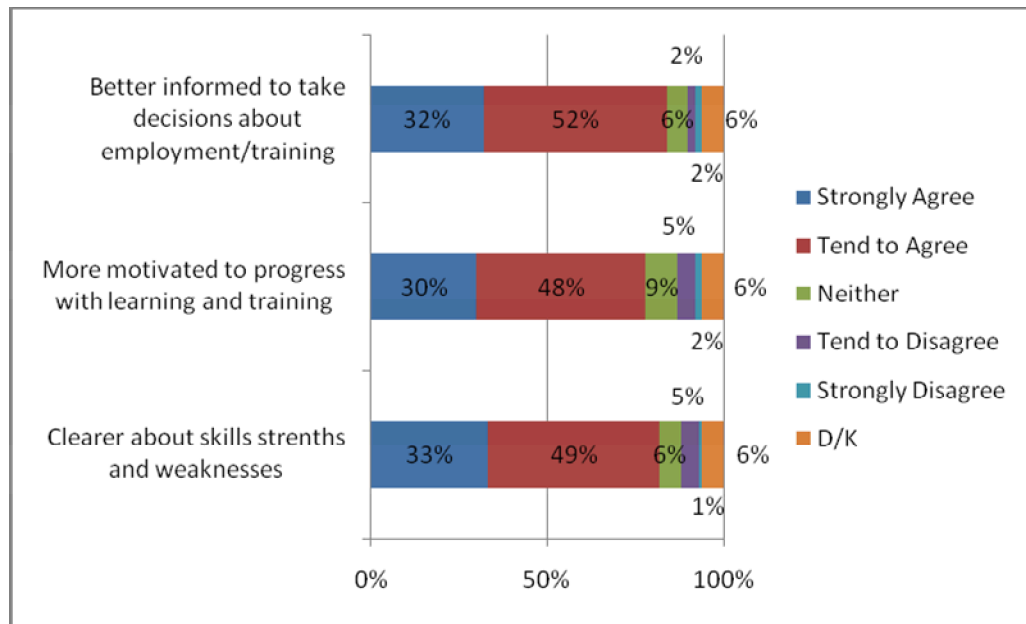
Figure 9 Extent to which interview with adviser and Skills Action Plan helped with progress



The Customer Experience

4.44 The majority of the surveyed respondents thought that the interview with the SHC adviser and/or Skills Action Plan had been beneficial to them in terms of three key areas – becoming clearer about their own skills strengths and weaknesses, becoming more motivated to progress with learning and training and being better informed to take decisions about their employment and training choices (see Figure 10).

Figure 10: Value of SHC Interview and/or Action Plan



Base=122 Respondents

4.45 Just over half of the surveyed sample of customers (54% or 66 respondents) had been able to either partially or fully obtain the skills and qualifications identified by their adviser, with respondents from the Careers Wales North East area more likely to state this (at 90% or 28 of 31 respondents) than others. A third (34% or 41 respondents) had not been able to obtain the skills and qualifications at all⁸⁶ and respondents from the Cardiff and Vale and Mid Glamorgan regions were much more likely to fall into this category.

4.46 Overall, a much lower proportion of surveyed customers (41% or 50 respondents) had been able to progress into the type of employment identified by their adviser and just under half (49% or 60 respondents) had not been able to progress at all into the employment identified by their Adviser. Respondents from the Careers Wales West region were much more likely to fall into this category (with 80% or 24 of the 30 respondents having been unable to progress into the employment identified by the adviser).

⁸⁶ The remaining 15 did not know or did not respond to this question.

4.47 The majority of surveyed respondents at 92% had found the interview with their SHC adviser useful, with 76 respondents or 62% saying it was very useful and 37 respondents or 30% saying it was fairly useful. This compares with 89% of clients saying that they found their guidance interview with a Careers Wales adviser useful in the March 2010 Careers Wales Adult survey⁸⁷, with 52% saying that they found the guidance interview with their Careers Wales adviser very useful and 37% saying that they found it fairly useful.

4.48 Respondents who had received support from the North West, followed by West Wales, were the most complimentary about the usefulness of the support received whilst respondents from the Cardiff and Vale were the least complimentary. This broadly mirrors the findings of the 2010 Careers Wales Adult Survey.⁸⁸

4.49 The aspects that were deemed most useful about the interview included:

- It provided a boost in respondents' confidence with comments such as 'the interview gave me a boost in confidence. I had applied for jobs in the past and been knocked back several times'; 'After long discussions she changed my way of thinking. I gained more confidence by having meetings with her and she pointed me in the right direction and arranged an interview for me with the volunteering centre'; and 'because I had been unemployed for a long time, she pointed out what particular skills I had (which I didn't think were relevant) and after long discussions I had more confidence';
- Practical support in terms of searching and identifying appropriate employment opportunities, such as 'Showed me what jobs were available in my area - didn't realise there were so many';

⁸⁷ Page 12.

⁸⁸ See Figure 3.2.3 on Page 13 of the 2010 Careers Wales Adult Survey report.

- Practical support with regards to developing interviewing skills and improving CVs, such as 'helped with preparing for interviews and CV's' and 'given a lot of useful advice regarding CV's and covering letters to send out to potential employers';
- Practical advice on study opportunities and courses which many stated that they were not aware of before, such as 'gave me advice on study opportunities and courses I could do at home which I wasn't aware I could do';
- An assessment of customers' strengths and weaknesses, such as 'I didn't think I had enough qualifications to apply for some jobs - the interview helped me see that I had good skills and qualifications and that I could apply for these jobs' and 'the interview helped me identify my strengths and weaknesses and informed me of the jobs that were available';
- Help to better plan for the future such as providing a 'finger in the right direction - given me lots of good specific advice'.

4.50 The aspects that were deemed to be of least use about the interview included the following, which were mentioned by no more than two respondents in each case:

- The lack of suitable jobs suggested during the interview: 'the suggested jobs weren't suitable at all and I felt that I had come to a dead end' and 'the job list was very vague and not specific enough';
- The lack of any added value from attending the interview: 'It was just the same as any other interview I've had and there's no jobs around anyway' and 'it was too general – not specific enough';
- The lack of information the customer wanted on aspects such as training or courses;
- The lack of specific advice on improving CVs: 'I asked him to help with my CV but I've still not received it'.

Feedback from offenders at Prescoed Prison

- 4.51 Views were also gathered from eight offenders⁸⁹ in Prescoed Prison who had received a SHC from a Careers Wales adviser available within the prison. The offenders were serving (and coming to the end of) various sentences. Most said they had undertaken a lot of education and training in prison (e.g. Prince's Trust Awards). Similarly, most said that it was 'important to leave here with something'. However, while some held qualifications at level 3 and above, few had obtained qualifications prior to prison. Around 16 offenders in total were thought to have received support via the SHC Pilot.
- 4.52 The interviews with offenders revealed universally high levels of motivation; all wanted to work when they left prison and five of the eight also said they would consider training options. The offenders were planning to undertake training/work in a range of sectors/occupations including information technology, management, construction (mentioned by three of the eight), factory work and self-employment.
- 4.53 All respondents were happy about the number and duration of sessions they had received from the Careers Wales adviser under the SHC Pilot. Four offenders reported that they had met with the IES Pilot Careers Adviser two or three times. Two had attended just the one session. Four expected to meet with the SHC Careers Wales adviser again, prior to release. Sessions were reported to vary between 30 minutes and 1.5 hours – all but one of the respondents implied this was appropriate (one respondent undertaking a 1 hour session said 'it was a bit boring'). All reported that accessing / arranging sessions was easy.
- 4.54 Seven of the eight offenders had undertaken the SHC diagnostic (one offender used the term 'Skill Check', another 'diagnostic'). All offenders were very positive about the rationale for the SHC Pilot ('it's a very good idea'; 'it's something I think that should be there'). The Careers Wales adviser was considered 'friendly' and 'always willing to answer your

⁸⁹ All eight offenders were males.

questions'. One respondent said that 'they could do with more Careers advisers'.

4.55 In terms of outcomes most of the prisoners we interviewed said they had found the session with the Careers Wales Adviser useful. In particular, the prisoners suggested that the sessions had been useful in providing advice and information on possible career options after their release:

- 'Opened my eyes to my options';
- 'Gave me good advice about what jobs I can apply for with a criminal record';
- 'It's good that it's not just any job. It's based on what you want. At my time of life I don't want to work outside I want to work inside. So there's not point just coming up with any job. [The Careers Wales adviser] helped me find jobs in-doors that I could apply for';
- 'I have IT qualifications and I was told I should try for something in IT rather than what I was thinking of doing, because this would give me the best chance of getting a job';
- 'She [SHC Careers Wales adviser] told me I needed a plan B just in case my first choice does not come off. That makes sense, I think'.

4.56 Several of the prisoners also said that the session with the Careers Wales Adviser had been useful in helping them to develop their CV:

- 'I had some help with my CV: how you can put words down that show you in a better way', also 'how to write the CV so that you put the information you have to but no more – so you don't get discriminated against for having been to jail', and 'my CV was too long – next time we are going to cut it down';

4.57 One prisoner also suggested that the session with the Careers Wales Adviser had been useful in terms of identifying possible training courses:

- ‘She [The Careers Wales Careers Adviser] had contacts for the training [courses] and contacts for agencies’.

4.58 Of the seven reporting a positive experience, five said they were more confident about finding work or training as a result of the advice they had received ‘after 12 years inside you don’t have much confidence in finding a job’. The two that reported no increase in confidence were ‘already confident’. ‘Improved motivation’ and ‘direction’ were also benefits cited by three offenders (‘before I spoke to [the Careers Wales adviser] I wasn’t interested. I’ve had a few meetings with her and now I do have plans for when I leave’).

4.59 One offender stated that the SHC ‘was not appropriate because I want to start my own businesses, to become self-employed, so I didn’t really need this help’.

4.60 Three offenders explained that IES support was also ‘good because things like this help people to not re-offend’. However, they also underlined the importance of skills and employment support needing to be one element in a wider resettlement support package, a view supported by previous research⁹⁰. One prisoner commented that If accommodation is not in place [on release] then things like training or finding a job are not relevant – the advice we get [from Careers Wales] will only be as good as the whole support [package] we get’.

⁹⁰ The resettlement of short-term prisoners: an evaluation of seven Pathfinders. Occasional policy paper No 8 for the Home Office. September 2003. Lewis S et al.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

- 5.1 There is little doubt that the SHC pilots in Wales have made a valuable and positive contribution in moving the IES agenda forward. In particular, the pilots have improved the level of understanding and joint working relationships between Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales. The fact that this has been achieved at no extra cost to the taxpayer in Wales is very positive.
- 5.2 Importantly, the SHC pilots in Wales have also begun to tackle entrenched cultural and organisational divides. The challenge now will be to build on this positive start and to ensure that joint working becomes much more systematic in nature and less dependent on the goodwill of a few committed individuals.
- 5.3 Co-location has been an important cornerstone of the SHC pilots in Wales and it is clear that despite set-up difficulties, co-location offers substantial benefits, not least in terms of improved referral mechanisms and ultimately better attendance rates by, and outcomes for customers.
- 5.4 It is clear, however, that for the SHC process to be a success, all stakeholders need to be clear about what the aims and objectives are. This has not been the case to date, and it is clear that similar issues have been faced in the IES trials in England.
- 5.5 The overall coherence and focus of the SHC pilots in Wales could have been better, as could the way in which the aims were communicated to front line staff. Having a project manager to provide leadership in this respect throughout the pilot period would undoubtedly have helped.
- 5.6 There are a number of key areas in which joint working between Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales can be improved. Chief amongst

these is the opportunity to better integrate ICT systems, so that advisers have better information about customers in 'real time' and so that duplication (for example in the diagnostic process) is reduced and eventually cut out completely. Achieving more integrated ICT systems will not be straightforward to achieve, but getting it right offers the potential for a real step change in terms of joint working practices and a realistic prospect of efficiency savings. It should therefore be seen as a worthwhile investment by all concerned.

- 5.7 While the Skillcheck Live diagnostic tool received a lukewarm reception amongst Careers Wales advisers, customers on the whole were reasonably positive about it. In a similar vein, the Skills Action Plans have added value to the pilot process, despite their use to close the information loop between Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus having been patchy. More will have to be done to ensure that plans are disseminated in a more systemic and reliable way to the right people (particularly Jobcentre Plus Advisers) at the right time so that their value to the customer is maximised.
- 5.8 The outcomes from the SHC pilots in relation to customer progression are positive and compare reasonably well with the 2010 Careers Wales Adult Survey. Overall feedback and satisfaction levels relating to the information, advice and guidance received is also reasonably positive and customers have valued the advice and support that they received. The employment and training outcomes are encouraging and again compare reasonably well to the findings of the 2010 Careers Wales Adult Survey in terms of numbers applying for jobs, attending interviews, securing employment and starting training courses. Attribution levels (according to the view of the customers themselves) are also reasonably positive which suggests that the SHC process has added some value to the overall customer journey.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

5.9 The Welsh Government, Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales should be ambitious and build on the strengths and momentum of the SHC pilots by moving to a roll out phase. In doing so, the project management board needs to communicate the strategic aims and objectives simply and clearly to Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales managers and advisers. This should involve preparation of more detailed operational guidance and agreeing targets for each participating Jobcentre Plus location. The precise nature of the targets should be discussed and agreed by the project board, but should include as a minimum a referral (output) target as well as job and training (outcome) targets for each location . On-going management information should be produced and progress reported against these targets to the project management board.

Recommendation 2

5.10 The roll out phase should aim to consolidate the co-location arrangements in the pilot areas but should also aim to increase the number of participating Jobcentre Plus sites (preferably in between four and six new areas of Wales) within the first year. The project management board should consider at the earliest possible opportunity the selection of the new sites for co-location that will participate in the roll-out phase.

Recommendation 3

5.11 Progress in relation to the roll out phase and the new co-location sites should be reviewed towards the end of 2012 with a view to full mainstreaming of SHCs in Wales from early 2013 onwards.

Recommendation 4

5.12 The roll out phase should be based on a specific targeting strategy aimed at referring those who would most benefit from the SHC process. The targeting strategy should be based on supporting individuals (regardless of age) that are out of work and disengaged from the labour market (i.e. have been out of the labour market for some considerable time) and who would, (on the basis of the assessment of Jobcentre Plus advisers), benefit from information and advice on their skills, coupled with well-informed⁹¹ guidance on local employment opportunities.

Recommendation 5

5.13 While highly challenging, the roll out phase should continue to be funded from within the existing resources of Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales. As such, managers in both organisations will need to ensure that advisory staff are fully committed to the concept of implementing the SHC process and are equipped to take it forward as a core and integral part of their work rather than seeing it as a bolt-on, voluntary project activity. This will involve an on-going approach to ensure continued momentum and commitment. A 'one off' briefing at the start of the process will not be sufficient to achieve meaningful change.

Recommendation 6

5.14 The Welsh Government should explore all possible avenues to resource and appoint, (possibly via offering a secondment opportunity) a project manager to oversee the roll out phase. The project manager should lead work to communicate the strategic aims and objectives of the roll out phase to key operational stakeholders (in Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales), including preparation and dissemination of guidance on an on-going basis. The project manager should also oversee the monitoring of the pilots including analysis of customer related data for regular reporting to the project management board.

⁹¹ Well informed by robust local labour market intelligence.

Recommendation 7

5.15 The project manager, working closely with colleagues in the Welsh Government Social Research Division should develop and agree an evaluation plan for the SHC roll-out phase. This should include provision for the commissioning of independent research, the specification for which should include formative and summative elements considering implementation processes and the impact of the roll-out phase on customer outcomes. The evaluation specification should also include a comparative analysis of outcomes generated by the SHC 'route' against the mainstream Jobcentre Plus route that non SHC customers take so that the counterfactual can be explored in greater detail. Jobcentre Plus officials need to put the necessary management information processes in place to ensure that appropriate control group data is captured at the outset of the roll-out phase.

Recommendation 8

5.16 The Skills Action Plan should be taken forward and refined. This needs to include establishing more systemic processes of ensuring that the Action Plans are distributed in a timely and efficient manner to Jobcentre Plus advisers so that they can be actively used to help inform their work with customers in the roll out phase.

Recommendation 9

5.17 Jobcentre Plus should, as a member of the project management board, seek to urgently explore ways in which it can do more to share data and information via its ICT systems with Careers Wales advisers involved in the roll out phase. Enabling better data sharing should be seen as an absolute priority in progressing the integration agenda and full advantage should be taken in ensuring the compatibility of Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales systems under the new unitary structure of Careers Wales. This should also be seen as a key priority in terms of tackling the issue of non-attendance by customers.

Recommendation 10

5.18 There would seem to be some logic in exploring the feasibility of a single, ICT based skills/careers diagnostic tool that can be deployed as one part of a well-rounded information, advice and guidance process and which takes account of local labour market intelligence. This should be taken forward and, if there is agreement that such a tool is needed, it should be procured as part of the new unitary structure for Careers Wales to ensure maximum cost efficiency. The resource should then be made available for use as soon as possible in the SHC roll out phase. In the meantime, the SkillChecklive tool should be retained, though its limitations in advising clients with appropriate and realistic career options need to be recognised.

Recommendation 11

5.19 While the main focus of taking the SHC forward in Wales should be co-location, resources permitting, the Welsh Government, in conjunction with Careers Wales should give careful consideration to the potential roll out of the prison based SHC pilot. This should include continuation of the work at Prescoed Prison. Key considerations in moving forward with the roll out of the SHC prison model will be to explore its appropriateness in other prisons and to take account of other forms of support being offered in those locations as part of resettlement programmes. If taken forward, the partners involved should ensure that the SHC is deployed as one part of wider resettlement support packages (e.g. including accommodation support) during the latter stages of prison sentences so that the advice remains relevant when newly released ex-offenders begin to look for work.

Annex 1

List of Interviewees

Name	Organisation
Nick McNeill	DfES
Bon Westcott	DfES
Paul Watts	DfES
Andrew Heylin	Jobcentre Plus Wales
Judith Morgan	DfES (Retired)
Stacey Hamilton	Careers Wales West
Sue Abbott	Careers Wales West
Michelle Austin	Careers Wales West
Sacha Davies	Careers Wales Cardiff and Vale
Mike Davies	Careers Wales Cardiff and Vale
Helen Malvisi	Careers Wales Cardiff and Vale
Mark Owen	Careers Wales Mid Glamorgan and Powys
Emlyn Evans	Careers Wales North West
Stephen Williams	Careers Wales North West
Fiona Morris	Careers Wales North West
Paty Wysom	Careers Wales Gwent
Suzanne Metcalfe	Careers Wales North East
Ian McDermott	Careers Wales North East
Wendy Sigsworth	Careers Wales North East
Rebecca Vincent	Jobcentre Plus (Caerphilly)
Jim Conway	Jobcentre Plus (Cardiff)
Bob Nash	Jobcentre Plus (Cardiff)
Linda Ellis	Jobcentre Plus (Shotton)
Caroline Westacott	Jobcentre Plus (Morrison)

**A Review of the Development and
Implementation of the Skills Health
Check Pilots in Wales**

A Review of the Development and Implementation of the Skills Health Check Pilots in Wales

Introduction

This paper provides an initial review of the Skills Health Check Pilot (SHC) activity that has taken place in the six pilot areas across Wales in the period Jan 2010 – May 2010. The review was designed to be undertaken as a paper-based exercise, with more detailed fieldwork activity forming the basis of a second phase evaluation which will take place in early 2011. This paper therefore draws on information gathered by the Skills Health Check management group including meeting notes, monthly log sheets, management information data and other relevant material.

This review has been undertaken by members of the CELLS Research Branch of the Social Research Division within the Welsh Assembly Government. It was agreed that this phase of the evaluation of the SHC pilots would as far as was practicable within the given resources focus on formative issues including:

1. Preparation for and communication about the pilots
2. The referral process, including signposting to and feedback from the process.
3. Use and appropriateness of the SHC diagnostic tool
4. Customer awareness of and satisfaction with the pilots
5. Identification of barriers to the success of the pilots
6. Staff views on collaborative working
7. Examples of best practice from the pilots

An independent, externally commissioned evaluation of the impact of the SHC pilots, including an assessment of the customer experience is planned for early 2011.

The review has followed approaches taken in both the Scottish Executive and the DWP evaluations and make use of both qualitative and, albeit to a lesser extent quantitative data. Management Information was to be gathered by the organisations taking part in the pilots to enable analysis of the processes being undertaken (See Appendix 1). For qualitative data a monthly log sheet (see Appendix 2) was to be completed by the representatives of each participating organisation asking for details of what was working well, what could be improved and asking for general observations and examples of best practice.

Background

The 2006 Leitch Review of Skills recommended the development and introduction of a more integrated system of employment and skills. Following this the Westminster government produced a command paper *Opportunity, Employment and Progression: making skills work* which set out an ambition to develop an Integrated Employment and Skills (IES) service which would provide all Jobcentre Plus customers with the opportunity to be referred the new adult advancement and careers service for a Skills Health Check form 201/11 onwards⁹². In England IES trials were launched in September 2008 and designed to test the key elements of the proposed service in advance of any national roll out.

A similar IES approach was developed in Scotland but the IES trials in Scotland did not form part of the wider DWP pilot and in a policy context the Scottish Government's skills strategy "Skills for Scotland" sets out the intention to integrate employment and skills "to facilitate the journey individuals make from long-term unemployment to sustained employment and in-work progression" (Chapter 2 pg 23). More broadly, Skills for Scotland had a focus on skills utilisation, unlike the English Leitch review which was more focussed on raising skill levels generally. This approach was not felt to be adequate in a country which already has a highly qualified workforce. The IES trials in Scotland began in February 2009.

In Wales the process has been slightly different and for a number of reasons has taken longer to reach the pilot stage. The Welsh Assembly Government Employability Team began work on the pilots in September 2008 with DWP, Jobcentre Plus Wales and Careers Wales aiming to progress the integration of employment and skills by developing a pilot delivery model. The intention of this joint work was to develop a model that met both the needs of the UK Government's Welfare Reform aspirations and the WAG Skills that Work for Wales commitment to implementing the Careers Ladders Model. The pilot process in Wales was initially to be supported by DWP and was to be a substantial pilot in the manner of the English trials. The funding from DWP did not materialise for the pilots in Wales and so a smaller scale pilot approach driven by the Assembly Government, with support from Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and Careers Wales (CW) was agreed upon.

⁹² Opportunity, Employment and Progression: making skills work, November 2007
<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/making-skills-work.pdf>

Preparation for and communication about the pilots

Development & Roll Out of the Pilot Models

The above three organisations agreed to pilot a Skills Health Check process for an initial period of six months. The pilots tested three approaches:

1. Office based pilots in four locations identified by Jobcentre Plus District Managers; Shotton, Caerphilly, Morryston and Alexandra House, Cardiff.
2. Redundancy support pilot in North West Wales
3. Offender/Ex-offender pilot in Gwent (involving the Prescoed Resettlement Team)

The original purpose of the pilots in Wales was;

- To test the effectiveness of a skills health check tool and process
- To share personal data between Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales by informed consent.
- To provide a seamless service⁹³

Feedback from officers responsible for the development and management of the pilots suggests that since the project inception the purpose of the pilots has been refined so that they are now setting out to:

- Test joined up approaches by Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales aimed at helping individuals into sustainable work more quickly by identifying and addressing any skills need.
- Test the effectiveness of a skills health check tool and process

As part of the pilot process a new diagnostic tool – the Skillchecklive tool was procured under licence for use in the new system to identify and highlight specific skill needs and also identify potential appropriate careers for the participants.

The Jobcentre Plus and prison pilots commenced during the period January to March 2010 with the redundancy pilot in North West Wales delayed further because no suitable large scale redundancy to test the model was identified.

Overarching guidelines were developed for the pilot models which allowed for a certain amount of flexibility in the light of local differences in resources and circumstances.

The Pilot Models

⁹³ Guidance SHC Wales Pilot Process JCP updated 27 01

Jobcentre Plus Office Pilots in Caerphilly, Cardiff, Murrison and Shotton

Within these pilots a two stage approach would be used;

Stage 1 – Signposting

All new JSA customers would be issued with a signposting leaflet to inform them of the on-line, website and face to face services that Careers Wales offers that could support their return to work and general career development. The leaflet would be issued either at the new jobseekers interview at the start of the claim or at the Back to Work sessions – generally around 6 - 8 weeks.

The rationale being that some new customers are able to self help, and would therefore be expected to take the initiative and use Careers Wales services without formal referral.

Stage 2 – Caseloading

Those customers identified as likely to benefit from a SHC, but unlikely to self refer would be encouraged to accept a direct referral facilitated by their Jobcentre Plus adviser and to be placed on a joint JCP/CW caseload with the aim of advisers in both organisations being able to offer an enhanced service of support. This would involve advisers from both organisations in consultation and collaboration via informal contact and /or case conferencing to monitor individual progress and provide a seamless service.

Redundancy Pilot Model

This pilot model aimed to target employees likely to be affected by specific redundancies (to be identified as the occasion arose) and was designed to identify individual skills development and training needs that could be supported by ReAct provision.

Careers Wales advisers would raise awareness of the general Careers Wales services available to support those under threat of redundancy at onsite group sessions at employers premises. Those eligible for the enhanced skills health check process would be offered follow-up appointments to undertake these and to develop a Skills Action Plan that could support applications for Re-Act funding, if appropriate, and could also be shared with Jobcentre Plus staff in the event that the individual becomes a Jobseeker and needs support to progress into further employment.

Prison Pilot model

This pilot was designed to test the Skills Health Check process and assessment tool with pre-release offenders in prison with a view to improving the identification of individual skills and skills development needs relating to employability. The resulting Skills Action Plan would be passed to Jobcentre Plus when the individual signs on as a jobseeker in order to support the transition back into employment. The prison resettlement team would support the pilot by working closely with Careers Wales to identify and refer eligible individuals to the SHC process. The JCP prison liaison Manager would play an important role in ensuring that action plans produced as part of the SHC process would be passed on to relevant Jobcentre offices.

Customer eligibility

All pilots were to operate within the same eligibility criteria for identifying suitable individuals for referral to the skills health check process i.e. those:

- a) Having basic, generic employment, or specific occupational skills development needs preventing them from achieving their immediate job goal.

OR

- b) Needing to understand their skills and options in order to focus on suitable occupational areas and possible skills development for future sustainable employment.

It was anticipated that these were likely to include those with a poor employment history or having out of date skills or lacking in the confidence or motivation to take action to address these needs themselves. Individual participation in the caseload activity was to be voluntary.

Processes were put in place for customer referral from JCP to CW and vice versa and informed consent would be obtained to assist data sharing between organisations.

Localised operation models – JCP office based pilots

At the outset of the SHC pilot process some success factors were drawn up for what would provide a seamless service in Wales. Among these were 'Agreement on the potential elements of the customer journey...' and also 'Agreed protocols for signposting and referral'⁹⁴.

Guidance for those implementing the pilots was developed and, in practice, the office based pilots followed the overall guidelines issued but some local differences did emerge. In some cases these differences were in areas not covered by the guidance which were to be 'local agreements' in others differences came about as a result of officers recognising the benefits that a different approach could bring.

For example, there were differences surrounding the stage at which the signposting leaflet was issued to the potential client and also by whom it was supplied. Three of the four JCP pilot areas had the JCP adviser issuing the leaflet at the initial claim stage with one of these also issuing the leaflets at the 13 week referral stage. The remaining office issued the leaflet at the 6 week Back to Work session interview.

Similarly, there were differences amongst the office based pilots on the age groups targeted for support through the SHC pilots. Initially three of the four Jobcentre pilot districts were targeting their support at 18-24 year old JSA claimants as this group had been identified as a priority whilst the fourth (as well as the redundancy and prison pilots) left it open to adults of all ages.

⁹⁴ IES critical success factors

The IES trial in England identified that “The policy intention is that a model of co-location occurs in all JCP offices in the IES trials where feasible” and this was also a consideration for the pilots in Wales. As far as was practically possible the pilots sought to co-locate those delivering the service. Indeed, one pilot area reported the need for co-location as one of the areas in which they believed their pilot needed to improve if it was to increase the number of those participating in the SHC.

As the pilots have progressed during the initial evaluation phase, steps have been made towards co-location with two of the four office based pilots carrying out interviews at JCP premises (Cardiff and Shotton). A further office based pilot is working to facilitate co-location (Morrison) while the other had been unable to implement this approach at this point in time (Caerphilly).

Whilst different practices were expected due to local working arrangements and requirements, the scale of the office based pilots makes it difficult to assess whether these localised differences have had any major impact on the take up of the service.

Engagement with Practitioners

From the outset efforts have been made to engage with representatives of the agencies involved in delivering the pilots to gain their input into their developing. At a launch meeting in November 2009 as well as being introduced to the aim and objectives of the pilots the participants were asked to highlight resourcing issues, the support needed to roll out the pilots as well as suggest the range of management information that the pilots should collect for monitoring purposes.

A further event was held in late March 2010 to gain feedback on the roll out of the pilots to date. Although the pilots were operating in all areas at this time there were comments made that indicate that participants may not have fully understood the pilot process or the core aims that they were working towards.

Asked what they hoped to get from the meeting some delegates responded:

“I now know how the pilots are operating – more clarity needed”

“Clarification of MI”

“An understanding of how other pilots are working”

It did provide an opportunity to network, however it seemed that many questions, issues remain unanswered”

“A clear direction/understanding for moving forward”

“Clarification of objectives”

This suggests that prior to the workshop there was some uncertainty surrounding the pilot objectives and the role that the pilot areas were to play,

and a common theme around a lack of firm understanding of the process seems to be emerging at this stage.

The referral process

Take up of the Service

MI provided by JCP shows that between February and June 2010 over 2,000 leaflets signposting clients to the SHC service have been handed out in the office based pilot areas. In this same period the MI provided by JCP shows that over 1,600 customers from the target group were seen across all office based pilots with 273 customers being referred onto Careers Wales for support and 106 customers accepting that support. The number of customers who subsequently completed an Action Plan is 73 at the end of May 2010. At this point in the pilot it is difficult to assess the impact of this stage of activity in the SHC process in terms of caseloading and closer working arrangements between JCP and Careers Wales. This will be explored more fully in the second phase of the evaluation.

MI provided by Careers Wales indicates that to the end of June the Prescoed Prison Pilot has had 15 take up the services of the SHC pilot while 17 from the redundancy pilot had taken up the service.

Client characteristics

Based on the MI provided the breakdown of client characteristics as a percentage of those referred to the SHC pilots are as follows:

Male clients: 60%

Female clients: 40%

Age range: 16-18 - 11%

19-24 - 68%

25-35 - 8%

36-49 - 9%

50-59 - 4%

60+ - 0%

Qualification levels of those referred to the service are mixed, the data provided suggests that just under a fifth have no qualifications while just over a third are qualified to NVQ Level 2 or equivalent.

The percentage of customers who declared a disability stood at 17%.

Referrals

All office pilot areas and the Prescoed Prison Pilot highlight a perceived low level of referrals and, in the case of the office based pilots, take up of the service as an area of concern and one which requires improvement. All areas mentioned both the low volume of the use of the service as well as a high proportion of participants failing to attend various stages of the intervention as both a strain on resources and on staff involved in the process.

While all office pilot areas stated that they viewed take up as low it is not stated clearly at the outset what the anticipated and expected take up of the service was likely to be. While a figure of 20 caseload clients was made explicit the time frame for this caseload was not stated and also the total use to be made of the service was not discussed making an evaluation of the success or otherwise of the service difficult.

Coupled with this the statistics show a high attrition rate from the point at which clients were initially seen by JCP to those who eventually received a Skills Health Check Action Plan, from 1738 to 73 which represents 4.2% of the initial cohort. However, not all of the initial cohort were identified as requiring the additional support offered by the SHC. When comparing the figures between those initially referred, 273, and those receiving an Action Plan the achievement rate sits at 27%.

However, each of the office based pilots report that the volume of clients that have been seen are disappointing and they were expecting more use to be made of the new process:

“The weekly numbers of referrals could be significantly improved” – April and May log sheet, Office pilot

“JCP advisers are still having problems in getting the client group to engage with the SHC process” – May log sheet, Office pilot

“More constant flow of referrals to pilot (is required) to ensure adviser is fully utilised and sufficient evidence is gained for evaluation purposes” – April log sheet, Prison pilot

Feedback from the log sheets indicate that the referral numbers could be improved and offer some suggestion as to why some clients do not take up the offer of support:

“JCP advisers feel that some of the clients in this group have recently been involved with CW at school and that some find it difficult to see the benefit of advice and guidance now that they have left school” – May log sheet, Office pilot

“Some customers are changing their mind about the SHC when I ring them to make the appointment saying that the only want help with a CV” – May log sheet, Office pilot

“The main barrier is actually getting through to the referrals in the first place mobile phone calls are rarely answered and many have no answer phone facility” – April log sheet, Office pilot

“As a company we have invested much in terms of resources to the project...advisers have identified potential clients who would benefit from the SHC process but unfortunately despite following up these

clients many have been very reluctant to actively engage with the process and are very non committal” – April log sheet, Redundancy pilot

Impact of low referral numbers

A log sheet return from May provided firm evidence of the problems caused by low referral rates as it had been necessary to discontinue the co-location of the careers adviser at the job centre due to a lack of referrals and a need to optimise the advisers time.

“having given co-location 8 weeks to bed in we have to withdraw this service due to lack of referrals” – May log sheet, Office pilot

Along with a low number of referrals concerns were raised about the number of clients who were not attending their appointments once referred onto the programme. Information provided by Careers Wales suggests that to the end of June 2010 just over 90 appointments were missed.

This had impacts on resource allocation and also raises questions as to why clients were not attending. Unfortunately this review is unable to investigate the underlying reasons for this should the programme be rolled out more fully. It may be worth noting however that in the pilot process participation in the programme was entirely voluntary and so clients were under no obligation to continue any contact with the programme even if they had agreed to take part.

“Due to the fact there is a high did not attend (DNA) rate there are concerns regarding CW resource allocation” – May log sheet, Office pilot

“For those that agree to a referral non attendance is still an issue” – May log sheet, Office pilot

“The number of failed appointments is an area that continues to be a challenge” – April log sheet, Office pilot

Efforts to improve service delivery

Some suggestions on measures to combat low take up figures were made across the pilot areas:

“The new leaflets advertising SHC have not been put to use as yet. This will help the non-attendance of customers” – May log sheet, Office pilot

“In response to the limited take up and attendance on the SHC pilot it has been agreed that we will change the parameters of the pilot – we will still work with 18-24 year olds but the offer of SHC will now be made at the 13 week interview not the initial interview as this

should allow the JCP advisers more time to discuss the process and sell the benefits” – May log sheet, Office pilot

While some log sheets asked for advisers to be scheduled to be allocated more time to work on the pilots it is difficult to gauge whether this would be of benefit given the concerns raised about non-attendance and may result in more adviser time being lost or wasted due to cancelled appointments.

Use and appropriateness of the SHC diagnostic tool

As part of the Skills Health Check process there is an option for clients to undergo an online skills assessment. The pilots have been asked to test the Skillcheck tool current skills and skills gaps. Of the 106 people who took part in the SHC process, 50 were taken through the Skillcheck assessment.

There were some conflicting views on the effectiveness of the Skillcheck diagnostic tool and the relevance attached to the results produced.

“Feedback from CW adviser and clients that the tool is not enhancing the process. The list of suggested occupations is limited and often inappropriate to the client. This has made the resulting guidance process very difficult and as a result adviser has stopped using the tool” – May log sheet, Office pilot

Compare this with a response received regarding a 30 year old client made redundant;

“Skillcheck live produced her key skills as being; working with others, problem solving and I.T....one career idea was accountant.... and ReAct funding enabled her to take up an accounting technician course” – April log sheet, Office pilot

Similarly another area noted that clients using the tool appreciated the guidance that emerged from it:

“Skill Check Live is proving to be very popular with clients. They learn about their skills and follow this through by looking at the job suggestions as this opens new ideas for them to aspire to. One of the most useful sections is where their skills are matched to the complete listing of jobs...this gives the clients a massive resource whereby they can match their skills to every job listed” – June log sheet, Office pilot

Given that the tool is one of the central elements of the SHC process it is an area that the second phase evaluation will explore further as part of assessing the overall customer experience. The views of both advisers and customers should be sought to examine this.

Customer awareness of and satisfaction with the pilots

Customer satisfaction with the experience is only mentioned by two of the pilot areas although this should be tempered with the fact that this was not one of the areas where feedback was explicitly requested. This may be a further area of research to be considered in the more in depth second phase evaluation that is planned. While the overwhelming view of those presented in the log sheets is a positive level of customer satisfaction it should be remembered that the views in the log sheets are subjective views of the staff involved in the trials and may not fully reflect the true customer experience.

“Customers going through the pilot seem to be happy with the additional support they are receiving and the way that the SHC is being delivered by CW” – May log sheet, Office Pilot

“Overall we are receiving positive feedback from those who do use the SHC...a young person said it was ‘awesome’ and older people with few qualifications feels it gives them a boost to their self esteem” – May log sheet, Office Pilot

“Clients that do engage with the pilot enjoy Skillcheck it is popular and is seen as a positive outcome” – April log sheet, Office Pilot

The second phase of the pilot evaluation will explore the customer experience in more detail and examine satisfaction levels.

Identification of barriers to the success of the pilots

As highlighted throughout this evaluation report, there are a number of key issues that have impacted upon how the pilot activity has been introduced and how the process has been rolled out across the pilot locations. Anecdotal evidence from log sheets have suggested that the following have been areas that have impeded the introduction of the pilots across Wales:

- Perceived lack of clarity around the aims and objectives of the pilot
- Insufficient communication around the procedures and selection criteria to follow
- Poor take up and low referral numbers, and the subsequent impact on resources set aside to run the pilots

Staff views on collaborative working

Closer Working Relationships and Improved Communication

The overwhelming theme to emerge from the responses is that those taking part in the process noticed that the working relationship between Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales is growing and developing. In some areas this is expanding beyond the remit of the SHC process. There were differing

degrees of agreement on the state of the relationship but it was a common theme that the two organisations were working together more effectively:

“a closer working relationship is being cultivated between JCP and Careers Wales to offer support to mutual clients” – April log sheet, Office Pilot

“the liaison between the CW advisor and the JC staff is now quite good” – April log sheet, Office Pilot

“close communication between Careers Wales and Job Centre Plus advisers” – May log sheet, Office Pilot

“The working relationship between (adviser) and the JC staff continues to work very well” – May log sheet, Office Pilot

“Communications between resettlement officers and other agencies based in prison improving” – May log sheet – Prison Pilot

“communication between CW and JCP is excellent” – May log sheet, Office Pilot

The improvement in working relationship and improved communication between the two organisations was mentioned in each of the pilot areas and in both of the months where log sheets were completed. This positive outcome shows that the advisory staff working on the project in both organisations have shown a willingness to co-operate with each other.

There still exists however some room for improvement and two of the responses under ‘what needs to be better’ stated;

“Improved communication between CW adviser and JCP advisers” – May log sheet – Office Pilot

“Communication with local management team of JCP” – April log sheet – Redundancy Pilot

Recognition of the benefits of Co-location

Recognition of the positive impact that co-location has had on the pilot is also one of the themes that emerges strongly in the log sheet data.

“Careers Wales Adviser now based in Jobcentre once a week” – May log sheet, Office Pilot

“Co-location features strongly in the pilot – this was established a long time before the pilot commenced and is already successful in general” – May log sheet, Office Pilot

“Co-location – after a stumbling start this is now planned out with a room booked” – April Log sheet, Office Pilot

In the one office pilot area where co-location was not possible it was felt that being able to do this would lead to more positive outcomes and a strategy to cope with this was being developed. As highlighted previously the co-location of services was regarded as one of the priorities for a successful approach and this certainly seems to be an issue that is regarded as an important factor in achieving success as pointed out in the feedback provided in the log sheets.

“Co-location would increase the number of clients who would benefit from a skills health check” – April log sheet – Office Pilot

The importance placed on co-location by those actively delivering the service, should be a key consideration for any expanded roll out of the service.

Examples of best practice from the pilots

The early stages of the rollout of the pilot have not produced any sufficiently robust examples of best practice. It is anticipated this will be further explored in the second phase of the evaluation.

Concluding Remarks

A number of key themes have emerged from the formative review of the pilot process.

Feedback suggests that involvement in the pilots has been constructive in terms of promoting a greater degree of co-operation between the main delivery partners⁹⁵. This was reported in all of the areas where the pilots took place and was accompanied by a view that communication between the delivery partners had also improved during the pilot. Although this review did not seek to investigate the issue of customer satisfaction, the limited anecdotal evidence provided does suggest that clients using the service found it beneficial to them. Customer satisfaction of all aspects of the Skills Health Check process is an area that the evaluation may wish to focus on.

Although no overall estimates of the anticipated client uptake across the life of the pilot were made at the outset, it can be seen that the organisations delivering the pilots felt that there could or should have been more clients making use of the service. The perceived low number of referrals and the reported high level of missed appointments is an area which the evaluation may wish to investigate in more detail.

This review of the first months of the SHC pilots suggests that should a wider roll out be undertaken there is a need to ensure that adequate preparation and training is available for those delivering the pilots. Feedback from those involved in the pilot indicates that some participants were unclear as to the aim of the SHC pilot and what was expected of them until very late in the day. This suggests that more training would have been beneficial. This could also address the issue of a lack of consistency in the management information provided as monitoring would need to be improved for a larger scale programme.

⁹⁵ Similar results were also reported at the prison pilot between the probation service and Careers Wales

Appendix 1

WALES SKILLS HEALTH CHECK PILOTS

Monthly reporting requirements

Jobcentre Pilots

Management Information data

Data	Provided by	Source of data
No. of new claims during the month	JCP	Performance team
No. of ⁹⁶ new JCP customers seen by JCP nominated staff	JCP	JCP Advisers personal records, collated if more than one adviser
No. of new customers referred to Careers Wales for a Skills Health Check	JCP	LMS opportunity or JCP Advisers personal records, collated if more than one adviser
Take up of JCP referrals to CW for SHC	CW	SHC client records – collation of total referrals minus DNAs
Breakdown of referrals to SHC by Stage of claim	JCP	JCP Advisers personal records, collated if more than one adviser
	CW	SHC client records
Take up of Careers Wales services by JCP customers signposted by pilot Jobcentres <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Face to face○ On-line○ Telephone	CW CWA LCA line	CW offices (adult client database) Careerswales.com records CW Learning and Careers Advice Line – specific SHC records

⁹⁶ “New” Jobcentre Plus customers refers to those who sign on during the period of the IES pilot. They may be referred to a skills health check on day 1 of their claim or at any subsequent claim stage when it seems appropriate. Detail of the claim stage will be recorded on the SC1 referral form.

Number and type of Careers Wales interventions per pilot case load customer. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Information ○ Diagnostic interview ○ SHC diag. tool ○ Guidance interview ○ Skills Action Plans produced ○ Total face-to-face time spent with CW adviser ○ Number of missed appointments 	CW	SHC client records
Number of interventions that JCP advisers have with SHC pilot customers	JCP	JCP Advisers personal records, collated if more than one adviser
No. of re-referrals of pilot customers who had left Careers Adviser case load	JCP	JCP Advisers personal records, collated if more than one adviser
Characteristics of customers included in the pilot: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Age ○ Ethnicity ○ Health problems ○ Length of unemployment ○ Highest existing qualification 	CW	SHC client records
	⁹⁷ CW JCP	IES client records for those who attend for an SHC Required for those who are not referred successfully to CW. JCP Advisers personal records, collated if more than one adviser

NB

Additional qualitative information will be requested from key staff in both JCP and Careers Wales at agreed stages during the pilot to inform the overall evaluation. Topics to be explored are likely to include:

- Role in and understanding of the pilot
- Understanding of partner organisations services
- Seamlessness of service to customers – referral processes between JCP & CW partners
- Skills Health Check process and Skills Action Plan
- Appropriateness of recommended onward referrals, barriers to take up
- Working together

⁹⁷ Careers Wales client records will only include those successful referrals. The characteristics of those customers who do not attend will need to be captured by JCP advisers, if possible

- Joint progression achieved in improving the process for partners and customers

Customer feedback on the overall support offered by the pilot will be sought as part of a tracking exercise designed to gather evidence on the hard outcomes in terms of skills developed and employment gained.

Information on Careers Wales activity to be sent to Paul Watts
Paul.Watts@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Information on Jobcentre Plus activity to be sent to Christine Davies.
IES.wales@jobcentreplus.gsi.gov.uk

Appendix 2

WALES SKILLS HEALTH CHECK PILOTS

Log sheet

Please use the template below to comment on the following aspects of your pilot activity:

- Communication
- Referral
- Delivery
- System barriers

Skills Health Check Process pilot area:

What is working well?

What needs to be better?

Overall **Communication** is:

Excellent Good Could be improved Poor

Overall **Referrals** are:

Excellent Good Could be improved Poor

Overall **Delivery** is:

Excellent Good Could be improved Poor

Additional comments:

(e.g. Barriers encountered/overcome, good news stories etc.)

Date: