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# The ESF Participants Survey: Qualitative Fieldwork Findings December 2019

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# The ESF Participants Survey: Qualitative Fieldwork Findings

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## Contents

Glossary.....	2
Executive Summary .....	3
1. Introduction .....	10
2. Methodology.....	12
3. Findings – Priority Axis 1 operations .....	18
4. Findings – Priority Axis 3 operations .....	36
5. Conclusions.....	60
Annex I: Qualitative interview discussion guide .....	63
Annex II: Focus group discussion guide .....	76

## List of tables

Table 2.1: Profile of individuals who contributed to ESF qualitative fieldwork .....	15
Table 3.1: What PA1 interviewees were doing when they got involved with the project .....	21
Table 3.2: What PA1 interviewees had been mostly doing since leaving school .....	21
Table 3.3: PA1 interviewees highest level of qualification on joining project.....	22
Table 3.4: Reasons why PA1 interviewees were not looking for work .....	23
Table 3.5: Main factors which made it difficult for PA1 interviewees to find work .....	24

## **Glossary**

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Definition</b>
ACE	Achieving Change through Employment
AA	Alcoholics Anonymous
ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
ASDAN	Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CAD	Computer Aided Design
CSCS	Construction Skills Certification Scheme
COSHH	Control of Substances Hazardous to Health
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service
EESW	Engineering Education Scheme Wales
ESF	European Social Fund
ESI	European Structural Investment
F1	Formula 1
FE	Further Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
HWW	Healthy Working Wales
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
MPC	Military Preparation College
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
SQA	Scottish Qualification Authority
PA	Priority Axis
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
WEFO	Welsh European Funding Office
WJEC	Welsh Joint Education Committee
WCVA	Wales Council for Voluntary Action

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

OB3 Research, in conjunction with IFF Research, was commissioned by the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) to undertake the European Social Fund (ESF) Participants Survey for 2015-2018. This survey builds upon [ESF Leavers Surveys 2007-2013](#) conducted by the same research team during the previous European Structural Investment (ESI) programme period.

One aspect of the research aimed to gather the views of participants who might be under-represented within the large-scale survey, notably young people and vulnerable adults. This report presents the findings of qualitative fieldwork undertaken with 129 individuals supported by eight operations across Priority Axis 1: Tackling Poverty through Sustainable Employment (PA1) and Priority Axis 3: Youth Employment (PA3) of the current ESI programme.

### Method

The method adopted for the research involved attending an initial meeting with the client, developing a discussion guide, selecting eight ESF operations to be included within the research and liaising with them and their respective delivery partners to secure the contribution of participants and leavers. It also involved securing the contribution of 129 individuals either via one to one interviews (52 individuals) or focus group discussions (77 individuals). Overall, 96 individuals had been supported by five Priority Axis 3 operations and 33 had been supported by three Priority Axis 1 operations. The operations and number of contributors from each were:

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*Priority Axis 1: 33 individuals*

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- *Healthy Working Wales Out of Work Service: 13 individuals*
  - *Active Inclusion: 12 individuals*
  - *Achieving Change through Employment (ACE): 8 individuals*
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*Priority Axis 3: 96 individuals*

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- *STEM Cymru 2: 35 individuals*
  - *Active Inclusion Youth: 6 individuals*
  - *Cynnydd: 22 individuals*
  - *TRAC 11 -24: 22 individuals*
  - *GO Wales Achieve through Work Experience: 11 individuals*
-

## **Profile of individuals**

Just over half of those who contributed to the research were women (70 individuals) and just under half were men (59 individuals). Proportions were similar across both PA1 and PA3. The age of interviewees ranged from 20 to 63 year old across PA1 operations and between 12 and 23 year old for PA3 operations. The majority of all contributors described their ethnic background as either Welsh or other British. A third of those interviewed had a long-term illness, health problem or disability.

Awareness that ESF had helped to pay for the provision that they had accessed was higher amongst PA1 (at two-thirds) than PA3 individuals (at one third), suggesting that either operations targeting young people have effectively embedded intervention into educational provision already being accessed by this cohort or that young people are generally less aware of how provision has been funded.

## **Priority Axis 1 individuals**

Many PA1 individuals described how they led very chaotic lives prior to getting involved in their respective ESF provision, with mental health and substance misuse issues common amongst those supported by the HWW Out of Work Service. Individuals supported by the HWW Out of Work Service had struggled to maintain relatively low paid, temporary jobs in the past. ACE individuals reported wide-ranging backgrounds, with some who had been very well educated in their home country but were unable to work in the UK due to their asylum-seeking status or not having previous employment experience in place. By comparison, Active Inclusion clients had a stronger employment background.

The majority were looking for work when they came into contact with the project although many, particularly HWW Out of Work Service and ACE individuals, were not ready to find and sustain employment at the time. Health problems and addictions were cited as factors which restricted many from finding work, together with personal issues such as lack of confidence and low self-esteem.

Each operation recruited participants via different routes, with referrals from other supporting organisations playing an important role in each case. Individuals' motivation for getting involved included wanting to cope with personal issues, to break out of negative behaviours and to address their barriers to employment. Barriers to finding work included mental health issues, anger issues, anxiety, depression, addiction, isolation, poor social

skills, weak language skills, financial problems, housing issues as well as adjusting to a new country and culture.

The provision accessed by individuals varied and depended upon the approach taken by the project and its providers as well as the needs of individuals. However, all individuals had accessed support from a dedicated mentor or adviser and some had attended training and volunteering opportunities. Overall, individuals were very satisfied with the support accessed and the perceived strengths of the provision included tailoring the approach according to client need, interaction with other clients and the quality of, and approach taken by, the advisor.

Of the eight interviewed leavers, five had secured work and were employed at the time of interview, one had gained work but was not working at the time of interview and the other two were volunteering. Whilst the majority of current participants were unemployed and still looking for work, three were either working or about to start work, six were volunteering and one was about to return to education.

A number of current participants recognised that they were still 'not ready for work' and anticipated that they would continue with either training or volunteering work for the time being. The perceived benefits of participating included a range of personal benefits and behavioural changes including improved routine, improved relationship with others, increased social interactions, improved self-esteem and confidence. Several individuals had improved or gained new skills as a result of participating.

For individuals in work, the project was thought to have made a very important contribution to their ability to secure employment. The vast majority of individuals thought that the project had made a fundamental contribution to their personal lives and circumstances, with several examples of participants having improved their life situation as a result of intervention.

### **Priority Axis 3 individuals**

The majority of PA3 individuals who were interviewed or participated in focus group discussions were still in, or nearing the end of, their education or training (89 individuals). Of these, 66 individuals were at school, 12 were at college and 11 were at university. A few (seven individuals) were unemployed and looking for work and all six Active Inclusion Youth participants fell into this category.

#### *STEM Cymru*

All STEM Cymru focus group attendees were in mainstream secondary school settings, either in Years 7, 9 or 12. They got involved in order to extend their extra-curriculum

experiences, to be involved in a fun activity and to gain an experience in the field of technology and engineering.

STEM Cymru participants were very satisfied with their experience of the project and reported gaining new scientific and generic skills as well as an insight into industry as a result. Some suggested that the project had been more demanding than anticipated in terms of time commitment.

Their involvement in the project had served to strengthen pupils' interest in engineering and broadened their horizons about potential careers in the sector. Older, female pupils who had been involved with the F1 project in particular acknowledged that the experience had made them consider a career within STEM.

### *Cynnydd and TRAC*

Most Cynnydd and TRAC pupils reported negative experiences of school and younger pupils reported having struggled to make the transition from primary to secondary school. A handful of school pupils had been permanently excluded and a number were in danger of being excluded. All pupils were dealing with a wide range of personal and behaviour issues which impacted on their ability to attend and engage in education. These issues included anxiety, stress, low confidence, bullying, paranoia, anger, panic attacks, low self-esteem, difficulties associated with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), poor engagement at school and difficulties at home.

Schools and colleges played a key role in informing pupils about Cynnydd and TRAC projects.

Pupils accessed a range of structured activities, group sessions and individual pastoral, emotional support from their Cynnydd or TRAC project worker. They conveyed high levels of satisfaction with the support received and, in most cases, thought that it had made a huge difference to their personal lives and engagement with education. The main strength of the project was identified as the trusting and close relationships which pupils had established with project workers.

The main benefits cited by pupils of being involved with Cynnydd or TRAC included improved behaviour at school, reduced anxiety about attending school, improved attendance and engagement in studies and improved ability to cope with particular situations. Other benefits included improved social interactions with friends and family and being better able to cope with life and as such reported being calmer, more confident, happier and less angry. In the absence of involvement in such a project, a small number

thought that they would have otherwise left school or college whilst several others thought that their attendance would have been poorer.

### *GO Wales Achieve through Work Experience*

Of the 11 GO Wales Achieve through Work Experience interviewees, seven were current participants and four were leavers. They ranged from first to final year undergraduate students. One was a postgraduate student. Nearly all individuals had attended university immediately after leaving school or college and had achieved A level qualifications but lacked any prior work experience. Individuals had come to hear about the project via a range of methods including via e-newsletters, university websites, promotional exhibitions and conversations with tutors and student support staff.

Individuals had accessed a wide range of shadowing and work experiences at host organisations, arranged by the project according to individuals' interests and needs. The main strengths of the project included the opportunity to gain hands-on work experience with an employer organisation and the opportunity to discuss career possibilities with helpful advisors. Some individuals had, however, only accessed the initial work shadowing experience largely due to joining the operation during the final study year and had not had the opportunity to benefit from all work experiences on offer.

The perceived benefits of being involved included improved skills, improved confidence, enhanced CVs and identifying ways of overcoming health and disability related obstacles within the workplace. Most didn't expect their experience would lead directly to any employment opportunities, not least because this was not the overall objective of the project but also because the intervention was quite light-touch.

### *Active Inclusion Youth*

All six Active Inclusion Youth participants were out of work when they got involved with the project. They had left school or college at different points in time, having achieved a mix of qualifications. None had worked previously and were finding it difficult to secure work due to lack of experience, lack of confidence and lack of qualifications. Individuals had primarily come to hear of the project via their Jobcentre. An important motivator for getting involved was to access help to prepare for work and to find work. Individuals accessed personal development support as well as guidance on finding work, such as developing a CV, job searching, applying for work and preparing for interview. Some also accessed training opportunities and volunteering work.

Individuals were very satisfied with the support accessed via the project and the role and approach of project officers was singled out as a key strength. Another important element was the opportunity to interact with others who were experiencing similar issues.

The benefits of being involved with the project included personal gains such as feeling more positive about the future, having a renewed sense of direction and greater clarity about what they wanted to do in the future and how to go about it. In the absence of support, individuals thought that their situations would not have improved or changed much. Individuals who had either found work or were returning to education thought that the project had made a tangible difference to this outcome.

### *Current situation and the future*

There was minimal change in the employment or educational circumstances of individuals supported across the five operations, not least as the majority were still in school, further or higher education. Active Inclusion Youth participants were the most likely to cite changes to their employment or training circumstances: three were planning on returning to education and one had found employment.

Some STEM Cymru pupils who contributed to the research were now considering a career in engineering and their involvement in the project had contributed towards their decisions. A number of pupils involved with the F1 element of STEM Cymru anticipated or would welcome being involved with the project again in the future.

Most Cynnydd and TRAC pupils envisaged continuing in school until the end of Year 11 to obtain GCSE qualifications although in some cases pupils were planning on studying alternative or a narrower range of qualifications. Most of those in Year 11 had plans to attend further education in the forthcoming academic year to study various courses. Most FE pupils planned on returning the following academic year either to progress to study a course at the next level or to complete their current two-year course.

As most GO Wales participants were undergraduate students, they anticipated returning to university to complete their degree in the first instance. Overall, eight of the 11 individuals were either planning or considering studying a postgraduate course, be that a PGCE, Masters or PhD qualification in the future.

### **Conclusions**

The qualitative fieldwork has generated some specific and detailed insights into the experiences of a small number of participants who have engaged with eight ESF operations targeted at supporting young people and vulnerable groups. However, there are several

methodological considerations which restrict the value and utility of the data and evidence gathered. They relate to comparability with ESF quantitative survey data, the limited size of the sample interviewed relative to the scale of operations and difficulties associated with analysing qualitative findings at a programme level. They raise questions about the value of repeating this type of research exercise again and we recommend that consideration be given to alternative methods, such as using funded operation's evaluation evidence, in the future.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 OB3 Research, in conjunction with IFF Research, was commissioned by the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) to undertake the European Social Fund (ESF) Participants Survey for 2015-2018. This survey builds upon previous [ESF Leavers Surveys 2007-2013](#) conducted by the same research team during the previous European Structural Investment (ESI) programme period. These aimed to assess the effectiveness of labour market interventions and involved telephone surveys with people who had left an ESF project as well as in-depth qualitative interviews with leavers and current participants.
- 1.2 The objective of the 2015-2018 ESF Participant Survey, which ran for three years, was to evaluate the outcomes achieved by participants who had either started or left provision at any time between 2014 and 2018. It was intended that the ESF Participant Survey would include a small number (circa 400) of survey interviews which would be undertaken on a face to face basis, adopting the ESF Participants Survey questionnaire. It was envisaged that some 100 face to face survey interviews would be conducted on an annual basis, across operations which targeted young people via Priority Axis 3 operations and vulnerable people supported via Priority Axis 1 operations. However, due to a number of reasons, including delays associated with accessing data and the challenges of adopting the same survey questionnaire within face to face settings, the approach was modified.
- 1.3 It was therefore agreed with WEFO that the face to face element of the study would be better utilised as qualitative interviews and focus groups with a smaller cohort of participants. It remained the case that the fieldwork would focus upon those groups who might be under-represented within the large-scale survey, notably young people and operations targeting vulnerable adults.

### Structure of the Report

- 1.4 The remaining report is structured as follows:
- **chapter 2** outlines the methodology adopted in undertaking the qualitative fieldwork
  - **chapter 3** presents the findings of the fieldwork with participants supported by three operations funded via Specific Objective 1, including a profile of those who contributed, their circumstances prior and following intervention,

the nature of support accessed, their views on the service accessed, as well as the difference made by the intervention

- **chapter 4** presents the findings of the fieldwork with young people supported by five Priority Axis 3 operations, adopting a similar structure to that for chapter 3.
- **chapter 5** presents the conclusions which stem from the fieldwork and considers the value and utility of the evidence gathered via this approach.

## 2. Methodology

2.1 The method adopted for the research involved:

- attending an initial meeting with WEFO officials in January 2019 to discuss a work programme for the qualitative fieldwork and setting this out in a work programme document
- developing discussion guides to inform interviews and focus group discussions with current participants and leavers. The individual interview discussion guide included a small number of closed questions which were also used within the quantitative telephone survey in order to allow for data to be compared. The discussion guides are set out at Annex I and II
- selecting and agreeing upon eight ESF operations for inclusion within the qualitative fieldwork
- receiving contact data for the lead delivery organisations responsible for these operations
- liaising with each lead delivery organisation, and where appropriate sub-contracted providers, to discuss the most suitable approach for selecting interviewees and focus group participants. Contributors were recruited in two ways:
  - via opportunistic methods: in these cases, a researcher attended events arranged by operations where there would be an opportunity to interview or facilitate discussion groups with attendees, and
  - via provider selection and recruitment: guidance was provided to each lead delivery organisation and/or sub-contracted providers on the profile of contributors required to ensure that the research captured the views of a cross-section of participants in terms of gender, age, geography and support accessed. In these cases, lead delivery organisations or providers approached a sample of participants and either made arrangements for the research team to meet with them or shared their contact data with the research team to approach directly.
- making the necessary arrangements to interview current participants and leavers: the original intention was to interview a total of 126 individuals, with 80 of these contributing on an individual basis and the remaining individuals contributing across 10 focus group discussions

- securing the contribution of a total of 129 individuals between May and August 2019. Of these:
  - 77 individuals contributed across 19 focus groups
  - 52 individuals contributed in one to one interviews
  - 96 individuals had been supported by Priority Axis 3, and 33 had been supported by Priority Axis 1 operations
- analysing the findings of the fieldwork and drafting this report.

## Summary of ESF operations

2.2 The eight ESF operations which had supported interviewees and focus group attendees were:

### *Priority Axis 1*

- *Healthy Working Wales Out of Work Service*: this project, led by the Welsh Government, provides support to individuals who have substance misuse or mental health problems to enter employment or return to work. Individuals who contributed to this research had been supported by two of the Healthy Working Wales (HWW) Out of Work Service providers operating across East Wales - Cyfle Cymru and the Peer Mentoring Service delivered by Gofal
- *Active Inclusion*: this project is delivered by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action and aims to support economically inactive and long-term unemployed people into work. Individuals who contributed to the research had been supported by two providers - Creating Enterprise and Prime Cymru
- *Achieving Change through Employment (ACE)*: This project provides empowerment and mentoring support to help Black, minority ethnic and migrant people in Wales into training, volunteering and employment. Individuals who contributed to this research had been supported by Change, Grow, Live (previously known as SOVA).

### *Priority Axis 3*

- *STEM Cymru 2*: This project, led by Engineering Education Scheme Wales (EESW) assists young people aged between 11-19 years to study STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and maths) with the objective of helping to improve their qualifications, skills and career prospects. Focus group attendees had been supported by two of the project's five strands - the

Formula 1 (F1) project targeting pupils aged 11 to 19 and the EESW Sixth Form project targeting pupils aged 16 to 17. Focus group attendees were recruited from across seven school settings based in south Wales

- *Cynnydd*: This project provides individually-tailored programmes of support, including training, volunteering opportunities and paid work placements to improve the career prospects of young people aged 11-19 years across south west Wales. Individuals who contributed to this research had been supported across four schools and one FEI setting across the counties of Pembrokeshire, Neath Port Talbot and Swansea
- *TRAC 11 -24*: This project aims to help improve the career and life prospects of young people who are at risk of disengaging and falling out of education and training and is led by Denbighshire County Council on behalf of north Wales local authorities. Individuals who contributed to this research had been supported by six schools and one FEI setting across the counties of Flintshire and Wrexham
- *GO Wales Achieve through Work Experience*: This project, led by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), aims to boost the career prospects of students from disadvantaged backgrounds to improve their longer-term job prospects after they graduate. Individuals who contributed to this research had been supported by four higher education institutions - Aberystwyth University, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, University of South Wales and Bangor University
- *Active Inclusion Youth*: this project, delivered by the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, provides targeted support for young people aged 16 - 24 years old who are furthest from the labour market and have multiple barriers to employment. Individuals who contributed to this research had been supported by two providers - Rewise, based in Swansea, and Siawns Teg, based in Powys.

2.3 The profile of contributors to the research by each ESF operation is set out in Table 2.1. Of the 129 individuals who contributed to the research, 70 were women and 59 were men.

**Table 2.1: Profile of individuals who contributed to ESF qualitative fieldwork**

Code	Area	Specific Objective	Operation	Method	Focus group participants	One to one interviewees	Total participants
80737	EW	1.1	HWW Out of Work Service	Individual interviews	0	13	13
80727	WWV	1.2	Active Inclusion	1 focus group and interviews	3	9	12
80930	WWV	1.2	Achieving Change through Employment (ACE)	1 focus group and interviews	3	5	8
<b>Priority Axis 1 sub-total</b>					<b>6</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>33</b>
80744	EW	3.1	Active Inclusion Youth	2 focus groups and interviews	4	2	6
80833	WWV	3.2	Cynnydd	6 focus groups at 5 schools/FEIs	22	0	22
80753	EW	3.2	TRAC 11-24	2 focus groups and interviews	10	12	22
80884	WWV	3.2	GO Wales Achieve through Work Experience	Individual interviews	0	11	11
80726	WWV	3.3	Stem Cymru	7 focus groups across 7 schools	35	0	35
<b>Priority Axis 3 sub-total</b>					<b>71</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>					<b>77</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>129</b>

Source: OB3 Research

## **Methodological considerations**

- 2.4 In undertaking the research, a number of methodological issues were encountered.
- 2.5 The research team were unable to fulfil the original objective of conducting face to face survey interviews on an annual basis over the study period due to several factors. These included delays in accessing data and challenges associated with adopting the same survey questionnaire with specific cohorts, such as young people and current participants. The qualitative findings have therefore been informed by the views of a smaller sample of contributors and some care should be adopted when interpreting data at individual operation level. Despite this, the findings provide a more detailed insight into the experiences of individual contributors who have been supported by these operations. In addition, the discussion guide was designed to cover the same themes as those set out within the survey questionnaire and included a small number of directly comparable closed questions to allow for data to be compared.
- 2.6 A higher number of Priority Axis 3 participants (96 against a target of 85) and a lower number of Priority Axis 1 participants (33 compared to 45) contributed to the research. It proved easier to recruit a greater number of young people who had been supported via Priority Axis 3 operations via schools and colleges whilst operations funded via Priority Axis 1 provided the research team with fewer contact details for individuals who were prepared to contribute.
- 2.7 A higher number of individuals contributed to the research within focus group settings and a lower number contributed via one to one interviews than envisaged. This was due to the fact that project providers thought that young people (who accounted for a higher number of contributors than anticipated) would be more comfortable contributing via small group discussions in school and FE settings as well as the fact that some sessions were arranged opportunistically (whereby a researcher was invited to meet groups of participants during training or celebratory events). Given that the number of focus group attendees was often very small (circa 2-3 individuals in many cases) it was possible for the research team to gather detailed feedback from each individual about their experiences of the support accessed although data such as demographic profile was not always captured in as much detail.

2.8 In all cases, the research team were reliant on the operations (or their contracted provider) to identify individuals who would be prepared to contribute to the research. This approach was taken in light of as previous experience of undertaking qualitative interviews as part of the ESF Leavers Survey. During these studies, the response rate when recruiting individuals from a representative sample selected at random from operations' databases was low and had to be 'topped up' with a sample identified by operations' staff in all cases. It was also the case that it would have been inappropriate for the research team to have accessed contact data for young people supported via Priority Axis 3 operations, hence there was a reliance upon schools and colleges to recruit and facilitate access to contributors on our behalf.

### **3. Findings – Priority Axis 1 operations**

3.1 This chapter considers the qualitative findings for individuals supported by the three Priority Axis 1 operations: the Healthy Working Wales (HWW) Out of Work Service (13 individuals), Active Inclusion (12 individuals) and Achieving Change through Employment (ACE) (eight individuals). The findings are considered for each project, as appropriate.

3.2 It draws upon the feedback gathered from a total of 33 individuals. Of these, 27 were interviewed individually and six participated within focus group discussions. The majority (25 individuals) were current participants and a minority (eight individuals) were leavers. All focus group contributors were current participants.

#### **Profile of individuals**

3.3 Just over half of all individuals were women (17 in total, 12 interviewees and five focus group attendees) and 16 were men (15 interviewees and one focus group attendee).

3.4 The age of interviewees ranged from 20 to 63. The average age of interviewees was 41.

3.5 The majority of interviewees (21 interviewees) identified themselves as either Welsh or other British whilst two identified themselves as of another white background. A minority (six interviewees) identified themselves as another ethnic group. One focus group was held with three Bangladeshi women.

3.6 Very few individuals spoke Welsh (three interviewees reported that their first language was Welsh). Two-thirds of interviewees (18 interviewees) identified English as their first language whilst six reported another first language. In addition, three of the focus group participants identified another first language (Bangladeshi).

3.7 A third of interviewees (nine interviewees) had a long-term illness, health problem or disability, and in seven cases this was thought to affect the amount or type of work they could undertake.

3.8 Two-thirds (17 interviewees) were aware that ESF had helped to pay for the provision accessed compared to a third (10 interviewees) who were not aware of this.

## Background

### *Healthy Working Wales Out of Work Service*

3.9 Most of the 13 individuals who had been supported by the HWW Out of Work Service described how they led very chaotic lives prior to getting involved with the operation. One such interviewee reported that:

‘I’ve always lived with my mum, I’ve had mental health problems for a while and I’m recovering from addiction, heroin and crack cocaine addiction. I’m in supported living now and waiting for my own council place. I have ADHD<sup>1</sup> and had support from CAMHS<sup>2</sup> when I was in school. I went into refuge at 15 because of my father. At 17 I was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia.’

3.10 A marriage or relationship breakdown was discussed by at least two HWW Out of Work Service interviewees, whilst another had lost her husband after having been his carer for a number of years:

‘I split up from my partner of 20 years .... we have four children...my circumstances deteriorated quite quickly after we split and at one point I was sleeping in a slum...now I have my own flat...things are improving a lot’.

One interviewee reported suffering from mental health issues and lack of confidence when her ten-year relationship with a partner broke down, adding that the pressure of having ‘to fend for herself and children’ put her under huge strain.

3.11 It was not uncommon for HWW Out of Work Service interviewees to report that they had struggled with alcohol and drug related issues, which often coincided with mental health issues, abusive relationships and self-harming. As a result, interviewees were often coming into contact with the project at their ‘lowest point’:

- one client reported falling into trouble at an early age, leaving school at 15. She started taking drugs and was subjected to abuse, both of which fuelled a decline in her mental health. Her drug usage worsened over time and she ended up living in a refuge to escape an abusive partner
- one interviewee who had a criminal record and had spent a period of time in prison, reported funding his drink and drug abuse with short term ‘cash in

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<sup>1</sup> Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

<sup>2</sup> Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service.

hand' work. He acknowledged that he had poor mental health and anger issues at the time of coming into contact with the project.

- 3.12 A number of the HWW Out of Work Service interviewees reported having held a range of short term and temporary jobs since leaving school, with posts in retail, catering, security, customer services and the care sector commonly reported. In at least five cases, interviewees admitted that they had struggled to maintain their employment because of health and/or addiction issues. One, for instance, reported that they had been 'off sick for a period' whilst another noted that they 'had a mental health breakdown that meant I was off work for about a year'. It was also the case that interviewees had been unable to maintain longer positions due to the nature of their 'zero-hour contract' employment.
- 3.13 Becoming a parent was another reason cited by HWW Out of Work Service interviewees for giving up a previous post. For instance, one reported 'after the children came along, my partner decided that she'd like to go back to work...I become the main carer for the children'.

#### *Active Inclusion*

- 3.14 Perhaps in contrast, Active Inclusion clients had stronger employment backgrounds and it was not uncommon for individuals to report that this had been their first time out of work. For instance, all three Prime Cymru clients reported having been in long periods of employment, and only been out of work recently. Two reported having recently been made redundant due to difficult trading conditions or the closure of a business, whilst the third had lost their job due to the impact of being bullied at work. All three individuals reported enjoying their work until losing their positions.

#### *Achieving Change through Employment*

- 3.15 Four of the eight individuals supported by the ACE project were either asylum seekers or had been granted asylum status, and had moved to Wales relatively recently from Sudan, Afghanistan, Syria and Iran. In three of these cases, individuals were well educated and had held professional jobs in their home country (e.g. as an academic lecturer or a paediatric doctor). In one case, the individual's qualifications were not recognised within the UK to allow her to work as a paediatric doctor whilst two were restricted from finding work due to their status as an asylum seeker. Another three individuals, who had moved to Wales from Bangladesh, had

done so at least ten years ago but had no previous employment experience due to their childcare and housewife responsibilities. Whilst these issues were regarded as barriers to finding work, one also recognised that her weak English language skills presented an additional barrier. The final ACE interviewee, who had moved to live in Wales from Spain in order to improve his English, had worked in a customer service role for a period of time but was unemployed at the time of interview.

*Prior work and qualifications*

- 3.16 The majority of interviewees were looking for work when they came into contact with the project, as shown at Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1: What PA1 interviewees were doing when they got involved with the project**

Previous status	No of interviewees
Unemployed and looking for work	19
Not in or looking for paid work	4
Working in a voluntary, unpaid role	2
Employed	1
In education or training	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>

Source: PA1 interviewed individuals

- 3.17 Most interviewees had been employed at some point since leaving school, as shown at Table 3.2. Several commented that they had been employed in short term or temporary jobs, but that ‘sticking to anything had been very difficult’. A handful had been out of work for longer periods of time, often due to raising a family or due to health and addiction issues.

**Table 3.2: What PA1 interviewees had been mostly doing since leaving school**

Mostly doing since leaving school	No of interviewees
Employed	16
Not in or looking for work	5
Unemployed and looking for work	2
Working in a voluntary, unpaid role	1
In education or training	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>

Source: PA1 interviewed individuals

3.18 Individuals' level of qualification varied from those who didn't have any because they had left school before taking any exams, to those who had some GCSE qualifications to those with very advanced qualifications equating to Level 6 and above. In terms of their highest qualifications, interviewees had a range of qualifications, as set out at Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3: PA1 interviewees highest level of qualification on joining project**

Highest qualification	No of interviewees
Entry level	1
Level 1	3
Level 2	4
Level 3	5
Level 4	2
Level 5	1
Level 6	7
Level 7	0
Level 8	1
Other	3
Total	27

Source: PA1 interviewed individuals

3.19 Indeed, some interviewees reported having secured very good qualifications whilst others suggested that their initial strong start in education and professional life had not been sustained due to their addictions taking effect on their lives:

'I was fortunate to get a scholarship...and become a concert pianist...but [the job] didn't work out. Alcohol became an issue in my twenties...I haven't worked full-time in twenty years'.

3.20 Others had not been able to complete their education, be that at school or at college, due to personal circumstances and health issues. One who had left school early before turning 16 commented:

'I wasn't put in for exams and my mother tended to keep me home from school because she had problems and was lonely'.

3.21 Some two individuals were either in, or had just left, education or training when they joined the project. One was referred to the project as they were completing their

BTEC<sup>3</sup> studies in travel, tourism and hospitality at school. Another was studying an intensive English as a second language course when referred to the project.

### **Factors affecting individuals' ability to find work**

- 3.22 Interviewees who were not in employment when they got involved with the operation were asked about the factors which restricted them from working or finding work.
- 3.23 Several HWW Out of Work Service individuals reported that they were not actively looking for work when they came into contact with the project, simply due to the fact that they were not ready to find and sustain employment. Individuals supported by Active Inclusion, some of whom had only been out of work for a relatively short period of time, were actively looking for employment, whilst those supported via the ACE project had not worked since moving to the UK. In the case of the latter, a number were volunteering or undertaking training at the time of interview due to not being allowed to work in the UK. Other ACE participants reported that they had not looked for work due to their responsibilities raising a family.
- 3.24 Given the nature of the operations, it was not surprising that health problems and addictions were mentioned by interviewees as reasons why they were out of work or unable to find work, as shown at Table 3.4. Indeed, several interviewees stressed that they were 'in recovery' and that they needed time to deal with mental health and addiction issues. Often, issues relating to reliance on medication, lack of confidence, low self-esteem and isolation were considered to make it more difficult to look for work.

**Table 3.4: Reasons why PA1 interviewees were not looking for work<sup>4</sup>**

Factors	No of interviewees
Temporary health problems or injury	7
Alcohol or drug dependency	7
Long-term health problems or disability	6
Other factors	5
Doing unpaid voluntary work	4
No jobs available	1

Source: PA1 interviewed individuals

<sup>3</sup> Business and Technology Education Council.

<sup>4</sup> Interviewees could select more than one response.

3.25 As shown at Table 3.5, the main factors which interviewees cited as making it difficult to find work were health problems, followed by the lack of qualifications and skills. It was acknowledged by those supported by the HWW Out of Work Service that chaotic lifestyles and poor health were major barriers to finding lasting employment, which often resulted in, or reinforced, further negative behaviours. Those supported by the Active Inclusion project were more likely to cite other barriers to finding work such as the lack of employment opportunities available whilst those supported by the ACE project cited factors such as lack of qualifications and skills, including lack of English language skills, and being unable to drive.

**Table 3.5: Main factors which made it difficult for PA1 interviewees to find work<sup>5</sup>**

Factors	No of interviewees
Health problems	14
Not having the right qualifications	10
Not having right skills	8
Alcohol or drug dependency	8
Other reasons	7
Not having relevant work experience	5
Hard to get to appropriate work	5
Having caring responsibilities	4
No appropriate jobs near	4

Source: PA1 interviewed individuals

### **Hearing about the project**

3.26 Individuals found out about the ESF projects via a number of ways. In the case of the HWW Out of Work Service, individuals mentioned having heard of the project via sources such as Jobcentre Plus (four cases), previous contact with providers such as Cais, Cyfle and Kaleidoscope as well as jobs fairs, family members or being referred by organisations such as Careers Wales, detox centres and Barod.

3.27 Individuals supported via Active Inclusion projects tended to highlight sources such as job seeking events, social media and internet searches as methods of hearing about the project as well as being referred by Jobcentre Plus and housing associations.

<sup>5</sup> Interviewees could select more than one response.

3.28 In the case of the ACE project, individuals reported that local community centres and project community officers had played an important role getting to hear about the project together with sources such as local events and being referred by organisations such as Welsh Refugee Council or local authorities. Two focus group attendees stressed the importance of community networks in getting to hear about the project:

- two women had come to hear of ACE through a *what's app* group established for Bangladeshi women in their community. A well-known and well-connected member of the community, who had already signed up to the project, played an important role in promoting the opportunities available via the project in this case.

### **Motivation for getting involved**

3.29 In addition to wanting to find work, individuals got involved with projects for a variety of reasons, including to:

- improve their lives and to find ways of coping with personal issues. One suggested that 'I needed to get my backside into gear again. I needed to get out, I was bored and becoming depressed. I was stuck in a rut and needed something to do with my life'
- meet people, get a sense of routine, to alleviate boredom and to break out of negative behaviours. One individual who had attended a course observed that they found it hard leaving the house and the fact that 'I have done a solid week – this is a big achievement for me'
- overcome issues such as lack of confidence, addictions, anxiety and isolation
- find out what work they wanted to do and assess their future: 'where I wanted my career to go' and 'whether it was worth investing in college'
- have contact with a trusted advisor: 'the project offered a lifeline, having someone to look out for me was massive...now I've got somebody who I can call whatever the problem'
- find opportunities to volunteer so as to learn new things and feel 'useful' once again
- gain training opportunities and qualifications

- address their lack of understanding about how employment processes worked in the UK
- improve their prospect of getting a job, to become more employable and better placed to sustain a job
- source suitable job opportunities, particularly those available around school hours.

3.30 A number of individuals identified personal issues which they hoped the project would help address. Many of these have already been discussed. Others included mental health issues, anger management, isolation, poor social skills, weak language skills, financial problems, housing issues, low self-esteem as well as adjusting to a new country and culture. In some cases, individuals hoped that the project would fulfil an important brokering role between them and organisations who could offer volunteering and employment opportunities. For instance, in one case it was reported that a project co-ordinator had helped bridge cultural and linguistic differences between participants and a local school by securing volunteering placements for participants at the school.

#### **Nature of provision accessed**

3.31 The provision accessed by individuals varied and depended upon the approach taken by the project and its provider.

#### *Healthy Working Wales Out of Work Service*

3.32 In the case of the HWW Out of Work Service, the most commonly cited type of provision accessed was one to one peer mentor support to deal with life issues and to gain support around health and personal issues such as low confidence and poor social skills. Individuals spoke of having attended courses which ranged from short, one day sessions to longer, 12 week courses covering a range of subjects such as basic skills, IT, counselling as well as health and social care courses. Some of these courses had been accessed online. Several interviewees also mentioned that they had accessed employment related support such as developing a CV, signposting to volunteering opportunities and accessing information about job opportunities. A few reported that they had participated in group sessions such as an art group, a football team and a choir.

- 3.33 In several cases, HWW Out of Work Service interviewees stressed that the service had helped them resolve personal living circumstances and financial issues in the first instance. One interviewee reported:
- ‘they helped me get my financial and living arrangements under control and that put me in a much better position to tackle other parts of my life’.
- 3.34 In other cases, their involvement with the service was a first step into some sort of routine:
- ‘for the first time in ages I was catching a bus and leaving my own back yard to meet new people – that was a big thing for me’.
- 3.35 For others, it was the first time that they had been encouraged to consider their future:
- ‘they asked where did I want to go, and this was the first time in ages that I'd been forced to think about the future. That was the nudge that I needed really’.
- 3.36 Several interviewees noted that it was only after resolving these personal issues that they could consider further practical steps to address remaining barriers to work such as lack of skills, experience and access to the labour market. Being able to work towards short term goals was important for interviewees during their journey with the service as was being encouraged by a dedicated mentor: ‘my mentor was really good at getting me to look past my anxieties and push myself’.

#### *Active Inclusion*

- 3.37 Active Inclusion individuals’ experiences of the project included access to courses such as back-to-work, health and safety, safeguarding, IT and mindfulness courses. It also included one to one support from a job coach or dedicated adviser. In the case of one provider (Prime Cymru) the support had been geared more towards job searching and supporting individuals to update their CV and inform them of job opportunities available.

#### *Achieving Change through Employment*

- 3.38 For ACE participants, the nature of provision accessed was fairly broad and included support to navigate the employment system, search for work placement and volunteering opportunities, search for job vacancies, prepare for interviews, hone English language skills as well as help to establish the equivalency of individuals’ qualifications from their home country through conversion courses. In

some cases, support had been accessed via group sessions with individuals attending regular weekly sessions, including training, at a local library.

### **Satisfaction with the project**

- 3.39 Individuals were very satisfied with the support provided by the three ESF projects and frequently referred to the support accessed as being 'brilliant', 'excellent' and 'exceeded expectations'. Individuals conveyed important messages about how the support accessed had been tailored according to individual needs and that projects had been able to deliver on their initial promises. For instance, one HWW Out of Work Service interviewee observed 'this is the first project that has delivered against what they promised'.
- 3.40 The following elements were highlighted as being key strengths of the provision:
- projects had been able to support individuals with personal issues and circumstances which had resulted in improved confidence, improved skills, securing qualifications and improved life skills such as timekeeping
  - individuals had been able to benefit from their interaction with other clients 'it's lovely being part of a group, just chatting to people'. Several individuals mentioned that they had enjoyed working with other people who had similar challenges to themselves, as they were considered to be 'more accepting and less judgemental'. In one case an individual reported gaining confidence from being given the opportunity to teach Welsh to others within their group
  - not being pressured to progress and being able to work 'at their own pace'. One individual commented: 'they didn't rush me and walked me through things step by step. There wasn't any pressure for me to rush into work before I was ready'
  - a few individuals highlighted training courses as the main strength of the provision. One individual, who had attended a four day music writing course, observed 'this has been fun, [I've] enjoyed it so much ... I am sad it's ending, and I don't get to come back again'
  - support being delivered by advisors or mentors who were friendly, sympathetic, trusting, respectful and had adequate time to meet with clients. One individual commented: 'I immediately felt at ease with the team and that helped me open up and start talking'. Staff were frequently described as being 'very helpful' and wanting to 'make a genuine effort'. Several

interviewees stressed the importance of having adequate time with their mentor or advisor, and that this had compared favourably to the shorter sessions which they had experienced at Jobcentre offices. A few individuals also highlighted the importance of advisors or mentors actioning things which had been agreed during their meetings e.g. providing follow up information and contact details as promised

- in some cases, mentors were able to draw on similar experiences which was thought to 'make a massive difference...relate to what I'm saying' and also offer a positive role model to clients. One such individual reported that 'they know what you are going through and can speak your language...[there's] no bullshit'
- accessing support from the same mentor had been important for many individuals, but not all had been able to benefit from this continuity. Two interviewees had found a change of mentor 'unsettling' and had been anxious as a result.

3.41 The main aspects of support which individuals thought could be improved tended to be around issues relating to:

- project eligibility – some suggested that they could have benefited from support earlier, rather than having to wait until they were out of work for 12 months
- adequate resourcing – one individual thought that the project had been under resourced given that they had been required to wait a while before they could meet with a mentor
- financial support – particularly in the case of asylum seekers and refugees wishing to study the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) course so as to demonstrate language proficiency, as this was an expensive course to study.

3.42 Individuals gained a range of qualifications or accredited certificates as a result of participating on completed courses provided by the projects. These were mostly Level 1 and 2 qualifications, covering subjects such as introduction to counselling, peer mentoring, food safety, manual handling, first aid, control of substances hazardous to health (COSHH), harm reduction, Assist (suicide first aid), construction skills certification scheme (CSCS), IT and safeguarding. The HWW Out

of Work Service individuals were more likely than others to have participated in training and citing qualifications as a result of them. Those supported by ACE were more likely to have been referred by the project to other training provision, such as the IELTS course and in one case, a Diploma in Public Service Interpreting course.

3.43 Interviewees stressed that getting current qualifications was perhaps more important to them than obtaining qualifications at a higher level than they previously had in place, as they were useful in demonstrating to prospective employers that they had current and updated skills and licences.

3.44 At the time of interview, several individuals anticipated that they would continue to attend other courses and obtain further qualifications or accredited certificates with the project. In some cases, individuals had been provided with a list of courses available to them and had identified those they wished to attend.

### **Present situation**

3.45 Of the eight interviewed leavers, five had secured work and were employed at the time of interviewing. Of these, three had secured employment with their project provider and the other two had secured work in the care and retail sectors respectively. A further interviewee had secured employment at a customer service centre immediately after leaving the project but was unemployed at the time of interview due to this position having only been a temporary contract. The remaining two interviewees were volunteering.

3.46 For those still participating in the project, the majority of interviewees and focus group attendees were unemployed and still looking for work. Only two reported being employed – one was working as a support worker on a zero-hour contract with an agency and another had just secured employment with a housing association. A small number (six interviewees) reported working in a voluntary, unpaid role with various organisations. A small number of current participants had concrete plans for the future - one for instance was planning on starting a health and social care course in September at her local college and another was about to embark on a job in the care sector, but was waiting for their disclosure and barring service (DBS) checks to be approved prior to taking up this role. A third was planning on becoming self-employed as a tutor.

3.47 The reasons identified as making it difficult for individuals to find work at the time of interview were very similar to those identified on joining the project – with health

problems, not having the right skills and not having the right qualifications most commonly cited. Interestingly, issues relating to alcohol or drug dependency had reduced in importance, with only one individual citing this as a restriction at the time of interview. Practical issues such as not having a driving licence and childcare responsibilities were more likely to be identified by participants looking for work at the time of interview.

- 3.48 A number of participants recognised that they were still 'not ready for work' and anticipated that they would continue with either training or volunteering work for the time being.

### **Benefits of the provision**

- 3.49 Individuals identified many benefits from having been involved with the project. Many of these benefits were soft outcomes such as personal gains and behavioural changes, including:

- personal benefits such as feeling 'happier', 'better about myself', 'calmer', 'more focused' and 'more positive'. Several individuals reported that they also benefited from having 'time to reflect' on their situation and as a result found a sense of 'purpose', had 'a boost', 'got me out of a rut' and developed 'new interests'
- improved routine due to their attendance at volunteering, training and advisory sessions. This was particularly important for those with addictions and mental health issues as 'the project has given me a place to come, a routine that is safe for me...regular attendance minimises boredom...and minimises the risk of drinking again'. Another individual suggested that the course which they had attended was important in 'just being able to get out of bed – having a purpose'
- improved relationships with others, such as friends and family. For instance, one individual observed that 'my kids tell me that they love their new self-confident mum' and another reported that 'my Gran bursts into tears whenever I mention my job, as she is so proud of what I have achieved'
- increased social interactions and a reduction in feelings of isolation which had stemmed from 'meeting new people' and participating in groups such as 'choirs'. A few individuals highlighted the importance of being around 'positive people' as this had a bearing upon their mood and attitudes

- improved confidence given that individuals had been encouraged to focus on their strengths rather than weaknesses. In some cases, improved confidence had come about as a result of interacting and ‘speaking with other people’. One individual observed that she would not have contributed to this research had it not been for the project: ‘you wouldn’t have got a word out of me’
- improved self-esteem and self-worth. One individual observed that they ‘value[d] myself now, and I haven’t valued myself for a long time’
- hope and plans for the future. Several individuals reported that they had found a sense of ‘hope’ and had goals and ambitions in place for the future. Several individuals highlighted the value of the project in helping them set short term, achievable goals. One individual commented ‘for the first time in years I’ve started to look to the future. I have a real spring in my step’.

3.50 Several individuals also highlighted the importance of gaining new or improving their skills as a result of the project be that listening or communication skills as well as other practical skills such as IT or job searching skills. Aligned to this a few individuals also thought that they were now better informed about the labour market and opportunities available to them and had, in some cases, broadened the areas of work which they were looking to undertake.

3.51 Of the eight individuals who were either in, or about to start work, all thought that the project made a very important contribution to their ability to secure their post. In the case of the three individuals who found work with the project provider, it was clear that their support and training had enabled them to develop the appropriate skills and qualifications to progress into these roles. In other cases, individuals suggested that the project adviser had played an important role in identifying job opportunities for them with one adding that the adviser had:

‘opened up my mind and enabled me to broaden my job search. I doubt that I would have considered applying for a sales post in [name of business] without this intervention’.

3.52 Two individuals were in education or training and one was about to start a course at the time of interview. Both individuals who were already in education thought that the project had contributed to their current circumstances, in that the project had given them the confidence and encouragement to pursue their current training programme. One individual commented: ‘I would not have believed in January when

I felt physically ill for three months that I would now be volunteering and training. I felt that [name of adviser] was on my side, I felt supported...I wasn't just a name and number to him'. In the case of the second individual, the project had identified the need for the participant to improve their English language skills prior to applying to a university to have his overseas qualifications validated in the UK and had supported him to access an IELTS language course. The individual who was about to start a college course had enrolled prior to getting involved with the project but added that their experience of the project had reinforced their decision 'now I have been on this...I know I can do it'.

- 3.53 Individuals not in work or training were broadly positive about their future prospects and anticipated staying with the project either until they found a job or were able to progress into education or training. One anticipated being referred to other sources for specific help e.g. to start up in business. A number recognised that the project had been instrumental in helping them become more employable as the project had helped them to address many of the factors which held them back from entering work. One emphasised that the project had helped them get to a position where they were better informed and better placed to make decisions about their future.
- 3.54 The vast majority of interviewees stressed that the project had made a fundamental contribution to their progress and their current circumstances. In the absence of having been involved with the project, many individuals who had been supported by the HWW Out of Work Service thought that they would be 'at home' and 'doing nothing', as well as being at a higher risk of drinking or drug taking again.
- 3.55 Individuals who felt that they had been able to turn their lives around attributed much of this to the HWW Out of Work Service, recognising that the project had played a vital role and provided a 'lifeline'. In one case, an interviewee suggested that 'without this project I would have been dead...I wouldn't have stopped drinking without this support'.
- 3.56 Individuals supported by Active Inclusion thought that the support had played a key role in the changes which they had experienced, adding that 'I wouldn't be where I am today'. Likewise, ACE participants thought that the provision had made a positive contribution towards their current circumstances, particularly in terms of improving their employability and (where not already in work) improve their chances of finding work.

### **Use of other support providers**

3.57 Individuals mentioned that they had accessed help, support or training from a range of other support providers over the last couple of years. Broadly, interviewees rated the support which they had received via the projects as being very good compared to other support accessed.

3.58 The most commonly cited provision accessed by interviewees were:

- medical support e.g. GPs, psychiatrist
- Jobcentre Plus
- charities, including those offering addiction related support, e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Gwent Drug and Alcohol Service, Salvation Army, Women's Aid, Welsh Refugee Council
- employment agencies and work placement agencies e.g. Remploy, Pertemps
- career and training providers e.g. Careers Wales, North Wales Training, Further Education Institutions (FEIs)
- statutory provision e.g. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAHMS)
- other ESF operations e.g. Bridges into Work, Communities for Work.

### **Future**

3.59 In terms of plans for the future, current participants anticipated that they would continue with the project, adding that they were accessing all the support required at present. Some current participants did not consider themselves to be work ready as yet whilst others had their sights on particular careers and future job prospects. Others were mindful that they needed to make decisions about which direction to take e.g. one was debating whether to return to education or to seek employment at the time of interview.

3.60 Those in employment were focused on making it work – with those in more temporary roles keen to find more permanent and better paid jobs in the future. Individuals anticipated that they might require help in making this transition and would value such support from the projects if necessary.

3.61 In terms of other types of support required in the future, individuals highlighted the following:

- interviewees who considered themselves to be moving on in terms of work or training, would value having someone to turn to should issues arise in the future
- some would value having a mentor in place on an ongoing basis, even when in work.

## **4. Findings – Priority Axis 3 operations**

- 4.1 This chapter considers the qualitative findings for 96 individuals supported across five Priority Axis 3 operations: STEM Cymru (35 individuals), Active Inclusion Youth (six individuals), Cynnydd (22 individuals), TRAC 11-12 (22 individuals) and Go Wales (11 individuals). The findings are considered for each operation, as appropriate.
- 4.2 It draws upon feedback gathered from a total of 96 individuals. Of these, 25 were interviewed individually and 71 participated within focus group discussions. Those who were interviewed individually were supported by three operations (Active Inclusion Youth, Go Wales Achieve through Work Experience and TRAC) although feedback was also captured via focus group attendees for two of these operations. The vast majority of contributors (83 individuals) were current participants and a minority (13 individuals) were leavers. All focus group attendees were current participants, although in several cases were nearing the end of their academic course due to the timing of the fieldwork.

### **Profile of individuals**

- 4.3 Just over half (53 individuals) of those who contributed to the research were women and 43 individuals were men. A higher proportion of interviewees were women (19 of 25 interviewees) and a quarter (six interviewees) were men. Conversely, a greater number of men (37 individuals) contributed to focus group discussions compared to women (34 individuals).
- 4.4 The age of contributors ranged from 12 to 23. The average age of the 25 interviewees was just under 18 years old. The age of focus group attendees varied: for instance, individuals supported by STEM Cymru were either in year 12 (16 – 17 year olds, 24 pupils who had engaged with the Engineering Education Scheme Wales (EESW) initiative) or in year 7 or 9 (11 – 12 year olds or 13 – 14 year olds, 19 pupils who had engaged with the Formula 1 (F1) initiative). The ages of school pupils supported by the Cynnydd and TRAC projects ranged from year 7 to year 11 (11 to 16 years old), with those engaged across further education (FE) settings typically 17 or 18 year old. GO Wales Achieve through Work Experience contributors were all higher education students, aged between 18 and 20 years old whilst Active Inclusion Youth contributors were similarly aged between 18 and 20 years old.

- 4.5 The majority of interviewees (18 of 25 interviewees) identified themselves as either Welsh or other British whilst three identified themselves as of another white background. A minority (six interviewees) identified themselves as another ethnic group. Three focus group sessions were conducted in Welsh and these all related to the STEM Cymru project.
- 4.6 Three-quarters of interviewees (19 of 25 interviewees) identified English as their first language. One identified Welsh as their first language and three identified another language as their first language.
- 4.7 A third of interviewees (nine interviewees) had a long-term illness, health problem or disability. In seven cases this was thought to affect the amount or type of work they could undertake.
- 4.8 A third of interviewees (eight of 25 interviewees) were aware that ESF had helped to pay for the provision.

### **Background**

- 4.9 The majority of individuals interviewed or who participated in focus group discussions were still in, or nearing the end of, their education or training (89 individuals). Of these, 66 individuals were at school, 12 were at college and 11 were at university. A few (seven individuals) were unemployed and looking for work and all six Active Inclusion Youth participants fell into this category.

### *STEM Cymru*

- 4.10 All EESW and F1 focus group attendees were in mainstream secondary school settings. EESW participants were all Year 12 pupils whilst F1 pupils ranged from Year 7 to Year 9. The majority of FI focus group attendees (11 of 13) and a quarter of EESW focus group attendees (six of 24 contributors) were female.

### *Cynnydd and TRAC*

- 4.11 Most Cynnydd and TRAC participants were attending mainstream school. A small number were attending pupil behavioural or support units either within mainstream school or at a pupil referral unit (PRU). In some cases, pupils had been referred to those units due to behavioural issues at their previous mainstream school.
- 4.12 All Cynnydd FE participants were first year students having recently transitioned from local secondary schools. TRAC FE participants were studying a range of qualifications from Level 1 to Level 3 BTEC qualifications, with some having

progressed to study a traineeship opportunity whilst accessing support. Learners recalled having negative experiences of school education and considered themselves to have left with very few GCSE qualifications. A couple noted that they had struggled at school due to behavioural and mental health issues. A number felt that they had drifted into college as it was the obvious next step, but they did not have a clear plan for what they wanted to do after leaving school.

- 4.13 One TRAC interviewee, who was a registered pupil with the local authority inclusion service and accessing tuition at home, was being supported to find a job at the time of fieldwork. This pupil had left mainstream education during Year 8 and had come into contact with the project as a result of a referral by social services.
- 4.14 Most Cynnydd and TRAC pupils reported that they didn't enjoy school and had struggled with their academic subjects. A few of the younger pupils reported having struggled to make the transition from primary to secondary school. A handful of pupils had been permanently excluded from their previous school or had been moved to another school. A number of pupils also acknowledged that they had found themselves in trouble and were in danger of being excluded.
- 4.15 Many pupils reported having experienced difficulties at school and were struggling with their studies:

'school sucks'

'the teachers get on my nerves and never listen'.

#### *GO Wales Achieve through Work Experience*

- 4.16 Of the 11 GO Wales Achieve through Work Experience interviewees, seven were current participants and four were leavers. They ranged from first to final year students. One was a postgraduate student. They were based at four universities: Aberystwyth University, Bangor University, University of South Wales and University of Wales Trinity Saint David.
- 4.17 Nearly all individuals had attended university immediately after leaving school or college and reported having achieved A level qualifications. A few reported having achieved other qualifications such as an Extended Diploma or an equivalent Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) or another foreign award.
- 4.18 Only one of those interviewed had any prior work experience before getting involved with the project and this involved part time work to supplement student income.

Indeed, the lack of any prior work experience was cited as a main motivator for getting involved with the GO Wales project.

- 4.19 Most contributors noted that they suffered from some sort of personal and health related issues, such as agoraphobia, depression, anorexia, anxiety, shyness and low confidence. A few were finding their course challenging and demanding and were struggling in some cases with coursework and exam demands. Despite this, interviewees were mostly enjoying their courses and in many cases were planning on pursuing a Masters qualification in a related field.

#### *Active Inclusion Youth*

- 4.20 All six Active Inclusion Youth participants were out of work when they got involved with the project. They had left school or college at different points in time, having achieved a mix of qualifications ranging from 'a good mix of GCSEs' to 'no GCSEs'. Four had initially progressed to study A levels but had not continued with this route for different reasons – in two cases, individuals opted to follow courses at the local FE college but this hadn't worked out for them. In one case, an individual was asked to leave college because of poor attendance. Generally, contributors had not enjoyed their time at school or college:

'I had a terrible time, I absolutely hated it'

'I really hated some of the subjects and didn't see the point turning up every day. It was painful'

'College was hell for me and I was in a bad place afterwards'.

- 4.21 None of the contributors had worked previously and were finding it difficult to secure work due to factors such as lack of experience, lack of confidence and lack of qualifications:

'I couldn't find any jobs that I was qualified for because I've got no GCSEs and no experience of working – I had no idea how to get a job with such an empty CV. It was depressing'.

- 4.22 Some individuals were also facing additional challenges such as living in sheltered accommodation and having no family support around them. A few individuals reported hurdles associated with poor mental health, anxiety and autism. For instance, one commented:

'I was rarely leaving my flat...I was very isolated and couldn't face the world'.

## **Involvement with the project**

### *STEM Cymru*

- 4.23 All STEM Cymru focus group attendees had heard of the project through their schools, either directly from their teachers or as a result of previous pupils having been involved in the project. Pupils involved with the EESW element of STEM Cymru had become involved in slightly different ways – in one school the project had been embedded into the work of a Year 12 Physics course whilst in other schools, the project had been offered to any pupil who was interested. In one case, the school had selected participants following an interview process. In all cases, the project has been targeted at able and hardworking pupils, largely due to the additional time and work commitment involved.
- 4.24 For the F1 project, year 7 pupils had been introduced to the project early during the winter term. Some older pupils, such as those in Year 9, had been involved with the project in previous years – in some cases during their time at primary school.
- 4.25 Design and Technology teachers played a vital role in informing pupils about the F1 project but older pupils, who had been previously involved, also played a role. In one case, pupils recalled receiving a presentation from an external visitor about the project. Schools adopt different methods of selecting pupils for the project – in one school pupils from one class had been selected at random and given the choice of whether they wanted to participate or not. In another school, all pupils in Years 7 and 8 had been encouraged to be involved in the initial stages of the project, as it had been incorporated into Design and Technology lessons, with only some groups continuing to the competitive stage. In another school, the same group of pupils had been involved with the project over a number of years, drawing in new team members as required.
- 4.26 Individuals involved with the EESW element of the STEM Cymru project reported that an important motivator for them in getting involved was the opportunity it offered to demonstrate, via their UCAS<sup>6</sup> application, additional experiences when applying for university. For others, the project offered an interesting opportunity to

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<sup>6</sup> Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.

get involved in engineering, particularly those who were considering undertaking a degree in the subject whilst others had been attracted to the opportunity the project offered to work with industry.

- 4.27 Pupils involved with the F1 elements of the STEM Cymru project reported that they had got involved as it was perceived to be ‘a really cool project’ and it was an experience they expected to enjoy. Some pupils got involved as they were keen to undertake extra-curricular activities. Others reported that they wanted to experience and learn about technology and engineering: female contributors in particular considered this to be a new area for them to explore.
- 4.28 None of the pupils who had engaged with either element of the STEM Cymru project expected the project to address any personal issues they were facing. Indeed, feedback from teaching staff suggested that those involved tended to be the most able and talented pupils from their school year.
- 4.29 For the EESW element of the STEM Cymru project, individuals can expect to work with professional engineers in an industrial setting, so as to gain experience of a career in STEM. Teams of Year 12 pupils are issued with a real problem and are expected to research and design an appropriate solution, prototype or model. As part of their experience they attend an initial welcome event, a workshop session and are expected to submit a report on their project over one academic year. They also attend a presentation event at the end.
- 4.30 The nature of EESW research projects vary, and pupils reported working on projects such as how a civil engineering company could reduce their carbon dioxide emissions, how a marine company could harvest wave energy and how a manufacturing company could develop a tile which could transfer sound and vibrational energy into energy that could be stored via devices such as phones and batteries.
- 4.31 The F1 project as part of the STEM Cymru scheme involved designing and manufacturing model racing cars using Computer Aided Design (CAD) software. Pupils interpreted this objective as ‘building a model car and getting it to go as fast as possible’. This involved designing, building and testing the aerodynamic nature of the car before competing against teams from other schools. As part of the competition stage pupils were required to develop a full portfolio of information and present their project to a panel of judges. Team members often took responsibility for different elements of the project, drawing on the particular strengths such as

design, artwork or communication skills. It was noted that competitions were held regionally before successful teams progressed to national and then international events.

- 4.32 Some F1 STEM Cymru pupils worked on the project during their Design and Technology lessons whilst others did so during lunchtime. It was estimated that pupils spent up to 60 hours in total over the course of an academic year on the project.

#### *Cynnydd and TRAC*

- 4.33 In the case of the Cynnydd and TRAC projects, school pupils had begun to work with their Cynnydd worker whilst in mainstream school or on referral to a specific behavioural unit at another school. They had often been referred to the project by a teacher or had met the project worker whilst spending time 'in isolation' at the school's dedicated area for time out:

'I started talking to the guys when I was down here on isolation...I was down here a lot...and they've been great'.

'A teacher spoke to me because he could see that I was struggling with a problem. He suggested I visit the centre for a chat, and then things moved forward from there'.

- 4.34 In the case of FE pupils, individuals had become involved with Cynnydd or TRAC via a range of routes – in some cases they got involved as a result of getting into trouble, in other cases on referral by a tutor and in other cases on being directly approached by a Cynnydd or TRAC worker.

- 4.35 In all cases, Cynnydd and TRAC pupils were dealing with a wide range of personal or behavioural issues that were impacting on their ability to attend and engage in school or college. The common issues identified by pupils included anxiety, stress, low confidence, bullying, paranoia, anger, panic attacks, low self-esteem, difficulties associated with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), poor engagement at school and difficulties at home. A few pupils also spoke of difficulties 'fitting in' at school and several pupils mentioned that they had 'got into trouble' at school, be that fights with other pupils or arguments with teachers:

'From year 7 my attitude to teachers has been really bad and I just didn't want to be here'

'I couldn't handle some of the teachers and I'd just cause a lot of problems in class.'

4.36 TRAC pupils who are at FE were more likely to cite that they had become involved with the project because they needed help with their studies, although many acknowledged that this had been driven in part by personal issues and circumstances. For instance, participants observed that:

'I had been kicked out of my house, was homeless, so learning wasn't top of my list really'

'my mum had died, but I wasn't looking for counselling support, just someone to talk to and help to get my work on track'.

4.37 Pupils had experienced a range of structured activities as part of the Cynnydd and TRAC projects. On occasion, pupils' timetables were modified to accommodate these activities. In the case of school pupils, activities included outdoor pursuits such as mountain biking, orienteering, rock climbing, hiking, camping and kayaking, to various craft, survival and first aid activities at venues outside school. These provisions were often delivered by external providers and were tailored to the interests of the pupil to some extent. In the case of college students, the project had offered them the opportunity to participate in physical activities, courses such as mindfulness and wellbeing sessions, as well as access to counsellors for support with issues such as anger management.

4.38 TRAC school pupils also mentioned that they had been able to visit an FE college for taster sessions in subject areas such as hair and beauty or animal care.

4.39 One Cynnydd pupil had accessed a structured training programme available via Military Preparation College (MPC) over an 18 month period which led to qualifications. This pupil was interested in joining the army and having secured four GCSE qualifications through the provision had secured a training place on a military course. The pupil observed, 'without Cynnydd I don't think I would have realised how much I wanted to join the army'.

4.40 Many pupils had accessed group sessions run by Cynnydd and TRAC workers. These covered issues such as positive relationships, healthy eating, drugs and alcohol and anger management. TRAC school pupils reported having accessed a wide range of group support sessions covering general wellbeing, relaxation, confidence building, self-esteem, anger management, body image, social media and gaming.

4.41 A handful of pupils also reported having accessed work experience arranged by the project. One Cynnydd pupil spoke of gaining work experience at a crèche and was planning on attending this placement for one day a week. Two TRAC pupils reported undertaking sessions of work experience at a hair salon.

4.42 In addition, school and college pupils were able to access individual pastoral, emotional support from their Cynnydd and TRAC worker. At the college, pupils were in regular contact with the Cynnydd team, often 'dropping in to see them every day'. The pastoral support provided an opportunity for pupils to talk through issues and access a safe space to 'let off steam'. Similarly, school pupils regularly spoke of having opportunities to talk to Cynnydd and TRAC workers to discuss problems, de-escalate situations and learning coping techniques for dealing with future challenges:

'I spoke with [name of advisor] about stuff that was going on at home that was upsetting me. I felt much better afterwards and I can deal with it better now'

'I could talk to her about anything, I trust her. I decided what we talked about. It wasn't boring. It was fun. [Name of advisor] helped me as best as she can'.

4.43 In the case of the TRAC project, FE students and school pupils alike spoke of having a dedicated weekly slot to meet with a TRAC worker to discuss issues and, in the case of the FE setting, to access support with studies e.g. help with assignments. Some FE pupils also had accessed an Entry level 'Kickstart course' which was described as a three day per week course involving both academic lessons (e.g. English and Maths) as well as vocational taster sessions.

#### *GO Wales Achieve through Work Experience*

4.44 Interviewees had come to hear about the project via a range of methods including e-newsletters, university website information, promotional exhibitions and conversations with tutors and student support staff.

4.45 In all cases, individuals had met with their respective project officer to discuss their interests and possible areas of work experience at the outset. The project involved different types of placements, including work shadowing (up to three days of unpaid work experience), work taster (up to four weeks of unpaid work experience) and work placement (four to six weeks of paid work experience).

4.46 Individuals accessed a wide range of shadowing and work experiences such as:

- supporting a local swimming club with swimming data analysis
- shadowing an occupational therapist at a local university
- work experience at a local library
- work experience at a local book shop
- work experience at a local authority town planning department
- work experience at a graphic design company
- work experience at a charity organisation supporting children and young people with physical and mental disabilities
- work experience at a housing association and a mental health charity.

4.47 Individuals reported that the time spent on shadowing and work experience through the project varied from a few days to 'once a week for six weeks' and '24 days' in another case. Some individuals had accessed the initial work shadowing experience but had not progressed to the second or third stages on offer via the project, largely due to the fact that they had only engaged with the operation during their final year of study and lacked time to undertake further work experience. Other reasons were offered by two contributors: one suggested that this had been down to them 'not reaching out' for more experiences whilst another reported that the work experience had been discontinued due to staff changes within the host organisation.

4.48 Individuals were aware that one of the main challenges in finding suitable work experience opportunities was the need for the project to source relatively local opportunities to reduce the travel requirement involved. Transport costs were paid for by the project and this was appreciated.

#### *Active Inclusion Youth*

4.49 Most individuals had come to hear of their Active Inclusion Youth project via their Work Coach at the local Jobcentre office whilst others had heard of it via their social worker or friends. An important motivator for getting involved was to prepare them for work and ultimately to help them find work. Several individuals recognised that they needed help to improve their life skills and participants were also aware that they struggled with personal confidence and poor mental health. The relaxed, informal environment at provider settings appealed to participants and was

regarded as being in sharp contrast to the more ‘impersonal’ and ‘hurried’ environment at Jobcentre Plus offices.

- 4.50 The provision accessed by individuals varied from one provider to another. For instance, in one case, individuals had participated in a one week music writing course whilst in another participants had accessed a wide range of activities such as arts and crafts, as well as volunteering and training opportunities.
- 4.51 Individuals received personal development support to develop life skills and make new friends. Individuals also received support to find work, including developing a CV, job searching, applying for work and preparing for interview. In the case of one provider, individuals were also given information about diversity and equality within the workplace.
- 4.52 A few individuals had accessed very intensive training opportunities as part of the project. For instance, one participant had completed a three month course at an outdoor skills centre which had allowed him to develop a range of woodworking and construction skills. Others had undertaken valuable volunteering work.

### **Satisfaction with the project**

#### *STEM Cymru*

- 4.53 For the EESW element of the STEM Cymru project, individuals thought that their experience had been positive overall. Individuals acknowledged that the project had been ‘demanding’ upon their time and abilities but nonetheless had provided new and different experiences for them. Some individuals were clearly more enthusiastic about the value of the project than others. The main strengths of the project were considered to be the practical, hands-on nature of the work and the opportunity to design, create and test new products. Some individuals had enjoyed and valued the opportunities of visiting external universities and businesses, particularly being able to do so at a time when they were considering their future options.
- 4.54 Also, in the case of the EESW element of the STEM Cymru project, individuals thought that they had been able to develop project management skills. It was also the case that the project was considered a good opportunity to demonstrate that they were satisfying the Enterprise and Employability Challenge of the Welsh

Baccalaureate, given that the project had been approved by the WJEC<sup>7</sup> as an eligible activity.

- 4.55 Pupils involved with the F1 element of the STEM Cymru project had enjoyed the experience immensely and found it a rewarding one.

‘it’s an amazing experience for all of us. We enjoy it so much. It is a lot of work to do but sometimes it doesn’t feel like much of a burden because it’s enjoyable.’

- 4.56 One group had not appreciated how much effort would be required in order to succeed during the competitive stage of the project and the strong competition at the regional judging event had been somewhat unexpected. Despite this, all pupils had enjoyed the competition events which included a presentation to the judging panel and exhibiting their portfolio.

- 4.57 The key strength of the F1 project was thought to be the links made with industry and FEs, such as working with a company to help with the branding. The main issue in being involved with the project, raised by two focus groups, related to their misinterpretation of the project’s regulations on the required weight for designed cars, which in one case was thought to have resulted in a slower speed time. The other disadvantage, cited by one focus group, was thought to be the need to balance the project with other lesson demands in one, since they had developed their project within technology subject lessons.

- 4.58 Pupils involved in the F1 project reported receiving certificates of achievement at the end and they considered this as being important in having a record of their involvement and achievement. Older pupils mentioned that this would be important for them to include on their UCAS forms when applying to study at university.

#### *Cynnydd and TRAC*

- 4.59 Pupils were very satisfied with their experiences of the TRAC and Cynnydd projects and in most cases believed that it had made a huge difference to their lives and education. School pupils spoke enthusiastically about the different opportunities and activities which they had experienced as part of the project, with these often taking place off school site.

- 4.60 School pupils in particular valued having a safe space to which they could retreat when facing difficulties and issues at school. It was also the case that pupils

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<sup>7</sup> Welsh Joint Education Committee

appreciated being able to resolve their issues privately, rather than having the same discussion with a teacher in front of the class.

‘It’s a nice quiet, peaceful environment, and you know that whatever the problem, you can come up here, chill out and talk about things with someone who will listen’.

4.61 However, access to private facilities was not available at all sites and this was highlighted as a downside at one setting. TRAC FE pupils spoke of the lack of a private room where they could meet with their support worker for their individual session and felt uncomfortable participating in their session at the college’s library.

4.62 The main strength of the project however was the input available via Cynnydd and TRAC workers. Project workers were praised for their approach and most pupils commented on the trusting and close relationships which they had established. College students in particular emphasised how they felt able to trust staff, and this allowed them to talk openly about their worries and problems. Pupils commonly observed that project workers were prepared to listen and offer advice:

‘At first I didn’t want to talk about things; but by getting to know the guys I’ve been able to open up and start talking about all sorts of things. It has really helped me a lot’

‘I wasn’t sure about the counselling to begin with...I’m not good at opening up, but then I did start opening up and it sort of worked.’

4.63 The ongoing relationships which were in place between pupils and workers was evidence of the strong bonds which had been formed. These positive relationships were in stark contrast to the poor relations which pupils had with teachers:

‘I absolutely love [name of advisor]; she knew what to say to me from the first moment we met. She is down to earth and really understands what I’m going through’

‘I think they are brilliant. [Name of advisor] is like a best friend to me and I tell her everything’.

4.64 It was often argued that Cynnydd and TRAC workers alike had a better understanding of pupils’ personal issues and challenges than other teaching staff:

‘The Cynnydd worker helps me talk through things, and that’s much better than it was in mainstream school, where the teachers were way too busy and would just send me home’.

- 4.65 Pupils also appreciated the fact that they could ‘drop in’ on their support worker at any time, and valued the easy access to staff:
- ‘I’m always calling in and if I need to cool down or have a cry, they’ll help me calm down and talk it through’.
- 4.66 FE TRAC pupils reported being fairly satisfied with the support that they received from their TRAC workers. The main strength was having consistent contact with the same TRAC worker. Their slightly less positive feedback, compared with Cynnydd, may be due to the project’s greater focus on study support which students would possibly be less enthusiastic about in any case. Amongst the comments made were:
- ‘it was alright’
- ‘if I’m honest, I was forced to go by my mum and dad...[but] it did start to work for me’.
- 4.67 It was a concern for a small number of pupils that they would not have access to the Cynnydd and TRAC support over the course of the summer period, with one observing:
- ‘a lot can happen over that time and it would be good if you could still have someone to talk to if you need it’.
- 4.68 A small number of TRAC and Cynnydd pupils were aware that their participation in the project, and attendance at ‘a centre’, was a source of mockery amongst their peers and this was often difficult to bear. TRAC pupils also spoke of the ‘stigma’ attached to their group within the FE setting which was thought to be ‘a bit patronising’.
- GO Wales Achieve through Work Experience*
- 4.69 Most individuals regarded their experience of GO Wales as excellent and had been ‘very satisfied’ with it whilst a small number thought it had been fairly good:
- ‘I received a lot of help. I received a lot of information through e-mails and was able to discuss the opportunities that would have been of interest. I suppose it helps you identify what you want and don’t want to do’.
- 4.70 The main strengths of the provision were considered to be the opportunity to reflect upon and discuss future career possibilities as well as gaining direct hands-on work experience at a relevant host organisation. Individuals were mindful of their lack of

prior work experience, particularly in sectors relevant to their degree subject.

Several individuals commented positively upon the fact that project advisors had taken time to discuss their interests and consider possible work experience opportunities at the outset. Indeed, advisors were praised for being 'very approachable', 'friendly', 'helpful' and 'empathetic' in this respect and managed to create comfortable environment to discuss any health and study related issues with participants.

- 4.71 Another strength of the approach was thought to be the links which project officers had in place with prospective host organisations. This was used effectively to mediate links between undergraduates who were not familiar with the area and local opportunities. In some cases, this involved a project officer taking participants to meet with a representative from the host organisation and on occasion, discuss any health related issues which might impact upon a participants' ability to undertake specific duties.
- 4.72 The main downside of the project was that some participants' experience had been limited to work shadowing opportunities only, largely due to the fact that they could only be supported until the summer after graduation. In other cases, external factors accounted for this. For instance, one participant had wanted to gain work experience which would involve working with people with dementia, but the project had been unable to secure an appropriate work experience. Another participant had found their work experience cut short due to staffing issues at the host organisation, whilst a third acknowledged that they struggled to maintain their involvement with the project due to health issues.

#### *Active Inclusion Youth*

- 4.73 Individuals who contributed to the research were very satisfied with the support accessed via the Active Inclusion Youth project, adding that it had been focused on their needs and objectives. Focus group attendees reflected that:
- 'out of 10, I'd score them as a 10 because of how hard they work to help us. They've helped me more than I would have imagined possible'.
- 4.74 Project officers were singled out as a strength of the provision in that they managed to create a relaxed and supportive environment for participants and were considered to be sympathetic, accessible and took a real interest in their case. Several individuals stressed the value of 'being listened to'. This was in contrast to

their experience at the Jobcentre where ‘it’s all about finding you work, whereas here they talk about you as a person and then try to do what’s best for you’.

- 4.75 The other key strength of the project was thought to be the opportunity to interact with others who were experiencing similar issues:

‘it helps you realise that you are not alone, and that other people have similar problems’

‘sharing our stories and emotions with each other...it’s been really cathartic’.

### **Present situation**

- 4.76 There had been no change in the circumstances of individuals supported by the STEM Cymru project and all focus group attendees were continuing with their mainstream school education since having become involved with the operation.

- 4.77 Likewise, there had been no major change in the circumstances of most Cynnydd and TRAC individuals since joining the project, although many contributors who were in Year 11 or in FE settings and nearing the end of their academic year anticipated that their situation would soon change. Despite this, some pupils reported that their engagement with the project had resulted in a revised school timetable to reflect their project activities and one FE TRAC pupil reported having changed his study options since having come into contact with the project:

‘I decided to go back to do A levels as I want to go on to university...He gave me the confidence in myself and belief that I was good enough to do A levels.’

- 4.78 GO Wales Achieve through Work Experience participants were nearing the end of the academic year at the time of interview so some were waiting for the results of their final year undergraduate studies whilst others were expecting to return to their second or third year of study. Those who were about to leave university were offered an opportunity to meet with the GO Wales advisor to discuss possible career and job prospects.

- 4.79 Some Active Inclusion Youth participants reported changes to their circumstances since having come into contact with the project. One individual reported having achieved a Level 2 qualification as a result of the training undertaken with the project, having left school with no qualifications at all. Another had found paid employment working in a retail outlet as a result of the project. Three were planning on returning to college in the autumn to study courses such as accountancy and

beauty. Others anticipated continuing with the project until they managed to find work.

## **Benefits of the project**

### *STEM Cymru*

- 4.80 Individuals involved with the EESW element of the STEM Cymru project reported having benefited in many ways. A key benefit was the opportunity to develop new scientific skills which were broader than those they would have developed in the classroom. Many had gained experience of project management and delegation skills, as well as improved their communication skills as a result of presenting findings to industry and a judges' panel. Their involvement in the project had served to strengthen pupils' interest in engineering and broadened their horizons about potential careers in the sector.
- 4.81 Pupils involved in the F1 STEM Cymru project reported experiencing benefits such as increased personal confidence as a result of presenting their portfolio to a judging panel. They also commonly identified increased technology related knowledge and a greater interest in technology related subjects. This was a particular benefit cited by female contributors who reported that the project had provided them with a hands-on experience of technology. In terms of skills, pupils mentioned that they had developed skills such as teamworking, problem solving, working to deadlines, time keeping, communication, presentation and CAD software design skills. One group mentioned that the project, given its competitive approach, had been important in helping them deal with failure. Another group had found the project useful in getting an opportunity to observe how technology was used across industry, in a professional capacity, and this had been of value in understanding the range of jobs available within engineering.
- 4.82 Broadly, younger pupils had not given much consideration to how the project would be of benefit to them in terms of the CVs or future career and were more inclined to identify the value of the project in boosting their technology and engineering know-how.
- 4.83 Older female pupils in particular acknowledged that their experience of the F1 STEM Cymru project had made them consider their future careers. One pupil for instance reported that she had 'started to think about getting into engineering' having been involved with the project for three years. Other girls were less decided

on their future careers but recognised that the project had led to ‘another path [being] opened’ and, in one case ‘gave us a better idea of what Design and Technology is about’.

### *Cynnydd*

- 4.84 One important benefit reported by Cynnydd and TRAC school pupils was improved behaviour in school, which was often expected to lead to better educational outcomes. Those who had just completed their GCSE exams at the time of interview thought that it would have been unlikely for them to have completed their course or done as well in their exams without having had support. Comments offered included:

‘I’m not arguing with teachers as much’

‘the stuff I’ve done with Cynnydd has helped me get my head down in school, and I’ve been doing well with my studies’.

- 4.85 It was also the case that many pupils reported reduced anxiety and concerns about coming to school, which had led to improved attendance and engagement with their studies. In one case a pupil reported having increased their attendance from around 50 per cent to over 90 per cent. A couple reported that they put more effort into completing their homework and were concentrating more in lessons than previously. Several pupils reported being happier than they used to be.

‘I don’t worry about coming to school anymore – I just get up and jump on the bus’.

- 4.86 Several pupils reported being better able to cope with situations in school as a result of their involvement with the project, as they were able to discuss their concerns directly with project workers. Several pupils had learnt new coping and breathing techniques which they now used in difficult situations. A few thought that they were now better able to control their anger and temper, having been given strategies to manage them. For instance, at one school, pupils reported that they had been supported to build a wellbeing box, which they then filled with items to calm them down when experiencing a difficult day:

‘I’m a lot calmer than I was and I don’t kick off as much. I’m still not a massive fan of school, but Cynnydd has made it much more bearable’.

- 4.87 A number of pupils thought that their confidence had improved and commented positively on improved social interactions with new friends. A small number of pupils

reflected upon the fact that their experience with the project had helped address relationship issues which they had with parents or siblings. One such pupil observed that 'because I'm going to school and enjoying things more, there are less arguments'. Many also thought that their self-esteem had increased and that they felt more positive about their current and future circumstances.

4.88 Both Cynnydd and TRAC FE pupils thought that their involvement with the project had helped them continue with their studies over the course of the year, and therefore ultimately help them achieve their qualifications at the end. They also noted other personal positive benefits, particularly being better able to cope with life and as such reported being calmer, more confident, happier, less angry and better able to cope with stress. TRAC FE pupils thought that they had been able to perform better on the course as a result of the project supporting them with their studies and assignments. Indeed, TRAC pupils thought that they had been able to gain a range of skills as a result of participation and cited improvements to skills such as study and communication skills.

4.89 It was also the case that some TRAC and Cynnydd pupils had secured certificates of achievement for various group activities and work placements which they had undertaken.

4.90 In the absence of having been involved with the project a number of Cynnydd and TRAC pupils reported that they would probably have been 'kicked out of school' altogether whilst college students thought that they would have 'quit college'. A few pupils also observed that they wouldn't have been attending school or college as often, or if they did, they wouldn't have been as focused:

'I wouldn't be here without the project. My behaviour went out of control...she helped me through that'

'I wouldn't have been coming to school anywhere near as much'

'without this, I doubt I'd go to lessons, or if I did, I'd just waste my time'.

4.91 Perhaps the case of a couple of pupils illustrate the extent to which Cynnydd has helped young people to turn their lives around:

'I doubt I'd be alive to be honest. I was really unhappy and couldn't see much of a future for myself, it was pretty scary. They've helped me a lot'

'had I not had the support, my life would be exactly the same. I'd be unhappy, angry, depressed and falling out with everyone. I don't even like thinking about it to be honest. My life has turned around'.

### *Go Wales Achieve through Work Experience*

4.92 The benefits of being involved with the project were thought to include:

- improved social and communication skills as a result of being placed with employer organisations: 'it's made me think about the way I present myself and communicate with people'
- improved personal confidence, particularly in professional circumstances when dealing with colleagues and clients/patients. One individual commented that 'I am much more confident talking to people and have a better feel of how to get key points across to people' and another observed that 'I feel much more confident going into different situations now. I will express my opinion a lot more too. I never really did this before. I would be afraid to share my opinions and get things wrong'
- improved employability skills, such as better time keeping, organisational skills, established routine, working to deadlines, problem solving and working under pressure
- addressing doubts as to whether they could be employed: 'I felt useless before...but then I felt much more confident...I have never worked that much before and it gave me confidence that I could actually be in a job'
- finding ways of overcoming personal issues within the workplace such as dealing with health related obstacles and disabilities such as dyslexia whilst on work experience: 'it's been a huge boost to my confidence not to see dyslexia as a downfall'
- being better informed about career options and having a better idea as to possible future career 'to make you think about the things you like and dislike'
- having an enhanced CV as a result of being able to cite the shadowing and work experiences, as well as having an appropriate employer reference to cite for future job applications. Amongst the comments offered were 'having it

on my CV will be beneficial' and 'I'm hoping that it's good for my CV and gives me an advantage'.

- 4.93 Most individuals, however, were realistic that they didn't expect their experience with GO Wales to lead directly to any employment opportunities as this was not an objective for the project. One individual however thought that the project had been 'vital' to her current situation, as she had since secured a part time cleaning role and would not have been confident enough to apply for this without having any prior work experience. Other elements, such as having a degree qualification and a strongly written CV and job application, were considered in comparison to be more important in securing work in the future.

#### *Active Inclusion Youth*

- 4.94 Participants reported a number of benefits of having been involved with the Active Inclusion Youth project. These included personal gains such as feeling more positive about the future, having a renewed sense of direction and greater clarity about what they want to do in the future and how to go about it. For instance:  
  
'It's given me a sense of pride in myself again. Before I came here, I had no plan and was a bit down'.  
  
'I can actually picture myself doing a job now'.
- 4.95 Several participants had developed new skills during their time with the project including improved communication skills, coping skills and job searching skills.
- 4.96 One participant had struggled with anxiety and was finding it hard to interact with new people. This individual was also nervous around large groups and when confronted with new situations. The group work within the project helped the participant overcome her fear of working with others:  
  
'interaction with smaller groups has helped me overcome that fear, and I've become a bit of a people person now'.
- 4.97 In the absence of support, individuals thought that their situations would not have improved or changed. Those still looking for work thought that they would still be doing so in a non-constructive way:  
  
'If I hadn't come here, I'd be stuck...I'd be going around in circles at the Job Centre'  
  
'I'd still be endlessly searching for jobs on 13 different websites'.

- 4.98 One participant who had secured work, suggested that whilst they had spotted the job opportunity themselves, the project had made a difference in helping them secure the role, adding that it 'wouldn't have happened without the encouragement and coaching I'd received from these guys'.
- 4.99 Another who was planning on returning to education in the autumn thought that in the absence of the project they would have retreated back into isolation and 'probably would have stopped leaving the flat altogether'. The individual thought it very unlikely that they would have enrolled on an FE course.

### **Use of other support providers**

- 4.100 Broadly, STEM Cymru and GO Wales Achieve through Work Experience participants were the least likely to have accessed any other type of support, although GO Wales participants had accessed student support and counselling services on occasion whilst at university.
- 4.101 Participants involved with Cynnydd and TRAC projects reported having accessed support such as from CAHMS, social services and other professional counselling services, including the Drug and Alcohol Service. Likewise, Active Inclusion Youth participants had accessed a range of other support services including Jobcentre Plus and Careers Wales provision.

### **Future**

#### *STEM Cymru*

- 4.102 A small number of EESW STEM Cymru pupils who were interviewed were now considering a career in engineering and their involvement in the project had contributed towards their decisions. Two were considering taking an apprenticeship route into engineering whilst the third had decided to study engineering in university, having previously been keen to study medicine. This pupil observed 'I have wanted to be a doctor for most of my life but, as a result of this experience, I now want to go into engineering. The experience has been so enjoyable and rewarding.'
- Interestingly, some pupils were more open to the prospect of undertaking an apprenticeship as a result of their involvement with the project, as opposed to a university degree.
- 4.103 A number of the F1 STEM Cymru pupils anticipated or would welcome being involved with the project during the next academic year, with many keen to perform better and learn from their experiences. Most pupils, particularly girls, reported

being more interested in technology and engineering than was previously the case and thought that the project had played an important role in getting them involved in this area, for instance:

‘before I did this, I wasn’t thinking about doing technology much. But after the experience, I’m more towards doing it’ (female focus group attendee)

‘I’m not sure I would have been as enthusiastic about engineering because I’ve come to love it through this project’ (female focus group attendee).

- 4.104 Others, particularly boys, thought that their experience had reinforced their previous interest in this area and anticipated a career within engineering or technology:

‘when I’m older, I always knew I would do tech and stuff like that because my Dad works in a garage’

#### *Cynnydd and TRAC*

- 4.105 Most of the Cynnydd and TRAC pupils envisaged continuing in school until the end of Year 11 to obtain GCSE qualifications or equivalent. In some cases, Key Stage 4 pupils were planning on studying a narrower range of GCSE qualifications including vocational qualifications such as hair and beauty and qualifications offered by the [Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network](#) (ASDAN<sup>8</sup>). Most of those in Year 11 had plans to attend further education in the forthcoming academic year to study various courses. Some had other plans, such as joining the army, studying at university or finding work or volunteering opportunities. A couple were less certain about what they would do after leaving school:

‘I’m in no rush but I’m still so confused about what I want to do...It has helped me emotionally and stuff like that...[but] it hasn’t helped me in a way where I can just go out and find a job’.

- 4.106 Most FE pupils planned on returning the following academic year either to progress to study a course at the next level or to complete their current two year course.

#### *GO Wales Achieve through Work Experience*

- 4.107 As most GO Wales participants were undergraduate students, they anticipated returning to university to complete their degree in the first instance.

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<sup>8</sup> A Curriculum Development Organisation and Awarding Body.

- 4.108 Of the five who were in their final undergraduate studies at university, one was working, and another planned on working in low paid jobs (one in retail and another in the hospitality sector) whilst considering possible career options. Two were planning on embarking on a Master's course and the fifth had enrolled to study a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course in England.
- 4.109 Overall, eight of the 11 individuals were either planning or considering studying a postgraduate course, be that a PGCE, Masters or PhD qualification in the future. In most cases these individuals reported that they were considering this route regardless of their involvement with the project but nonetheless recognised that the experiences gained would be helpful in strengthening their application for a postgraduate course.

*Active Inclusion Youth*

- 4.110 Of the six individuals who contributed to the research one was working and three were planning on returning to education. The two remaining participants anticipated continuing with the project until they had secured a positive outcome. Volunteering work was cited as an area which they intended to pursue with the project.

## 5. Conclusions

- 5.1 To conclude, we return to consider the overall aim of this research which was to gather the views of participants who might otherwise have been under-represented within the large scale ESF Participant phone survey.
- 5.2 The qualitative fieldwork conducted with participants supported across two Specific Objectives of the current ESI programme has generated some specific and detailed insights into the experiences of a small number of participants who have engaged with eight ESF operations targeted at supporting young people and vulnerable groups.
- 5.3 There are several methodological considerations which restrict the value and utility of the data and evidence gathered via this approach.
- 5.4 First, the original intention of this approach was to gather feedback from specific cohorts of participants not covered by the large-scale survey with the objective of enhancing the ESF quantitative survey data. However, due to a number of factors, it did not prove practical to use the same survey questionnaire on a face to face basis with these groups and a more qualitative approach was adopted instead which necessitated a separate report. There is scope to compare and contrast the qualitative interview and focus group findings with the ESF quantitative survey data when this is analysed and published by the Welsh Government. This should be possible as the research instruments used within the qualitative study mirror the themes covered by the survey questionnaire. However, whilst there would be benefit of comparing the data for those participants supported via Priority Axis 1 operations there would be little value doing so for Priority Axis 3 participants on the basis that the majority of these participants were still in education at the time of interview and have an unique profile compared with the remaining participants supported via ESF operations.
- 5.5 Second, the sample of participants interviewed was significantly lower than planned (129 compared to circa 400 interviews) due to the fact that the fieldwork was restricted to a one-year period (compared to the original intention of a four-year period) and qualitative in nature. As such the findings can only serve to provide a snapshot of participants' experiences and cannot be considered to offer findings for a robust and representative sample of those supported across the eight operations selected.

- 5.6 Third, when considering the information and data gleaned from the interviews and focus groups it became evident that it was very difficult to analyse the findings at a programme level, given that the nature of the support and experiences gained was so different from one operation to another. Whilst it was possible to analyse the experiences of participants supported by operations which had similar objectives (such as those reported by Cynnydd and TRAC participants for instance), there would be little value in attempting to analyse the outcomes achieved by participants for a broader range of interventions.
- 5.7 Having considered these limitations, it is therefore questionable whether it would be worthwhile repeating this type of research exercise again in the future. Rather, consideration could be given to alternative methods such as using operation's own evaluation evidence where an independent evaluation, which has included fieldwork with participants, has been commissioned. For instance, it would be feasible to undertake a macro-level review of participants' evidence presented within evaluation reports across particular Specific Objectives with a view of drawing out common experiences and outcomes achieved. Funded operations' own evaluation evidence could provide similar, and possibly more triangulated, evidence of the difference made to participants.
- 5.8 Despite the limitations of this study, the feedback gleaned from contributors generally point to them having had a very positive experience of their ESF operation and their involvement led to positive outcomes.
- 5.9 Priority Axis 1 contributors led very chaotic lives and had struggled to maintain relatively low-paid, temporary jobs prior to engaging with their intervention. Whilst the majority were looking for work when they joined the project, contributors could not find and sustain employment and therefore required significant guidance and support to address pre-employment issues. The fieldwork found that operations effectively delivered bespoke solutions to address personal issues and needs. Other key aspects of successful intervention were identified as interaction with other clients and the quality of, and approach taken by, a dedicated mentor or advisor. Contributors reported being very satisfied with the support accessed, although some caution must be taken given the role played by providers in identifying and recruiting contributors to the research.

- 5.10 In terms of the outcomes achieved by Priority Axis 1 participants, it is not unexpected that contributors were still not work ready at the time of interview, given the severity of the personal issues they were facing. Despite this, the evidence suggests that interventions can turn participants' lives around and contributors regularly reported having achieved soft outcomes such as improved routine, improved relationship with others, increased social interactions, improved self-esteem and confidence which made them more employable. The vast majority of individuals thought that the project had made a fundamental contribution to improving their personal lives and circumstances.
- 5.11 Most Priority Axis 3 participants were in education when they joined their operation and there was minimal change in their employment or educational circumstances, not least as the majority were still in school, further or higher education. The profile of participants was heavily influenced by the operation's objective. Some operations were directly geared towards supporting those who were struggling or becoming disengaged from education, such as Cynnydd and TRAC, whilst others focused on providing specific and enhanced opportunities for learners or students. Participants' involvement with operations varied from short and fairly light touch to much more intensive, long-term involvement and as a result, the range of outcomes reported by participants varied.
- 5.12 The nature of outcomes reported by contributors very much depended upon the operation's objectives. Across the five operations included within the research these included gaining new skills, developing or strengthening an interest in a particular career or sector, enhanced CVs, improved confidence as well as improved behaviour and attendance at school. Participants who had been involved with initiatives targeted at those who were struggling or were disengaged with education were found to have overcome a wide range of personal and behavioural issues as well. These included addressing issues such as anxiety, stress, low confidence, dealing with bullying, low self-esteem and poor engagement with education.

## Annex I: Qualitative interview discussion guide

For use across eight ESF funded projects covering PA1 and PA3

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

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

A2 What you were doing when you got involved in the project? **CODE WHAT THEY WERE MAINLY DOING IN THE WEEK BEFORE STARTING PROVISION:**

Employed, including by a family member or self-employed	1	
On an apprenticeship	2	
Unemployed and looking for work	3	
In education or training (IF YES: what course or training was this?)	4	
Working in a voluntary, unpaid role or internship	5	
Not in or looking for paid work (e.g. looking after children or relatives, retired)	6	
(DO NOT READ OUT) Can't remember	X	

A3 **(For those not engaged with pre-16 compulsory school education)** Is that what you have mostly been doing since you left school? If not, what have you mainly been doing? **CODE which one of the following best describes their situation:**

Mostly employed, including by a family member or self-employed	1	
On an apprenticeship	2	
Mostly unemployed and looking for work	3	
Mostly in education or training (IF YES: what course or training was this?)	4	
Mostly working in a voluntary, unpaid role or internship	5	
Mostly not in or looking for paid work (e.g. looking after children or relatives, retired)	6	
(DO NOT READ OUT) Can't remember	X	

A4 **(For those not engaged with pre-16 compulsory school education)** Tell me a little about the sort of things you've done since leaving full time education at the age of 16? [Respondent may wish to flag up any previous issues they've experienced such as ill-health etc]

- Ask about work
- Ask about training or courses that they've attended before
- Ask about volunteering

A5 Before you joined the project what was the highest qualification that you had obtained?

- Ask for type of qualification
- Ask for level and grade

INTERVIEWER TO NOTE THAT

- GCSEs at grades 3,2,1 or grades D,E,F,G should be considered Level 1
- GCSEs at grades 9,8,7,6,5,4 or A\*, A, B, C should be considered Level 2
- A levels and AS levels should be considered Level 3
- Higher National Certificates (HNC) should be considered Level 4
- Higher National Diplomas (HND) should be considered Level 5
- Degrees (excluding foundation and master's) should be considered Level 6
- Foundation degrees are Level 5
- Master's degrees are Level 7
- Doctorates are Level 8

Entry Level	1	
Level 1	2	
Level 2	3	
Level 3	4	
Level 4	5	
Level 5	6	
Level 6	7	
Level 7	8	
Level 8	9	
Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)	10	
Don't know	11	

A6 **[If they were not in work before getting involved]:** Tell me a little about your time out of work:

- How long had you been out of work?
- Have you ever had a paid job? If so, what was the nature of your previous job?
- Were you actively looking for work when you joined the project? [IF YES: what sort of jobs?]

A7 **[If they were not in work before getting involved]** Were you not looking for work for any of the following reasons? CODE ALL THAT APPLY:

Looking after the family, home or caring for dependents	1	
Temporary health problems or injury (including physical and mental health problems)	2	
Long-term health problems or disabled (including physical and mental health problems)	3	
Retired	4	
Doing unpaid voluntary work	5	
Not needing or wanting employment	6	
Not looking for work as there were no jobs available	7	
Alcohol or drug dependency	8	
Or was there some other reason you were not looking for a job (PLEASE SPECIFY)	9	
DO NOT READ OUT: Can't remember	10	

A8 **[If they were not in work before getting involved]** Thinking about before you got involved with the project, did any of the following things make it difficult for you to find work? **CODE ALL THAT APPLY:**

Not having the right qualifications	1	
Not having the right skills	2	
Not having relevant work experience	3	
Not being able to afford childcare	4	
Having caring responsibilities	5	
Health problems (including physical and mental health problems)	6	
Your age	7	
Alcohol or drug dependency	8	
Having a criminal record	9	
No appropriate jobs where you live	10	
Hard to get to appropriate work	11	
You only wanting to work part time	12	
Believing you would not be better off financially in work	13	
Were there any other reasons why it was difficult for you to find work (PLEASE SPECIFY)	14	
DO NOT READ OUT: Don't know	15	
DO NOT READ OUT: None of these	16	

A9 [If they were in work/self-employed when they got involved with project OR if they had some previous recent working experience before getting involved]: Tell me a little about the job you had EITHER when you got involved with the project OR in the past:

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

A10 [If they were in education or training when they got involved with project] Tell me a little about the education or training you were doing before starting the course.

- Were you in school, college, on a traineeship or course whilst working?
- What subject/course were you studying?
- [SO 3.3 Projects only] Were you studying any STEM subjects?
- How satisfied were you with the education or training which you were undertaking at the time?
- What were you enjoying the most/the least about the education or training?
- What challenges, if any, were you facing in your education/training at the time?
- What plans, if any, did you have in place for when you completed your education or training?
- [SO 3.3 Projects only] Had you considered a career in STEM at all? If so, what plans or ideas did you have?

A11 [For those aged 21 and under and not in education when they got involved with the project] Tell me why you decided to leave education when you did?

- At what point did you leave education?
  - What were you studying at the time e.g. GCSE, A Level etc
- Did you finish before or after completing your studies?
- Did you finish due to any personal reasons? If so, ask whether these included:
  - Personal health problems
  - Financial reasons
  - Caring responsibilities for own child
  - Caring responsibilities for others (e.g. parents, siblings)
  - Other personal factors (specify)
- Did you finish due to other reasons such as?
  - Found course/education too boring
  - Found course/education too difficult
  - Found it difficult to attend
  - Was excluded
  - Other reasons (specify)



## SECTION B INVOLVEMENT WITH THE PROJECT

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

- Were you referred to the project by another organisation? If so, by who?
- Were you informed about it by a teacher or tutor?

B2 What did the course/training/project involve?

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

B3a **[FOR THOSE STILL IN FULL TIME EDUCATION]** Why did you get involved with the course/project? **PROMPT AND CODE ALL THAT APPLY**

Teacher / tutor / adviser said it would be a good idea	1	
To learn something new	2	
To help you decide what subject to study in future	3	
To help you decide what career to follow	4	
To get something to put on your CV / job applications	5	
To get work experience	6	
To prepare you for the world of work	7	
To help you stay in education / continue your studies	8	
To help you do something positive with your life	9	
Or was there another reason (PLEASE SPECIFY)	10	
DO NOT READ OUT: Can't remember	11	

B3b **[FOR THOSE NOT IN FULL TIME EDUCATION]** Why did you get involved and what did you hope to get out of the project?

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

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

### **SECTION C: SATISFACTION WITH PROJECT**

C1 How satisfied are you/have you been with the support and courses that you've been involved with? Why do you say that?

C2 Is the project meeting/did the project meet your initial expectations?

C3 What is/was good about the project?

C4 What is/was not as good about the project? How could these be improved?

C5 Did you complete/have you already completed any courses offered by the project?  
[For leavers, if no]. If not, why not?

C6 Did you obtain/have you already obtained any qualifications or accredited certificates as a result of being supported by the project? If so,

- What type of qualification was this?
- What level/grade?
- [Check given earlier responses] So was this at a higher level than any qualifications which you already had before joining the project?

C7 **[Current learners]** Do you think you'll complete any [further] courses offered by the project? If not, why not?

C8 **[Current learners]** Do you think you will obtain any [further] qualifications or accredited certificates as a result of being supported by the project? If so,

- What type of qualification will this be?
- What level/grade will it be at?
- [Check given earlier responses] So this will be at a higher level than any qualifications which you already had before joining the project?

### **SECTION D PRESENT SITUATION**

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

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

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

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

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

Employed, including by a family member or self-employed	1	
On an apprenticeship	2	
Unemployed and looking for work	3	
In education or training	4	
Working in a voluntary, unpaid role or internship	5	
Not in or looking for paid work (for example looking after children or relatives, retired)	6	
Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)	7	
DO NOT READ OUT: Can't remember	8	

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

Employed, including by a family member or self-employed	1	
On an apprenticeship	2	
Unemployed and looking for work	3	
In education or training	4	
Working in a voluntary, unpaid role or internship	5	
Not in or looking for paid work (for example looking after children or relatives, retired)	6	
Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)	7	
DO NOT READ OUT: Can't remember	8	

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

Employed, including by a family member or self-employed	1	
On an apprenticeship	2	
Unemployed and looking for work	3	

In education or training	4	
Working in a voluntary, unpaid role or internship	5	
Not in or looking for paid work (for example looking after children or relatives, retired)	6	
Other (PLEASE SPECIFY)	7	
DO NOT READ OUT: Can't remember	8	

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

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

Not having the right qualifications	1	
Not having the right skills	2	
Not having relevant work experience	3	
Not being able to afford childcare	4	
Having caring responsibilities	5	
Health problems (including physical and mental health problems)	6	
Your age	7	
Alcohol or drug dependency	8	
Having a criminal record	9	
No appropriate jobs where you live	10	
Hard to get to appropriate work	11	
You only wanting to work part time	12	
Believing you would not be better off financially in work	13	
Were there any other reasons why it was difficult for you to find work (PLEASE SPECIFY)	14	
DO NOT READ OUT: Don't know	15	
DO NOT READ OUT: None of these	16	

D7 **[If they are in work/self-employed]** Tell me a little about the job you have:

- Is it the same job as you had before you got involved with the project?
- What does the job entail – ask about job title and responsibilities
- Is the job: permanent, fixed term, casual/temporary or zero contract hours
- Were you employed, self-employed or on an apprenticeship?
- How many hours per week did you usually work for?
- How long have you been in this post?
- Approximately, what is the salary for this post?
- How satisfied are you with this job? Explore any issues raised e.g. salary, working hours, ability to fulfil potential

D8 **[If they are in work/self-employed]** What contribution, if at all, did the project make to you obtaining your current post?

D9 [If they are currently in education or training] Tell me a little about the education or training course which you are currently undertaking.

- What course/subjects are you studying?
- [SO 3.3 Projects only] Are you studying any STEM subjects?
- How satisfied are you with the education or training?
- What are you enjoying the most/the least about the education or training?
- What challenges, if any, are you facing in your education/training?
- What plans, if any, do you have in place for when you complete your education or training?
- [SO 3.3 Projects only] Are you considering a career in STEM at all? If so, what plans or ideas do you have?
- [If previously not in education] What contribution, if any, did the course have in helping you to re-enter education? Do you think you re-entered education directly because of the course, the course helped or it made no difference?

## SECTION E: BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT

E1 Do you think you've benefited/are benefiting from being involved with the project? If so, in what way?

- Ask about personal confidence and how they feel about themselves
- Ask about dealing with or overcoming personal problems
- Ask about changes in behaviour e.g. anger management
- Ask about improvement in wellbeing
- Ask about changes in attendance
- Ask about new interests and making friends
- Ask about attitudes to learning and work
- Ask about job and career prospects

E2 Have there been any disadvantages to you from being involved with the project? If so, what are/were they?

E3 Can you tell me more specifically what was it about the project that led to these benefits [at E1]?

- For example, was it meeting others, specific advice or guidance received, getting back into a routine. Ask for examples.

E4 What sort of skills do you think you've gained or improved/you're gaining or improving from being involved with the project?

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

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

- Ask about changes to job security
- Ask about changes to salary

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

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

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

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

## **SECTION F: USE OF OTHER SUPPORT PROVIDERS**

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

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

## **SECTION G FUTURE**

G1 What are your plans for the future in terms of education and/or employment?

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

## FINAL SECTION ON DEMOGRAPHICS

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

### 1 CODE GENDER

Male	1	
Female	2	

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

Exact age in years \_\_\_\_\_

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

<b>White</b>		
Welsh	1	
Other British	2	
Irish	3	
Any other white background (SPECIFY)	4	
<b>Mixed</b>		
White and Black Caribbean	5	
White and Black African	6	
White and Asian	7	
Any other mixed background (SPECIFY)	8	
<b>Asian or Asian British</b>		
Indian	9	
Pakistani	10	
Bangladeshi	11	
Chinese	12	
Any other Asian background (SPECIFY)	13	
<b>Black or Black British</b>		
Caribbean	14	
African	15	
Any other Black background (SPECIFY)	16	
<b>Other ethnic group</b>		
Arab	17	
Gypsy / Romany / Irish Traveller	18	
Any other (SPECIFY)	19	
Refused	20	

**4 What is your first language?** Single code. Do not read out.

Welsh	1	
English	2	
Other language (including bilingual) (PLEASE SPECIFY)	3	
DO NOT READ OUT: Don't know	4	
DO NOT READ OUT: Refused	5	

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

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

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

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

**6 Were you aware that the European Social Fund (or ESF) helped to pay for the course?**

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

## Annex II: Focus group discussion guide

For use across PA3 ESF funded projects

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

- A1 First of all tell me a bit about yourself and what you were doing when you got involved in the project? Ask *as appropriate* warm-up questions about where they live, their educational history, what they were doing prior to getting involved with the project, any qualifications they had previously obtained and any employment that they may have had
- A2 **[If they were in education or training when they got involved with project]** Tell me a little about the education or training you were doing before you got involved with the project.
- Were you in school, college, university, on a traineeship or course whilst working?
  - What subject/course were you studying?
  - **[SO 3.3 Projects only]** Were you studying any STEM subjects?
  - How satisfied were you with the education or training which you were undertaking at the time?
  - What were you enjoying the most/the least about the education or training?
  - What challenges, if any, were you facing in your education/training at the time?
  - What plans, if any, did you have in place for when you completed your education or training?
  - **[SO 3.3 Projects only]** Had you considered a career in STEM at all? If so, what plans or ideas did you have?
- A3 **[For those aged 21 and under and not in education when they got involved with the project]** Tell me why you decided to leave education when you did?
- At what point did you leave education?
    - What were you studying at the time e.g. GCSE, A Level etc
  - Did you finish before or after completing your studies?
  - Did you finish due to any personal reasons? If so, ask whether these included:
    - Personal health problems
    - Financial reasons
    - Caring responsibilities for own child
    - Caring responsibilities for others (e.g. parents, siblings)
    - Other personal factors (specify)
  - Did you finish due to other reasons such as?
    - Found course/education too boring
    - Found course/education too difficult
    - Found it difficult to attend

- Was excluded
- Other reasons (specify)

A4 [For those aged 21 and under and in work/self-employed when they got involved with project OR if they had some previous recent working experience before getting involved]: Tell me a little about the job you had EITHER when you got involved with the project OR in the past:

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

A5 [For those aged 21 and under and not in education and have no work/self-employment experience] Tell me a little about your efforts to find work:

- How long had you been out of work?
- Have you ever had a paid job? If so, what was the nature of your previous job?
- Were you actively looking for work when you joined the project?
  - [IF YES: what sort of jobs?]
  - [IF NO: Why were you not looking for work?]
- What made it difficult for you to find work?

## SECTION B INVOLVEMENT WITH THE PROJECT

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

- Were you referred to the project by another organisation? If so, by who?
- Were you informed about it by a teacher or tutor?

B2 What did the course/training/project involve?

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

B3 Why did you get involved with the course/project?

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



## SECTION C: SATISFACTION WITH PROJECT

- C1 How satisfied are you/have you been with the support and courses that you've been involved with? Why do you say that?
- C2 Is the project meeting/did the project meet your initial expectations?
- C3 What is/was good about the project?
- C4 What is/was not as good about the project? How could these be improved?
- C5 Did you complete/have you already completed any courses offered by the project? If not, why not?
- C6 Did you obtain/have you already obtained any qualifications or accredited certificates as a result of being supported by the project? If so,
- What type of qualification was this?
  - What level/grade?
  - So was this at a higher level than any qualifications which you already had before joining the project?
- C7 Do you think you'll complete any [further] courses offered by the project? If not, why not?
- C8 Do you think you will obtain any [further] qualifications or accredited certificates as a result of being supported by the project? If so,
- What type of qualification will this be?
  - What level/grade will it be at?
  - So this will be at a higher level than any qualifications which you already had before joining the project?

## SECTION D PRESENT SITUATION

D1 Since joining the project have your education, training or work circumstances changed at all?

**[Note to researcher: The remaining questions in this section only needs to be asked of participants whose education or work circumstances have changed whilst still on the course. Otherwise move to Section E]**

D6 **[If they have become out of work]:** Are you looking for work?

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

D7 **[If they have moved into work/self-employed]** Tell me a little about the job you have:

- Is it the same job as you had before you got involved with the project?
- What does the job entail – ask about job title and responsibilities
- Is the job: permanent, fixed term, casual/temporary or zero contract hours
- Were you employed, self-employed or on an apprenticeship?
- How many hours per week did you usually work for?
- How long have you been in this post?
- Approximately, what is the salary for this post?
- How satisfied are you with this job? Explore any issues raised e.g. salary, working hours, ability to fulfil potential

D8 **[If they have moved into work/self-employed]** What contribution, if at all, did the project make to you obtaining your current post?

D9 **[If they have moved in education or training]** Tell me a little about the education or training course which you are currently undertaking.

- What course/subjects are you studying?
- **[SO 3.3 Projects only]** Are you studying any STEM subjects?
- How satisfied are you with the education or training?
- What are you enjoying the most/the least about the education or training?
- What challenges, if any, are you facing in your education/training?
- What plans, if any, do you have in place for when you complete your education or training?
- **[SO 3.3 Projects only]** Are you considering a career in STEM at all? If so, what plans or ideas do you have?
- **[If previously not in education]** What contribution, if any, did the course have in helping you to re-enter education? Do you think you re-entered education directly because of the course, the course helped or it made no difference?

## SECTION E: BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT

E1 Do you think you're benefiting from being involved with the project? If so, in what way?

- Ask about personal confidence and how they feel about themselves
- Ask about dealing with or overcoming personal problems
- Ask about changes in behaviour e.g. anger management
- Ask about improvement in wellbeing
- Ask about changes in attendance
- Ask about new interests and making friends
- Ask about attitudes to learning and work
- Ask about job and career prospects

E2 Have there been any disadvantages to you from being involved with the project? If so, what are/were they?

E3 Can you tell me more specifically what was it about the project that led to these benefits [at E1]?

- For example, was it meeting others, specific advice or guidance received, getting back into a routine. Ask for examples.

E4 What sort of skills do you think you've gained or improved/you're gaining or improving from being involved with the project?

E5 How do you think your involvement with the project will help you in the future in terms of education and work?

E6 Had you not got involved in this project, what do you think would have happened/what would you have done?

## SECTION F: USE OF OTHER SUPPORT PROVIDERS

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

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

## **SECTION G FUTURE**

G1 What are your plans for the future in terms of education and/or employment?

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