

Evaluation of Supported Employment Coach Pilot

1. Executive Summary

Background

- 1.1 This paper reports on the Evaluation of the Supported Employment Coach pilot ('the pilot'). Learning and Work Institute (L&W) was commissioned by Welsh Government to undertake an evaluation of the pilot, which began in October 2021, initially through the Traineeships programme, and runs until March 2023 as part of the Jobs Growth Wales+ programme (JGW+), which has replaced Traineeships.
- 1.2 [Evaluation](#) of the Traineeships programme highlighted concerns that some providers were not able to provide the resource intensive support required to meet the needs of young people with complex needs and enable them to secure good outcomes. [Reviews](#) of other programmes highlighted similar concerns. In response to this the Welsh Government introduced the Supported Employment Coach Pilot.

Overview of the Supported Employment Coach pilot

- 1.3 The overall aim of the pilot is to improve outcomes for young people with a moderate to severe learning disability/difficulty (LDD) and/or autism, by increasing the number who progress on to paid employment or apprenticeships. In addition, the pilot aims to:
 - Provide resources to further develop awareness and confidence in supporting disabled learners and those with additional learning needs;
 - Inform a better understanding of the cohort of learners who would most benefit from following a learning pathway in line with the Supported Employment Model; and
 - Inform how Welsh Government can support young people with moderate to severe LDD and/or autism to progress onto positive outcomes, including inclusive apprenticeships and paid employment.

1.4 Total funding for the pilot is £400,000. The funding helps providers to access specialist training and advice for existing staff and access to Level 3 specialist work coaches for young people with moderate to severe/ complex needs. Specialist work coaches, trained in using the Supported Employment Model (Level 3)¹, can be used to enhance the support for eligible learners on all strands of the JGW+ programme in a variety of ways including:

Aims of the research

1.5 The evaluation examined the delivery and outcomes of the pilot, and aims to provide detailed insight into the effectiveness of the programme to inform future Welsh Government policy and programmes designed to improve employment outcomes for disabled young people. Specifically, the research sought to understand:

- The intended outcomes for learners participating in the pilot scheme, including what they, their parents/guardians, providers, and coaches consider as success.
- The extent to which learners have benefitted from the pilot scheme. Including any unintended consequences.
- The extent to which learners on the pilot scheme make progress towards positive outcomes. Whether intended outcomes have been met, and why/why not?
- The extent to which Traineeship/JGW+ providers' staff feel their confidence and skills have increased in supporting learners with moderate / severe learning disabilities and autism as a result of participating in the pilot scheme.
- The extent to which the Working Wales² referral process provides the necessary information to identify young people's support needs and effectively informs their Individual Learning Plans. Including whether providers have the information they need to be able to support the learners; whether learners feel that the referral process works; and any information that is lacking.

1.6 The evaluation used a mixed methods approach and included:

- **A rapid document review** of relevant programme, and wider policy and strategy documents, to set the context for and inform the design of the evaluation.
- **Case studies of three learners** who have received support through the pilot, including online in-depth interviews with each learner, their parent/s or guardian/s, JGW+ provider staff, their job coach and employer (where appropriate).

¹ Level 3 Certificate for Supported Employment Practitioners

[Qualification-Specification-Supported-Employment-L3.pdf \(gatewayqualifications.org.uk\)](#)

² Working Wales is delivered by Working Wales and provides careers information, advice and guidance to support individuals to get into work.

- **Qualitative interviews and focus groups.** Online semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with a range of stakeholders including:
 - JGW+ providers and Working Wales staff, to understand how the outcomes referral process for the pilot is working.
 - JGW+ provider staff to explore the effectiveness of training accessed through the pilot.
 - Supported Employment Agencies providing job coaches for the pilot.
- **Analysis of learners' Individual Learning Plans (ILPs).** The ILPs of three young people taking part in the case studies were analysed to investigate the extent to which progress has been made towards positive.

2. Key findings

Referral process

- 2.1 When a young person is referred to the pilot, an Assessment and Referral Report (ARR) is completed by a Working Wales advisor as part of a conversation with the young person. Providers note that the level of detail captured in the form is inconsistent. Gathering information, as fully as possible, at the point of referral is essential to ensure that appropriate support is put in place for young people at the start of an intervention.
- 2.2 The ARR is a starting point in identifying a young person's barriers to employment, support needs and learning goals, and ongoing opportunities for young people to share additional information are also important to inform changes to their learning plan, to ensure they make sustained progress.
- 2.3 Total numbers of referrals over the course of the pilot are unclear. However, qualitative evidence indicates that participation has been lower than anticipated. This highlights the importance of effective communication to ensure that young people who would benefit from support to progress onto positive outcomes, their families, as well as careers advisors and wider stakeholders, are fully aware of the support available, understand the aims of the support and which young people are eligible.

Job coach support

- 2.4 Job coaches offered wide ranging support to case study learners to build confidence, become more independent, develop essential skills for work and daily life and to gain work experience in a supportive environment.
- 2.5 Supported was person-centred to respond to the specific learning needs, goals and preferred learning styles of each young person.

- 2.6 Effective collaboration between the job coach and provider staff helped to ensure an integrated package of support for the young people taking part in the pilot, highlighting the importance of partners, including any support young people may be accessing external to the pilot/JGW+, working together to help young people to sustain progress.
- 2.7 Uncertainty around the specific roles of the provider and the job coach in supporting one young person, emphasises the importance of providing clear guidance on the aims of an intervention and the roles and responsibilities of different partners.
- 2.8 Parents and young people valued the support offered through the pilot. They were positive about their relationship with their job coach and the way in which they had tailored support to their needs and interests.
- 2.9 Parents would welcome more regular and direct communication about the support/activities their son or daughter is undertaking with the job coach and the progress they are making.

Outcomes

- 2.10 Taking part in the pilot resulted in positive outcomes for case study learners, including increased confidence, social, emotional and personal development; the development of employability skills; and increased work readiness. Case study learners were better able to imagine themselves in the workplace and were assessed by provider staff as making good progress towards employment outcomes.
- 2.11 Staff expressed mixed opinions about the impact of training offered through the pilot. However, those with limited prior experience of supporting young people with moderate to severe LDD and/or autism, did feel better prepared to support young people with ALN following the training and had applied this learning in their job roles. Access to more tailored training sessions focussed on specific learning needs, and training to help young people's mental health, would enable staff to further develop their confidence to support disabled young people and young people with ALN.

3. Conclusions/Recommendations

- 3.1 The ARR is a comprehensive referral tool, however, completion of the form is inconsistent and there are often gaps especially around the specific learning and support needs of young people with more severe/complex needs. Referral is the first stage of an ongoing process to identify, assess and review young people's needs, goals and aspirations. However, information captured at this stage should be as detailed as possible to ensure that providers have a good understanding and can put appropriate, tailored support in place from the start of an intervention. Good practice suggests that parents should be involved in

initial referral conversations with Working Wales advisors, and the completion of the ARR form, to ensure as full information as possible.

Recommendation 1: Welsh Government should consider issuing guidance to Working Wales about involving parents in the initial meeting, and the types of information that should be included/depth of assessment that should be undertaken for the ARR. The guidance should also include the aims of the support, the target groups and who to refer to, to ensure that young people are directed to appropriate support following the end of the pilot, in March 2023.

- 3.2 Working Wales and provider staff report that referrals to the pilot have been lower than anticipated and raised concerns that some young people who could benefit from, and were most in need of support, may not be aware of the pilot.

Recommendation 2: Welsh Government should review the effectiveness of different methods used to promote the pilot and future initiatives for this group of learners. In future, clear information should be provided about the aims of new initiatives, the timescales and duration of support, what it involves, who it is aimed at and who to refer to. This information should be communicated to all stakeholders.

- 3.3 Providers identified the benefits of monthly reviews of ILPs to build on information/insights into the support needs of young people gained at the referral point. Regular reviews provide opportunities for learners to share further information and changing needs/goals as they build trust in staff and gain a better understanding of the types of support that job coaches can provide. Learning from reviews is also essential to update and inform changes to ILPs and job coach support plans.

Recommendation 3: Welsh Government should consider issuing guidance to providers supporting young people with ALN to ensure systematic and regular updating of ILPs. Providers in the case studies shared the outcomes of ILPs with job coaches, following the review. The guidance should also include a recommendation that job coaches attend review meetings to share insights/progress from activities they have undertaken with young people and ensure they are part of discussions to inform changes to support/learning goals.

- 3.4 Support to develop independence is a key aspect of the support offered by job coaches and vital for young people to achieve positive outcomes, including employment outcomes. However, the research indicates that parents of young people with more severe/complex needs feel they need more regular and direct communication about the types of activities that young people are involved in, in part to assuage any anxieties they may have about

specific activities but also to gain a better understanding about the aims of the support, and the progress made by the young person toward learning goals.

Recommendation 4: Welsh Government should work with providers to explore ways of improving ongoing communication with and involvement of parents in shaping support, reflecting on the balance between promoting independence and keeping parents informed.

- 3.5 Research demonstrates the value of flexible, 1-1, intensive support in helping this cohort of learners to achieve positive outcomes and make progress towards/secure sustained quality employment. The findings of this evaluation highlight the effectiveness of the breadth of activities and range of support provided by job coaches. In addition, the flexibility of the funding enables support to be provided at a pace that meets the needs of individual learners, without the restriction of time-limits.

Recommendation 5: This person-centred/needs led approach and the potential to support a young person over an extended period should be central to future design and delivery of employment support initiatives for young people with disabilities.

- 3.6 Where the provider and Supported Employment Agency worked closely together, this resulted in an effective and integrated package of support for the young person.

Recommendation 6: Welsh Government should ensure that the design and delivery of future provision builds in joined up support between providers, specialist job coach support and any additional external/specialist support accessed by the young person during their time on the intervention.

- 3.7 Robust data is essential to understand numbers and characteristics of young people participating, outcomes/impact and value for money (VFM) of initiatives designed to increase numbers of young people with moderate to severe LDD and /or autism moving into inclusive apprenticeships/employment.

Recommendation 7: Welsh Government should take steps to ensure compliance with LLWR data requirements and that robust data systems and processes are in place to improve data quality for future initiatives, and to monitor and analyse progress of young people with ALN on JGW+, beyond the end of the pilot.

- 3.8 Staff expressed mixed views on the effectiveness of training offered through the pilot, depending on their level of experience of working with young people with ALN. Less experienced staff had a better understanding of the needs of young people with moderate to severe LDD and/or autism and felt better equipped to support them. However, they felt that further training would be beneficial to explore specific learning needs in more depth,

and how to manage challenges encountered in supporting young people with different needs. Provider staff identified increasing mental health needs among young people engaging with the pilot and JGW+ more generally, especially post pandemic, and would welcome additional training on supporting young people's mental health/wellbeing.

Recommendation 8: Welsh Government should ensure that training is targeted at staff who will gain the most, and explore ways of ensuring that learning from training is cascaded to wider staff. This should include mental health awareness training and support, and support for young people with specific learning needs. In addition, Welsh Government should work with providers to ensure effective join up with/referral to specialist mental health support services. This should be a key part of future design and delivery of programmes for this group of learners.

- 3.9 The evaluation has shown that support from a specialist job coach can be effective in supporting disabled young people to overcome barriers to employment, achieve positive outcomes, and make progress towards securing and sustaining work.

Recommendation 9: Welsh Government should consider undertaking further research to explore the impact of support offered through the pilot on longer term outcomes for this cohort, and the transferability of this model for other groups of learners.

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Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/jobs-growth-wales-supported-employment-coach-pilot-evaluation-2021-2022>

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

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