

The process, impact and economic evaluation of Communities for Work and Communities for Work Plus: Summary and Recommendations

Key findings

- Communities for Work (CfW) outperformed expectations in engaging and supporting young people, and to a lesser degree, long-term unemployed adults, into employment. However, it underperformed expectations in engaging and supporting economically inactive adults.
- Communities for Work Plus (CfW+) outperformed expectations in engaging and supporting people into employment.
- Although staff expressed a clear preference for CfW+'s more flexible and responsive model, the difference in performance between the two programmes was primarily because:
 - CfW+ benefitted from more flexible eligibility criteria, which meant the programme was open to larger numbers of potential participants, across wider geographical areas; and
 - the expectations for CfW+, in terms of engagements, were lower than those for CfW.
- The COVID-19 pandemic created major challenges, which the programmes responded well to, and which faded over time. They contributed to CfW's underperformance in relation to economically inactive adults, but do not fully account for this.
- The programmes relied heavily upon referrals, particularly from Jobcentre Plus (and the partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) was a key strength of the programme), but struggled to engage some 'hard to reach' groups, such as economically inactive people, who by definition, are not actively looking for work (which highlights the importance of people's motivation to seek and take up support).

However, performance in relation to engaging some other priority groups, such as Black Asian and minority ethnic participants, was stronger.

- Although motivation to engage with a support programme like CfW or CfW+ and to find work is necessary, it is not sufficient. Therefore, while for some of those who engaged with programmes, the support was transformative of their lives and life chances, the programmes struggled to help others find work, primarily because there was a gap between what they wanted and what they could do. This could be because:
 - the employment opportunities open to them were not sufficiently attractive; and/or
 - their capabilities were so constrained (e.g., as a result of poor mental health and/or a lack of skills and experience) and/or their personal circumstances so difficult, that they could not access employment opportunities at this stage (or point) in their life.
- The Counterfactual Impact Analysis (CIA) identifies that participation in CfW or CfW+ is associated with an average improvement in employment outcomes of 10 percentage points. These results are broadly consistent with other comparable programmes. However, it is worth noting that the impact for different groups differs, and in particular, the estimated impact upon women was low.
- In comparison to CfW+, CfW is relatively costly at £6,585 per job entry. However, when compared to other similar programmes, it is cost-effective. CfW+ is also cost-effective, and at £4,100 per job entry, is both less costly than CfW and a number of comparable programmes.'
- Both programmes complement DWP employment support, such as that offered by Jobcentre Plus (JCP), and embody 'what works', offering a flexible, holistic and person-centred approach that increased the number of people who were unemployed or economically inactive, moving into employment.
- However, neither programme is a panacea. As noted, CfW struggled to engage as many economically inactive people as anticipated and many of those supported by the programmes are likely to have entered work even in the absence of the programmes' support. These findings illustrate the limits of the existing evidential base of 'what works' to support individuals into employment and suggest that new approaches, which are not yet proven to be effective, may be required.

1. Research aims and methodology

1.1. The aims of the evaluation of [Communities for Work \(CfW\)](#) and [Communities for Work Plus \(CfW+\)](#) were to:

- review changes to the delivery of the CfW operations and CfW+ programme since the evaluation of the previous stages of CfW from 2015-2018;
- assess the extent to which the programme and operation aims have been achieved and targets met for the lifetime of the programmes since 2015;
- provide evidence of the outcomes of the programmes for individuals;
- undertake a counterfactual impact evaluation of the programmes, providing evidence of the impact for participants compared to a counterfactual group.

1.2. In order to address these aims, the programmes' theory of change was discussed with senior programme managers and data gathered through the evaluation, was used to test and refine it. This included:

- a desk-based literature and document review;
- analysis of programme data to assess expenditure and performance;
- qualitative research with stakeholders including:
 - interviews with six senior managers;
 - interviews with 68 operational staff from nine local authorities (LAs);
 - interviews with 46 participants focused upon exploring their experiences and journeys in depth; and
 - facilitation of three focus groups (with 12 participants); and
- telephone surveys with 451 CfW+ participants and 236 CfW participants. The survey data for the CfW cohort (n=236) was merged with responses received to previous European Social Fund (ESF) participant surveys conducted during 2018 and 2022^[1](n=1,201²) to generate a sample of 1,437 CfW participants.

¹ The Welsh Government commissioned IFF Research to undertake ESF Participant Surveys in 2018 and 2022. These involved a survey of people who had undertaken training or received support funded by the 2014-2020 ESF programme and included CfW participants. The 2018 ESF Participant Survey contained additional questions relating to the CfW programme but the 2022 ESF Participant Survey did not.

² 55 ESF Participant Survey responses were removed as part of the counter-factual analysis, as they did not have a unique ID number to allow for them to be linked to the administrative records.

1.3. The counterfactual impact analysis (CIA) primarily considered all the survey data i.e., from the previous ESF participant surveys³ and a survey CfW+ participants.⁴ For the purposes of the CIA analysis, data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Annual Population Survey (APS) was used to derive control groups against which the 12-month employment outcomes of CfW/CfW+ participants could be compared.

2. The rationale, design, and delivery of CfW and CfW+

- 2.1. On paper, CfW and CfW+'s offer to participants appears similar to the offer of other employability programmes, such as JCP's (e.g., information, advice and guidance to improve job searching, access to training and financial support). However, the offer is qualitatively different, as CfW and/or CfW+ advisors and/or mentors have much more time and flexibility and they often have a very different relationship with participants than JCP Work Coaches have. Therefore, CfW and CfW+ complement other employability programmes, and the evidence suggests they can support participants that other programmes struggle to.
- 2.2. CfW's voluntary, community-based, approach aided initial and sustained engagement with the programme, but did not prove as effective as anticipated in supporting direct recruitment to the programme. As a consequence, CfW struggled to engage as many participants as envisaged and was more dependent upon JCP for referrals than anticipated. Therefore, the programme was potentially missing those who were not engaged with JCP, not least, economically inactive individuals. However, the programmes' relationship with JCP was a key strength and proved crucial during the pandemic, when referrals from other sources sharply contracted.
- 2.3. The partnership between the Welsh Government, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Lead Delivery Bodies (LDBs) (local authorities or Community Voluntary Councils) is one of the key innovations of CfW and as noted, was critical to the programme's capacity to recruit participants. However, cultural and organisational differences between the DWP and LDBs, and/or competition between DWP and LDB teams, particularly where areas were struggling to achieve targets, have sometimes hampered team working at an operational level.

³ The 2015/18 ESF and 2019/23 Participants Survey, each involved telephone interviews with approximately 12 thousand people who had been supported by ESF provision and who had left that provision at least 12 months prior to interview.

⁴ The design and methodology of the CfW+ survey mirrored that of the ESF Participants Survey so that the data collected from CfW and CfW+ participants could be combined and analysed in a consistent way. The survey of CfW+ participants achieved 451 telephone interviews.

2.4. Further details on the rationale, design, and delivery of CfW and CfW+ are provided in the [process evaluation and theory of change](#) (Welsh Government , 2023a).

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

2.5. The COVID-19 pandemic was consistently identified by interviewees as the biggest shock the programmes experienced. It necessitated fundamental and rapid changes in the programmes' and partners' practice⁵ and helped accelerate the delivery of support and training online, by phone or email. Referrals, and particularly CfW engagement of adults aged 25+ also fell sharply as:

- outreach work ceased in local authority hubs, GP surgeries and 'street corners' and JCP offices (a key referral pipeline) were initially closed;
- participants were less motivated, as, for example, job vacancies fell sharply, it was reported that some people were fearful of catching COVID-19 and/or had additional caring responsibilities following the closure of schools; and
- there was a marked stepping up of the scale of DWP interventions in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic with, for example, a doubling in the number of work coaches; and the launch of new schemes such as Restart⁶ and KickStart⁷, to meet the expected sharp rise in unemployment, which did not materialise.

2.6. Employment outcomes, particularly for CfW also fell during the early stages of the pandemic in the spring of 2020, as:

- employment vacancies contracted rapidly; and
- the priorities of participants changed, and particularly in the early stages, support from advisors or mentors shifted from a focus upon work, to helping participants cope with the impacts of the lockdown.

⁵ For example, the practice of partners such as Jobcentre Plus, training providers, and community outreach venues, all changed.

⁶ Initially focused upon those out of work for at least 12 months and in receipt of benefits, the eligibility criteria were later relaxed, to make those out of work for at least nine months eligible. It is delivered in Wales by Serco, under a three year framework contract with DWP.

⁷ The scheme provided funding to employers to create short term (6 month) paid jobs for 16 to 24 year olds claiming Universal Credit.

- 2.7. However, as restrictions were eased from the summer of 2020⁸, and the economy began to recover⁹, both engagements, and more markedly, employment outcomes for both programmes increased sharply.
- 2.8. Further details on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic upon CfW and CfW+ delivery, performance and participants are provided in [the process evaluation and theory of change](#) (Welsh Government, 2023a), the [performance and value for money of the programmes](#) (Welsh Government, 2024a) and [participant characteristics and experiences reports](#) (Welsh Government, 2024b).

3. Programme performance

CfW programme performance

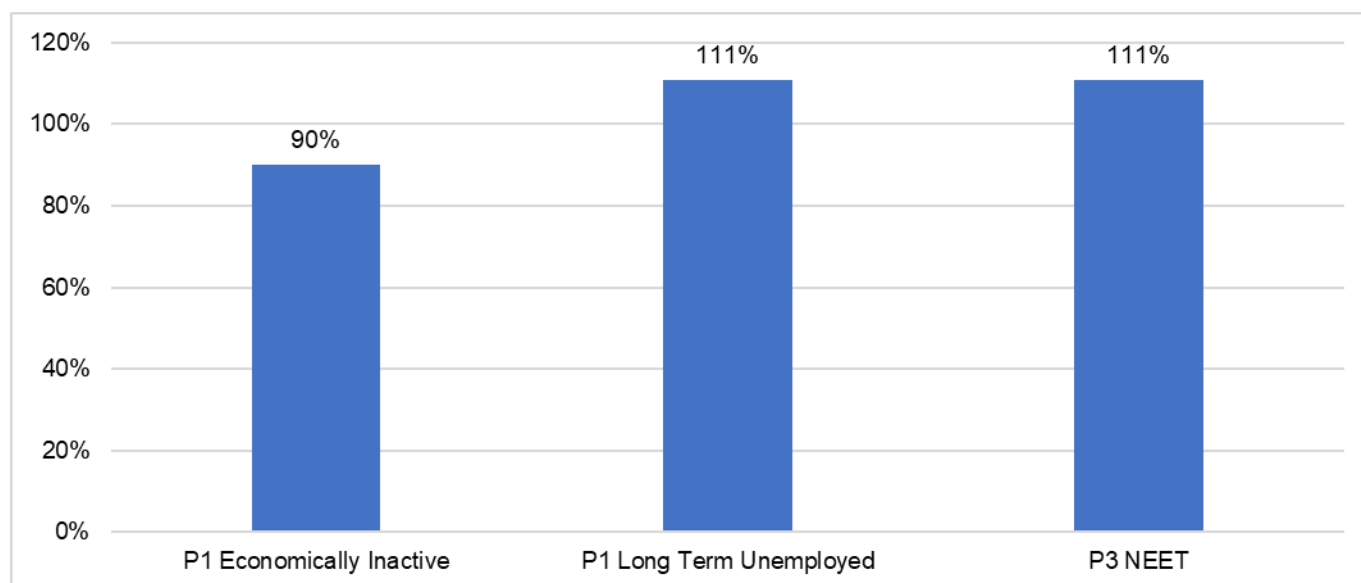
- 3.1. CfW engaged 37,917 people over almost eight years (May 2015 – March 2023). Performance over the lifetime of the programme was uneven:
- performance against engagement targets for young people (Priority 3 (P3)) was stronger than expected (106 per cent of the target from May 2015 to March 2023);
 - performance against engagement targets for long-term unemployed participants was also very strong and stood at 102 per cent of the target from May 2015 to March 2023;
 - however, performance against engagement targets for economically inactive participants was somewhat weaker, and stood at 91 per cent of the target from May 2015 to March 2023.
- 3.2. In part this reflected the impact of the pandemic, which, as outlined above affected both engagement and programme delivery. Nevertheless, because the programmes responded well to the challenges created by the pandemic and they (the challenges) faded over time, they contributed to CfW's underperformance in relation to economically inactive adults, but do not fully account for this.
- 3.3. Over the lifetime of the programme (i.e., May 2015-March 2023), CfW supported over two fifths of those engaged, 16,933 people, to enter work. As Chart 3.1, illustrates, performance against job entry targets for long term unemployed P1 participants and P3 participants was very strong, 111 per cent of target from May 2015 to March 2023. In contrast, programme

⁸ The first national lockdown was introduced in March 2020, were eased in the summer of 2020, before local restrictions were reintroduced in autumn 2020, followed by a Wales wide lockdown in the winter of 2020, and easing in the rules from Spring 2021 onwards (Senedd Research, 2022). Some restrictions were reimposed in December 2021 but were relaxed from January 2022 onwards (Senedd Research, 2023).

⁹ Economic activity contracted very sharply following the first lockdown from late March 2020 onwards. Economic activity increased as restrictions were eased over the summer of 2020 before contracting again in the autumn, albeit not as sharply as in the spring of 2020, as new restrictions were imposed. as these were eased in 2021, economic activity increased. (House of Commons Library, 2022).

performance against job entry targets for economically inactive P1 participants, was weaker, at 90 per cent of the target overall from May 2015 to March 2023.

Chart 3.1. CfW cumulative programme performance against job entry targets for economically inactive and long-term unemployed participants (P1) and young people who are NEET (P3), May 2015-March 2023



Source: Welsh Government CfW Management Information

3.4. It is not clear from the data gathered for this evaluation why engagements of economically inactive people were much lower than anticipated.¹⁰ There are many more economically inactive people in Wales (364,000 aged 16-64), than those who are unemployed (76,000 aged 16+) (ONS, 2023). Equally, because by definition economically inactive people are not actively looking for work, it is likely to be harder for an employment support programme to engage them, compared to people who are unemployed (and by definition, actively looking for work).¹¹ However, this is speculation, and because the evaluation did not include research with people who were not engaged by the programme, much less is known about why they chose not to engage.

3.5. As outlined in the section discussing participants' experiences, data was collected from those who chose to engage with the programme and more is therefore known about their choices. It may be important that a number of previously economically inactive people who

¹⁰ Although the programme achieved over 90% of the target, in 2019 the programme targets were reprofiled to better reflect programme performance since 2015, and targets for the engagement of economically inactive people were halved.

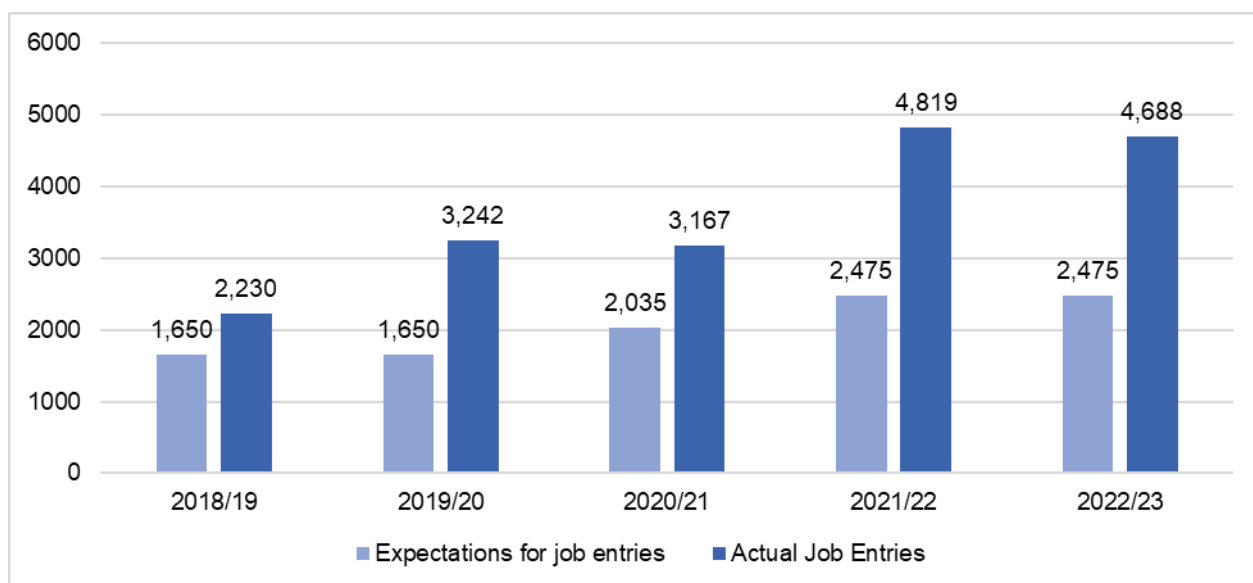
¹¹ Economically inactive people are not eligible for unemployment support such as Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) or Universal Credit (UC), although they may be eligible for other types of benefit, such as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). Some those claiming ESA will be in the 'work related activity group', as following a work related capability assessment, it has been judged that although they cannot work now, they can prepare to work in the future. People in this group, who only make up around 7% of those claiming ESA (DWP, 2023), could be signposted to CfW and CfW+. The numbers of economically inactive people likely to signposted by Jobcentre plus are therefore likely to be small, and the reliance upon Jobcentre plus as key referral pipeline may have contributed to the lower than expected numbers of economically inactive people engaged by the programme.

were engaged by the programme (and interviewed) had experienced significant life events which helped trigger or led to their engagement. These included, for example, bereavements and the experiences of the pandemic, which led people to reassess what they wanted to do in life, and/or a decline in caring responsibilities (e.g., as children started school), which increased their opportunities. Importantly though, these were events over which the programme had no control or influence, but which the programme could help people who experienced them, act upon.

CfW+ programme performance

3.6. CfW+ engaged 42,390 people over a five-year period (April 2018 – March 2023)¹², and like CfW it supported over two fifths of these, 18,146 people, to enter work. As Chart 3.2 illustrates, despite the impact of the pandemic, it easily exceeded Welsh Government expectations.

Chart 3.2. CfW+ job entries: Welsh Government expectations and actual performance, April 2018 – March 2023



Source: Welsh Government CfW+ Management Information

Programme performance compared to initial expectations

3.7. In considering the programmes' performance, which as outlined above has been strong, it is important to note that the initial expectations for each programme were somewhat different to what happened in practice. In particular, the number of P1 participants, and particularly economically inactive participants engaged by CfW, was lower than anticipated, and the programme targets were reprofiled in 2019 (meaning it supported fewer people

¹² Funding for CfW+ funding started in April 2018, but the time it took LAs to recruit staff, meant CfW+ did not become fully operational until November 2018.

than anticipated). However, the programme was markedly more effective than anticipated in converting engagements into job entries, so job outcomes were much stronger than originally anticipated. In contrast, CfW+ was expected to be a modest programme intended to (i) support CfW by helping backfill the infrastructure lost when Communities First closed and (ii) extend employment support to those not eligible for CfW. However, CfW+ was expanded first in 2020, as part of the Welsh Government's response to the pandemic, and more recently in 2022, as part of the Young Persons Guarantee¹³. In terms of scale, CfW+ is now larger than CfW. Moreover, CfW+ teams have exceeded Welsh Government expectations, particularly in relation to job entries, but also in terms of engagements.

Engagement of priority groups

- 3.8. Both the CfW and CfW+ programmes have engaged large numbers of both young people and adults (aged 25+) facing often complex barriers to work, including people with no or low qualifications, work limiting health conditions, care and childcare responsibilities, who were from jobless households and/or effected by housing exclusion. Very strong progress was made, particularly by CfW+ in engaging people from Black, Asian, and ethnic minority backgrounds. Nevertheless, the proportions of people from other priority groups, particularly disabled people, was lower than hoped. Moreover, as outlined above, while CfW+ surpassed expectations, the total numbers of people aged 25 and over engaged by CfW fell short of the initial targets, given the difficulties engaging economically inactive adults¹⁴.
- 3.9. CfW's difficulties in recruiting participants aged 25 and over, compared to those aged 16-25 and CfW+, which has much looser eligibility criteria, highlights the potential challenges associated with targeting specific groups. Equally, it also means the CfW programme was more targeted, working with a higher proportion of people with more complex barriers than CfW+ (Welsh Government, 2023a).
- 3.10. Further details on the performance of the programmes are provided in the [performance and value for money report](#) (Welsh Government, 2024a).

¹³ In July 2020, as part of the Welsh Government's Employability and Skills COVID-19 Commitment, LAs were allocated additional funding totalling around £3m through the CfW+ programme. This was increased to £6m in 2021/22. Although the COVID-19 Commitment funding ended in 2021/22, the Welsh Government allocated £8m to CfW+ through its Young Person's Guarantee for the 3 years from 2022/23 to 2024/25.

¹⁴ P1 CfW operations had targets for the number of long term unemployed and numbers of economically inactive people aged 25 and over who were engaged and who entered work. The difficulties engaging economically inactive adults meant that the total numbers of people aged 25 and over (who were either long term unemployed or economically inactive) engaged by CfW fell short of the initial targets. Targets for P3 CfW operations (such as the numbers of young people (16-24) who were not in employment, education or training who were engaged and who entered work) and CfW+ (such as the targets for the numbers of people (aged 16+) engaged and numbers entering work) were different.

4. Participants' experiences and journeys

- 4.1. Most CfW and CfW+ survey participants reported that their participation in the programme resulted in a positive impact in terms of their readiness for work; and there is also good evidence that participation in CfW and CfW+ brought about positive personal gains for survey participants, in terms of their capabilities, wellbeing and resilience.
- 4.2. The accounts of interviewees consistently emphasised the value participants attached to a person – or human centred approach: of having someone to talk to, who would listen and they felt 'respected' them, who were reliable; and who as one interviewee put it, 'does their job'. This enabled advisors and mentors to forge relationship that helped them better understand participants, so they could tailor and offer support – and where appropriate challenge. This relationship also meant that participants were more willing to take up the offer of support and accept challenge.
- 4.3. One surprising finding from the survey was that CfW participants were generally more positive about the impact of the support they received from the advisor or mentor, than their counterparts on CfW+, whereas CfW+ participants were more positive about the impact of the training they did. This was unexpected as the two programmes are similar in design and delivery, although there was evidence that CfW+ could be more flexible and responsive than CfW (Welsh Government, 2023a). In many cases, the differences are within the margin of error for the two surveys, so may simply be a chance finding.
- 4.4. However, if we assume there is a difference in CfW and CfW+ participants' experiences of the programme, in the judgment of the evaluation team, it is likely to reflect differences in the characteristics of those accessing CfW and CfW+, rather than differences in programme design or delivery. This is because those accessing CfW tend to have more complex barriers, and were therefore likely to have both needed and received more support, and to have felt the support made more of a difference. Conversely, more of the training CfW participants did, was focused upon personal development, whereas more of the training CfW+ participants did, was more immediately useful and practical for returning to work. Therefore CfW+ participants might be more inclined to see the direct relevance and usefulness of the training they received.

Understanding participants' journeys

- 4.5. The accounts of the 46 participants who were interviewed make it clear that while motivation to find work is necessary, it is not sufficient to enable people to effectively search for and find work; they also need the capability and opportunity to do so. As voluntary programmes, CfW and CfW+ rely upon people being motivated to engage with the

programmes – and in this context it is notable that the participant surveys identified that finding a job is not the only motivation. However, once engaged the programmes can help nurture people’s motivation, by for example building their self-confidence and capability to search for work and enhancing their access to employment opportunities.

4.6. The interviewees’ accounts also make it clear that while for some of those interviewed, the support was transformative of their lives and life chances, some people appear to be ‘stuck’ and the programmes have struggled to help them, primarily because:

- there is a mismatch between their aspirations and their capabilities and/or access to employment opportunities;
- they are not motivated to find work at this stage in their life; or
- their capabilities are currently so constrained (e.g., as a result of poor mental health and/or a lack of skills and experience) and/or their personal circumstances so difficult, that they cannot access employment opportunities at this stage (or point) in their life.

4.7. This is supported by the participant survey which identifies a range of barriers that participants still felt held them back, such as problems with their health and/or a lack of skills or qualifications (constraining their capabilities) and difficulties finding work in their area, or caring responsibilities (limiting their access to opportunities).

4.8. More positively, the accounts of interviewees illustrate how critical moments¹⁵ in people’s lives, such as the death of relatives or experiences of the pandemic, can become the catalysts for change, that can help people - with the support of the programmes - move forward, although these type of events can also derail people’s progress and their lives.

4.9. Finally, it is notable that amongst many of those who had worked (before joining one of the programmes), or who have found work (through the programmes), their accounts of work and the workplace included descriptions of long and/or unsocial hours, poor pay and poor treatment, including bullying. This was one reason why participants wanted to work, but almost without exception, didn’t want to take just any job, and were focused upon particular areas of work. This limited some people’s access to opportunities (e.g., where their aspirations and capabilities were misaligned). It meant some used the programme to change direction, in some cases delaying their re-entry to work, but enabling them to find

¹⁵ These are variously described as ‘critical moments’, ‘fateful moments’, ‘turning points’ and ‘wake up time’ in the wider literature (see e.g., Jones, 1995).

more fulfilling employment. It also meant that some of those in work were keen to progress and get better work, but were sometimes struggling to see how they could.¹⁶

The value of in-work support

- 4.10. Interviews with staff, the survey of participants and interviews with participants all identify that in-work support is not constantly taken up or needed, but is valued¹⁷ when taken up. For example, it can be very important in easing the transition to work, and in helping, particularly those who have had to overcome more complex barriers, sustain work.
- 4.11. Given people's experiences of 'poor work' (discussed above), the scope for in-work support to not only help people sustain work, but to progress in work, may be important. In this context, it is notable that unlike CfW, CfW+'s more flexible eligibility criteria meant it could work with those who were in work, but who remained at risk of poverty and almost one in ten of CfW+ participants (8.6 per cent) were recorded as employed upon entry, suggesting this was an important feature of the CfW+ programme.

The programmes' Welsh language offer

- 4.12. Despite offering services in both Welsh and English, the number of participants expressing a preference for Welsh was lower than expected. It is not clear why this is the case, but the qualitative interviews highlighted that a number of Welsh speakers were not confident using their Welsh when engaging with public services as they lacked confidence in their own ability, were more used to using English, particularly in more formal settings (such as when interacting with services) and/or were concerned the Welsh used would be too 'formal' or 'technical'¹⁸. This is consistent with other research (see e.g. WCVA, 2022) which also identifies that the reluctance to use Welsh may reflect a fear that it would be more difficult to access services in Welsh, when services' default language is English (see e.g. CAB, 2015).
- 4.13. Further details on participants' experiences are provided in the [participant characteristics and experiences report](#) (Welsh Government, 2024b).

5. The programmes' impact

- 5.1. The application of CIA techniques to data gathered through the surveys of CfW and CfW+ participants demonstrates that participation in these programmes is associated with

¹⁶ Measuring the quality and sustainability of employment is not simple, and there is no single measure. Nevertheless, it may be notable in this context, that the survey identified that 64 per cent of CfW and 74 per cent of CfW+ survey participants who were in work at the time of survey held permanent positions. This compares with 94 per cent of all working age people (16- to 64-year-olds) who were employed in 2021 across the UK who held permanent employment.

¹⁷ 98 per cent of CfW and 95 per cent of CfW+ participants surveyed who had taken up in work support, reported that it was either very or fairly useful.

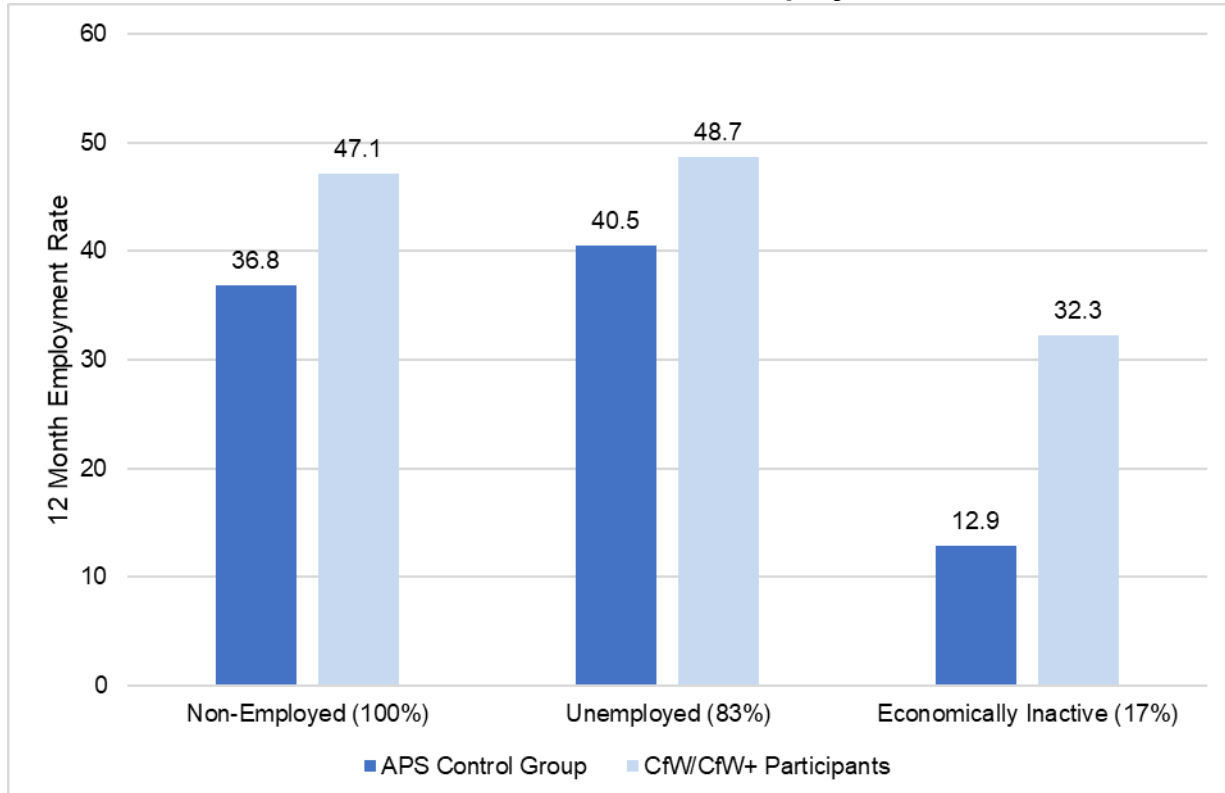
¹⁸ This is in line the findings of a review of the use of Welsh in the WCVA Active Inclusion Fund (WCVA, 2022).

improved employment outcomes. As Chart 5.1 demonstrates, across the entire sample of unemployed and economically inactive participants, participation in CfW or CfW+ is associated with an increase in employment. Among CfW/CfW+ participants, 47 per cent are estimated to be employed at 12 months following participation in these programmes. Among a comparable group of unemployed and economically inactive people extracted from the APS, 37 per cent are estimated to enter employment over a period of 12 months. Participation in these programmes is therefore associated with a 10-percentage point increase in the share of those entering employment.

5.2. As Chart 5.1 also demonstrates, for:

- the unemployed, participation in CfW or CfW+ is estimated to be associated with an improvement in employment outcomes of eight percentage points, with 49 per cent of CfW/CfW+ participants being in employment at 12 months compared to 41 per cent among a comparable group of people from the APS ; and
- the economically inactive, participation in CfW or CfW+ is estimated to be associated with an improvement in employment outcomes of 19 percentage points, with 32 per cent of CfW/CfW+ participants being in employment at 12 months compared to 13 per cent among a comparable group of people from the APS.

Chart 5.1. Combined effect of CfW and CfW+ on employment outcomes



Source: ESF Participants Surveys, Survey of CfW+ Participants, Annual Population Survey

- 5.3. The CIA results are broadly consistent with those typically derived from the application of such techniques for other employability programmes¹⁹. The estimation of larger effects for the economically inactive is also consistent with previous studies. However, there are concerns regarding the ability to make truly 'like for like' comparisons among economically inactive participants and that the estimated effect of these programmes for this group may be overstated.

The impact of each programme

- 5.4. The CIA identifies that the percentage of participants entering employment is higher among CfW+ participants (64 per cent at 18 months)²⁰ compared to CfW participants (46 per cent at 18 months).²¹ These differences are likely to reflect the relative characteristics of these groups, with CfW+ participants for example having higher levels of educational attainment and being less likely to be carers or disabled.

Impact upon employment for priority groups

- 5.5. Because members of priority groups (such as disabled participants and participants with low or no skills) tend to have more severe and/or complex barriers than other groups (which is a key reason why they are considered priority groups), it is unsurprising that the increase in the percentage of participants from these groups entering employment is lower than other groups, who typically face fewer barriers.
- 5.6. The impact of the programme upon those with more complex barriers is considered as part of the CIA evaluation. This identifies that overall, the programmes generate bigger impacts, in terms of the increase in the percentage of people in each group who are employed, for those who are closer to the labour market. For example, the estimated increase in the percentage of CfW/CfW+ participants with a work limiting ill-health condition entering employment as a result of the programme, is estimated to be five percentage points, compared to an estimated increase of 13 percentage points for CfW/CfW+ participants with no work limiting ill-health conditions. However, it is important to note that the improvements in employment exhibited by those with work limiting ill-health conditions are starting from a lower base and that, in comparable terms, the increase in employment is estimated to be

¹⁹ For example, a recent review of evidence of the effectiveness of schemes that support participation in employment for young people, IES (2020) conclude that changes in net employment outcomes are rarely estimated to be higher than 10 percentage points and are often less.

²⁰ participation in CfW+ is associated with an improvement in employment outcomes of 16 percentage points, with 60 per cent being in employment at 12 months compared to 44 per cent among a comparable group of people from the APS.

²¹ Participation in CfW is associated with an improvement in employment outcomes of nine percentage points, with 44 per cent being in employment at 12 months compared to 35 per cent among a comparable group of people from the APS.

similar among both groups (19 per cent among those with work limiting ill-health conditions compared to 24 per cent among those with no such conditions).

5.7. The difference between employment rates for men and women is particularly stark. This means that the evidence of the positive effect of these schemes is therefore being primarily driven by the improved employment outcomes observed for men. This could be indicative of the more complex barriers to employment faced by women²² and the inability of statistical analysis to adequately account for these.

5.8. This is an important finding, which suggests that the programmes have not fully fulfilled their aim of helping those furthest from the labour market. This is consistent with the qualitative research and survey findings which suggests that the programmes have been less effective at supporting:

- those with constrained capabilities, due to a health problem or impairment; and
- those with constrained access to opportunities, due to caring responsibilities or who have an impairment, to enter employment.

5.9. There is one important exception to this though, as larger employment outcomes are estimated for those with lower levels of educational attainment. The CIA identifies that:

- the absolute increase in employment for those with no qualifications at level 2 or above was nine points; and
- the absolute increase in employment for those with qualifications at level 3 or above was five percentage points.

Therefore, the increase in employment for those with no qualifications at level 2 or above, was higher despite starting from a lower base. This means in relative terms, the improvement in employment among those with lower qualifications (23 per cent) is over twice that observed among those with qualifications at Level 3 or above (11 per cent).

5.10. Moreover, among CfW/CfW+ participants who have been without a job for more than one year, the CIA identifies that:

- the absolute increase in employment for those who have not had a job within the previous 12 months was eight percentage points; and
- the absolute increase in employment for those who have had a job within the previous 12 months was 11 percentage points.

²² Such barriers could include discrimination, caring responsibilities that disproportionately fall upon women, the affordability of childcare or only wanting to work part time in order to manage the conflicting pressures of work and family life.

Therefore, the increase in employment in absolute terms for those who have had a job within the previous 12 months is larger. However, because those who have been out of work for longer are starting from a lower employment base, in relative terms, the increase in employment share is actually larger among those who have been out of work for longer than 12 months (24 per cent) compared to those who have been out of work for less than a year (19 per cent).

- 5.11. Further details on programme impact are provided in the [counterfactual impact evaluation report](#) (Welsh Government, 2024c) and further details on engagements and outcomes for priority groups are provided in the [participant characteristics and experiences report](#) (Welsh Government, 2024b).

6. Contribution to Welsh Government equality objectives and wellbeing goals

- 6.1. The programmes' strong performance in engaging and supporting a diverse range of people (for example, in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, health and disability) to access employment opportunities, means both programmes have made important contributions to tackling poverty and social exclusion and promoting equal opportunities. However, while large numbers of people were supported, the proportions of people from some groups, most notably women and disabled people, entering employment, was much lower than hoped, limiting the impact of the programmes.

Additional action to address the Cross Cutting Themes

- 6.2. Tackling poverty and social exclusion and promoting equal opportunities were central to the design and purpose of CfW. The strongest evidence of additional activity in relation to the Cross Cutting Themes (CCT) case level indicators was in relation to equal opportunities and CfW engaged and supported a diverse range of participants. However, there was limited evidence of activity to challenge occupational segregation²³ and although CfW had a bilingual offer, as outlined above, fewer participants than might be expected to, chose to use the Welsh language.
- 6.3. Further details on programme's contribution to Welsh Government equality objectives and wellbeing goals and action to address the CCT are provided in the [programme performance and value for money report](#) (Welsh Government, 2024a).

²³ Occupational segregation describes how men and women choose, or are channelled into, different occupational roles or tasks, so that a disproportionate number of men or women occupy particular roles or undertake particular tasks.

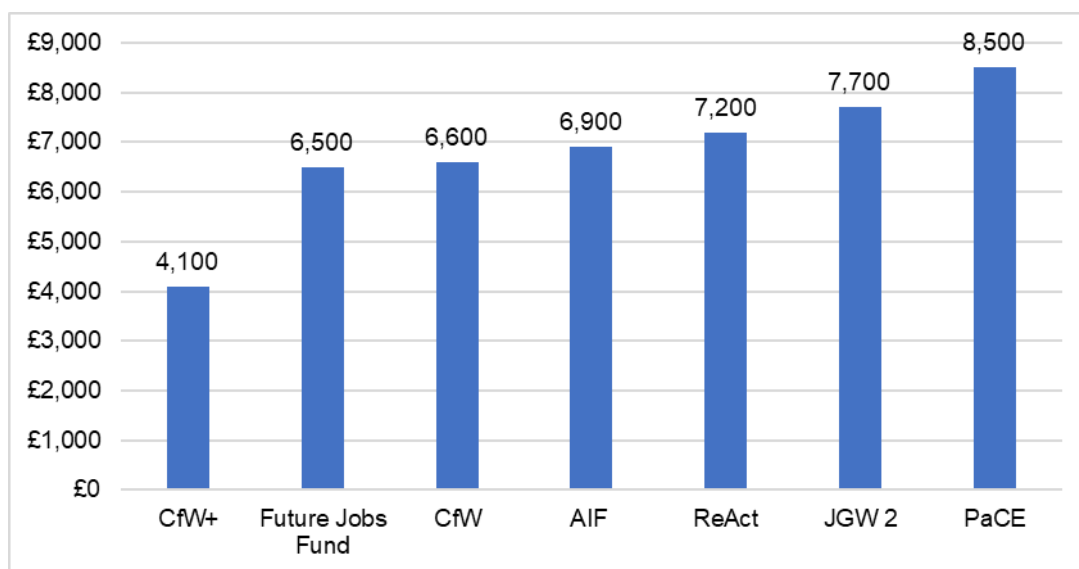
7. The programmes' value for money

Economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity²⁴

7.1. CfW expenditure was in line with the budget and the anticipated cost per job outcome was very similar to that forecast. CfW is also comparable to other employment support programmes when considering the outcomes achieved against expenditure. However, the cost for each engagement was higher than originally expected, as the number of engagements was lower than anticipated. In part this was due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which means that direct comparisons with the costs of other programmes which operated before the pandemic should be made with caution.

7.2. In comparison, CfW+ is considerably less costly than CfW, and both the anticipated cost per engagement and cost per job entry, were lower than expected and as Chart 7.1 illustrates, lower than many comparable programmes. Therefore, it was both economical and efficient. Because most programme costs (for both CfW and CfW+) are fixed (and do not change as the number of participants supported change) efficiency was very dependent upon the numbers of participants engaged and supported into work. Working with larger numbers of participants, with fewer barriers, as CfW+ did, was a more efficient model.

Chart 7.1. Cost per job entry: CfW, CfW+ and comparable programmes (figures have been rounded up or down)



Sources: AIF (WCVA, 2022); Jobs Growth Wales 2 (Welsh Government, 2020); PaCE (Welsh Government, 2023b); OPUS (ERS, 2020); Future Jobs Fund (Welsh Government, n.d. a); ReAct (Welsh Government, 2011)

7.3. As outlined above, both programmes were effective, and achieved strong outcomes despite the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although CfW supported fewer people

²⁴ The programmes' value for money is assessed against the four criteria adopted by the National Audit Office to assess government spending: economy (spending less); efficiency (spending well); effectiveness (spending wisely) and equity (spending fairly).

than anticipated, it was more successful than anticipated in converting engagements into job outcomes, while CfW+ exceeded Welsh Government expectations in terms of engagements and job outcomes.

- 7.4. Both programmes were delivered to participants in a fair and equitable manner, in that they were designed to meet individual participant needs and tailored according to the level of service which participants required. Although, as noted, CfW was more targeted at those with greater barriers to employment who were likely to be more difficult to engage and likely to be more costly to support into work, compared to CfW+ participants. In this sense, CfW required more resources (and funding) to achieve the same level of outcomes as CfW+.

8. Conclusions

The effectiveness of the delivery of the CfW and CfW+ programmes

- 8.1. The programmes were largely implemented as planned, and the process – the pathways participants followed (triage, advice and support, access to training, work placements and/or volunteering opportunities) - broadly reflected that envisaged in the programmes' theory of change. However, the evaluation also identifies that:
- the closure of the Communities First programme somewhat undermined CfW's community-based delivery model, and later and more significantly, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, severely constrained CfW's community-based delivery model; and
 - the referral pipeline from partners proved less diverse (with greater reliance upon JCP than anticipated) and less productive than anticipated (with smaller numbers referred, or directly recruited, than anticipated). In large part, this was due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this was not the only reason, and as community-based programmes, both direct recruitment, and the cultivation of relationships with local partners (other than JCP) who could help refer people to the programmes, was weaker than anticipated. This in turn, hampered programme performance in relation to engagements.
- 8.2. Although, both CfW and CfW+ have similar models and approaches, CfW+ has greater flexibility in who it works with (given more flexible eligibility criteria), how it supports them (most notably the greater accessibility and responsiveness of training and the Barriers Fund²⁵) and how it records this (as it is not required to comply with EU requirements). The

²⁵ The purpose of the Barriers Fund is to enable participants to overcome the final barrier to employment such as meeting the costs of transport, childcare or suitable clothing or tools, where this cannot be met by other sources of funding, such as the DWP's Flexible Support Fund.

combination of greater flexibility and less bureaucracy, was widely reported to make the CfW+ programme:

- more accessible and more open;
- more responsive to, and therefore more effective and/or swifter at meeting the needs and aspirations of participants;
- more efficient, given less paperwork/bureaucracy and greater flexibility around training; and
- more resilient and better able to respond to programme wide shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic.

8.3. Nevertheless, it was also less targeted upon those with the greater barriers than the CfW programme and aspects of the CfW model, such as the more comprehensive data collection and longer-term funding commitment, were stronger than CfW+'s model.

Programme performance

8.4. Despite the challenges created by the pandemic, CfW performance over the lifetime of the programme against engagement targets for young people (P3) has been stronger than expected. In contrast, CfW performance over the lifetime of the programme has been sharply divided performance in relation to adults aged 25 and over (P1) where engagements of economically inactive participants were disappointing, but engagements of long term unemployed participants were stronger. The difficulties the programme experienced in engaging economically inactive people, are notable, but are not fully understood.

8.5. CfW supported over two fifths of those engaged, almost 17,000 people, to enter work. Performance against job entry targets for long term unemployed P1 participants and P3 participants has been very strong. In contrast, programme performance against job entry targets for economically inactive P1 participants while was weaker.

8.6. CfW+ exceeded Welsh Government expectations in terms of engagement, despite the impact of the pandemic, and like CfW, it has supported over two fifths of these, more than 18,000 people, to enter work.

8.7. The evaluation identifies that the difference in performance between the two programmes was primarily because:

- CfW+ benefitted from more flexible eligibility criteria, which meant the programme was open to larger numbers of potential participants, across wider geographical areas. Although this created challenges, most notably in covering large rural areas, overall, it

made it easier to engage participants, even allowing for the 'priority' given to CfW for those prospective participants eligible for CfW²⁶. Moreover, because CfW+ participants tended to have fewer barriers, they may have been more motivated to find work and therefore easier to engage than CfW participants (who tended to face more barriers); and

- the expectations for CfW+, in terms of engagements, were lower than those for CfW, (and this helps explain much of the difference in each programmes' performance against Welsh Government expectations).

The programmes' impact

8.8. 'Like for like' comparisons derived from statistical matching techniques reveal that:

- participation in CfW or CfW+ is associated with an average improvement in employment of 10 percentage points, with 47 per cent of CfW/CfW+ participants being employed at 12 months following participation in these programmes compared to 37 per cent among a comparable group of unemployed and economically inactive people from the APS;
- participation in CfW is associated with an improvement in employment outcomes of nine percentage points, with 44 per cent being in employment at 12 months compared to 35 per cent among a comparable group of people from the APS ; and
- participation in CfW+ is associated with an improvement in employment outcomes of 16 percentage points, with 60 per cent being in employment at 12 months compared to 44 per cent among a comparable group of people from the APS.

8.9. In terms of inequities in employment outcomes associated with participation in CfW/CfW+, the results are mixed. Whilst participation in these schemes is associated with a 13-percentage point increase in employment outcomes among men, the estimated impact upon women is a far more modest three percentage point increase in participation in employment. Evidence of the positive effect of these schemes is therefore being primarily driven by the improved employment outcomes observed for men. The improvements in employment outcomes associated with participation in CfW/CfW+ are estimated to be relatively uniform with respect to age and work limiting ill-health status. However, there is evidence to suggest that the employment impacts of these schemes are larger among those with low levels of qualifications and those who have been out of paid work for longer.

²⁶ If someone is eligible for CfW they will typically be referred to CfW rather than CfW+.

The programmes' value for money

- 8.10. Although CfW was an expensive programme, given the focus of the Priority 1 operations upon long-term unemployed and economically inactive people, who are likely to be more costly to engage and support, it offers reasonable value for money, particularly in terms of job outcomes.
- 8.11. CfW+ is considerably less costly than other employment support programmes (including CfW) and offers very good value for money, when comparing the cost of outcomes achieved with other similar programmes. However, as noted, the programme was also less targeted at those furthest from the labour market, and this probably helps explain CfW+'s lower costs compared to CfW.
- 8.12. In assessing value for money, it is also important to consider the wider cost savings achieved for individuals, society, and the exchequer when a person who would have been unlikely to have entered work in the absence of the intervention does actually return to work, and these financial savings are not considered when looking at simple cost per engagement or job outcome for each programme. Had these individuals not secured work through the programme, a substantial additional financial burden would have been placed upon society and the public purse more generally.

9. Recommendations and reflections for future employability programmes

Recommendations for CfW+

- 9.1. Limitations in the data that was collected by CfW+, and how it was recorded, constrained evaluation of the effectiveness of CfW+ in engaging and supporting different groups. Developing a more comprehensive and robust dataset and inputting this onto a database (rather than a spreadsheet), will be important to support performance management and future evaluation of the programme. Improving data collection about key target groups such as disabled people, and alignment of data collected across different employability programmes and surveys would also support this.²⁷
- 9.2. The flexibility of CfW+ is a key strength of the programme, and it is important that this is preserved. Nevertheless, the flexibility the programme gives to local areas in how the

²⁷ For example, given the uncertainty about the reliability of the identification of disabled participants by the programmes, considering adopting a new question for participants as part of the enrolment process would be appropriate. There is a strong case for using the same questions across different employability programmes (to facilitate benchmarking), and this could, for example, use the Government Statistical Service question: (a) Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more? and if yes (b) Does your condition or illness/do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities? Participants answering yes to both would be recorded as having a disability.

programme is delivered, may increase risks linked to differences in practice in different areas or teams. In order to help manage these risks, improvements in data collection, analysis and use, will be important to, for example, identify weak or under performance and also strong performance. The latter could for example, be investigated through an approach like appreciative inquiry, which focus upon learning from successes.

- 9.3. CfW+ has been a successful programme that far exceeded initial expectations, in terms both the numbers of engagements and the number of job outcomes. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that compared to CfW, CfW+ is less well targeted at adults with complex barriers to employment, who are often those furthest from the labour market. Moreover, evidence from CfW and CfW+ suggests that the programmes' delivery model does not fully meet the wants and needs of all groups, including in particular:
- disabled people (where engagements fell short of expectations);
 - economically inactive people (where engagements fell short of expectations); and
 - women (where the programmes appear to have a much more limited impact upon entry to employment compared to men).

- 9.4. CfW (which was more targeted) illustrates some of the challenges inherent in engaging those furthest from the labour market, most notably economically inactive participants. Particularly now that CfW has ended, further action to reach out to engage those furthest from the labour market, and also, for example, women and disabled people, will be important in order to maximise the contribution of CfW+ to Welsh Government equality and poverty reduction targets. The use of a model of behavioural change, such as the COM-B framework (Michie et al., 2011) (which this evaluation used) may be helpful to better understand why some people choose to engage with programmes like CfW+ and progress into employment, while others either choose not to and get 'stuck' and struggle to move forward. Further research may also be warranted to investigate why some groups are under-represented on programmes such as CfW and CfW+, particularly as those who do not engage, are generally not included in fieldwork as part of evaluations of these programmes.

Key lessons and recommendations for future employability programmes

- 9.5. The evaluation identifies a clear need and demand for employability support from programmes like CfW and CfW+, and there is a strong case for continuing CfW+ (CfW has now ended). The evaluation also identifies some key lessons for current and future programmes (including, but not limited to CfW+). For example:

- the effectiveness of employment support programmes like CfW and CfW+ cannot exceed the effectiveness of its frontline staff. Therefore recruiting, training, and retaining staff with the right skills and ethos is vital;
- the pandemic has helped accelerate the delivery of support and training online, or by phone. Going forward, a flexible, person-centred approach, that blends face-to-face and online or phone contact, is appropriate;
- an ‘active offer’ of services in Welsh is not sufficient of itself to encourage Welsh speakers to take it up, unless, for example, it is delivered in a welcoming, and informal way, that encourages and supports those who may not be confident or used to using Welsh when interacting with public services like CfW and CfW+;
- entry to employment is an important outcome measure, but may not be sufficient to inform decisions about the impact of programmes like CfW+ upon reducing poverty. This reflects concerns about the low pay, lack of opportunities for progression and/or precariousness of some types of employment. In order to maximise employment support programmes’ impact upon reducing poverty, further work to support progression in-work may be required, and changes to outcome measures (which currently focus upon entry into work, rather than the quality of work) may be warranted to reduce the risks that people get stuck in ‘poor work’ ²⁸ (and, for example, exposed to in-work poverty);
- CfW and CfW+ suggest that models such CfW’s triage process²⁹, which can support a single ‘front door’ to a number of different employment support programmes, and co-location of different teams and employment programmes can help strengthen collaboration at an operational level, provided that there is sufficient demand, so that services or teams are not competing for the same potential participants;
- the evaluation illustrates the impact that the initial expectations of a programme in terms of engagements and job entries (and therefore the targets set), have upon judgments of programme performance. Regularly benchmarking performance against comparable programmes is likely to be important in calibrating the expectations used to set targets for programmes, so that they are challenging but achievable, and that the relative performance of different programmes can be more easily considered.

²⁸ The Fair Work commission defines ‘fair work’ as ‘work where workers are fairly rewarded, heard and represented, secure and able to progress in a healthy, inclusive environment where rights are respected’ (p 2. Welsh Government, 2019) ‘Poor’ work would lack one or more of these characteristics.

²⁹ The process is supported by triage officers, who help establish the eligibility of potential participants and ensure participants receive appropriate support from different staff (e.g., advisors or mentors) or programmes, given an individual participant’s needs and circumstances.

9.6. Both CfW and CfW+ were rooted in evidence of ‘what works’, but like other comparable programmes, they were less effective at engaging and supporting people with more complex barriers to employment (compared to those who were closer to the labour market and faced fewer barriers). This is illustrative of a range of evaluation findings that illustrate both what works and the limits of what works or the trade-offs created by choices between different approaches. For example, the evaluation identifies that:

- a community-based model can increase the visibility and accessibility of employment support programmes and help foster a distinct identity from JCP, but is not of itself sufficient to generate engagements from communities. Further research and piloting new innovative approaches to increase engagements from currently ‘hard to reach’ groups such as economically inactive participants may be warranted;
- the value for money offered by CfW’s centrally procured training model compared to alternatives such as CfW+ market-based model, warrants further investigation;
- the partnership between the Welsh Government, JCP, LAs and CVCs, was a key strength of the CfW programme (and should be considered in future programmes), and its contribution to the referral pipeline has been crucial to the success of CfW and CfW+. However, it also created tensions at an operational level, and it took time to overcome barriers linked to cultural and organisational differences and contributed to an overreliance upon JCP for referrals (which also need to be considered if this model is replicated in the future);
- the CfW+ model, which is more open and accessible and more flexible than CfW’s, is more responsive and was generally favoured by those delivering the programmes but is also less precisely (or effectively) targeted upon those furthest from the labour market;
- CfW and CfW+ suggest that a voluntary model of engagement can help increase people’s motivation and engagement with employment support programmes, but more work is required to improve ways to engage those who are demotivated. ‘Soft conditionality’, where, for example engagement with a programme like CfW or CfW+ forms part of a claimant commitment, can help introduce people to such programmes that could help them, but will not in and of itself ensure they engage effectively;
- conversely, there is also some evidence of people engaging with the programmes, primarily in order to meet DWP ‘work related’ requirements for some benefits, rather than engaging because they genuinely want support to find work. The scale of this and the unproductive costs this imposes upon programmes, may warrant further investigation;
- the extent to which effective approaches to engage and support groups who may have complex barriers, such as some disabled people, can be mainstreamed, is not clear.

Their needs may sometimes be better met by targeted programmes, such as Engage to Change³⁰. It is possible that both mainstreaming support for different groups into programmes like CfW+, and the development or funding of more targeted programmes, like Engage to Change, to complement roles such as the Disabled People's Employment Champions and Business Wales Disabled People's Employment Advisors³¹, is appropriate, but the evidence base remains under-developed.

- 9.7. These findings illustrate the limits of the existing evidential base of 'what works' and suggests that new approaches, which are not yet proven to be effective may be required. As this would be riskier than continuing to use 'tried and tested' models and approaches, developing and testing theories of change (e.g., through Delphi groups³² and the use of behavioural change models like COM-B), before piloting and then undertaking robust evaluation of new approaches, would be appropriate.
- 9.8. The evaluation also suggests that a whole systems approach to planning employability support, which considers:
- the strategic fit of different employability programmes to ensure coherence (and minimise unnecessary duplication or competition); accessibility (for example, through single points of access to employability programmes); and assessment and assignment, to match people to the most appropriate programme (for example, through roles such as triage workers); and
 - the current and anticipated future demand for employability support – and therefore the capacity that is appropriate to meet this, is likely to be important.
- 9.9. Indeed, this is set out as an aim in the [Welsh Government's Employability Strategy, *Stronger, fairer, greener Wales: a plan for employability and skills*](#) (Welsh Government, 2022). For instance, the aim to 'prioritise and consolidate Welsh Government led, national employability support to target young people, those under-represented in the labour market and those in and out of work with long term health conditions to find work and progress in employment'. However, decisions by the UK Government (and DWP) and the replacement of the ESF with the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, may complicate this. The Welsh Government may therefore 'need to achieve more through influencing the wider

³⁰ Engage to Change was an employability programme, which has since ended, that supported young people aged 16-25 who had a learning difficulty, learning disability and/or autism.

³¹ The network of Disabled People's Employment Champions are supported by Business Wales Disabled People's Employment Advisors, and provide advice, information and support to employers.

³² The Delphi technique uses expert opinion and views to generate ideas and then establish a measure of agreement over preferred solutions.

employment system than through directly funding and commissioning new programmes' (IES, 2021).

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