



*Rhagoriaeth i bawb – Excellence for all*

Arolygiaeth Ei Mawrhydi dros Addysg  
a Hyfforddiant yng Nghymru

Her Majesty's Inspectorate  
for Education and Training in Wales

# Initial review of the effectiveness of the Welsh Government's Traineeships and Steps to Employment programmes

## January 2013



**The purpose of Estyn is to inspect quality and standards in education and training in Wales. Estyn is responsible for inspecting:**

- ▲ nursery schools and settings that are maintained by, or receive funding from, local authorities;
- ▲ primary schools;
- ▲ secondary schools;
- ▲ special schools;
- ▲ pupil referral units;
- ▲ independent schools;
- ▲ further education;
- ▲ independent specialist colleges;
- ▲ adult community learning;
- ▲ local authority education services for children and young people;
- ▲ teacher education and training;
- ▲ work-based learning;
- ▲ careers companies; and
- ▲ offender learning.

Estyn also:

- ▲ provides advice on quality and standards in education and training in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales and others; and
- ▲ makes public good practice based on inspection evidence.

Every possible care has been taken to ensure that the information in this document is accurate at the time of going to press. Any enquiries or comments regarding this document/publication should be addressed to:

Publication Section

Estyn

Anchor Court

Keen Road

Cardiff

CF24 5JW or by email to [publications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:publications@estyn.gsi.gov.uk)

This and other Estyn publications are available on our website: [www.estyn.gov.uk](http://www.estyn.gov.uk)

**© Crown Copyright 2013: This report may be re-used free of charge in any format or medium provided that it is re-used accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the document/publication specified.**

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Context</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Main findings</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Initial referral</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Barriers to programme delivery</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Standards</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Support for learners including support for literacy</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Leadership and management including management of quality</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Welsh Government data for Traineeships and Steps to Employment programmes</b>	
<b>Appendix 2: The remit author and survey team</b>	

## Introduction

- 1 Estyn was asked, in the annual ministerial remit, to undertake an early review of the Traineeships and Steps to Employment programmes funded by the Welsh government. This report is intended to inform Welsh Government's next tendering arrangements for June 2013, which will determine the delivery of the programmes from August 2014.
- 2 In preparing this report, inspectors initially reviewed information supplied by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), including documents relating to the tendering process and the allocation of contracts. Inspectors also reviewed the programme specifications for Traineeships and Steps to Employment programmes and Estyn inspection reports on providers that have been awarded the contracts to deliver the programmes.
- 3 Estyn sent questionnaires to all contract holders for the programmes and received responses from 15 out of the 16. Inspectors then visited all 15 providers to interview leaders and managers and to inspect relevant documentation.
- 4 This report focuses on how the learners are progressing on the programmes and the processes that providers have put in place to support them and progress them into further education or training.
- 5 In the final report to be published in early summer 2013, Estyn will consider the overall effectiveness of the programmes, particularly in improving the early engagement of young people and adults in education and training and on moving individuals into work.

## Context

- 1 In July 2010, DfES issued a tender invitation for the delivery of its work-based learning programmes, including the Traineeships and Steps to Employment programmes, for the period August 2011 to July 2014. In March 2011, DfES awarded commissions to 16 established work-based learning providers to deliver Traineeships, and commissions to 13 of these providers to deliver Steps to Employment. As a result of the tender, seven new provider consortia were established. The purpose of these consortia is to establish formal collaboration arrangements between partners to deliver a co-ordinated work-based learning delivery across a wide geographic area. Delivery of Traineeships and Steps to Employment began in August 2011.
- 2 Traineeship programmes are designed for young people up to the age of 18. They are programmes that focus on the early engagement of young people, using a flexible learning approach to encourage continued participation in education and training. The main focus is to get people into employment. Three Traineeship programmes are provided to meet the three categories of identified need. These are Engagement, Level 1 and Bridge-2-Employment.
- 3 The Engagement Traineeship programme identifies and addresses learning barriers that prevent the learner from immediately participating in vocational or other learning at level 1, 2 or 3 or progressing into employment. It uses employer work placements, community projects, voluntary work and centre-based learning opportunities to determine an occupational focus and provide learners with the breadth and flexibility of skills they need to enable them to participate in the work force and in the wider community. Engagement Traineeship learners must attend learning for 12 hours or more in any 5-day period (Monday to Friday only). The maximum hours of attendance are 21 hours in any five-day period.
- 4 The Level 1 Traineeship is intended to identify and address learning barriers and uses employer work placements, community projects, voluntary work and centre-based learning opportunities to deliver a Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) qualification, which tests occupational competencies at Level 1 or a Basic/Essential Skills qualification at Level 2, relevant to the career aim of the learner, prior to progressing to either further learning or employment. All learners entering a Level 1 Traineeship must undertake a Basic Skills assessment unless evidence of competence is available following progression from the Engagement Traineeship.
- 5 The Bridge-2-Employment programme is for learners who are assessed as occupationally focused, have completed a Traineeship Level 1 programme and have attained, as a minimum, all of the following:
  - a Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) qualification (or units) which tests occupational competencies;
  - Essential Skills at level 1 in Communication, Application of Number and Information Technology qualifications;
  - Essential Skills Level 1 in Working with Others, Improving Own Learning & Performance and Problem Solving;
  - a Personal, Social, Health and Economic qualification or equivalent unit as identified by the Welsh Government;

- a citizenship qualification or equivalent unit as identified by the Welsh Government; and
  - an enterprise qualification or equivalent unit as identified by the Welsh Government.
- 6 The Bridge-2-Employment programme encompasses the delivery of elements of a QCF qualification, which tests occupational competencies at Level 2 as defined by the learner's chosen occupational focus and prior learning.
  - 7 Traineeship Level 1 and Bridge-2-Employment learners normally attend learning for 30 hours or over in any seven-day period. The maximum hours of attendance is 40 hours (including one meal break per day) in any seven-day period.
  - 8 The Welsh Government set training providers the following performance targets for the year 2011-2012:
    - Traineeship (Engagement): 60% progression to employment or higher level learning/Traineeship;
    - (Level 1): 65% progression to employment or higher level learning/Traineeship;
    - (Bridge-2-Employment): 85% progression to employment or higher level learning.
  - 9 Steps to Employment programmes are designed for people who are 18 years of age or over, have left full time education, are ordinarily resident in Wales and are in receipt of Department for Work and Pensions allowances. They are training programmes focusing on moving individuals into work by providing them with the support to overcome barriers into work including the necessary employment skills to obtain sustainable employment. There are two Steps to Employment programmes provided to meet the individual needs of learners. These are Work Focused Learning and Routeways to Work.
  - 10 The Work Focused Learning programme is intended to identify and assess learning barriers, including the lack of Essential skills that prevent the learner from immediately participating in employment, further learning and/or Routeways to Work. The programme uses employer work placements, community projects, voluntary work and centre-based learning opportunities. It delivers QCF qualifications to test occupational competencies above level 2, determine occupational focus and provide learners with the breadth and flexibility of skills they need to enable them to participate in the work force and society prior to progressing to either employment, further learning and/or Routeways to Work.
  - 11 The Routeways to Work programme is for eligible adult learners who are not employed, are assessed as being occupationally focused, and are able to follow a bespoke programme of learning that meets the current or future vacancies of a particular business, businesses or economic sector as identified by the Department for Work and Skills (DWP) or Job Centre Plus (JCP).
  - 12 The programme involves identifying an employer, group of employers or economic sectors, in Wales, that are actively seeking to recruit individuals that are not employed; and providing a bespoke programme of learning, up to eight weeks in length, which meets the needs of the recruiting employer. Employers are required to offer of a job interview upon completion of the learning programme.

- 13 Learners are required to carry out a Basic Skills and applicable occupational Routeway assessment as part of their initial assessment, unless appropriate evidence is already available following progression from the Work Focused Learning.
- 14 Learners on Adult Learning programmes must attend learning for 16 hours or more in any seven day period (excluding lunch breaks). The maximum hours of attendance are 40 hours in any seven day period.

## **Main findings**

- 15 The referral process to the programmes is not robust and where it is effective it relies on personal relationships rather than efficient systems. The quality of the information that learners and providers receive from referral agencies is often incomplete and does not help providers to match learners to appropriate programmes.
- 16 Eligibility rules and the short length of the programmes often restrict the levels of learning and the progression that learners can realistically make. The achievement of target outcomes both for learners and for providers is hampered by the lack of work experience and sustainable employment opportunities. Employers often do not fully understand the programmes.
- 17 Overall, contract targets are not being met and learners are taught in groups that are too small to be educationally or economically viable. Providers, DfES and the National Training Federation for Wales (NTfW) are working together to resolve these difficulties.
- 18 Welsh government data shows that, overall, standards and progression rates on all programmes are at best adequate. The numbers of learners progressing into other training or employment are higher from the Traineeship programmes than from the Steps to Employment programmes.
- 19 The majority of providers identify and record the needs of learners, address barriers to learning and do their best to address these needs. Providers work well with partners to secure a variety of support for learners. However, in a minority of providers, serious client barriers are not identified early enough.
- 20 Overall, the standard of basic skills and literacy support provided is too variable. In the best cases, individual client needs are identified and learning support is delivered early in their training programmes. However, in too many cases, the starting point and progress made by learners in developing their literacy skills are not identified or tracked respectively. Improvement in literacy is limited as a result.
- 21 Most providers have adapted their working practices to accommodate learners referred to the Traineeships and Steps to Employment programmes. Providers work well within their consortium and with external partners including employers to develop the programmes.
- 22 All providers have sophisticated management information systems in place to record high-level outcomes for learners. Most disseminate this information across the consortium but not all monitor the detail of learner progress well enough to help individual learners to succeed.

## Recommendations

In order to improve the provision of Traineeships and Steps to Employment training programmes:

### **The Welsh Government should:**

- R1 make sure that referral agencies have a clear understanding of what the available training programmes provide and which programmes are suitable for individual learners;
- R2 work closely with providers to address issues that affect the take-up of Traineeship and Steps to employment programmes; and
- R3 make sure that employers have a better understanding of the programmes.

### **Training providers should:**

- R4 check that all learners are placed on appropriate training pathways;
- R5 encourage all learners to disclose any information that may adversely affect the identification of learning and employment barriers;
- R6 improve progression rates on all programmes;
- R7 make Individual Learning Plans sufficiently detailed and challenging for learners;
- R8 improve basic skills testing and the tracking of progress;
- R9 work with employers to provide suitable work and community placements; and
- R10 ensure that employers are fully informed about learners' off-the-job training requirements.

### **All referral agencies should:**

- R11 improve the quality of the initial information given to training providers about learners in the referral process;
- R12 encourage all learners to disclose any information that may adversely affect the identification of learning or employment barriers; and
- R13 improve information-sharing between the different agencies that work with young people.



## **Initial referral**

- 23 Referral agencies, Careers Wales (CW) and Job Centre Plus (JCP), have not been able to refer enough people to the programmes to meet the initial targets set by the Welsh Government. The same client is often referred to more than one training provider.
- 24 Referral agencies do not have sufficiently robust processes to disseminate information to learners or providers but rely on ad hoc arrangements. Where there are good personal relationships and good lines of communication between the referral agencies and providers, the referral system is more effective.
- 25 The quality of information about learners that providers receive from Careers Wales (CW) and Job Centre Plus (JCP) is inconsistent. It is often not detailed enough and/or incomplete. Learners with significant social issues are not always identified and directed to appropriate support organisations. Lack of background information makes it difficult for providers to match learners to programmes that are right for their individual circumstances. Providers report that referrals from CW are generally more detailed and useful than those from JCP.
- 26 Learners are often reluctant to disclose sensitive personal information about themselves, for fear of not being selected for a programme. As a result their barriers to learning may not be accurately identified and addressed early enough in their programmes.

## **Barriers to programme delivery**

- 27 Providers have identified various constraints within the contract specifications, which adversely affect their ability to deliver these training programmes effectively. Often the rules related to the eligibility of learners restricts access to programmes and the restriction to level 1 for enrolment on Traineeship programmes penalises the more able learner. There are many instances where 17-year-old learners have to wait until they are 18 years old to complete level 2 qualifications, due to legal requirements within certain sectors.
- 28 Progression opportunities for learners are reduced because providers are not allowed to progress learners who have completed their current programme to qualifications in different learning areas that are at the same level as their current qualification. For example, a learner completing a Level 1 programme in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) cannot transfer to an NVQ in Business Administration at Level 1 as this is deemed as non-progression, even though this might be the best solution for certain individuals. Also a very few providers are uncertain about whether, under the funding arrangements, they are allowed to transfer learners to follow specific qualifications that might be better delivered by partner providers within their consortium.

- 29 Opportunities for employment and work experience are limited and providers often compete against each other for these opportunities. A few providers find that 'work tasters' are not available in some sectors. This means that learners often do not get experience in the areas of work that they want. The voluntary sector offers many opportunities but again these are often not the experiences that learners want. A number of mainstream employers are of the opinion that learners take too much time 'off-the-job' to undertake additional basic skills training whilst on a programme. As a result, employers are reluctant to accommodate work placements.
- 30 Providers highlight funding issues that affect the delivery of programmes. These include the inability to vire funding between training programmes to address fluctuations in demand and the lack of financial incentives, thus limiting the flexibility for providers to deliver additional qualifications in training to enhance learners' employment or training opportunities.
- 31 The high cost of delivery, due to low Staff Student Ratio (SSR) issues related to rural areas and the cost of catering for the additional support needs of the most disadvantaged groups of learners, has been underestimated and this has hampered delivery. Providers have not always had the staff with the appropriate skills to meet the needs of learners on these programmes. As a result, costly additional staff training and development have often been required.
- 32 Because of the short amount of time learners spend with providers, staff are not always able to offer enough support to help learners to overcome very significant barriers to learning and employment.
- 33 Many key partners, including support agencies and employers, do not fully understand the requirements of the training programmes. They are therefore not as effective as they could be in supplementing the work of the training providers and helping learners to gain the skills they need to sustain employment.

## Standards

- 34 Many providers find that referral numbers are lower than the initial numbers anticipated by DfES and initial targets are not being met. Providers say that contractual targets stipulated by DfES are too demanding given the current economic situation.
- 35 Many providers deliver training to learners in groups that are so small that not only are they likely to be unsustainable in terms of contract value and cost but they are not necessarily educationally effective either. Providers are working with DfES to identify and rectify shortcomings in the structuring of how training is delivered. The NTfW is acting on behalf of the contracted providers in meetings with the DfES officers to resolve issues.
- 36 Numbers of starts in the Traineeship programmes are lower than the contract values and progression is generally slower than expected. However, a few providers indicate that starts in the Work Focused Learning strand of the Steps to Employment programme are higher than anticipated.
- 37 Welsh Government data<sup>1</sup> shows that progression rates on all programmes range from adequate to unsatisfactory. The numbers of learners progressing into other training or employment are higher in the Traineeships programme than in the Steps to Employment programme. This suggests that providers are more effective at addressing barriers and preparing younger learners for the next stage of the employability programmes or employment. However, within the Traineeship programmes, the progression rates for the Engagement programmes are significantly better than those for the L1 programmes, indicating that the best progression is from a very low-level engagement activity to a slightly higher level of learning. Poorer outcomes in the Steps to Employment programmes may be partly attributed to the lower number of adult learners available for the programmes and the higher-level qualifications required to achieve a successful outcome. There have been no starts in the Bridge to Employment strand of Traineeships.
- 38 Data released by DfES shows that, overall, 62% of leavers from Traineeship programmes had a positive progression and 40% of leavers from Steps to Employment had a positive progression. This performance is at best adequate for Traineeships, and unsatisfactory for Steps to Employment, when compared to original performance targets set by DfES.
- 39 See Appendix 1 for the link to the latest Welsh Government data on the programmes.

---

<sup>1</sup> Projected Apprenticeship Framework Success Rates and Provisional Destinations Data for Traineeship and Steps to Employment Learners, 2011-2012:  
<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2012/121127sdr2042012en.pdf>

## Support for learners including support for literacy

- 40 Provider staff focus on supporting learners and often work hard to provide solutions to individual learners' barriers to learning. However, overall, the standard of support provided for learners is too variable. In the best cases, individual learners' needs are identified and offered early in their training programmes. These needs are often complex and are not always related to educational attainment. Providers are often hampered by a lack of information about learners when they are referred to a programme. In a few cases, learners do not disclose personal issues that are a barrier to progress into employment until late in the programme, when the learner gains confidence in the tutor. When this occurs, most providers offer extra support where they can.
- 41 Providers generally identify learners' learning needs through initial assessment, induction reviews and interviews. In the best cases these findings are recorded in detail in individual learning plans (ILPs). A few providers use learning coaches effectively to mentor learners throughout their time on the programme.
- 42 All providers use the expertise and resources of partners or external agencies well to provide support for learners when required, for example counselling for self-harming and substance and alcohol misuse, and social services and other support agencies to help learners with social issues including homelessness.
- 43 In one provider, a weekly job club provided at all the training venues is used well by learners. Learners take an employability qualification to help them focus on job search activities.
- 44 When learners are on work placement, many providers maintain close working relationships with employers as well as with learners. However, not enough employers are fully involved in learner progress reviews. As a consequence, planning specific activities within the workplace to match the learners' skills and training requirements, together with the needs of the employer, is not as effective as it could be.
- 45 All providers use a combination of diagnostic testing and individual interviews with learners to identify education and training needs. The BKS<sup>2</sup> test is used by almost all providers early on to identify the client's level of skills and support required. Overall, the standard of diagnostic testing is good and test results are used effectively to identify the basic skills levels and support requirements of learners. However, this information is not always used effectively by providers to implement appropriate support for learners or to monitor learners' take-up and response to the support given.
- 46 In most cases, follow-up tests are used at the end of the programme to monitor and record the progress made by learners. However, a few providers do not use follow-up tests consistently at the end of training.

---

<sup>2</sup> BSKB supply interactive solutions to improve learners' English, mathematics and ICT skills. Each learner is given an assessment that identifies their current level and specific skill gaps.

- 47 When ILPs are used well, they provide an accurate record of learners' progression and achievement. In the best cases, ILPs are detailed and contain useful milestones to encourage learners to progress. However, ILPs are not always sufficiently detailed and comprehensive information is not always recorded. Targets are not always set and progress against targets is not recorded effectively.

### **Leadership and management including management of quality**

- 48 All providers manage the Traineeships and Steps to employment programmes as part of their general delivery of work-based learning provision. Providers have developed new ways of working to accommodate the demands of the particular needs of the learners referred to them through the employability projects. Many providers have developed a significant amount of flexibility within programmes to meet the individual needs of learners. A minority of providers have developed a good infrastructure of staff with the necessary skills to deliver effective support for these learners. Almost all providers within consortia engage very well with each other and there is generally a great deal of mutual respect and shared values.
- 49 Within all consortia, each partner generally maintains good links with the employers they work with and the group as a whole maintain a centralised employer database. Most individual providers formally seek the views of employers, through an annual questionnaire. However, employers are not always aware of or have a full understanding of the requirements of employability programmes. For example, when providing a work placement, they do not always appreciate the need for the learner to attend off-the-job training sessions with the training provider. Many providers use effective networking strategies to provide community support for learners.
- 50 All Traineeships and Steps to Employment lead providers engage well with partner organisations. They meet with DfES and referral agencies on a quarterly basis to discuss progress issues and good practice.
- 51 All providers have Management Information Systems (MIS) in place. Many providers use TRACIO<sup>3</sup> and associated Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR)<sup>4</sup> documentation. The TRACIO and MAYTAS<sup>5</sup> monitoring systems are generally used effectively to record high-level management information and overall learner performance to report to the Welsh Government. The best providers use a range of systems and processes to monitor the completion of reviews and ILPs. These include the use of triplicate documents, learner tracking systems, quality review groups and Digital Pens<sup>6</sup>, which can present up-to-date information and give an

---

<sup>3</sup> TRACIO is a web-based tool for providers to track and measure learners' progress and distance travelled.

<sup>4</sup> Data on learners across Wales is submitted electronically into the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) by learning providers. This data is used for funding, monitoring and analysis. The data is also required for monitoring performance and outcomes and to inform strategy development.

<sup>5</sup> MAYTAS is a management information system that holds learner, staff, employer and management information to track learners' performance.

<sup>6</sup> A digital pen is an input device which captures the handwriting of a user and converts it into digital data, which can then be uploaded to a computer.

instant quality check. However these systems are not used consistently well by all providers to track learners' complex needs and individual learner progress at the level of detail that would be usable in assessment for learning.

- 52 In one good example, management information is used to monitor the performance of individual learners, to record qualifications achieved and to identify additional training and support needs. This information is disseminated to partners effectively through team and board meetings. In one consortium, the Senior Officer (SO) liaises with each partner's data officer to provide regular information and updates. The SO sends out monthly reports, visits providers regularly and provides information on performance against contracts and outcomes. However, in the majority of cases lead providers do not use their systems effectively to set quality benchmarks with partner providers or to monitor and quality assure the work of sub-contractors.

## Appendix 1

Web-link to Welsh Government first release SDR 204/2012 – Projected Apprenticeship Framework Success Rates and Provisional Destinations Data for Traineeship and Steps to Employment Learners, 2011-2012, 27 November 2012

<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2012/121127sdr2042012en.pdf>

## Appendix 2 The remit author and survey team

Stephen Davies	HMI
Mark Evans	HMI
Bernard O'Reilly	HMI
Bernard Hayward	HMI