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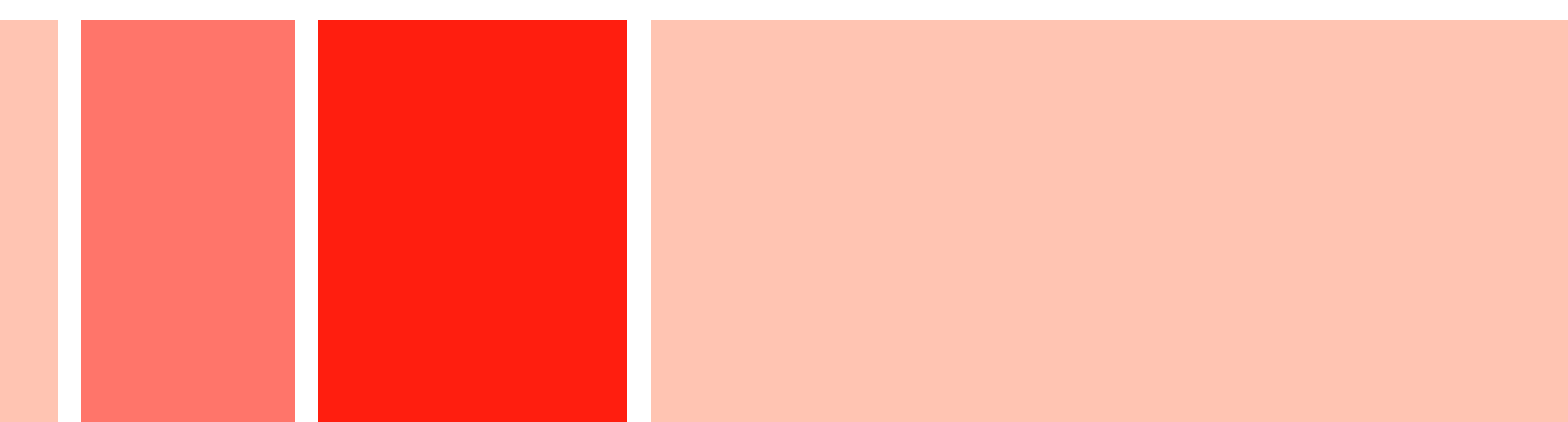
Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Ymchwil gymdeithasol  
Social research

Rhif/Number: 24/2014

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# Evaluation of Work-Based Learning Programme 2011-15: First report on contracting arrangements and Traineeship delivery



# **Evaluation of Work-Based Learning Programme 2011-15: First report on contracting arrangements and Traineeship delivery**

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

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Welsh Government Social Research, 2013

ISBN 978-1-4734-1060-2

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## Glossary of acronyms

<b>Contractor</b>	The term contractor is used to refer to provider organisations contracted to deliver work-based learning activities as part of the Work-based Learning programme 2011-15.
<b>ESF</b>	European Social Fund
<b>Estyn</b>	Her Majesty's Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales
<b>LLWR</b>	Lifelong Learning Wales Record. Data on learners across Wales is submitted electronically via LLWR by learning providers
<b>NTfW</b>	National Training Forum Wales – a membership body of organisations involved in work-based learning
<b>QCF</b>	Qualifications and Curriculum Framework
<b>SASW</b>	Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales
<b>WEFO</b>	Wales European Funding Office

## Summary

1. The Welsh Government commissioned York Consulting, in association with Old Bell 3, the University of Cardiff and IFF Research, to carry out an evaluation of the Work-Based Learning Programme 2011-15 (WBL 2011-15). The evaluation covers nine distinct areas of activity in relation to Apprenticeships, Traineeships and Steps to Employment.
2. The evaluation has wide-ranging aims in relation to the effectiveness, outcomes and impacts of WBL 2011-15.
3. This report is based on the very early stages of the two-year evaluation, which focused on providing initial evidence on the effectiveness of the contracting and delivery arrangements for the programme and Traineeships<sup>1</sup>. This stage was specifically designed to capture learning from the current programme to inform the invitation to tender for Work-based Learning from 2015 onwards (WBL4), which will be issued in early 2014.

## Contracting and Delivery Arrangements

4. The delivery of WBL 2011-15 is undertaken through three models of contracting: delivery consortia; lead contractors with sub-contractors; and lead contractors with no sub-contractors. There are six delivery consortia and 18 lead contractors, with minimum contract values of £350,000 for Apprenticeships and £650,000 for Traineeships and Steps to Employment. Approximately 120 consortia members and sub-contractors are involved in delivering the programme.
5. In the previous (2007-11) WBL programme, the Welsh Government held contracts with 64 providers, with a minimum contract value of £99,000.
6. There have been mixed views about the effectiveness of the, largely electronic, tendering approach adopted for WBL 2011-15. Opportunities for face-to-face contact between DfES staff and potential contractors were valued, whereas the online question and answer system was found to be

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<sup>1</sup> In particular: the extent to which Traineeships have been individually tailored; the extent to which Traineeship providers offer a sufficiently wide range of vocational options to meet learners' individual needs; the support offered by Traineeship providers to ensure learners remain engaged with learning the extent to which Traineeship providers ensure employers actively support learners through their learning programme; and the extent to which Traineeship providers actively plan a progression path for learners.

less valuable. One consortium lead commented that the responses to questions were sometimes found to be re-statements of elements of the specification document, rather than considered replies to the queries raised.

7. The move to the current delivery structures was a significant transition for the provider network in Wales. The consortia and sub-contracts include organisations that had pre-existing working relationships and others that had to establish new links in order to respond to the invitation to tender. These new working relationships were a pragmatic response to meet the contracting requirements. In some instances they have been regarded as opportunistic and described as 'marriages of convenience'.
8. The transition to new working relationships and delivery arrangements took some time to bed in and was seen by contractors as having a negative impact on delivery during the early stages of the programme. Further structural changes are already anticipated for the new programme and it is important that a smooth transition can be achieved in order to minimise the impact on programme performance and learner experiences.
9. Both consortia and lead contract arrangements have the potential to enable consistent high quality delivery of work-based learning. However, the extent to which contracting arrangements are successful depends to a significant degree on the specific way in which partnerships are established and operate. Where arrangements have been less effective, issues have tended to relate to ineffective communication, bureaucracy and lack of clarity of responsibilities in large consortia.
10. The increased scale of the delivery contracts, and the need to work through more complex consortia or sub-contracting arrangements, meant that lead contractors and consortia leads were required to adapt and further develop their previously established systems and structures.

### **Performance and Contract Management Arrangements**

11. At this stage in the evaluation, it has not been possible to carry out a full review of programme performance data. However, the headline programme performance figures provide valuable context for discussions of the effectiveness of the contract management approaches that are currently in place.

12. On **Apprenticeships**, framework completion in 2011/12 was 85% and an upward trend in this figure is reported to be continuing and is now approaching what would be considered to be the maximum sustainable level.
13. On **Traineeships**, 68% of learners show positive progression from the Engagement strand and 56% progress from the Level 1 strand. No trend data is available for Traineeships, although we understand that progression rates improved during 2012/13 and are better than was achieved by the Skillbuild youth programme previously.
14. Half of **Steps to Employment** participants achieved positive progression during 2011/12, reaching the 'good' performance threshold, although positive outcomes were still significantly below those achieved by other elements of the WBL 2011-15 programme.
15. The approach to contract management adopted by the Welsh Government for WBL 2011-15 has been relatively 'hands-off', with most formal communication with delivery contractors through the use of e-mail and online information systems, which have not always been effective from the perspective of contractors. The reduction in the number of organisations with direct contracts with the Welsh Government has inevitably meant that sub-contractors and consortia members have less direct contact than previously, which they have raised as a concern.
16. The need to improve communication with lead contractors and consortia leads has been recognised by the Welsh Government and named contract managers are now being introduced.
17. In contrast to the relatively 'hands-off' contract management by the Welsh Government, there are close contracts between lead contractors/consortia leads and their delivery partners, with regular performance management and review meetings. The relationships between leads and their partners have matured and become more effective over the contract lifetime.

### **Traineeships**

18. The establishment of Traineeships as the successor to Skillbuild aimed to create a very broad programme specification, providing an opportunity for innovative providers to develop new approaches to meet the needs of 16-18 year olds facing barriers to further learning or employment.

19. Consultations with Welsh Government staff have consistently raised disappointment at the performance of Traineeships in providing a truly new and innovative response to the needs of the eligible learner group.
20. Providers are generally of the view that they are able to meet the needs of Trainees referred to them within their existing provision, rather than having to tailor their offer to meet individual requirements.
21. There is an important misalignment with stakeholder perceptions that providers are not utilising the flexibilities available to them, while lead providers feel that they are doing so.
22. Where providers have identified issues in their ability to meet the needs of individual Trainees, this has tended to be due to difficulties in finding suitable employment placement opportunities. Contractors and other consultees argued that the Traineeships learner group can be very challenging. For example, one provider particularly commented on the amount of upskilling required by learners before they are ready to move into a workplace, while another identified issues with timekeeping and learner behaviour. This impacts on the willingness of employers to engage with the programme and therefore the capacity of the programme and ability to achieve the desired progression opportunities.
23. Traineeships activities can include an employer placement or community projects or volunteering. We understand that the use of community or voluntary activities has been limited. The need to achieve progression to learning at a higher level or movement into work has been raised as a significant concern by one major voluntary organisation.
24. Concern has been expressed, by Welsh Government officials, that some providers are delivering Traineeships that do not contain sufficient work-based activities. The contract structures can encourage providers to keep learners on centre-based learning programmes rather than learning in a work-based environment.
25. Some contractors are wholly reliant on referrals from Careers Wales for their Trainees. There is reported to be variability in service provided by Careers Wales, with a very good service in some areas but a lack of understanding of the Traineeships programme evident elsewhere, which may mean that suitable individuals are not being referred to the



programme. This is limiting the overall effectiveness of the referral process and greater consistency in joint working between Careers Wales and consortia/contractors is required.

26. Traineeships are not seen as an integral element of a coherent work-based learning programme, and there has been much less success in achieving progression beyond Level 1. They are being delivered in a very complex operating environment, with a significant number of alternative routes available in Convergence areas. The issues faced by Traineeships may reflect a lack of general awareness of the programme among potential participants. There is a need to consider the profile and positioning of Traineeships and explore the most appropriate approaches to incentivise providers to tailor their delivery to the specific needs of Trainees.

### **Conclusions and issues for further consideration**

27. Performance across the elements of the Work-based Learning programme, in terms of the delivery of positive progressions for learners is broadly positive. There is some variation across the different strands of activity, however, this is not unexpected given the different maturity levels of the different strands.
28. The commissioning of the Work-based Learning Programme 2011-15 led to significant structural changes in the learning provider network, which took some time to bed in, which had a negative impact on delivery during the early stages of the programme, although these issues now appear to have been addressed. In commissioning WBL4, it will be important to consider how best to capitalise on the structures and relationships that are now in place to ensure maximum continuity and minimum disruption to learners.
29. Sub-contractors and consortia members clearly have much less direct contact with Welsh Government than was the case previously. However, communications through lead providers/consortia leads are generally found to work well. Pro-active contract management by lead contractors/consortia leads is generally seen to be effective in ensuring good performance.

30. There have been some concerns from providers that changes introduced by the Welsh Government are too slow and give providers a dilemma as they balance risks of contract flexibility with staff contracts and learner continuity. These were raised by two lead providers, who had been told they were being allocated additional resources to increase their delivery and prepared to do so. Changes were then made by the Welsh Government to the timing of these additional resources, which required the providers to make further changes. There is a need to ensure that messages from the Welsh Government about the programme are clear and consistent, to enable providers and their partners to make appropriate decisions and actions.
31. Providers and stakeholders expressed some major concerns about the awareness and understanding of the various WBL programme elements from national stakeholders through to local practitioners, employers, schools and young people (although it is important to note that we have not consulted employers, schools and young people to be able to confirm these concerns at this stage). Traineeships are not well recognised and understood, which impacts on the levels of take-up. Some think this information 'deficit' could be addressed through clearer articulation of how various elements at the different levels might support learners and employers.
32. Currently, there is variability in the effectiveness of relationships between Careers Wales and providers in different locations across Wales. Action needs to be taken to improve the consistency of this service as a key stage in the learner engagement process.
33. The picture is made more complicated by the ESF projects operating in some areas targeting similar learner groups. There is a need for better coordination of funding programmes to avoid duplication and competition to provide support to the same learner groups.
34. Providers report few difficulties in meeting the needs of Traineeship learners, but their delivery appears to show little innovation, with continuing emphasis on standard packages of learning.
35. There is a need to consider how best to drive innovation and best practice in delivering learning to meet the needs of Trainees. There may be merit in

considering alternative funding strategies to achieve the outcomes which are desired.

36. In the short term, it is important that any changes that are made in commissioning WBL4 are able to capitalise on the progress achieved with the current programme. In the medium term, it will be necessary to consider how best to integrate the elements of the programme to provide clear potential progression routes to higher levels of learning and employment for all Trainees. There is a need to strengthen the message of how Traineeships fits into the progression map. This should help the programme to achieve its full potential.

# 1 Introduction

## Background

- 1.1 The Welsh Government commissioned York Consulting, in association with Old Bell 3, the University of Cardiff and IFF Research to carry out an evaluation of the Work-based Learning Programme 2011-15 (WBL 2011-15). The evaluation commenced in early November 2013 and will continue until November 2015.
- 1.2 In summer 2010, the (then) Welsh Assembly Government issued an invitation to tender to deliver its Work-based Learning programmes between August 2011 and July 2014 (later extended to March 2015). WBL 2011-15 covers three main areas (as set out in **Table 1.1**), elements of which receive funding from the European Social Fund.

**Table 1.1: Coverage of the Evaluation**

Apprenticeships	<p>Employment-based learning programmes for employed learners, post-compulsory school leaving age, following frameworks that are compliant with the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for Wales (SASW) and published by the relevant Sector Skills Council. All apprenticeship frameworks include Qualification and Curriculum Framework (QCF) occupational competency and knowledge based qualifications as well as Essential Skills and Employer Rights and Responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Foundation Apprenticeships – are at QCF level 2 and considered equivalent to five good GCSEs</li><li>• Apprenticeships – are at QCF level 3 and considered to be equivalent to two A-level passes</li><li>• Higher Apprenticeships – are at QCF Level 4 or above (and, in some cases, a knowledge-based qualification such as a Foundation Degree)</li><li>• Flexible Learning – skills training at QCF levels 2 to 5. Employees aged 19 and over can undertake single qualifications from within Apprenticeship</li></ul>
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	frameworks, to which the Welsh Government will contribute up to 50% of normal funding rates
Traineeships	<p>Traineeships are intended to provide young people aged 16-18 with the skills needed to get a job or progress to learning at a higher level, including an Apprenticeship or Further Education. Traineeships are offered at the following levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement Traineeship – for youth learners who are assessed as needing to address one or more barriers to further learning or employment and/or need to confirm or contextualise an occupational focus prior to entering further learning or employment;</li> <li>• Level 1 Traineeships – for youth learners who are assessed as being occupationally focused and able to follow a programme of study leading to a Level 1 qualification;</li> <li>• Bridge-to-Employment Traineeships – for youth learners who are assessed as occupationally focused where a progression opportunity is not readily available. This provision is short-term whilst progression is secured.</li> </ul> <p>Traineeships include the identification of the barriers faced by the young person; carrying out a work placement, community project or voluntary work; centre-based learning opportunities, to provide the learner with the range of skills they need to progress.</p>
Steps to Employment	<p>This was designed to provide access to training and work placement opportunities for people aged 18 or over who are not in full time education or employment. This was delivered at two levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work Focused Learning – for learners who wish to address any barriers to learning or who need to</li> </ul>

	<p>confirm an occupational focus in order to take part in employment, further learning or Routeways to Work. This included work placements, community projects, voluntary work and centre-based learning enabling the learner to achieve qualifications up to and including Level 2 and test knowledge at Level 3;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Routeways to Work – for learners with an occupational focus and who are able to follow a bespoke learning programme, which can take up to eight weeks. The learning programme will align to current or anticipated vacancies in particular businesses or sectors identified by the Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus. Where an employer has been identified, the learner will be offered an interview on completion of the training.</li> </ul> <p>Steps to Employment was withdrawn for new entrants on 31 July 2013 and replaced with the Work Ready programme<sup>2</sup>.</p>
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1.3 There are a number of other projects related to the the Work-based Learning programme:

- Jobs Growth Wales – this is being evaluated separately with the evaluation due to complete in 2015
- Pathways to Apprenticeship – this is being evaluated separately with the evaluation due to complete in 2015
- Shared Apprenticeships – an evaluation report was published March 2014<sup>3</sup>
- Young Recruits – an evaluation report was published in July 2013<sup>4</sup>, however, further evaluation of this project may be undertaken as part of the WBL 2011-15 evaluation

<sup>2</sup> Work Ready is available for over 18s receiving benefits. Following a needs assessment, participants receive tailored support either through Learning for Work, a 24-week part time course, or Routeways, providing 10 days training in the skills that employers have said they need.

<sup>3</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/?topic=Education+and+skills&lang=en>

<sup>4</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/young-recruit-programme/?lang=en>

Appropriate links will be made across the separate evaluations.

## **Evaluation Overview**

1.4 The aims of the evaluation are to:

1. Assess the effectiveness of the contracting and delivery for WBL 2011-15;
2. Satisfy WEFO's evaluation requirements for projects receiving ESF funding;
3. Carry out specific evaluation of the delivery of Traineeships;
4. Assess the delivery of outputs, outcomes and impacts;
5. Assess the extent to which the programme has secured the participation of individuals according to protected characteristics;
6. Review how Essential Skills Policy has been embedded in the delivery of WBL and how this has contributed to the achievement of WBL 2011-15 objectives.

1.5 The approach to carrying out the evaluation has been designed to use multiple methods to achieve these evaluation aims, including:

- Consultations with key stakeholders in the WBL programme;
- Consultations with lead contractors and consortia leads;
- Electronic surveys of sub-contractors and members of delivery consortia;
- Surveys of employers and learners;
- Economic modelling;
- Review of programme data.

## **Initial phase of the evaluation**

1.6 This report is based on the very early stages of a two-year evaluation project which will cover all aspects of programme delivery and assess the achievement of outputs, outcomes and impacts. This initial phase of the evaluation has focused on providing initial evidence against the first and third evaluation aims, relating to the effectiveness of the contracting and delivery arrangements for the programme and Traineeships<sup>5</sup>. This

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<sup>5</sup> In particular: the extent to which Traineeships have been individually tailored; the extent to which Traineeship providers offer a sufficiently wide range of vocational options to meet learners' individual needs; the support offered by Traineeship providers to ensure learners remain engaged with learning the extent to which Traineeship providers ensure employers

was specifically designed to capture learning from the current programme to inform the invitation to tender for Work-based Learning from 2015 onwards (WBL4), which will be issued in early 2014.

- 1.7 During the initial phase of the work programme, our work has included:
- consultations with seven Welsh Government officials responsible for different aspects of WBL 2011-15;
  - consultations with six external stakeholders to the programme, including business representative organisations, organisations representing learning providers, Careers Wales and Jobcentre Plus. The stakeholder organisations consulted are listed in Annex A;
  - consultations with a sample of 18 of the 24 consortia leads/lead contractors;
  - an e-survey of members of the delivery consortia and sub-contractors, which was forwarded to all 120 providers by lead contractors/consortia leads. The questions within the survey were 'open' questions so provided qualitative rather than quantitative data. Ninety responses were received to the e-survey, with 12 respondents also taking part in telephone consultations to explore their responses in more detail. These respondents had provided responses that prompted further questions and encouraged more discussion.
- 1.8 The fieldwork during this stage of the work programme has taken place over a six-week period and has not sought to achieve comprehensive coverage of what is a large and complex programme of activities. Rather it has focussed on informing the development of WBL4. At this stage, all fieldwork has generated qualitative evidence. Significant further fieldwork and data analysis will be taking place during early 2014.

### **Report Structure**

- 1.9 In the remainder of this report, we discuss:
- the contracting and delivery arrangements for the programme;
  - contract management;

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actively support learners through their learning programme; and the extent to which Traineeship providers actively plan a progression path for learners.



- Traineeships delivery;
- conclusions and areas for further consideration.

## **2 Contracting and delivery arrangements**

### **Introduction**

2.1 In this Section, we discuss the contracting and delivery arrangements that have been established for the Work-based Learning programme and consider the key lessons that should be taken into account in tendering for WBL4.

### **Tendering and Contracting**

2.2 The Welsh Government is obliged to re-tender for the delivery of Work based learning programmes periodically (usually every 3 or 4 years). A retender provides opportunity to revise the programmes or introduce new programmes (for example replacing Skillbuild with Traineeships in the 2011-15 tender). The tender for the 2011-15 programme also provided an opportunity to build on the Welsh Government's transformation agenda for post-16 education through consortia delivery.

2.3 The delivery of the Work-based Learning programme is currently undertaken through three models of contracting:

- Delivery consortia;
- Lead contractors with sub-contractors;
- Lead contractors with no sub-contractors.

2.4 Six delivery consortia are involved in the programme, and a further 18 organisations are involved as lead contractors. Approximately 120 consortia members and sub-contractors are also involved in delivering the programme.

2.5 The delivery consortia are partnerships of providers working jointly in the delivery of the programme under a single contract. Their status as consortia means that they are treated as providers in their own right, with joint approaches to management, quality assurance and self-assessment and subject to inspection by Estyn in their own right.

2.6 Where lead contractors are involved in programme delivery, they have responsibility for delivery of a set range and volume of activities. In order to achieve this, most have chosen to enter into sub-contract agreements with other providers to enable delivery to particular learner groups, specific sectors or in particular geographic locations. A small number of

lead contractors have chosen to deliver all aspects of their contracts themselves.

2.7 The move to contracting with delivery consortia and lead contractors has led to the Welsh Government having direct contractual relationships with a smaller number of organisations, with these prime contracts being significantly larger than individual organisations held previously. This therefore had the potential to create economies of scale and scope for the Welsh Government. The invitation to tender for the programme set minimum contract values for different elements of the programme, as follows:

- Apprenticeships - £350,000
- Traineeships and Steps to Employment - £650,000
- Apprenticeships and Traineeships and/or Steps to Employment - £500,000.

2.8 In the previous (2007-11) Work-Based Learning programme, the Welsh Government held contracts with 64 providers, with contract values ranging from a minimum of £99,000 to a maximum of £8 million.

2.9 There have been mixed views about the effectiveness of the tendering approach adopted for the WBL 2011-15 programme among the consortia leads and lead contractors. Most of the views relating to the tendering process focused on the approaches to communication. Opportunities for face-to-face contact between DfES staff and potential contractors were valued by both parties. The initial supplier briefings were generally found to be useful, whilst one provider described the post-award debriefing sessions as 'the most useful part of the process'.

2.10 Where the online system was used for questions and answers, this was found to be less valuable by the contractors. One consortium lead commented that the responses to questions were sometimes found to be re-statements of elements of the specification document, rather than considered replies to the queries raised.

2.11 One stakeholder was highly critical of the commissioning process for the current programme. They stated that the approach to evaluating tenders focused on reviewing the 'pot of outcomes' identified in providers' proposals. It did not take account of the relationships previously

established between providers and employers, which are seen by providers as the key mechanism to stimulate demand for the programme.

- 2.12 The reduction in the number of lead providers through contracting for the current programme was said by one stakeholder to have '*decimated the relationships between providers and employers, leaving apprentices in the lurch. It was chaos. This must not happen again*'. This is a more extreme view than has been expressed by others we have consulted, whose views suggest that it has not been a persistent issue. However, it emphasises the key issue that changes to provider structures as a result of the commissioning and contracting process can have a significant impact on the potential of the programme to meet the needs of learners and employers.
- 2.13 The move to the current delivery structures was a significant transition for the provider network across Wales. The consortia and sub-contracts include organisations that had pre-existing working relationships and others that had to establish new links in order to respond to the invitation to tender. These new relationships were established as a pragmatic response to meet the minimum contract values published in the invitation to tender. They enabled smaller providers, without the capacity to achieve the minimum contract value, to continue delivering work-based learning, whilst providing additional capacity and flexibility to larger contractors to deliver, in some cases, significantly higher value contracts. For example, one lead contractor has seen its contract value increase from £7 million to £20 million.
- 2.14 It must be recognised that the way in which some of the new relationships between providers were established was opportunistic. One stakeholder consulted described them as '*marriages of convenience*'. The prime focus in their creation was on securing a contract, rather than necessarily maximising the potential to meet the needs of learners and employers. The need to develop new ways of working between organisations was regarded as having had a negative impact on their delivery focus during the early stages of the contract. However, it will take further evaluation work to establish whether the

changes ultimately provided fruitful to the delivery of WBL 2011-15 as a whole.

- 2.15 Where new joint working arrangements have worked well, their establishment has been part of a rigorous process. For example, one major lead provider used a formal vetting process for potential sub-contractors, to ensure that they were able to meet their requirements. This has been identified as a specific example of good practice by Estyn.
- 2.16 One lead provider which works nationally established new sub-contracting arrangements with four partners and relocated their delivery in one region. This was described as being '*somewhat disruptive*' and had a negative impact on delivery during the early stages of the programme.
- 2.17 Changes to the overall scale of contracts have been raised as an issue by the sub-contractors consulted. For example, one provider commented that '*sufficient time is not given to 'tool up' when contract increases are given. Similarly, once investments are made, contracts are reduced with little or no warning... investment in staff and resources had already occurred by this time. It was difficult to manage down and adapt to the new contract requirements*'. However, a WG official stated that the contractors tendered on the basis that they could deliver the bid from contract start.
- 2.18 In the period since contracts were initially established, there have been some re-allocations of learners and sub-contractors due to performance and/or business issues with sub-contractors. These have also required the establishment of new working relationships which have taken time to bed in and achieve maximum performance.
- 2.19 The sub-contractors responding to the e-survey and further consultations identified similar issues in relation to the contracting arrangements. For example, one sub-contractor commented that problems encountered during the first year of delivering the contract meant that they had to restrict the number of learner starts, although this issue has now been overcome and delivery is described as having returned to 'business as usual'.

- 2.20 The impacts of changes in delivery structures on programme performance and the experiences of learners are significant. We understand that there may be a small number of further structural changes in the delivery arrangements for WBL4. For example, one of the smaller lead contractors consulted indicated that, due to their specialist focus, they would be unable to secure a standalone contract for delivery under WBL4. They are therefore now considering potential consortia or lead contractors with which to work in order to continue their delivery. The ability to achieve a smooth transition in delivery is critical.
- 2.21 It is important to recognise that sub-contractors may be working with a number of lead contractors, although this approach has not been recommended by Welsh Government. For example, one of the sub-contractors consulted stated that they were working with three lead contractors, which means that they have to develop a number of different approaches to delivery and management of provision.
- 2.22 There is a need to ensure that there is sufficient time for lead contractors and sub-contractors to develop their relationships to enable efficient delivery. This is illustrated by comments from one sub-contractor who reported that their increasing involvement with the lead contractor is now paying dividends, with *'improved communications, and ultimately improved standards of provision to learners and value for money'*.
- 2.23 From consultations with consortia leads, lead contractors and sub-contractors, it is clear that both consortia and lead contract arrangements can be highly effective. Both structures have the potential to enable consistent high quality delivery of work-based learning. However, the extent to which contracting arrangements are successful depends to a significant degree on the specific way in which partnerships are established and operate.
- 2.24 Where arrangements had been less effective, similar issues have been highlighted from members of consortia and lead contractors. These particularly relate to ineffective communication, but also issues of potential bureaucracy in large consortia or large sub-contractor groups. In addition, two lead contractors suggested that effective working in consortia can be more difficult than a lead/sub-contractor arrangement

due to the lack of a clear hierarchy, although this issue has not been raised by consortia leads.

- 2.25 Estyn has raised issues of the standard of leadership where consortia have been less effective. In particular, some consortia have been less successful in developing and embedding effective approaches to consistent joint working. Where consortia are working well, a key component of this is the ability to identify and build on the strengths of consortia members and drive truly effective partnership delivery<sup>6</sup>.

### **Provider Systems and Structures**

- 2.26 The lead contractors and consortia leads had significant track records of delivering work-based learning prior to the issue of the contracts for the current programme. This meant that they had established systems and structures to enable delivery. However, it should be noted that the increased scale in the current contracts, and the need to work through more complex consortia or sub-contracting arrangements, meant that there was a requirement for these systems and structures to be adapted.
- 2.27 One lead provider that saw a significant increase in the total value of their contract had to make significant changes and increase their overall capacity. This included increasing their own staff from 50 staff to 300, to enable their own delivery and the ongoing management of 16 sub-contractors.
- 2.28 Where sub-contracting arrangements have worked particularly well, there has been considerable investment in the development of consistent systems for recording and monitoring delivery. This is coupled with regular contract management meetings to review performance and delivery against the sub-contract.

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<sup>6</sup> See Estyn Inspection reports: <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/english/inspection/inspection-reports/>

### **3 Performance and contract management arrangements**

#### **Introduction**

3.1 In this Section, we consider the contract management arrangements that are in place to support the delivery of the Work-based Learning programme and ensure that performance is in line with the targets set. In considering the contract management arrangements that have been implemented, it is important to reflect on the approaches used by the Welsh Government to work with consortia leads and lead contractors, and the approaches adopted to manage delivery by consortia members and sub-contractors.

#### **Headline Programme Performance**

3.2 To date, it has not been possible to carry out a full review of programme performance information. However, the headline programme performance figures provide a valuable context for discussion of the effectiveness of the contract management approaches that have been implemented.

3.3 From 2011 onwards, the Welsh Government has published Learner Outcome Reports showing the learner success rates achieved on the WBL programme and identifying 'traffic light' thresholds to indicate the ratings of different levels of performance. For Apprenticeships, these are based on the percentages of learners completing their Apprenticeship frameworks, while for Traineeships and Steps to Employment they are based on progression to employment or learning at a higher level.

3.4 Programme performance will be reviewed in detail during the remaining stages of the evaluation.

#### **Apprenticeships**

3.5 The traffic light thresholds for learner outcomes on Apprenticeships are shown in **Table 3.1**.



**Table 3.1: Framework Completion Thresholds – Apprenticeships**

	<b>Unsatisfactory (red)</b>	<b>Adequate (amber)</b>	<b>Good (light green)</b>	<b>Excellent (green)</b>
<b>Framework Completion</b>	<b>Below 70%</b>	<b>70-79%</b>	<b>80-89%</b>	<b>90% or above</b>

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/learningproviders/raisingqualityandstandards/learneroutcomes2/outcomesreport/?lang=en>

- 3.6 Evidence published in April 2013<sup>7</sup> shows that framework completion across all work-based learning providers in Wales in 2011/12 was 85 per cent, compared to 82 per cent in 2010/11 and 80 per cent in 2009/10. From our consultations, we understand that the upward trend in framework completion is continuing. This therefore reflects strong overall programme performance and a continuing focus within providers on learner outcomes.
- 3.7 Clearly, there will be variations in framework completion rates between providers and across different Apprenticeship frameworks. However, the strong upward trends in overall completion rates indicate that Apprenticeships programme performance is approaching what would be considered to be the maximum sustainable level. The success and value of the Apprenticeship programme has been recognised in significant additional funding over the next three years.

### **Traineeships**

- 3.8 **Table 3.2** shows the performance thresholds for Traineeships, which are based on the percentage of learners progressing either to higher level learning or employment.

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<sup>7</sup> Data in this Section is drawn from <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/learningproviders/raisingqualityandstandards/learneroutcomes2/outcomesreport/?lang=en>

**Table 3.2: Progression Thresholds – Traineeships**

	Unsatisfactory (red)	Adequate (amber)	Good (light green)	Excellent (green)
<b>Positive Progressions from Engagement</b>	<b>Below 60%</b>	<b>60-69%</b>	<b>70-79%</b>	<b>80% or above</b>
<b>Positive Progressions from Level 1</b>	<b>Below 45%</b>	<b>45-54%</b>	<b>55-69%</b>	<b>70% or above</b>

Source:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/learningproviders/raisingqualityandstandards/learneroutcomes2/outcomesreport/?lang=en>

3.9 Performance data for Traineeships in 2011/12 shows that 68 per cent of learners were showing positive progression from the Engagement programme and 56 per cent were showing positive progression from Level 1 programmes. Based on the RAG ratings originally set, this indicates only adequate performance for engagement and Level 1 programmes only just achieving the threshold of good performance.

3.10 As a new programme, no trend data is currently available for Traineeships. However, during our consultations it has been indicated that progression rates have improved during 2012/13. It is also important to reflect that the headline progression rates for Traineeships in 2011/12 were an improvement on the performance achieved by the Skillbuild youth programme previously.

3.11 It has been suggested that the performance thresholds established for the first year of Traineeships were somewhat ambitious and require amendment. As discussed in Section 4, the market in which Traineeships is operating can also be seen to be having an impact on the level of performance achieved.

### **Steps to Employment**

3.12 **Table 3.3** shows the performance thresholds set in relation to Steps to Employment Work Focused Learning and Routeways to Work.

**Table 3.3: Steps to Employment – Performance Thresholds for Work Focused Learning and Routeways to Work**

	Unsatisfactory (red)	Adequate (amber)	Good (light green)	Excellent (green)
Positive Progressions	Below 40%	40-49%	50-59%	60% or above

Source:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/learningproviders/raisingqualityandstandards/learneroutcomes2/outcomesreport/?lang=en>

3.13 During 2011/12, 50 per cent of Steps to Employment participants achieved a positive progression. Therefore, during its first year of operation, the programme achieved the ‘Good’ performance threshold. It is important to recognise that this performance was achieved during a period of dual running with the established Skillbuild programme.

Stakeholders have therefore indicated that they would not regard the performance of Steps to Employment as particularly weak, although clearly positive outcomes were at a significantly lower level than those achieved by other elements of the Work-based Learning programme.

3.14 There remains a general level of disappointment among the contractors involved and some of the guidance organisations consulted that the Steps to Employment element ended. There are some concerns that the new element, Work Ready, does not provide sufficient training for participants.

### **Contract Management**

3.15 The approach to contract management adopted by the Welsh Government for the Work-based Learning programme has been relatively ‘hands-off’, compared to the approaches that have typically and traditionally been used in Wales in the past. Most formal communication between contractors and the Welsh Government has been through the use of e-mail and online information systems. This has led one lead contractor to comment that their relationship with the Welsh Government has been ‘completely faceless and impersonal’. Another lead contractor commented *‘there has been much less review and management of performance and spend than would normally be expected. Contract management discussions are not taking place’*.

- 3.16 The use of the e-mail and online system for communication has not always been effective from the perspective of contractors. For example, one lead contractor stated that where questions have been raised, replies have been in the form of references to clauses within contracts, rather than a clear reply including an explanation. Another lead contractor indicated that it can take longer to receive a response to questions than would be ideal, which can impact on delivery, especially where the answers to questions need to inform changes in ways of working.
- 3.17 The contractors we have consulted have found that there has been some variability in the messages they have received where multiple queries have been raised. This has been particularly the case where it has been necessary to raise additional questions following receipt of an initial response to an enquiry. This variability in messages has led some contractors to view the contract management as badly organised, with one lead contractor indicating that working on the contract can be akin to *'taking part in a game where the rules keep changing. They should say something and stick to it. Make the process clear'*. This issue will be investigated further in the next phase of the evaluation.
- 3.18 Sub-contractors and consortia members have found that the lack of direct contact with the Welsh Government has been a concern for them. Survey respondents indicated that more direct communication would perhaps be beneficial to them. This relates to the speed of communication and is therefore linked to the longer lines of communication that are inevitable where this takes place via the lead contractors or consortia leads.
- 3.19 There was no suggestion in the responses from sub-contractors and consortia members that there are significant issues with the relationships with their respective leads.
- 3.20 We understand that the need to improve communication with contractors has been recognised by the Welsh Government. Named contract managers are now being introduced, although only one of the lead contractors consulted made specific reference to this, and they were

unaware of the specific way in which this relationship is intended to operate.

- 3.21 The system for contractors to report performance using LLWR is said to work well in general. It has also been stated that the Welsh Government and contractors have placed considerable emphasis on improving the quality and robustness of data reported on the programme. This suggests that there can be increasing confidence that reported levels of performance and comparisons are accurate.
- 3.22 However, the range of measures used, and the detail required to support invoicing, have been found by some to be very complex. One lead contractor commented that *'it is the most complicated way of invoicing our accountants have come across. The level of detail required to support invoices makes it easy to make mistakes, which then contribute to compliance issues. Difficulties around invoicing have led to delays in payment, which are not acceptable'*. This issue will be investigated further in the next phase of the evaluation.
- 3.23 It is possible that the issues encountered around invoicing and the evidence required to support invoicing will be improved through closer working between consortia leads/lead contractors and named contract managers. However, it is also possible that the level of detail required is due to the fact that elements of WBL 2011-15 are funded by the European Social Fund. This issue will be investigated further during the later stages of the evaluation.
- 3.24 In contrast to the relatively 'hands-off' contract management by the Welsh Government, consultations with providers indicate that consortia leads/lead contractors and consortia members/sub-contractors are close. Regular performance management and review meetings are taking place.
- 3.25 One sub-contractor that works with three different lead contractors indicated that some problems are encountered due to the lead contractors each using slightly different systems and procedures, which can be somewhat disruptive.

- 3.26 The effectiveness of the current relationships between leads and sub-contractors/consortia members reflects that they have matured somewhat over time. A number of sub-contractors specifically stated that the effectiveness of their working relationships has improved, with lead contractors specifically focusing their attention on improving their relationship with their sub-contractors and facilitating the sharing of good practice across their networks.
- 3.27 Only one of the consortia members that responded to the e-survey indicated that there were significant problems with the consortia approach. In their view, consortia members have lost their identity through the establishment of consortia. They expressed concern that working in consortia could lead to poor working practices by consortia leads being perpetuated across consortia. However, this would appear to be a reflection of a specific issue with this consortium, rather than a systemic issue with consortium arrangements.

## 4 Traineeships

- 4.1 The aims of the evaluation include a specific requirement to carry out additional evaluation of Traineeships, as these were new for WBL 2011-15 and there were some concerns raised by Welsh Government staff about whether they were operating as envisaged. The initial phase of the evaluation has gathered early evidence against this aim. In this Section, we consider the specific findings in relation to the operation of Traineeships and consider key lessons for future development of this element of the programme.
- 4.2 In establishing Traineeships as the successor to Skillbuild, the aim was to create a very broad programme specification, which would provide an opportunity for innovative providers to develop new approaches to meet the needs of 16-18 year olds who need to address barriers to further learning or employment. The concept of Traineeships focuses on tailoring support to meet the specific needs of individual Trainees, enabling them to progress into higher levels of learning or into employment. Delivery of Traineeships should combine a work placement, community project or voluntary work with centre-based learning opportunities.
- 4.3 The flexibility open to providers on Traineeships is intended to enable them to provide opportunities for learners to progress as quickly as possible. However, consultations with Welsh Government staff have consistently raised disappointment at the performance of Traineeships in providing a truly new response to the needs of the eligible participant group. There is a view that many providers are continuing to offer the same types of support as were available through Skillbuild and other programmes.
- 4.4 When questioned about their ability to respond to the specific needs of Trainees, providers generally expressed the view that they can meet the requirements of learners referred to them. However, the responses from providers suggest that they tend to be able to meet Trainees' needs within their existing provision, rather than that they are tailoring their offer to meet individual requirements.

- 4.5 This indicates an important misalignment with stakeholder perceptions that providers are not utilising the ‘flexibilities’ available to them, while lead providers feel that they are doing so, or do not need to do anything further in order to meet Trainees’ needs.
- 4.6 While providers have the scope to be fully flexible in their learning delivery, there has been no explicit drive to deliver more individualised support under Traineeships. One issue here is that it is less costly to deliver standard packages of learning than individualised support, which means it is in the interests of providers to group learners together as far as possible. Discussions with providers about tailoring delivery for Trainees indicate that their approach is based on the subject they offer, rather than the way in which learning is delivered.
- 4.7 Where providers have identified issues in their ability to meet the needs of individual Trainees, this has tended to be due to difficulties in finding suitable employer placement opportunities. This is influenced by a number of factors including:
- the sector in which opportunities are sought;
  - the nature and extent of links between employers and providers;
  - potential competition for work placement and job opportunities;
  - the impact of zero hours contracts;
  - the geographic area in which the provider is operating (for example, with fewer options for learners in rural areas);
  - economic conditions.
- 4.8 The potential to meet individual learner needs can be limited by the willingness and/or ability of learners to travel to undertake work placements. This can also have an impact on the ability of participants to access progression opportunities, either into further learning or employment. These issues will depend to a significant degree on the distribution of sector employment and the home base of the learner.
- 4.9 Training providers have argued that the Traineeship learner group, especially Engagement Traineeships, can be very challenging. For example, one provider particularly commented on the amount of upskilling required by learners before they are ready to move into a workplace, while another identified issues with timekeeping and learner



behaviour. This impacts on the willingness of employers to engage with the programme. One provider specifically stated that they have found a downward trend in motivation among Trainees, although the reason for this is not clear. As this consortium leader commented '*we are getting employers sending people back after half a day saying that they can't work with these people*'. This will be investigated further during the later stages of the evaluation. Difficulties in retaining the engagement of employers will clearly have a significant potential impact on the capacity of the programme and the ability to achieve the desired progression.

4.10 As noted above, the range of activities that can potentially be included within Traineeships could include an employer placement, but could also include community projects or volunteering. Our consultations with providers have shown limited use of community or voluntary activities. It is possible that more active engagement with community and voluntary agencies might add to the range of opportunities available through the programme. However, if the objectives of Traineeships are to be achieved, these opportunities must enable the achievement of progression in learning or movement into work. We are aware of one consortium in which a significant national voluntary organisation is involved. There are concerns that the need to achieve progression to further learning at a higher level may not be regarded as most appropriate for all Trainees. There is seen to be a potential risk that this voluntary organisation will withdraw from delivery due to the need to offer progression onto higher level learning opportunities. This will be investigated further in the later stages of the evaluation.

4.11 Concern has been expressed by one lead provider that some providers are delivering Traineeships that do not contain sufficient work-based activities. The way in which the contract is structured can create a perverse incentive for providers to keep learners on centre-based learning programmes rather than learning in a work-based environment. There may therefore be an argument for reviewing the way in which the delivery of work-based activity can be incentivised in the contract.

- 4.12 The routes into Traineeships vary across provider. Some consortia and contractors are wholly reliant on referrals from Careers Wales, while others are undertaking significant activities to generate take-up of the full range of work-based learning support, including Traineeships. This may be due to differences between types of Traineeships as engagement learners should all be referred by Careers Wales, whilst Level 1 should self-refer following a guidance interview with Careers Wales.
- 4.13 Careers Wales have particular concerns including: the limited extent to which bespoke training is being provided to learners; providers' ability to gain and retain employers offering placements; clients being identified to peers as having essential skills needs; impact of being put back from Level 1 to engagement (demotivation, loss of income).
- 4.14 Feedback in relation to Careers Wales indicates a degree of misunderstanding. In some areas, Careers Wales are seen to be providing a very good service. Elsewhere, there is found to be a lack of good understanding of Traineeships and of the providers operating in their area. There is evidence of a changing relationship between Careers Wales and providers; some Careers Wales staff feel less involved and less able to support young people, while some providers report a lack of quantity and/or quality of referrals:
- *“Quality of Level 1 application forms is poor as Careers [Wales] are not involved in the process. Not all information is recorded on the Trainee Referral Form and we find out key information when they commence for example, issues at home etc”;*
  - *“Careers Wales do not interact with many disengaged young people and this needs to be seriously looked at. Providers should be able to attract their own referrals directly”;*
  - *“this [referral process] used to work better when each careers office could talk to a training provider. Now it appears to be centralised.”*
- 4.15 The new Youth Guarantee and Common Area Prospectus will mean that young people are able to consider potential post-16 opportunities side by side, with access to careers advice and guidance about the most suitable opportunities for them. This development should mean that

young people are better informed and will give providers an opportunity to market their services.

- 4.16 Issues with low levels of take-up on Bridge to Employment were not regarded as being linked to guidance or referral problems, as illustrated by the following quote:

*“surely the reason for low take-up of Bridges to Employment is related to the open ended provider risk: If the learner still has not secured employment after this 10 week period is up and is still eligible, the learner’s training provider must cover the cost of the allowance until the learner finds a job, the learning programme is complete or the individual becomes ineligible for this programme.”*

- 4.17 Overall, these issues limit the effectiveness of the referral processes.

There is a need to improve consistency and the effectiveness of joint working between Careers Wales and consortia and contractors.

- 4.18 One potential issue with Traineeships is that they are not seen as an integral element of a coherent work-based learning programme. Whilst progression from entry level to Level 1 is reported by providers to be working relatively well, there has been much less success in progression above Level 1. This raises a question of whether learners are being sufficiently equipped by their involvement in Traineeships to progress to higher level learning. As indicated above, some providers are of the view that there may be a need to recognise further learning at Level 1 as a positive outcome from the programme.

- 4.19 The NTfW (National Training Federation Wales) forum provides a potential mechanism for sharing and embedding good practice among providers. However, while there is evidence of this being shared, there is some evidence from consortia leads and lead contractors of resistance to adopting ideas that lead to greater flexibility. This will be explored further in the next phase of the evaluation.

- 4.20 Traineeships are being delivered in a very complex operating environment. This is especially the case in ESF Convergence area<sup>8</sup>,

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<sup>8</sup> The Convergence area covers West Wales and the Valleys: Isle of Anglesey, Conwy, Denbighshire, Gwynedd, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen.

where it is reported by providers and other stakeholders that there are a substantial number of alternative ESF funded routes available to the Trainees. In theory, there should not be direct competition between Traineeships and other programmes. However, in practice, potential Traineeships participants are said by providers to be choosing alternative routes rather than being referred by Careers Wales onto a Traineeship. There is a need for much clearer positioning and profile for Traineeships if they are to achieve the objectives set.

- 4.21 The issues encountered with Traineeships may reflect a lack of general awareness of the programme across the eligible participant group. It has been acknowledged by Welsh Government consultees that Traineeships is a difficult programme to market. This may be partly due to the inherent flexibility available, which means that potential learners are unable to get a clear understanding of what they will get from Traineeships in comparison with the other opportunities they may be considering. For example, providers and young people don't tend to refer to the programme as 'Traineeships'. One lead contractor reported that young people often say *"I'm on the engagement programme"* rather than saying *"I'm on a Traineeship"*.
- 4.22 We need to learn more, in further phases of the evaluation, about the actual and perceived effectiveness of the marketing campaign for Traineeships, to understand whether the marketing has resulted in the expected outcomes and, if not, why not.
- 4.23 Furthermore, providers are finding some difficulties in gaining access to schools to promote Traineeships to build awareness among students of the full range of routes available to them. This means that Traineeships are considered as a 'last resort' opportunity, rather than a positive route into a good employment opportunity.
- 4.24 The findings from our early fieldwork on Traineeships are consistent with the findings of Estyn's Initial Review of the effectiveness of Traineeships and Steps to Employment. They reflect the need to consider the profile and positioning of the programme, but also to explore the most appropriate approaches to incentivise providers to tailor their delivery to

meet the specific needs of Trainees, rather than offering generic learning opportunities.

## **5 Conclusions and issues for further consideration**

- 5.1 In this Section, we set out the conclusions from our early evaluation activities and identify issues that require further consideration in taking the programme forward. The areas for future consideration include those which can inform direct actions in commissioning the WBL4 programme and those that may lead to changes in programme design and delivery in the medium term and beyond.
- 5.2 Performance across the elements of the Work-based Learning programme, in terms of the delivery of positive outcomes for learners is broadly positive. Some variations are seen across the different strands of activity, however, this is not unexpected given the different levels of maturity of strands. Apprenticeships represent a mature and well recognised range of activities that are now delivering very high levels of positive outcomes.
- 5.3 Performance on Traineeships in delivering progression opportunities for learners is improving and is now higher than was achieved in Skillbuild. However, this reflects much stronger performance in progression from Entry Level to Level 1 than in the delivery of progression to Level 2. This is an area that requires further consideration.
- 5.4 Prior to its closure, the performance of Steps to Employment was below that of Traineeships, but this may reflect issues around dual running with Skillbuild impacting on take-up and delivery of positive outcomes.
- 5.5 The commissioning of the Work-based Learning Programme 2011-15 led to significant structural changes in the learning provider network in Wales, with the need to establish new approaches to working together in lead contractor and consortia arrangements. The new delivery arrangements took some time to bed in, which had a negative impact on delivery during the early stages of the programme. In the context of an open and transparent tender, when commissioning WBL4, it will be important to consider how best to capitalise on the structures and relationships that are now in place to ensure maximum continuity and minimum disruption to learners.

- 5.6 In terms of contract management, there was a generally positive view of the new arrangements, although some lead contractors would like more direct and face to face contact with the Welsh Government. The introduction of named contract managers should enable this, although this will depend on the frequency of contact and the nature of the relationship established.
- 5.7 Sub-contractors and consortia members clearly have much less direct contact with Welsh Government than was the case previously. However, communications through lead providers/consortia leads are generally found to work well. Pro-active contract management by lead contractors/consortia leads is generally seen to be effective in ensuring good performance.
- 5.8 There have been some concerns that changes introduced by the Welsh Government are too slow and give providers a dilemma as they balance risks of contract flexibility with staff contracts and learner continuity. These were raised by two lead providers, who had been told they were being allocated additional resources to increase their delivery and prepared to do so. Changes were then made by the Welsh Government to the timing of these additional resources, which required the providers to make further changes. Three of the providers we consulted reported a lack of clarity in responses to issues they raised, which has caused some confusion. There is a need to ensure that messages from the Welsh Government about the programme are clear and consistent, to enable providers and their partners to make appropriate decisions and actions.
- 5.9 Lead providers are generally positive about the use of NTfW to share good practice, although some national stakeholders are less convinced about how this works.
- 5.10 Providers and stakeholders expressed some major concerns about the awareness and understanding of the various WBL programme elements from national stakeholders through to local practitioners, employers, schools and young people (although it is important to note that we have not consulted employers, schools and young people to be able to confirm these concerns at this stage). Traineeships are not well

recognised and understood, which impacts on the levels of take-up. Some think this information ‘deficit’ could be addressed through clearer articulation of how various elements at the different levels might support learners and employers. It is clear that Apprenticeships are far better recognised in the market, which facilitates engagement of learners and employers.

- 5.11 The issues relating to the awareness and understanding of the elements of the WBL programme are reflected in the role played by Careers Wales on the programme. Currently, there is variability in the effectiveness of relationships between Careers Wales and providers in different locations across Wales. This may be due, in part, to the sustained nature of some aspects of WBL but action needs to be taken to improve the consistency of this service as a key stage in the learner engagement process.
- 5.12 The picture is made more complicated by the ESF projects operating in some areas targeting similar learner groups. There is a need for better coordination of funding programmes to avoid duplication and competition to provide support to the same learner groups.
- 5.13 Whilst the headline performance of Traineeships is relatively good, it is not viewed as operating successfully and considerable disappointment has been expressed by Welsh Government officials about the nature of delivery under the programme. In particular, Traineeships was established to provide maximum flexibility for providers to be able to meet the needs of individual learners through tailored provision. Providers report few difficulties in meeting the needs of Traineeship learners, but their delivery appears to show little innovation, with continuing emphasis on standard packages of learning.
- 5.14 The balance of funding and the ‘perceived difficulty’ of securing and maintaining work placements is leading to much more ‘classroom’ activity and less vocational experience – some providers do not feel this is happening, so there is clearly a difference of opinion:
- there is a feeling that the ethos of ‘bespoke’ training hasn’t been fully embraced by all providers: *“in reality most clients experience a*



*generic, group approach to their learning and a block, generic induction programme” (Lead Contractor).*

- *“programmes of learning are often pre-determined rather than individually tailored to meet learner need” (Welsh Government official).*
- *“some providers offer standardised inductions over set time periods rather than arranged to suit the needs of the learner” (Stakeholder).*
- *“There are incidents of clients being in centre 6 to 8 weeks waiting for a placement” (Lead Contractor).*

5.15 The current contracts for the delivery of Traineeships provide the opportunity for providers to innovate in their delivery, but there has been no specific incentive to drive innovation. There is a degree of perverse incentive for learners to remain in centre rather than on placement with employers, due to funding arrangements. There is a need to consider how best to drive innovation and best practice in delivering learning to meet the needs of Trainees. There may be merit in considering alternative funding strategies to achieve the outcomes which are desired.

5.16 In the short term, it is important that any changes that are made in commissioning WBL4 are able to capitalise on the progress achieved with the current programme. In the medium term, it will be necessary to consider how best to integrate the elements of the programme to provide clear potential progression routes to higher levels of learning and employment for all learners. There is currently a disconnect between Traineeships, which is referred to by many as ‘the Engagement Programme’, and Apprenticeships. There is a need to strengthen the message of how Traineeships fits into the progression map. This should help the programme to achieve its full potential.

### **Next steps for the evaluation**

5.17 The next stages of the evaluation will include further work to build a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness and impact of the programme. Evaluation activities will include:

- a telephone survey of 100 employers involved with the programme;
- a telephone survey of 500 programme participants;

- detailed review of programme performance data;
- the development of an economic model of programme impact;
- further consultations with delivery contractors and wider groups of stakeholders;
- a focus on the ESF funded elements of the programme.

5.18 In the next stages of the evaluation, our fieldwork will explore in more detail the issues identified in the initial evaluation and will draw out specific examples of good and effective practice that can help support future programme delivery.

5.19 The evaluation will run until November 2015.

## ANNEX A

### **STAKEHOLDER ORGANISATIONS CONSULTED**

Careers Wales  
Colegau Cymru  
Department for Work and Pensions  
Federation of Small Businesses  
National Training Forum Wales  
Wales Council for Voluntary Action

## ANNEX B

### INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDE Evaluation of Work-Based Learning 2011-15

#### Introduction

The Welsh Government has commissioned York Consulting, in association with Old Bell 3, Cardiff University and IFF Research to evaluate its Work-Based Learning programmes delivered between 2011 and 2015. The elements covered by the evaluation include:

- Apprenticeships (including Foundation Apprenticeships, Apprenticeships and Higher Apprenticeships);
- Traineeships (including Engagement Traineeships, Level 1 Traineeships and Bridge to Employment Traineeships);
- Steps to Employment (Work Focused Learning and Routeways to Work). This was closed to new entrants from 31 July 2013.

The aims of the evaluation are:

1. To assess the effectiveness of the contracting and delivery for WBL 2011-15;
2. To satisfy WEFO's evaluation requirements for projects receiving ESF Funding;#
3. Specific evaluation of the delivery of Traineeships;
4. Assessing the delivery of outputs, outcomes and impacts;
5. Assessing the extent to which the programmes have secured the participation of individuals according to protected characteristics;
6. Review how Essential Skills Policy has been embedded in the delivery of WBL and how this has contributed to the achievement of WBL 2011-15 objectives.

The evaluation will run from November 2013 to November 2015.

The evaluation activities up to the end of December 2015 are focusing on establishing the effectiveness of current programme contracting and delivery arrangements to inform planning for the next Work-based Learning programme.

This phase of the evaluation will be based on:

- Consultations with Welsh Government officials;
- Consultations with Consortia Leads and Lead Contractors;
- Consultations with a range of external stakeholders;
- A survey of Consortia Members and Sub-contractors.

The following questions provide a framework to guide the areas to be covered in each consultation.

#### **Background to Interviewee's Involvement**

For each interviewee, it will be important to establish the specific nature of their involvement with the current Work-based Learning programme. The areas of questioning to be covered in each interview should be tailored to reflect this involvement.

	WG	Stakeholders	Consortia	Providers
1) What systems and structures have been established to facilitate management of the programme?	✓	✓	✓	✓
a) Welsh Government (WG) level?	✓	✓		
b) Consortia level?			✓	✓
c) Provider level?			✓	✓
2) How effective have the contracting and programme management systems and structures been?	✓		✓	✓
3) How have these systems and structures drawn on learning from previous programmes and other work based learning programmes?	✓		✓	✓
4) What issues have been encountered with contracting and programme management?	✓		✓	✓
5) How have contracting and programme management issues been responded to?	✓		✓	✓
a) by WG	✓		✓	
b) by consortia	✓		✓	
c) by providers?	✓		✓	✓
6) What are the lessons from current contracting and programme management arrangements that need to be taken into account in planning for the new programme?	✓	✓	✓	✓
a) What key changes could improve programme performance and delivery?	✓	✓	✓	✓
7) Across all elements of the programme, what are the trends in take-up, progression and achievement?	✓		✓	✓
a) How do trends in take-up and performance vary by region, consortia, provider, sector, target groups etc?	✓		✓	✓
b) How do these vary across the protected participant characteristics?	✓		✓	✓
8) How have economic conditions impacted on the performance of the programme?		✓	✓	✓
a) How does this vary across the different elements, geography, sector etc?		✓	✓	✓
9) How does performance vary between ESF and non-ESF	✓	✓	✓	✓

funded activities?				
10) What evidence is there of good practice in the programme?	✓	✓	✓	✓
a) How is good practice being captured?	✓		✓	✓
b) How is good practice being used to improve overall programme delivery?	✓		✓	✓
11) How does programme performance compare to other similar programmes?	✓		✓	✓
12) What issues are encountered as a result of similar programmes?	✓	✓	✓	✓
a) What approaches have been put in place to minimise duplication and overlap with other programmes?	✓	✓	✓	
13) How clear are potential participants, employers, guidance providers etc about the purpose of the programme?	✓	✓	✓	✓
a) How effectively has confusion been minimised in the market place?	✓	✓	✓	✓
b) How do Careers Wales identify providers for individuals	✓	✓		
14) What are the destinations and progression routes of participants?	✓	✓	✓	✓
a) For Apprenticeships, what evidence is there that the jobs involved are sustainable in the long term following framework completion?	✓	✓	✓	✓
b) What factors are impacting on retention of apprentices?	✓	✓	✓	✓
c) How have economic conditions impacted on destinations and progression routes for programme participants?	✓	✓	✓	✓
15) What has been the impact of changes to Young Recruits on employer engagement with mainstream WBL?	✓	✓	✓	✓
16) What evidence is being used by providers to tailor provision to Traineeship participants?	✓	✓	✓	✓
a) How effective has this been from the participants' perspective?	✓	✓	✓	✓
b) What issues have been encountered by providers in tailoring provision? What are the constraints on flexibility?)	✓	✓	✓	✓
c) How have these issues been overcome?	✓	✓	✓	✓
17) How does tailoring of provision build on providers'	✓	✓	✓	✓

mainstream programmes?				
18) What progression paths are Traineeship participants following?	✓	✓	✓	✓
a) How well has the programme enabled participants to pursue these pathways?	✓	✓	✓	✓
b) What issues have been encountered with progression pathways? How are these being overcome?	✓	✓	✓	✓

## ANNEX C

### **E-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE** **Evaluation of Work-Based Learning Programme 2011-15** **Sub-contractor and Consortia Member e-survey**

The Welsh Government has commissioned York Consulting in association with Old Bell 3, Cardiff University and IFF Research to evaluate its Work-Based Learning programme delivered between 2011 and 2015. The elements covered by the evaluation include:

- Apprenticeships (including Foundation Apprenticeships, Apprenticeships and Higher Apprenticeships);
- Traineeships (including Engagement Traineeships, Level 1 Traineeships and Bridge to Employment Traineeships);
- Steps to Employment (Work Focused Learning and Routeways to Work). This was closed to new entrants from 31 July 2013.

The first phase of the evaluation focuses on reviewing the effectiveness of the current programme contracting and delivery arrangements. This evidence will be used to inform the contracting of the next Work-Based Learning programme.

This brief e-survey seeks feedback from providers involved in delivering the current programme. All responses will be treated as anonymous.

#### **Involvement in the Work-Based Learning programme**

Which element(s) of the programme is your organisation involved in delivering? (Tick all that apply)

Apprenticeships:

1. Foundation Apprenticeships
2. Apprenticeships
3. Higher Apprenticeships

Traineeships:

4. Engagement Traineeships
5. Level 1 Traineeships
6. Bridge to Employment Traineeships

Steps to Employment

7. Steps to Employment – Work Focused Learning
8. Steps to Employment – Routeways to Work



**Contracting Arrangements**

Overall, how effective would you say the contracting arrangements for the Work-Based Learning programme as a whole have been? (Tick one box)

- 1. Very Ineffective
- 2. Slightly Ineffective
- 3. Neither Ineffective nor Effective
- 4. Slightly Effective
- 5. Extremely effective
- 6. Don't know

Why do you say this?

.....  
.....  
.....

What aspects of the programme contracting arrangements have worked well?

.....  
.....

What aspects of the programme contracting arrangements have been less effective?

.....  
.....

From your perspective, how could contracting for the programme be improved?

.....  
.....

**Delivery**

Which aspects of the delivery of the programme elements in which you are involved do you consider to be particularly good?

Apprenticeships: .....

Traineeships: .....

Steps to Employment: .....

What are the key aspects of the programme contributing to effective delivery?

Apprenticeships: .....

Traineeships: .....

Steps to Employment: .....

Why are these aspects effective?

Apprenticeships: .....

.....

Traineeships: .....

Steps to Employment: .....

Which aspects of delivery do you consider to be working less well?

Apprenticeships: .....

Traineeships: .....

Steps to Employment: .....

Why are these aspects of delivery less effective?

Apprenticeships: .....

Traineeships: .....

Steps to Employment: .....

How could delivery of Work-Based Learning be improved in future?

Apprenticeships: .....

Traineeships: .....

Steps to Employment: .....

**Partnership**

How effective is your relationship with the Welsh Government?

How effective is your relationship with the lead contractor/consortia lead?

How, if at all, do the relationships mentioned above need to change?

How well is the Careers Wales referral process working? Are there any issues?

**Traineeships (ASK ONLY THOSE INVOLVED IN TRAINEESHIP DELIVERY)**

What evidence are you using to tailor provision to Traineeship participants?

.....  
How effective has this been from the participants' perspective?  
.....  
.....

.....  
What issues have you encountered in tailoring provision?  
.....  
.....

.....  
How have these issues been overcome?  
.....  
.....

.....  
How does tailoring of provision build on your mainstream programmes?  
.....  
.....

.....  
What are the constraints on flexibility? Is there anything you would wish to do under the Traineeship programme that you are not currently able to do? If so what and why?  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Good Practice and Performance**

What aspects of the current contracting and delivery arrangements would you regard as being examples of good practice?  
.....  
.....  
.....

How would you rate the performance of the programme elements in which you are involved against their aims and objectives? (Tick one box in each column that applies)

	Apprenticeships	Traineeships	Steps to Employment
1. Very poor			
2. Poor			
3. Ok/Moderate			
4. Good			
5. Very good			
6. N/A			

Overall, how would you rate the performance of the programme as a whole against its objectives? (Tick one box)

- 1. Very poor
- 2. Poor
- 3. Ok/Moderate
- 4. Good

- 5. Very good
- 6. N/A

**About you:**

Name: .....

Position: .....

Organisation.....

e-mail: .....

Telephone:.....

We will be carrying out follow-up interviews with a small number of survey respondents to further inform the evaluation of WBL 2011-15. Please tick here if you are happy for us to contact you for a telephone interview:

Thank you for your contribution to the evaluation.