Interim Evaluation of the Pathways to Apprenticeship programme

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BMG Research

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

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Acknowledgements

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Glossary of acronyms

EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance
ERP	Economic Renewal Programme
ESDGC	Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship
ESF	European Social Fund
EU	European Union
FE	Further Education
FEI	Further Education Institution
GCSE	General Certificate of School Education
ILA	Individual Learning Agreement
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LLWR	Lifelong Learning Wales Record
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
ONS	Office for National Statistics
OCN	Open College Network
PLA	Programme-Led Apprenticeship
PtA`	Pathways to Apprenticeship
QCF	Qualifications and Credit Framework
SSC	Sector Skills Councils
WEFO	Welsh European Funding Office

Executive Summary

Introduction

1. In September 2012 BMG Research was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the Pathways to Apprenticeship (PtA) programme. The evaluation is intended to assess the value of the PtA programme as a contribution to the Welsh Government's (WG) efforts to combat youth unemployment and as a route towards rewarding, sustainable employment for the programme's young learners. The programme is supported by the European Social Fund (ESF), and, therefore, the evaluation also considers the extent to which the objectives of the ESF contribution, for learner achievement and progression within the Convergence[1] area of Wales, are met. It is expected that the programme, devised in response to the 2008/09 recession, will end in July 2014.

2. The evaluation is based on two annual periods of evaluation activity. The report of which this is a summary sets out the outcomes of the first annual period of evaluation. It will be followed later by further evaluation activity leading to a final report in 2015. This will include analysis of the counterfactual i.e. what would have happened in the absence of the programme.

Context of the PtA programme

3. A review of the context for the Pathways programme showed the need, at the time PtA was designed and instituted, for innovative government responses to combat rising numbers of young unemployed people in Wales against a background of recessionary conditions, falling numbers of Apprenticeships and, as a consequence of Wales' all-age approach, strong competition for Apprenticeships from people in older age groups.

4. The review also showed that pre-Apprenticeship preparation is widely used across the UK and elsewhere in the world. However, there is no fixed model of pre-Apprenticeship training, and provision elsewhere varies in

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[1] The Convergence area covers West Wales and the Valleys: Isle of Angelsey, Conwy, Denbighshire, Gwynedd, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen.

length and in focus – some provision aimed at developing qualifications at Levels 1 or 2, other provision simply raising the employability of young people, often with disadvantages, who might well otherwise be NEET. In choosing a one-year programme mainly aimed at Level 2 qualifications, the WG adopted a relatively 'high end' approach.

5. However, despite the wide use of pre-Apprenticeship programmes, the review suggests that there has been little formal evaluation of these programmes. Thus, this evaluation has considerable scope to generate unique information on the value of pre-Apprenticeship training and to guide the future delivery and organisation of such training in Wales and elsewhere.

Origins and design of the PtA programme

6. The WG originally developed the programme in 2009, aimed at providing a flexible route for young people to acquire the underpinning knowledge and skills that would be required for successful completion of the full Apprenticeship framework. In the absence of Apprenticeship opportunities being offered through employment during the recession and economic recovery, the project would support young people to make a successful transition into employment through an intensive one year intervention to fast track the majority of learners to achieve a Level 2 qualification thereby positioning them for progression to Apprenticeships.

7. The programme offers young people, aged between 16 and 24, the opportunity to develop employment related skills within a further education institution on a full-time intensive training programme, including a work placement element of between 5 and 12 weeks in length, following a framework set by relevant Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). The WG also intended the programme to:

   - progress 75 per cent of learners each year onto an Apprenticeship upon completion of the programme
   - increase the standard number of hours of learning delivered by FEIs from a minimum of 16 hours guided learning hours per week up to 21 hours as standard, with a maximum of 30 hours, in order to deliver a

blend of a set curriculum and of work experience identified by SSCs as meeting the needs of employers

- provide the opportunity for learners to gain Level 2 qualifications that will maximise their potential to ensure that they are job ready once the economy recovered
- deliver qualifications to learners that will meet identified employer needs within the region as well as wider key skills and additional vocationally relevant qualifications
- enable up to 1,000 learners per year in Convergence areas to gain a qualification at level 2 or above
- utilise direct employer engagement through the work placement element of the learning programmes
- prepare learners for entry into employment via the Apprenticeship programme where they will work toward their Level 3 award.

8. All PtA learners are able to apply for a non-means tested training allowance (PtA Education Maintenance Allowance) of £30 per week for up to a maximum of 52-weeks training duration of the programme.

The evaluation process

9. The sources of data for the first phase of the evaluation reported here comprise:

- twenty-three qualitative interviews with WG officials and other key stakeholders including FE colleges and SSCs,
- an analysis of programme management information provided by the WG Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) system
- a postal survey of 67 employers who provided work placements, an on-line survey of 270 current PtA learners and a telephone survey of 200 past PtA learners (those who had completed their PtA courses)[2]
- qualitative interviews with three employers and thirty programme learners (both current and past).

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[2] These sample sizes are modest and error margins range from over ±10% in the case of the employer survey to ±5%-7% in the case of the two learner surveys

10. Respondents in the qualitative interviews were those identified as likely to have valuable information by the Welsh Government. Samples in the quantitative surveys had different sample bases. In the case of the employer survey, the sample base was of employers to whom a postal questionnaire was distributed by the Sector Skills Councils involved in PtA. The current PtA learner sample was of those learners who chose to respond to a request by Colleges (sent to all current PtA learners) to respond to the on-line survey. The past learner sample was drawn randomly from a database of past learners provided by the Welsh Government.

11. Quantitative survey questionnaires were designed by BMG and signed-off by the WG. All surveys were undertaken between April and June 2013 and were made available to respondents in either English or Welsh. All survey questionnaires and interviews were designed to take around 15 minutes to complete.

12. Qualitative interviews were conducted using semi-structured topic/discussion guides which ensured answers to specific common questions but also gave interviewees scope to make wider comments and observations beyond those required by the guide. Most interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted approximately 60 minutes each in the case of administrative stakeholders and 30 minutes in the case of employers and learners.

The effectiveness of delivery of the PtA programme

The employer perspective

13. Evidence from the evaluation suggests that programme delivery processes are generally seen as effective by employers. Satisfaction with the programme was high and the administrative burden was low. There are some minor issues – some perceived limitations in the abilities and attitudes of learners, some failures of communication between Colleges and employers, and the view of some employers that placements should be longer. However, these limitations were raised in numbers which were low enough to suggest that they constitute the niggles which accompany

any organisational process rather than systematic failure of the programme.

The learner perspective

14. Overall, the participant responses in surveys and discussions suggest that they were very positive about their PtA experience:

- They entered with positive motivations and with enthusiasm.
- Most learners got advice on the programme.
- Most got the programme area they wanted.
- They rated their College experience highly and were enthusiastic about the work experience element of the course.

15. Within this generally satisfactory picture, there were a number of issues affecting minorities, mostly small minorities, of learners:

- For around 1 in 10 learners, the nature of the course they undertook (the fact that it was a PtA) was not clear to them until they had actually started on the course and, for some, not until some months into the course.
- An Individual Learning Agreement was not established for 6 per cent of respondents and, for more than this, the Agreement was of insufficient significance for them to recall whether it was established or not.
- The survey of past learners reported that 12 per cent of learners did not have a work placement as part of their course. Responses from the small number of people reporting this show that some (9 out of 24 cases) were because of early withdrawal from the course. However, absence of work experience for the remaining minority of cases (around 8 per cent of the total sample) may imply that some courses failed to supply the blend of off-site and on-site experiences which is a principal strength of the PtA approach.

The stakeholder perspective

16. Stakeholder perspectives on PtA delivery, including those of government officials, SSCs and Colleges, are that:

- the basic motivations and design characteristics of the programme – a short, relatively intensive programme combining off-site learning and

good work experience – were positively perceived by all these stakeholders

- it was widely recognised that rapid introduction of the programme had led to operational difficulties

- as with all pilots, these difficulties included: precise identification and co-ordination of the roles of the three partners; bureaucratic complexities; frequent changes in operational details as a result of programme improvements; communication failures; and a perception by some stakeholders that Colleges did not adjust to PtA's demands

- significant administrative problems occurred in the first year of PtA's operation. Some of these have been resolved by stabilisation of management personnel, better quality of management, and intensive management effort but the administrative burden, in relation to the scale of the programme, continued to be perceived as high by one senior government official

- the ESF funding contribution to PtA from its second year of operation was recognised as fundamental to maintaining the programme's character and volume of delivery

- ESF involvement had, however, generated information requirements which were not initially met and subsequently required intensive effort to provide the necessary data. Some Colleges stressed the bureaucracy burdens which ESF involvement placed on them whilst others, while recognising the burden, accepted it as an inevitable accompaniment of beneficial funding

- ESF funding also added additional emphasis on PtA's compliance with the existing WG requirement for learning provision to pay due attention to Environmental Sustainability and Equality and Diversity principles. Given existing procedures, this emphasis was not regarded by Colleges as problematic and aroused no great threat. However, one government official said that some College attitudes had the character of 'lip service' rather than real commitment. It was also noted that effort to engage young women in some male-dominated pathways had not resulted in much greater female involvement

- the programme has had resource implications for Colleges – largely related to information demands and the sourcing of employment engagement – which are higher than those of standard FE provision

- marketing of PtA has not been costly and, in consequence, has been somewhat low key. There has been little formal feedback as to its effectiveness (in the form, say, of young people's or employers' awareness of PtA). However, given the limited nature of PtA, this is not particularly important and, as a key measure, the ability of PtA to attract learners has not posed a major or widespread problem

- engagement of employers to offer work placements has been somewhat more difficult. There were early ambiguities as to the responsibility for this in the eyes of some stakeholders. However, responsibility is now more clearly placed with Colleges. Although Colleges report difficulty in securing placements, other sections of this report suggest that the great majority of learners receive work experience which they value

- discussions with Colleges did not suggest any significant demand for PtA provision in the Welsh language. Colleges asserted that should demand arise, they could and would meet it.

Outputs of the PtA programme

17. Analysis of programme outputs identifies that:

- the programme has mostly been of value to the young, male population. Because the Pathways which were developed were related to occupations which are heavily 'gendered', relatively few young women were assisted by the programme. (This outturn is broadly consistent with Apprenticeships themselves. For example, LLWR statistics show that, in 2010, 98 per cent of construction Apprentices in Wales, 94 per cent of manufacturing Apprentices and 85 per cent of agricultural Apprentices were male.) However, the extent to which delivery of PtA actively sought to counter the unequal participation of young men and young women was not clearly revealed in this first phase of the evaluation. The second year of evaluation will have a

particular focus on clarifying PtA equality practices in relation not only to gender but also to ethnicity and disability

- the pathways which the programme developed have not been stable in their 'offer' to young people. Hair and beauty was cancelled and while new pathways (automotive skills, IT and telecommunications and sport and leisure) were brought into the programme, two major pathways, construction and engineering, experienced significant declines in participation

- as the combined result of these changes, the volume of delivery, while close to the original target of 2,000 places per year in the first two years of the programme, declined in 2011/12

- the availability of PtA to young people in different areas of Wales was not even. Young people in the Convergence area and in the catchments of some Colleges had more opportunity to participate than those in the Competitiveness area (reflecting the availability of ESF funding in the Convergence area) and in the catchments of other Colleges to participate

- the programme was able to accommodate a minority of young people with disabilities but the programme did not attract, or in some way excluded, substantial participation by young people from ethnic minorities – who comprise 6.5 per cent of the 16-24 year old population of Wales but only 1.9 per cent of PtA learners.

Outcomes of the PtA programme

18. Analysis of PtA programme outcomes identifies that:

- PtA has had completion, attainment, and success rates which are at least as good as those for Further Education as a whole in Wales

- one of the programme outcomes has fallen substantially short of the programme WG principal target, to progress 75 per cent of learners into Apprenticeship. However, substantial numbers of learners additionally progressed into further learning, largely fulfilling the programme's subsidiary objectives. Few learners have subsequently become 'NEET'. The target set for this outcome by the Welsh

European Funding Office (WEFO) (47.5 per cent) was narrowly missed at the halfway stage of the project; being reported at 42 per cent of learners moving into employment, including into Apprenticeship.

- the great majority of learners undertook work placements which developed skills relevant to employment in particular industries

- only one learner out of the 200 past learners who were surveyed had left course early because they perceived they would not get an Apprenticeship at the end of their PtA course

- for four out of five learners, what they did on completion of their PtA course was what they wanted to – even though only two out of five had progressed into Apprenticeship

- of the 1 in 5 learners who did not get their preferred destination, just over half of had wanted to go into Apprenticeship at the end of PtA. Overall, thus, only around 1 in 10 PtA learners subsequently became a 'frustrated would-be Apprentice'

- at the time of the evaluation survey of past PtA learners, fewer than 1 in 10 were unemployed; the great majority were in 'positive' situations

- the great majority of the latter reported that PtA had been valuable in generating those positive situations and to their long term career aspirations

- employers who supplied PtA work placements confirmed that they mostly supplied good work experience offering real opportunities to develop industry-specific skills as well as employability in general. Almost all said that that they believed their placement was valuable as preparation for work in their industry

- employers also reported benefits to their business from their PtA placements. These benefits included the ability to assess individuals as future employees or Apprentices, PtA learners' assistance with workload, and development of the business's position in the community

- Government officials recognised the programme's failure to meet its principal target for progression into Apprenticeship. They had different views on the extent to which this failure was offset by the programme's other progressions, its ability to improve employability, its contribution

to the reduction of youth unemployment, and by the pilot or innovative character of the programme

- SSCs and Colleges had a similar view. They mainly believed that PtA was fundamentally a good programme producing strong benefits for learners, in advance of those offered by standard FE provision. The programme's failure to meet its main progression target was, as with government officials, widely recognised. Again, this was contextualised. Economic difficulty in general, the particular problems of small and medium enterprises, and pronounced local and sector variations in demand were commonly-reported factors. Though there were some procedural factors which SSCs and Colleges also saw as limiting progression (with implicit disagreement between the two groups on some of these), almost all of these stakeholders took the view that 'outcomes' of the programme in terms of learner skill gains and enhanced employability were strong – and that outcomes of this type should be viewed as a strong counter-balance to the programme's failure to meet its headline target
- at the midway point the programme has not met ESF targets for total participant numbers, progression into Apprenticeship and employment, or for achievement of qualifications (as set out in the table below)
- it has met and exceeded ESF targets for progression into further learning, for gaining other positive outcomes, and for employer engagement
- there is evidence that a substantial majority of learners were actively engaged in efforts to promote environmental sustainability and equality and diversity in accord with ESF requirements and targets in respect of these objectives. In respect of the latter, while gender equality in PtA was promoted, this did not prevent particular pathways having a very strong balance in favour of male (most usually) or female participation
- the end of PtA as such will be regretted by many stakeholders but government officials believe that some of the programme's key

characteristics will be preserved in the new, developing approach to funding of Further Education qualification 'packages'[3].

Conclusions: achievement of targets

19. Conclusions of the first year of the evaluation of PtA are set out in the following schedule in relation to WG and ESF objectives:

Objective/target	Result	Discussion
Assess the extent to which the WG's objectives for learner achievement were met		
Progress 75 per cent of learners each year onto an Apprenticeship upon completion of the programme	Data for 2009/10 does not permit assessment against this target. In 2010/11, 27 per cent of learners progressed into Apprenticeship. In 2011/12, 33 per cent of learners progressed into Apprenticeship. This target was not met.	This target was clearly undershot by a clear margin. This fact has proved the '*Achilles heel'* of the programme's reputation. However, numerous commentators took the view that a wider set of gains in learners' skills and employability substantially mitigate this failure. Employers, learners, SSCs, and Colleges reported that the programme has been valuable.
Increase the standard number of hours of learning delivered by FE from a minimum of 16 to 21 hours, to a maximum of 30 guided learning hours per week	Surveys of learners suggest that this target may not have been met in a small minority of cases. More detailed discussions with learners and with other stakeholders indicate that learner hours have been very substantially increased.	The small minority of learners reporting that learning hours were below the specified minimum of 21 hours may have misunderstood the survey question ('How many hours per week did you spend in classes or training sessions?') and excluded some 'hours of learning' which they discounted.
Provide the opportunity for learners to gain Level 2 qualifications that will maximise their potential to ensure that they are job-ready once the economy recovers	Only those learners on pathways other than the construction pathway were given this opportunity. This equates to 65 per cent of learners. This objective was, therefore, not met as one Pathway, the construction one, was offered at Level 1.	Both learners and employers reported that they developed skills which are valuable to employment in the industries to which their pathways were related and, hence, may be assumed to be more 'job-ready'.
Deliver qualifications to learners that will	The programme delivered over 9,000 completed learning activities in each of 2010/11	Achievement (completion of programmes, attainment, and success rates) was at least

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[3] Under the new arrangements, post-16 Further Education and Work Based Learning providers will be funded to provide integrated sets of courses and qualifications rather than courses and qualifications being funded as single items.

Objective/target	Result	Discussion
meet identified employer needs within the region as well as wider key skills and additional vocational relevant qualifications	and 2011/12. These included both vocational qualifications (NVQ and other certificated awards) and key and essential skills certification. Attainment rates for all individual completed learning activities were over 90 per cent. Success rates (attainment of qualifications for those who started programmes) were over 80 per cent for all learning activities.	comparable with, and may have exceeded, FE achievement in general. Whether qualifications met 'identified employer needs' was not tested but it is assumed that SSC involvement in PtA course specification assures that this was, at least, mainly the case.
Utilise direct employer engagement through the work placement element of learner programmes	Survey of employers allows an estimate that at least 1,300 employers have supplied work placements to over 5,000 PtA learners between 2009/10 and 2011/12.	A very substantial number of employers have supplied work placements. It is assumed the number is sufficient to suggest that this objective has been met and exceeded on a wide scale.
Prepare learners for entry into employment via the Apprenticeship programme where they will work towards their Level 3 award.	Entry into Apprenticeship overall was identified above. 27 per cent of learners progressed into Apprenticeship in 2010/11 but only 13 per cent progressed into Level 3 Apprenticeship. 33 per cent of learners progressed into Apprenticeship in 2011/12 but only 14 per cent into Level 3 Apprenticeship. This target was not met	The 'Level 3' objective was undershot by a very considerable margin. The programme did not prove to be a successful progression route into Level 3 Apprenticeship for other than a minority of learners. Progression into Level 3 Apprenticeship was, in part, restricted by the fact that the Construction pathway was at Level 1 and, hence, could not have resulted into direct progression into Apprenticeship at Level 3.

Assess the extent to which there has been compliance with the requirement to establish Individual Learner Agreements for all learners

100 per cent of all learners to make an Individual Learner Agreement (ILA) with their College.	Of past learners, 87 per cent reported making an ILA, 6 per cent said they did not, and 7 per cent could not recall. Of current learners, 81 per cent had made an ILA, 6 per cent had not, and 13 per cent could not recall (paragraph 3.27).	The data is a little equivocal. 'Can't recall' may indicate that ILAs were or were not made. 'No' in the past learner case may be because some very early leavers left before making an Agreement. 'No' in the current learner case may be because the Agreement has not yet been made but will be. A reasonable interpretation may be that this objective has been substantially met.

Objective/target	Result	Discussion
ESF targets and objectives for the Convergence area		
Achieve 47.5 per cent progression into employment including Apprenticeship.	42 per cent of Convergence area learners made this progression.	As with the WG's progression target, various mitigations of these shortfalls can be, and were, advanced by stakeholders and can be inferred by evaluation surveys which reveal other benefits of PtA participation.
10 per cent entering further learning	64 per cent of Convergence area learners entered further learning.	While there were significant shortfalls in the ESF employment/Apprenticeship outcome above, these were countered to a degree by substantial progression to further learning.
100 per cent achieving qualifications.	85 per cent of Convergence area learners achieved qualifications.	There was some, but not huge, shortfall in this ESF target
42.5 per cent of learners gaining other positive outcomes	67 per cent of Convergence area learners gained other positive outcomes.	This target was exceeded
Four hundred employers collaborating with education/training providers (over total duration of project.	336 employers had collaborated during 2010/11 and 2011/12	Employer engagement was above target at the halfway stage of the programme.
4,000 participants (over total duration of project)	980 learners claimed for ESF funding over 2010/11 and 2011/12 academic years	Participant numbers are substantially below target at the half way point in the project.

1 Introduction to the evaluation

Introduction

1.1 In September 2012 BMG Research was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the Pathways to Apprenticeship (PtA) programme.

1.2 The evaluation intended to assess the value of the PtA programme as a contribution to the Welsh Government's (WG) efforts to combat youth unemployment and as a route towards rewarding, sustainable employment for the programme's young learners. More particularly, the evaluation is intended to address:

- the extent to which the WG's objectives for learner achievement and progression are met
- the extent to which, within these, the objectives of the European Social Fund (ESF) contribution, for learner achievement and progression within the (West Wales and the Valleys) Convergence area of Wales[4], are met
- the extent to which the desired scale of employer engagement has been achieved
- the extent to which there has been compliance with the requirement to establish Individual Learner Agreements for all learners
- the extent to which course requirements (targeted level of qualification, minimum learning hours, work placement specifications, etc.) have been met
- the extent to which compliance with WG and European Union expectations with regard to equal opportunities and environmental sustainability have been met.

1.3 The evaluation is based on two annual periods of evaluation activity. This report summarises the outcomes of the first annual period of evaluation. It will be followed later in 2014 by further evaluation activity leading to a final report. This will include analysis of the counterfactual that is what would have happened in the absence of the programme.

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[4] The Convergence area covers: Isle of Angelsey, Conwy, Denbighshire, Gwynedd, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea, Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend, Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen.

1.4 The report has five further chapters. The next three chapters, Chapters 2, 3, and 4, evaluate the process of delivery of PtA. Chapter 5 discusses the outputs of the programme; that is, the numbers and characteristics of learners. Chapter 6 reports on outcomes of the programme; that is, the benefits for the young people who participated and for employers who provided the work experience elements. Chapter 7 reports briefly on the potential longer term impacts of the programme in relation to its broad objectives. The final chapter offers conclusions and recommendations based on the evidence set out in previous chapters.

1.5 Before that, this chapter:

- briefly reviews the background to the programme
- describes the programme's format and intended mode of operation
- outlines the method of the evaluation

Background to the PtA programme

Growing youth unemployment

1.6 Youth unemployment in Wales – that is the proportion of young people aged between 16 and 24 who were out of work but seeking and available for work – grew slightly between 2004 and 2007 but, with the onset of recession in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, rose substantially in 2008 and 2009. This is set out in **Table 1.1**.

Table 1.1: Youth unemployment, 2004-2009

Wales					Rates (percentages of age group)	
	2004	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**
Age 16-19	18.0	19.6	18.6	20.0	26.4	27.1
Age 20-24	10.1	11.0	11.3	10.9	12.5	15.4
All of working age	**4.8**	**5.2**	**5.2**	**5.6**	**6.3**	**8.1**

Source: Annual Population Survey, Office for National Statistics; 'ILO measure' of unemployment

1.7 The number of young unemployed people (aged 18-24) claiming unemployment benefits and the number claiming for more than 12

months also rose in the continuing recessionary or near recessionary conditions of 2009 and 2010 (see **Table 1.2**).

Table 1.2: Unemployed claimants aged 18-24, 2004-2010 (March of each year)

Wales   Numbers

	2004	**2005**	**2006**	**2007**	**2008**	**2009**	**2010**
Age 18-24	14,300	14,500	16,900	15,600	15,600	27,600	27,600
Aged 24 and under claiming for over 12 months	180	270	500	510	410	520	2,100

Source: Claimant count statistics, Office for National Statistics

1.8 Overall, the statistics suggest some widening of the gap between unemployment rates for young and older people. The rates for both have risen but, for example, in 2004, the rate for 16-19 year olds was 13 percentage points higher than that for all people of working age. By 2009 the gap was around 19 percentage points. Possible reasons for a high rate of youth unemployment may be that:

- job vacancies were reduced, so there was less opportunity to find employment for those entering the job market
- younger staff may have been more likely to lose their jobs. In recession, employers may retain more experienced and trained employees in whom they have invested more and who may be more expensive to make redundant
- job losses in the 2008 recession were less than predicted by economists, suggesting that firms attempted to retain staff capacity. Firms may therefore have been slow to build up staffing during any recovery.

1.9 Whatever the reasons the effects are worrying. Where older people who become unemployed usually have a portfolio of experience on which to build their efforts to secure re-employment, younger people may have only their qualifications, sometimes low and of negligible value in the

labour market, on which to base their claims for employment. Youth unemployment can have particularly negative effects as:

- sustained youth unemployment can lead to lower future earnings
- it represents a failure to take advantage of Wales' productive potential
- it can lead to disenchantment of young people who do not feel they have the same opportunities as other adults
- it can reinforce intergenerational transmission of poverty
- it may encourage illegal alternatives to raising income and other disruptive behaviours

A declining number of Apprenticeships

1.10 One of the major government interventions to increase the ability of young people to enter the labour market is the organisation and funding of Work-Based Learning. In Wales, education is a devolved responsibility and the WG has the freedom to develop its own distinctive approach to the support of post-16 education and training. The two main 'arms' of Work-Based Learning in Wales in the years leading up to the 2008/09 recession were Apprenticeships – Foundation Apprenticeships at Level 2 and Apprenticeships at Level 3 – and Skillbuild (a mainly short programme blending the development of employability skills with work experience, now replaced by Traineeships). Apprenticeships in particular was (and remains) a 'flagship' programme – increasing learners' skills to an employable level, widely supported by employers and delivered in significant volumes. However, in the years leading up to, and during, the 2008/09 recession the trend in numbers of Apprenticeships was downwards. The trend is shown in **Table 1.3**. The reasons for this trend are several and include funding constraints, the introduction of new Apprenticeship frameworks and economic pressures on employer take-up of the programme.

Table 1.3: Learners in WBL programmes, 2005/06 to 2010/11

Wales   Numbers

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Foundation Apprenticeship (Level 2)	30,115	26,895	24,510	21,575	21,035	20,200
Apprenticeship (Level 3)	19,545	17,965	17,365	16,665	16,450	16,090
Skillbuild	17,865	12,650	14,480	18,455	20,725	18,755 [a]

(a) In 2011/12 Skillbuild was superseded by Traineeships and Steps to Employment. Figure for 2011/12 includes Skillbuild participants 'carried over' from 2010/11 as well as figures for the two new programmes.
Source: LLWR

1.11 Further, Wales' development of an all-age Apprenticeship programme had resulted in a position such that relatively few Apprenticeships, particularly at Level 3, were held by young people aged 16 to 18 (see **Table 1.4**).

Table 1.4: Take up of WBL programmes, 2006/07 and 2011/12: by age

Wales

	Foundation Apprentices		Apprentices		Skillbuild[a]	
	16-18 years	19+ years	16-18 years	19+ years	16-18 years	19+ years
Number in 2006/07	6,725	23,390	2,035	20,840	13,215	4,650
% of total in 2006/07	*22*	*78*	*10*	*90*	*74*	*26*
Number in 2011/12	3,920	16,285	1,545	14,545	13,405	5,355
% of total in 2011/12	*19*	*81*	*10*	*90*	*71*	*29*

(a) Skillbuild figures for 2011/12 include Traineeships and Steps to Employment.
Source: LLWR

WG responses to recession

1.12 The WG's broad response to difficult economic circumstances, including some emphasis on skilling young people for work and on expanding

Apprenticeships, was formally set out in 2010[5]. However, while the eventual severity and longevity of the downturn was not yet fully apparent, following Wales' 4th Economic Summit in March 2009 the need for immediate action was identified and a series of programmes were rapidly designed and put into operation. In the youth unemployment case, decisions were taken in 2009 to stimulate Apprenticeships for young people as a counter measure. The Young Recruits programme offered a wage subsidy of £50 per week for one year to employers who recruited a young Apprentice, aged 16 to 24, when they would not otherwise have done so.

1.13 Alongside this, the *PtA* programme was quickly designed and implemented. It was initially intended to run for only one year but has since been extended, during a time of continuing recessionary or near recessionary conditions. The essence of this programme, a one year course in Further Education to prepare young people for Apprenticeship at Level 3, is paralleled by similar programmes and opportunities elsewhere in the UK and overseas.

Pre-Apprenticeship training: the wider context

Pre-Apprenticeship training in the UK

1.14 There are numerous examples of pre-Apprenticeship programmes which have been offered in the UK by different providers and organisations, public, private and voluntary. This variety is illustrated in **Table 1.5** by a selection[6] from the many pre-Apprenticeship programmes available.

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[5] Economic Renewal: a new direction, WG, July 2010
[6] http://www.londonlc.org.uk/services/pre_apprenticeshiptraining_work_experience_for_ young_ people/; http://www.workinglinks.co.uk/media_centre/latest_news/060111_training_ opportunities. aspx; http://www.wyredup.co.uk/PreApprenticeships.php; http://www.training2000.co.uk/ foundation/pre-apprenticeship-programme/; http://www.conel.ac.uk/our_courses/pre_ apprenticeships_it; http://www.gloscol.ac.uk/Zenntrix.aspx?a_id=6902; http://www.accross.ac.uk/ apprenticeships.html; http://www.rrnetc.co.uk/employ-an-apprentice.php

Table 1.5: Some examples of pre-Apprenticeship programmes in the UK

Provider	Age range	Length	Level	Sector focus
London Learning Consortium	16-18	6-8 months	Level 1	Childcare ICT Business Administration
Working links	18-24 on JSA	4 weeks	Level 2	Customer services Hospitality Warehousing
Lancashire LA partners	16-18 NEET	20 weeks	Employability skills	-
Training 2000	Not specified	12-20 weeks	Level 1	Automotive Business Administration Construction Engineering Social Care
College of North East London	16-24	14 weeks	Level 1/2	Accountancy Business Administration Construction Hair and beauty Media Social care Sports and fitness
Gloucester College	16-19 NEET	Flexible over several months	-	Bricklaying Carpentry Electrical installation Motor vehicle Plumbing
Accrington and Rossendale College	16-18 NEET	-	Employability skills	-
Rolls Royce North East Training Centre	Not specified	1 year	Level 1/2	Engineering skills IT Quality control Health and Safety
Preston College (Lancs) and partners	16-24 NEET	7 months	City and Guilds Skills for Working Life	-

1.15 As can be seen from Table 1.5, pre-Apprenticeship programmes have varied lengths and levels (from basic employability skills to Level 2), tend

to have sector foci and tend to focus on young people, particularly those of NEET status.

1.16 The availability of pre-Apprenticeship training is not confined to individual providers and organisations in England since September 2008. Northern Ireland has supported pre-Apprenticeship learning sponsored by a variety of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs)[7]. In Scotland, Skills Development Scotland has funded the Targeted PtAs programme since 2010/11 as 'a response to the number of young people … making the transition from school but who are unable to access employment, Apprenticeships, or FE/HE'. The programme, lasting between 13 and 16 weeks, offers a mix of employability training, basic occupational skills, and work experience[8]. Latterly, the UK government has introduced the Access to Apprenticeship Pathway in England. This Pathway, lasts for a maximum of 6 months, is for 16 to 24 year olds of NEET status and offers mainly work-based, 'hands on' training, a start on some elements of Apprenticeship frameworks and opportunity to complete the key/functional skills element of frameworks[9].

Pre-Apprenticeship training overseas

1.17 Overseas, too, pre-Apprenticeship training is frequent. For example, programmes are offered at numerous Canadian educational institutions[10] and in the United States[11]. In Australia, $20 million was made available in 2010 to boost the availability of the pre-apprenticeship training component of the Kickstart programme[12]:

> *'Pre-apprenticeship training is training that is designed and intended to lead into an Australian Apprenticeship. This training generally involves both theoretical and work experience components to prepare individuals for the Australian Apprenticeship they intend to*

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[7] http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/publications/pre-apprenticeships.htm
[8] *Targeted PtAs (TTA): Learning Provider Guidance 2011-2012,* Skills Development Scotland, 2011.
[9] www.apprenticeships.org.uk/partners/policy/accesstoapprenticeships.aspx
[10] See, for example, the 52 weeks' duration, Level 1 pre-Apprenticeship programme in Ontario at http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/apprentices/pre_apprent.html
[11] See, for example, the programmes offered by a variety of providers in Washington State to improve basic skills at
http://www.lni.wa.gov/TradesLicensing/Apprenticeship/About/IntroProg/default.asp
[12] http://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/info_aus_apps/kickstart.asp

pursue. Pre-apprenticeship training is frequently targeted at traditional trades and has a greater focus on industry specific skills over general employability skills.'

1.18 Research work in Australia[13] has identified that, in 2009, there were already over 30 pre-Apprenticeship programmes involving around 65,000 students in engineering and construction subjects.

1.19 In Europe too, there has been some focus on pre-Apprenticeship preparation[14], often to allow the development of personal rather than specific technical skills:

> *'Pre-apprenticeship schemes have been formalised such as 'personal development pathways' and 'bridge projects' in Flanders, and 'modules de formation individualisee' in the French Community. They are targeted at young people in part-time vocational education who cannot find part-time employment or whose apprenticeship has been interrupted due to lack of maturity of the young person'.*

The rationales for pre-Apprenticeship training

1.20 Generally, thus, pre-Apprenticeship training in Wales is supported both by the commitment to such training elsewhere and by the logic of creating readiness for the employment and learning demands of Apprenticeship, of (sometimes) offering 'taster' experiences of different occupations and of presenting employers with potential employees who have already shown commitment to the industry and who have developed a degree of relevant knowledge and skills.

1.21 Beyond these 'logical' drivers of particular pre-apprenticeship programmes, in particular places and at particular points in time, there has been little in-depth consideration of the role or value of pre-apprenticeship preparation in the academic literature (in contrast to the vast literature on Apprenticeship itself). It has been largely left to commentators from the training industry to reflect on the contribution of pre-Apprenticeship learning and these cover a variety of what might

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[13] http://www.ncver.edu.au/publications/2352.html
[14] http://www.mutual-learning-employment.net/uploads/ModuleXtender/PeerReviews/95/Peer_Country_paper_Belgium_FINAL.pdf

constitute pre-Apprenticeship learning. One commentator[15] argued the case for pre-Apprenticeships as a stepping stone to Apprenticeship:

> *'We need to develop a programme of "pre-Apprenticeship training" which will provide a bridge to the full range of Apprenticeship programmes. Without such a bridge in place, stepping on to the Apprenticeship ladder will always be difficult.'*

1.22 A second commentator has made a similar case for pre-Apprenticeships as a contribution to tackling the youth unemployment problem[16]:

> *'Employers' reluctance to take on young people is, unfortunately understandable. …. these young people are not only swelling the youth unemployment figures they are often seen as unemployable…. some businesses are under pressure to make ends meet, many see a young, inexperienced worker as an unnecessary risk…..*
>
> *To make a sustainable dent in our youth unemployment, we need pre-apprenticeships, and we need these to be properly funded by the government, and employers need to know about them, and be encouraged or incentivised to take these young people on… There needs to be recognised qualifications for pre-apprenticeships that give people a real step-up to a full apprenticeship.'*

1.23 Another provider group (the 157 Group of leading FE Colleges in England) has also advocated pre-Apprenticeship provision[17] as a valuable link between full-time education and Apprenticeship, suggesting in this case that a key function is not just to build employability but to offer broad provision which avoids young people having, sometimes wrongly, to make early career choices:

> *'One of the main findings of the Wolf review of vocational education was that the transition of young people into the labour market is*

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[15] Roger Francis, an Executive Director of 'Mindleaders', on July 24th, 2012 at http://blog.mindleaders.com/can-pre-apprenticeship-training-solve-our-alarming-neet-problem/. Mindleaders is a global supplier of learning programmes which, in England, receives substantial funding from the UK government to deliver Apprenticeships, Functional Skills, and Skills for Life programmes.

[16] Graham Harding-Evans, managing director of the awarding organisation NOCN commenting for FE Week at http://feweek.co.uk/2012/06/27/pre-apprenticeships-offer-the-sector-a-neet-solution/. NOCN, the National Open College Network, is a not-for-profit body which supplies accredited qualifications through 2,500 centres in the UK, including FEIs and HEIs.

[17] The 157 Group in 2011 at http://www.157group.co.uk/files/expanding_apprenticeships.pdf

increasingly extended and characterised by a high degree of churn
between occupations and indeed sectors. Professor Wolf concluded
that for this reason educational provision ought to avoid premature
specialisation and closing off options.'

'The implication for the provision of pre-apprenticeship programmes
is that they too should not be narrowly focused. They should build on
the current interests and aspirations of young people, but also
enable them to progress in different directions if their ambitions
change. Large FE colleges provide the ideal setting for the delivery
of such programmes; they are sufficiently well-informed about the
needs of employment to provide the specialist training that can
motivate young people and enhance their employability; but at the
same time they are educational institutions that can impart the skills
and knowledge needed for academic progression.'

Evaluation of pre-Apprenticeship training

1.24 If the formats of, and rationales for, pre-Apprenticeship programmes are somewhat varied, it can also be seen that their effects and impacts have not frequently been systematically evaluated and reported. However, a limited amount of evaluation work is briefly reviewed here.

1.25 A first perspective considers Programme-Led Apprenticeships (PLAs) in England. These Apprenticeships, originally started in 2002, were characterised by the fact that they started with a period of non-employed college-based or other provider-based learning before the leaver (in principle) moved into the employed, work-based phase of the Apprenticeship. An Ofsted inspection of PLAs in 2008[18] observed that PLAs had some positive features – employers were positive about PLAs when learners had been prepared to meet their expectations and had gained knowledge of the skill area; and, in cases where PLA Apprentices moved into a work-based phase, that phase had high success rates and the full Apprenticeship was achieved in a shorter time. However, some learners who received no income[19] whilst in the offsite training phase were dissatisfied and *'too few further education*

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[18] *The impact of programme-led apprenticeships,* Ofsted, 2008
[19] as a result of means testing of Educational Maintenance Allowance from April 2008

colleges had converted their programme-led full-time vocational courses to ensure there was progression to an employed apprenticeship'. The report observed further that:

> *'Work placements, as part of a programme-led apprenticeship, gave a valuable opportunity for young people to start an apprenticeship where there were insufficient employers offering apprenticeships or where they needed work experience prior to being employed. But learners who spent too long on a work placement, without the prospect of securing employment lost motivation and were more likely to leave their programme.'*

1.26 Given these concerns, Programme-Led Apprenticeships (PLAs) were abandoned by the Learning and Skills Councils from April 2011 and the model fell into disrepute. For example, commenting on the new Access to Apprenticeships arrangement, the Association of Learning Providers observed (press release 16th May, 2011) that:

> *'ALP believes that the now abandoned Programme-Led Apprenticeships (PLAs) were damaging the apprenticeship brand by leaving too many young people with no employers to go to after finishing the course. The Access to Apprenticeships pathway retains many of the positive elements of PLAs but the new name and programme will signal that young people are embarking on a progressive route to a gold-plated apprenticeship rather than on an apprenticeship itself.'*

1.27 In Northern Ireland, PLAs have continued to be operated but tensions are apparent between trade bodies (such as the Electrical Contractors' Association) and the programme[20]. These tensions caused the Northern Ireland Department of Employment and Learning to observe (in September 2012) that PLAs were not the first or preferred option:

> *'Training suppliers delivering programme-led apprenticeships have been reminded that the programme is a contingency measure and that it should not be actively marketed in that it is a fall-back measure*

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[20] http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-19681092

*when all efforts to secure an employer-led apprenticeship have been
exhausted.'*

1.28 Of course, PtA followed by Apprenticeship in Wales is *not* a
'programme-led Apprenticeship' as such. The PtA programme was not
advertised as leading directly to an Apprenticeship. However, the route
does clearly share the characteristic of a college-based phase in which
some Apprenticeship framework elements are undertaken prior to entry
to an employed-status Apprenticeship proper. The key messages of the
PLA experience in England are thus relevant: that when the transition
takes place (and the learner has been remunerated during the
preparatory stage[21]) the total package can be successful both for
learners and employers; but when it doesn't occur with sufficient
frequency then there are obvious dangers (of dissatisfaction and
unfulfilled aspirations and of the programme developing a poor
reputation).

1.29 Further evaluations of pre-apprenticeship training have been undertaken
on two projects which focussed on disadvantaged groups.

1.30 In Brighton, a European-funded project sought, between January 2006
and October 2007, to re-engage 16-25 year old NEETs through a mix of
college courses and work placements which aimed to develop
construction skills. However, its evaluation[22] (based mainly on learner
and stakeholder interviews and review of documents) is not clear as to
the scale of the programme or its outcomes but the latter were not
wholly positive. Although some learners progressed:

*'Interview evidence revealed that students still had many gaps in
their knowledge about the routes into the construction industry and
the levels of attainment required.'*

1.31 A more recent project[23] used a pre-Apprenticeship programme as part of
a package of measures to combat young people's alienation following

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[21] It can be noted that means-tested support of £30 per week is available to learners on PtA
programmes in Wales
[22] *Pre-apprenticeship and pre-work training for re-engaging 16-25 year olds not in
employment, education or training*, School of Environment and Technology, Briefing Paper 9,
2008
[23] *Back on Track: Interim Evaluation of the Back on Track Model*, Innovation and Research,
Midland Heart, September 2012

August 2011 riots in Birmingham. The evaluation report summarises the impact of the pre-apprentice element as:

> *'This has been seen as a vital step for individuals to make the transition from their current situation into a paid apprentice. The fact that Midland Heart was able to guarantee apprenticeships at the end of a successful pre-apprentice placement was a key motivator and importantly, it also gave the individuals an early sense of achievement.'*

1.32 Given the focus of these two latter projects on disadvantage and their small scale, the messages of their evaluations for PtA in Wales are very limited but some points can be made:

- Both studies point out the importance of the transition at the end of pre-Apprenticeship training period: In the Brighton case, the 'danger of raising expectations' when the transition into work/Apprenticeship cannot be guaranteed; in the Birmingham case, the value of having a guaranteed Apprenticeship as a motivator of performance at the pre-Apprenticeship stage.

- The question of programme net benefits was raised in both studies: in the Brighton case somewhat in passing (the cost per learner of £2,500 was contrasted with the £30,000 cost of keeping someone in a young offenders' institution); in the Birmingham case huge net benefits were claimed (using the worst case scenario for the counterfactual of non-participation). In the evaluation of PtA a more rigorous cost-benefit/counterfactual analysis is desirable (and is being undertaken in 2014 as part of this evaluation programme).

1.33 A somewhat broader review of pre-Apprenticeship programmes[24], commissioned by GFE South (a joint enterprise of 20 FE Colleges in South East England) undertook case studies of 11 pre-Apprenticeship programmes offered by colleges and other training providers. The basic method of the study was conversations with the providers to obtain descriptions of processes and outcomes. As such, there is relatively little numerical evidence of the rate of successful transition into

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[24] Effective practice in Pre-Apprenticeship programmes: Final Report, Sussex Council of Training Providers for GFE South, 2012

Apprenticeships particularly as most of the programmes examined were of quite recent origin and many learners were still on the programme. However, such evidence as the case studies offer, a mix of anecdote and some statistics, suggests a fairly mixed picture with rates of completion and progression into full Apprenticeship ranging from 10 per cent to 70 per cent. Overall, the evaluation notes:

> *'Some of the most attractive Pre-Apprenticeship offers (most commonly found in colleges) involve a provider using multiple funding sources to provide a choice of Pre-Apprenticeship entry points arranged as a ladder of progression opportunities that match the abilities and aspirations of new learners. A 'something for everyone' approach.'*
>
> *'Where Pre-Apprenticeship programmes are not delivered by apprenticeship providers then these apprenticeship providers and their offers often may need improvement and learner support for people in finding jobs may be insufficient or unclear.'*
>
> *'Conversely, where Pre-Apprenticeship programmes are delivered by apprenticeship providers, full use can be made of the provider's employer relationships and job matching functions to support the learner in making the transition into a job and an apprenticeship.'*

1.34 Overall, these evaluations make the following points:

- that reduction in NEET numbers and progression into Apprenticeship are not easy to achieve simultaneously – potentially because 'NEETness' is sometimes accompanied by personal attitudes, motivations and abilities which are not compatible with Apprenticeship's demands

- that access to employers willing to establish full Apprenticeships is often critical to successful transitions from pre-Apprenticeship programmes into Apprenticeship itself.

1.35 Finally, research on the impacts of pre-apprenticeships from Australia[25] is noted. The key findings of this research were that:

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[25] *Pre-apprenticeships and their impact on apprenticeship completion and satisfaction,* National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Australian Government, 2011

- *'pre- apprenticeships lead to only a modest increase in satisfaction with job-related aspects of apprenticeships (but not off-the-job training aspects)*
- *pre- apprenticeships increase the likelihood of completion for apprentices in the construction, food and electro-technology trades and those with a Year 10 or Year 12 level of education*
- *pre- apprenticeships reduce the likelihood of completing an apprenticeship for hairdressers and apprentices in the automotive and engineering trades and for those people who already have a certificate III or higher qualification. This suggests that the design of pre-apprenticeships is important*
- *in general, apprentices who have undertaken a pre-apprenticeship are less likely to discontinue their training because they did not like the type of work or training, but this does not translate into a higher likelihood of completion.'*

1.36 The report concludes somewhat negatively:

'All in all, our analysis of the impact of pre-apprenticeships on various aspects of apprenticeships is not comforting for those who advocate the benefits of pre-apprenticeships.'

'It seems that the design of effective pre-apprenticeships – and matching to the right candidate – is a challenge.'

Summary: context for the evaluation

1.37 A brief review of the context for the Pathways programme shows, firstly, the need for innovative government responses to combat rising numbers of young unemployed people in Wales against a background of recessionary conditions, falling numbers of Apprenticeships and, as a consequence of Wales' all-age approach, strong competition for Apprenticeships from people in older age groups.

1.38 The review shows, secondly, that pre-Apprenticeship preparation is widely used across the UK and elsewhere in the world. However, there is no fixed model of pre-Apprenticeship training and provision elsewhere varies in length and in focus – some provision aimed at developing

qualifications at Levels 1 or 2, other provision simply raising the employability of young people, often with disadvantages, who might well otherwise be NEET. In choosing a one year programme mainly aimed at Level 2 qualifications, the WG has adopted a relatively 'high end' approach. However, some sectors require level 1 for entry to the level 2 course.

1.39 Thirdly, the rationale for pre-Apprenticeship programmes in the UK is somewhat mixed. On the one hand, they are used as a response to the youth unemployment problem. This has two aspects. One aspect is that some able young people find themselves unemployed or NEET because, not able or wanting to aim for or enter higher education, and with few jobs available, there are simply insufficient opportunities for their productive engagement. In this sense, pre-Apprenticeship programmes offer governments and other programme sponsors an opportunity to create engagement activity (though there is the obvious danger that programmes fall into disrepute, as with numerous 'youth training' initiatives in the past, if the activity does not in fact lead to employment or other progression and simply becomes 'time-filling' until economic conditions improve). The other aspect concerns young people with various combinations of low ability, low qualifications, poor motivations, disrupted backgrounds, and so on. In these cases, it is evident (as in the Birmingham and Brighton examples briefly discussed earlier) that pre-Apprenticeship can be deployed as a tool to tackle disadvantage and raise aspirations.

1.40 On the other hand, pre-Apprenticeships can be viewed from a 'skill' viewpoint, not as a tool primarily to counter difficult economic conditions or social disadvantage, but as a valuable preparation for full Apprenticeship, allowing young people to show commitment to a progressive occupational route, giving them a head start on developing skills and knowledge which would otherwise need to be developed during the Apprenticeship itself, and generally raising their work readiness.

1.41 Of course, these perspectives do not necessarily conflict and governments sponsoring pre-Apprenticeships will hope to kill at least two

birds with one stone – reducing youth unemployment whilst using a real, skill-raising, programme to do so. However, it is probably valuable to acknowledge that the success rates of pre-Apprenticeship programmes and their cost (reflecting the varied scale of mentoring and support which pre-Apprentices need) are likely to relate to how far programmes are set up to counter disadvantage and how far they focus on skills and qualifications rather than simple employability. Wales' PtA programme focusses very much on the 'skills' rationale – in targeting Level 2 achievement, in involving SSCs in programme design and validation, and in product literature aimed at young people, stressing commitment, intensive training and ambition.

1.42 Finally, despite the wide use of pre-Apprenticeship programmes, there has been little formal evaluation of these programmes. What appears, in such literature as there is, is mostly a mix of anecdotal reports of numbers progressing (in various directions) from particular programmes, some showcasing of individual achievements, and some, perhaps somewhat optimistic, cost-benefit work. The final message from the review of the context for PtA is that this evaluation has considerable scope to generate unique information on the value of pre-Apprenticeship training and to guide the future delivery and organisation of such training in Wales and elsewhere.

2 PtA: programme characteristics and evaluation method

Strategic aims of the PtA programme

2.1 The WG originally developed the PtA programme in 2009, aimed at providing a flexible route for young people to acquire the underpinning knowledge and skills that would be required for successful completion of the full Apprenticeship framework. In the absence of Apprenticeship opportunities being offered through employment during the recession and economic recovery, the project would support young people to make a successful transition into employment through an intensive one year intervention to fast track the majority of learners to a Level 2 qualification thereby positioning them for progression to Apprenticeships.

2.2 The programme has been operating 2 sets of targets as follows:

- A target of 75 per cent progression into apprenticeships as per the WG programme specification.

- A target of 47.5 per cent progression into apprenticeships or employment and 10 per cent entering further learning set by the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO).

2.3 The programme offers young people the opportunity to develop valuable employment related skills within a further education institution on a full-time intensive training programme following a framework set by the relevant SSCs. The WG intention was for the programme to:

- increase the standard number of hours of learning delivered by FEIs from a minimum of 16 hours per week to 21 hours per week as standard and up to a maximum of 30 guided learning hours per week in order to deliver a blend of a set curriculum and of work experience[26] identified by SSCs as meeting the needs of employers

- provide the opportunity for learners to gain Level 2 qualifications that will maximise their potential to ensure that they are job ready once the economy recovered

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[26] The programme requires learners to take part in a work placement with an employer lasting a minimum of 25 days and a maximum of 12 weeks.

- deliver qualifications to learners that will meet identified employer needs within the region as well as wider key skills and additional vocationally relevant qualifications

- enable up to 1,000 learners per year in Convergence areas to gain a qualification at level 2 or above

- utilise direct employer engagement through the work placement element of the learning programmes

- prepare learners for entry into employment via the Apprenticeship programme where they will work toward their Level 3 award.

2.4 Early employer engagement was required to ensure opportunities to gain an Apprenticeship are available at the end of the initial training programme. SSCs work with providers and partners where necessary to produce a bank of employers who can offer work placements and continue to support learners during the lifespan of the one year course.

2.5 Training in the chosen vocation commenced in September at the start of the Academic Year and there were 2,000 places per year available on the programme, which are delivered by Further Education Institutions (FEIs) across Wales.

2.6 It was intended that FEIs would ensure that a high percentage (target 75 per cent) of learners would have the opportunity to progress onto a full Apprenticeship and that the numbers of PtAs started reflect employer demand in their areas before the programme of study commences. The progression route for the young person following completion of the PtA, having gained the relevant qualifications as specified by the SSC, is to progress to a full Apprenticeship once the training has been completed, assisted by early engagement with an employer whilst on the programme.

2.7 Throughout the programme, thirteen SSCs or Bodies developed programmes of qualification to meet their industry requirements and are aligned with the WG Economic Renewal Priorities (ERP):

- Institute of Motor Industry (Automotive)

- Construction Skills (Construction)

- Construction Skills (Insulation and Energy Efficiency)

- COGENT – Chemical, Pharmaceuticals, Nuclear, Oil and Gas, Petroleum and Polymer Industry (Energy)
- Creative and Cultural Skills
- E Skills (IT skills and Telecoms)
- HABIA (Hair and Beauty) (since discontinued)
- IMPROVE (Food Manufacture)
- LANTRA (Agriculture, Horticulture, Floristry)
- People 1st (Hospitality)
- SEMTA – Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies Alliance (Engineering)
- Skills Active (Sport and Leisure)
- Summit Skills (Plumbing, Domestic Heating, Refrigeration and Ventilation, and Electro technical)

Whilst the WG endeavoured to run all sectors, demand for IMPROVE and COGENT Chemical, Nuclear, Oil and Gas - during 2010/11 and 2011/12 - did not materialise.

Eligibility for the programme

2.8 To be eligible for entry onto the PtA scheme, a learner must be:
- aged 16-24 on the first day of attending the FEI as part of the programme of study (although the ESF element is only open to those in aged 16-19)
- a resident ordinarily living in Wales on the first day of the academic year or an EU national who is resident in Wales on the first day of the academic year who meets the residency requirements set out in the Education Maintenance Allowance Wales scheme
- attending an FEI in Wales delivering the PtA programme from the start of the academic year.
- meet the pre requisite skills for the pathway they will study.

Financial support to learners

2.9 All eligible learners are able to apply for a non-means tested training allowance (PtA Education Maintenance Allowance) of £30 per week

during the lifetime of study, including work placement taken outside of term dates, up to a maximum of 52 weeks (depending on the Pathway). All eligible learners are entitled to a toolkit (specific items set out by relevant SSC) to the value of £200 including VAT. The toolkit remains the property of the FEI until the learner finishes their course of study under the PtA programme.

Measuring progression

2.10 Providers of PtA learning are required to identify the progression of learners following the end of their PtA courses[27]. The *key* positive measurable progression for a Pathway to Apprenticeship learner (as set out in the PtA Programme Specification, 2011/2012) is progression into an Apprenticeship on completion of the programme.

2.11 The following two indicators are also seen by WG as positive measures of progression:

- Progression into employment, which is of 16 hours or more per week with an intended duration of a minimum of 13 weeks.
- Progression into further learning at a higher level.

2.12 A progression is not regarded as positive and measurable when a PtA learner leaves the programme mid or end of year to undertake a qualification at the same level of study as the Pathways programme – i.e. Level 2 (in most cases, but Level 1 in the case of the construction sector pathway).

The PtA learning process

2.13 The FEI must firstly ensure that all new learners are assessed either prior to or immediately upon entering learning. The purpose of initial assessment is to identify previous learning, the current learning requirements and any support needs of individual learners in order that an Individual Learning Agreement (ILA) can be produced that details the learner's needs. The ILA must be agreed by the learner, the FEI and where applicable, the employer. Further learning and support needs are

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[27] Other milestones such as, starts, positive early leavers and achievements of the course are not required.

identified through regular progress reviews and reflected in updates to the ILA.

2.14 Thereafter, the learner's course of study is according to specification designed in collaboration with the relevant SSC. The specifications vary in detail but, in essence, establish entry requirements (typically ability to pass aptitude tests supported, in some cases, by minimum GCSE requirements), qualifications to be pursued, minimum teaching days and hours, and specification of work placement arrangements (which must be of between 5 and 12 weeks duration). Different courses have different funding costs with some being more expensive (to the WG and ESF funders) than others. The average cost is around £5,000 per learner with engineering the most costly at around double the average cost (however, this forms the first year of a three year Apprenticeship).

Participating Further Education Institutions

2.15 The Pathways programme has been delivered at 16 participating FEIs (as at 2012), with each College able to offer a range of Pathways skills sector routeways (as determined by the SSCs) according to their teaching specialisms and capacities:

- Bridgend College
- Cardiff and Vale College
- Coleg Ceredigion
- Coleg Gwent
- Coleg Llandrillo – As from September 2012 merged to become Grŵp Llandrillo Menai
- Coleg Menai - As from September 2012 merged to become Grŵp Llandrillo Menai
- Coleg Morgannwg – As from September 2013 merged to become Coleg y Cymoedd
- Coleg Powys - As from September 2013 merged to become GrŵpNeath Port Talbot College
- Coleg Sir Gâr

- Deeside College – As from September 2013 merged to become Coleg Cambria

- Gower College Swansea

- Merthyr Tydfil College

- Neath Port Talbot College- As from September 2013 merged to become GrŵpNeath Port Talbot College

- Pembrokeshire College

- Yale College Wrexham– As from September 2013 merged to become Coleg Cambria

- Ystrad Mynach College – As from September 2013 merged to become Coleg y Cymoedd

2.16 Young people can seek entry to the programme either by direct enquiry to one or more of these participating Colleges, via the Skills Hotline[28], and/ or by contacting a local outlet of Careers Wales.

The European dimension

2.17 As the programme is supported by ESF funding (estimated contribution of £14 million between August 2010 and October 2014)[29]. The ESF contribution has particular objectives which establish a set of targets (for Convergence areas only) in addition to those set by the WG, referred to previously in the report. These are:

- 4,000 total participants (over total duration of project)

- 100 per cent achieving qualifications

- 10 per cent entering further learning

- 42.5 per cent gaining other positive outcomes

- 47.5 per cent progressing into employment (including Apprenticeships)

- four hundred employers collaborating with education/training providers(over total duration of project).

2.18 There is also a specific requirement to operate the Pathways programme in a way which promotes ESF cross-cutting themes of

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[28] https://business.wales.gov.uk/growing-business/welsh-government-support-1/skills-support-0

[29] *Business Plan Outline, PtA*, Welsh European Funding Office, 6th May 2011

Environmental Sustainability and Equality and Diversity. The latter would in any case be expected under the WG's vision for Equality, Diversity and Human Rights in Wales.

2.19 European funding further emphasises this aspect of programme delivery. In practical terms, it is expected that the project management structure will ensure that the guidelines set out by WEFO are embedded within contract holders' systems and procedures. These guidelines are intended to underpin all project activities.

2.20 Thus, each provider is required to have an equal opportunities policy in place. This is monitored at tender and through normal contract monitoring, evaluation, audit and inspection. The WG embeds equal opportunities within the learning provider and employers and it forms part of their contract.

2.21 The individual needs of learners are intended to be established at the initial assessment stage. Any subsequent actions or support requirements are also intended to be identified for action by the learning provider. The WG works with learning providers to help ensure that the individual needs are met. Projects are intended to collect and monitor participant data by age, gender, ability, and ethnic origin to ensure that monitoring and reporting identifies accurate participant profile information.

Planning and funding of Pathways

2.22 Under the planning and funding system for FE, programme related uplifts are paid to reflect additional costs associated with either the mode of delivery or the subject being delivered. There is an uplift of *Welsh medium or bilingual delivery*. This reflects the additional costs associated with Welsh medium or bilingual delivery. If providers wish to deliver any of the PtAs programmes through the medium of Welsh, then this uplift is available to support the extra costs of delivery.

2.23 To counter disadvantage due to *deprivation* FEIs are given a learner-related uplift. These uplifts follow the learner and reflect the additional costs to FEIs in recruiting and engaging learners from educationally deprived wards. Individuals, too, may not be able to afford the cost of

undertaking such learning, thus they become disadvantaged in seeking to raise their skill levels. The project removes this financial barrier as the programme is free to the learner, as are the associated tools/equipment for vocational routes. All FEIs hold a support fund which is available to learners in the case of financial hardship (financial contingency fund). This support fund is open to PtA learners.

2.24 Opportunities in all sectors are intended to be equally available to *female and male learners*. Marketing material across all sectors is designed to attract male and female candidates equally. However, take-up of the programmes reflects the individual career preferences and eligibility of young people. Assistance is made available to those learners with *childcare requirements* through hardship funds which are offered, with varying eligibility criteria and at varied levels, by individual FE Colleges.

2.25 The project is also expected to support the European Union's Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) 'cross-cutting theme'. In practical terms, this requires that delivery of the programme involves practical steps (such as minimising the use of paper documentation, using recycled and recyclable materials, and minimising travel requirements) to minimise the project's total environmental impacts.

Evaluation method

2.26 In order to meet the research aims and objectives it was agreed that a mixed-method approach would be the most appropriate methodology, including:

- Twenty-three qualitative interviews with WG official and other key stakeholders including FE colleges and SSCs
- analysis of programme management information provided by the WG LLWR system
- quantitative surveys of employers who offered work placements, of current PtA learners, and of past PtA learners (those who had completed their PtA courses)

- qualitative interviews with employers and programme learners (both current and past).

Quantitative surveys: sampling

2.27 Following initial scoping of the research it was identified that there were limited contact details available for employers and learners in the PtA programme[30]. Because of this, the following methods were used to distribute the quantitative survey questionnaires to potential respondents:

- Past learners: a telephone survey of 200 respondents from a database of 685 contacts provided by the WG (all 685 learners were contacted to generate the 200 responses, a response rate of 29 per cent).

- Current learners: an online survey, disseminated via FE colleges, with 270 respondents (response rate unknown due to dissemination method used; however, there are around 1,500-2,000 current learners).

- Employers: a paper based survey, disseminated via SSCs, with 67 respondents (response rate unknown due to dissemination method used; however, questionnaires were received from employers in 5 out of the 9 sectors currently participating in Pathways and 982 surveys were sent out to SSCs).

2.28 Due to these survey methods, quotas could not be set for the employer and current learner surveys. However, targets were set for the survey of past learners based on whether learners had completed the programme or not and what employment or education outcomes they had progressed into following PtA. The targets were designed so as to be representative of the outcomes recorded by the WG of the individuals for whom contact details were accessible. The targets set for the past learner survey are shown in **Table 1.6** alongside the actual numbers of interviews achieved.

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[30] A database containing the contact details for 685 of the 5,275 Pathways learners who enrolled on the programme between the academic years 2009/10 and 2011/12 was provided by the WG. Contact details for the remaining 4,590 learners could not be provided as these learners had not consented for their information to be shared with third parties.

Table 1.6: Targets (quotas) for the survey of past learners and actual achievement

	Target		Achieved	
	n	*%*	n	*%*
Early leaver	20	*10*	17	*9*
Completed – entered Apprenticeship	70	*35*	71	*36*
Completed – did not enter Apprenticeship	110	*55*	112	*56*
Total	**200**	*100*	**200**	*100*

2.29 The level of confidence (i.e. standard error) associated with a given sample is not determined by the size of the population being observed (particularly where the population is large), but by the actual size of the sample generated. In practice, once a sample size exceeds 100 (whatever the size of the total population) it is likely to deliver an acceptable degree of accuracy provided it is a random sample.

2.30 The samples generated in this research through the different surveys have the following maximum standard errors at the 95% level of confidence:

- Survey of 200 previous participants: maximum standard error of +/-7%[31].

- Survey of 270 current participants: maximum standard error of +/-6%[32].

Analysis of management information

2.31 Following meetings between BMG and the WG (including the statistics department), analysis of management information from the LLWR system relating to individuals who had participated in the programme was undertaken by the WG and provided to BMG. This included:

- counts of PtA learners:
  - number of PtA starts per month from earliest to latest

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[31] This means that in 95% of cases the true value for any binomial response will fall into a maximum of between +/-7% of that given. So, for example, if 50% of respondents agree, it can be stated that 95% of the time the true value will lie between 43% and 57%.
[32] This means that in 95% of cases the true value for any binomial response will fall into a maximum of between +/-6% of that given. So, for example, if 50% of respondents agree, it can be stated that 95% of the time the true value will lie between 44% and 56%.

- sum of starts in each academic year since 2009/10

- description of PtA population (all starts), including:
  - counts by gender, local authority, region, Convergence/ Competitiveness area, College, ethnicity, disability, sector subject (construction, engineering, etc.)
  - cross- tabulations of: sector subject by gender; sector subject by region; sector subject by Convergence/ Competitiveness area

- description of PtA outcomes including counts of completed/not completed; achieved/not achieved; progressed into different statuses: (a) for whole population (b) for each year of PtA.

Survey design and dissemination

2.32 All survey questionnaires used were designed by BMG and signed-off by the WG. All surveys were undertaken between April and June 2013 and were made available to respondents in either English or Welsh language. All survey questionnaires and interviews were designed to take around 15 minutes to complete. Methods of administering the three evaluation surveys were:

- *Current Learners Survey – Online:* The questionnaire for current PtA learners was designed by BMG in Confirmit software. A link to the survey was sent via email by the WG to all Colleges taking part in the PtA programme with a request that the link be distributed to all current PtA learners.

- *Past Learner Survey – Telephone:* The questionnaire for past PtA learners was designed by BMG in Confirmit software and administered by BMG's in-house call centre. Potential respondents were called on a range of days and times on up to 10 occasions before being recorded as a non-respondent.

- *Employer Survey – Postal:* Paper questionnaires were designed by BMG in Snap software and distributed to SSCs via courier. SSCs subsequently posted a questionnaire, covering letter and pre-paid envelope (addressed to BMG) to all their employers who had taken part in the PtA programme.

Presenting survey data in the report

2.33 Individual question bases are provided on the graphs and charts in this report. Cross-tabulations were undertaken for current and previous PtA learners based on key variables concerning the learners' experiences and demographic profile. These variables included: gender; ethnicity; whether the learner has a disability or not; whether the learner completed or intends to complete the PtA programme; whether they receive financial support whilst on the programme; and their overall satisfaction with the programme. Independent t-tests[33] were conducted at the 95% confidence level[34] to identify where differences between groups were statistically significant. Due to the limited number of cases in the sample, cross-tabulations by sub-groups of employers are not provided as bases for sub-groups are too low to provide statistically significant findings.

2.34 Most data used in this report are rounded to the nearest whole percentage. For this reason, on occasion, tables or charts may not add up to 100 per cent.

Qualitative consultations

2.35 In addition to the surveys outlined above, qualitative primary research was undertaken to identify stakeholder, learner and employer views of the PtA programme in some depth. **Table 2.1** shows the different respondent types and numbers of people who were interviewed in-depth.

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[33] A T-test is a statistical test performed to determine if groups of data are significantly different from each other
[34] Confidence levels are used to indicate the reliability of an estimate

Table 2.1: Types and numbers of stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation

Respondent type	Number interviewed
WG officials	5
Colleges	8
SSCs	5
Other stakeholders	5
Current learners	20
Previous learners	10
Employers	3

2.36 Most interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted approximately 60 minutes each in the case of administrative stakeholders and 30 minutes in the case of employers and learners.

2.37 All interviews were conducted using semi-structured topic/discussion guides which ensured answers to specific common questions but also gave interviewees scope to make wider comments and observations beyond those required by the guide.

3 The delivery of the PtA programme: the employer viewpoint

3.1 From the first chapter of this report it can be seen that evidence from employers is limited. This evaluation was able to gather survey data from 67 employers and to engage only three of these in depth interviews.

3.2 In this section, some characteristics of the employers who were surveyed and interviewed are set out and the processes by which PtA learners were engaged by employers are outlined. These descriptions form context for the main point of the Chapter which is to identify employer views on administrative and organisational aspects of PtA from their point of view. The analysis does not make a distinction between ESF Convergence and Competitiveness areas as the numbers are too small to analyse in this way.

3.3 The survey sample (of 67 cases) shows some marked divergence from the national distribution of workplaces. These divergences may be a result of sample bias due to the constraint (discussed earlier in the 'evaluation method' section of Chapter 1) on research access to all employers who have engaged in the programme. However, *if* it is assumed that the sample is at least reasonably representative of all PtA employers then it appears first that PtA employer workplaces tend to be larger than average. The proportions in various size bands are compared with the proportions of all workplaces in Wales in the same size bands, as shown in **Figure 3.1**.

Figure 3.1: Size structure of the sample of employers in the survey compared with that of all workplaces in Wales
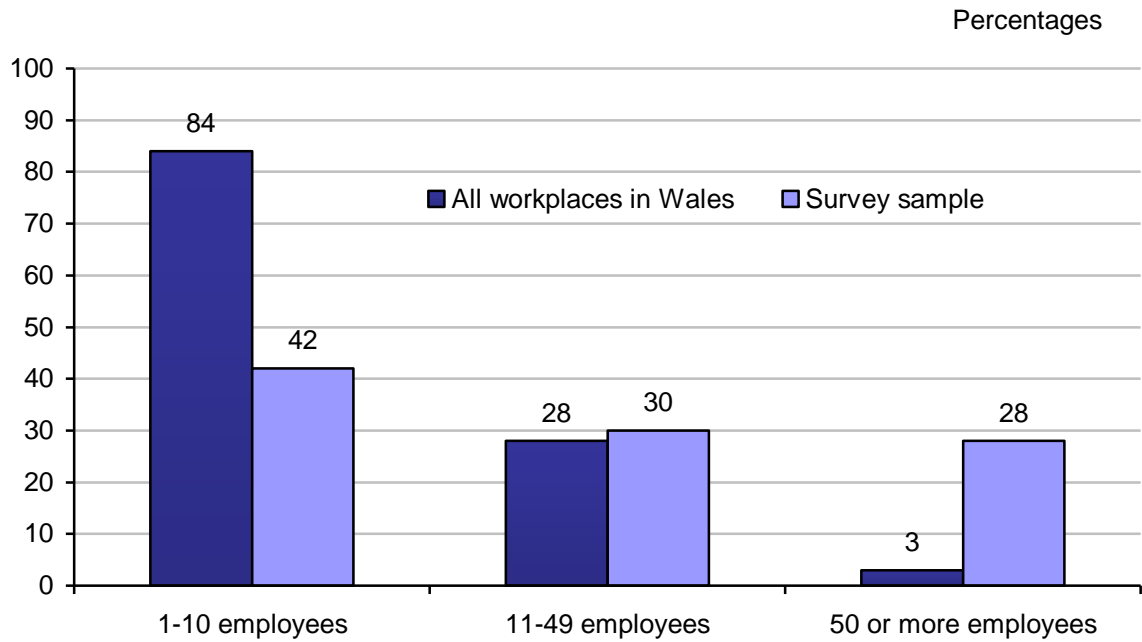
Percentages

Base 67 for survey sample

Sources: Survey of PtA employers 2013 and Annual Business Inquiry 2008

3.4 Second, the sector distribution of PtA employer workplaces is disproportionately balanced, compared with the Welsh economy (in brackets), towards location in production sectors:

Figure 3.2: Sector structure of the sample of employers in the survey compared with all workplaces in Wales
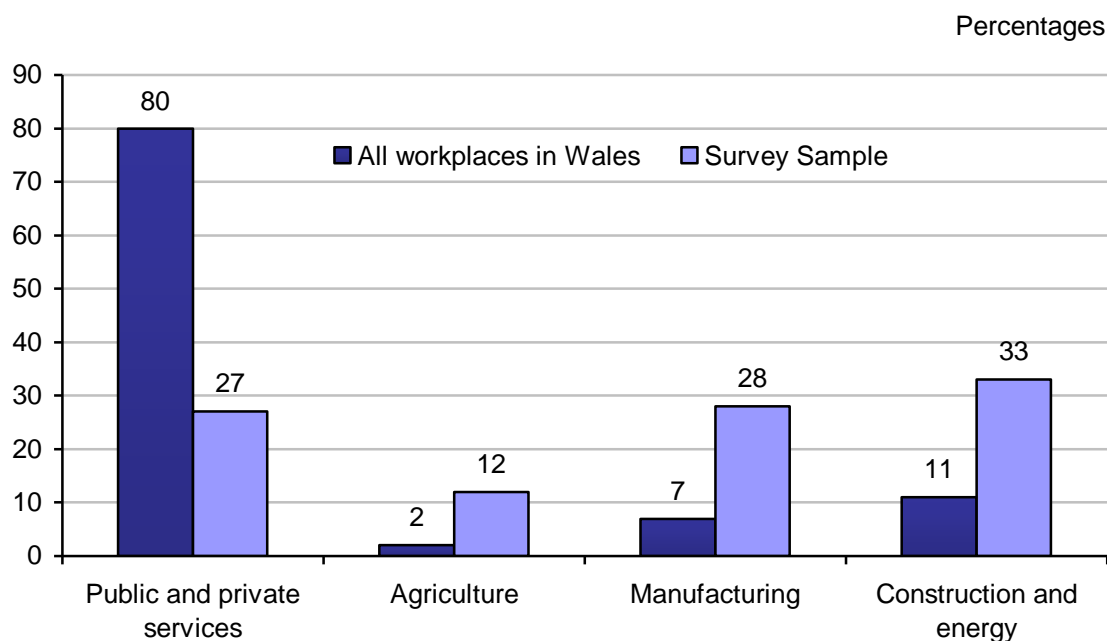
Percentages

Base 67 for survey sample

Sources: Survey of PtA employers 2013 and Annual Business Inquiry 2008

Note: Counts of employers in agriculture are underestimated by the Annual Business Inquiry as this survey includes 'agricultural businesses' but not farms as such in its sample

3.5   The reason for the sector imbalance seems straightforward. As will be shown later, the main PtA Pathways were designed to prepare for Apprenticeships and employment in the over-represented sectors. In respect of size, two factors may be in play. Firstly, manufacturing enterprises (which, as above, are over-represented in the sample) are, on average, larger than the average for all sectors; and, second, larger organisations may be inherently more able to offer work experience without undue interference to their operations.

3.6   Of the 67 employers in the survey, 39 had first had a PtA placement in the year prior to survey, 18 had first had a placement in the 2 to 3 years prior to survey, and 10 respondents believed it was longer ago than that or couldn't recall. Most employers had had just one PtA learner (28 cases) or two learners (15 cases) or three learners (7 cases). However, 11 of the employers had had five or more placements (one employer reported having had 45 placements).

3.7   Of the 200 young people who were reported by the 67 employers as having had placements with them, 93 per cent were reported as being

young men. This percentage overstates the actual proportion of young men who take up PtA places (77 per cent)[35], in part because of a few 'outlier' instances in the survey of employers who had had large numbers of PtA learners on placement who were all male in each outlier case.

3.8 Employers in the survey had mostly first become involved in PtA as a result of external requests: from a College in 46 cases, from a young person in 14 cases, and from a SSC in 5 cases. Only 7 cases reported that they had become aware of PtA and volunteered themselves as a host for programme placements.

3.9 Employers in the survey were asked to choose reasons for offering placements from a set of possible reasons offered to them (see **Figure 3.3)**. A mix of altruistic reasons (to help young people or the local College) were most frequently given but substantial minorities also chose business- or skills-related reasons (to aid recruitment, to test out potential Apprentice recruits, or to help with workload):

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[35] This figure is drawn from the Welsh learner record system (LLWR) and will be considered in more detail alongside other statistics on PtA participation in a later chapter

Figure 3. 3: Reasons for offering PtA placements

Numbers of respondents [(a)(b)]

Reason	Number
To help the local College	35
To help young people	34
To test out potential Apprentices	29
Company policy to offer work experience	21
Good for the business to help local community	20
Need to recruit young people - lets them see the business	17
To help a specific young person	14
To help with workload	13
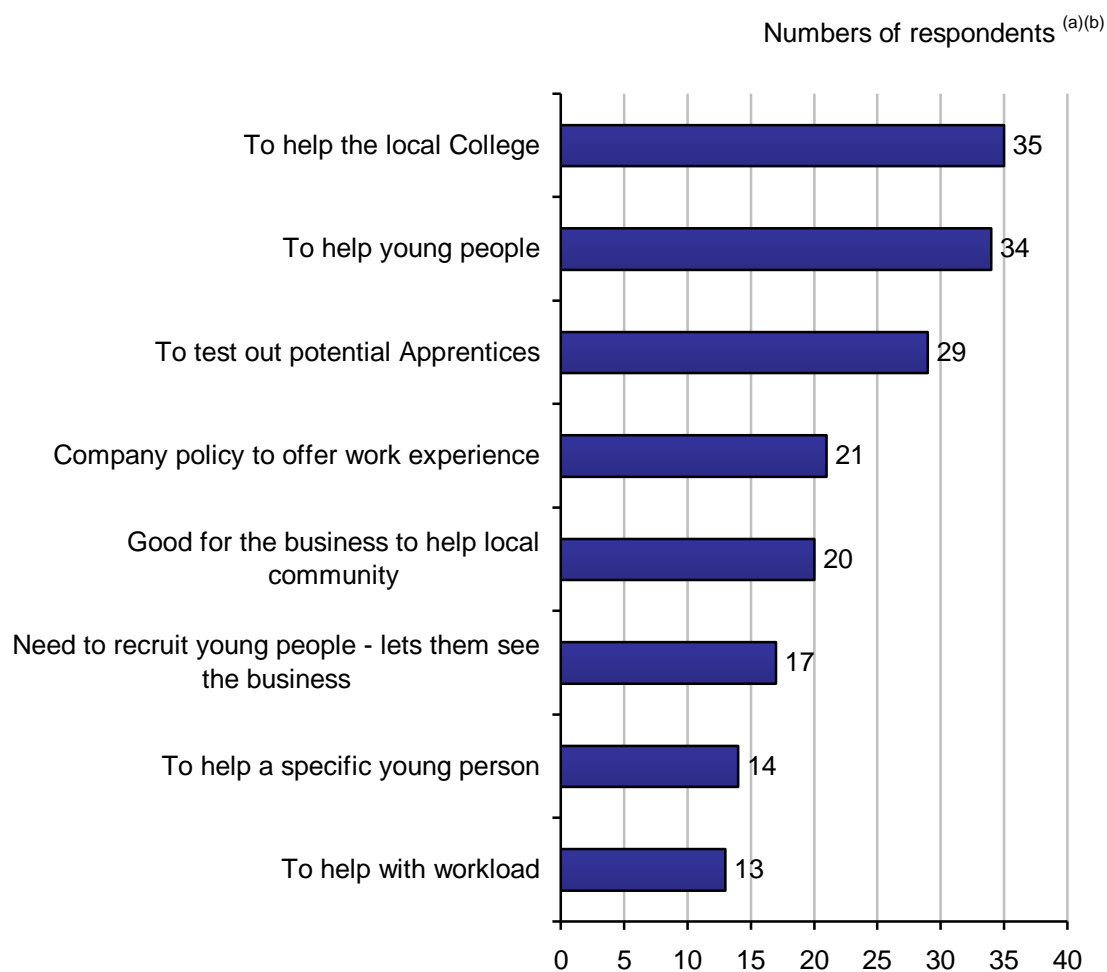
Source: survey of PtA employers 2013

(a) Base = 67

(b) Multiple response question

3.10 The three employers who were interviewed in more depth focussed on the use of PtA as a means of identifying potential Apprentices. One said:

> *'For us as an employer, for me, the scheme is there to weed the poor ones out, yes? Some are on it because they just want to come to college and do something but all we're interested in really is the best candidates who want our Apprenticeship. We can't have everybody and, you know, we find it's been an excellent scheme for us to tap into.'*

3.11 When it came to actually filling their PtA places, most PtA learners were selected for placement by Colleges. The employer either took whoever the College recommended (30 cases) or was offered a choice of young

people from whom they selected one or more following interviews (16 cases) or inspection of CVs (3 cases). However, in some cases, employers allocated their places to young people who asked for them (24 cases) or found places for young people they knew (9 cases). [Note: these responses add to more than the 67 cases in the survey because some employers with more than one placement used more than one method of selection.] One employer interviewed in depth exemplified the College part in the process:

> *'We work closely with the College. We don't interview but to be honest, we won't take anybody. We don't want people who don't attend or can't attend or have poor time keeping.'*

3.12 However, the selection of PtA learners was not always without problems. One employer interviewed in depth noted basic literacy and numeracy problems (but with a qualifying assumption that these problems are widespread in the teenage population). This employer noted a particular problem matching the PtA course off-site with the actual work offered on placement.

3.13 When asked to rate the abilities of the young people who took part in their PtA placements– which could be seen as an indicator of the effectiveness of the selection processes - most employers were complimentary. Of those who responded to the question, the numbers rating their learners' *ability* as being at various levels were:

- Very good – 20 employers
- Good – 25 employers
- Moderate – 18 employers
- Poor – 1 employer
- Very poor – 0 employers

3.14 When also asked to rate the *attitudes* of the young people who entered their PtA, most employers were again complimentary. Of those who responded to the question, the numbers of employers rating their learners' attitudes as being at various levels were:

- Very good – 30 employers
- Good – 23 employers

- Moderate – 11 employers
- Poor – 1 employer
- Very poor – 0 employers

3.15 Asked whether, allowing for their age and experience, their learners had limitations in terms of work readiness and work-related characteristics, 32 out of the 67 employers said they had none. The remaining 35 identified limitations of one kind or another of which the most frequent were lack of initiative (12 cases), poor numeracy (7 cases), and poor literacy (6 cases). Some personal failings were less frequently mentioned: poor attendance (4 cases); lateness (2); laziness (2); and poor personal presentation (2).

3.16 Despite these limitations, employers generally saw their learners' performance on the placement as satisfactory. Of those who responded to the question, the number of employers rating their learners' performance as being at various levels were:
- Very satisfactory – 27 employers
- Quite satisfactory – 21 employers
- Moderately satisfactory – 16 employers
- Quiet unsatisfactory – 1 employer
- Very unsatisfactory – 0 employers

3.17 Placements with employers, which should last a minimum of 5 weeks, were reported by employers to vary greatly in length. Twenty-one respondents couldn't recall how long the young person had been with them but of the remainder, 19 employers reported a period between 1 and 4 weeks, 12 reported a period of between 5 and 12 weeks, and 15 reported placements lasting more than 12 weeks.

3.18 Against this background, as noted earlier, the main focus of this section is the effectiveness of PtA organisation and administration. In the employer survey, respondents were asked three questions on this, as shown in **Table 3.1.**

Table 3.1: Employer views of PtA administration and bureaucracy; numbers

Number of respondents

Did administration or paperwork place a burden on you prior to the placement(s)?	
Yes – quite or very onerous	0
Yes – but only slightly	29
No – not at all	36
Don't know	2

Did administration or paperwork place a burden on you during the placement(s)?	
Yes – quite or very onerous	2
Yes – but only slightly	22
No – not at all	41
Don't know	2

How well would you say the PtA programme is organised?	
Very well	39
Moderately well	24
Not very well	1
Don't know	3

Source: Survey of PtA employers 2013
Base = 67

3.19 This data shows that, from the employer viewpoints, administration was very seldom burdensome and organisation was generally believed to be effective.

3.20 From the in-depth interviews, there was also a view that dealing with paperwork associated with PtA was not onerous. These respondents reported that they were rarely (if at all) required to complete paperwork, as this was typically handled by the College. One noted that health and safety vetting forms had to be completed for subcontractors whom they used to offer work experience but they were only required to support this process and most were already vetted:

'We've been involved with the PtA since it started three or four years ago, so we've got a lot of places that have been vetted, so now it doesn't take much time because everything's in place.'

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3.21 Another respondent described the requirement to complete questionnaires on attendance and behaviour but again, this was not seen as a burden.

3.22 However, when asked how PtA could be improved, a number of comments (either in the survey or in depth interviews) pointed to some organisational issues (albeit in the context of the general satisfaction with the programme's organisation described above). These focussed on:

- Better communications by Colleges:

    'Since the young person finished I have had no correspondence or contact from the college. We would like to take him on but are not being helped at all.'

    'More correspondence from college. We were once asked to do a placement but then never heard anything more'.

    'More communication between company and college to assess needs and what can be offered. This would be useful to both parties and to the young person.'

    'Maybe do a review process, you know? So if a person's done two weeks out there, how's it gone? I may have had a phone call from a sub-contractor saying that it's not working out, or: "He's really good, can we have him again?" If there were a review, that would be communicated back to the College.'

    'Better communication channels so that college work and course modules are used to tailor placements.'

- And the need for longer placements:

    'All PtA should be a minimum amount of time on-site – maybe 10 to 12 weeks.'

    'The placement duration should be at least 4 weeks at a time.'

    'The big gap in the programme for me is to extend or expand on that work experience programme. Because the more hours you've got out there, the more experience you gain, the more days you do, it's obviously going to enhance your skills, isn't it?

> *So I would maximise it. I'd be a bit harsher really on the scheme and I'd go for a ten week placement on site, not the five weeks.'*

3.23 Overall, when asked how satisfied they had been with their involvement with PtA, the majority of employers were satisfied:

- Very satisfied – 26 employers
- Quite satisfied – 26 employers
- Moderately satisfied – 11 employers
- Quite dissatisfied – 0 employers
- Very dissatisfied – 1 employer

Employers and PtA delivery: evaluation points

3.24 Evidence from the evaluation suggests that programme delivery processes are generally seen as effective by employers. Satisfaction with the programme was high and the administrative burden was low. There are some minor issues – some perceived limitations in the abilities and attitudes of learners, some failures of communication between Colleges and employers, and the view of some employers that placements should be longer. However, these limitations were raised in numbers which were low enough to suggest that they constitute the niggles which accompany any organisational process rather than systematic failure of the programme.

4 The delivery of the PtA programme: the participant viewpoint

Introduction

4.1 This chapter examines PtA from the points of view of learners who took part in the programme and have since left it and of learners who were currently on the programme at the point at which they took part in the survey.

4.2 The sources of data as noted in Chapter 1 are surveys – telephone survey with 200 learners, 270 on-line responses from current learners – and depth interviews with 10 past and 20 current learners.

4.3 For learners, evaluation of the delivery of Pathways is not greatly concerned, as with employers and other stakeholders, with matters of organisation and administration. Rather, evaluation is concerned here with the nature of the programme as it is experienced by them. This chapter describes various aspects of that experience before setting out learners' responses to questions which focus more directly on learners' own expectations of the experience.

4.4 Where the same questions were asked of the two samples of past or current learners, responses of both groups are set out. Where responses differ between the groups, this may be because PtA or its learners have changed in some way between earlier experiences (past learners) and current ones (current learners) and/or because the responses of past learners have been influenced by their post-PtA experiences. However, as the two surveys were undertaken using different methods (on-line survey for current learners, telephone survey for past learners) it may be the case that differences are at least partially due to this variation in research method.

4.5 However, both samples were quite similar in their basic characteristics. Eighty-one per cent of past participant respondents were male as were 85 per cent of current learners who responded. Both samples contained very small proportions of respondents from ethnic groups other than 'white British/Welsh' or of people with disabilities.

Engagement with PtA

4.6 Most learners moved into the programme directly from school or from FE College as shown in **Table 4.1.**

Table 4.1: Participant status before joining PtA

		Percentages
	Past	**Current**
At school	39	36
At College of Further Education	41	49
Had left school and was looking for next thing to do	8	4
Was working in a full-time job	7	6
Was working in a part-time job	5	3
Something else	2	2
Total	**100**	**100**
Base (n)	*200*	*270*

Source: Surveys of past and current PtA learners 2013

4.7 Typically, their qualifications at this point comprised 5 or 6 'good' GCSE passes and/or other passes below Grade C. Relatively few had A/S or A Level passes (around 18 per cent of past learners and 10 per cent of current learners) and similar proportions had achieved vocational qualifications. **Table 4.2** shows the average number of examination passes of different types and of work-related qualifications gained per past and current participant prior to joining PtA.

Table 4.2: Participant qualifications gained prior[1] to joining PtA

	Average number per past participant	Average number per current participant
GCSEs at Grade C or above	6.3	5.0
GCSEs at 'Pass' or above	4.8	3.5
A/S or A levels	0.5	0.2
Work-related qualifications other than an Apprenticeship such as a City and Guilds or BTEC or RSA qualification	0.6	0.6
Base (n)	*200*	*270*

1 Respondents asked 'Before starting your Pathways to Apprenticeship course, how many of the following qualifications did you have?
Source: Surveys of past and current PtA learners 2013

4.8 Corresponding with their prior statuses before PtA, most learners learned of PtA from educational institutions (see **Table 4.3)**. Friends or family were important minority sources of awareness but direct marketing was not important to awareness:

Table 4.3: How learners first found out about PtA

	Past	Current
Careers Wales	2	6
A careers advisor or teacher at school	9	15
A careers advisor or a lecturer at College	66	56
Jobcentre Plus	2	0
In a newspaper advertisement	2	1
A training provider	2	2
An employer or work placement	3	1
Friends or family	7	8
Internet/Web	5	3
From direct marketing such as a leaflet	3	1
Didn't get advice	0	1
Don't know	2	4
Total	**100**	**100**
Base (n)	*200*	*270*

Source: Surveys of past and current PtA learners 2013

4.9   Schools and Colleges were, thus, the most important sources of *initial awareness* of PtA. However, respondents were also asked whether they got any information and advice from other sources before taking up the PtA course. In this case Careers Wales, friends and family and internet information, in addition to schools and colleges, were important sources of *information and advice* before entering PtA, as shown in **Table 4.4**.

Table 4.4: Sources of information and advice before entering PtA

	Percentages	
	Past	**Current**
Careers Wales	31	14
A careers advisor or teacher at school	24	19
A careers advisor or a lecturer at College	58	52
Jobcentre Plus	8	1
In a newspaper advertisement	5	1
A training provider	7	3
An employer or work placement	13	2
Friends or family	17	12
Internet/Web	17	6
From direct marketing such as a leaflet	10	1
Don't know	2	5
Didn't get advice	12	10
Base (n)	*200*	*270*

Source: Surveys of past and current PtA learners 2013

4.10 Young people interviewed in depth interviews frequently said that they had received some encouragement or support to join the programme. The most common form of support came from College tutors or other College staff, who had provided information about the programme and highlighted its benefits (in particular, the work experience):

> *'They were just showing us some of the achievements we could have done if we did do the course, and told us a lot of information about it.' (Current Participant)*

> *'They said it would be the right thing to do because it would work out best in the long run, then, because you'll have more experience on site, and everything like that.' (Current Participant)*

4.11 Some also noted that they had received encouragement from parents or other family members. For a few, having family members who were in the relevant trade was particularly influential.

'My grandfather was a carpenter and my brother was on the course. He told me to go for it really.' (Current Participant)

'Basically, my family really. They work in construction.' (Previous Participant)

4.12 Other support or encouragement noted included: friends (typically those who had undertaken the programme); past students; co-workers; and in one case, a careers advisor.

4.13 Alternative routes to PtA were widely considered – further education, employment or an Apprenticeship were the most frequent of these. Fewer than a fifth of learners only considered PtA as shown in **Table 4.5**.

Table 4.5: Alternatives to PtA considered by learners

		Percentages
	Past	**Current**
Staying on in the 6th Form or going to 6th Form College	19	14
Working towards a qualification in a Further Education College or other training provider	30	27
Going to University	18	6
Getting a job	51	38
Staying in a job you already had	18[a]	5
Taking a gap year	8	6
Just doing nothing much – not working or training or studying	8	1
Applying for an Apprenticeship	52	20
Something else	1	1
Nothing else considered	13	17
Don't know	0	4
Base (n)	*200*	*270*

(a) In the survey of past respondents only 12 per cent said they were working before course, this seems to contradict this result. It may be that individuals had interpreted the response option differently than we expected.
Source: Surveys of past and current PtA learners 2013

4.14 The reasons why people chose PtA, mainly reflected the programme's rationale – career advancement, the value of both work and learning

experiences, and achievement of a qualification (see **Table 4.6)**. This is the case for both past and current participants. However, proportions of current participants giving most of the reasons are lower than the corresponding proportions for past learners. This may reflect the different modes of delivery of the surveys (telephone in the case of past learners and on-line in the case of current learners) or may perhaps indicate that, with subsequent experience, past learners are more able to see the benefits of the programme.

Table 4.6: Reasons for participating in PtA

		Percentages
	Past	**Current**
You were interested in a particular career and thought the course would help	65	65
To gain experience of employment in the work placement part of the course	62	43
To gain training and learning experience	63	31
To get a qualification	60	31
You felt there was no other option available e.g. no jobs or Apprenticeships available	15	1
Unsuccessful in applying for an Apprenticeship	21	6
Your friends were doing the same	19	1
It was recommended by others	37	9
Was required to do it by the Job Centre or benefits people	5	6
The FE college told you that you were on a PtA but you didn't apply for it specifically	11	6
Other	5	0
Base (n)	*200*	*270*

Source: Surveys of past and current PtA learners 2013

4.15 In-depth interviews, as in the surveys, respondents predominantly reported that they hoped to gain relevant experience, knowledge and qualifications to enable them to progress to an Apprenticeship or job:

'The qualifications and the experience that it gives you to get a job in mechanical engineering.' (Previous Participant – Engineering)

'It was mainly the work experience that you got with the course that, like, I thought would benefit the most.' (Previous Participant – Engineering)

4.16 For some, it was perceived that the programme would provide them with a better chance of securing an Apprenticeship or employment in the sector than undertaking other routes (such as non-Pathways College courses):

'The majority of us went with the Pathways because it's a good course to get you onto a job to start you in the business.' (Current Participant – Hospitality and Catering)

'I wanted to do an Apprenticeship so I think that was what attracted me to it because it was an extremely good way to get into it.' (Previous Participant – Engineering)

4.17 Other reasons given in-depth interviews for applying for the programme, noted by several respondents in each case, included:

- interest or enjoyment in the subject area
- the practical nature of the programme course
- the ability to study and work at the same time.

4.18 The small numbers of respondents who said in the two surveys that they were told by a College that they were on a PtA course, rather than knowing they were applying for one, – 22 past learners and 17 current learners – were asked when this occurred. Fifteen of the current learners said that this was before or on starting the course. Others said they became aware in the first 6 months of the course but 2 individuals did not realise they were participating in PtA until its final 6 months.

4.19 From in-depth interviews with learners, it seems that the greatest awareness of the PtA was amongst those who had undertaken Level 1 learning in the College. However, some were made aware of the programme (and their eligibility for it) by the College during the process of applying for other courses, whilst several were simply informed that they had been allocated onto the programme when commencing their course.

'I didn't have a clue I was even going into it before until they told me.'
(Current Participant – Automotive)

'I didn't know about the PtAs until I went on the course.' *(Current Participant – Plumbing)*

4.20 Most learners (79 per cent of past and 80 per cent of current learners) had only considered the type of Pathways course they were pursuing. Of those who considered other types of Pathways course, the majority (64 per cent of past learners and 87 per cent of current learners) reported they decided on this type of Pathways course because 'this was the one I most wanted to do'. Only 12 per cent of past learners (who considered other options) and 5 per cent of current learners (who considered other options) said they couldn't get on to other PtA course(s).

4.21 In-depth interviews with learners confirmed this general picture. Most had considered other vocational options – mainly in FE College – but were fairly settled in their interests. Two respondents, for example, said:

'No, I was always thinking construction and wanted to do it.'
(Previous participant – Construction)

'I've always had a passion for cooking, so I just decided that I would do whatever I could to get my qualifications in the catering before I actually went in.' *(Previous participant - Hospitality)*

4.22 Amongst those in-depth interviewees who had considered other options, most had considered undertaking an alternative vocational college course. One respondent had also considered applying for the Army.

4.23 On starting their PtA courses, survey results showed that:

- most learners were totally/mostly certain or fairly certain that they wanted to work in the course area as a long term career (94 per cent of past learners and 90 per cent of current learners)

- almost all described themselves as enthusiastic about having got a place on the course (99 per cent of past learners and 97 per cent of current learners)

- most wanted, at the point of joining, to go on and do a full Apprenticeship following PtA (93 per cent of past learners and 85 per cent of current learners).

4.24 In a minority of cases, 11 per cent both of past and current learners, learners reported that it was not explained to them that a full Apprenticeship after PtA was not guaranteed to them.

4.25 Almost all in-depth interviewees said that it was clear that the programme would not necessarily lead to a guaranteed Apprenticeship. One, however, felt that others on their programme had not fully understood this. Most, however, were not disheartened by the fact an Apprenticeship was not guaranteed and simply felt they would be satisfied with the experience and qualifications gained. A few were also aware that they could apply for their own Apprenticeships elsewhere:

> *'No, it didn't influence me because I knew the experience would be useful anyway.' (Current Participant – Engineering)*
> *'There's nothing wrong with not getting an Apprenticeship at the end, you still get qualifications afterwards.' (Previous Participant – Engineering)*

Experiences on PtA courses

4.26 On starting their courses, 87 per cent of past learners and 81 per cent of current learners reported making an Individual Learning Agreement with their College. Six per cent of both groups said they did not, and 7 per cent and 13 per cent respectively were uncertain whether they did or not.

4.27 Of those who recalled making an Agreement:

- 70 per cent of past learners and 74 per cent of current learners said the Agreement was made before the target date
- 10 per cent of past learners and 7 per cent of current learners said that the Agreement was made after the target date
- 21 per cent of past learners and 19 per cent of current learners were unsure when it was made.

4.28 Very substantial proportions of learners received PtA Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) whilst on their courses – 86 per cent of previous and 92 per cent of current learners reported this.

4.29 Substantial proportions of learners reported that they would have done the PtA course if the PtA EMA had not been available and only very small proportions reported that they would definitely not have undertaken PtA if they had not received EMA. This is set out in **Table 4.7.**

Table 4.7: Extent to which EMA influenced participation

	Percentages	
	Past	**Current**
Very likely I would still have done it	64	40
Quite likely I would still have done it	18	29
It is balanced as to whether I would have done it or not	9	15
I probably would not have done it	6	9
I would definitely not have done it	4	3
Don't know	0	3
Total	**100**	**100**
Base (n)	*171*	*247*

Source: Surveys of past and current PtA learners 2013

4.30 The majority of in-depth interviewees felt the financial support provided to be sufficient and useful in contributing towards key college costs, particularly travel and tools/ equipment (including stationary). The support was also useful for a few in paying for lunches whilst on trips, and, in one case, for contributing towards their enrolment fee:

> *'Travel expenses, to pay for your bus pass, any trips or anything like that we go on or any college equipment which we needed a lot of as well, so it's been helpful.' (Current Participant – Hospitality and Catering)*

> *'I just use it for the basic things, like, when you're on the course they do provide you with a tool box, but it just adds, like, single tools and you can buy steel toecaps. Things to help you when you finish college really.' (Current Participant– Plumbing)*

4.31 A few in-depth interviewees stated that without the financial support, they may not have been able to undertake the programme:

'Going from having a wage last year, I don't think I would have been able to do it without.' (Current Participant – Hospitality and Catering)

However, for most, as with survey respondents, although the funding was helpful, it was not necessarily a deciding factor in them undertaking the course

4.32 Conversely, a few felt that the financial support provided was not sufficient. This was particularly true for those living independently, not working or who had children, as it did not cover both travel and living costs:

'It's not very helpful to be honest, it's not that much. Luckily I'm working. For people who don't work I know it's not enough to live off.' (Current Participant –Carpentry)

4.33 Further, some identified issues with their College failing to pay financial support, even when they had attended all sessions:

'To be honest with you, it was rubbish, EMA. It was really bad because I was going to my classes and everything but they weren't paying me.' (Previous Participant – Automotive)

4.34 However, when participants were asked in survey about an indirect aspect of financial support, the toolkits provided to them to enable them to undertake practical aspects of their placements, most respondents (78 per cent overall) viewed this support as good (27 per cent) or very good (51 per cent). Only eight per cent thought this form of support was poor.

4.35 Survey respondents were asked 'How many hours per week on average do you spend in classes or training sessions?' Responses are set out in **Table 4.8.**

Table 4.8: Hours per week in PtA classes or training

	Past	Current
Up to 16 hours	13	11
17-29 hours	18	37
30 hours	67	36
Don't know	4	15
Total	**100**	**100**
Base (n)	*171*	*247*

Source: Surveys of past and current PtA learners 2013

4.36 The table suggests that the majority of learners undertook, as intended, more than the minimum 16 hours of learning which is required by 'standard' FE courses.

4.37 Learners who took part in depth interviews reported attending College full-time (typically five days a week, 9am-4pm) as part of the programme. The exact hours tended to differ slightly for Hospitality and Catering learners, who were often required to work late nights in the College restaurant. Further, a few were only required to attend College four days a week (one Business and IT, one Creative and Cultural, and one Carpentry respondent). For Business and IT and Creative and Cultural respondents, this was because one day was spent undertaking their work placement.

4.38 In the survey, 88 per cent of past learners said they had undertaken the (compulsory) work placement element of their PtA course. Of the 24 cases (12 per cent) who said they did not undertake a placement, six said this was because of difficulty arranging one, nine said there was no difficulty as far as they knew, and nine said they left the course before this point.

4.39 Where placements had been undertaken, 22 per cent of learners had arranged it themselves, 79 per cent had been arranged by Colleges, 3 per cent by parents and 4 per cent by employers.

4.40 Past learners were asked about the length of their placements. The distribution of reported placement lengths was:

- 1-4 weeks: 18 per cent
- 5-12 weeks: 29 per cent
- More than 12 weeks: 43 per cent
- Not known: 10 per cent

4.41 These placement lengths, given that no placement was intended to be of more than 12 weeks in total, suggest that some respondents interpreted this question as referring to the overall duration of placements. If for example, the placement involved 1 day per week over a longer period than 12 weeks but cumulatively amounted to less than 2 weeks, they reported the placement as lasting the period from its first to last days rather than calculating the actual number of days or weeks they spent with their employer.

Requirements of placements

4.42 Seventy-two per cent of past learners who had undertaken a work placement received at least one visit from College staff whilst on their work placement. Nineteen per cent of these learners (who had undertaken a work placement) said it would have been helpful to have had more visits from College staff.

4.43 Eighty-one per cent of past learners reported that their placement had lasted for the anticipated period and nine per cent (16 respondents) in each case said it had lasted for a longer or shorter period than anticipated. The reason for work placements finishing early were varied but included the learner not liking the work and leaving, no work being available (including cases where the business closed down), and, in 3 cases, problems at the workplace In respect of their College experiences, learners mostly rated these very positively when asked to rate various aspects of College provision on a scale from 1, meaning very poor, to 5, meaning very good, average ratings were mostly between 'good' and 'very good'. This is set out in **Table 4.9.**

Table 4.9: Ratings of different aspects of College provision

Average rating on scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is 'very poor' and 5 'very good'

	Past learners	Current learners
The expertise and knowledge of the teaching staff	4.4	4.5
The support you received from teaching staff	4.4	4.4
Helpfulness of other staff at the College	4.2	4.2
The toolkit provided	4.2	4.3
Other resources available (for example, books, materials and computers) to help with your training	4.4	4.3
The financial support available such as the hardship fund or the PTA EMA scheme	4.2	3.9
The quality of the teaching	4.5	4.5
Base (n)	*200*	*270*

Source: Surveys of past and current PtA learners 2013

4.44 When asked to describe their College's attitude to their training, 60 per cent of past and 54 per cent of current learners said it was very positive, 31 per cent of past and 39 per cent of current learners said it was quite positive. Only 8 per cent of past and 3 per cent of current learners described it as 'indifferent or not much involved' and only one per cent of past and 2 per cent of current learners said it was negative.

4.45 Insights from learners interviewed in depth confirmed this generally positive view. The majority of these interviewees felt that their tutors were very supportive during the Pathways programme, typically due to their availability and willingness to help with any course-related problems. Several highlighted support with assignments, boosting confidence and career advice to be particularly advantageous:

'It was great, the teachers helped me every time I needed help, they would come and ask me if I needed help and all that.' (Previous Participant – Automotive)

'They were absolutely fantastic…if we needed any support, if you didn't understand anything, you could go to them and they would sit down and explain it to you again until it was in your head...you could

*go up to them for support for one-to-one in whatever situation we
required.' (Previous – Engineering)*

4.46 Some interviewees noted help with specific issues such as dyslexia:

> *'Taking extra time, giving me more feedback, giving me words, they
> like, for the spelling. We'd have SP for spelling mistakes and then
> we'd write them down, and stuff like that, so it was really good.'
> (Current Participant – Plumbing)*

4.47 Overall, learners' views of the programme were very positive, as shown
in **Table 4.10.**

Table 4.10: Learners' overall views of PtA

		Percentages
	Past	**Current**
Very satisfactory	63	51
Quite satisfactory	23	34
OK but not great	11	9
Quite unsatisfactory	2	1
Very unsatisfactory	2	*
Don't know	0	4
Total	**100**	**100**
Base (n)	*200*	*270*

* Less than 0.5%

Source: Surveys of past and current PtA learners 2013

4.48 Overall, most in-depth interviewees reported their programme as
interesting and enjoyable both in its work experience element and in
allowing them to study a subject they enjoyed:

> *'I really enjoyed it, I did. Just never a dull day, really. Lots of practical
> work with that course. Yes, it was very enjoyable.' (Previous
> Participant – Engineering).*

> *'The whole course is really good in each individual way, really. The
> way we were taught things, the trips, the opportunities we were
> given. We were able to not just do our kitchen assessments and
> cook for the restaurant all year, we were able to go off and do things,
> we were able to help with functions. It was the whole course, really,*

in all that is really good and a really positive thing to do.' (Current Participant – Hospitality and Catering)

'I enjoyed it all, I thought it was awesome. There wasn't really anything about the course where I thought, 'I didn't really like it'. (Previous Participant – Automotive)

'The best I'd say is the work experience…its professional plumbers…you see how everything works out in the real world, as opposed to sitting in college doing it on a board.' (Current Participant – Plumbing)

4.49 There were, however, some instances of dissent on the quality of provision:

- Two interviewees noted receiving poor quality teaching for part of their course on occasions when their usual tutor was absent.

- A few felt that their course covered irrelevant subject areas; for example, the Essential Skills, the Welsh Baccalaureate and/or Computer skills elements.

- One Automotive respondent felt this course content to be quite basic and missing key areas (such as welding).

Learners and PtA delivery: evaluation points

4.50 Overall, the participant responses in surveys and discussions suggest that they were very positive about their PtA experience:

- They entered with positive motivations and with enthusiasm.

- Most learners got advice on the programme.

- Most got the programme area they wanted.

- They rated their College experience highly and were enthusiastic about the work experience element of the course.

4.51 Within this generally satisfactory picture, there were a number of issues affecting minorities, mostly small minorities, of learners:

- For around 1 in 10 learners, the nature of the course they undertook (the fact that it was a PtA) was not clear to them until they had actually started on the course and, for some, not until some months into the course.

- An Individual Learning Agreement was not established for 6 per cent of respondents and, for more than this, the Agreement was of insufficient significance for them to recall whether it was established or not.

- The survey of past learners reported that 12 per cent of learners did not have a work placement as part of their course. Responses from the small number of people reporting this show that some (9 out of 24 cases) were because of early withdrawal from the course. However, absence of work experience for the remaining minority of cases (around 8 per cent of the total sample) may imply that some courses failed to supply the blend of off-site and on-site experiences which is a principal strength of the PtA approach. However, work experience offered on-site at the FEI would be available as an alternative and agreed by the WG on an individual basis and could account for these cases.

- As a critique not of PtA itself but of its ancillary support element, very substantial numbers of respondents said that their participation in PtA was not dependent on the Educational Maintenance Allowance which they received. This data suggests that Pathways EMA may have low 'additionality': young people's entry into PtA may not be strongly conditional on the availability of EMA[36]. However, some responses in in-depth interviews suggest the availability of EMA was critical to individuals in disadvantaged circumstances.

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[36] This finding would conform with findings about EMA in England. Research undertaken by the National Foundation for Education Research (Submission of evidence by NFER to the House of Commons Education Committee, February 2011) included a finding that only 12 per cent of students in receipt of EMA would not participate if EMA were not available.

5 The delivery of the PtA: the stakeholder viewpoint

Introduction

5.1 As noted in the discussion of evaluation method in Chapter 1, a series of in-depth interviews were undertaken with stakeholders (as well as learners and employers in PtA). These included government officials, representatives of SSCs, and Colleges. This chapter presents the views of these groups on the effectiveness of delivery of PtA. In this chapter, unlike in others in the report, views are reported 'thematically', with the views of the various groups being collated under headings concerned with different aspects of delivery.

Design principles of the programme

The basic rationale for PtA is widely accepted

5.2 There was general recognition of the motivations of the programme as a response to recession and to particularly high unemployment rates amongst young people. The problems of reduced employer investment in training and the need to boost the Apprenticeship programme were recognised, in some cases this recognition being linked with particularly difficult trading conditions for small and medium enterprises in some sectors. The programme was recognised as one of a suite of 'rapid response' programmes introduced by the WG.

5.3 The use of the programme as 'filling a gap' for young people not quite ready to go into Apprenticeship, or for whom Apprenticeships were not available, was also recognised. As '*a fast track level 2 framework delivered in 1 year in a sheltered environment*', PtA would enhance work readiness by adding a minimum work experience element to an accelerated Level 2 Further Education course.

5.4 As such, the basic design of the programme was widely approved by all stakeholder groups as a potentially valuable response to manifest problems.

There is, however, a view that stronger linkage with other programmes would have been of benefit

5.5　A number of respondents, including government officials and SSCs and Colleges representatives, observed, however, that design and operation of particular WG programmes, such as PtA, tended to take place independently of the design and operation of other programmes. Rather than being integrated in a structured or holistic approach, they operated 'in silos'. In this case, for example, it was suggested that PtA could have been linked more formally as pre-Apprenticeship preparation for the Young Recruits and Shared Apprenticeship programmes.

Introduction of the programme

Some negative impacts of rapid programme introduction

5.6　Whilst the fundamental motives and design of the programme were not questioned, there were some issues stemming from the urgent introduction of the programme.

5.7　Government officials recognised that the period from identification of the programme's basic format to its first implementation by Colleges for the 2009/10 academic year was swift. A government official commented *'Obviously it was a new programme. We were asking them [the colleges] to do things outside their comfort zone.'* and *'If it was designed again, I would have done a lot more capacity building, and awareness raising training for Colleges beforehand.'*

5.8　For their part, most Colleges thought that the rapid development of the programme had not allowed them to be sufficiently (or at all) consulted on its design. Consequently, when the programme was presented to them, via initial emails and meetings, while attracted by PtA funding, they were, in several cases, left feeling uncertain about the programme given its demands and the short timescale for its introduction. There were particular concerns about the contribution and role of SSCs. While representatives attended initial meetings, one College representative described them as 'a shadowy presence' in the early days of the programme, requiring course content which was regarded as lacking sufficient flexibility and in some cases, making demands on Colleges.

Some of these demands related to teaching weeks or to qualifications which could not be met. Colleges also believed that some GCSE entry requirements for PtA were too high as they would normally be regarded by young people as the starting point for Level 3 learning rather than PtA at Level 2.

5.9   It was also reported that the programme's subsequent connection to the ESF and associated data requirements were not clearly evident from the offset.

Colleges became more positive as familiarity increased

5.10   Despite these initial concerns, Colleges generally became more positive towards the programme and were described by a representative organisation as 'acting swiftly and nimbly' to implement it. However, there was also a sense that the haste with which the programme was introduced has had effects which have lingered through its delivery since.

Initial progression target frequently seen as over-optimistic in retrospect

5.11   An instance of this concerns the programme's target for 75 per cent progression of PtA learners into Apprenticeship. At the outset, some Colleges reported that they were led to expect that SSCs would be more active, than they believe was subsequently the case, in engaging their sectors in the programme in supply of work placements and Apprenticeship opportunities. Thus, the target handed to them was accepted though with some misgivings. As the programme has matured, the target has proved consistently impossible to meet on an 'average' basis. The perception now, not just of Colleges, is that, in retrospect, having initial targets for the programme (and a programme name) which allowed for a wider definition of achievement would not only have been more realistic (for a new and exploratory programme introduced in difficult economic conditions) but would have lessened some of the angst which has accompanied inability to meet the target. However, the WEFO target of 47.5 per cent progression into Apprenticeships or employment and 10 per cent into further learning was believed to be more likely to be achieved.

Partnership working and the role of SSCs

5.12 The PtA programme was, in broad terms, designed by the SSCs, with the WG signing off the delivery models. The anticipated outcomes and achievements sought by potential employers were built into the range of programme units and qualifications for each of the pathways and were required to be readily available across Wales. The SSCs, being the sectoral industry voices, were given roles in designing course content, monitoring delivery, and assisting Colleges with finding work placements for learners. Colleges delivered off-site education and training, managed the work placements and tested learners.

5.13 The extent to which these arrangements had been effective were considered in-depth interviews with the three groups.

Government officials: colleges needed to be encouraged to adapt their provision to meet PtA demands

5.14 From the WG side, there had been a number of issues. The first was ensuring that Colleges fully recognised the requirements of the new courses delivered in PtA:

> *'We had a lot of issues of FE just covering what they wanted to deliver. We've put a manual system in to make sure we were instructing, checking and ensuring that the head of faculty in some college wasn't just signing up to the course he normally signs up to. That's been very successful because that's almost eliminated now.'*

Government officials: accurate data recording has been problematic

5.15 Accurate recording of learner participation has also been problematic, particularly because of ESF data requirements from 2010/11 onwards:

> *'Data has been an enormous problem. This links into the college's inability to be able to consider and respond on an ESF project. They've not flagged the right data fields, they've not input the right data. In some instances they've not held the forms we [the WG] require with the ESF logos. We've had to take a range of audits, they've done self-assessments, we've cleaned data, tracked every single learner to check all the records are in place. We've had to exert a lot of management control onto a process. Whether that process was designed right in the first instance, people would agree*

or disagree with. The policy intent was a good one but practical implementation was a huge issue for us.'

Government officials: colleges took over the main employer engagement role from SSCs

5.16 Government officials also observed that the main responsibility for finding PtA work placements needed to be shifted from SSCs to Colleges:

> *'In the first two years, as part of our contracts with the SSCs, we asked them to provide the colleges with banks of employers for learners to go on placement with. Their specification said, however, if the colleges wanted the SSCs to provide banks of employers, then they needed to contract with the SSC for them to do that work for them. The contracts were amended later and the onus was put on colleges to work with their local employers to provide the placements with help from the SSCs.'*

SSCs: some uncertainties about organisational roles

5.17 The question of which of the three partners should have responsibility for different functions in respect of PtA organisation appears to have been uncertain on occasion. One SSC commented:

> *'It's difficult when you can't compare yourself to what other SCCs do. When I first started on the programme I met with xxxx who managed the xxxx sector. xxxx said that [they] very much let colleges and employers get on with it themselves and didn't take any responsibility for college issues, and relayed them direct to WG and let them sort it out amongst themselves. I feel, with our sector, as an SSC we've had to take quite a lot of responsibility for the colleges and almost act as an applicant for them to WG on certain issues. It's, kind of, hard to know how well the role really works. However, it does seem that having the SSC almost gives the WG Apprenticeship managers a reason not to get too involved.'*

5.18 Two SSCs suggested that there were more fundamental issues concerning how SSCs and Colleges saw PtA. Whilst these SSCs' partnerships with the WG had been successful, they believed that Colleges were not sufficiently dedicated to differentiating PtA from

standard Further Education and were too driven by the funding associated with the programme. One of these SSCs observed:

> *'The partnership between the WG and the SSCs has been fine. Our relationships then with the colleges have been at slight odds, but this goes back to the fact that colleges saw it as a money generation scheme as opposed to something that should properly lead onto an apprenticeship. I don't think the money thrown into it was focussed on making sure there was a pathway. I think the main barrier was not allowing SSCs to actually have control of numbers per college. We had three colleges who converted all their full-time programmes to Pathways programmes, just because they could get a lot more money. That became a real problem, because it meant the programme was doomed to fail in those colleges on what we would count as outcomes, which is Apprenticeships. However, the colleges' interpretation of outcomes were very much on the wider brief that the outcomes were if they continued in education, and went into employment somewhere else. Our feeling was they were gaining all the benefits of finances, and not doing anything different to normal programmes where they can count everything as a successful outcome.'*

5.19 Another SSC reported that a College had recruited a set of learners into a wholly wrong sector framework not that set up for PtA, with the result that the learners, rather than undertaking PtA, had simply been put onto a standard Level 2 FE course.

SSCs: some communications issues

5.20 One SSC also noted that communications in a tripartite arrangement were not always clear:

> *'There is a real issue in communication between WG and the colleges. WG will say one thing, and they feel that they've followed up something in a certain way, then you speak to colleges and they have a different view on how things have been handled.'*

5.21 A further SSC view on communications between partners concerned their timeliness:

'They're all busy people and I think sometimes you wish there was a quicker response but equally I think to a greater extent it works okay. We've been to some good events that the WG have hosted for SSCs, ensuring that we understand the paperwork and everything. There are occasions when I think there could be more timely emails and such like but I think it's worked reasonably well. It would be wrong to say it's perfect, it's not perfect but it's just about timings. If you looked at colleges, too, it's trying to get into colleges in a timely way which is at the time when they're involved in a whole group of students starting and it's very difficult to get involved.'

Colleges: partnership with the WG generally worked well

5.22 Colleges also had quite mixed views on aspects of PtA partnership. Firstly, Colleges tended to see their relationship with the WG as generally effective. One College said:

'The WG have been very good, actually. I think they are a listening government. Devolution and education has really worked and the civil servants that we work with have been very, very supportive. They listen, they go away, think about things, and if you've got something sensible, they'll actually change things to support you.'

Colleges: but bureaucracy and communications have been onerous or imperfect

5.23 However, it was also recognised that Government and, particularly, ESF involvement has generated bureaucracy and complexity:

'The WG, initially, were very hands-off. Apart from issuing guidelines, albeit that they came in late and changed mid-programme, they were very hands-off. More recently, as they've focused on the ESF-funded part of it, they've been much more hands-on and it's become very bureaucratic. I know how constraining European funding is, so I know it's not somebody thinking, 'How can we make it difficult?', but sometimes even the interpretation of the funding rules has been rather odd. It takes a lot of time going back between yourself and the WG auditors, trying to apply common sense to some of the rules.'

5.24 In at least one instance, bureaucratic demands and communications failures were overlaid:

'The other things that have happened have been, sometimes, the SSCs have had discussions with the WG about certain requirements to do the PtAs, and then the SSCs have told our staff, 'You don't need to collect that information anymore. We've agreed that with the WG.' Then when an auditor comes in later, they say, 'Yes, you do have to collect it, it's in the requirements.' We've had incidents where we actually got rid of paper copies of stuff, and we had to go back and recreate them because we'd been misinformed. So we've had to sit down with all of our staff and say, 'It doesn't matter what the SSC tells you. This is the data you collect, follow this guideline and don't go away from that unless you're told by college management.' We've had to make it a much more centralised system so we can control it.'

5.25 Other Colleges complained of information overload, delay and changes from only the WG: *'Endless emails and attachments which were often late in the day.'; 'The Pathways team is good and accessible but there is too much information to deal with.'* They also reported that the WG was sometimes cut out of communications by Colleges and SSCs: *'There are things being done – deals being cut by Colleges and SSCs – which don't get reported back to the Government.'*

Colleges: there was variation in the capacity of SSCs to fulfil expectations

5.26 Colleges also observed that their relationships with SSCs were not uniform, with some, in their eyes, performing much better than others:

'I think where the SSCs are good and engaged, and xxxx is a good example of this. It's worked very well, because both the college and the SSC have been really engaged in the process. The links with employers are real links, so you're giving students real opportunities, and we've seen enormous success. I think the yyyy SSC was shocking. We were told there were 60 apprenticeships in this part of the world. We recruited 60, and yyyy SSC couldn't get any work placements for us at all. Those are probably two extremes. There was one which fulfilled all its promises and then some, and then there was another which couldn't fulfil any of its promises.'

5.27 Another said:

> *'There just seems a big difference between the two SSCs that we work with, of what they are doing when they are monitoring us. I thought it would be the same. I thought they would have had a descriptive thing from the Government saying, "Every month or every quarter you have got to get this filled in, and return it," but there seems to be a variation on that.'*

5.28 A further College, however, while observing that SSCs differed in their capacity and effectiveness, set this in the positive context of the SSC's broader role:

> *'As part of their remit, they have to bridge the gap, they are our employer voice, if you like. They allow us to know what employers want, what the skill levels are, what the industry requires from a qualification point of view and a level of competence. So it helps us to deliver what those qualifications need. It's maybe down to personalities or it may be down to the resources of the SSC, but it varies across, they're not all consistent. The better ones you always see more engagement and there's probably more progression onto the Apprenticeships. It's sporadic depending on what the industries are.'*

The ESF contribution to PtA

Government officials: ESF funding recognised as vital to PtA's viability

5.29 There was general recognition by government officials that the ESF contribution to PtA delivery from the programme's second year of operation has been essential to maintaining the viability of PtA in its current format:

> *'If we hadn't had the ESF help, the programme wouldn't have been operating. We wouldn't have been able to deliver the programme in the way that we have. We would have had to remove key components of the programme. Without the extra delivery and qual[ification]s it would lose a lot of value. So, the ESF brought a lot of additionality into the programme. Without it, it would be a bog-standard FE course.'*

5.30 However, it was also recognised that ESF involvement comes with some cost:

> *'There is always a trade-off with ESF. There are certain programmes which are conditioned to use ESF but FE has had to go some way to fully recognise the requirements of ESF in respect of the PtA and that's been a learning curve. We've tried to keep it going, but it's needed a huge degree of control.'*

5.31 Some confusion in integrating PtA and ESF funding was attributed to changes of personnel in the WG but there were also concerns that at the early stage of applying ESF funding, the requirement on Colleges was not sufficiently specified:

> *'I think this project sounded good in a meeting room, but when you actually try and implement it, there were certain things that maybe weren't sufficiently ironed out, bottomed out. The programme spec wasn't specific and rigid enough. They didn't absolutely nail the colleges to ensure the work placement, a funding critical aspect of the programme, was to specification. Auditors need to know what the rules of your programme are – these are the things you need to make sure you do or you won't get funding from us. The programme spec for year one of this programme was probably short of the mark.'*

5.32 Most observed difficulties in the first year of funding were overcome subsequently but by no means all problems were eliminated:

> *'We tightened up, clarified, you still have a situation where colleges haven't been delivering the rules of the programme, specific ingredients. In some cases, certain qualifications are not fundable, but the main problem's been a lack of evidence.'*

Government officials: Colleges too saw ESF as generating administrative demands

5.33 In relation to this evidence issue, it was reported that a major data cleansing exercise had been undertaken to ensure that Colleges reported all their eligible expenditure. While government officials recognised that data reporting placed a burden on Colleges, there was

also a view that *'Colleges go into it with their eyes wide open. If they want the money, live with it.'* There was a similar view that, where Colleges sub-contract PtA provision, it is their responsibility to manage the information requirement from their sub-contractors: *'It's their job not ours to make sure they get it right.'*

5.34 Colleges, of course, also recognised the administrative and data demands stemming from ESF funding, particularly in the early stage. While some Colleges were fairly sanguine about these demands (*'par for the course'*) others had more difficulty adjusting:

> *'In the beginning, we weren't fully aware of all the auditing requirements that would be necessary. We've learnt that the hard way. We have had to put extra resource into the finance and registry department, to deal with the toolkit claims, etc., extra resource into the EMA department to deal with all the extra EMA claims. We've put extra resource into audit.'*

5.35 Another College also reported the burden of paperwork and record keeping in non-standard formats:

> *'It has been quite difficult because the campuses that deliver this see it as an FE programme, so having all these additional things and more paperwork is over the top. All they want to do is teach the learners, and deliver qualifications. To add to that they need eligibility forms, which are completely different to anything they've ever seen before. It has been quite challenging to get the mindset of the heads of schools to change. The learners too, because although you explain why they have done it, because it is partly ESF funded, it is still six or seven pieces of paper that they have got to sign, and we have got to keep the originals. That is a huge difference to what FE funded programmes are doing – a lot more bureaucracy.'*

Colleges: but Colleges also recognised the benefits of ESF involvement

5.36 However, another College reflected on the administrative burden in the same light as some government officials – a price to pay for the benefits brought by ESF funding:

> *'The seeking of the ESF has allowed the additional capacity, the increased resource with the toolkits and everything, it's allowed you*

*to maximise the income that's available to provide this type of
delivery. It's that benefit to the individual that is the main concept.
There tends to be a negative from an administrative type of burden,
and the paperwork goes with that, but it's only as a consequence of
the actual delivery and the numbers that people put through. It
depends on which side of the fence you're looking from. First and
foremost, it's the got to be for the individual and for the learner, and
as a consequence of that, then yes, you do get the negative side of
the paperwork, but you can't get one without the other.'*

ESF funding: cross-cutting themes

5.37 The other main effect of ESF funding was to add emphasis to the WG's
pressure on Colleges to operate appropriate environmental sustainability
and equality and diversity policies. Government officials reported that
Colleges were consistently challenged on these and their practices
monitored. However, one official believed that some College response
was *'lip service'*. In interviews with SSCs and Colleges, attempts
particularly to encourage young women into 'male' sectors were
reported; and it was generally reported that tuition in, or respect for,
sustainability and equality issues were systematically built into PtA
courses, as in other areas of provision, and that good practice on
recycling, waste minimisation, and so on was followed.

Efficiency of PtA administration

*Government officials: PtA administration was initially challenging but has
improved*

5.38 Previous discussion in this chapter has pointed to a range of
administrative difficulties associated with PtA delivery affecting all three
stakeholder groups. When government officials were asked particularly
about programme administration by the WG in general, there was
recognition that this had been problematic, particularly in the
programme's early days. One official said:

*'I think the project team were in some difficulty early… There have
been staff turnover issues on the project, so let's be fair to the staff
who were there before... I think people were asked to do jobs where*

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they didn't have the background. It was a very daunting project, put together with a hell of lot of relationship issues to do with the colleges, there were a myriad of functions and branches that ended up having roles to play. The colleges actually weren't fully consulted at the start which would have been a much better way to do things.'

5.39 Another official suggested that administration suffered from a rapid introduction of the programme and from a failure to introduce a simple entity representing FE Colleges, either collectively between groups of Colleges or internally to each College, through which to manage the FE contribution:

'It was put together too quickly. It should have had its own planning function, its own budget and a very clear management structure within FE to enable it to respond to the programme. We deal with so many different heads of faculties. We wanted an FE PtA programme team either based on a regional basis or within colleges to respond and deal and manage this. It's bolted onto everything they do, and (PtA gets) lost. That was the biggest weakness.'

A government official: PtA administration is costly in relation to the programme's scale

5.40 A third official commented on the scale of administrative effort required to run the team: *'Within the WG, it's very bureaucratic. There are a lot of people running it and the time input is heavy.'* This official also observed that a learning curve had been required to get internal programme management to a more effective position: *'Initially, the PtA team didn't have a good grasp of performance measurement or data analysis.'* This official believed that the administrative burden outweighed the value of the programme: *'Because administration is so resource intensive and had not been particularly efficient in getting round all the complexities, I would be glad to see PtA discontinued. The essence of the programme is good, but the burden of administration and organisation to keep it on track isn't worth it.'*

PtA administration: summary points

5.41 Overall, thus, while programme administration was believed to have strengthened during PtA's lifetime, there have clearly been many

difficulties along the way, not all of which have been eliminated, and the management cost of the programme was seen by one government official as being high in relation to the volume of delivery.

Resource implications of PtA for Colleges

5.42 While PtA placed pressures, as above, on government administration, it also required additional resource input from Colleges. This was usually a combination of additional staff time in teaching and management and recruitment of extra staff to manage internal administration or to identify and monitor work placements. There were no resource implications for buildings or facilities because Colleges only established pathways in subject areas in which they had established physical capacity. One College described a PtA resource requirement which was broadly typical of others:

> *'We've put extra resource into audit. We've got two people working full-time looking at audit, because that's such a huge area and we've had some problems with that, because we weren't aware of how in-depth the levels of evidence they would need were. We've had to employ work experience coordinators. We've had to employ someone just to go out and find and monitor the work experience placements. We have had to invest quite a lot. Had we known it would last this long, we would have employed a coordinator for the college, but I've just put in extra time personally to manage that. So we've got directors and programme area managers and each of them have put extra time into this. We've given staff extra time to coordinate PtA programmes, because they take more time than coordinating a normal FE course. So it's just giving extra time to a whole range of people.'*

Marketing of PtA

WG marketing of PtA: activity

5.43 WG marketing of PtA was largely comprised of:
- production of 7,500 printed PtA brochures/packs of which 5,000 had been distributed to SSCs, Colleges, and Careers Wales. The pack

comprised a 'generic' PtA wallet into which intermediaries could put their own more specific material

- the WG's Skills Hotline staff were briefed on PtA
- electronic links from the WG site to the PtA brochure and from the Careers Wales website back to the WG site
- publicity for PtA at Apprenticeship Week events.

WG marketing of PtA was relatively low-key

5.44 In relation to this activity, it was observed that:

- the marketing budget for PtA at £20,000 was relatively low
- there was no marketing data (on how or how much intermediaries had used the PtA pack, on Hotline calls about PtA, on website 'hits' about PtA)
- SSCs and Colleges were also involved in marketing PtA (to employers and potential learners)

However, sufficient learner demand was generated

5.45 In respect of marketing of PtA to learners, it was believed that demand for PtA places exceeded the availability of places and, thus, that a limited marketing strategy would not be problematic in this sense. More recently, marketing of PtA had been introduced into general marketing of Apprenticeship (in brochures for example) rather than producing 'stand alone' PtA marketing outputs.

Marketing of PtA by Colleges

5.46 Discussions with Colleges suggested that, in some cases, marketing of PtA was also fairly low key:

> *'I don't recall there being any publicity, but I could be wrong. In the early days there wasn't much time to market. After that, I can't remember how we did it... I think we had a section in our brochure to talk about PtAs. We would have done some of our own advertising to explain what it was, certainly in the second year when we had a run-in time.'*

5.47 Another College suggested that they had used the Government's PtA pack appropriately:

'The government did give out some marketing information at the beginning, but obviously it is very generic, so we have looked to develop some ourselves. Especially for employers, when we want to try and get them to do the work experience. So we have tried to put information leaflets together for the employers, so they can see what the learners are doing, and what a Pathway is, because an employer has no idea of what it means. So internally we have tried to put something together ourselves for that.'

5.48 Other marketing of PtA was basically through word of mouth contacts with potential candidates for work based learning in general:

'From our perspective it's a recruitment drive, we would do it through anybody coming on, we would talk to schools and give them opportunities looking at that transitional aspect into college. We would look at results for those people who don't want to go down the academic route, or haven't got the qualifications to go down the academic route, we've given these now as an alternative. We've given them the benefits of working into an Apprenticeship and the benefits of that way and this would be the stepping stone into that. We've done a lot of marketing from that perspective from our work ideals, and looked at what we can offer then in terms of the actual readiness.'

Colleges, too, reported generally adequate demand but also competition from academic routes and limited demand in some sectors

5.49 For Colleges in general, the issue of learner demand in itself was mostly not a problem. Rather, issues which arose were of competition from the academic route for potential PtA learners with good GCSEs and of some lack of demand for places related to some sectors:

'It's around the entry levels, and the criteria set for people to come on them. Sometimes that's been a bit of a barrier. Where there are five GCSEs required, sometimes you'll find that once people have got those, they want to go down the academic route.'

'We trialled new areas that perhaps haven't taken off, or there wasn't a demand for that in a particular industry, or they want to go straight

into Apprenticeships, so we've had some recruitment issues there as well, but overall I think it's been quite positive.'

Recruitment of employers

SSCs reported initial lack of clarity on responsibility for employer engagement

5.50 While engagement of young people in PtA was not widely problematic, securing employers to offer work experience was more difficult.

5.51 The initial identification of who was to be responsible for employer engagement was, at least in the eyes of some SSCs, unclear. One SSC noted this lack of clarity and also suggested that there was some weakness in Colleges' organisation of employer engagement:

'There is a paragraph in the specification that is given out to colleges by WG that is quite ambiguous. It almost seems to suggest that SSCs have a bank of employers that they will then refer to the colleges, that it's almost the Sector Skills responsibility to be finding employer placements. When I started meeting up with the colleges to begin with, they were all expecting us to do all of the work on that element, whereas, from the conversations I'd had with WG, it seemed to be that it was actually college responsibility. So, it took a while to sift through that, because in all honesty, the colleges we've worked with in the first year, they weren't great at employer engagement, it's not something that they'd done before. The difficulty with the PtA running purely through the particular faculty rather than being anything to do with work based learning departments within the colleges, meant that there was all this employer engagement expertise and work placement officers working within the college who weren't used.'

5.52 Another SSC had a similar experience: that responsibility for engagement was unclear and that Colleges are not geared up to meet employer needs:

'We took a role in that, and colleges were contracted to do it. Certain colleges, at the beginning, didn't understand they were responsible for placements. Engagement was very poor at the beginning, and I still don't think colleges are good at getting employers engaged for

work experience, so that's a flaw in the programme. They're not geared up for it. Also, from a finance perspective, colleges are more concerned with getting bums on seats, which this programme helps that. However, from an industry point of view the less time they're in college, the more time they're outside, which is preferable, but also it's about flexibility, and sometimes colleges aren't there, especially during the summer months. So when the PtA programme finishes, the colleges finish, so there's no-one then looking to find young people Apprenticeship places during the summer, and new training providers. No-one from the college takes any initiative.'

5.53 Two SSCs were quite clear that they could never have taken primary responsibility for employer engagement but were able to assist with small numbers of placements:

'Identifying employers would be an impossible task for us. There's nobody better than the local training providers to know their own employers. I can speak to employers and knock on doors, but I don't know what quality those employers are up to… I wouldn't want to put a learner in an environment where perhaps, you know, they wouldn't be right for them. The training providers do the health and safety checks. There are occasions where someone will say, 'I'm having a hard time getting this person into a placement. Do you know anybody there?' Or, 'Could you go around and have a look,' and I will do that on the odd occasion, but not for 160 students.'

'Mainly this is something that the FE college do, it's not our role to recruit employers onto the programme, it's something they are contracted to do by WG. It's been okay primarily because a lot of the FE institutions running our programmes seem to have reasonably developed relationships with employers within our sector. So, they seem to be able to source placement opportunities reasonably well. There are occasions however, in certain regions of Wales, where perhaps an FE institution may be struggling to find placement opportunities. With that scenario they do come to us to seek our advice, guidance and information, as to whether we can broker some relationships, if we already have developed relationships with

employers within that area. We've done that on a few occasions, but not too often, I'd say. It's generally something that the FE institutions have done quite well.'

College perceptions of employer engagement and its challenges

5.54 Colleges recognised their responsibility for employer engagement but acknowledged difficulties. Some of these simply stemmed from difficult economic conditions which did not dispose some employers to engage with external programmes:

'It has been a challenge. In some cases, quite difficult. In this area, there are very few employment opportunities. You're talking about some local areas where there's something like 80% unemployment. That's difficult when you have learners in those areas who want skills and employment through things like PtA.'

5.55 Other barriers concerned the problems of finding places for young learners and, in one case, in establishing PtA in a subject area where work experience had not previously been necessary. In this last case, SSC assistance was acknowledged:

'It has been quite difficult, especially in engineering. We struggle quite a bit. Because of the nature of engineering, and the courses being mechanical and electrical, and the type of industry that they are going into, we do a lot of our apprenticeships with larger companies, and they wouldn't offer work experience because they want the learners to be eighteen.'

'It depends again on the occupational area, some of it has been difficult, sometimes we've had a cohort of people where we are used to offering apprenticeships, so we've had companies that we know. I suppose it's been a bit more difficult where work placements have been a new area of development for us. That's where the SSCs have needed to help out.'

Government officials: earlier difficulties with employer engagement have been resolved

5.56 However, despite some ambiguities and difficulties, WG officials believed that the employer engagement issue, as with other aspects of

the programme, was now better managed and largely successful despite occasional hurdles:

> *'The colleges have employer officers. If a college can't find work experience placements for a programme that centrally hinges on work experience placements, I think there's a problem. I'm part of the planning processes when the colleges put in their bids to us as a team, and the sectors that they want to deliver, we ask if they've got the employers' engagement for all the processes.*
>
> *That's a positive picture now. We're running at a very high percentage. It's not going to be 100% because you have a change in the labour market, so, where you've sourced an employer at the beginning of the year, they may not be able to provide the five weeks at the end of the year. Maybe they provided a year but they can't provide any more. Sometimes it's spread out throughout the year. There are sometimes issues in certain sectors, the work experience not timing with the timing the colleges were asking for.'*

Welsh language provision

5.57 The basic response of Colleges on the relationship of PtA to the Welsh language was that the capacity was in place to deliver PtA learning in Welsh should that be required, but none of the Colleges interviewed had any significant demand from learners. One College noted, however, that it was valuable to have Welsh-speaking tutors to negotiate placements with local employers who preferred to speak Welsh.

Stakeholders and PtA delivery: evaluation points

5.58 Some key points of the evaluation stemming from discussions with government officials, SSCs and Colleges are that:
- the basic motivations and design characteristics of the programme – a short, relatively intensive programme combining off-site learning and good work experience – were positively perceived by all these stakeholders

- it was widely recognised that rapid introduction of the programme had led to operational difficulties

- as with all pilots, these difficulties included: precise identification and co-ordination of the roles of the three partners; the different capacity of different SSCs to deliver what was required of them; bureaucratic complexities; frequent changes in operational details as a result of programme improvements; communication failures; and a perception by some stakeholders that Colleges did not adjust to PtA's demands

- significant administrative problems occurred in the first year of PtA's operation. Some of these have been resolved by stabilisation of management personnel, better quality of management, and intensive management effort but the administrative burden, in relation to the scale of the programme, continued to be perceived as high by one senior government official

- the ESF funding contribution to PtA from its second year of operation was recognised as fundamental to maintaining the programme's character and volume of delivery

- ESF involvement had, however, generated information requirements which were not initially met and subsequently required intensive effort to provide the necessary data. Some Colleges stressed the bureaucracy burdens which ESF involvement placed on them whilst others, while recognising the burden, accepted it as an inevitable accompaniment of beneficial funding

- ESF funding also added additional emphasis on PtA's compliance with the existing WG requirement for learning provision to pay due attention to Environmental Sustainability and Equality and Diversity principles. Given existing procedures, this emphasis was not regarded by Colleges as problematic and aroused no great threat. However, one government official said that some College attitudes had the character of 'lip service' rather than real commitment. It was also noted that effort to engage young women in some male-

dominated pathways had not resulted in much greater female involvement

- the programme has had resource implications for Colleges – largely related to information demands and the sourcing of employment engagement – which are higher than those of standard FE provision

- marketing of PtA has not been costly and, in consequence, has been somewhat low key. There has been little formal feedback as to its effectiveness (in the form, say, of young people's or employers' awareness of PtA). However, given the limited nature of PtA, this is not particularly important and, as a key measure, the ability of PtA to attract learners has not posed a major or widespread problem

- engagement of employers to offer work placements has been somewhat more difficult. There were early ambiguities as to the responsibility for this in the eyes of some stakeholders. However, responsibility is now more clearly placed with Colleges. Although Colleges report difficulty in securing placements, other sections of this report suggest that the great majority of learners receive work experience which they value

- discussions with Colleges did not suggest any significant demand for PtA provision in the Welsh language. Colleges asserted that should demand arise, they could and would meet it.

6 PtA: outputs

Introduction

6.1 The evaluation was supplied with evidence on outputs of PtA – the numbers and distribution of learners on the programme – by the Welsh Government's statisticians. This evidence is drawn from data on learners submitted electronically to Wales' Department for Education and Skills by the Colleges at which PtA programmes were delivered. The data is held in the Department's LLWR system.

6.2 This chapter examines the numbers and distribution of starts on the programme for the first three years of PtA – that is, 2009/10, 2010/11, 2011/12.

Gender of learners and subjects of Pathways

6.3 **Table 6.1** shows the distribution of 'starts' on the programme by gender.

Table 6.1: PtA starts by academic year and gender[1]

	2009/10*		2010/11		2011/12		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Male	1,475	77	1,420	75	1,325	90	4,220	80
Female	425	23	490	25	135	10	1,055	20
Total	**1,905**	100	**1,905**	100	**1,465**	100	**5,275**	100

1 Rounded to nearest 5

Source: LLWR

* Note: PtA was not funded by ESF in 2009/10

6.4 The table shows that young men have made up the majority of learners in PtA and that, in 2011/12, the number of PtA learners dropped by over 400 people. Within the smaller number of learners in 2011/12, the proportion of young women in the programme decreased significantly to around 1 in 10 from around 1 in 4 in the two previous years.

6.5 The decline both in overall numbers and in the proportion of women may be mainly explained by the loss of the hair and beauty pathway in

2011/12[37]. This pathway accounted for around four hundred places in 2009/10 and 2010/11 – over 95 per cent of which were taken up by women in both years – but no places in 2011/12.

6.6   In addition, there were other changes in the pattern of provision including: substantial declines in the number of engineering and manufacturing places after the initial year and in construction in 2011/12; the introduction of an automotive skills pathway in 2010/11; and the introduction of IT and telecommunications and sport and leisure pathways in 2011/12 (see **Table 6.2).**

Table 6.2: Number of PtA starts by pathway and academic year[1]

| | | | | Numbers |
Pathway	2009/10*	2010/11	2011/12	Total
Agriculture, Horticulture and Land-Based Engineering	0	0	35	**35**
Automotive skills	0	165	135	**305**
Construction	775	710	470	**1,960**
Hair and Beauty	375	420	0	**795**
Hospitality, Leisure, Travel and Tourism	95	105	115	**315**
IT and Telecommunications	0	0	135	**135**
Plumbing	50	150	135	**330**
Engineering and Manufacturing	610	355	340	**1,305**
Sport and Active Leisure	0	0	60	**60**
Unknown Pathway[a]	0	0	35	**35**
Total	**1,905**	**1,905**	**1,465**	**5,275**

1 Rounded to nearest 5

Source: LLWR

An 'Unknown Pathway' is one of which its subject was not recorded in LLWR. This is either Cogent (Life Sciences) or Improve where 35 places were allocated but delivery of pathways did not ending up taking place and therefore there was no specific PtA LLWR pathway code in place
* Note: PtA was not funded by ESF in 2009/10

6.7   Overall participation in different pathways was strongly related to gender. For example, proportions of men in the five pathways with the

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[37] The decision was made to cease delivery following 2010/11, as it was not possible to complete the required Level 2 qualifications within the one year of delivery (a maximum of 52 weeks for each year of the programme) The Hair and Beauty sector did not comply with the WG suite of pathways, aligned with the Economic priorities set out in the Programme for Government.

highest percentages of men (over the 3 years in total) were: automotive skills, 95 per cent; construction, 98 per cent; IT and telecommunications, 85 per cent; plumbing, 98 per cent; engineering and manufacturing, 96 per cent. In the pathway with the lowest percentage of men, hair and beauty, only 4 per cent of learners were male. Of the five pathways with larger numbers of learners, only the hospitality pathway showed anything like parity between genders, with 59 per cent men and 41 per cent women.

The geographical distribution of PtA

6.8　The distribution of PtA starts (total over 3 years) by Local Authority is shown in **Table 6.3**. The table also shows the percentage of all 16-24 year olds in Wales who lived in each area in 2011.

Table 6.3: Number of PtA starts by Local Authority

		Percentages
	of 16-24 year population	**of PtA starts**
Isle of Anglesey	1.9	3.0
Gwynedd	4.5	4.2
Conwy	3.0	6.6
Denbighshire	2.7	4.4
Flintshire	4.4	7.8
Wrexham	4.0	5.9
Powys	3.4	2.0
Ceredigion	3.8	1.6
Pembrokeshire	3.4	4.2
Carmarthenshire	5.2	9.5
Swansea	9.1	3.2
Neath Port Talbot	4.0	3.0
Bridgend	4.0	8.6
Vale of Glamorgan	3.6	6.1
Cardiff	10.3	8.4
Rhondda Cynon Taf	7.5	8.5
Merthyr Tydfil	1.9	1.8
Caerphilly	5.3	7.0
Blaenau Gwent	2.3	0.6
Torfaen	2.8	0.8
Monmouthshire	2.4	0.6
Newport	4.8	1.2
Unknown/Outside Wales		1.0
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Sources: Annual Population Survey 2009/10 (ONS); LLWR 2009/10-2011/12

6.9   It can be seen that the proportions of all PtA starts in each area are not
     well correlated with proportions of all 16 to 24 year olds in Wales who

live in each area. Some areas had markedly higher proportions of starts than the population figures might predict – including Bridgend, Caerphilly, Carmarthenshire, Conwy, and Flintshire. Some areas had lower proportions of starts than their populations might suggest – including Blaenau Gwent, Ceredigion, Monmouthshire, Newport, Swansea, and Torfaen.

6.10 Two factors may have been involved in generating these imbalances. Firstly, the effect of ESF funding may have had an impact. Overall, the Convergence area of Wales is home to 61.2 per cent of all 16 to 24 year olds in Wales but had 67.6 per cent of PtA starts in the three year period.

6.11 Secondly, the differential enthusiasm of different Colleges towards establishment of PtA places may have had an effect within the overall Convergence/Competitiveness area effect. The exact relationship of numbers of PtA places per College to the pattern of PtA participant residence cannot be precisely determined. Many Colleges have several campuses and outposts which do not all fall neatly within Local Authority areas, it is not known at which campuses and outposts particular PtA programmes were located, and PtA learners were free to cross Local Authority boundaries to pursue their courses.

6.12 However, the distribution of PtA places (total over the three years) by College is shown in **Table 6.4**. It can be inferred, for example, that large numbers of places located in Bridgend College, Ystrad Mynach College, Coleg Sir Gar, Coleg Llandrillo, and Deeside College may, respectively, underpin the relatively high proportions of starts in Bridgend, Caerphilly, Carmarthenshire, Conwy, and Flintshire which were noted above. The table also shows that the numbers of PtA places offered by Colleges have varied over the three year period. This is assumed to be related to variations in the pattern of provision of PtA by different subject areas which was noted earlier in this chapter:

Table 6.4: Number of PtA starts by FEI and academic year

Numbers

Further Education Institution	2009/10*	2010/11	2011/12	Total
Barry College	195	195	0	**385**
Bridgend College	220	240	145	**605**
Coleg Sir Gar	210	200	150	**555**
Coleg Ceredigion	20	35	25	**80**
Deeside College	125	135	135	**395**
Coleg Glan Hafren	30	80	-	**110**
Coleg Gwent	95	55	50	**200**
Coleg Llandrillo	285	170	190	**645**
Coleg Llysfasi	10	0	0	**10**
Coleg Meirion-Dwyfor	45	0	0	**45**
Merthyr Tydfil College	0	65	0	**65**
Pembrokeshire College	70	90	55	**210**
Coleg Morgannwg	115	130	75	**325**
Coleg Powys	25	35	30	**90**
Swansea College	15	40	45	**105**
Yale College	135	130	115	**375**
Ystrad Mynach College	140	155	105	**400**
Coleg Menai	85	90	75	**250**
Neath Port Talbot College	85	65	55	**205**
Cardiff and Vale College	0	0	220	**220**
Total	**1,905**	**1,905**	**1,465**	**5,275**

Source: LLWR

* Note: PtA was not funded by ESF in 2009/10

PtA participation, ethnicity and disability

6.13 1.9 per cent of PtA learners were from other than white ethnic groups
(compared with 6.5 per cent of the 16-24 population of Wales[38]). Eleven
per cent were identified in LLWR as having a disability or learning
difficulty of some kind.

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[38] (Source: Annual Population Survey, 2011)

Outputs of the PtA programme: evaluation points

6.14 The description of PtA outputs set out in this chapter suggests some points which are important to the evaluation.

- The programme has mostly been of value to the young, male population. Because the Pathways which were developed were related to occupations which are heavily 'gendered', relatively few young women were assisted by the programme. (This outturn is broadly consistent with Apprenticeships themselves. For example, LLWR statistics show that, in 2010, 98 per cent of construction Apprentices in Wales, 94 per cent of manufacturing Apprentices and 85 per cent of agricultural Apprentices were male.) However, the extent to which delivery of PtA actively sought to counter the unequal participation of young men and young women was not clearly revealed in this first phase of the evaluation. The second year of evaluation will have a particular focus on clarifying PtA equality practices in relation not only to gender but also to ethnicity and disability.

- The volume of delivery, while close to the original target of 2,000 places per year in the first two years of the programme, declined in 2011/12.

- The pathways which the programme developed have not been stable in their 'offer' to young people. Hair and beauty was cancelled and while new pathways (automotive skills, IT and telecommunications and sport and leisure) were brought into the programme, two major pathways, construction and engineering, experienced significant declines in participation.

- The availability of PtA to young people in different areas of Wales was not even. Young people in the Convergence area and in the catchments of some Colleges had more opportunity to participate than those in the Competitiveness area (reflecting the availability of ESF funding in the Convergence area) and in the catchments of other Colleges to participate.

- The programme was able to accommodate a minority of young people with disabilities but the programme did not attract, or in some way excluded, substantial participation by young people from ethnic minorities – who comprise 6.5 per cent of the 16-24 year old population of Wales but only 1.9 per cent of PtA learners.

7   PtA: outcomes

Introduction

7.1   'Outcomes' of the programme discussed in this chapter broadly concern the benefits which accrue to those who participate in the programme, either as learners or employers. Other outcomes clearly occur, such as income to Colleges from the WG and the generation or maintenance of employment in managing the programme and in teaching PtA learners. However, these latter types of outcome, which are relatively minor in relation to Wales' post-16 education and training programmes as a whole, are not considered. The programme is also likely to have positive benefits for the economy of Wales over the longer term. However, given the relatively restricted size of the programme and the fact that little time has elapsed since the first programme completions, these benefits are not estimated.

7.2   Information on outcomes derives from several sources:

- LLWR data on the completion, attainment and success rates of PtA learners, and their destination at the end of their PtA participation.
- Surveys of, and interviews with, PtA learners and employers.
- Discussions with other stakeholders including government officials, SSCs, and Colleges.

Destination of PtA learners

7.3   LLWR data on PtA learners for the first year of the programme is regarded as unreliable as it was not systematically reported by Colleges. However, data for 2010/11 and 2011/12 academic years is available and has been published[39].

7.4   **Table 7.1** shows attainment from the PtA programme in 2010/11 and 2011/12.

7.5   The table shows: (a) the number and percentage of learners who completed learning activities; (b) the percentage of those who completed the activity who attained the qualification; (c) the percentage of those

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[39] *Progressions from PtA Programmes*, Statistical Article, the WG, 27 August, 2013

who attained the qualification as a proportion of all those who started the learning activity. These replicate the performance measures used for standard FE provision.

Table 7.1: Learning activity completion, attainment and success rates for PtA, 2010/11 and 2011/12

Percentages

2010/11	Completed learning activities (n)	*Completion[1]*	*Attainment[2]*	*Success[3]*
2010/11				
NVQ				
QCF	915	*91*	*93*	*85*
Award/Certificate/Diploma	1,240	*90*	*93*	*84*
Key Skills/Essential Skills	3,725	*90*	*93*	*83*
Wales	635	*96*	*93*	*90*
OCN credit(s)	2,760	*91*	*90*	*82*
Other				
All	**9,275**	***91***	***92***	***84***
2011/12				
NVQ				
QCF	485	*88*	*92*	*81*
Award/Certificate/Diploma	1,935	*92*	*91*	*84*
Key Skills/Essential Skills	3,810	*91*	*93*	*85*
Wales	780	*99*	*97*	*96*
OCN credit(s)	2,810	*92*	*92*	*85*
Other				
All	**9,815**	***92***	***93***	***85***

Source: LLWR

1 Percentage of learners who completed learning activities

2 Percentage of those who completed the activity who attained the qualification

3 Percentage of those who attained the qualification as a proportion of all those who started the activity

7.6 Broadly, these figures suggest outcomes from PtA which are in line with those for completion and a little above Welsh averages for attainment

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compared to all learning activities in Further Education. In 2010/11: completion rate for FE was 92 per cent compared to 91 per cent for PtA; attainment was 88 per cent for FE compared to 92 cent for PtA; and success was 81 per cent for FE compared to 84 per cent for PtA. In 2011/12: completion rate for FE was 91 per cent compared to 92 per cent for PtA; attainment was 88 per cent for FE compared to 93 per cent for PtA; and success was 82 per cent for FE compared to 85 per cent for PtA[40].

7.7   Following PtA participation, a variety of outcomes occur. These conform to a hierarchy of desirability from the point of view of PtA objectives: (1) progression into a full Apprenticeship or employment; (2) progression into a Foundation Apprenticeship; (3) progression into a Further Education course at Level 3; (4) progression into a Further Education course at Level 2. These progressions are identified using a data-matching methodology developed by government statisticians. However, where information on learner progression is not available, the destination of the learner as recorded by the learning provider has been reported. Published data on 'other outcomes' separates this data from the Apprenticeship and Further Education outcomes because it is regarded by government statisticians as less robust. However, for simplicity the data in **Table 7.2**.

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[40] *Learner Outcomes for Further Education and Work-Based Learning,* 2010/11 and 2011/12 editions, Welsh Government

Table 7.2: Progressions/destinations of learners completing PtA programmes in 2010/11 and 2011/12

		Percentages
Progression/Destination	**2010/11**	**2011/12**
Progressions		
Apprenticeship	12.7	13.9
Foundation Apprenticeship	14.3	19.3
Further Education (Level 3)	25.9	20.1
Further Education (Level 2)	17.1	17.3
Other learning	4.8	4.5
Destinations		
Employment	6.8	6.9
Further learning	5.6	7.9
Seeking work/unemployed[1]	5.2	5.0
Other[2]	1.6	0.9
Not known	6.0	4.0
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Sources: LLWR

1 Unemployed and seeking work whether or not in receipt of out-of-work benefits

2 Includes pregnancy, long term sickness, custody, or movement out of Wales

7.8 This data can be interpreted variously depending on the 'severity' of the criterion which is applied to it. Clearly, the programme has not achieved its objective, that 75 per cent of learners should progress into Apprenticeship, by a considerable margin. Only 27 per cent did so in 2010/11 and only 33 per cent did so in 2011/12. If progression into an FE course at Level 3 is viewed as an additional acceptable outcome, then the proportions of successful outcomes rise to 53 per cent in both 2010/11 and 2011/12. Employment outcome estimates are reliant on information from Colleges and are only based on progression within three months of leaving. These estimates are not therefore as reliable as learning outcomes which have been measured by tracking of LLWR learner records. However, if these estimates are added into the calculation for positive outcomes, then successful outcomes were 60 per cent in both 2010/11 and 2011/12. If a liberal view were taken and

participation was viewed as successful if individuals were, at least, not delivered into NEET status (Not in Education, Employment or Training) then this was achieved for known proportions of 88 per cent in 2010/11 and of 90 per cent in 2011/12.

Outcomes from the PtA learner perspective

7.9   Additional insights in PtA outcomes are derived from surveys of, and in-depth interviews with, PtA learners. It should be noted that the survey of past learners had quotas for completed learners and early leavers and for the employment or education structures into which they progressed following PtA. These quotas were set to ensure the sample was representative of the 'past learner' population as described by WG records.

7.10 Firstly, the evaluation survey of past learners asked respondents about the nature of the work they undertook on their work placement, as shown in **Figure 7.1**. Their responses are included here as an 'outcome' in the sense that they indicate whether learners did or did not develop skills on their work experience which are likely to be valuable to them in future.

Figure 7.1: Nature of PtA work experience

Percentages
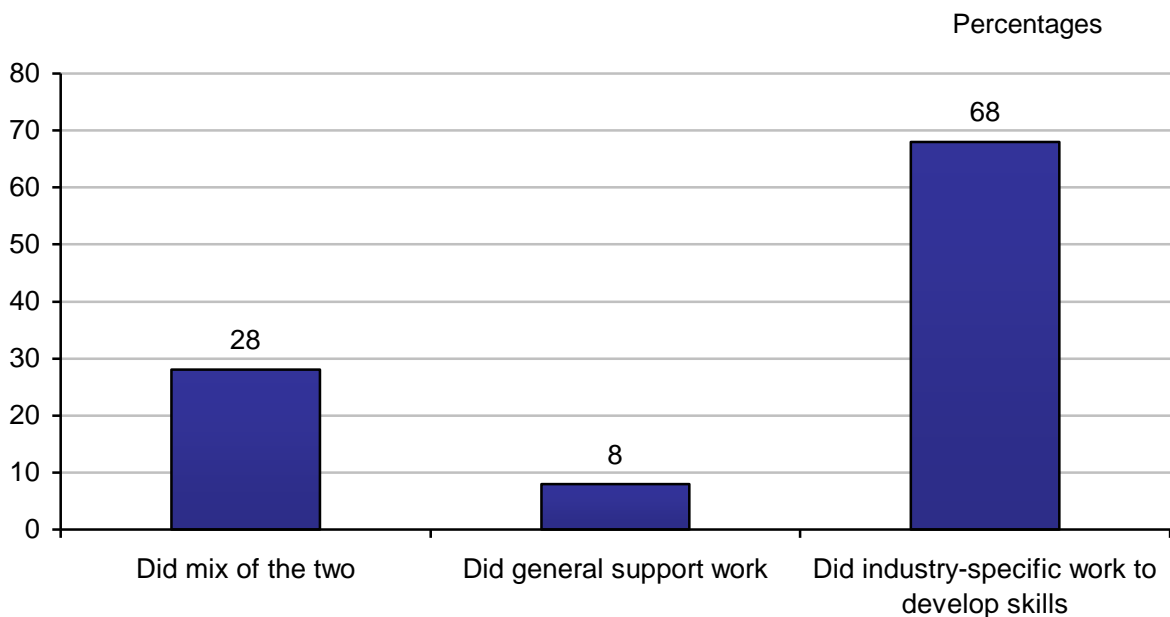
Source: survey of past PtA learners, 2013

Base = 176

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7.11 The data suggests that a substantial majority of learners developed industry skills during their work experience. When asked directly how useful their placement was in developing skills, 95 per cent said it was useful ('very useful' 78 per cent, 'quite useful' 16 per cent). And when asked what skills they had developed as a result of their participation in PtA as a whole (both College and work experience elements), 77 per cent said they had developed sector specific skills and 64 per cent said they had developed employability skills. Only 3 per cent couldn't identify any skills resulting from their PtA experience.

7.12 A second insight arises from the survey of past learners. Eight per cent had not completed their course. These respondents, 16 cases, were asked why they didn't complete. The reasons were varied but 8 respondents left either because they got a job while on the course (3 cases) or left to get a job. Three respondents left because they weren't performing well, two for personal reasons, and one because they decided they didn't like the type of work they were preparing for. Only one respondent left because there was no prospect of getting an Apprenticeship at the end of the course.

7.13 The destinations of past learners following their course are set out in **Table 7.3**. It can be seen that these broadly conform with the distribution of destinations based on LLWR data set out earlier in the chapter – though fewer survey respondents reported going into Further Education than were identified as doing this by LLWR and substantially more reported entering employment. It can also be seen that the proportion of survey respondents who said they went into Apprenticeships was higher than the proportion identified in LLWR (around 28 per cent in 2010/11 and around 33 per cent in 2011/12):

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Table 7.3: Main activity of past learners immediately following PtA completion

	Percentages
	Past
Got a full Apprenticeship in the same sector as my PTA course	38
Got a full Apprenticeship in different sector to my PTA course	2
Stayed on at College and do more qualifications	20
Went to University	1
Got employment in the same sector as my PtA course	16
Got employment in a different sector to PTA course	8
Other including unemployment	9
Refused	*3*
Total	**100**
Base (n)	*200*

Source: Survey of past PtA learners 2013

7.14 For the majority, 78 per cent, their destination was their first choice of activity, for 19 per cent it was not (38 respondents), and 4 per cent were unsure about this.

7.15 The 38 respondents who did not move onto their first choice activity were variously positioned in relation to their post-PtA destinations:

- Nine were employed in a sector definitely not related to their PtA course.

- Two were definitely employed in the same sector as their PtA course.

- Six were employed but the relationship of the sector of employment to their PtA course was not specified.

- Eight had stayed on at College.

- Seven were in 'other' statuses (including unemployment)

- Four were in an Apprenticeship in a sector related to their PtA course.

- The destination of two of these respondents was not identified.

7.16 When asked what their preferred option was at the time of participating in their PtA course, over half, 22 out of 38 cases, said they had wanted

to progress into Apprenticeship but had not done so. Eleven had wanted to get a job. One person (who had got a job) said they actually wanted to go to College and another (in the 'other' category) had wanted to go to University. Three respondents were unsure what alternative to their actual destination they would have preferred.

7.17 Those past learners who did not undertake an Apprenticeship after their PtA course were asked why this was the case. The responses are set out in **Table 7.4.**

Table 7.4: Reasons for not entering an Apprenticeship following PtA participation

	Percentages
	Past
Decided they don't like/are not suitable for the type of work an Apprenticeship course would prepare them for	14
It was not possible as they did not complete/get qualifications	10
It was not possible – no Apprenticeships available	33
They wanted to get more qualifications in College	8
They wanted to work towards going to University	0
They wanted to get a job	12
They wanted more money	2
Already employed	9
Base (n)	*113*

Source: Survey of past PtA learners 2013

7.18 This data shows that an Apprenticeship was not available to a third of learners, who did not progress onto an Apprenticeship, but employment or College were preferred alternatives for others and a quarter of learners decided they didn't like the type of work for which PtA prepared them or failed to get the qualifications which, in principle, would have enabled entry to Apprenticeship.

7.19 The survey of past learners also established what those learners were doing at the point at which they were interviewed rather than, as earlier, immediately after their PtA course. Responses (shown in **Table 7.5**)

indicate current 'positive outcomes' (study, training, or employment) for 80 per cent of past PtA learners. Nine per cent were unemployed and 11 per cent were in 'other' statuses. The main variation between immediate post-PtA destinations and current activities shows a transfer from learning in Apprenticeship or at college (which declined from 60 per cent to 37 per cent) to employment (which rose from 24 per cent to 43 per cent). Essentially, as time has passed, some participants have moved from their pre-employment education and training into employment itself:

Table 7.5: Current status of past learners

	Percentages
	Past
Currently in a full Apprenticeship in the same sector as PTA course	21
Currently in a full Apprenticeship in different sector to PTA course	3
At College and do more qualifications	13
At University	2
Currently employed in the same sector as my PtA course	28
Currently employed in a different sector to PTA course	15
Unemployed	9
Other	11
Total	**100**
Base (n)	*200*

Source: Survey of past PtA learners 2013

7.20 Past learners were also asked to say how valuable they felt their PtA courses were to be in generating these 'current statuses'. Ninety per cent said their course was very valuable (67 per cent) or quite valuable (23 per cent). Only 4 per cent said their course was not very valuable. Only 5 per cent said it had no value.

7.21 Very similar proportions said their PtA course was valuable or not in relation to their long term career aims (70 per cent 'very valuable', 22 per cent 'quite valuable', 4 per cent 'not very valuable', 5 per cent 'not at all valuable').

7.22 Actual outcomes for past PtA learners as described above may be contrasted with the hoped-for outcomes of current learners, as set out in **Table 7.6.**

Table 7.6: What current PtA learners hope to do after their PtA course

	Percentages
	Current
Get a full Apprenticeship in the same sector as my PTA course	60
Get a full Apprenticeship in different sector to my PTA course	2
Stay on at College and do more qualifications	14
Go to University	3
Get a job in the same sector as my PtA course	13
Get a job in a different sector to PTA course	3
Other	1
Don't know	*4*
Total	**100**
Base (n)	*270*

Source: Survey of current PtA learners 2013

7.23 It can be seen that the proportion of current PtA learners who hope for an Apprenticeship (at 62 per cent) was about 20 percentage points higher than the proportion of past learners who actually got one (around 40 per cent in the survey of past learners) – but also that progression into Apprenticeship was not the main objective of about 4 out of 10 learners (because, as shown in Table 7.4, they often decided that they didn't like the kind of work of their pathway, they wanted to get a job, they wanted to get more qualifications, or they were already employed). Of current learners who wanted to progress into Apprenticeship, 84 per cent were confident that they would achieve this – a level of expectation which presents a challenge given the actual progression rates into Apprenticeship of past learners.

Outcomes from the employer perspective

7.24 Some further insights into outcomes of PtA derive from the survey of 67 employers who had provided work experience placements. A majority of

these employers said that their placement developed industry-specific skills (confirming learner accounts of this aspect of their course). Only 5 out of 67 employers said their learners mainly did general support work.

7.25 More directly, 64 employers said that their placement was very helpful (38 cases) or quite helpful (25 cases) as preparation for working in their industry and, similarly, 64 employers said the placement was very helpful (42 cases) or quite helpful (22 cases) as preparation for working life in general.

7.26 Turning from employer perceptions of their placements' benefits to learners to the benefits to the business, 43 out of the 67 employers said that their businesses benefited from the placement in various ways, with the most frequent reason first:

- With recruitment of staff or Apprentices *('Usually done when we are looking to take on an Apprentice and we get to see if the person is suitable'; 'Excellent trial period – good initial assessment before all parties commit to Apprenticeship'; 'Gives an opportunity to train young people in our way of working before offering a full-time position').*

- With workload *('Extra hands at a very busy time'; 'Supports extremely small workforce in their work'; Very helpful with a busy period of calving and lambing').*

- With image in the local community *('The trainees report back to their supervisors with positive views and the business gets good report'; 'We can demonstrate Corporate Social Responsibility'; 'It gives closer ties with the local community').*

- With employee relations *('We get enhanced morale from employees when we are seen to invest in the local community').*

7.27 The benefits of the programme were such that 21 of the 67 employers had taken on a PtA learner as a full Apprentice, 13 had considered doing so but not yet gone ahead, and 23 would consider doing so depending on circumstances. Only 5 of these employers would not consider offering an Apprenticeship to a young person who was on a PtA placement – mainly because they did not need Apprentices in their operations.

Outcomes from the stakeholder perspective

7.28 Other stakeholder groups – government officials, SSCs, and Colleges – were asked in a series of depth interviews to give their views on PtA's achievements.

7.29 In the case of *government officials*, a wide range of views were given. Generally, however, there was little clarity on what progressions PtA was achieving in the light of data inadequacies and the unavailability, at the time interviews were undertaken, of clear figures for the proportions of learners entering Apprenticeships or other post-PtA destinations. Estimates for progression into Apprenticeships ranged from 10 per cent to 65 per cent. Correspondingly, however, there was wide recognition that the 75 per cent target for progression into Apprenticeship was not being met.

7.30 Against this background of uncertainty, views of whether outcomes were adequate or not also ranged widely. At one end of the spectrum, some officials saw the programme as offering a high quality learning experience which greatly enhanced learners' employability and skills. For these officials, it was not seen as critical that Apprenticeship wasn't the immediate destination provided, as they believe was occurring, that other positive outcomes in the form of employment or further learning, were being achieved. In this sense, some felt that the programme had been a hostage to its name and that if a less definitive ambition had not been encapsulated by the 'PtA' label, the programme would not have been as exposed in its ambitions. It was also believed that measuring only immediate destination could conceal later entries to Apprenticeship which, if recognised, would allow a more positive view of PtA.

7.31 It was also recognised that there were variations in success rates between different Pathways and between different Colleges, and that market vagaries – the state of the economy generally and the differential performance of different sectors in different locations – affected the programme's success in progressing young people into Apprenticeship or not. It was also noted that any programme which is aimed at young people inevitably faces the fact that such people are often themselves uncertain as to what they want to do with their lives and that some lack

of progression into Apprenticeship inevitably reflects this factor. In this light, it was suggested that, particularly in better economic conditions, if existing examples of best practice were allowed time to develop widely, then success rates would improve. For some respondents, the pilot, innovative nature of the programme was a mitigation of a lower than hoped-for rate of progression into Apprenticeship. From this perspective, even if the rate was lower than anticipated, the programme had shown a way forward in respect of government intervention to improve young people's life chances which could and should now be developed.

7.32 At the other end of the spectrum, some officials were less willing to make the kind of arguments above and saw the programme – in the light of its main aspiration to act as a route into Apprenticeship – as having failed. One official quote summed up this position: *'I question whether PtA is an investment which the WG should have made or should be making.'*

7.33 *SSCs* interviewed in depth were almost all likely to see the basic outputs of PtA as successful. They stressed the programme's value in producing young people who were much closer to being 'industry-ready', were more rounded and more mature individuals through contact with real work situations, and had enhanced skill sets. One respondent suggested that PtA offered *'an enhanced programme with stronger content that anything else in FE.'* This general perspective was seen as being the case even where SSCs recognised progression into Apprenticeship as being low in their sector and even more so the case where sectors believed their progressions into Apprenticeship were relatively high. However, even in this latter case, no SSC representatives believed their immediate progression rate was meeting the Government's 75 per cent target; but one or two SSCs believed that with inclusion of later progressions, those which occurred 3 to 12 months after PtA completion, the target rate was achieved or exceeded in their sectors.

7.34 As with government officials, SSCs not only suggested quite varied progression rates into Apprenticeship, but also reported great variation between Colleges. One representative observed that rates for progression into their sector Apprenticeship from different Colleges had

varied from 0 to 100 per cent. In seeking to explain variation between Colleges, and more generally, SSCs expressed some criticism of Colleges. It was suggested by different respondents: that Colleges were not good at judging the market willingness of employers to host PtA placements and subsequently to offer Apprenticeships; that Colleges, because of the grant income attached to PtA, took too many places; that, particularly, if they did not offer a Level 3 Apprenticeship programme themselves, they were too ready to retain PtA completers in non-Apprenticeship FE courses rather than identify an alternative provider for their learner. Such factors for some SSC respondents, held back PtA progression-into-Apprenticeship rates. The perception of poor market judgement by Colleges led some SSCs to suggest that they, the SSCs, should have had a stronger guiding role in the process by which Colleges were allocated numbers of PtA places.

7.35 There was also a particular 'strategic' view from some SSCs that PtA would have had stronger outcomes if it had been linked as a 'feeder' mechanism more closely to the Young Recruits and Shared Apprenticeship programmes and if it had been directly tied into the allocation and funding of Level 3 Apprenticeships.

7.36 Many SSC representatives also reported that PtA had had valuable 'spin-off' outcomes for their SSCs themselves. These included use of PtA to develop better linkages with their employer bases, opportunities to develop or adjust qualifications or National Occupational Standards to better meet industry needs, and to use joint working and dialogue with Colleges to improve the industry-relevance of their courses.

7.37 Finally, in relation to SSC perspectives on outcomes, one SSC representative, in a sector which had only recently developed its Pathway, had a particularly downbeat view of Colleges as likely not to pursue Apprenticeship outcomes vigorously – *'Colleges just follow the line of least resistance – they just put PtA learners into Level 3 courses.'* – and that Colleges had too much control of delivery: *'They sign up for the money and then do what they want. They have no intention of putting learners into Apprenticeship. Some of their learners don't even know what Apprenticeship is and the Colleges don't have the mindset to*

know what industry employers need.' This representative summed up progression as *'We will probably get progression but not the progression we need.'* and the programme as a whole as *'It's successful as a Level 2 course but not as a pre-Apprenticeship programme.'*

7.38 As with other stakeholders, Colleges recognised both that overall progression into Apprenticeship had not been achieved and that there was very wide variation in rates between Colleges and pathways. For example, one College noted that progression into Apprenticeship was around 50 per cent for their engineering Pathway but 'close to zero' for their construction Pathway. In different interviews, one College reported their motor vehicle progressions as their worst at around 20 per cent whilst another College reported their motor vehicle progressions as being their best at around 60 per cent.

7.39 Various explanations for lower-than-target progressions into Apprenticeship were put forward by Colleges. The general state of the economy and the particular uncertainties for small and medium enterprises were frequently noted. It was also suggested that SSCs were not active enough in helping secure work placements and Apprenticeship opportunities. One College also noted that they had other demands on the Apprenticeship places they were able to find – from a contract with an SSC to deliver Apprenticeships in that SSC's particular sector. A further College also noted that there was a gap in synchronisation between PtA and some ESF-funded Level 3 Apprenticeship provision coming on stream which hindered progression.

7.40 It was also argued by Colleges that the '75 per cent into Apprenticeship' target was fundamentally unrealistic, One said: *'Whoever thought that one up wasn't living in the real world.'* And similar arguments were made, as by other stakeholder groups, that the concept of 'outcomes' in PtA's case should recognise the programme's general capacity to develop employability and to improve individuals' prospects of long term career development. It was widely stressed by Colleges that very few PtA completers became NEET – even if they did not get an Apprenticeship, almost all got an employment outcome (often part-time alongside further learning) or entered a course in Further Education.

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One College was at pains to point out (in contradiction of some SSC views) that there was no financial incentive *not* to progress PtA learners into Apprenticeship: *'The College reaches its funding level anyway. We don't need to protect this by not pushing Apprenticeship as progression.'* And Colleges widely reported that they had put a great deal of effort into securing work placements for their PtA learners.

7.41 One College also put forward the same perspective noted by government officials – that PtA outcomes should be considered in the context of the programme being a pilot of a new approach. As such, it was not logical to critique the programme simply in relation to targets which were inevitably arbitrary in an exploratory context. Rather, it should be viewed as an 'exercise in R&D' from which lessons should be learned for the future development of combined learning and work experience programmes.

Outcomes from the European Funding perspective

7.42 It was noted in Chapter 1 that the programme is required to meet a set of targets specifically as a condition of the ESF support it receives in the Convergence area only. To reiterate, the targets for the Convergence area PtA project are:

- 4,000 total participants (over total duration of project)
- One hundred per cent achieving qualifications
- 10 per cent entering further learning
- 42.5 per cent gaining other positive outcomes
- 47.5 per cent progressing into employment (including Apprenticeships)
- Four hundred employers collaborating with education/training providers(over total duration of project)

7.43 There is also a specific requirement to operate the Pathways programme in a way which promotes ESF cross-cutting themes of Environmental Sustainability and Equality and Diversity. The latter would in any case be expected under the WG's vision for Equality, Diversity and Human Rights in Wales.

7.44 The data reported below as achievement against the ESF targets is not directly comparable with other data used in this report (in that it refers only to participants for whom claims on ESF budgets have been made).

7.45 Performance against targets is set out in **Table 7.7**. The 4-year project lifetime targets for participants and employers have been partitioned to reflect the fact that the achievement figures below are those applying to a halfway point in the project.

Table 7.7: Achievement of ESF targets

Percentages

	Target	Achievement
Total participant numbers (number)	2,000	980
Achieving qualifications	*100.0*	*85*
Progressing into further learning	*10.0*	*64*
Gaining other positive outcomes	*42.5*	*67*
Progressing into employment (including Apprenticeship)	*47.5*	*42*
Employers collaborating with education/training providers (number)	200	336

Source: WEFO claim May 2013

7.46 Overall, thus, with respect of ESF PtA targets:

- Those for progression into employment/Apprenticeship and for achievement of qualifications have not been achieved (though by quite a small margin in the former case)
- Those for entering further learning and gaining other positive outcomes have been exceeded, comfortably so . However, this is to the detriment of the employment target
- In terms of overall participant numbers the project has not claimed as many ESF participants as would be expected in the first two

academic years[41] but the number of employers engaging has been higher than expected to this point.

7.47 The evaluation offers a variety of inferential evidence in respect of ESF's environmental sustainability and quality and diversity requirements. It is inferential because it derives from surveys and discussions which cannot be readily allocated to participants in Convergence areas only. However, if it is assumed that overall, all-Wales findings broadly apply to the Convergence areas, then some indications in respect of these ESF 'cross-cutting' themes become available.

7.48 Firstly, substantial numbers of the 67 employers surveyed in the evaluation's employer survey had environment-friendly policies and procedures: environmental management system for waste disposal and packaging (45 cases); for efficient energy use (30 cases); for use of recycled paper (26 cases); for travel constraint and vehicle policies to reduce carbon dioxide emissions (23 cases); and for measures to develop an environment-friendly culture among staff (43 cases).

7.49 The evaluation survey of past learners shows that:

- 69 per cent of learners had been encouraged to act in environment-friendly ways. These ways included: recycling materials (61 per cent of those who had been encouraged); reduction in wastage (16 per cent); following current waste disposal methods (10 per cent); reducing carbon footprint in travel (6 per cent); dealing correctly with rubbish and litter (7 per cent); energy use reduction (4 per cent); increasing use of 'green' energy (7 per cent); buying environmentally-friendly products (4 per cent); attending 'green' meetings and presentations (2 per cent)

- 53 per cent of learners recalled having had classes in which environmental issues had been discussed.

7.50 In the in-depth interviews, most learners noted that they were encouraged to be environmentally friendly during their course. This was often both through specific sessions during College lessons, and general encouragement throughout their practical activities. Examples varied

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[41] The funding formulae has been revised so additional learners will be claimed for the lifespan of the programme to maximise ESF participant funding

depending on the sector of the programme, but typically included recycling and the minimising of waste through effective use of materials. Sector specific examples included:

- Hospitality and Catering – ensuring locally sourced dishes are made to minimise transportation impacts
- Construction **–** the use of energy efficient building materials
- Plumbing – the use of environmentally friendly toilets and boilers (such as biomass) and
- Engineering – the use of 'greener' engineering methods.

  'Yes, we're always shown how to recycle old oil and everything properly or any used parts or anything need to be recycled and not go to waste.' (Current – Automotive)

  'We always have the coloured bins, the cardboard, your plastics, your food waste and your normal recycling. We always had all of that and we always were told about it, because, you know, it's costly and it's affecting the planet as well, I suppose.' (Current – Hospitality and Catering)

7.51 However, one Automotive respondent said that although they undertook sessions on low carbon technology (such as hybrids), they were not actually able to put this learning into practice, as the technology was too advanced for their actual practice situation.

7.52 The general view of other stakeholders – government officials, SSCs, and Colleges – was that sustainability policies are now universally established in all post-16 educational and training activities and that the PtA programme was an automatic beneficiary of this general position.

7.53 In respect of equality and diversity:

- In the evaluation survey of 67 employers, 46 employers said they had an equality and diversity policy and 44 employers said they had a bullying and harassment policy.
- SSCs and Colleges reported widely that they recognised gender imbalances in particular sectors. At a minimum, they marketed courses as being equally open to both genders and in some cases, particularly in engineering and construction, made particular efforts

to attract more women into the sector. These general efforts were applied in the case of PtA. However, it was also recognised that, despite minor successes (instances of young women being attracted into PtA courses usually dominated by young men) the overall picture (as discussed earlier in Chapter 5) was one in which equality of opportunity did not result in equality of outcome.

7.54 Generally, thus, in respect of ESF sustainability and quality issues, evaluation findings suggest that:

- the influence of WG and European programmes over many years has established an institutional environment in which responsiveness to sustainability and equality and diversity is widely embedded and corresponding procedures are routinely applied to the provision of learning – including, as here, the PtA programme

- majorities of employers who hosted PtA learners on their work placements had environmentally-friendly and equality policies in place

- in combination, these factors were sufficient to ensure that PtA was conducted in an environment in which the majority of learners were actively made aware of environmental matters

- against these positive perspectives on these issues, it can be noted, however, that a substantial minority (30 per cent) of past PtA learners were not conscious of having had a 'sustainability' element as part of their course; and, as above, offering opportunities in a way designed to appeal to both men and women or actively seeking to promote women's entry to traditional 'male' sectors, or indeed men's entry into traditional 'female' sectors such as hair and beauty, did not prevent PtA participation largely following historic patterns of gender segregation.

Outcomes: overview and the future of PtA

7.55 One final set of outcomes concerns the summary views of government officials, SSCs and Colleges which were generated by experience of the programme and expectations and views on its future.

7.56 The viewpoint of most government officials on PtA can be summed up in the comment of one official: *'Concept positive, delivery and monitoring aspects weak.'* (One official was more negative: *'We've paid more money for it but it's not much different from standard FE'* and *'we should draw a line under it.'*).

7.57 However, officials also recognised that, while PtA will be terminated after the 2013/14 academic year, one of its key principles will be adopted by a new WG approach to FE which, through Learning Area Programmes, will, as with PtA, fund packages of qualifications rather than single qualifications as before:

> *'The principle design of Pathways has informed a lot of thinking on the qualifications review. We took all the evidence about how we designed the Pathways. It now features in the design of mainstream FE delivery. It's being mainstreamed. The policy and concepts, no matter what the project delivered, have been taken on-board and are represented in the local area programmes that FE will now have to deliver. We fed heavily into that process. At a strategic level, there are the successes for the employers, for individuals, lots of success.'*

7.58 For other stakeholders, the future of PtA was not so clearly perceived (at the time at which discussions with them were held). Thus, most asked to sum up the programme's achievements as a base for perceptions of the way forward, were very positive about these achievements and keen for the programme to continue in some format.

7.59 One SSC took a more positive view of PtA than a government contact:

> *'The successful elements of PTA are gaining such credibility with other employers, there's an opportunity to turn this around, I think. We're talking to the WG about new opportunities emerging. There's a positive effect happening in some sectors because of the PTAs, and it's an opportunity to build on it. I had a discussion with one of the senior officials of the WG the other day, and she said, 'The trouble is,*

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Pathway to Apprenticeship as a title has got a bad press.' It hasn't in lots of sectors, it's got a very good press and we shouldn't lose it.'

7.60 Another SSC representative took a similarly broadly positive view and would regret its termination:

'In general I think it's a really good initiative, it's certainly been very helpful for SSC being involved in delivering it, because there are all sorts of other off-shoots that come off it, in terms of level three and higher apprenticeships and all that sort of stuff. It is a very good programme and I think the aims and objectives that it was set up for in the beginning, they still exist now. So if they decided not to continue running the programme I think it would be a real loss, especially when it's doing so much at ground level in terms of changing the way the colleges work, and the way the colleges and learners think and the way the programmes are delivered. It would be a real shame if they then cut that and just went back to the status quo, I think they'd, kind of, miss an opportunity there to improve further education.'

7.61 Looking forward, two SSCs had mixed views on a hypothetical continuation. One wanted an enhanced role for the SSC and linkage with Shared Apprenticeship:

'Give greater control to SSCs to allocate numbers, with allocation based on previous successes and use Pathways as a platform to go onto Shared Apprenticeship schemes. If this were the case, then we would support its continuation.'

7.62 Another, however, while supportive of PtA, questioned the role of their SSC as an intermediary organisation:

'I'd question whether there was a continuing role for SSC, going forward. Having the SSC in that middleman role, it has its benefits but it also has its disadvantages in that it stops WG and colleges working together. I sometimes feel that perhaps it would be better if WG apprenticeship managers took on the role that SSCs are doing now, which would help them to better understand what's going on on the ground. They will be better placed to manage programmes than they are at the moment, rather than always hearing things second

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hand from SSC. I think that's a question for WG. I just think if they
had a greater understanding of the sectors that they were working for
and the colleges and the college environment, they might understand
the issues more and be able to address them better.'

7.63 Only one SSC was quite dismissive of PtA:

We're not bothered either way. It's a huge amount of work for the
money we get, communications are poor and we don't get many
conversions. We'd prefer the funding to go straight to the employers.
They have the commitment and would buy the training they need.'

7.64 Colleges were aware that there was some likelihood of termination. One
College simply said *'We'd like PtA to continue but we don't think it will.'*

7.65 One further College would regret termination:

'For me, I think the Pathways programme has been absolutely win,
win, win, as I said. It's been a winner for everybody. To be fair,
you've got to take your hat off and say, 'Well done,' to the WG. They
put the funding behind it. I think it would be really sad if all this work
that's been done disappears completely. Some training providers
have said that they'll try and run something similar themselves.
They've seen so many benefits from it.'

7.66 Similarly, regret was expressed by another College about the lack of
continuity in government interventions with the rise and fall of PtA being
used as an instance of that:

'The WG are looking at the longer-term, and the vibe I'm getting is
the future of the PtA programme is under the microscope and may
not continue after the next academic year. My only worry is, quite
often we confuse employers. We've had very similar initiatives over
the years, we've had the Work-based Learning Pathway programme,
we've had the Principle Learning qualifications, we've got the PtA
programme and they're all quite similar in terms of target audience.
The problem I've got is, quite often, employers get confused about
the branding and different initiatives that are coming out from
government. So, quite often it's about sustainability and maintaining
the brand and continuing to build on the successes that have been
clearly evident. So, I'm slightly concerned what the future holds for

the programme, if I'm honest with you. It would be great if it could be continued and mainstreamed. That's my personal view.'

Outcomes of the PtA programme: evaluation points

7.67 The description of outcomes from PtA set out in this Chapter suggests a range of points which are significant to the evaluation:

- PtA has had completion, attainment, and success rates which are at least as good as those for Further Education as a whole in Wales.

- Programme outcomes have fallen substantially short of the programme's principal objective, to progress 75 per cent of learners into Apprenticeship. However, substantial numbers of learners additionally progressed into further learning, largely fulfilling the programme's subsidiary objectives. Few learners have subsequently become 'NEET'.

- The great majority of learners undertook work placements which developed skills relevant to employment in particular industries.

- Few learners left their courses early because they perceived they would not get an Apprenticeship at the end of their PtA course.

- For four out of five learners, what they did on completion of their PtA course was what they wanted to – even though only two out of five had progressed into Apprenticeship.

- Of the 1 in 5 learners who did not get their preferred destination, just over half of had wanted to go into Apprenticeship at the end of PtA. Overall, thus, only around 1 in 10 PtA learners subsequently became a 'frustrated would-be Apprentice'

- At the time of the evaluation survey of past PtA learners, fewer than 1 in 10 were unemployed; the great majority were in 'positive' situations.

- The great majority of the latter reported that PtA had been valuable in generating those positive situations and to their long term career aspirations.

- Employers who supplied PtA work placements confirmed that they mostly supplied good work experience offering real opportunities to

develop industry-specific skills as well as employability in general. Almost all said that their placement was valuable as preparation for work in their industry.

- Employers also reported benefits to their business from their PtA placements. These benefits included the ability to assess individuals as future employees or Apprentices, PtA learners' assistance with workload, and development of the business' position in the community.

- Government officials recognised the programme's failure to meet its principal target. They had different views on the extent to which this failure was mitigated by the programme's other progressions, its ability to improve employability, its mitigation of youth unemployment, and by the pilot or innovative character of the programme.

- SSCs and Colleges had a similar view. They mainly believed that PtA was fundamentally a good programme producing strong benefits for learners, in advance of those offered by standard FE provision. The programme's failure to meet its main progression target was, as with government officials, widely recognised. Again, this was contextualised. Economic difficulty in general, the particular problems of Small and Medium Enterprises, and pronounced local and sector variations in demand were commonly-reported factors. Though there were some procedural factors which SSCs and Colleges also saw as limiting progression (with implicit disagreement between the two groups on some of these), almost all of these stakeholders took the view that 'outcomes' of the programme in terms of learner skill gains and enhanced employability were strong – and that outcomes of this type should be viewed as a strong counter-balance to the programme's failure to meet its headline target.

- The programme has not met ESF targets for total participant numbers, progression into Apprenticeship and employment, or for achievement of qualifications.

- It has met and exceeded ESF targets for progression into further learning, for gaining other positive outcomes, and for employer engagement.

- There is evidence that a substantial majority of learners were actively engaged in efforts to promote environmental sustainability and equality and diversity. In respect of the latter, while gender equality in PtA was promoted, this did not prevent particular pathways having a very strong balance in favour of male (most usually) or female participation.

- The demise of PtA as such will be regretted by many stakeholders but government officials believe that some of the programme's key characteristics will be preserved in the new, developing approach to funding of Further Education qualification 'packages'.

8   Conclusions

8.1   Evaluations of other pre-Apprenticeship programmes in place in places other than Wales have not been particularly robust. However, they have suggested amongst other things: that the availability of a genuine, employed status Apprenticeship following the pre-Apprenticeship stage is important to their success; that pre-Apprenticeships can be applied for semi-social purposes to assist young people with considerable disadvantage (rather than, as with Pathways, as a high-quality preparation for those able to enter Level 2 or 3 training); and that simple relationships between pre-Apprenticeship participation and eventual success in Apprenticeship itself cannot be assumed. In this light, conclusions of the first year of the evaluation of PtA are set out in the following schedule (firstly in relation to WG and ESF objectives):

Objective/target	Result	Discussion
Assess the extent to which the WG's objectives for learner achievement were met		
Progress 75 per cent of learners each year onto an Apprenticeship upon completion of the programme	Data for 2009/10 does not permit assessment against this target. In 2010/11, 27 per cent of learners progressed into Apprenticeship. In 2011/12, 33 per cent of learners progressed into Apprenticeship. This target was not met.	This target was clearly undershot by a clear margin. This fact has proved the '*Achilles heel*' of the programme's reputation. However, numerous commentators took the view that a wider set of gains in learners' skills and employability substantially mitigate this failure. Employers, learners, SSCs, and Colleges reported that the programme has been valuable.
Increase the standard number of hours of learning delivered by FE from a minimum of 16 hours 1 to a maximum of 30 guided learning hours per week	Surveys of learners suggest that this target may not have been met in a small minority of cases. More detailed discussions with learners and with other stakeholders indicate that learner hours have been very substantially increased.	The small minority of learners reporting that learning hours were below the specified minimum of 21 hours may have misunderstood the survey question ('How many hours per week did you spend in classes or training sessions?') and excluded some 'hours of learning' which they discounted.
Provide the opportunity for learners to gain Level 2	Only those learners on pathways other than the construction pathway were given this opportunity. This	Both learners and employers reported that they developed skills which are valuable to employment in the industries to which their

Objective/target	Result	Discussion
qualifications that will maximise their potential to ensure that they are job-ready once the economy recovers	equates to 65 per cent of learners. This objective was, therefore, not met as one Pathway, the construction one, was offered at Level 1.	pathways were related and, hence, may be assumed to be more 'job-ready'.
Deliver qualifications to learners that will meet identified employer needs within the region as well as wider key skills and additional vocational relevant qualifications	The programme delivered over 9,000 completed learning activities in each of 2010/11 and 2011/12. These included both vocational qualifications (NVQ and other certificated awards) and key and essential skills certification. Attainment rates for all individual completed learning activities were over 90 per cent. Success rates (attainment of qualifications for those who started programmes) were over 80 per cent for all learning activities.	Achievement (completion of programmes, attainment, and success rates) was at least comparable with, and may have exceeded, FE achievement in general. Whether qualifications met 'identified employer needs' was not tested but it is assumed that SSC involvement in PtA course specification assures that this was, at least, mainly the case.
Utilise direct employer engagement through the work placement element of learner programmes	Survey of employers allows an estimate that at least 1,300 employers have supplied work placements to over 5,000 PtA learners between 2009/10 and 2011/12.	A very substantial number of employers have supplied work placements. It is assumed the number is sufficient to suggest that this objective has been met and exceeded on a wide scale.
Prepare learners for entry into employment via the Apprenticeship programme where they will work towards their Level 3 award.	Entry into Apprenticeship overall was identified above. 27 per cent of learners progressed into Apprenticeship in 2010/11 but only 13 per cent progressed into Level 3 Apprenticeship. 33 per cent of learners progressed into Apprenticeship in 2011/12 but only 14 per cent into Level 3 Apprenticeship. This target was not met	The 'Level 3' objective was undershot by a very considerable margin. The programme did not prove to be a successful progression route into Level 3 Apprenticeship for other than a minority of learners. Progression into Level 3 Apprenticeship was, in part, restricted by the fact that the Construction pathway was at Level 1 and, hence, could not have resulted into direct progression into Apprenticeship at Level 3.

Assess the extent to which there has been compliance with the requirement to establish Individual Learner Agreements for all learners

100 per cent of all learners to make an	Of past learners, 87 per cent reported making an ILA, 6 per	The data is a little equivocal. 'Can't recall' may indicate that ILAs were

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Objective/target	Result	Discussion
Individual Learner Agreement (ILA) with their College.	cent said they did not, and 7 per cent could not recall. Of current learners, 81 per cent had made an ILA, 6 per cent had not, and 13 per cent could not recall (paragraph 3.27).	or were not made. 'No' in the past learner case may be because some very early leavers left before making an Agreement. 'No' in the current learner case may be because the Agreement has not yet been made but will be. A reasonable interpretation may be that this objective has been substantially met.

ESF targets and objectives for the Convergence area

Objective/target	Result	Discussion
Achieve 47.5 per cent progression into employment including Apprenticeship.	42 per cent of Convergence area learners made this progression.	As with the WG's progression target, various mitigations of these shortfalls can be, and were, advanced by stakeholders and can be inferred by evaluation surveys which reveal other benefits of PtA participation.
10 per cent entering further learning	64 per cent of Convergence area learners entered further learning.	While there were significant shortfalls in the ESF employment/Apprenticeship outcome above, these were countered to a degree by substantial progression to further learning.
100 per cent achieving qualifications.	85 per cent of Convergence area learners achieved qualifications.	There was some, but not huge, shortfall in the ESF target for the achievement of Level 2 qualifications, however other qualifications were achieved.
42.5 per cent of learners gaining other positive outcomes	67 per cent of Convergence area learners gained other positive outcomes.	This target has been exceeded
Four hundred employers collaborating with education/training providers (over total duration of project.	336 employers had collaborated during 2010/11 and 2011/12	Employer engagement was above target at the halfway stage of the programme.
4,000 participants (over total duration of project)	980 eligible learners claimed for ESF funding over 2010/11 and 2011/12 academic years	Eligible participant numbers are substantially below target at the half way point in the project.

8.2 The analysis above sets out the 'technical' answers to the specified objectives of the evaluation. However, as a final note, a simple interpretive 'overview' conclusion is added here. In essence, PtA to date has had two main limitations which, together, may support the observation noted in Chapter 1's review of pre-apprenticeship programmes elsewhere that *'the design of effective pre-apprenticeships….is a challenge'*:

- It has not met some of its principal targets and, particularly, not those for progression into Apprenticeship which are embodied in the programme's name.
- The programme has proved difficult to manage and administer in several ways – relating mainly to the roles and responsibilities of delivery partners, to communications between those partners, and to the acquisition of timely and accurate information.

8.3 These limitations are mainly difficulties experienced by WG officials who have had the ultimate responsibility for the programme's organisation and operation. The other delivery partners, SSCs and Colleges, revealed various frustrations and burdens (particularly administrative ones) in the course of discussions undertaken as part of the evaluation. However, these mostly constituted specific or sporadic difficulties particular to their own contributions whilst government officials experienced their cumulative effect and had more consistent and constant pressure on them to meet overall programme objectives and to maintain effective delivery of the programme as a whole.

8.4 Moving beyond the administrative point of view, however, the programme was broadly seen as successful by employers. Whilst it was sometimes difficult to recruit employers to host work placements, many employers (an estimate of 1,300 or so) were in fact engaged. And these employers were mostly very satisfied with their engagement, giving good reports of their young learners, reporting that most learners undertook work placements which were good preparation for work in their industry, subsequently recruiting PtA learners as Apprentices (or being willing to

do so in future) in substantial numbers, and reporting a range of benefits for their businesses from their programme participation.

8.5 For learners, too, the programme was largely a positive experience. They were enthusiastic about joining the programme and believed they developed valuable industry-specific and employability skills which would be valuable to achievement of their future career hopes. High proportions completed the programme and achieved the qualifications they pursued. Following the programme, while many did not progress into Apprenticeships, this was not necessarily a disappointment to them. Most were happy with their post-programme destination, whether or not this was an Apprenticeship, and relatively few have subsequently become unemployed.

8.6 A broad appreciation of these employer and learner outcomes and perceptions has, informally or formally, fed back to the delivery partners discussed above. For SSCs and Colleges, it has led to a position in which most (but not all) of these, whilst recognising various specific difficulties in operating the programme, believe PtA to date has been a very valuable and worthwhile programme which, with adjustments to its delivery, would ideally be continued and developed.

8.7 For the government, with its more urgent concerns for the programme's targets and with its overall management responsibility, the balance of calculation has been that the programme is not strong enough to be preserved in its present format beyond 2013/2014 – particularly in circumstances in which the government's approach to funding post-16 learning in Further Education is, in any case, moving to a position in which some of the essential characteristics of PtA – its packaging of a set of qualifications and work experience to create higher levels of work readiness – are to be generalised to the funding of learning programmes in FE as a whole.